



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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First Session

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2022

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HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2022

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

12:00 NOON

SPEAKER

Hon. Keith Bain

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Angela Simmonds, Lisa Lachance

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We'll now proceed with the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition with the operative clause that reads:

“We, the undersigned, hereby request that the Government of Nova Scotia change legislation to allow those 25 and over with Type I diabetes to be covered under the NSIPP (Nova Scotia Insulin Pump Program).”

There are 1,354 signatures, Mr. Speaker, and I have also affixed my name to the petition.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable member for Richmond.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition from the Seniors Take Action Coalition in Richmond County. The coalition collected 1,213 signatures for the petition with respect to Nova Scotia Power's request to the URB for an increase in electricity rates in the province.

The operative clause of the petition reads:

“We, the undersigned residents of Nova Scotia, call upon the Government of Nova Scotia to:

1. We request that the Utility and Review Board (UARB) decline Nova Scotia Power's proposed rate increase, storm recovery charge and guaranteed annual profit increase.

2. We request that NSP be returned to a democratically run power utility with mandates set by the people.

3. We ask that Nova Scotia Power pay taxes on all of their infrastructure like every other business in the province.

4. We request that Nova Scotia Power meet all their performance standards and continue to be fined by the UARB until they do so.

5. Instead of charging Nova Scotians to restore power, we ask that the Utility & Review Board reduce NSP's guaranteed rate of return for every power interruption and unmet performance standard.

6. We request that NSP subsidize solar users for the green credits that they generate for the company.”

Mr. Speaker, I have affixed my signature to this petition.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of L'nu Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 237

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

Whereas Indian Residential School survivors have had the courage to share their experience of the residential school system in Canada and the pain and lasting impact on them, their families, and communities; and

Whereas author Isabelle Knockwood of Sipekne'katik First Nation has helped break the silence with her book *Out of the Depths* by sharing her story and those of other survivors of the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie; and

Whereas these stories teach us about the importance of healing the intergenerational trauma left by the residential school system and how we can walk the path toward reconciliation together with Mi'kmaq and Indigenous peoples across the country;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in recognizing Isabelle Knockwood and all residential school survivors, and make a commitment to continue education and awareness by reading *Out of the Depths*, a copy of which you are receiving today through the Treaty Education and the Department of L'nu Affairs.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

RESOLUTION NO. 238

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

Whereas an education in French as a second language is an opportunity for the youth of our province to develop the linguistic and cultural skills necessary for their personal and professional development, as well as for the liveliness of the Francophonie; and

Whereas more than 15,000 students are enrolled in French immersion programs and more than 44,500 in core French, which represents more than 51 per cent of students enrolled in French as a second language programs in Nova Scotia, and enrolment is increasing every year; and

Whereas Canadian Parents for French, a non-profit association that promotes bilingualism by creating opportunities to learn and use French for all Canadians, has been working in Nova Scotia since 1977;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House join me in recognizing and congratulating Canadian Parents for French for the opportunities that continue to motivate young people to promote learning and using French on a regular basis for 45 years.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of L'nu Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 239

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

Whereas the art of basket weaving is handed down from generation to generation in Mi'kmaw communities and is a significant part of Mi'kmaw culture, admired in Nova Scotia and beyond our shores; and

Whereas Virick Francis of Eskasoni First Nation recently shared his story about having started making baskets as a teenager after watching his mother and grandmother at work; and

Whereas weaving requires great skill and knowledge and through his miniature baskets Mr. Francis has helped create interest in Mi'kmaw culture and traditions;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize Virick Francis and all Mi'kmaw basket makers for their creativity and dedication to a craft shared by their ancestors.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Community Services.

RESOLUTION NO. 240

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

Whereas legislation to open adoption records in Nova Scotia will take effect on May 1st; and

Whereas the change allows adopted persons once they turn 19, birth parents, and other relatives to access adoption information if they want to and the legislation will apply to all adoption records; and

Whereas those who may wish to protect their privacy can file a disclosure veto or a contact notice before adoption records open on May 1st or after depending on whether their information has already been shared, and members of this House have been sharing information about the legislation with communities and I am grateful to them for doing so;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in continuing to spread the word that adoption records open on May 1st, after which people can file to receive their information and that people can still file a privacy tool after May 1st if their information has not yet been shared.

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

[12:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 173 - Entitled an Act an Act Respecting Code Critical Accountability Reporting. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 174 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 4 of the Acts of 2004, the Health Protection Act. (Hon. Iain Rankin)

Bill No. 175 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 23 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Assessment Act. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I actually have a statement today.

THE SPEAKER: Statement? Okay.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness. (Laughter)

GOOGOO, JARVIS: BOSTON MARATHON PARTIC. - CONGRATS.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I jumped the gun and caused some confusion there.

Jarvis Googoo made local history in Boston on April 18th. He became the first person from We'koqma'q First Nation to qualify for and compete in the Boston Marathon. The Mi'kmaw runner crossed the finish line in 3:15:07. Finishing a 26-mile race in that amount of time is an achievement few can equal.

It's a standard for celebrations to take place at the end of a marathon, but in this case, the celebration for Jarvis that preceded the race was just as significant. A send-off video was made for him by the people of We'koqma'q congratulating Jarvis and wishing him well in the marathon. No doubt it propelled him along his journey.

Congratulations, Jarvis. You've represented your community well, and Nova Scotians are proud of your achievement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

GOOD GRUB GRP.: FREE MEALS FOR SRS. - THANKS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, on Easter weekend, close to 250 seniors in Yarmouth received deliveries of a free Easter ham dinner. This was made possible by Yarmouth's Good Grub Group. This group was started by Steve Berry, Yarmouth's deputy mayor and one of our town's hardest-working volunteers.

Steve and his team of dedicated volunteers have prepared and delivered or arranged pickups of many free meals for our community members over the last year. Our community has enjoyed full dinners of hams, sweet and sour meatballs, chicken, and of course, rappie pie, and much more.

I would like to ask this House to join me in thanking Steve Berry for starting this amazing group, the many devoted volunteers who assist him, and the generous donors who contribute food supplies and funding to ensure this amazing initiative continues. They're all an inspiration to our community, Mr. Speaker, and I thank them very much.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MUNROE, FLORENCE: COM. SERV. - THANKS

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize Mrs. Florence Munroe. Mrs. Munroe is a senior who has been a volunteer in our community and a churchgoer longer than she can remember. At the age of 83, Mrs. Munroe uses her kind heart and upbeat spirit to give back.

Usually in the form of cooking and baking, Mrs. Munroe often contributes to events put on by the Phoenix Youth & Community Centre, located here in Halifax Needham. She's always contributing her culinary skills to cooking hams or turkeys for community

meals or various events put on by PYCC throughout the year. She is known for her baking abilities and often sells baked goods to help with the building fund at her home church.

Volunteers like Florence make it possible to run programs and have events that otherwise might not be possible. Mrs. Munroe, today we celebrate you for your kindness and volunteerism and continued dedication and support.

I would like the House to help me thank and recognize the important work that volunteers like Mrs. Florence Munroe do in our community.

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

FOREST HTS. HS: AFGHAN. WAR VETS. CEREMONY - THANKS

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a ceremony that took place at Forest Heights Community School yesterday and every year around April 17th.

Twenty years ago this week, Canadians experienced the first loss of life in the war in Afghanistan. Pte. Richard Green of Hubbards and Pte. Nathan Smith of Eastern Shore, along with fellow Canadians Cpl. Ainsworth Dyer and Sgt. Mark Leger, all of the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, were lost to us on while on duty at Tarnak Farms, in southern Kandahar.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Honorary Colonel Dan Hennessey, and Pte. Green's mother, Doreen Coolen, the 2002 National Memorial (Silver) Cross Mother, and the staff and students at Forest Heights for doing their part to ensure that our community never forgets the sacrifice of those who served and those who were lost in Canada's war effort in Afghanistan. Lest we forget. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

LEG. CLEANING STAFF: ATT. TO DETAIL - THANKS

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a moment right now to thank some people who have helped to make the House session a success thus far. I think all too often that their work is taken for granted. I'm talking about our cleaning staff here at the Legislature. (Applause)

I don't think it's just because I'm drinking more water that I've seen more of them in certain rooms in this House this session, but I have to say that I really appreciate their attention to detail in wiping down all the surfaces that we're using over this session. I want to thank them for helping to ensure that at least some of us are going to come out of this session without having caught COVID-19 yet.

THE SPEAKER: Indeed, everyone gives thanks to all the workers here at Province House who are making things click. Thank you. (Applause)

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

GOSBEE, M./DIXON. K: BUS. SUCC. - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate two young Dartmouth North entrepreneurs, Melinda Gosbee and Kayley Dixon, who founded a new company last November.

My Eternal Essence provides customers with a beautifully unique way to commemorate their loved ones. The idea for the business came to the pair after Melinda's grandfather, a man with a big personality, died during the pandemic. The best friends and Saint Mary's University business students brainstormed the physical ways that they could honour Melinda's grandfather's true essence that would go beyond a traditional urn.

Melinda and Kayley enrolled in the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Education Development's Incubator Program and the result was the colourful resin keepsakes that can include pictures, cremains, flowers, and more. The pieces can also mark important milestones such as births and anniversaries.

I ask that the members of this House join me in congratulating these two Dartmouth North entrepreneurs on their successful business and to thank them for the comfort that they provide to so many.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

ROCKWELL, ROBERT: PARENT-CHILD GUIDE - CONGRATS.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 27th anniversary of the *Parent-Child Guide*.

Operated by Robert Rockwell and his family, the *Parent-Child Guide* has been HRM Metro's oldest and largest free family newspaper since 1995. The major articles in the *Parent-Child Guide* are written by local professionals such as doctors, psychologists, counselors, educators, and health consultants. Even some local MLAs, from time to time, contribute a column.

This newspaper consists of positive, helpful, and informative articles for adults, teens, and children. Article topics range from self-help suggestions to relationship issues to pet care. Since 1995, the *Parent-Child Guide* has had an estimated 7 million readers.

I ask that members of the Legislature join me in congratulating Robert Rockwell for the success that the *Parent-Child Guide* has achieved and wish them all the best for future success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

LEG. HOUSE LEADERS: WORK - RECOG.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I did this last session as well, but I do want to recognize my colleagues from both the government and the third party - the House Leaders particularly. It's been a bit of a journey this session to get us in and out, and virtually, and everything else, but I have a tremendous amount of respect for both of them. It's a pleasure to work with both of them.

I rise in my place to recognize the Government House Leader and the House Leader for the NDP for their friendship and the work that they do to support all of us. It wasn't easy, but here we are.

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

YOUTH ADV. CCL.: WORK FOR YOUTH - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the members of the Halifax Citadel-Sable Island Youth Advisory Council.

As I'm sure my colleagues here know, the rights and voice of youth are of paramount importance to me as a community member and a legislator. Youth have a right to participate in the decisions that affect them, which I think is everything, as laid out in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Halifax Citadel-Sable Island Youth Advisory Council meets monthly to bring together young people aged 15 to 24 years old who feel connected to my constituency and want to work on community issues that matter to them. To date, members are interested in children's rights, action on climate change, and urban planning. They have been learning together and from youth across Canada about the role of, and youth engagement structures in, child and youth advocates offices.

I would also like to directly acknowledge the work of Jack Baker. He is an astute and capable young person with national leadership skills and shepherds the Youth Advisory Council along. I ask that my fellow members join me in recognizing the time and work put into the Youth Advisory Council by its members, as well as Jack Baker's skillful leadership of the group.

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

PUTNAM, ROBERT: SPORT HALL OF FAME IND. - CONGRATS.

LARRY HARRISON: Recently, Robert Putnam of Brookfield was inducted into the Nova Scotia Sports Hall of Fame. His sports career extended over 16 years as a member of the Brookfield Elks senior men's fast pitch team.

During his time, Mr. Putnam won eight Nova Scotia titles, six of which were in consecutive years. He and his team also won four medals at the national championship, world bronze, and several individual accolades. During the ceremony, Robert was presented with his Hall of Fame plaque and pin by fellow Hall of Fame members Mike Henderson and Lyle Carter.

I wish to extend congratulations to Robert Putnam on earning this much-deserved honour.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

GAUDET, ANNA: ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS - CONGRATS.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise to recognize Anna Gaudet of Whites Lake, who worked as a Summer student before in my constituency office and is one of 20 students selected from more than 700 applicants to receive the 2022 McCall MacBain Scholarship.

Anna is a fourth-year honours student completing a double major in history and environment, society and sustainability. This Fall Anna will get to connect with a whole new community as she begins a Master of Arts in History at McGill.

In her first years of studies at Dal, Anna focused on history and volunteered her time to start a genealogy clinic at a downtown seniors' complex. After taking a sustainability course, she was surprised by the extent history plays a role in sustainability, social issues, and social change. A Summer job at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax opened her eyes to the important ways the museum can help engage people in stories from the past.

The McCall MacBain Scholarship provides full funding for tuition and fees, a living stipend, connections with mentors, and the opportunity to participate in an intensive leadership development program.

I would like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Anna on her successful academic achievements and for her enterprising, community-minded spirit to start a genealogy project for seniors.

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

BEC STUDENTS: BLANKET GIFTS - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: The Easter Bunny came early for residents of Maple Hill Manor because of Grade 7 students at Breton Education Centre, under the direction of their teacher, Corinne Pinhorn. The Grade 7 students made lap blankets for the residents as their home economics project.

The blankets were designed with the Cape Breton tartan. Their teacher, Corinne Pinhorn, said the real lesson learned went beyond the curriculum. They learned sewing skills, yes, but also how to work together.

The residents of Maple Hill Manor were delighted to have the students visit and to receive their beautiful lap blankets. Please join me in thanking Corinne Pinhorn and the Grade 7 class for their beautiful gifts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

TITANIC TRAGEDY: 110TH ANNIV. - RECOG.

HON. PAT DUNN: This past week we marked the 110th anniversary of the tragedy of the *Titanic*. I'd like to take this opportunity to commemorate this infamous disaster, to honour the heroes involved, and to remember the more than 1,500 people who lost their lives.

I know everyone present is familiar with the story. On April 15, 1912, RMS *Titanic*, the largest passenger ship in operation at the time and considered unsinkable, sank after striking an iceberg 700 nautical miles from our province. The massive loss of life that resulted made it one of the deadliest maritime disasters in peacetime history.

Despite the tragic nature of this event, there is no shortage of heroes to this story, including those who gave up their own seats in lifeboats so that others might survive, and the many crew members who stayed at their posts to the very end. Nova Scotians also contributed to the heroism. Not long after the vessel sank, the *Mackay-Bennett* and the *Minia*, two Halifax-based cable repair vessels, set sail to the site of the disaster and recovered the remains of many of the victims. A Canadian government ship, the CGS *Montmagny*, also departed from Halifax toward the site to help with the recovery effort.

I ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing the 110th anniversary of the *Titanic* tragedy and remembering those lost in this maritime disaster, and in acknowledging the role that many residents of our province played to assist in the aftermath of this tragedy.

THE SPEAKER: We must be getting close to the end of the session because it seems there have been four Member Statements already that have far surpassed the one-minute mark. Please keep it in mind.

The honourable member for Kings South.

PENG, CARMEN: PIANO & STRINGS COMP. WIN - CONGRATS.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I'll try to do better, Mr. Speaker.

To an extremely talented young musician, playing at one of North America's most prestigious concert venues would be a dream come true. Sixteen-year-old Carmen Peng of Wolfville has just been invited to showcase her talents this June at Carnegie Hall in New York after winning first place in the American Protégé International Piano and Strings Competition.

Despite her young age, Carmen has won many awards for her musical talents, which include an \$8,000 scholarship from the Nova Scotia Talent Trust for her organ playing. Carmen also plays violin and has been filling in as choir director at the St. James Anglican Church in Kentville for her older sister Chantel, who is equally as talented and has also played at Carnegie Hall.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Carmen Peng on her numerous musical achievements and wish her all the best for her first performance at Carnegie Hall.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

OROMIYA DAY: CELEB. OF OROMO CULTURE - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the date June 29, 2021, when the Halifax Regional Municipality declared this day Oromiya Day. Oromiya is a celebration about Oromo culture, heritage, pride, and history. With over 100 Oromo families and growing calling Nova Scotia home, the Oromo community contributes to the diversity, vibrancy, and talent of our province.

Oromiya Day is an opportunity for all Canadians to learn more about and celebrate the unique heritage, culture, and to understand the contributions of the Oromo people. I ask all members to join me in acknowledging the values and contributions of the Oromo community in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

LEBLOND, SO JEO: FUNDRAISING FOR UKRAINE - THANKS

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my appreciation to Pictou West artist So Jeo LeBlond for fundraising and support of humanitarian aid in Ukraine. She creates beautiful Polish-Ukrainian Easter eggs with elaborate designs using an art form known as pysanky. The designs are not drawn or painted on, but rather created from a melted wax that is applied with a tool called a kistka.

So Jeo is holding a raffle each week during the month of April with all the proceeds going to the humanitarian efforts in Ukraine. Her raffle coincides with Pysanky for Ukraine Day which took place April 1st.

I ask the members to join me in thanking So Jeo for her kindness and generosity. So Jeo, you are a gem.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS: COVID EFFORTS - THANKS

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to congratulate all our health care workers - the real COVID-19 heroes. These individuals have been on the front line their entire careers but COVID-19 has made it even more difficult on them.

These frontline heroes are being worked to the bone, are being denied vacation, and have mandatory overtime carrying the burden of the current wave. These individuals are exhausted, are missing family and friend time, they come home after long hours, volunteer in our communities, and still run a family and a household.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart and know that your work does not go unnoticed. True Nova Scotia Heroes.

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

VAN LEEUWEN, MARIUS: CA WORK - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, while all members know that winning an election is exciting, the real win is creating a great constituency team. In August I was so excited to learn that my constituency assistant Marius van Leeuwen was available to join me in the Halifax Citadel-Sable Island constituency office.

Marius is a diligent office administrator and skilled oral and written communicator in both French and English. More importantly, they are a combination of compassionate and persistent and tireless in the search for solutions for those struggling in my

constituency. They are always happy to share tips and advice and connect with other CAs across the province.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing the enormous capacity of Marius and all CAs across Nova Scotia who truly are public servants finding solutions for all Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

GERROIR, M./REINHART, J: DUKE OF EDIN. AWD. RECIPS. - CONGRATS.

CHRIS PALMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate two students in Kings West, Makayla Gerroir and James Reinhart, for receiving their Silver Award from The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award program.

This program gives young people access to a global framework that empowers them to learn and grow through non-formal education, all while working towards a globally recognized accreditation.

The award encourages young people to stay mentally and physically healthy, connect safely with others, give back to their community, embrace structure and purpose, and readjust to formal education.

Completion of these awards takes time and dedication. Robert Albert has been the Senior Advisor for the West Kings Duke of Edinburgh Award Unit for the past nine years and I would like to thank him for his time and encouragement of this wonderful program.

Makayla and James received their awards last Thursday at West Kings District High School and I'd like to ask all members of this House to join me in acknowledging this significant accomplishment by two very deserving students and wish them well in all of their future endeavours.

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

SALAH, FATHER PATRICK: ORDINATION - CONGRATS.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour someone extremely important to me, Father Patrick Salah. From a young age Father Patrick was already an old man, one who imparted his opinions and wisdom to all of us. It's ironic that he is now who I often turn to since back then it wasn't always appreciated.

A musical virtuoso, Patrick was the only student in his year to take a Bachelor of Music specializing in pipe organ. He studied as well as served as Director of Music at Saint Benedict Church in Clayton Park. It was around that time that he began to hear the calling

into the priesthood. After graduating from Dalhousie in 2015 he began attending St. Augustine's Seminary of Toronto.

On August 21, 2021, Father Patrick was ordained as a priest at St. Mary's Basilica and is now Associate Pastor at Christ the King Parish in Dartmouth East. Even though entering the priesthood does not equal a one-way ticket into Heaven for us, the entire peanut gallery are still very proud of him and love him very much.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Father Patrick Salah on his ordination and wishing him an early very happy 30th birthday.

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

C. B. BLIZZARD FEM. HOCK. ASSOC.: RINK EFFORTS - BEST WISHES

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize women and girls hockey in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. The Cape Breton Blizzard Female Hockey Association under President Christina Lamey are trying to get the CBU arena open to girls' and women's hockey as there's not enough ice time to accommodate the growing interest.

The association is working to raise funds to convert the needed Canada Games Complex into a rink exclusively dedicated to women's and girls' hockey. Christina believes this will go a long way toward resolving the issues around equity in ice time. I wish them all the success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

CURRIE, JIM: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

NOLAN YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Jim Currie. Jim retired on March 31st after a 41-year career as a primary care paramedic. During those 41 years Jim provided care for numerous residents throughout Shelburne County and the province, always with the utmost care and compassion for all, as those who know him will attest to.

Throughout his 41-year career Jim was faced with many changes and challenges, all of which he met with professionalism and dedication to the profession he loved and the residents he served.

I ask all members to join me in thanking all Nova Scotian paramedics and today, in particular, Jim Currie for his 41 years of service to the residents he cared for, who wish him all the best in his retirement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ASHBURN GOLF CLUB: 100TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to celebrate Ashburn Golf Course for its impending centennial anniversary. Formed as the Halifax Golf and Country Club in 1922, the golf course would officially open its doors in 1923. Over the years, many legendary feet have walked across its greens.

Ashburn has gone under many different names and has seen many different faces but it has always served its community proudly. We know, to have a business for over 100 years, that it takes a lot. I can say proudly I represent a constituency that has a lot of history in this province, in many different aspects that I think it is worthwhile to recognize in this House.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

RASHID, WENDY: FOSTER'S FLORAL STUDIO OPENING - BEST WISHES

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to a new business in our community. Foster's Floral Studio opened their doors on December 4, 2021 right here in Eastern Passage, at Quigley's Corner, around the corner from my office.

Owner and master floral designer Wendy Rashid has 30 years experience in the field that she brings each day. Wendy has a goal to enrich the lives of each customer with her positivity and I myself received beautiful flowers from her store.

Foster's Floral Studio is settling into our Eastern Passage community well and Wendy has recently become a proud member of the local Eastern Passage & Area Business Association.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in wishing Wendy Rashid of Foster's Floral Studio many successes this year and beyond.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

C.P. ALLEN HS: 9 TO 5 MUSICAL - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the cast, crew, directors, lights, everybody who is working on this year's Charles P. Allen High School musical, which is an adaptation of the classic 1980 Dolly Parton film *9 to 5*. Putting on a show of this scale requires endless rehearsals and practices. From the clips that I've seen online so far I expect the show will be nothing short of spectacular.

I would ask all members of the House to recognize the hard work that is being put in to make next month's show a success. And, to paraphrase Dolly's words for our life in this House - working noon to midnight, what a way to make a living. (Laughter)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

NADER, DR. NABIL: CMA HON. MBR. AWD. - CONGRATS.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I stand to give honour to one of our great surgeons in Amherst.

Amherst surgeon Dr. Nabil Nader was recently recognized by the Canadian Medical Association with an honorary membership award for his leadership and outstanding contributions in surgery.

Dr. Nader's surgical career has spanned 39 years in multiple locations. He studied medicine at Saint Joseph University in Beirut, Lebanon, and completed his post-doctoral residency training in general surgery at Université Laval in Quebec. Dr. Nader did his medical education in Lebanon during the country's civil war. As his skills developed in the theatre of war, so did his dedication to his practice as a surgeon and his commitment to care for those in need during unspeakable hardship.

After leaving Lebanon with his family, Dr. Nader took multiple locum positions in Nova Scotia prior to settling in Amherst in 2006. For the past 16 years, Dr. Nader has worked with the Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre in Amherst. Through his leadership, he has transformed the hospital's surgical department into a centre of excellence for complex abdominal surgery.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

PARK VIEW EC FOOTBALL TEAM: CH'SHIP. WIN - CONGRATS.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, today I recognize the Park View Education Centre football team, the 2021 NSAF Division 2 champions. The Panthers captured the title last November at Acadia University by defeating Fall River's Lockview High School 41-7 in a convincing win. The win capped off a perfect 9-0 season for the team who are ranked 16th in Canada - an amazing feat considering it's only the third season for the team.

Congratulations to head coach Jamie Dearing; assistant coaches Danny Macphee, Adam Murray, Joe Hurtubise, Brenden Zwicker, Mackenzie Maclean and Cameron Crouse; trainer Shaelyn Elliot; manager Tina Dearing; and players Chase Crouse, Hayden Murray, Chandler Zinck Marier, Hayden Chaisson, Matt Chapman, Rylan Macumber, Nate Inness, Elias Macphee, Evan Hebert, Deacon Benoit, Morgan Greek, Fisher Genge, Ryan

Gee, Spencer Dearing, Oscar Larkins, Owen Nauss, Tyler Johnston, Ethen Coles, Magnus Marchand, Austin Greek, Cowan George, Trea Meisner, Lukasz Kozera, Mattias Gow, Ethan Ross, Kyle Holder, and Lucas Sutherland.

I would ask the members of the House of Assembly to please join me in congratulating the Park View Panthers on an outstanding season.

THE SPEAKER: I wonder, could the member read those names again?

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

VOL. FIRE DEPTS.: KEEPING COMS. SAFE - CONGRATS.

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, a couple of hard acts to follow. I'm not going to break into song or recite a bunch of names, but today I would like to stand and thank the volunteer fire departments that are in my constituency: Coxheath, Westmount, North Sydney, Sydney Mines, and Florence. The members of these departments do amazing work to keep our communities safe, to keep us safe.

Also, this time of year tends to be grass fire awareness time. I'd like to remind all constituents to please keep an eye out for grass fires. It takes valuable time away from our firefighters who are out trying to protect us.

Fire departments do much more than just fires. They're also actively involved in our community from volunteerism to helping those who need the help. Congratulations to all our fire departments.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

SPORTWHEELS SPORTS EXCEL.: PROV. EQUIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Jeff Mayhew and Kevin Marriott from Lower Sackville.

Jeff and Kevin are owners of one of Lower Sackville's oldest family businesses, Sportwheels Sports Excellence, which was begun 75 years ago by Jeff's great-grandfather. The business started as a retirement project for his great-grandfather with bicycle repairs, axe sharpening and repairs for his neighbours. Seventy-five years later, it has turned into so much more and is still going strong.

I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating Jeff, Kevin, and the staff of Sportwheels Sports Excellence for continuing to provide the necessary sports equipment which has encouraged both the young and the old for many generations to live a more healthy, active life.

[12:45 p.m.]

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

MASON, PAUL: COM. SERV. - THANKS

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to stand today and recognize Paul Mason, a top-notch example of how volunteering shapes our community fabric. Hundreds of Cole Harbour-Dartmouth youth participating in either baseball or hockey have benefited from Paul's positive coaching and leadership. Paul has been active on many organizing committees and chaired numerous provincial and Atlantic championships in both sports. He also lends his voice as a most able auctioneer at sports fundraising events.

A well-respected member of the Cole Harbour-Dartmouth community, Paul meets each challenge with unruffled modesty. He enjoys coaching and it shows in Paul and in his players. In July 2021, the Astral Drive Junior High baseball field was renamed after Paul Mason to honour his contribution to our community. I ask that members of this House of Assembly join me in recognizing Paul Mason.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

COOPER, WILL: ART GALLERY OPENING - CONGRATS.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Will Cooper of Lower Canard on the opening of his new art gallery in his Saxon Street studio.

Will Cooper's art is a return to the timeless innocence, simplicity, joy, and wonder of childhood. He features the ocean prominently in his work as it is his main source of inspiration. Will Cooper uses vibrant acrylics and meticulously cut and sanded pieces of wood to create dream worlds full of movement and colour. His images are like wooden jigsaw puzzles utilizing Baltic birch to create his designs. He then frames the mosaics in maple.

Please join me today in congratulating Will Cooper on the opening of his new art gallery and his dedication to the arts community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

LOHNES, DON: SCHOOLS ARCHERY PROM. - THANKS

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Don Lohnes, who is the coordinator for the National Archery in Schools Program. Since 2007, Don has dedicated an incredible amount of time to coordinating the archery program in the schools and helping to develop the sport across Nova Scotia. He has gone above and beyond to

introduce archery to those who might not otherwise have had the opportunity to try it. His passion and commitment to the delivery of this program are truly unmatched.

This year, Don will be retiring from his position as a coordinator. It is my hope that there will be support from someone new to take on this role and to carry on the legacy that Don has created. If there is anybody here who has taken archery and loves it, and knows somebody who could do it, please talk to me after. Don would love to meet them.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the House to please join me in thanking Don for his incredible commitment as the coordinator of the National Archery in Schools Program.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

LIV. FD LADIES AUX.: FUNDRAISING EFFORTS - THANKS

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Liverpool Fire Dept. Ladies Auxiliary for their fundraising efforts, which recently allowed the department to purchase a new and important piece of rescue equipment.

This time, the proactive, committed, and tireless members of the auxiliary saw their ongoing efforts allow for the purchase of an AB Marine 4.27-metre boat with a 50 horsepower motor and all the necessary rescue gear. The total cost of this purchase was approximately \$30,000. The new boat will allow for more varied response with water and ice rescues and access to smaller bodies of water.

Mr. Speaker, I offer heartfelt gratitude to the auxiliary members for their continued dedication and support of their hard-working fire department and for all their commitments to the residents of Queens.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

SINGH, DR. SUKHDIP: ACADIAN SMILES OPENING - CONGRATS.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, in 2018, our community welcomed Dr. Sukhdip Singh and his family. They had travelled a great distance from their home in India so that Dr. Singh could join a local dental practice. Very quickly, Dr. Singh built a reputation as a skilled and kind dentist. His family promptly became part of our community as well. His boys, Maanav and Josh, attend the nearby CSAP school and play soccer, karate, and hockey.

With time, the family decided to make their move to Clare permanent. Last Summer, three years after their arrival, Dr. Singh and his wife Roshni took over the dental practice in Meteghan - a practice they renamed Acadian Smiles, in part to thank the residents of Clare for making their move such a positive experience.

I ask that all members join me in congratulating Dr. Singh and Roshni on opening their new dental practice and in welcoming them once again to our community.

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

TRURO MUSIC FEST.: 100TH ANNIV. - RECOG.

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an impressive milestone in my constituency.

The Truro Music Festival has been a proud tradition since 1922 and is now celebrating an incredible 100 years of competition. Recognized as the third-oldest competition music festival in North America, it was originally known as the Truro Choral Society Music Competition. The festival was created to foster childhood education and development for schools in Truro and has grown to include musicians from far beyond the Truro area. The Truro Music Festival will celebrate its centennial anniversary with a concert in May.

I ask the members of the House to join me in thanking the many dedicated volunteers for making the Truro Musical Festival a time-honoured tradition.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

MACNEIL, TALLULAH: BASK. PROWESS - RECOG.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I'd like to congratulate a young local athlete. Tallulah MacNeil - or Tua, as we call her - actually played her final high school basketball game recently. She contributed 26 points to the girls' team Division Three Provincial Championships as Tallulah's school, Sacred Heart, won out over Oxford, Nova Scotia. I have to say it's been a pleasure watching Tallulah grow up and grow into a fine young woman.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. There's quite a bit of chatter going on in the Chamber. The member for Bedford Basin has the floor.

KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, would you like me to start over? No, I'm just kidding.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry I interrupted you, but it was getting a little noisy.

KELLY REGAN: That's all right. It's been such a pleasure watching Tallulah grow up. She's a really smart kid, she excels academically, and she's also a fine athlete. In

addition to playing basketball, she also plays tennis and coaches tennis and pickleball out of the Daniel Nestor Tennis Centre.

It's kind of also a bittersweet time because we know our family's time together is going to change. She's going to go off to university and things will be different, but I want to say congratulations to Tallulah, and well done in your basketball game. I just really can't wait to see what you get up to next.

THE SPEAKER: The member for Dartmouth North.

ROSE, R./WEAGLE, S: CONSTIT. WK. - THANKS

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour and thank two people who have helped me be here for the last several weeks. Rebecca Rose is the constituency coordinator in my office in Dartmouth North. While I've largely been absent from the office, Rebecca's been running the show, helping the many people who come through the doors, communicating with the larger community through our very helpful newsletter, and handing out COVID-19 tests to the many people who have been coming in to get them, which is great.

Rebecca is joined by Sandi Weagle, who does critical navigating and advocating for residents in Dartmouth North. Together, they have been helping people apply for housing subsidies and heating rebates, talking to Nova Scotia Power about bill arrears, and advocating to ESIA on many issues.

Constituency staff, as we all know, are frontline public servants who are often not recognized as such, and they deserve a huge amount of thanks and support. So, in Dartmouth North, Rebecca and Sandi are truly a dream team. I'm grateful for them and their excellent work on behalf of the residents of our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

JAMES-CHELSEA MEM. RD. HOCK. TOURN.: CBRH FUNDRAISER - RECOG.

HON. BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend a great group from Louisbourg and the surrounding area who organize and participate in a road hockey tournament every year, donating all the proceeds to the pediatric unit at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital.

One of the organizers, Dalton Lahey of Louisbourg, stated they have been coordinating this event since 2014 in memory of their closest friend, James Hanley-Campbell, who lost his fight with cystic fibrosis in 2013 at the young age of 26. They later named it the James-Chelsea Memorial Road Hockey Tournament after James's sister,

Chelsea Morash, lost her battle to cystic fibrosis in 2016 at the young age of 27. They were both well-known in their community for their outgoing, kind spirits.

I would like to take this time to applaud all those involved in this annual tournament who are raising awareness for cystic fibrosis. I would like to remind everyone that next month is National Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month.

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

ABRAHAM, RYAN: CURLING SUCC. - CONGRATS.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I rise today to congratulate an excellent young curler from Clayton Park, Ryan Abraham. Ryan started curling shortly after he learned to crawl and has dedicated most of his life to the sport. His string of successes is long, and he has represented Nova Scotia at the Canada Games Under-18 and Under-21 National Championships.

Last month, Ryan achieved every curler's dream when he represented Nova Scotia at the 2022 Brier in Lethbridge, Alberta. At age 22, Ryan was the youngest curler in the entire field. While Team Nova Scotia didn't take home any medals, they curled well and were recognized for their great sportsmanship and their friendliness at the bar after the games.

I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Ryan on his curling successes and wish him all the best in the future, and as a side note, his brother is very proud of him.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

MACDONALD, MARY JESS: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: It's an honour for me to pay tribute to Mary Jess MacDonald, former board chair for the Strait Regional School Board, who passed away April 5, 2022.

Mary Jess started at Normal College at the age of 14 and began teaching at 16 years of age in a one-room schoolhouse in Queensville. She continued on with her own studies, earning her Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education, and Master of Education, with specialties in reading and special education.

Mary Jess spent 37 years inspiring students in Inverness as a teacher, supervisor of special education, and Assistant Superintendent of Schools. After her retirement she spent 24 years as an elected school board member, chair of the Strait Regional School Board, and president of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association. Her commitment to education

and her students was recognized in 2012 with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Mr. Speaker, I send my sincere condolences to Mary Jess's family and friends, and to all those who had the pleasure of knowing Mary Jess. She will be greatly missed.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

ROCK. HER. SOC.: FED. DESIG. WORK - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: My riding of Bedford South is very new in many ways, but there are some fantastic historical areas as well. One of those is in the area around Hemlock Ravine Park - the Princes Walk area. At one time Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, lived there, in the 18th century. There is a rotunda on the other side of the train tracks - you can see it when you drive along the Bedford Highway.

I just want to recognize Wayne Ingalls and others from the Rockingham Heritage Society, who are continuing to work to get federal designation for that area. It's beautiful, it's historic, it dates back 200-plus years. I invite everybody to visit, and I look forward to the day when it is designated and we have a beautiful plaque at the Bedford Highway location.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

WILSON, SARAH JANE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Last week on April 14th, 2022, beautiful, young Sarah Jane Wilson was taken from us at the young age of 27. She died in a tragic single-vehicle accident in Leicester, Cumberland County.

Sarah was the definition of joy and happiness, kindness and love, and she always lit up a room. Sarah was born in Moncton on April 5th, 1995, and grew up in beautiful Sackville, New Brunswick. Sarah graduated from Tantramar Regional High School in 2013. Later she attended the University of New Brunswick, where she earned a degree in kinesiology in 2017. From there she attended Acadia University, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in nutrition in 2020.

Sarah was just beginning her career as a dietitian in Amherst. In the Fall, I spent several hours with Sarah discussing nutrition and wellness for women managing menopause. She was great at telling and showing everyone how much she loved them. Please join in sending our sympathy and condolences to her family, her friends, and especially her employer, Christine MacDonald of Simply for Life in Amherst.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

HADHAD, TAREQ: LITERACY PROMOTION - THANKS

HON. JILL BALSER: I rise today to recognize Tareq Hadhad for his promotion of literacy and for sharing his story with those all over Canada and around the world.

Mr. Hadhad, a Syrian refugee, Canadian citizen, and founder of Peace by Chocolate, has recently taken the national stage to participate in this year's CBC's *Canada Reads*, the great Canadian book debate.

During *Canada Reads*, five prominent Canadians choose the one book all Canadians should read. Over four days of debate, they narrow this list of five books to one. This year, Mr. Hadhad was selected to participate as a panelist, and he championed the novel *What Strange Paradise* by Omar El Akkad.

During the debates, Mr. Hadhad opened up about how much *What Strange Paradise* resonated with his own experience as a former refugee from Syria. He also noted that in these trying times, Canadians need to hear the powerful stories of refugees and why *What Strange Paradise* is the one book that Canada should read this year.

Please join me in congratulating Mr. Hadhad on his achievements during this year's *Canada Reads* competition and thank him for sharing his story and promoting literacy on a national stage.

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

[1:00 p.m.]

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

THE SPEAKER: The time is now 1:00 p.m. We'll finish at 1:50 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: COVID-19 DATA - ACCESS

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, other provinces in the country are saying that they are potentially at the peak of the sixth wave. The Province of Ontario is saying that because of their data. They're predicting that they could be at that peak. I'll table that. Here in Nova Scotia, we don't have access to that same level of data. We get weekly data, but I'd like to ask the Premier if he can tell this House if we are seeing a peak of our cases in the sixth wave now.

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Obviously, COVID-19 is still on the minds of Nova Scotians as we go about our day-to-day lives and follow all the practices that we know to keep ourselves safe. We recommend wearing a mask, getting our vaccines - just being mindful of what we can do to keep ourselves safe.

We put out a significant amount of data on Thursdays every week. The member knows that. It's the same data that our epidemiologist gets. Quite frankly, I'm flabbergasted that the member is still trying to make an issue that there's not enough data. There is absolutely enough data. Nova Scotians know more than data tells them. They just know COVID-19 is still around and present in their communities.

IAIN RANKIN: I thought he said it was an important question and yet he's still flabbergasted. Mr. Speaker, in the weekly COVID-19 updates that we receive, it says that the data dashboard will be updated weekly until April 28th. I'll table that. Nova Scotians are already missing the information they once received, and to stop providing it just one week from now would be alarming given that we still don't know if we're at the peak of this wave, as the Premier acknowledged.

Can the Premier confirm that Nova Scotians will continue to receive even just the weekly data that they're getting now beyond April 28th, which is just over a week from today?

THE PREMIER: The information that's available to Nova Scotians is important. We recognize that. We also know that Nova Scotians know what they know. They know how to keep themselves safe. They know that COVID-19 is present in their communities. In terms of the very specific question about the weekly data that's available to Nova Scotians, I'll certainly take that back to Public Health and to the department. I personally don't see or think it would be a good thing to continue it on, but I'll talk to the department and understand the pros and cons of that.

IAIN RANKIN: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Given that we don't know where we're at in this wave, I think Nova Scotians would appreciate continuing to get that weekly information. We are seeing new variants pop up in other parts of the world. Even in this country, we've seen now documented cases of the XE variant, one of the recombinant variants.

I'd like to ask the Premier: When these new variants arrive, is it still the case that Nova Scotia sends these cases away to a lab to ensure that we know what variants of concern are in our province so that we can ensure that our policy is appropriate given that the variants of concern are here in our province?

THE PREMIER: Nova Scotians have great faith in Public Health. We have great faith in the leadership that we've seen from Public Health through two years of a pandemic. Of course, there will always be some who are always looking forward - new variants, we're

going to need a lockdown in the future. There will always be some of that fearmongering. It's just not coming from us. We stand with those Nova Scotians who know how to keep themselves safe. They know what to do and they're anxious to go about getting it done.

Variants are sent away to the national lab. There's some equipment that will be showing up in Nova Scotia soon so we can do even more testing here. I want to say to the member very, very clearly: I have great faith in Nova Scotians, and I am extremely optimistic about the future of this province despite what fear otherwise people might try to spin.

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

PREM.: BUDGET & BASIC NEEDS - EXPLAIN

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, this government's budget begins with the words that it is about solutions for the most basic needs we have. There's no more basic need than food. Canada's Food Price Report for 2022 predicts an average family will pay 7 per cent more this year for food, but household income was up only 1.6 per cent last year. That leaves a very wide gap.

It's in consideration of this gap that, in the Province of Québec, the government is advancing \$500 for every citizen of the province through its budget. We have no such direct income transfers in this government's present budget. I want to ask the Premier: How is that solving our people's most basic needs?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we do have a \$500 Seniors Care Grant. I will tell you what, the budget before the House right now has significant investments in families, has significant investments in seniors, has significant investments in Nova Scotia. I certainly hope the member will be supporting that budget and all the good it does for Nova Scotians.

GARY BURRILL: The specific claim that we're examining, Mr. Speaker, is the claim that the budget provides for our people's most basic needs. Now income assistance rates for families with children are not increasing whatsoever and surely providing for your children is about as basic a need as there is. Even with the increases in the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, with the budget's 4.2 per cent inflation forecast, a one-child family will have their actual inflation adjusted annual income decrease this coming year by \$192. My question to the Premier is: Can the Premier explain how that is meeting our people's most basic needs?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I just disagree with the premise of the question. Yes, inflation is high right now in Nova Scotia. It is high across the entire country. But we are investing in Nova Scotians. Anyone who tries to paint the narrative that we're not investing

in Nova Scotians is just wrong. The member has a chance to stand up for Nova Scotians by supporting the budget and quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I'll be flabbergasted if he doesn't.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about painting anything or constructing any narratives. We're talking about the government's claim that by its budget it has provided for people's most basic needs - its words.

Now surely a roof is a pretty basic need. There are over 23,000 households in Nova Scotia today who pay out more than half of their total income for the roof over their head. That's the situation in which only 370 of the 22,600 units the government has announced in their special planning areas are actually designated as affordable units. The total of those 370 that are to be permanent rent or mortgage geared to income-affordable units is actually zero.

My question to the Premier is: Will the Premier acknowledge that those whose most basic needs were not being met before this budget are not going to have their most basic needs met by this budget either?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, there are significant needs in this province, there's no question about that. We're doing what we can, as much as we can. We tabled a \$500 million deficit before this House because we understand the need to invest in Nova Scotians, in their health care, in their families. In this budget before the House right now, there are millions of dollars dedicated to affordable housing, millions of dollars in rent subsidies. There are millions of dollars - billions, quite honestly - to invest in Nova Scotian families.

I am incredibly proud of the work that the minister is doing to make sure that we solve the housing crisis that all Nova Scotians have inherited because people in government before us looked the other way. We will not look the other way. We're standing up for Nova Scotians. The members opposite have a chance to stand with us and I hope they do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: MASKING GUIDELINE - COMMIT

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Yesterday the Premier said, you know who else recommends wearing a mask? I do. However, Mr. Speaker, the Premier does not recommend wearing one in his Premier's office or the PC caucus office. He told reporters that if it were up to him, masks wouldn't be required in the Legislature. I'll table that. The Premier is now not only out of step with Dr. Strang's recommendation but also his own. My question to the Premier is: Why do he and his office not follow his own recommendation?

THE PREMIER: I actually appreciate this question because it gives me a chance to clearly identify the difference between the members opposite and us. We do not mandate masks in our offices, Mr. Speaker. They are recommended, of course. If you walk through our offices, you will see some people wearing masks, but it's not mandated. Just apparently like it was not mandated at the Liberal AGM, where there wasn't a mask in sight, from what we saw.

We recommend masks, we understand COVID-19 is real, and we will continue to recommend masks because that's what's important for Nova Scotians. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear: The Liberal AGM was not in the middle of the most deadly wave this province has ever seen. The comments that the Premier is making refuse to admit that masks not only protect themselves, but those around you. That's why masks are important for people, especially those most vulnerable.

"Mr. Speaker, you made a decision that people would wear a mask in here" and "we respect your authority to do that," the Premier said. I'll table that. This is from the same Premier who put out a statement saying, "Our government does not agree with the decision the Speaker's Office made on their own" with regard to COVID protocols. I'll table that. That was very proudly published by the Premier's Twitter account.

It appears that those on this side of this House have a very different interpretation of "respect" than the Premier. I ask the Premier: Which is it? Does he respect the mask mandate in here or does he wish he had his own way and we'd all be in here without one?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I understand the urgency of Opposition members to try to create division and create narratives. Let there be no doubt of the amount of respect I have for the decisions that come from the Chair. We respect the decisions from the Chair. Do we always agree with them? That's a different story, but we do respect them - unlike some members in this House who will not respect the authority of the Chair, would rather walk out of this Chamber than respect the authority of the Chair.

And if the truth be known to the member, I'll give the member just one last little tidbit before I take my leave for the next question: As a caucus, we had already agreed weeks before this House session that we would wear masks in this Chamber. That was a well-known fact and the reason is because we recommend the wearing of masks and we continue to do that.

THE SPEAKER: I'm going to ask that everybody just calm down for a little while or there are going to be a lot of interruptions and people won't get any time to ask questions.

The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

FTB: SOARING INT. RATES - SUPP. PLAN

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, in October, CTV News reported that the market share of new variable mortgages surged to 51 per cent. That's the highest rate since the Bank of Canada began tracking this data. I'll table that. This means that when interest rates rise, many Nova Scotians' mortgage payments rise automatically as well.

Last week, the Bank of Canada raised rates by 50 basis points, the first such increase in two decades. The last time was in May 2000. This is on top of a 0.25-per-cent increase earlier this year. Rising interest rates mean more financial hardship for Nova Scotians in this cost-of-living crisis.

My question for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board: What is the government's plan to support Nova Scotians facing soaring interest rates in the middle of this cost-of-living crisis?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, there's no question - people paying their mortgages, many people are putting money out as quick as it's coming in. Many people don't realize how cheap money has been the last number of years, with increases that are actually designed to stop inflation and to stop people from spending and investing. That can come as a challenge to many family budgets. We're concerned about that.

We also recognize that a lot of this is under the control of the central bank - setting interest rates, deciding whether or not to have quantitative easing or tightening - and those are things that are done far from Nova Scotia. So we're certainly watching this. I'll let the member ask her next question.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South. See what happens when you relax? (Laughter)

KELLY REGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's Bedford Basin, but I hope I can stand up anyway.

Nova Scotians are already beginning to feel the effects of these interest rate increases in the cost of living crisis. In fact, there are lots of things that governments can do, like taking off or removing or reducing gas taxes, for example. The latest consumer index report by MNP shows . . . (Interruption) I'm sorry, Mr. Premier?

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Bedford Basin has the floor.

[1:15 p.m.]

KELLY REGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The latest consumer reporting by MNP shows that 57 per cent of Atlantic Canadians are feeling the effects of the rise in interest rates. The same report shows that nearly two-thirds of Atlantic Canadians say that rising interest rates hurt their financial situation. I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, as Nova Scotians are feeling these increases, what they are not feeling is any support from this government to help them through that. Why?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I would reject that statement. What I would say is that before the budget for this year was even introduced in here, we took measures to quickly target meaningful support to those most vulnerable to things like increases in interest rates and the costs of inflation.

The reality is nobody likes inflation. Nobody likes interest rate increases. But if the central bank is going to target inflation to try to stop it from being such a problem, one of the main tools they have is to increase interest rates to cool spending. What I hope is that in the long run we get back to a more reasonable level of inflation so that consumers and everyone in society is protected.

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

FTB: COST OF LIVING CRISIS - SOLUTIONS

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, soaring costs and rising interest rates are putting Nova Scotians closer and closer to bankruptcy. The Consumer Price Index report also shows that over four in 10 Atlantic Canadians say that rising interest rates could push them into bankruptcy. I'll table that. Yet with so many Nova Scotians on the financial brink, this government has still offered no support or solutions.

My question to the Premier is: How many Nova Scotians will be forced into bankruptcy before they see any cost of living solutions from this government?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I think I'll just use a political example right now. We have a provincial Liberal Official Opposition here. Their federal colleagues in government in Ottawa were very concerned when they introduced their recent federal budget that they did not do too much. As you know, they spent a lot in the last two budgets and it was very beneficial for this province, in part contributed to a \$1 billion revenue surprise coming into this budget year.

What I would say is that the federal Liberals are concerned about doing too much because if they do too much, they could actually make the problem worse.

PATRICIA ARAB: I thank the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board for that response. This is his responsibility, currently, so I'm not sure why looking back is what's happening. We need to look forward. It's his responsibility. Sixty per cent of Atlantic Canadians say they are \$200 or less away from not being able to pay their bills. Some are unable to pay them already.

Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians are one busted tire or cancelled work shift away from not being able to pay their bills. With so many Nova Scotians struggling to get by in the cost of living crisis, why are Nova Scotians still waiting for the support they need from this government?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I'm not looking backwards. I guess you could say I'm looking sideways towards Ottawa. I think, in fairness, the member is trying to put it all on the provincial government, but what we're seeing are world problems. We see the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, what that has done to energy prices. We know that energy prices drive the cost of food. The cost of everything is going up.

We're just coming out of a pandemic where there were supply chain interruptions. Meanwhile, as I've just stated, the federal government was forking out the dollars to protect people and it may have caused some of the inflation we're seeing now. We have to be careful. Governments have to be responsible. We don't want to make the problem worse.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

H&W: FREE CONTRACEPTIVES - CONSIDER

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Last week the Legislature's Standing Committee on Health heard from Martha Paynter, a registered nurse in abortion and reproductive health care, and Dr. Melissa Brooks, an OB/GYN at the IWK, about the need to provide free birth control to Nova Scotians.

They pointed out that while medical and pharmaceutical abortion is free, birth control is not. This means that the government will cover the cost of a \$2,000 abortion but not the \$400 cost for an IUD or a \$30 monthly cost for oral contraceptives. Family Pharmacare does not help most people who can't afford birth control. Does the minister think that it makes economic sense to offer free contraceptives?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Currently we are undergoing the formulary review, I think as the member knows, and we are looking at a number of different options. I did watch the committee last week and was grateful to have the feedback from folks, so it is part of the review that we're doing, looking at that.

We have a number of competing requests and a number of people who have things that they want covered, and finite resources. What I will say is that we're currently under review and we will take the information that we heard last week under consideration.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I thank the minister for that answer, and just in case she needs more information I'm going to table that it's not just Dr. Paynter and Dr. Brooks who think this is a good idea. The Canadian Pediatrics Society, Oxfam Canada, Actions Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, the Canadian Association of Midwives, the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives, the Canadian Medical Association, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada, Dr. Alyson Holland, a pediatric doctor at the IWK, the medical director at the Halifax Sexual Health Centre, and 33 OB/GYNs, family practice doctors, and nurse practitioners from across Nova Scotia have all called on the government to create a free universal prescription contraception program. Say that five times fast.

Will the minister agree with these experts and doctors that free contraceptives are an essential part of public health care?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly since I've taken on the role of Minister of Health and Wellness, I've met with a large number of stakeholder groups, all of which have very valid concerns and things that they would like us to cover as government. We are undertaking a formulary review. We are looking at the Family Pharmacare Program, recognizing that we have finite resources. We will again take some of the information that we heard. I'm happy to have a look at the information that's tabled, but at this time I cannot make any commitments.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

FTB: STRUCTURAL DEFICITS - CONCERN

HON. KEITH IRVING: Nova Scotians worked hard for years starting in 2013 to rein in a structural deficit, a deficit that was flagged by the Ivany report as a threat to this province. By 2017, Nova Scotia was operating fiscally sustainable, as determined by the Parliamentary Budget Office. Now Nova Scotia has a government that seems content in running large deficits deep into this decade, including a \$500 million debt this year alone. Now interest rates are rising quickly, compounding the risks associated with structural deficits.

My question for the Minister of Department of Finance and Treasury Board: Is he committed to structural deficits for years to come?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I don't know what the Opposition wants. A moment ago, I'm being asked to pour money on a situation, which would be akin to pouring gas on a fire, quite possibly making things worse. Now I'm being accused of being

imprudent with the province's finances. Why? Because we're spending money on health care - something the last government didn't do.

KEITH IRVING: The role of the government is to balance these things, and the role of the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is to look forward and figure out where this province is going to be. The minister's budget shows increasing debt payments going forward, and now increasing interest rates will make it even more challenging for this government to meet its debt obligations.

We have learned from the questions in this House that the government has no plan for economic growth, no plan for fiscal sustainability, no plan to get back to balance in the term of this government.

My question for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board: Is the minister concerned and now planning for a credit rating downgrade by the bond rating agencies, which will further increase the cost of these large deficits - yes or no?

ALLAN MACMASTER: I'll never answer a question with a yes or no. What I would say is the Opposition needs to balance their asks here. At the end of the day, interest rates - we always have to be conscious of that. We have to be conscious of what we're spending money on, but we've chosen with this budget to focus on health care.

How many people suffered, how many people waited for a nursing home bed? How many people waited for that promise, a doctor for every Nova Scotian? They're still waiting. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. (Interruption) Order, please. This is your final warning, to the member.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has the floor.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, what I would say is in this budget, yes, there's a deficit. But we're trying to fix the health care system.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FTB: GOVT. PROJECTING RECESSION - AWARE

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, they say that the devil is in the details. In the past few days, I've had time to look a little closer through this budget, and as our government has boasted, about \$13 billion in spending. I, as well as many Nova Scotians, will be flabbergasted to see that the government has neglected to say that their economic outlook projects less growth each and every year until the economy shrinks in 2024, with our real

GDP in decline. My question is for the Premier: With no plan to grow the economy, is he aware that his government is projecting a recession?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear in this budget that our focus is on health care. We've got a capital budget over almost \$1.6 billion in investment, much of it announced by the previous government. That is having a significant impact on our GDP.

Government is making investments. We're also wanting to ensure that we have growth that's manageable. We're trying to address the labour shortages we see in the province. In the budget we have an excellent initiative to bring more young people to this province in trades and in occupations that are in high demand.

We need everybody pulling together, and we're going to do it.

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, one thing I would point out is that I do believe that this government has a smaller increase in health care spending than the previous government. In this cost of living crisis, Nova Scotians are being more and more mindful of their pocketbooks and their bottom line. If only the government would do the same. Instead, this government has downloaded \$500 of debt on every single Nova Scotian this year alone.

This government is spending more and Nova Scotians are getting less and less. So I will ask the Premier: Other than a recession, what are Nova Scotians getting out of this gamble with our financial future?

ALLAN MACMASTER: I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health care, they got a lot less out of the last government. When I look at the numbers to suggest that we're not spending more on health care, it's almost 10 per cent. When you actually pull out the numbers and look at what federal government flow-through money was coming to us and going out during the pandemic, our actual expenditure on health care is almost 10 per cent more. We intend to fix health care. It's going to take some spending to do it, but we intend to do it.

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

FTB: COST OF LIVING CRISIS - PLAN

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, I'm hearing from people wanting to know what this government is doing for those struggling. Our population is aging rapidly and the current cost of living crisis hurts our seniors and those on fixed incomes and low incomes the most. What is the government's spending plan to help them specifically? What are they going to see, and how is it going to impact their pocketbook?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I can think - even before the budget, we took action on this. We put in over \$13 million toward people who are on income assistance. The Heating Assistance Rebate Program - we decided, why don't we use a program that we have already in place, that people have already applied for and received money from? We can just top them up. It was a quick way to get money out into the pockets of people in need. We've been very focused.

We also said that we would keep the door open. A budget is a budget. It's an estimate of what's to be spent in the coming year. If we feel there is a need to help people, we certainly have the capacity to do so.

LORELEI NICOLL: Well, while the door is open, as a Nova Scotian, I know what I know. We all know that this government's projected recession in 2024 will hurt Nova Scotians the most. The government claims to be proactive, yet we've seen no action to support Nova Scotians through the cost of living crisis and no measures to mitigate the coming economic shortfall.

With Nova Scotians who need support the most seeing none in this budget, how can seniors on fixed income and on low income trust that the Premier is supporting them with this government's projected recession?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Once again, we could do what Quebec did and give - I think it was \$500 to every person. In their case, they added \$3.2 billion to their debt. What we did was, we did something targeted for people most in need before the budget, and then in the budget we have the \$500 a year Seniors Care Grant, a new initiative by this government.

We have the Property Tax Rebate for Seniors; we have off-oil initiatives to help people protect themselves from the cost of oil. We know that 40 per cent of Nova Scotians are heating with oil; we want to help them get off that. We have Efficiency Nova Scotia grants, we have the Good Neighbour Energy Fund, and I could keep listing, Mr. Speaker, but I see I'm out of time.

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

DCS: IA OVERPAYMENTS - FORGIVE

KENDRA COOMBES: Last week when I asked the Minister of Community Services to forgive overpayments charged to income assistance clients due to CERB, the minister told this House that clients who accepted CERB made a decision.

The ESIA regulations state, "An applicant or recipient is not eligible to receive assistance if they have another feasible source of income," and I'll table that. The ESIA Policy Manual states "an applicant or recipient is required to pursue all other feasible

sources of income . . . Where an applicant or recipient refuses to pursue all other feasible sources of income and applicable assets, ESIA will be refused and/or discontinued.”

I would respectfully ask the minister to acknowledge that her previous comments were incorrect, and that the IA clients who were eligible did not have a choice about whether to accept CERB.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: One of the things that I love about our job is the work that we do in our constituency offices. I think everyone here loves being in their constituency offices, and here’s the reason why: It’s because when individuals come in with problems, you sit down with them and you figure out a plan, because there are options out there. There are solutions out there, there are resources out there to help them. You sit down and you figure out a plan how to assist them.

Perhaps they decided to keep the CERB as well as their income assistance, which they shouldn’t have, but some of them did not know that, and that’s okay. Many did. So you sit down with them, and you explain what the future’s going to hold and you work it out with them.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I don’t need a lecture on constituency work. When I asked the minister and this government about this government’s decision to table a budget that sets income supports well below what is needed for a household to meet their basic needs, the minister pointed out that it’s in her mandate letter to tackle poverty. However, there is no money in this budget specifically to address poverty, and the government has not put forward any targets. You can’t buy many groceries with a mandate letter. If the minister is committed to tackling poverty, why isn’t it a part of the budget?

KARLA MACFARLANE: It’s hard to have the member across the floor make us all feel like the sky’s always falling. It’s not. We’re here to uplift people. We’re supposed to be a springboard for them.

Let me share the number of ways in the budget that are there to help people: reducing fees for child care; increasing the Nova Scotia Child Benefit; increasing wages for continuing care assistants; nearly \$30 million for the Seniors Care Grant; \$15 million for affordable housing; \$2.7 million for rent supplements; paying tuition for CCAs; \$17 million for supportive housing initiatives for people experiencing homelessness.

There’s lots in this budget: \$93 million in this budget for the Department of Community Services. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

DED: NON-RESIDENT TAX - IMPACT

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: It was recently reported that the CEO of Rhyolite Resources, Fred Stanford, is cancelling a major \$20 million investment into Lunenburg County because of this government's approach to out-of-province residents, Mr. Speaker.

While the Premier and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board have indicated that these new punitive measures won't help with the housing crisis in Nova Scotia, I wonder if they've considered the fact that even by taking in these extra taxes, there might be a net loss when Nova Scotia loses more investment from outside our province.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: The specific case that he has spoken of - I've met with Mr. Fred Stanford about this project, and the truly innovative mining technology at its core. In fact, I have a meeting with him again on Monday.

There's been a lot of emotion raised in regard to the non-resident tax. It is really quite difficult to say whether Mr. Stanford's decision was caused by his hurt, and he has spoken specifically of his hurt, or if it is because of a business decision. To quote him: because building this facility in Lunenburg was always going to damage his reputation with his investors..

ZACH CHURCHILL: I don't think the government should be shocked that people are hurt by being treated unfairly and punitively in the province of Nova Scotia.

For two years, the world - North America was looking at us. We were welcoming outside investment. We were getting people to move here. Now this government has actually made a decision that has forced many fellow Canadians, including Nova Scotians, to actually issue a constitutional challenge which could create a liability for this province.

The Premier has told us that his Chief of Staff is getting paid \$80,000 more than any other Chief of Staff because of the legal counsel he gets. Did he get counsel that this move could be . . .

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, what I would simply say to that is that this kind of a tax has been in Prince Edward Island for many, many years. It is the same. It's a non-resident tax. Nobody has ever successfully challenged it in Prince Edward Island. That's a reality.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

FTB: BETTER PAYCHEQUE PLAN - DELAY

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, the cost of everything is outpacing wage growth in this province. The cost of gas is \$1.70. Diesel is \$2.00. Families will be spending over a thousand dollars extra on groceries this year. The average price of a one-bedroom apartment in Halifax is \$1,600 or more. I could go on. These costs are increasing while paycheques are stagnant. I would ask the Premier again: Where is this government plan that we heard so much about to ensure Nova Scotians see a better paycheque?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the member is talking about the cost of housing. We've seen, as the previous member asked and pointed out, tremendous investment by people from outside of our province in the province. Certainly, we appreciate that. We acknowledge that. But we're also trying to look out for Nova Scotians, many of whom cannot find a place to live. For that very reason, prices continue to go up, up, up.

We are trying to take measures and bring measures to the floor of this Legislature, one of them being the non-resident tax and deed transfer tax, to try to protect Nova Scotians, to look out for Nova Scotians who are competing against people coming from out-of-province who are selling homes for three times the price of a similar home here. That's what they're competing against.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: A better paycheque was one of the ways they were going to help Nova Scotians, Mr. Speaker, yet despite the cost of living crisis, the Premier has made it clear that this is not a priority for him or his government. Will the Premier finally admit that his promise of a better paycheque was an empty campaign promise? How long will Nova Scotians have to wait before they see a better paycheque from this government?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, once again we know the Opposition asks for one thing and then they say no, don't do that. Then they turn around and they ask for something else and they say, no, don't do that. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'll let it go. The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has the floor.

ALLAN MACMASTER: It kind of reminds me of the devil in the old Caramilk commercial. Of course, he had the Caramilk secret, and people were trying to buy it, and the constant refrain was "not enough." Until finally he was offered anything, to which point his ears perked up and he said, anything? (Laughter)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

PREM.: MTG. WITH VETS. - COMMIT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I am glad that the government is having so much fun with this because our job in Opposition - and I want to speak for the member for Sydney-Membertou - our job is to be the voice of the people. That's our job.

On that note, last Fall I did ask the Premier here in the House about a commitment that the Premier had made to veterans and asked if the Premier would be willing to stand and hold up that promise. I will read a quote from the Premier on that day and table the document that says "I can make that commitment to the member. In fact, I remember meeting with the veterans . . . so I can make that commitment." Unfortunately, and I know the Premier is very busy, but I believe veterans deserve our time and our respect.

THE SPEAKER: Question, please.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Can the Premier ask if he is willing to remake that commitment and make time in his schedule for veterans who served this country?

THE PREMIER: I assure you that veterans across the province, and certainly across the country, know my great respect for their service. Of course, my father is a veteran as well. I have a tremendous respect for veterans. I have tremendous respect for the democratic process that happens in this House. I will tell the member this very clearly: As all Nova Scotians know, when I make a commitment, I stand by it, Mr. Speaker.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Well, I would love to see a commitment of maybe a time, because my office has been trying since the Fall to get an appointment with veterans on this veterans' medical clinic and we have, unfortunately, not been given a timeline. I believe that veterans should be respected, and they should be given a meeting to discuss this.

A lot of talk today has been around finances and budget. I think that the Premier would be pleased to know that this actually will save the Province money, because if there is a veterans' medical clinic, the federal government will be paying for the veterans' medical appointments. So this would actually put money back in our provincial coffers.

My last question to the Premier is: Does he realize that this will realize health savings for our budget? Will he actually commit to a schedule and a timeline before the Fall session this year of meeting with veterans about the veterans' medical clinic?

THE PREMIER: For me, being an elected official, it is always about the people, not the politics. So my commitment is to meet with the veterans, and I will do that. The member wants to make it about meeting with the member. It's not about meeting with the

member. It is about meeting with veterans, and I will always respect veterans every single day of the week.

[1:45 p.m.]

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

FTB: COST OF LIVING INC. - ADDRESS

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, inflation is squeezing the purses of Nova Scotians and we are hearing much about Nova Scotians who are finding it difficult to meet the everyday needs of their families. Through this budget, we have seen a couple of small glimpses - one-time funding options - but no sustained plan to help Nova Scotians through this cost of living scenario that we are in today. My question to the Premier is: Why are Nova Scotians paying for a lack of sustained action in addressing the cost of living?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, when we look at Russia's invasion of Ukraine - it happened as I recall, on February 24th. Our budget numbers were put together at that point, so what did we do? Before the budget came out, we introduced targeted support of over \$13 million, and we have said we would keep the door open.

We know that the cost of living is affecting people and affecting people who are at lower income levels the most. If the price of a loaf of bread goes up, it's of small consequence to somebody who is of wealthy means. But somebody who is living paycheque to paycheque, or whatever the case may be, if they have a low income, it's a significant issue, and we will remain attentive to those needs.

BEN JESSOME: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and those same folks are now dealing with gas that's at \$1.70 per litre. We're not seeing any sort of nimble funding to help support these people who are trying to meet the basic needs of their families. The cost of fuel is burning a hole through the wallets of Nova Scotians. I'm asking for something that's reliable, something that Nova Scotians can look to, other than one-time funding. How much higher do gas prices have to rise before Nova Scotians get to see something adaptive and reliable?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I think this is a problem that if you start looking back at the charts, it started in December, but it really hit in February. We responded in timely fashion with that \$13 million. Our hope is that things will change, but if things don't, the door is not closed. We'll be here for Nova Scotians.

If the member is looking for concrete things, I think about the Seniors Care Grant - \$500 each year. I think about the Nova Scotia Child Benefit being increased up to \$1,275 for every child. Again, I could go on with other ones here. I think about the rent cap that's in place to protect people right now.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

DED - SMALL BUS.: FUEL COSTS - SUPPORT

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps talking about the door is open, but you know what has stayed the same? You know what hasn't increased? The \$12,165 people on income assistance make every year - and that minister hasn't given a single penny towards that.

Soaring gas prices are impacting our small businesses. When asked what costs are causing difficulties for their businesses, 72 per cent of businesses responded: the cost of fuel and energy costs. That's 72 per cent. There's nothing in this government's spending plan to help our small businesses with this cost.

My question is for the Minister of Economic Development: When will this government finally support small businesses with out-of-control gas prices?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I have spent a lot of time in these first months of government speaking with business people and business leaders of all different sizes. Yes, the little bobblehead going over there. What they have told me that they need more than anything is to fill labour . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm not sure if the word that you used is parliamentary or not, but I'm going to ask if you would withdraw it, please.

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I will happily withdraw that characterization.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

The honourable Minister of Economic Development.

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Business people have consistently said that what they need is labour and housing to address the housing needs of the employees that they need. Those are things that we are taking action on. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: I heard that. I'm going to ask the member to withdraw what he just said because other people in the House heard it too.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I will be happy to withdraw the statement after the insult that was levelled at me. Mr. Speaker, inflation is hitting an all-time high . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. What did you just say?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I said I will happily withdraw the statement, but there was an insult levied my way.

THE SPEAKER: I think that was withdrawn.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Yes, okay, and I withdraw my statement.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, inflation is at an all-time high. Rising costs are hurting our small businesses. Four out of five small businesses claim that rising costs are a significant challenge for them. We heard the minister say that they've spoken to people, they've listened to people, but 72 per cent of small businesses are saying fuel and costs are killing them.

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

I think it's time that we all take a 10-minute recess.

[1:50 p.m. The House recessed.]

[2:02 p.m. The House reconvened.]

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, we've very pleased to have the opportunity to put forward some of our bills today on Opposition Day. Would you please call Bill No. 23.

Bill No. 23 - Mental Health Bill of Rights.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I am pleased to rise today to talk about Bill No. 23, the Mental Health Bill of Rights. As I have shared before, it is a struggle to access adequate mental health support as both a child and as a parent in Nova Scotia. That was one of the reasons that inspired me to run for politics. I realize that things haven't changed, things haven't changed fast enough, and things aren't changing fast enough. I wonder what we could learn from mental health that could be applied in other sectors.

I am pleased to stand today and talk about Bill No. 23. Earlier in the session the Minister Responsible for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health asked us to have faith. I would submit that for those of us on the frontline of mental health, being told by government to have faith is not appropriate. We already have faith of many different kinds. It's the only thing that has often kept us going - faith in our love for our friends and our families. From government we want a plan.

A Mental Health Bill of Rights could help establish that plan. In the Fall we reintroduced this Mental Health Bill of Rights. On one hand it would commit the government to spending 10 per cent of its health care budget on mental health supports, in line with the World Health Organization's recommendation. This level of increased funding would make possible the kinds of improvements that we need.

The Mental Health Bill of Rights also sets out some important principles and states that anyone in Nova Scotia who is struggling to maintain mental wellness has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, have prompt and appropriate access to publicly funded diagnostic resources and treatment, have timely access to client and family-centred support services, have access to treatment support that is appropriate for the person and the person's circumstances, and have access to an advocate of that person's choice or to a public advocate if necessary.

We have also advocated for access to same-day, next-day mental health counselling services across the province, a network of staff by trained professionals offering assessment and brief intervention therapy without the need for referrals from primary health care providers.

We also want to support, with commitments from this provincial government, Nova Scotia to finally have a province-wide system of integrated youth services. We also need a province-wide mobile mental health emergency response service that would help people in crisis and divert resources away from police who are not equipped or trained to respond.

The key piece to all these critical improvements lies in expanding our mental health system's capacity, strengthening our public options and structures. Yesterday I spoke in Supply, talking a bit about what we know about child and youth mental health in the province. I started off by saying we don't know enough - we actually don't know where

we are, so we don't know where we're going. Because we don't have a baseline, we don't know that what we want to do will work. This continues across the lifespan.

What we do know is concerning: that 20 per cent of Nova Scotians live with a mental illness, and that only 20 per cent of those folks are getting access to care. The other thing we know is that access is important. Access affects treatment adherence, so if someone continues their treatment - treatment effectiveness. It also can predict the rate of disability resulting from mental health issues, and it costs us a lot of money annually: \$51 billion annually in Canada. We need community-based solutions that are supported by a government system based on research, practice, and lived experience.

We need to bolster the services available in our communities and support the people who work in it with adequate resources. It is a conscious set of decisions and political strategy that has left our public mental health care system in shambles - and it is in shambles. As I also have shared, I am contacted every week by families who are struggling to support their young person through no lack of faith but a lack of a system that they can turn to for help. This type of system needs to be reversed, and our party is committed to doing that work.

After listening to Estimates and considering other things I have heard over the past few weeks, one key thing I think that we need when we're talking about mental health and a mental health bill of rights is transparency and accountability. The Progressive Conservatives made public, costed, and very specific commitments that have not been explained. The money is not in the budget and it's not clear if there's a plan to reach those budget goals. There have been allusions to major spending and programs, but we aren't being brought into the conversation.

The current spending shows some promise, but it's only a fraction of what was talked about during the election campaign. It seems like there are building blocks to increase our data and evaluation, as well as consideration of other models. This is absolutely essential. This is what I'm talking about when I say we don't know enough about where we are. Things like where people toss around the effect of COVID-19 on child and youth mental health, that's really hard to say because we didn't know very much before COVID-19, so we don't know much now. I think this is really important.

The minister has referred to developing a strategic framework. The current spending also talks about increased clinicians to provide virtual care, and these are all important pieces, but this is not the universal mental health care that was promised clearly and repeatedly by this government.

The current budget also funds a major investment for early intervention for autism. Again, this is important and critical, as is support across the lifespan. In Estimates, the minister committed to looking at the service gap for school-aged young people with autism who are struggling with behaviour and other issues. This investment - again, the current

one for early intervention, ongoing ones across the lifespan - these investments are not what people understood during the election campaign when the Progressive Conservatives talked about universal mental health care.

The new day hospital is an important pilot but currently budgeted a small amount of money and doesn't address the myriad of challenges that face people when they're outside the walls of the hospital after two weeks - and it's really limited to HRM. It does very little for other parts of our province such as Cape Breton, where the wait times for mental health treatment across the system, across all ages, are tragic. They're unacceptable.

There was some year-end funding for mental health, but again that's not funding into a system that actually shares a set of principles. The organizations that will receive funding will do amazing work, but they'll struggle under the burden of having one-off, one-time, short-term funding. I've often heard members of community-based organizations talk about their constant struggle.

The substance use drop-in centres also seem like a promising investment from this budget - again, we're hoping this here is the standard across the province. But there's no plan to get from \$20 million to \$100 million, and we don't have an answer for how all Nova Scotians will have access to mental health care, virtual or otherwise. We still lack a formalized approach to youth engagement and family engagement, a formalized approach to peer support, and there's not nearly enough investment in mental health crisis response.

There are other considerations that need to be addressed as well, some of which I talked about yesterday when I spoke going into Supply. One is the need to strengthen the ability of primary health providers to screen and support people where they're at in community and in relationship. I guess it is, of course, hard to imagine getting there with the current shortage of physicians and other primary health care providers, but I think that's a really important piece to think about. Who is in our system of health care providers who could become part of that system of providing primary mental health?

We need to address complexities. One of the things that you'll kind of hear in the mental health world, and particularly in the child and youth mental health world, is people talking about how the complexity of issues has increased somehow, and people are seeking to understand that. I think one of the main factors in this actually is our lack of ability or lack of capacity thus far to really address the social determinants of health that are in particular influenced by structural oppression and marginalization and discrimination.

We talk about intergenerational trauma. I think a lot of us know that term now when we think about the impact, for instance, of residential schools. What that actually means on the ground is that - or, in schools, in community clubs and sports leagues for young people - is that young people have a hard time being part of those organizations. The intergenerational trauma - I mean, we know it's actually physically carried inside people's

bodies, but it's also carried in the stories, it's carried in the opportunities that families have, and it's carried and perpetuated by ongoing systems of oppression.

I also think that we make it very hard for people to have good mental health when we make them work very hard to survive, to feed their families. I know that we have talked a lot about the cost of living crisis and affordability in this province. The government would like us to think that, well, we have lots of programs, so don't just look at one number, think about all the other things.

That is an exhausting way to live. If you're trying to manage your own mental health or physical health issues, or other things, being told to go from service provider to service provider is not really actually giving people a basis of dignity and respect from which they can improve their mental health.

We also need to be thinking about mental health across a lifespan, and that's from early childhood to our seniors. There's lots of work and lots of research happening across Canada and around the world that we can benefit from. Yes, we need to respond to our specific contexts in Nova Scotia, but we do not need to reinvent the wheel each time for mental health programs and services. We need to build on the evidence that exists, and we need new models of crisis response.

The Mental Health Bill of Rights is a key pillar of setting our system right. With important principles to guide the work and guide decision-making, adequate funding to fund services that respond to needs, and a renewed commitment for mental health for all in Nova Scotia. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: It's okay to not be okay. Access to mental health care is a right, not a privilege. Mental health care is health care. Access should not be exclusive to those who are fortunate enough to have insurance coverage or who can afford private care. Access should be truly universal.

We have incredibly dedicated frontline mental health professionals in Nova Scotia who work in both the private and public system. They dedicate their lives to the betterment of others.

We all need support at some time in some way. Statistics suggest that annually, one in five individuals experience mental illness. Experts suggest that by the time a person reaches age 40, that number increases to one in two Canadians.

Thousands of Nova Scotians, both young and old, struggle with mental health conditions that are likely manageable if they had access to the appropriate supports. These individuals are being unfairly penalized by bad government policy. They have the right to

expect access to the regular, reliable, publicly funded mental health and addictions treatments that will improve and promote their well-being and ensure that they are productive members of society.

[2:15 p.m.]

The five pillars of the Canada Health Act are public administration, accessibility, comprehensiveness, universality, and portability. Nova Scotia is failing to uphold these five pillars in almost every way. The results are that too often, illness simply goes untreated or even to the extent that treatment is available, much of the burden of managing mental health services falls to family physicians and ER doctors.

Time spent managing ailments for which they do not specialize, or are not comfortable, exacerbates the shortage of family doctors in the province, putting more pressure on a stressed system and contributing to the inability to take on new or more patients. Similarly, when the only option available is the emergency room, the results can be ineffective long-term treatment and further overcrowding in the already overburdened system.

Without a family physician, some patients may be discharged without adequate long-term supports and the necessary follow-up care and the cycle continues. Meanwhile, individuals with complex and severe illnesses don't receive the necessary regular support or access to an appropriate team of professionals. As a province, we need to do a lot better at meeting the need.

These are not my words, Mr. Speaker. They are from the Universal Mental Health Care platform introduced by the Progressive Conservatives during last year's election. They are words that had lofty promises and hope for those personally affected with mental health illness - those who are in crisis.

It was a promise of a universal mental health care system. Yet in the budget that we have before us, we see promises that fall very short from those promises made a year ago. In fact, \$81.4 million is the deficit between what was promised and what is actually in this particular budget.

We have a government that likes to talk about the plans that they have for this province. We have a government that likes to criticize and say what was wrong and what was done wrong in the past and assure Nova Scotians that there is a plan for doing better in the future. Yet we don't see the plan.

The first instance to see this is in the budget that we're talking about and that we will be talking about today, and continue to talk about this week, that will pass because the Progressive Conservatives have a majority government but one that does not follow through on the promises of their campaigns - particularly within universal mental health.

We know that there's a lack of practitioners. We know that, particularly in the Eastern Zone - the Cape Breton/Guysborough area - we cannot recruit and retain mental health clinicians. That is not something that anybody would deny. How are we going to recruit them? What is the plan? What is happening? What incentives are being given? What conditions? What collaborative practices?

Do we have anybody in the queue? Is there anybody waiting? Is it an immigration issue? Is it a housing issue? Is there a place for people to live if they decide to come here? We have a housing crisis in the province. It's not unique to Halifax. Are any of these departments speaking to each other? Are these ministers speaking to each other? Is there any foresight?

The NDP present a bill today that talks about universal mental health care, but essentially it is trying to make into law the promise that was made to Nova Scotians by the Progressive Conservative candidates in 2021. The NDP caucus is just trying to do the work that really should have been done by this government.

It's frustrating to me, because the Premier himself is on the record saying that it is too important not to make the investments. It is too important of a topic. It's too important. It is too important. I have friends, I know individuals who voted Progressive Conservative in the last election based on the promises of mental health care.

I understand. It wasn't so long ago that I was on the other side of this Chamber. I understand the limitations. I understand the impracticalities of things. I understand how hands can be tied, how priorities need to shift - move from place to place. I probably will give allowances to pretty much every other promise that was made, but this is one area where the priority should never shift. This is one area where the priority and the focus need to be today - after two years of being in a pandemic - on the levels of mental health stress to all Nova Scotians.

Forget about those who deal with mental illness, because there is a difference. There are those who have mental illnesses but all of us have mental health. All of us have mental health that we need to protect, that we need to look at the same way that we take care of our physical health. The same way we take care of our spiritual health, our economical health. This needs to be normalized.

Every Nova Scotian needs to realize that they have mental health, and they need to take care of that mental health. They need to put it as a priority, but how do you do that when only a few of us have access to the supports that are out there?

Like with talking to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, is the minister speaking to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development? One of the best ways to protect individuals' mental health is through prevention. Preventive mental health - that's a great way to get a universal mental health system in place. You talk about doing

prevention, work with the schools. There are schools already in this province that are running preventive mental health programs with their elementary school aged kids.

There are individuals - we had world-renowned mental health professionals who advised government, who put things in place for preventive mental health within our school system. Is there a conversation that happens between the ministers? Is this something that is going to be a part of their universal mental health care plan?

You have tools. You made promises and you have tools. It is not just about money. We can look at the money. The money is important: 10 per cent of the health care budget should be dedicated to mental health supports. But that 10 percent can fall into a lot of different places. There are things that can be done.

The intentions of this government are good. I am not going to sit here and pretend that they are not well-intended when it comes to mental health. I know they are well-intended, but this needs to be a push and it needs to be a priority and you need to think outside of the box. You need to find ways to make this happen.

You need to take legislation like my NDP colleagues have put forward and see what can be used from it, because the mental health of our population isn't something to play politics with. It isn't something to be put onto a shelf or to be put aside and say we will deal with this in Year 2 or Year 3 or Year 4, or we will deal with this when we get another government, when we get another mandate. It is something that needs to have started from day one.

I am willing to help. I am willing to help and let you get all the credit. No problem. It's all good. As long as at the end of the day we have a system in place that helps Nova Scotians - that puts Nova Scotians as a priority.

When I think about when the current government was in Opposition and how often we had members in the Gallery who were brought in, who had lost loved ones due to suicide. How often the now government members would sit over on this side and criticize the lack of supports to people with mental illness.

My ask of you - I implore you - remember why you brought those people into this Chamber. Remember what they needed from you and make universal mental health care the priority that you promised it to be in 2021.

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

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Speaker, the health and wellness of Nova Scotians is the key focus of our government, including addictions and mental health. This is why our government appointed the first dedicated minister to oversee the work of the

Office of Addictions and Mental Health, which sets the strategic direction and funds the delivery of addictions and mental health services in the province.

The office maintains strong connections with the Department of Health and Wellness - sorry, these glasses are terrible, I need new ones - and the broader health system and collaborates with our education system, justice system, and housing and community service network on solutions that make a positive impact on the health and the well-being of Nova Scotians. The office works closely with Nova Scotia Health and IWK mental health and addictions programs in ensuring that Nova Scotians receive the right care at the right time and at the right place.

Those living with a mental illness deserve dignity, compassion, and respect. We must continue to talk about mental health in a way that reduces stigma, including using appropriate language when talking about mental illnesses and forms of psychological distress. Access to mental health care is a right, not a privilege. Mental health care is health care. Our partners at Nova Scotia Health and IWK provide high-quality, publicly funded mental health care support for Nova Scotians every day.

Frontline mental health professionals in both the public and private systems dedicate their lives to the betterment of others. Truly universal mental health coverage for all will ensure Nova Scotians can expect access to regular, reliable, publicly funded mental health and addictions treatment. This commitment remains a priority and the groundwork for universal care is under way.

There are different pathways for Nova Scotians to access treatment and support in the public system. Someone can be referred to the system by their family doctor or through central intake. The central intake service is staffed with clinicians who match patients with the appropriate support based on the person's circumstances.

Our government is aware of the World Health Organization's recommended 10 per cent of total health care expenditures going toward mental health. We have made numerous investments in addictions and mental health since the Fall. Already we've opened two new recovery support centres, with plans to open more over the next two years. We've opened a new mental health acute day hospital in Halifax and have provided unprecedented grants to community-based organizations in addictions and mental health that fund initiatives across the province.

Although we are not yet at the 10 per cent recommendation, we are close. It's expected that mental health spending will continue to increase over the coming years to deliver on the mandate of the office. Implementation of universal mental health care, as an example, will take a significant investment. Our government and the Office of Addictions and Mental Health will continue to follow evidence-based - not "I think, I don't know" - but evidence-based practices to evaluate options on health care delivery.

[2:30 p.m.]

Integrated youth services, especially, are an area that our government is looking at expanding. The ACCESS Open Minds site in Cape Breton is doing tremendous work in the community and is something that the minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health visited this past Fall. Social workers provide a key role in delivering mental health care in Nova Scotia. We know not everyone with a mental illness needs to see a health care clinician such as a psychologist or a psychiatrist. For many, a social worker plays an essential role in improving one's situation.

The Office of Addictions and Mental Health will be assessing the role that all mental health professionals play in delivering mental health services in the province, and social workers will be a key component in the consultations for universal mental health care. In March, the government provided \$5 million for Cape Breton University to undertake a strategic health initiative that will explore training and health care enhancement to recruit and retain health care workers to areas of the province outside of the urban core of HRM. Part of this money will be used to create Bachelor and Master of Social Work degree programs, helping to fill the need for more social workers, particularly in rural Nova Scotia.

I am proud of the work our government is doing in mental health and addictions. We have already accomplished a lot, but our work is certainly not finished. The task has just begun to make Nova Scotia a leader in being the first jurisdiction in North America to offer universal mental health for all.

As I have stated, much of the content of this bill before us is work that is already under way; therefore, I cannot support this bill and the minister in charge of this portfolio says quite often that he wants to do it, the government wants to do it once and they want to do it right, and I have faith in this government that we will.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to rise today to speak to our caucus's Bill No. 23, the Mental Health Bill of Rights. Nova Scotia is one of the only provinces in Canada without a Mental Health Act. This year Nova Scotia yet again has not met the World Health Organization target of 10 per cent of health spending dedicated to mental health.

We see the impact of these gaps in my community and the communities across the province. It is clear the difference that a Mental Health Bill of Rights would make. Mental health wait times are particularly acute in Cape Breton.

Let's talk about the CBRM, for instance. People in the CBRM can wait more than four months for their first mental health appointment. They are then likely to wait months

for their second appointment. Imagine, five months for your first two appointments with a mental health professional. When you have a mental health issue, time is really much of the essence, and every time you have to wait months between appointments you are basically starting over. This is what I heard from social workers, who have told me that the wait times between the time they see people is consistently every time they have to start over, so they are having the same appointment over and over again. That is not conducive to good mental health practices.

Wait times for children and adolescents are even longer - up to 144 days for a first appointment and 121 days for a second appointment at the moment. I know I don't have to tell my colleagues that when children and adolescents are in need of mental health help that 144 days is ludicrous; 121 days for a second appointment is ludicrous. Again, you are talking about children and youth. That means they again, like adults, have to start over the process and have the same exact appointment over and over again, and that is if they get the same social worker, they might have some progress. But if they don't have the same social worker because the social workers are all burnt out, they are starting over every time.

It's unimaginable for parents who come through our doors, who are calling us on the phone, who are sending emails and they are desperate, and they don't know what else to do. They don't know how they're going to make sure their child makes it out of their teen years without a suicide occurring or a suicide attempt.

We can see what a difference a Mental Health Bill of Rights would have for people in Cape Breton. Imagine a law that promises to make the needed investments to abolish this two-tiered system and guarantees prompt and appropriate access to publicly funded diagnostic resources and treatment. Imagine that rather than the fraction of what was promised by the government to reach universal access to mental health care, making the needed investments in mental health care across the province. Imagine health and social services integrated in a way that recognizes the impact of mental health issues.

I'm always excited to talk with people in Cape Breton about what it would mean to meet the World Health Organization's 10 per cent goal. This would equal millions of dollars of new services in Cape Breton. It would mean same-day/next-day walk-in, free mental health services in Cape Breton.

A Nova Scotia Mental Health Bill of Rights could mean in-person, professional crisis response teams across the island, particularly in the CBRM, the province's second-largest municipality, which too often relies on the underequipped police when people are in mental health crisis. In speaking with police officers, they have told me: We're not equipped to deal with this. We may even escalate situations rather than calming them, because from their experience, oftentimes some people have already dealt with the police. They have traumatic experiences. They want to see more social services and more crisis teams being able to respond.

This is also why the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers has joined us in calling for the Province to dedicate 10 per cent of the annual health budget specifically to mental health services. In case members in the House may balk at the cost of this investment, let me remind them that it's expensive not to make these investments. A study in 2016 found that investment in treatment for depression and anxiety had a multiplier effect of four to one, meaning for every dollar invested, governments could anticipate a \$4 return when the value of the health effects were included. According to findings from a study by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, mental health problems and illnesses cost the Canadian economy \$48.5 billion every year.

Nova Scotians need a Mental Health Bill of Rights. People struggling with addiction need a Mental Health Bill of Rights. Imagine being guaranteed to have access to treatment and support that is appropriate for the person and the person's circumstances. We know we need an upstream approach to supporting people with addiction and substance abuse issues. An approach to addictions informed by a mental health bill of rights would improve access and availability of chronic pain treatment, identify, track, and manage co-existing mental health issues, increase the availability of trauma-informed clinical counsellors, social workers, psychiatric nurses, psychologists, and family physicians.

I see the great need of this kind of approach every day in Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier. A Mental Health Bill of Rights would make crystal clear that every person with a mental health disorder or in mental health crisis and distress is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect.

Consistent with the approach of a Mental Health Bill of Rights, it's also important to note that we need to update our occupational health and safety legislation to include psychological health and safety. I hear from too many people, and I know that others in this House do too, who are psychologically harmed at work and have zero resources or support. These are people who face bullying, harassment, and racism at work, and have no protections. If they lived in a different province, they would have them. The fact that they live in Nova Scotia means that they don't.

This is unacceptable. Making this change in our Occupational Health and Safety legislation is a critical step for the only province whose workers do not have this protection. People who are off work because of psychological harm at work have the right to be supported. A mental health bill would be an important and consistent step. Passing a mental health bill of rights into law would mean that people are guaranteed to have timely access to client- and family-centred services.

We have all heard the stories of people experiencing severe mental health distress or suicidal ideations seeking treatment and hospitalization and being turned away or sent home with a long lead time for a follow-up appointment. We've heard police departments urge again and again for an investment in crisis response, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, as I sum up my final remarks, Nova Scotians have the right to timely, appropriate, professional, universal, integrated mental health care. That is why our caucus's Mental Health Bill of Rights says that every person with a mental disorder or experiencing episodes of psychological distress is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect; have prompt and appropriate access to publicly funded diagnostic resources and treatment; have timely access to client- and family-centred support services; have access to treatment and support that is appropriate for the person and the person's circumstances; and to have access to an advocate of the person's choice or to a public advocate if the person is unable to choose an advocate.

We have a two-tiered mental health system in our province because of the barriers to access in the public system. People face outrageous wait times and an absence of primary level care. Access to mental health care is a massive priority for Nova Scotians, but we are tens of millions of dollars short of what was promised by this government during the election, short of what other provinces are investing, and still fall short of the WHO's 10 per cent goal.

The NDP has been consistent in putting forward solutions for greater access to mental health and addictions supports, including same-day/next-day in-person mental health support access across the country; emergency mental health crisis response teams province-wide; implementing a Mental Health Bill of Rights; funding mental health services to 10 per cent of the health care budget; creating a safe supply of drugs to prevent overdoses in Nova Scotia; Occupational Health and Safety amendments that would include psychological health and safety.

Nova Scotians simply cannot wait another year for the government to make these changes. People in Cape Breton - in my riding of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier - certainly cannot wait another moment for these services and for this funding.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I just want to stand in support of this bill, the Mental Health Bill of Rights for Patients. This is a topic that many of us have spoken to at length here in this Chamber. As one of the other members spoke to, it certainly was something that was big in the platform in the last election because many Nova Scotians recognize and agree that there are huge deficiencies in our health care system right now for mental health services.

I have spoken with the Minister of Addictions and Mental Health about the significant deficiencies in Cumberland County. I think the minister is quite aware of that. I look forward to the minister coming to visit, along with the member for Cumberland South, to see first-hand the significant deficiencies.

One of the reasons that I support this bill that the NDP have put forth is because they have some great ideas, and they have a lot of expertise right within their caucus: health professionals, researchers, people with great knowledge. I encourage the government to recognize the expertise that the NDP caucus brings to the table and embrace it. (Applause)

[2:45 p.m.]

Often, I think there's a history in this Chamber of debate and opposition that was really the opposite culture of collaboration and co-operation. I think we'll only achieve what Nova Scotians expect if we all put ourselves aside and put the interests of Nova Scotians first.

Politics can be a rough sport. It can be a blood sport, but the whole reason that we're here is to serve the people. When we put them first, we put aside the game that sometimes can happen here in this Chamber. When we listen to all the different members speak about mental illness - the reason that this is the first bill being debated today on Opposition Day for the NDP is because it is probably one of the top issues concerning Nova Scotians right now that is of the utmost importance.

We do see some positive things from this budget. I know the minister is working hard, but you know I've heard quite a few times the Premier putting the blame back on the previous government. You can only do that for so long. The people of Nova Scotia did elect this government to create positive change. It takes strong leadership that's very focused. It takes a lot of pressure to move the direction of the ship a little bit. You're working with a lot of bureaucracy, a lot of government departments.

Change is not easy. In order to create the kind of change that Nova Scotians are expecting, there's going to have to be a lot stronger leadership. Leadership is not blaming others. Leadership is staying focused on the targets and the goals. Universal mental health is a perfect example of that.

I heard last night in Estimates that there's a needs assessment being done. I hope that we're not just going to study, study, and study. I know that when this was put in the platform, there was already some study and work done on it. We have mental health care professionals, many that are working in the private sector who, through some discussions and work with them, could move into a universal mental health care system fairly seamlessly. This doesn't need to be studied for two years. Nova Scotians need it now.

One of the members spoke about the pandemic - and I did speak to the minister in Estimates about this last night. There is an urgent need now to deal with the systemic unwellness of people from the pandemic - of being isolated for too long, being in their homes and not going out. There's a transition that some people are going to have a much harder time going through than others.

I would love to see a plan from this government to address mental health post-pandemic. We're still in the pandemic, but as we hopefully transition out of it, it would be helpful to Nova Scotians if there was a specific health promotion campaign focusing on the mental wellness of the people of Nova Scotia post-pandemic. I'm sure there are other jurisdictions in Canada and across the world that are doing just that. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. We can work with others along the way, including members in this Legislature from the NDP caucus who put this bill forward today.

It is going to take strong leadership that stays focused on the goals ahead and sees the people on the opposite side of this room as partners, works in collaboration, and has some humility. It wasn't that long ago that they were in these seats. Regardless of what our place is, our most important place is representing the people who elected us. Whichever constituency you are from in Nova Scotia, the people who checked your name on the ballot, it was because they believed in you. They believed in you to be their voice.

Mental health care is one of the most pressing issues facing many individuals and families right now in this province. In Cumberland, we do not have any acute care mental health beds. Mental illness is not given the priority that it deserves and that the people of this province need. Why are there only acute care mental health care beds in certain hospitals? There are surgical beds in every regional hospital. There are ICU beds. There are medical beds, but there are not acute care mental illness beds.

Right there, all we have to do is look and see that the real priority is where the dollars are spent. In Cumberland, there is not funding for a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week mental health crisis team. A lot of time people think there is - we'll just call the crisis team. Well, there is no crisis team unless it's between 9:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., Monday to Friday, as long as there are no holidays. If you're going to have a mental health crisis, make sure it's during those times.

But in our health care system we have a radiologist, we have X-ray technicians, we have respiratory therapists, lab technicians. We have all these other specialities and departments that are funded 24/7. Even though they might only be called at 3:00 in the morning once a week, they are funded 24/7 - but the mental health crisis team is not.

So there's a lot of room for change. I've spoken about some of the issues already, but there are two more things I'm just going to mention before I close in my support of this bill. One is shared mental health care. I don't know if the minister has looked at that at all.

Twenty years ago, before I opened a collaborative care clinic in Amherst, I visited Cowie Hill. They had shared mental health care, where the psychiatrist came once a month and saw all the referrals that were made from the family physicians in that particular clinic. As well, they had two therapists who worked in that collaborative care clinic with the physicians, nurses and dietitian. The longest that any patient waited for a mental health referral was two weeks.

Almost everyone, when they were referred, got in within one week. The longest they ever waited was two weeks. That's because the therapists worked in collaboration in the same physical space, the same collaborative care unit as the physician. I worked on trying to get that model in our clinic for about four to five years, but there was no leadership. There was a resistance to change within the local mental health care department and unfortunately, there was no sort of political will to make those changes.

When we see models that work, why don't we just copy that and do it in other collaborative care clinics around the province? We know shared mental health care works. It's an effective model that reduces wait times and helps people receive mental health care when they need it - not 12 or 14 months later when more problems manifest themselves.

The last thing I want to just mention today - I didn't want to have to bring it up in Question Period, but I didn't know how else to get a response. Our veterans deserve better, not just here in Nova Scotia but across the country. People who served in our military, served our country, sacrificed their lives for us and for our freedom deserve to have access to care, including mental health care. Many veterans suffer from PTSD. We have seen the devastation that can have first-hand right here in this province when it's gone untreated. Devastating.

Our veterans need priority. Our veterans deserve to have access to primary health care services, as well as mental health care services such as PTSD. What is offered to them right now is not working. If you talk to almost any veteran, they will tell you that it is not meeting their needs. Most of them will not go and seek help in the current system.

They have told us what would work. They've given a complete model, they've given a financial plan, an operational plan. Our federal counterparts are willing to work with us and we have a meeting later this week. We have so many pieces of the plan put together, but we haven't had the support of the Premier. I am hoping that will change after today because our veterans deserve better.

Everyone deserves to have access to mental health care, but people who are willing to risk their lives and sacrifice for our country should not have to wait in vain. With those few words, I will say I support this bill - Mental Health Bill of Rights.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader for the New Democratic Party.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I thank all the contributors to that discussion.

Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 128.

Bill No. 128 - Energy Efficiency Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I am really happy to rise and speak to this bill. Energy efficiency is something that I get really excited about for lots of good reasons. It is really, I think, the way of the future in terms of meeting our climate goals and in making sure that people can live in adequate warmth and in adequate coolness in Nova Scotia. I will just expand on what I am saying there.

We are facing a climate emergency. The whole world is facing it, as the Premier likes to point out. Yet we here in Nova Scotia have to take the issue head-on and grapple with it and actually make some bold moves to do our part to address the climate crisis.

This is the kind of action that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns us is urgently needed if we are to avoid the most catastrophic climate events that are coming our way if we don't take action. We already know that we now cannot avoid all of the catastrophic climate events. The scale has tipped and that is not to say that we should stop and give up. Of course, we need to keep going and we need to do what we can to alleviate the impacts of that.

The climate targets currently set in Nova Scotia are ambitious, but they are not Nova Scotia's fair share. We have consumed more than our fair share and we should be looking for every opportunity to lower consumption now.

I hear time and again from this government on many issues, not just climate change, that we are the best in Atlantic Canada, or we are the third in the country. Well, that's good but it is not good enough. We should not be shooting for mediocrity or just okay or even pretty good. We need to actually blow our targets away and have much more ambitious targets.

When we talk about our fair share targets, we are talking about justice. Our place in a global community that is grappling with unequal levels of development, and capacity to lower emissions while also increasing standards of living. It's not just about us, Mr. Speaker - it is about our place in the world. We in Nova Scotia are in a position to do that.

Energy efficiency is crucial to meeting many of our goals for a just transition, not just emission targets, and we cannot get to our emission targets unless we have a just transition, to be honest.

To confront and eradicate poverty, I invite every member of this House to look at the map put out by the Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners or CUSP. If you Google that, you can see this great map where you can scroll over and see the levels of energy poverty anywhere.

I just did it for Nova Scotia and guess what, Mr. Speaker? Halifax County is the only county in the province that is not very high. In Halifax County, the energy poverty levels are high and then everywhere else in the province it's a different colour - it's dark

blue, which suggests very high - 41 per cent or higher levels of energy poverty. Overall Nova Scotia has the third-highest rate of energy poverty in the country.

[3:00 p.m.]

Now going back to what I just said about third is not good enough, let's take it in the other direction for this example. Almost 150,000 households - that's 37 per cent of the population - are spending more than 10 per cent of their after-tax income on energy bills. We're close behind Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island, both at about 40 per cent of their population. Of the three, we have the highest amount of actual people whose energy bills are this much of a burden. We have almost double the countrywide average of 20 per cent. I'll table all this later.

From the map it is also obvious that energy poverty is highest in rural areas, as I just said. When we talk about rural economic development, we should be talking about leveraging investments in energy efficiency to increase the standard of living in rural areas, through increasing the comfort and value of homes and creating local employment.

Another thing we need to do is increase our resilience to climate change, especially extreme weather. Energy efficiency is not just about keeping homes warm in the Winter - it's also about the ability to pay to keep a home cool in the Summer. This, Mr. Speaker, can be a matter of life and death. We only have to recall the incredible heat wave in British Columbia last Summer - 70 per cent of sudden deaths in those few days of that heat wave, a staggering 570 deaths, were due to the increase in heat.

Carrying on from that, to grow our ability to care for the young and the old, over 79 per cent of the people who died in B.C. because of the heat were over the age of 65. Forty per cent were over the age of 80. We have a very high population of older Nova Scotians here in this province. We need to prepare for the possibility of severe weather events as well as the fact that our Summers are getting hotter. I need not remind everyone who was out canvassing last year in August how terribly hot it was. It was unbearable.

We've talked about this. We talked about it last Fall when we were debating the climate change bill. The Premier referenced energy poverty when he spoke about the need for children to be in school, when we were talking about the pandemic, because it was the only place that some children could go where they could be warm and fed.

We have a massive problem with child poverty in this province and we must address the aspect of poverty that relates to energy. It shouldn't have to be stated so bluntly, but children should be able to be warm in their homes too, Mr. Speaker. They should be able to be warm and have food on the table. Lowering power bills through increasing efficiency is only one piece of the puzzle, but it is a very important one in addressing child poverty.

We also want to improve health outcomes in Nova Scotia. We've been talking a lot about that in this session. What does efficiency have to do with health? Well, actually it has a lot to do with health. First of all, if we're burning less fossil fuel, we're going to see a host of physical and mental health benefits. According to the International Energy Agency, energy efficiency measures can support good physical and mental health primarily by creating a healthy indoor living environment with healthy air temperatures, humidity levels, noise levels and improved air quality - not just living environments, I would add, but working environments and health care environments. We need to look at this for all buildings, not just our homes.

Furthermore, air pollution is a contributor to disease and premature death, so think of the benefit to the health of Nova Scotians when we triple our energy efficiency efforts. Perhaps most significant, though, is the relationship between financial stress and mental health. Lowering people's energy bills through efficiency will have a tangible, positive effect on the mental health of individuals and families by alleviating some of their financial burden.

Mr. Speaker, if we get this right we also have the chance to promote inclusion and equity. The Nova Scotia Community College is doing amazing work supporting people of diverse backgrounds to access education and jobs in the skilled trades. These jobs will grow when we triple our efficiency efforts. Although it isn't just about creating more jobs in the skilled trades, I want to say it loud and clear: Health care jobs are also green jobs. Just don't forget that. Also, culture jobs are green jobs as well.

When it comes to efficiency, we're not just talking about jobs in the construction trades. We're talking about the public sector, we're talking about education, we're talking about small business, we're talking about non-profits. Here's one great way to ensure that we can promote equity while creating green jobs: Increase the minimum wage to \$15.00 and establish a path to a living wage.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a bit about housing and how our bill relates to the current housing crisis. Many low-income homeowners are paying more for power than they should because they can't afford to upgrade and retrofit their homes.

I will say now, because I'm sure we'll hear about it, that EfficiencyOne and Efficiency Nova Scotia have excellent programs and they're doing excellent, excellent work, but with housing prices skyrocketing in Nova Scotia, it's becoming less affordable for people to make the kinds of investments that will reduce their power bills in the long run.

Although there are home efficiency rebates and incentives available through Efficiency Nova Scotia, there's currently a bottleneck in applications. People wait a long time for the programs because we need to get more people trained up to do energy assessments, and to do that kind of work, to install heat pumps. If we had those folks, they'd

all be working, for sure. Far too many of the existing energy efficiency programs require people to pay upfront costs, meaning that those who need the help the most are unable to access it.

People want to make improvements. They want to lower their power bills to reduce their carbon footprint, but our government is not showing the same sense of urgency or commitment. Many renters, likewise, are paying the prices of units that are inefficient and long overdue for retrofits and repairs.

Renters and homeowners alike are at the mercy of an unforgiving, indeed out-of-control housing market in which investment in home improvement for most is a far-off dream. Those who are fortunate to buy a home often are buying older homes - fixer-uppers, as it were - that need a lot of work. This is both a problem and a huge opportunity for the government to achieve climate and housing goals together.

Mr. Speaker, we'll hear more about energy efficiency in this debate, I hope. Again, I want to say that as the NDP spokesperson on environment and climate change, on health and wellness, and also seniors and long-term care, this is an important bill. One of the things about this bill is that it could cross many silos of government departments. I urge the government to take a look at this.

The government, rightly, has passed a pretty good environment and climate change bill in the EGCCRA legislation, but it's not willing, at this point, to look at finer and more detailed and more robust investment in the ways that we can achieve our climate change goals. Energy efficiency, Mr. Speaker, is the best way and the cheapest way to do it.

I will leave it there. I look forward to hearing what others have to say.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to get up for a few minutes and talk about Bill No. 128, introduced by my colleagues from the NDP. There are a number of aspects of the bill that are here that I think are doable. I think it's an important conversation.

I do want to recognize the staff. I think it's a little different. I'm still trying to figure it out. The Department of Natural Resources and Renewables has some, I think. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change takes on some of that as well. I do want to recognize the staff that I worked with for over three years. They're fantastic. The work that they do is absolutely amazing. Nova Scotia's always been on the leading edge of our efficiency programs that we offer here in the province. I do want to recognize their work. As I said, they're really good people.

I'll get a bit into the efficiency side of things, just because it was really a big focus for us over our time there. We expanded all of our efficiency programs to include houses that had other heating sources.

Generally, when the efficiency programs were in place, it was just for homes that were heated by electric. We expanded it to include all of the homes that were heated by wood or heated by other heating sources. That was a big step. It allowed a lot more Nova Scotians to access the programs through EfficiencyOne.

I talked about the solar program. We were leading the country in solar when it came to the incentive that we were providing through our office. Again, working with partners that saw our companies really go from about 16 companies to 70 in a year. I am happy to see that the government is making some important legislative changes to protect that industry.

When it comes to our housing stock within the province, there were some pretty significant investments at the time where I think it was 11,000 homes we actually did at the time through efficiency programs, funding partnerships, through the Province and the federal government to do that work. That work is important. Housing seems to be a plank for this government, and as they look at those units that they want to build, efficiency has to be part of that conversation.

As well, looking at what we did with the Mi'kmaw communities across Nova Scotia, that was a \$40-million investment where we're looking at retrofitting 2,500 homes in those communities. I say all of that because the work will never be done, that's for sure. I'll say this: One of the things that I always found interesting was that as parts of the province were transitioning away from oil-heated homes, moving to gas, especially gas in particular, I always found it interesting because it seemed like all of that stopped at the causeway. You saw the conversion of homes and certain energy sources, but it never made it to Cape Breton.

There's a long history of coal. I used to have these conversations with some of the gas companies, asking what's the plan for the Island, and there was always the issue around infrastructure, but efficiency actually fixes that. We're trying to transition away from that completely. As we transition in bigger areas of HRM and beyond, this actually is giving us the ability to finally start making the transition in Cape Breton, because it was oil or coal or really nothing before solar - wood, your more traditional heat sources. It's very important.

If you look at the bill and you look at some of the aspects of the bill, a lot of the work is done, or the foundation of the work is done when it comes to just ensuring that we continue to expand on our programs. I know that's something that's important to both ministers. I've talked to them both about it. I think the challenge really for government is what the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board was saying earlier today in Question

Period. As a government, and you'll do the same as a government, you're going to invest money in this, but a lot of the times it was in partnership with the feds.

If you look at when we expanded all of the efficiency programs to include houses beyond electric heat, that was a partnership with the federal government. The \$40 million that we're spending to upgrade homes in Mi'kmaw communities across Nova Scotia, that also was a partnership with the federal government. There were certain percentages we put in; there were percentages they put in.

If you look at the solar program, some of the other initiatives, they were all part of a package when we were negotiating with the federal government because they had a big mandate - they still do, as we all do - to reduce our carbon footprint and really provide as many options as we can to Nova Scotia. If they start pulling back on those kinds of resources, that will be an alarm for me, because that says that then the provincial government has to really start taking on the bulk of those expenses, which cost money.

These programs, like the solar program, they cost money. That's the one thing that - I've said this, I've asked the ministers this. That would be the one question that I would probably say is pending with the solar program: How are you going to pay for that incentive? The incentive is there now. Is that going to remain? You're putting a number of pieces of legislation in place to protect the industry, but ultimately that incentive was there to entice Nova Scotians to take solar. What does that envelope of money look like? What does that look like over a period of time? That would be the one question that I would leave for both ministers responsible.

I think it's mostly the Department of Environment and Climate Change now, I believe. I know he can't answer me, Mr. Speaker, but I'm still trying to figure out the relationship between the departments since . . . (Interruption) Exactly. I can reference both of you.

That's going to be the next big step for me on the solar program: What does that incentive look like? It's not cheap. It's not getting any cheaper with the cost of materials, but it was an incentive that we had in place that was so popular that we had to try to spread it out over a number of years, because we were basing it on funding that we had and funding that we were receiving from the feds at the same time. So that's going to be a balancing act for the ministers to deal with.

I just want to look specifically at the bill, because we are talking about the bill. Yes, we are. (Interruption) Well, I know you are. You kind of were. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, through you.

If you look at retrofits, they can help save money on their power bills. Upfront costs, of course we know that. This bill - "The Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables shall take immediate action to support, strengthen and set targets for energy

efficiency programming while prioritizing equitable access and benefits for low income and marginalized Nova Scotians.”

[3:15 p.m.]

My suggestion on that is really to continue - the work is already started with low-income housing and any of the developments that we had. We started with 11,000 units, and I suspect that the minister will probably do that for every new unit that they build. That's most important with the housing that we have, but also with the new housing that the government is suggesting that they're going to put forward in their mandate.

Then “. . . legislated energy efficiency resource standard covering all energy sources, with savings attributable to Efficiency Nova Scotia activities.” That one, I can understand what you're trying to do there. It would be a little difficult to manage. I'll be curious to hear some of the comments from my colleague about that one.

The plan to eliminate oil heating by 2050 is bold, but it's doable. Like I said, the challenge - and I always go back to home - the challenge was like, I would meet with our gas providers here in the province or anything, whether it was natural gas, whether it was propane, all the different elements that maybe Nova Scotians would use on a daily basis that transferred away from furnace oil, stopped at the causeway. Getting off the furnace oil is not just about getting off furnace oil. It's about actually allowing Cape Breton to make a real transition into clean energy. A lot of Cape Bretoners are taking on solar and they're taking on all the other programs, but there was never a transition from oil to gas to this. There was never an option. Now there is. I think the 2050 standard - I think any party or anybody would be pushing for that.

The “establishment of a minimum budget for low-income energy efficiency programs in all plans to meet energy efficiency resource standard requirements” - I can understand where the party is coming with that, but again, for me what this comes down to is that - and this is where the federal government plays a big part in this stuff too - these are going to be massive investments for the province. Ideally the partnership will still be strong, where they can access resources from the federal government, because these are going to come with pretty big price tags. Again, I'll be curious and interested to hear from my colleague on that one as well.

“The minimum target in clause (2)(b) may be increased by the Minister or the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board if cost-effective or deemed by the Minister . . .” Well, the minister obviously - listen, anybody who's the Minister of Energy or Natural Resources or Environment - they're always striving for new programs. That's really a testament to staff.

The one thing in Nova Scotia that we have an advantage over our sister provinces in Atlantic Canada is that we have an amazing department of people who are fully dedicated to transitioning us from traditional sources to now. Both ministers would

understand, as they're going through it, and you see some of the legislation that comes through here. That's one of our greatest assets. I think we may have the only real, true department that is dedicated to this stuff. I have full confidence in that staff, that they are looking at what this government wants to fulfill in its mandate and what programs we can access to help secure funds.

I do really appreciate the opportunity to get up and talk on anything related to energy. I think it's ever-evolving, as was said earlier today. It really drives a lot of what we do on a daily basis. As technology gets better, as we see the transition, it is becoming cheaper. Wind is becoming cheaper than it was five years ago. Electric vehicles and the infrastructure to have that in place, to support those kinds of vehicles, are getting cheaper. People are getting more comfortable with the idea. We still have a way to go in Nova Scotia, but eventually we will get there.

I think the biggest thing that government can do is just really keep pushing the envelope when it comes to new technologies that come. You have a huge mandate for housing. Make sure that you fulfill that mandate but when you fulfill it, you make sure that the units are efficient, and continue the program where we were retrofitting homes all over Nova Scotia. Keep expanding, that's the key.

Again, I'll just stop by saying that I appreciate the opportunity. This is a good bill. I'm happy to get up and talk on it. Again, we are really blessed with people who work within government who really know the stuff. They live and breathe it. You never see them. They are all wizards to me. I was amazed by how much they knew and how good they were to work with, so a big thanks to our staff in both departments.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: It is my pleasure to rise today to speak and highlight some of the climate change goals for our government and speak to this bill. Nova Scotia is a national leader in the fight against climate change. We have some of the most assertive climate change goals in the country: to have 80 per cent of our electricity generated from renewables by 2030 and to achieve net zero by 2050.

To achieve these goals, our work to pivot to cleaner sources of energy and the technologies that enable them is accelerating. As we move toward our goals, we will protect the ratepayers of Nova Scotia. They deserve clean, affordable, and reliable power. Through our amendments to the Electricity Act and the Public Utilities Act, we are making changes to improve the way electricity is delivered to Nova Scotians. We are looking at how we move forward with our relationship with Nova Scotia Power, and we will also lean on performance standards that will sift through these amendments.

We have the ability to pull different levers at different times and we will continue to look at those options. In addition, we will be active intervenors in Nova Scotia's general

rate application currently before the NSUARB. We have confidence that the NSUARB will hear all the information and deliver a decision that is fair for the ratepayers.

Our priority is to protect the ratepayers as we move forward to our green energy future. As we work toward our climate change goals, we are committed to protecting ratepayers and ensuring they have access to clean, reliable, affordable electricity. Over the next two years, we are investing nearly \$120 million in programs that reduce emissions and fight climate change.

Nova Scotia is a leader in energy efficiency programming. Each year, we invest more than \$30 million in our core energy efficiency programs, home warming, affordable multi-family housing, home energy assessments, green heat, and small business energy solutions. These programs create jobs, help families save money, and reduce emissions through energy efficiency. These investments are helping in the fight against climate change, while also reducing the personal energy costs.

Our investments have real impact: For example, they have improved 2,500 Mi'kmaw homes and 11,500 public housing units. They have helped Nova Scotians save more than \$180 million a year on their energy bills. They have helped us avoid more than one million tonnes of carbon emissions each year, and they have helped more than 21,000 low-income Nova Scotians get free home assessments and energy efficiency upgrades since 2007.

Our programs have reduced electricity demand by 12 per cent since 2008 and account for one million tonnes of reductions in greenhouse gas emissions annually. We do a great deal of work with incredibly dedicated partners like Efficiency Nova Scotia. In partnership with the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs, we are delivering Mi'kmaw homes energy-efficient programs. It provides deep energy retrofits for all homes across 13 First Nation communities in Nova Scotia while also providing training for community members to complete this work.

Home warming and affordable multi-family housing programs provide the financial support for energy retrofits for low-income households and affordable housing. The Province also provides support for off-oil programming helping homeowners reduce their energy consumption, and switch from oil heat to cleaner, more efficient alternatives. Heating oil accounts for 50 per cent of Nova Scotia's heating energy - the highest in Canada - and we want that to change.

The Home Energy Assessment program provides up to \$5,000 in incentives for home energy retrofits. We support the transition to help performance building codes through programs such as the Advanced New Home Construction Program offered through Efficiency Nova Scotia. They provide additional incentives for home builders to build beyond the current code. All of these programs support a local green workforce including heat pump installers, lighting specialists, solar PV installers, and builders. They are

currently employing more than 2,500 people in good-paying jobs, many of which are in rural Nova Scotia.

The Department of Natural Resources and Renewables provides scholarships and workforce training programs that support employment opportunities in the energy sector and include initiatives, awards, BIPOC and Mi'kmaw training programs to promote diversity as well. In energy training programs in 2021, 13 placements were funded and ten of those students remain employed with these organizations, which is a 77 per cent turnout. A total of 23 placements have been selected for the participation for 2022. This year's program starts April 25, 2022. A diversity component has been added to the program this year, increasing the total subsidy for 60 per cent of eligible placements.

Active transportation infrastructure investments are being made in partnership with the federal government as part of Canada-Nova Scotia Integrated Bilateral Agreement under the Investing in Canadian Infrastructure Program. It is a ten-year federal program for building a prosperous and inclusive country through infrastructure investments. The investments include projects that meet the federal outcome of increased access to clean energy transportation, including active transportation.

To date, Nova Scotia has contributed \$13 million through the program, which leveraged just over \$26 million from the federal and municipal governments for a total investment in the province to date of \$40 million, Mx. Speaker. This enabled six core active transportation network projects in the Town of Port Hawkesbury close to home, the Town of Kentville, the Town of Antigonish, the Town of Yarmouth, two within the Halifax Regional Municipality, the regional centre, which is the downtown core, and the community of East Preston.

We will continue to grow with our partners across the Atlantic region on paths to get off coal-generated power, Mx. Speaker. We will explore all options for the retirement of coal and the essential transition to renewable energy. It is important to select the right pathway for Nova Scotia.

The Maritime Link Project uses a 500 megawatt high voltage direct current connection that enables clean, renewable electricity generated in Newfoundland and Labrador to be transmitted to the North American grid in Nova Scotia. Once stable, reliable amounts of energy are generated by the Maritime Link, it could contribute significantly to our goal of generating 80 per cent of our own electricity from renewables by 2030.

The Atlantic Loop is one of many options to also help us reach our 2030 target. The broad concept is to upgrade transmission capacity on the East Coast to allow hydroelectric power from Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec to displace coal use in the region. It would allow the surplus of clean power to flow to regions transitioning away from coal. The Atlantic Loop is a focus of discussions in the federal Clean Power Roadmap for Atlantic Canada. It will take federal support to make this be a reality, Mx. Speaker.

[3:30 p.m.]

We'll continue to explore all of our options to meet our 80 per cent renewable target. We are not putting all of our eggs in one basket. On February 11th - my son's birthday - the Province-appointed procurement administrator, CustomerFirst Renewables, released a Request for Proposal for 1,100 gigawatts per year of new wind and solar energy. This is equivalent to 10 per cent of Nova Scotia's annual electricity use and will result in about 350 megawatts of wind and solar energy projects.

The submission deadline is early May and successful project awards are anticipated to be announced in late July. To date, there are 25 potential bidders. This supports our goal of achieving a 53 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and becoming net zero by 2050.

We're also looking at small-scale wood heat initiatives. A small-scale wood heat initiative is converting hot water heating systems from oil to wood chips in select public buildings. These wood chip heating systems ensure the use of locally sourced wood chips that are sustainably harvested primarily from private woodlots. This is creating new markets focused on private lands. Phase 1 is completed with nine buildings at six sites. This includes two district heat systems and government is looking to identify more suitable buildings for conversion as part of Phase 2.

The Green Choice Program is an emerging green power offering developed through collaborative innovation between the province, suppliers, the utility, and the large energy buyers. It will allow participating customers to purchase up to 100 per cent of their electricity used from local renewable energy sources. Staff are working to complete Green Choice Program regulations and hope to have those ready by mid-2022.

Community and commercial solar is also very important. Currently there are more than 4,000 homes with solar panels and we expect more will be installed in the coming years. The SolarHomes program helps residents get solar panels with the help of a rebate of up to \$6,000. We are currently consulting with communities and stakeholders on future residential and community solar programs and hope to have more to share on that in the very near future.

Electric vehicles are a key component to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. We are working with the federal government to advance EV adoption through incentives, through education, and building more charging infrastructure across Nova Scotia. Just in January, we announced \$500,000 to install more electric vehicle charging stations across Nova Scotia. In Budget 2022-23, we're investing another \$2 million to expand EV charging stations across the province.

We will continue incentive programs like the one delivered by the Clean Foundation that applies to new and used electric vehicles and electric-assist bicycles. This

program provides rebates ranging from \$500 per e-bike up to \$3,000 for a vehicle. We are also committed to working with the auto and glass service industries so that by 2030 30 per cent of our sales will be zero-emission vehicles.

For all these reasons outlined and for all of our goals our government is working towards, we will not be supporting this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I am not surprised that the government is not supporting our bill, but I would have like to have heard them mention it. I suppose we'll wait for the future, when maybe they take some of these ideas under their own banner, which I certainly hope they do, and move forward with them.

I am pleased to speak to Bill No. 128, the Energy Efficiency Act. I appreciate the comments of my colleagues. Efficiency Nova Scotia estimates that over 10 years, through its efforts, Nova Scotians have saved \$1.4 billion. That's amazing. In the process, we have avoided emissions of about a million tonnes of CO₂ annually. This is something I think we can be really proud of. I think this is an amazing accomplishment. I think this utility was among the first of its kind, has been incredibly successful, and this is great.

I am starting with that word "proud," but I'm going to transition to some other descriptors: words like "stalled," "stagnant," and "disappointing," because the recent Energy Efficiency Canada scorecard put us in third place in the country. I will table that. These are my previous stats that I cited. That's not bad, but as my colleague for Dartmouth North said in her remarks, not bad is not good enough. We are in a climate crisis.

We talk about price tags. My colleague, the former minister, talked about price tags, but I think we need to think about price tags in a bigger way. We've talked about this a lot this session: What is the price of inaction? There is work being done but our progress has stalled. Our stalled progress, I would say, is the result of bad energy politics, privileging rhetoric over reality, and rates over bills.

Mx. Speaker, we have not seen any legislation come forward this session that addresses the bills that Nova Scotians pay. We haven't. Nothing. As I think another one of my colleagues mentioned earlier, despite the fact that all parties will intervene with the UARB, there is one party in this House that has an opportunity to make a real strategic intervention, and that is the government. The PC caucus can, in fact, change the legislation that governs the UARB so they can properly consider our energy needs and they have failed to do that.

They are not alone. In 2013, when the Liberal Party said they were going to address rates, they did that by effectively campaigning against efficiency and capping the rates. When they capped the rates, they also capped the efficiency investments, because the

efficiency investments were tied into the rates. So yes, we did protect Nova Scotians' rates, but we protected them at the expense of their efficiency investments, and that's not the way either.

A different arrangement was made, but the Liberals succeeded in politicizing the fee. There was a campaign around a tax but in the end, that fee was folded into the rates, the rates were capped, the fee was capped, our efficiency progress was capped, and here we are at third.

Part of the problem is the way we talk about this. We talk about rates, but we don't talk about bills. What we need to talk about is: How much does every Nova Scotian pay for their power? In the end, that's the metric that matters. When we talk about energy poverty, when we talk about affordability, we're talking about how much money comes out of my bank account and goes to Nova Scotia Power.

Unfortunately, we have not successfully shifted that dialogue, so in the rate application from Nova Scotia Power we see these same old energy politics. Essentially, Nova Scotia Power is proposing a rider for efficiency - essentially, an efficiency tax. When the Halifax program was recently funded by the municipality - which we are very pleased went through - it was also discussed as an efficiency tax.

Why is it that efficiency is a tax, but everything else we pay for is just part of the budget? It doesn't make any sense. This is politics. When you call something a tax, people don't like it, so you often call it a tax if you want to have plausible deniability or political cover or to be able to go back on that. That's what we've seen.

We know from debates in this House - I think that we in the NDP caucus are fairly clear and buoyed by a lot of evidence - that Nova Scotia Power is not incentivized to help us cut our energy costs. In fact, Nova Scotia Power is incentivized to sell as much energy as possible. That is how it's structured.

I've argued in the House that we need a new regulatory system. I think we need to restructure the way that Nova Scotia Power makes its profit so that they are, in fact, incentivized to increase efficiency. Tie their profits to performance and lower bills for Nova Scotians. I think if you asked ten Nova Scotians if that made sense, at least nine of them would say yes, that makes sense, isn't that the way it works? It's not the way it works. We know that.

This is another debate - and I am straying from my bill - but I think the point I'm trying to make is that we can't use the same system and use the same thinking but expect different results.

Efficiency Canada finds us stalled. The second word that I want to use here is "stagnant." From 2015 to 2022, energy savings as a percentage of Nova Scotia Power's

electricity generation has stayed at around 1.1 per cent. EfficiencyOne - our efficiency utility in its new 2023-2025 filing that came out recently - says that our rate of energy savings is stagnant. I'll table that.

Massachusetts and Vermont, similar to us in many respects, are over 2 per cent. When we look at the spending as a percentage of the utility's profit, the gap between our jurisdiction's spending on energy efficiency is even greater. We've talked a lot about the profit and who benefits from that profit. Spoiler alert: not our constituents - not most Nova Scotians.

The third word that's been used about our policies and legislation around efficiency lately is "disappointing." To quote Kim Fry from last November, "The surprising lack of comprehensive energy efficiency goals in the new Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act was another missed opportunity and disappointing because our province has traditionally been a strong leader in this area." She called energy efficiency targets "the missing cog in Nova Scotia's net-zero wheel."

Mx. Speaker, I will remind the House that we attempted to bring in many of these amendments. While some amendments were accepted, we heard from the minister the day before that bill was to go to the Committee of the Whole House that no amendments would be entertained, that the work was done. But more work needs to be done and more work needs to be done on this missing cog, which is efficiency. I'll table that.

My colleague, the member for Dartmouth North, in her earlier comments mentioned a little bit about what's at stake. I will reiterate some of it. We have ambitious targets for GHG emissions reductions but our plans for replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy generation is tenuous. The Atlantic Loop is not a solid plan yet.

We're seeing Québec enter into agreements with New York, I think, and other U.S. states to sell energy. We hear a very different tune coming out of the Premier and the government now than we did at the beginning of the session, about the Atlantic Loop and our options there. The federal government has poured cold water on it. In the meantime, what do we do? Energy conservation is key to helping us meet our targets.

We're also among the top contenders in this country for the highest child poverty rates and the highest power bills. We know that Nova Scotia Power has just proposed to increase these rates by 10 per cent in a little over two years. This is all happening in the context of inflation, rising interest rates, soaring gas prices, and economic precarity brought on by the pandemic.

We're proposing that we need to be aggressively targeting energy efficiency to help us meet our climate goals and to lower our energy bills. We proposed in this bill first of all that we should have an energy efficiency resource standard, like our renewable energy

resource standard that sets targets that we need to meet. It should be legislated, and we should work back from those dates with plans.

[3:45 p.m.]

The new filing from EfficiencyOne, while there is much to praise, would still only get us to 1.2 per cent energy savings as a percentage of Nova Scotia Power's electricity generation. What we're proposing is the creation of targets and a plan to get us to 1.5 in 2023 and at least 3 per cent by 2030 - so close to a tripling of the current ambitions.

Part of our efficiency plan also needs to include expanding EfficiencyOne's mandate to include getting Nova Scotians off of home heating oil and on to other sources of heat, like heat pumps. I was glad to hear my colleague agree with that and note that that's pretty common sense, but as he noted, it's not just across the Causeway. I know that there is more plentiful natural gas here with respect - I have big questions about whether the time has passed for natural gas as a bridge, but anywhere.

My own home, which was built in the 1960s, came with an oil furnace and an oil tank. It's \$20,000, \$25,000 for me to convert my heating system. There are rebates but they're not that big. We need more work because we need to get off heating oil for so many reasons.

We've also said that we should have energy efficiency ratings on homes at the point of sale so that people know what their energy bills will be and where they're coming from. International research shows that this increases the value of houses and it increases an extra incentive for people to do energy efficiency upgrades before they sell.

Now we don't really need to increase the value of houses right at the moment here in Nova Scotia, but we want to increase the real value. What we see now is a bubble, but what we really want to see is people understanding what they're getting. Though there are worries that this will increase delays in getting home energy audits, the vice-president of the Canadian Association of Consulting Energy Advisors has said that the industry is a place where it can be done - this profession is exploding. I'll table that.

Municipalities should also be able to set and implement more stringent building codes. This is another amendment we tried to bring to EGCCRA that was voted down. We've seen many cases that municipalities like Bridgewater are leading the way in tackling energy poverty through efficiency. We need to make sure that they have the tools that they need in their jurisdictions.

In this province, there is the Low Carbon Communities program. There have been pilots of the Energiesprong technology, deep retrofitting. This is encouraging, but we need to move beyond pilots. We're seeing this technology scaled up in Europe and we could be doing the exact same thing here. In Europe, the Energiesprong model depends on market

development teams, and we need that kind of implementation here. If we are to increase our ambitions, we need to make sure that we're working in new coordinated ways that connects homeowners, contractors, and manufacturers.

We first proposed a green jobs plan in 2019, which would have brought multiple sectors to the table to see how we could capture the benefits of the green economy. It's now 2022. We have legislation, but in short, we need to do more - and we needed to do more yesterday. We need to do more to combat the climate crisis.

We need to do more to deal with power bills, which again, there is nothing before this House that is going to change any Nova Scotian's power bill in this province except for maybe the under 5 per cent of solar users. We especially need to deal with energy poverty. We need to move towards a just transition of our energy system. We can do it all by massively increasing efficiency as called for in this bill.

While I know that the government has said before they heard from us that they are not supportive of this, I really hope that the ministers are listening and that they are willing to take action on efficiency. It's low-hanging fruit. It creates jobs. It saves money. It combats the climate crisis, and we could be leaders in the country. We were, we can do it again, and we're here to help. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader for the New Democratic Party.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 3.

Bill No. 3 - Housing as a Human Right Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm super excited and positive today to talk about housing as a human right. I mean, if this was an interactive moment, I would say, "How many of us love the fact that we have a house to live in?" But it's not, so I'm just going to give you a few details and facts on some of the reasons why housing should be - and possibly we could do it today - a human right.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written to set a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. The right to safe, adequate, appropriate housing - one of our most basic human needs - is one of those common standards. Canada has signed these international agreements, and nationally recognizes housing as a human right.

The right to housing is defined as the right to live in a home in peace, security, and dignity, with security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, appropriate location, and cultural adequacy. Our bill that we're debating, or

that we will be discussing here today, does some really important things that I want to highlight.

First, it recognizes that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law. It requires the government to set clear timelines that will get us to the elimination of homelessness by 2030 - not reduction, elimination. Word of the day.

Imagine that. Who wouldn't want to play a role in the elimination of homelessness? Well, this bill says that the government will commit the maximum available resources to increase access to affordable housing, which I will say is already started.

We can all agree that this crisis is complicated, and it needs multiple solutions in order for this to work. It requires a government to be transparent and accountable to the public by collecting and reporting on housing and progress toward our goals. We want Nova Scotians to trust us. We want community input. We love collaboration, and we need that in order for this to work.

This bill recognizes that government has a responsibility to make sure that business activities do not result in a loss of affordable housing in communities. Most importantly, Mx. Speaker, this bill establishes a standard for what is included as affordable housing. That standard is that housing, including utilities, must not be more than 30 per cent of a household's total income - if it is meant to be affordable,

These are all extremely important parts of addressing the housing crisis that are missing from everything the government has put forward. Everyday people, everyday lives, and experiences from all walks of life should always be considered when making any of these decisions.

When our caucus introduced this bill in the last sitting, we received a letter of support from the Centre of Equality Rights in Accommodation. I have a number of pieces that I will table, and I'll hand that to you in a bit. CERA is a leading non-governmental organization working to advance the right to housing in Canada. CERA wrote that it is critical for legislation to be put in place that protects tenants and ensures that they have access to secure and affordable long-term housing.

Taking a human rights approach to housing means thinking about people and communities, not units and developments. It means starting from the position that no one in our province should go without adequate housing.

When members of this government stand up and say there's always more work to do, that is a choice. That is a decision they have made - that it is acceptable or appropriate to them that 544 people in Halifax are currently experiencing homelessness. It is a decision

that it is appropriate for 23,645 households across this province to pay more than half of their income on rent and utilities.

One of the lessons we have all learned from the pandemic is how quickly and urgently the government can act and make investments when they clearly understand the need. Entirely new programs were created and funded and implemented within weeks when we first began seeing the impacts of COVID-19 on our communities. We have seen that governments can do this, but we have not seen that kind of urgency or understanding from this government when it comes to housing.

All of these things absolutely are super important and if you feel like you need to have credit, then so be it. But I'm an advocate for 17,000 members or constituents in my riding and when I sit in the House here as well, I am an advocate for all Nova Scotians in this House. So party politics aside, I'm all about let's just get work done. Let's do what we need to do.

As I said, the work done so far has been minute compared to the amount of people needing homes and affordable housing. Taking a human rights approach to housing also means prioritizing the needs of marginalized people and groups living in precarious housing conditions, including seniors, people with disabilities, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and communities made vulnerable by structural racism and discrimination.

Previously we talked about a bill, and we talked about generational trauma and the effects of that in the mental health discussion. We know that housing is an example of a social determinant of health which can influence health equity in positive and negative ways.

Last Summer while we were all knocking on doors - and I know we all heard this - during the election, we spoke to so many people who were struggling to find and keep affordable, accessible housing.

I had the chance to talk to Fatima Syed who told us: Every night I am searching for a new apartment, but I cannot afford any of the apartments I am seeing. I have to move out in two months and I am worried about becoming homeless.

Our neighbourhood is growing, sure, but there are people - where are the people in the community supposed to go? I can say that in Halifax Needham we have a number of developments being built up and they are being built at a rapid rate. People cannot afford to live in their own communities. They are being pushed out because they are not able to find affordable housing because of rising rents and the cost of living today.

People cannot even afford to stay in their own communities. They are being pushed out and leaving all of their supports behind: their daycares, their schools, their doctors if

they have one, neighbours, family, et cetera - all of those support systems that help foster healthy living.

We spoke to Mike Sangster, who received a letter from his landlord threatening an \$850 per month increase to his rent. Mike said there are no affordable vacancies. Where are we supposed to live?

We also heard from Terry Madden, whose income from his Canadian disability pension barely covered his necessities, who was facing a \$75 a month rent increase which he couldn't afford.

During the election, myself and the leader of our party spoke with Garry Williams, an artist who lived in his North End apartment for a decade. Right before the pandemic, Garry got a notice that his rent would be going up \$400. Garry was lucky enough to find somewhere in his community that he and his partner could afford, for now. Another big increase would mean that he would have to move again and leave the community that he loves and not be able to save for a rainy day because monies earned were earmarked for rent.

The current housing crisis will get worse, not better. If we allow housing to be more about investment income than it is about people like Fatima, Mike, Terry, Garry - and we could go on and on about them not having a place to live. So I want to say: Can we, as the Premier has said, invest in Nova Scotians?

And that's all that we're asking here. Let's invest in the Nova Scotians whom we truly love and we care about. This House has said it many times in member statements and in proclamations and all of the wonderful things happening in our community and the people who make it so robust - we appreciate the people in our communities. All I am asking is: Can we also help them all live safely?

I know that the government has made announcements about housing that I am sure they will tell us all about in the course of this debate, but nothing that they have put forward has shown us a clear plan for - and I am going to say this word because I think we haven't had this said - affordable housing. The main investment is to provide public funds to private developments or rent supplements with no guarantee of keeping prices for housing affordable and without a clear definition of what affordable even means.

We have listened in on Estimates for many days here and for many hours, and we have heard about all of the wonderful programs that this government has invested Nova Scotians' money in. We've heard all about it and we think it is great because that's where it is supposed to go - back to Nova Scotians.

Patting yourselves on the back, speaking in a saviourism tone, is not the way we respect all Nova Scotians. Once we reach a certain point in our lives, doing the work that

we are supposed to be truly doing from the heart, doing the right thing, a stunningly powerful tool becomes available. You no longer need to take credit. So if you have a list and you have to keep listing it, you haven't done enough.

[4:00 p.m.]

The Nova Scotia I want to live in is a Nova Scotia where we take care of each other and we mean it; where we prioritize that; where governments make investments that build strong communities; where everyone has what they need to live a good, healthy life; where everyone gets a plate before anyone else gets seconds, but for housing instead.

The United Nations set the bar for us to aspire to for the "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations": the right to safe, adequate, appropriate housing. That is what this bill affirms. Let us be the Legislative Assembly that sets the standard. Let us be the leaders whom others follow. Let us stand together for all Nova Scotians and let us make our constituents proud of their vote for their members.

Do the right thing. Let's do our jobs. Housing is a human right. Profit is not. That is what I'm hoping all members in this Legislature can agree to here today. I've asked this question in many of our Question Periods about how we feel about that, and we're dodging that. So today we will know how we feel about housing being a human right for all Nova Scotians.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: A difficult act to follow, but I won't be as loud or as long in what I have to say.

I'm happy to stand today to discuss Bill No. 3, Housing as a Human Right Act. You'll remember that last week - well, maybe some of you do - I stood here on the Liberal Opposition Day debating a bill that has a lot in common with Bill No. 3 here today. I said that I like a plan and I like sticking to it. What these two bills have in common is that they're both the first two recommendations in the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission Report - recommendations that are set to be completed this year and have not yet even been initiated.

What is concerning is that the Affordable Housing Commission Report made it very clear that future recommendations are reliant on the success of earlier recommendations, and here we are, with zero indication from this government about when these first recommendations will even be initiated.

Mx. Speaker, recognizing housing as a human right does not seem like something that should be delayed, as we've heard, or prolonged by this government. I don't understand what the holdup is. Why is this government so reluctant and hesitant to pursue

affordable housing? It's a good plan, the Affordable Housing Commission Report. It addresses the full spectrum of housing with an action plan. Does this government not believe that housing is a human right?

I'll remind the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that his mandate letter clearly states that he is to follow through with the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Commission Report. These recommendations include timelines - timelines that are necessary to follow to ensure the report's success. It's clear that this government isn't serious about implementing the recommendations in the Affordable Housing Commission Report. Instead, we here on this side, the parties across the aisle, need to do the work for them to introduce legislation such as this and engage with the stakeholders necessary to push through these recommendations.

We've seen this government dole out millions of dollars going to developers, but there's no strategic public plan to address housing affordability, nor to address the housing urgency.

So as is the pattern that I've witnessed, sitting across the way, I expect someone will get up now and say that they don't stand for this bill. Therefore, in closing, I naturally support Bill No. 3, Housing as a Human Right Act, because it's Recommendation 2 of the Affordable Housing Commission Report.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

KENT SMITH: I am pleased to rise today to speak and say a few words on Bill No. 3. Housing and affordable housing is something that is near and dear to my heart, so I'm happy to offer a few brief comments.

I'll start by thanking the members opposite for their attention in bringing this to the forefront of the floor. Of course, our government believes that all Nova Scotians deserve a safe place to live, that they can afford. We are taking and have already taken steps to vastly increase the housing supply and support housing availability. It started last Fall. I heard the members opposite talk about the lack of urgency but we sat here last Fall and everyone talked and debated on Bill No. 32, which was the bill that finally allowed inclusionary zoning in HRM, something that HRM had been asking for, for years and years.

Then we talk more about urgency and then we talk about Bill No. 63 that we brought in last Fall, and Bill No. 63 led to the creation of the joint planning task force on housing. We've already seen that that task force has announced nine planning areas, 22,600 units that are going to be coming in the next few years. That doesn't even include the three NSCC campuses that have announced 350 units that are going to be created over the next few years.

I appreciate the members opposite for recognizing the fact that I'm going in a list. We're very orderly over here in the Progressive Conservative caucus. We like to keep things nice and neat. More recently we are supporting affordable housing initiatives through private and not-for-profit partnerships in Lantz, Dartmouth, Halifax, Kentville, and Oyster Pond, which is on the Eastern Shore by the way. That does not even include the support that we're offering for the deeply affordable units through partnerships with Akoma Holdings, Souls Harbour Rescue Mission, the North End Community Health Centre, and Habitat for Humanity.

Even more recently than that were some supports that came through our inaugural budget that contain millions and millions of dollars of support for Nova Scotians. Not every dollar there goes towards housing but every dollar that goes back into the pockets of Nova Scotians is something they can choose and maybe have some flexibility with where it goes and that might go towards housing.

Some examples of those include - and it's a list - reducing the fees for child care and continued enrolment in the pre-Primary program; increasing the Nova Scotia Child Benefit; increasing wages for CCAs; paying tuition for people who want to become CCAs; nearly \$30 million for the Seniors Care Grant; the new fertility support rebate; and introducing the new Children's Sports and Arts Refundable Tax Credit. Most notable is the MOST program, More Opportunities for Skilled Trades: zero provincial income tax dollars for those Nova Scotians under 30 in the trades. Those are just some of the things that don't relate to housing.

If we want to tie some of the things in the budget back to housing, we can talk about the \$15 million that is going to create new, affordable housing units. We can talk about the \$2.7 million in rent supplements, we can talk about the \$17 million in supports for Nova Scotians experiencing homelessness.

It's frustrating to stand on this side of the House and listen to the member opposite criticize everything that we do. We will continue to encourage and support Nova Scotians of every kind; we will continue to support low-income, affordable, market rentals; and we will ensure that every current and future Nova Scotian gets the support they deserve.

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

GARY BURRILL: Late last November I happened to be a guest at Saturday Mass at Saint Theresa Roman Catholic Church on North Street in the constituency I serve. Saint Theresa is a relatively close neighbour of People's Park, on the corner of Dublin and Chebucto.

Just before the Mass began, a striking thing took place. A congregational leader - it was Dan O'Connor, who some in this House will know from his long political life in Nova Scotia, got up and spoke to the congregation about the commitment that had been made by

the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth to build a series of 22 homeless shelters and to locate them on the parish properties of congregations across the province, of which Saint Theresa's would be taking responsibility for two.

As Dan spoke, there was a general head-nodding in the congregation, and then in the course of the mass, the priest mentioned the homelessness mission of the diocese, which had been led by the bishop, and then at the conclusion of the mass, Dan followed up with an organizational word, and get this: By the end of December, the two shelters had been completed, and had people living in them at Saint Theresa's, as had the other 20 across the province.

This, I want to suggest, is the kind of seriousness of purpose and effective sense of mission that is present when housing is regarded as the bill before us proposes: As a human right. A sense of priority, a sense of urgency of mission and - as my friend, the MLA for Halifax Needham has said - of the absolute unnegotiability of accomplishing the goal.

This may, obviously, be unfavourably contrasted with the malaise that has plagued government's efforts to provide emergency homeless accommodations in Halifax, which still by Centennial Pool this late April are not prepared and not open. This is the first core ingredient of understanding housing as a human right: priority.

It's not simply a matter of bringing Nova Scotia into compliance with Canada's commitments under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, although it is that also. It is, even more importantly, a matter of legislatively compelling governments to approach housing with the same allocation of resources and singularity of commitment that has been evident in the homeless initiatives at Saint Theresa's, and then to establish concrete timetables over the next eight years to accomplish the elimination of homelessness by 2030, as Canada's government has already agreed, in a more broad and general way, to do. That's the key word: priority.

The peninsula of Halifax is surely entirely familiar with what it is for the provision of housing to be approached with this kind of singularity of purpose. Whole sections of the north end were constructed - most well-known of course, the Hydrostone - with an incredible intensity of effort following the destruction of 1917. In the constituency I serve, Halifax Chebucto, literally miles of the city's west end, from Chebucto Road westward, are built out of the storey-and-a-halfs that are still called war-time housing, which were put up in a very short period of time, because government was entirely seized with the sense of the urgency of the errand. Priority.

In addition to priority, something else that this legislation and the whole approach of viewing housing as a human right brings into view is a sense of precedence, in the sense of what is it that's going to take precedence in our efforts to deal with the housing crisis? What this bill is suggesting is that the basic human need for shelter is the thing that must

take precedence. We can formulate this truth in this way: The human need for shelter takes precedence over the needs of the market for opportunities for investment.

[4:15 p.m.]

What does it mean, that the human need for shelter takes precedence over the needs of the market for opportunities for investment? It means, in basic terms, that housing has two component values. It has both the use value and an exchange value component. Its use value is the use that housing provides as a home, simply put. As opposed to its exchange value, from the point of view of which housing is seen as an asset, and an asset that first and foremost is an object of speculation, of market opportunity, and investment.

This is a familiar distinction to us in public policy in Nova Scotia. We meet it most commonly in the program of the property tax cap, by which we seek to ensure that no one is forced out of the use, value, and enjoyment of their home by changes in the exchange value - that is to say, the speculative market and consequent effects on property taxation - that may be going on around them.

At the core of a great deal of the housing crisis today in our province is what is often referred to as the financialization of housing. That is the exchange value universe of housing, choking out and squeezing out the opportunities for those who simply want a home.

This is partly what is being referred to in the recent figures from the Canadian Housing Statistics Program on the subject of the concentration of wealth in housing stock, where it is indicated that more of the housing stock in Nova Scotia is owned by people who own multiple houses than is the case in either B.C. or Ontario, and where it's demonstrated that 22 per cent of property owners own 41 per cent of the properties in the province.

This, of course, is not new. We know that it's not unique to Nova Scotia, but the overall situation - in which investors and pension funds and landlords and speculators of all kinds continue to aggressively squeeze more and more from tenants and prospective home buyers as the exchange value of housing loses all relation to its practical, real use - has reached a toxic crescendo in our province, meaning that we need a whole different way of looking at housing as a human right. The time for housing to be looked at as a human right has arrived and this is what is called for.

First, priority is what is envisioned by thinking of and speaking of and formulating a legislative edifice of housing when thinking of it as a human right - priority first. Precedence, where the real need for shelter and for a home takes precedence over the need of the market for opportunities for speculative investment. Then there is a third ingredient in addition to priority and precedence, and that is the providing of actual housing stock in which people can have a place to live.

I said earlier today in Question Period that it's not simply a matter of providing stock. It's not simply a matter of providing supply. It's a matter of providing stock and supply which are directed to what we know is the existence of the actual, existing, on-the-ground, real households' need.

We have brought forward in the course of this sitting a Special Planning Areas program, which is certainly major and considerable in its scope. Who could say anything other than 22,600 units is major and considerable in its scope? It is striking to think that this program, with that many units involved, has so very few units that are actually guaranteed to provide permanent rent- or mortgage-geared-to-income - that is to say real - affordable housing.

I was myself surprised the day of the announcement of the Special Planning Areas and the 22,600 units. I checked and re-checked the documents, saying surely this can't be that we have almost 23,000 units and the number which are set aside for permanent, guaranteed rent- or mortgage-geared-to-income is fewer than 1,000. In fact, it's way fewer than 1,000. It's 300 and some. I think that's somewhere in the order of 2 or 3 per cent.

Amongst those units that are provided in that category of affordable, that's affordable by a certain definition. It's not affordable by the definition of it being permanently affordable. It's not affordable by the definition of being directly tied to people's incomes. In fact, the amount of affordable housing out of the 22,600 units provided in the Special Planning Areas program that is designated for permanent, rent-geared, mortgage-geared-to-income affordable housing is exactly zero.

So, when you have a program where real, affordable housing units are zero out of 22,600, one might surmise that you have something of a problem. One might surmise that something, some key ingredient, is missing.

One of the key ingredients that is missing is the necessity for the government to understand that, as we speak about housing as a human right, the time has come for the government - in a more aggressive way than it has contemplated - to build, to buy or to otherwise acquire public housing, co-op housing, social housing, non-market housing in any form, so as to expand the proportion of the province's housing assets that aren't subject to the vagaries and pressures of the speculative housing market.

There are lots of ways to accomplish this, Mr. Speaker. One obvious one, of course, is construction, but we see lots of other pathways also, such as the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council's recent acquisition for affordable housing of a hotel in New Glasgow. Other jurisdictions have made advances through implementing the right of first refusal for the public acquisition of properties for affordable housing, intervening in the market to acquire affordable properties.

So much depends on one's point of reference. If the point of reference is the market, then affordability can be defined as anything lower than what the market will bear. That may or may not, as at present, be anywhere near what can be actually afforded, especially in a province where over 23,000 people pay out more than half of their income for their shelter.

But, as has been suggested by the member for Halifax Needham, if your point of reference is human need, if your point of reference is human rights, then the word "affordable" means something different. It means something more like 30 per cent of the actual income a person has coming in their door.

This legislation is based on the proposition that there is not, in fact, any meaningful road forward out of the housing crisis in Nova Scotia other than the one that begins and ends and is utterly conditioned by the reality of real, actual, concrete, human housing needs.

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

The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close debate on second reading of Bill No. 3.

THE SPEAKER: A recorded vote has been requested. Depending on how long the Whips - how long would you like?

We'll go into recess until the Whips are satisfied.

[4:24 p.m. The House recessed.]

[5:15 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We'll resume, and we're going to be voting on second reading on Bill No. 3, Housing as a Human Right Act.

A recorded vote has been called for, so I'll ask the Clerk to call the names.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[5:17 p.m.]

YEAS

Hon. Patricia Arab
Hon. Tony Ince

NAYS

Hon. Brad Johns
Hon. Tory Rushton

Hon. Brendan Maguire	Hon. Barbara Adams
Hon. Keith Irving	Hon. Kim Masland
Hon. Iain Rankin	Hon. Allan MacMaster
Hon. Derek Mombourquette	Hon. Karla MacFarlane
Hon. Kelly Regan	Hon. Michelle Thompson
Claudia Chender	Hon. John Lohr
Gary Burrill	Hon. Pat Dunn
Susan Leblanc	Hon. Timothy Halman
Lisa Lachance	Hon. Steve Craig
Suzy Hansen	Dave Ritcey
Kendra Coombes	Hon. Brian Wong
Rafah DiCostanzo	Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek
Hon. Ben Jessome	Hon. Brian Comer
Lorelei Nicoll	Hon. Colton LeBlanc
Fred Tilley	Hon. Jill Balsler
Braedon Clark	Trevor Boudreau
Ali Duale	Hon. Greg Morrow
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin	Hon. Becky Druhan
Carman Kerr	Larry Harrison
Hon. Zach Churchill	Chris Palmer
Ronnie LeBlanc	John A. MacDonald
Angela Simmonds	Melissa Sheehy-Richard
	John White
	Danielle Barkhouse
	Tom Taggart
	Nolan Young
	Kent Smith

THE CLERK: For, 24. Against, 29.

The motion is defeated.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader for the New Democratic Party.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, that concludes Opposition business for today. I'll turn it over to the Government House Leader.

THE SPEAKER: Now that the Opposition has concluded their business for the day, we've reached the moment of interruption. The topic for late debate, as submitted by the honourable member for Halifax Chebucto, is:

“Therefore be it resolved that the government has failed to address the impact of the rising cost of living on people across the province.”

ADJOURNMENT**MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)**

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

GOV'T. (N.S.): COST OF LIVING CRISIS - FAILURE TO ADDRESS

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, the core truth that this resolution is speaking to is the extent to which the government is removed, at a distance, and at some level simply out of touch with the daily and very difficult impact of the cost of living crisis on the people of Nova Scotia.

This is true from many different angles. Certainly, it is true from the angle that we have just been discussing - the angle of housing. I struggle to understand the rationale for why, in the midst of generationally high price increases reflected in the unavailability of housing at a host of levels, why in that situation the government would have, three days before beginning this budget session on March 21st, lifted the ban on renovictions.

It was literally and predictably within hours of the lifting of the ban - as national CBC Radio detailed so clearly in its segment on the subject on *The House* last weekend - that tenants began to receive notices of eviction accompanied by letters talking about renovations.

Now the government says that the number of households affected by this has been small - that little formal paperwork has been filed in this connection with the department. But this is not how it really works. How it really works is that a notice is delivered from the property management company on the property management company's letterhead. It's on the tenant's door or on the mat in front of them or in the mailbox. People get that notice and immediately become sick with worry and begin to talk together about where they might go and begin to think about their packing.

Not long ago, I became aware of a situation where just these notices had been delivered to some tenants that they had no business being delivered to - tenants who had long-term leases, which meant that the notices were of no legal effect and didn't apply. I contacted the property management company that had done this. The property management company says, yes, that's clearly an error, that's a mistake - those notices shouldn't have gone to the tenants with long-term leases, they're not supposed to go there. They're only supposed to go to the tenants with fixed term leases, and thank you for telling us.

But before I had even communicated this to the tenants in question, those tenants had already started thinking through their move. Whether or not this was the property management company's intent, I can't say. I can say, however, that that was the effect of that notice being posted on the tenant's door.

That's why it is and was, in my judgment, so profoundly out of touch with people's real lives and the real situations of real tenants - in the middle of a housing and cost of living crisis - for the government to lift the ban on renovictions.

This government also seems to me at a remove - at some level out of touch with where people really are on the subject of power bills as well. It was hurtful to see the government members stand last Thursday in turn, each as their names were called, to record their vote, one by one, against the changes in the Public Utilities Act that would make possible for the first time a universal services program in Nova Scotia.

Members would be aware that when the Affordable Energy Coalition years ago had gone to court to apply to try to make Nova Scotia a place that would have a universal services program, the judgement was that it can't be done because of the way the Public Utilities Act is constituted in Nova Scotia. The amendment before the House would have changed that particular clause of the Act in order to make a universal services program possible.

One of the great things a universal services program would be able to accomplish would be to establish a mechanism, a means, a funding source, from which people who had large-scale accumulated arrears that they couldn't begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel beyond - a mechanism by which those people could have those arrears dealt with within their relationship with Nova Scotia Power, so that they could start again with a clean slate, unencumbered with accumulated arrears from years before.

That change is not possible without that amendment that the government voted contrary to. I can't fathom why anyone who's ever advocated for Nova Scotia Power customers who are threatened with having their power cut off because of accumulated arrears - why they would vote against an amendment to enable a universal services program.

The only conclusion I can come to is that at some core level, what I'm discussing is a world of experience from which those who voted against it are completely out of touch. That's not to speak of the world that we have discussed so often in these last couple of weeks, the whole world of income assistance. People quite rightly ask, why would a government that forecasts in its budget inflationary pressures of 4.2 per cent - why in that very same budget would they leave income assistance levels without any increase?

This was detailed by one of the experts in the subject in our province, human rights lawyer Vince Calderhead, when he spoke on this subject at the Law Amendments Committee just a few days ago. He explained the effect of this inflationary increase combined with no increase in income assistance levels for any household configurations. The effect of this decision is going to be to lower the income of persons and families receiving assistance from a level that's already well below the poverty line to a level that is going to be even further below that line.

The income of a person receiving assistance - for example, a single person - is already at about half the poverty line, a little under that. But as a result of this decision, that same individual's income in this coming year is going to be reduced from just below a half to just over a third of the official poverty line for our country.

Why would anybody do that? What would be the motivation to do that? Maybe a person might do that if it was an abstraction to them, or maybe if the actual impact on the people and families who are going to be struggling more as a result of this decision wasn't something that registered with them. Maybe they would do it if they were just at some kind of a distance from the realities of income inadequacy in our province.

It's really not clear to me why a government would make a budget in this way. Part of the budget-making process, of course, is to review how present economic circumstances are being treated in other parallel jurisdictions, particularly within our country.

Surely then, those making these judgements had to have been aware that Quebec was responding to the cost of living crisis by providing \$500 to every citizen with an income under \$100,000. Surely the government's decision-makers had to have been aware that in British Columbia, rebates are being provided through the government, through the budget, in consideration of the cost of living crisis to everybody who has a driver's license - rebates in consideration of the price of gas.

I can't imagine it's possible that the government would have been unaware in making this decision that next door in New Brunswick, in consideration of the crisis of the cost of living, the government had decided to index income assistance to the cost of living. Surely the government was aware of all these things in the preparation of the budget. Yet the government of Nova Scotia today - their decision was to provide a budget which supplies direct transfers in consideration of the cost of living crisis in the amount of exactly zero dollars.

I cannot understand, Mr. Speaker, how that decision could be made. Those responsible for making the decision were, at some fundamental level, simply out of touch.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I wasn't going to stand up, but here we go. Today's lesson is words versus actions. This is what the topic for today should be.

First of all, I want to start by saying that I'm utterly shocked that the housing committee, which was a group of non-partisan individuals that looked at solutions and a direction for government - their second recommendation was to make housing a human right. This government has cherry-picked what they want to do out of that housing committee. For some reason, one of the most important recommendations - they just voted it down. They just voted down housing as a human right.

[5:30 p.m.]

That says a lot about this government. They had a bill here that's full of beautiful words. They stand up and they talk about protecting Nova Scotia Power customers. You know what? Great bill, except it does nothing to prevent the 10 per cent increase. The actions would have been in the bill, but they're going to use words and a hope and a prayer at the UARB and hope that they listen. The actions could have been taken here to protect Nova Scotia ratepayers.

As Opposition, they talked about period poverty. They took pictures and they signed documentation saying that when they get into government, they're going to deal with period poverty. Those were the words. The action in this budget is zero. Nothing.

We heard today that they tabled two different petitions, Mr. Speaker, one on power and the other one on Type 1 diabetes. During the election, there were the words. Every one of them, almost, took pictures. They posted it on Twitter. Posted it on Facebook. The Type 1 Diabetes Challenge - they tabled a petition today saying they support it. What are the actions? Nothing in this budget for Type 1 diabetes.

They tabled a petition on protecting Nova Scotia Power customers today. Nothing in this session. They'll tell you, oh, we're tabling these bills on power rates. I'm going to tell you something about the solar one that's been left out and no one's discussing it here: any extra power that's produced, Nova Scotia Power gets for free.

I paid for my solar panels. I overproduce. I would get a rebate cheque. It sure helped with power poverty. It sure helped with paying for groceries. It sure helped for all kinds of different things. But you know what? They said to Nova Scotia Power, you don't make enough money, here's the extra power, sell it back to the ratepayers of Nova Scotia. Those are actions, Mr. Speaker.

We want to talk about hearing the member stand up and talk about a Better Pay Cheque Guarantee. We heard them on the radio. We heard them every single day in the campaign. This was a main plank. Now we hear that it's too complicated, it's not easy to do. Those were the words. In this budget, the actions were bupkis. Nothing. Zero.

There is nothing in this budget to address inflation that is now at an all-time high since 1991. We've never seen higher inflation. But what they did today was point fingers. They said it's not us, blame the federal government. It's them - look, they were printing money. They were printing money left and right. During a two-year pandemic, they were printing and spending money.

Well, you know what would've happened if people didn't get CERB cheques? They would've gone under. They would've lost their homes. They would've lost their vehicles. They would've been broke.

We heard them say in the last session that nobody wants to do those jobs. Those frontline workers were considered heroes - those were the words. What were the actions? There's a call for a \$15 minimum wage. No action. They got 30 cents, I think. A 25 cent raise? No action, Mr. Speaker. When we talked about inflation, the response was, well, the workforce is booming. Go get another job. There are people out there begging.

It's words like that that show us that they don't know the consequences of being a parent, of being an individual who lives paycheque to paycheque. It's not as simple as snapping your fingers and saying I'm going to get a new job, I'm going to leave this job, do some interviews. Hopefully I'll get a new job. Or maybe can I have time off in the middle of the day from my job to go do interviews?

We heard about affordable housing. There was some action on affordable housing. There was \$30 million on affordable housing, and \$22 million went to one of the largest, richest developers in all of Nova Scotia, with no guarantees of affordability. There are your actions. No guarantee. When you sign those contracts, it should not be about getting on the front page of the newspaper. It shouldn't be about running out here to Gorman and Laroche to get an interview. It should be about making sure that Nova Scotians benefit from the \$13 billion you're spending of their money.

It took us reminding them that it's not their money. All we kept hearing was, look how much we're spending. Look what we're doing - we're spending \$13 billion. We had to remind them that this isn't your money. This is taxpayers' money. We are in a crisis now.

Anyone who reads the paper today, anyone who reads any form of media today, will see that inflation's through the roof. What does that mean? First of all, it means higher debt payments for the Province of Nova Scotia, which means less money for resources and for programs. But, more importantly, it means that car payments are going to go up. Housing and mortgages are going to go up. The cost of food is going to go up.

We hear them say things like, well, obviously there are things that are out of our control. I agree, there are lots of things out of their control. But what's not out of their control is how they spend the money and where they put it. You ask the seniors in this province - are they being helped? Have they expanded Pharmacare? They talked about it. Their actions are no, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing is we talked about some of these long hours, and what really kind of got to me a little bit was when they talked about - when they called these long hours, we challenged them on them, because people here have families. They have children they want to go home to. They have constituents they need to help.

The Premier himself stood up in this Chamber and he said, Nova Scotians expect us to be here and they expect us to work hard. We're here for 15 hours today. The Premier of Nova Scotia was here for 40 minutes in this Chamber - 40 minutes.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. That is out of order. You don't talk about how long any member has been in the Chamber or whether they're here or not. I would ask that you withdraw that, please.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I withdraw that the Premier of Nova Scotia was here for 40 minutes today. (Interruptions)

We have massive deficits of - they are talking about these deficits of \$500 million, and that money - those are their words, but the actions are that future generations are going to have pay for this and future generations are going to be saddled with less resources because of this.

Mr. Speaker, I will leave you with this. There is something that someone once told me and it has always stuck with me. A friend of mine once told me: Words are for lips, actions are for hearts. Mr. Speaker, it is now clear that this government is all lips and no heart.

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite - his lips have been pretty loose with the words that he is suggesting we've said over here. I would encourage anybody to look at Hansard to see what was actually said today and other days in the House here.

What I will say is this: I think the Opposition is raising an important issue here. We are concerned about the costs of living, how they are rising, and how they are impacting people, particularly those most vulnerable, people who are on fixed incomes. We have to consider what the causes are of these rising costs, and I think about a few things. I think about the cheap money, the very low interest rates that everybody has enjoyed for many years now - historic rock-bottom interest rates, but they were okay because we didn't see inflation. It wasn't happening and central banks kept them low and that was very good for the economy.

Mr. Speaker, I think about the concern about the environment that is often raised in the Chamber here. You know, we are always talking about growth and what is often paying the penalty for growth is the environment. For years we've had cheap money, we've had low interest rates - and the reason I'm raising that is because I think the central bank's aim is to keep inflation in check. I think that is something we can all agree to.

Nobody likes rising interest rates, Mr. Speaker. I would say to you that every single person here is affected by that, but more so are people who are on fixed incomes, people who are at lower income levels, who have mortgages to pay, and so on. But that is what the central bank is trying to do to combat inflation, so that when people go to the grocery store, when they are going to buy essentials, that inflation is not taking hold and making big increases in all those basic needs.

We've been living in a world with very low interest rates, with cheap money, central banks putting money out there by buying debt of banks and various other organizations to get more money into the economy. We are actually starting to see the reverse of that now, and this has happened many times in the past.

The other thing we are seeing, though, is with the pandemic. We've seen supply chain interruptions, and whenever there is an interruption in supply and if demand remains constant, what's going to happen? People are going to try to raise their prices. I think of building material prices in this province and how that has contributed to the rise of creating new housing and existing housing. People's homes are suddenly worth 30 per cent more now in this province because of that. It's a great thing if you are a saver or somebody who may be retired and owns their home, but not so great if you are starting out.

I think what is being raised here today in this debate is very important. The members have said - I know the last member talked about, well, go and get a job or get a better job. It is one of the few opportunities we see right now, in terms of people who are facing inflation and facing rising costs of living. The job market is really tight and I would say that, despite all the negativity of that and what that means for everyone, there can still be opportunity for people. I would encourage people not to give up hope for that.

I do believe one of our roles as representatives is trying to help people find employment and it certainly is a role for government to help connect people to good jobs, to jobs that may help them in their quest to face rising costs of living. The job market is very tight right now. In the month of February we saw one of the third-lowest unemployment rates since the early to mid-1970s.

Mr. Speaker, I think about energy prices. There was a lot of discussion about energy prices and there's no question we're seeing this with the invasion of Ukraine. Who knows why Russia is invading Ukraine, but I can mention a few things that may be part of the equation. There's a tremendous amount of grains in Ukraine. I think they have 40 per cent of the world's grains supply. You can connect that to fertilizers. Fertilizers are heavily dependent on petrochemicals.

Of course, Russia has a lot of natural gas and oil. An invasion of Ukraine to get resources and to get access - it's affecting the pricing of all those things. I think that's why an invasion of Ukraine has had such an impact on the price of fuels, Mr. Speaker. Those are things that are out of our control but they are a reality for people.

[5:45 p.m.]

I think one of the things we have to do as a provincial government and across the country is ensure that there's competition for energy and that there is a supply of energy, because when you see something like what we're seeing now in Ukraine, it's hurting people.

It's a small hurt if you compare it to what people in Ukraine are living with right now, with shells coming down upon their homes, trying to decide if they should stay or if they should just get out. I was listening to the news yesterday. People were trying to decide, this is probably my last chance to get out. I don't want to minimize what people are experiencing in this country but what's happening there is having an effect, a ripple effect around the world.

We saw prices starting to rise in December with fuel but we really started to see it rise in February, when Ukraine was invaded. These are things that I think about: carbon taxes coming in the next year. That's another one that's going to increase the price of fuel. Of course, as we know, we're talking about right now when you increase the price of fuel, what else goes up? Everything else - building materials, food and so on. So it will be important for governments to protect people who are vulnerable to those things going forward as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think some of the issues raised by the Opposition today - I think about renovictions. What I would say to anybody out there who is in a situation where their landlord is saying, we're doing renovations, you're going to have to leave, is to report that and for members to help ensure that the protections are in place for people in those situations, that the government can help them in those situations.

I would also say this: If we want to have landlords - and maybe the NDP has the philosophical view that the government should own every building in the province - if you take too much freedom away from landlords, Mr. Speaker, there is a balance. If you cannot have private housing development, then you are really left with government owning everything.

I suppose it can work, Mr. Speaker, but I don't think Nova Scotians would want a system where we would get rid of private land ownership. I know some of the solutions sound good but sometimes I question how practical they are. I think about what Quebec did. It was mentioned by the NDP about giving everybody \$500, anybody who is earning less than \$100,000. Mr. Speaker, that cost the government of Quebec \$3.2 billion.

At the end of the day, some of these ideas - power prices are going up. There are ways we can help people, creating some kind of a special rate based on people's ability to pay. All of these ideas sound good but what they are really moving towards is socialism.

(Interruptions) And there's mixed opinion over there - some are laughing and some are raising fists.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. First of all, I'll remind the member for Halifax Atlantic that nobody was heckling him when he was speaking. I think you should show the same respect to the speaker.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, with 40 seconds.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I'll try to clean things up in short here. We have made investments for people who are most vulnerable: before the budget, over \$13 million in targeted, meaningful help for people. We have a rent cap in place, we have \$30 million and another \$15 million invested in this budget in affordable housing. We have initiatives to get people off oil, to help them with that. The Seniors Care Grant, the Child Benefit increase this year. Universal mental health care coming in. I will have to stop at that.

THE SPEAKER: The time for the late debate has expired.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

[5:51 p.m. The House resolved into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance in the Chair.]

[8:10 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance resumed the Chair.]

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

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

Bill No. 147 - Public Utilities Act.

Bill No. 148 - Mi'kmaw Language Act.

Bill No. 154 - Tourist Accommodations Registration Act.

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

each without amendments, and

Bill No. 120 - Involuntary Psychiatric Treatment Act (amended).

with certain amendments, and the Chair has been instructed to recommend these bills to the favourable consideration of the House.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mx. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 145.

Bill No. 145 - Electricity Act (amended).

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mx. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 145, an Act to Amend the Electricity Act, now be read a third time and do pass.

Mx. Speaker, our commitment to ratepayers and to our environment is unwavering and clear. We will protect the ratepayers of Nova Scotia, transition our province to greener energy, and support Nova Scotians who have invested in joining us in the fight against climate change. We're delivering on those promises with these amendments.

Nova Scotians will be able to generate their own renewable power through sources like solar panels and gain more control of their energy use. They will be guaranteed their full right to net metering without fear of new special charges, fees, or rates from Nova Scotia Power.

I want to clarify that the net metering program for commercial solar will be developed under regulations. Staff are now working to ensure that program meets the needs of the various industries that will participate, including multi-unit residential buildings.

They will continue to work with interested parties to get feedback on the program regulations and design. Our broad intention is to increase access to net metering for customers and not reduce access.

Mx. Speaker, I also want to clarify that net metering was never intended to allow Nova Scotians to generate more electricity than they could use. The intention was always to meet their own electricity needs from renewables such as solar.

There was an unintended loophole that allowed a very small number of customers to generate more electricity than they could use and get compensated for that. They will be grandfathered under this legislation. It wasn't because of that member clapping, but I appreciate the interest - a good previous minister helping out. The minister was nice earlier.

People should only install what they need, not more. It's important that we not create unintended impacts on power rates, especially at a time when affordability is such a dire need. We're closing that loophole for further participants so that the program functions as intended.

People will be able to generate enough electricity to meet their own needs and bring their power bill to a zero, plus the nominal monthly fee. These savings on the power bills can help defray the installation cost. Buyers of properties with net metering will also be guaranteed that right.

These amendments also give Nova Scotians full access to the Green Button standard within 12 months; simplify the Green Choice Program that will offer more opportunities for large-scale customers to use renewable energy; simplify the community solar program, and limit Nova Scotia Power's role in that program; simplify the installation process for standard renewables; and allow us to purchase the output renewable energy projects on behalf of the ratepayers if the original energy customer no longer requires it.

The ratepayers of Nova Scotia are important to us. They deserve reliable, affordable, and sustainable power. We are committed to protect them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank the minister for clarifying that and obviously for grandfathering in - but it's not just about grandfathering in. People spent a lot of money on their solar. Essentially what's happening here is that it's giving Nova Scotia Power free access to power, which they're going to profit off of. There's an issue there.

It's about where that money goes. Does it go back into the pockets of Nova Scotians who have paid for this system and see a bit of a bonus? Not a lot, but a bit. Or does it go into Nova Scotia Power and Emera, one of the largest corporations in Nova Scotia, whose presidents just got millions and millions of dollars worth of bonuses?

[8:15 p.m.]

I know that the minister did say that this is going to be a work in progress, that they're going to be speaking to stakeholders and things like that. I hope that he takes this into account because it is very important. Nobody wants to do anything for free. Nobody at this point - especially a multi-billion-dollar corporation - should be getting anything for free, especially off the backs of Nova Scotians. I know that \$100 doesn't seem like a lot, especially when you consider the costs of these systems. We know they are expensive.

The other thing I'd like to see the minister do - he's one of the members I respect deeply in this Legislature, believe it or not, but I think we need to listen to Nova Scotians on this one. I hope that you review that. Also, when it comes to the actual costs of solar panels, as the minister is well aware, the more uptake we had in the solar program that the member for Sydney-Membertou helped usher in, the less of a credit people got because it was so popular.

At one point, people were getting a \$10,000 credit on a \$20,000 system. I think it is now down to \$3,000 or \$4,000, which isn't a lot, let's be honest. What had happened - and credit where credit is due - a lot of credit to the government for instantly reacting on this one. I've been critical of the government on several things, but I'll give you credit on this one because if Nova Scotia Power was able to get their way on this one, this would have destroyed an industry.

To put this into words on how big this industry is, three years ago we were lucky to get solar panels for our home. At the time, it was a wait time of eight months to one year from the time Aztek Solar came in. It was a gentleman with one truck with a sticker on the side that said Aztek Solar. It took us eight months to a year to get our solar panels in. It's now an almost two- to three-year wait-list to get your solar panels.

That industry has exploded, and Aztek Solar went from two people in the back of a truck to about a dozen trucks and probably about 50 employees, so this industry has absolutely exploded. I think if we want to continue the momentum of this industry, I hope that we are able to re-up those credits. I know the minister knows how important that is for all Nova Scotians.

The other thing I would like to see - and it's something that I've always scratched my head on this one - is when it comes to solar energy and producing your own energy. Obviously, it's the people who can afford these solar panels and these solar systems who actually get the benefit of it.

We do know that in the Public Accounts Committee, Peter Polley from Polycorp had come in and spoke about creating solar systems on multi-residential properties - so rental properties. If you have 40 units, allowing those buildings to have solar panels, as

long as that savings trickled down to the tenants. The idea would be that these buildings would produce power.

If you look at places like Clayton Park and other beautiful areas of our community, there are a lot of apartment buildings. There's a lot of opportunity to capture the solar energy, but a lot of people who are living in some of those buildings - I look in my own community - one of their biggest complaints is their power bill.

I think - another good example: I know the Minister of Community Services has worked day and night. We've had some back-and-forths here. I do think that your heart is in the right place and you're doing an incredible job on this, but one of the things that you could be doing - and I've heard this from other advocates - is maybe use the public housing space and use the roofs of public housing.

I look at Greystone in Spryfield, for example. It's the highest point in our community. It is on a huge hill, and the amount of sunlight that it gets is second to none. If you were able to put in solar panels - I know it's expensive to do - that would give a massive lift to those who are experiencing power poverty.

There are things that we can do, but right now I'll be the first to admit I'm lucky. We're one of the lucky ones in Nova Scotia who can afford these solar panels. I could tell you that solar storage is unaffordable. If you are looking to get batteries to do solar storage in Nova Scotia, a system of solar panels wired into your house is about \$20,000. If you want storage, it's another \$40,000-plus on top. In order to actually store your own energy, it's next to impossible. In the case for a lot of us, when you lose power, unfortunately, you still lose power.

Those are things I think that we can actually do to tweak this. I know it's not going to happen in this bill, but I know that the minister is all ears, and he likes to listen. He sits over there, and he takes it all in. I appreciate that. I meant that as a compliment, by the way - I really did.

I do think that there is something to be said again about the commercial residential properties. As we're seeing more and more people move to this province - apartment buildings and things like that . . . (Interruption) Excellent. That was one of the things that was really brought forward. Pardon me? (Interruption) I'll talk to the minister afterwards.

Again, I want to thank you for this. I do hope that you revisit the people who produce more energy. I just don't think in a company the size of Nova Scotia Power it's fair of them. Even if it's a little bit of energy from each home, it does actually add up after a while and then they're selling it and profiting off of it.

I do appreciate this bill. I sincerely do appreciate the hard work of the minister on saving the solar industry. I just hope there are some small little tweaks that you can look at.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand and speak briefly to this bill one last time. This bill is good news for solar and it's good news for Nova Scotia in terms of our path to net zero and so we're very pleased to see this swift action on solar.

As I said on second reading, I think ideally this could have been done in a slightly less panic-inducing way so that the industry didn't first feel like it was going to have its legs knocked out from under it. I think the result is really positive. Of course, we'll be watching to see how the changes to net metering impact the whole energy ecosystem over time.

I would be remiss if I didn't remind the House that this was one of the bills that was presented as a response to the general rate application from Nova Scotia Power. So while it does address the solar issue - which is no longer, as we understand it, in that general rate application, which is great - once again, it does not address rates, and it does not address bills. It does not have any impact on the price that Nova Scotians pay for their power, which is steadily rising, and there's a plan that it will rise another 10 per cent in the next couple of years.

We did attempt to amend this bill. It was a simple amendment, not dissimilar from a couple of others we've seen even tonight, which was to ask that the regulatory powers in this bill - which are quite broad and once rested with the UARB but now have come into the fold of government and of the department - be subject to consultation. I think that's really important. I think that in this case the net effect of taking those powers in-house, as it were, is positive because it protects the solar industry. It's also now subject to politics in a way that ideally it might not have been under the purview of the UARB.

While we accept the decision to do that, and we support it, we think that a good counterbalance to putting that once-independent set of things into the government's basket as opposed to the regulator's is to have consultation so that there is an understanding of the impact of these regulations when they're made. That amendment was defeated. We hope that the minister and the department will continue to consider the importance of public consultation and expert input, frankly, on provisions such as this. With those caveats we are in support.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I'm happy to stand and speak to the Electricity Act, the amendments, on behalf of the people of Cumberland North.

I had several people contact me very upset with the proposed changes that Nova Scotia Power were going to do, and people are very pleased to see this very quick action by the government. On behalf of the people of Cumberland North, thank you.

I will share a couple of other comments that they wanted me to share, and that includes they would like the government to continue to work with Nova Scotia Power on increasing reliability and increasing affordability. Those two things continue to be a consistent need, I think, for the people across all of Nova Scotia.

Just last night there was another power outage between Amherst, all along the shore of Tidnish, Lorneville, and Linden. I don't have the exact number of times, but it's at least five times in the last probably four months that that particular area has lost power. There's no question there are infrastructure upgrades that need to be done. We need to find a way to ensure that Nova Scotia Power is investing in infrastructure throughout Nova Scotia and making sure that the upgrades are there to decrease the number of times people are experiencing power outages here in Nova Scotia.

Often, the reasoning that's given is high winds. Well, in the Tantramar Marsh area, we've had high winds there for decades, centuries. I know first-hand from some of the workers that there's definitely infrastructure and equipment that require upgrading.

Affordability has long been a factor. We have some of the highest electricity rates in Canada, and it is a barrier for us attracting new business and retaining existing business here in our province. If we want to be more competitive as a region, we need to find a way to decrease our electricity rates so that we can be more competitive throughout the country.

I've gotten a lot of complaints, I don't know if anyone else here in the House has, but I've gotten a lot of complaints recently around smart meters. The smart meters are showing increased usage even though people are saying they had no change in the usage. Are there any sort of performance standards ensuring that the technology is accurate? We do have some calls in to Nova Scotia Power checking on that, but I am concerned about who is the advocate for the consumer and who is the advocate for the residential property owner, the commercial property owner in these situations.

Reliability of electricity for both residential and commercial is key, as well as affordability. Since the privatization of Nova Scotia Power, we have seen fewer employees being employed throughout the province, and an increase in profits. When you're in business, you want to see an increase in profits. If you've watched Emera, it's been a fascinating company. As a former businesswoman, I have a lot of respect for what they've done. As a corporation, they have grown throughout all of North America. But as an MLA, we're here to represent the people of this province and, unfortunately, a lot of the growth that Emera has experienced has been off the backs of Nova Scotia taxpayers.

I think it's time for there to be performance standards put in place to ensure that Nova Scotia taxpayers are not paying some of the highest rates in the country, that they have better reliability and better affordability of electricity here in the province of Nova Scotia. On those few words, I'll take my seat.

[8:30 p.m.]

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

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I thank the members opposite for the comments and the conversation that's gone on over the last couple of weeks. I appreciate the comments. I'm always listening, and I appreciate the understanding of that. I've been very adamant ever since Day 1 of sitting in this chair that there are going to be changes in the Electricity Act and the public utility. We're only getting started right now. Even after the general rate is over, however that looks in the next several months, this government is very adamant that the ratepayers are top of mind of every decision that we are making.

Basically, how I'd like to close this off is we are only getting started. The rate application doesn't start until the Fall. We do have another sitting in the Fall before anything would take effect on January 1st. But as my NDP colleague did mention, some of this does seem a little bit quick, and what I would say to that is there are other things that are on my table that I am certainly looking at, I am having conversations about, and excited about where our electricity is supplied from, the green renewables where we set standards and our environmental goals.

Nova Scotia is going to get there. We have done a lot of work in the past number of years and I am proud of where we are sitting today. Yes, there is more work to be done, and we are willing to do that. Again, I appreciate the comments from everybody in the House and I move to close third reading on Bill No. 145. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 145.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that the bill do pass and the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 143.

Bill No. 143 - Boat Harbour Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 143, amendments to the Boat Harbour Act, be read a third time and do pass.

I will be brief. The Boat Harbour Act is an important piece of legislation that protects the environment. The Act stopped the flow of effluent from Boat Harbour and set in motion the process for cleaning up Boat Harbour and returning it to a tidal estuary. The original act and these amendments protect the interests of the taxpayers of Nova Scotia and honour a commitment to the Pictou Landing First Nation.

Quite simply, these amendments strengthen the wording of Section 4 to make it very clear that no action means any action, including an action for damages or other compensation, can be brought against the Province. These amendments also remove provisions which became redundant after the deadline set out in the act has passed: the removal of Section 4, Subsection 2.

These amendments are consistent with the original intent of the legislation and are necessary to ensure that the act is interpreted the way it was originally intended, which is to prohibit any legal action against the Province of Nova Scotia for the enactment of that Act. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak to this amendment on behalf of the people of Cumberland North. This is an important topic to the people whom I represent in Cumberland County, as forestry has long been a foundation of our economy.

The Minister of Justice is quoted as stating "The Boat Harbour Act is an important piece of legislation that protects the environment. It also prevents legal action against the Province" and I will table that. Well, actually I have a bunch so I will just table them all at once at the end.

Now, I don't know if - we'll see what happens. I mean, everything has to be upheld in the Court of Law, but if people could just change legislation so that they don't get sued, I think we would see that more often than we do, but regardless, I want to speak for a little bit about the history of this act and forestry in Nova Scotia. There is significant political history associated with Pictou County, the provincial government, and industrial paper companies, starting with the Scott Maritimes Limited Agreement (1965) Act, and I will table that.

During the 1960s, the forestry industry in Nova Scotia was organized around three firms - Scott Paper in Pictou, Stora Forest Products in Cape Breton, and Bowater Mersey in Queens County. Of course, the Bowater Mersey pulp mill unfortunately closed in Queens County in 2012. My husband and I lived in Liverpool from 1992 to 1995 and know that when the pulp mill closed it was a huge blow to the economy of the area, as many people - most people - in the Town of Liverpool were employed at the Bowater Mersey pulp mill.

Like Cumberland County, the South Shore has a large, valuable forestry resource and it has long been an important part of their economy in the South Shore as well. The pulp mill industry has been fairly volatile globally, and due to this we have seen pulp mills close in New Brunswick and across Canada. In many rural communities, this has drastic economic impacts.

Of course, like everyone, the forestry industry has also been affected by the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. A quote taken from *Northern Ontario Business* magazine reminds us of that. Derek Nighbor says, "We're a very integrated sector. The residuals from our sawmills are feeding our pulp mills and our pulp mills are helping further manufacturers make diapers, sanitary wipes, and toilet paper and paper towels, and a whole host of products that people need." The Government of Ontario kept supply chains moving in the pandemic. The author says, "Key to the flow of material has been the provincial designations of essential industries." Nighbor "paid credit to Ontario for being the first government to include forest products producers (lumber, pulp, paper, wood fuel) on its list of essential workplaces, as well as those in their supply chain."

Rural areas of Nova Scotia such as Cumberland County, Colchester County, Queens, Shelburne, and many more know the importance of the forestry sector as one of our most important primary industries. Foresters have attempted to educate us politicians on the need for a pulp mill to keep healthy forests. Foresters need a market for low-grade pulpwood, as well as the parts of the trees that cannot be used for lumber or other marketable wood products, and sawmills need a pulp mill for their chips.

In the 2018 Lahey report, Lahey promised a change to ecological forestry, and the Lahey report concluded that "we can have forest practices in Nova Scotia that combine ecological protection and biodiversity with productive and profitable forestry." The Lahey report speaks to the importance of having pulp mills within market access for the low-grade pulpwood - that means a pulp mill that's close enough that it makes financial sense for it to be trucked to the pulp mill. If the pulp mill is too far away from the actual resource, there's no financial sense.

It is this access to a market that will likely pay for silviculture and ecological forestry practices that Lahey recommends on both Crown lands and private lands. Lahey believes "forest practices in Nova Scotia should be guided by explicit and formal adoption of a new paradigm - called 'ecological forestry.'" Ecological forestry "is not anti-forestry.

It does not aim to protect the environment by eliminating or prohibiting commercial timber production. Instead, it seeks to combine the imperative of protecting ecological systems and biodiversity with the social importance of sustaining a productive and profitable forestry industry.”

A profitable forestry industry includes a pulp mill. Forestry needs a large-scale market pulp mill for pulpwood and chips. In an article in *Canadian Forest Industries* dated March 19, 2021, Ryan Scott has a forestry consulting business, and he stated:

“Now, 14 months after the closure of the mill, a lot of contractors are operating at a loss. Consequently, the industry needs a high-end market for the one million metric tons of sustainably harvested low-grade wood available in Nova Scotia.” One million metric tons.

“The contractor group has therefore come up with a few market proposals. One would be to increase the use of locally produced biomass to achieve energy targets. However, to meet the targets laid out in the Lahey Report, Nova Scotia would need to build hundreds, if not thousands, of community heating plants, Scott said.

There have been discussions around exporting pulpwood to B.C. or Europe as pulp mills around the world are interested in supporting the supply chain. But, due to COVID-19 and the economies around his suggestion, these proposals have not moved forward.

According to Scott, restarting the kraft pulp mill in Abercrombie, N.S., seems most reasonable, as this is the only proposed solution that would pay enough to allow contractors to do selective harvesting, as recommended by the Lahey report.”

As soon as former premier Stephen McNeil made the announcement that the mill was closing, there was outrage and disbelief in Cumberland County and across the forestry sector. Local foresters, many of them third- and fourth-generation forestry families, were led to believe by the former government that the mill was going to be allowed to continue to operate, and a solution for the effluent would be found, a solution that everyone would be pleased with.

The foresters who have spoken with me supported the closure of Boat Harbour. However, they believed the government was going to act in the best interest of Forestry Nova Scotia and work toward a solution without closing the pulp mill. Immediately after

the announcement, local CEO of Athol Forestry - his name is Ian Ripley - he and I organized a public meeting for anyone interested in Cumberland County.

[8:45 p.m.]

We hired a facilitator, and we led our first meeting of 99 men and women - mostly men - and they were angry. Thankfully our facilitator was very skilled, and he was able to help the people who attended the meeting express their anger. He was able to help them communicate effectively, and we were able to move forward with trying to come up with solutions. It was actually even a blizzard that day, but we still filled a room with 99 people.

We had another public meeting the next Sunday, and that next Sunday we had over around 120 people and it was an ice storm. Despite the classic Nova Scotia Winter weather, we had an overwhelming number of forestry people come out who were - many of them - and still are very worried about their financial well-being. Many of them have hundreds of thousands, up to millions of dollars of equipment financed with no one there to help them. It was at that meeting, at those meetings, and several subsequent meetings thereafter that I came to know the hearts of these men and women and some of their families, and their love of forestry and love of their industry.

The Cumberland Forestry Advisory Committee was created and continues today. We used to meet every week, and then it was every second week, but we still meet every month, and the work continues. People look to Cumberland County from across the province toward this leadership by the foresters in our area. I talk about this in relation to the proposed amendment today to the Boat Harbour Act because it needs to be said.

Forestry and the men and women that work in forestry make up many of the communities in rural Nova Scotia, and they deserve to have a voice in this Legislature. They manage our forests, they do forest management plans, they plant trees, they decide upon the best methods based on the diversity of the types of trees, the soils, surrounding water, and other factors. Most agree with the findings of the Lahey report and want to work with government to implement their recommendations. They have generations of knowledge, and their experience is invaluable.

Many families in Nova Scotia have a foundation in forestry. My great-grandfather worked in logging camps, as did my grandfather, and my own father carried on that tradition somewhat, often taking us to the woods to work in the forest, usually on the afternoon of Christmas Day, just to make a point, and other holidays, to make sure that we knew the life of hard work.

One of Nova Scotia's most successful entrepreneurs and a man whom I highly respect, Mr. John Bragg, is from generations of a forestry family. This past January while doing a COVID-19 booster clinic, I met an 88-year-old man. We got talking about our families and he shared with me that his mother, who was a widow, a young widow with

five children, was a cook at a logging camp that my great-grandfather owned - Russell Smith in Chapman Settlement, Cumberland County. It's a small world.

It's a really small world and that's why I do have concerns with the government's approach with this amendment. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, a judge will decide if Nova Scotia owes a private company for losses for forcing them to close due to legislation and changes to their contract. A judge will decide if this legislation will hold up in court, just as they did in the cyberbullying piece of legislation when it was struck down by a judge for violating the Charter.

In the meantime, this government is sending a message to industry around the world: If we don't like the contract we sign with you, we will just change it in the Legislature. That hurts our Nova Scotia brand.

Nova Scotia has had a good reputation and a good reputation means something. Nova Scotia has had a reputation that we are good people, people who are true to our word and I believe this legislation taints our brand. Throughout all the history of Boat Harbour and companies doing business in Nova Scotia, from Scott Paper to Kimberly-Clark, to Northern Pulp and now Paper Excellence, the government of the day, from 1965 to present day, negotiated MOUs - memoranda of understanding - and business contracts with each one of these companies.

I am not an expert on the law, I am not an expert in the kraft paper industry, I am not an expert on the environment, but I do believe in honouring contracts. I do believe in holding up my end of the agreement.

In every story we like to find the villain and the hero, but this story has a long, complicated history and it's just not that simple. In 1965, the impact of industrial waste on the environment was not well-known. It was not respected like we see today. Money and jobs were king and money led to decisions being made that were not always in the best interests of the environment. We have seen this time and time again throughout the industrialized world.

The industrialized world was not known in the 1960s for corporate social responsibility, which we now expect all companies to have - environmental, philanthropic, ethical, as well as economic responsibility. In 1967 when the Scott mill opened and the Province agreed to provide water and a place for the waste, Boat Harbour was the place chosen for the effluent waste water. Before 1960, Boat Harbour was an unpolluted tidal estuary. We actually have one very similar in Pugwash and I can't even imagine what happened in Boat Harbour happening in ours.

Boat Harbour was on the Northumberland Strait in Pictou County. The estuary covered about 142 hectares that was used by the Pictou Landing First Nation community

for fishing, food, and recreational purposes. There was a conflict between First Nations, industry and the government starting very soon after the mill opened.

In 1968, Pictou Landing occupants made complaints about pollution from the effluent plant, saying that it affected their health. Two years later, in 1970, the Provincial Water Commission hired the Montreal-based company Rust Consultants to investigate the Boat Harbour complaints. They said the Scott Paper mill needed to be upgraded and that it needed to add aerators. The province signed a 25-year supply and waste treatment agreement with Scott Paper.

In 1986 Pictou Landing's Chief filed a lawsuit against the federal government for using Boat Harbour for waste and neglecting the health of their people. In 1990, several dead fish were reported below the waste outfall from Boat Harbour.

In the early 1990s, the Province was pressured by complaints from Pictou Landing occupants to fix Boat Harbour. It employed Jacques Whitford and Beak Consultants to research ideas around how to handle the mill's waste. In July 1993, the federal government signed a \$35 million out-of-court settlement with Pictou Landing First Nation. A month later, the consultants proposed five options to fix Boat Harbour's problems.

One was opening Boat Harbour to the Strait for \$30,000 and another was constructing a new treatment facility at an estimated cost of \$82 million. This was back in 1993. The Province chose at that time to pipe treated waste from the first lagoon two kilometres into Northumberland Strait, where it would be mixed with sea water.

In 1995, Kimberly-Clark Corporation acquired the mill. The Province promised to shut down Boat Harbour by 2005, 10 years later. The Province also promised it would pay for the environmental liability costs for the lagoon. In 2001, Pictou Landing signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the company, Kimberly-Clark, allowing the company to continue using the lagoon while Pictou Landing was financially compensated.

In 2002, the Province extended the lease of Boat Harbour until 2030. In 2003, the Nova Scotia government submitted an assessment of plans and documents to the federal government to reopen Boat Harbour to the Strait. In 2004, Neenah Paper took over the ownership of the mill. In 2005, consultants said reopening Boat Harbour could make the lagoon eutrophic, a term used to describe a body of water experiencing significant increase in algae growth. In 2006, Pictou Landing First Nation and Neenah Paper modified the Memorandum of Understanding and set 2008 as a new cleanup deadline.

You can see from the timeline there's a triangle between Pictou Landing First Nation making agreements with government and industry, and government making agreements with industry, and government making agreements with Pictou Landing First Nation.

In June 2008, Northern Pulp took ownership of the mill - yet another company. The licence for Northern Pulp to discharge waste into Boat Harbour expired but was renewed on a monthly basis. The Province promised not to extend it beyond December 31, 2008 without consulting Pictou Landing. In March 2009, the First Nation cautioned the Province about further discharge without their approval. It said the action would be perceived as a violation of its constitutional rights and First Nations council members would begin negotiating with the Province and Northern Pulp.

Meetings were placed on hold because of a June 2009 provincial election, and meetings didn't resume until September 2009. In March 2010, the Nova Scotia government loaned \$75 million to Northern Pulp to purchase 475,000 acres of forest land from the previous owner, Neenah Paper. The government stated the deal was made to protect jobs and support Pictou County's economy.

In April 2010, Pictou Landing First Nation requested the government end Northern Pulp's licence by June. June passed without the termination. In September, Pictou Landing First Nation launched a lawsuit against the provincial government and Northern Pulp demanding they build a new effluent treatment facility and clean Boat Harbour.

In October 2011, the Halifax Media Co-op reported that the Nova Scotia government drafted an offer - called the Capacity Building Agreement - of \$3 million to Pictou Landing to postpone their lawsuit, with the stipulation that they do not obstruct waste water dumping for two years and that the money not be used to fund their lawsuit. In January 2012, the federal government granted \$28 million to Northern Pulp to better fund environmental practices at the mill.

In March, B.C.- based company Paper Excellence bought Northern Resources, Northern Pulp's parent company. In January, Pictou Landing community members voted 90 per cent against the \$3 million capacity-building agreement, as recorded in a master thesis by Ella Bennett.

Northern Pulp received orders from the Nova Scotia Department of Environment in March and November to cut air pollution and the smell of sulphur. In April, the Province gave Northern Pulp a \$14.7 million repayable loan and a \$2.5 million forgivable loan to improve air quality and create jobs.

In June, *The Chronicle Herald* reported that a pipeline had been leaking untreated effluent into a wetland. Later that day, Northern Pulp released a statement acknowledging the leak. The mill shut down and Pictou Landing First Nation created a blockade to the damaged pipeline. The protests ended after the Nova Scotia government issued an order stating that if Northern Pulp does not cut their emissions to the mandated standards, they will be shut down in May 2015.

In May, the Boat Harbour Act was passed by Nova Scotia. This stated that the facility must cease the reception and treatment of effluent by January 31, 2020, shortening their previous lease, which ran until 2030. In September, Northern Pulp qualified for an environmental assessment of their proposed plans for a new waste water treatment facility.

These plans can be approved, denied, or have more information requested by the provincial Minister of Environment. The proposed facility will process mill waste water with a sludge treatment facility and then send effluent through an underwater pipeline into the Northumberland Strait.

In July, hundreds gathered in Pictou County for an air and land protest against the newly proposed pipeline. In October, a survey boat mapping Northern Pulp's potential pipeline was blocked by fisherman and forced back to shore. In October, Northern Pulp confirmed to media that a pipe has been leaking effluent into a wetland. It's the same pipeline that broke in 2014. They claimed that the leak was small and due to outdated technology.

In March, provincial Minister of Environment Margaret Miller didn't approve a new effluent treatment facility, requesting more information on the environmental impact. In May, the federal government committed \$100 million to fund a remediation project at Boat Harbour.

In October, Northern Pulp's focus to detailing more information requested by government was made available to the public. In December, the federal Environment Minister, Jonathan Wilkinson, decided not to give the Northern Pulp project a federal impact assessment, leaving the decision on a new facility to the Nova Scotia government.

I will just add in here that I'm reading the timeline. I want to make sure that I get it correct. I remember being here in the Legislature when all of that happened and the stress. One day I was in here and I was having a bit of chest pain and I think we had some protesters who had to be removed from the gallery. I went out to put my coat on because I needed to take a break from this place. The Minister of Environment was putting her coat on. I spoke to her and asked if she was doing okay. She said no because they recommended she leave because of the death threats that she was getting. Yes, it was a very tense time here in our province when all of this was happening.

Moving on - later that month Nova Scotia's Minister of Environment, Gordon Wilson, said that the government needed more information than the focus report provided, again withholding approval on a new facility. Wilson said that scientific evidence of the potential impact was unsatisfactory and the project would require an environmental assessment report.

Northern Pulp had up to two years to submit this report and after that the provincial government had up to 285 days to evaluate it and make it a decision. Days later, Premier

Stephen McNeil announced that there would be no extension to the January 31, 2020 closure date set in the Boat Harbour Act. He also announced a \$50-million transition fund to aid industry workers affected by the closure.

[9:00 p.m.]

In January, Northern Pulp said it intended to proceed with the environmental impact assessment of its proposed treatment facility and that day McNeil announced boiler waste water will continue to flow into Boat Harbour until April 30 in order to heat pipes through the Winter to prevent them from freezing and bursting, which could cause more damage. It's quite a timeline.

You can see that it's not just as simple as a villain and a hero. I think giving people the benefit of the doubt, when things first started, there was probably a lot of information that was not known, as far as environmental damage. Also, we know there was a culture where our Indigenous people were not respected, and that needs to change, and more work needs to be done there.

I think it's important, as we're moving ahead, to know our history and what happened in the past. Hopefully that will influence us to make better decisions. Fast forward to today. Two years after the closure of the pulp mill, only two months later, a global pandemic ensued, and we are still in the grips of that pandemic. There are increasing demands for lumber in the midst of a housing crisis and a population growth for our province. Our forestry industry here in Nova Scotia has clearly communicated there needs to be a pulp mill in order to fulfill the Lahey Report for ecological forestry.

The provincial government has not provided the pulp mill industry with clear environmental goals to meet for a treatment plant. The industry feels they are reaching in the dark to try to meet requirements that have not been clearly communicated. Now we have an amendment to this bill to try to protect Nova Scotia taxpayers from a company suing them because the Province shut them down.

The company owes the government money, and some would argue the Province owes the company money for breaking the contract, but that is for a judge to decide. When this company purchased the pulp mill, there was a lease agreement, a contract until 2030 for a treatment plant. The government changed that through legislation and are proposing another amendment today. I'll read a quote from a *Chronicle Herald* article:

“For its part Northern Pulp parent company Paper Excellence provided a written response on Friday, reading, ‘We are reviewing the proposed amendments. We are disappointed and concerned the Province is planning to substantially amend the Act to retroactively remove any right to compensation relating to the forced closure of the mill 11 years before the end of the Effluent Treatment lease.

Two former Premiers acknowledged the Province of Nova Scotia has a liability to Northern Pulp in connection with the early closure of the mill caused by the Act. These proposed changes should be of concern to any organization doing business in Nova Scotia.”

This is messy, but one thing is clear: This government, as well as the government before, is sending a message to industry that our word is not worth the paper it is written on. If we change a contract in business, you have to face the consequences, and any business owner will tell you that. Amending a piece of legislation and making it retroactive to try to avoid a judge holding the Province accountable is just not good business. No one will trust a gentleman’s handshake from a Nova Scotia politician. Maybe they will if there happens to be a female leader in the days ahead. We’ll see what happens.

Those are my comments. I’m not condoning anything that’s happened in history. I was working as a nurse when all of these items took place, but I do have a responsibility to speak on behalf of many of the people in my constituency of Cumberland North. They need government to work with them to ensure that we have a sustainable and healthy forest industry, that we can comply with the recommendations for ecological forestry as laid out in the Lahey Report. Even in the Lahey Report, it talks about the only way to make it financially viable, to provide the silviculture and the healthy, sustainable forestry practices is by making sure that there is a pulp mill as part of the forestry plan.

With those many words, I will close my comments.

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

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, I rise to close debate on Bill No. 143.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 143.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that the bill do pass. Ordered that the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

With the consent of the House and for the benefit of the Clerks, I would suggest that we take a five-minute break to allow them to at least get up and stretch their legs. Everybody else gets that opportunity. We’ll break until 9:10 p.m.

[9:06 p.m. The House recessed.]

[9:12 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to resolve back to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

[9:14 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Bills with Susan Leblanc in the Chair.]

[12:00 a.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance in the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: The House is now adjourned until April 21st at 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 12:04 a.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 241**

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas the Armview Restaurant and Lounge has been a Halifax staple for nearly 70 years; and

Whereas the Armview's iconic location offers unparalleled views of the Northwest Arm, and the restaurant's menu offers a wide range of locally themed dishes, from the "Dingle Tower" hamburger to the "Chebucto" breakfast; and

Whereas the Armview recently won Silver in the category of Best Diner at The Coast's Best of Halifax Awards;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates The Armview on this well-deserved recognition and wishes them all the best as Nova Scotia moves beyond the experiences of the past two years.

RESOLUTION NO. 242

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Blair Beauty Bar offers judgement-free and inclusive brow, lashes and waxing services; and

Whereas the pandemic had a very significant negative impact on esthetician services in general; and

Whereas Natalie MacDonald of Blair Beauty Bar won the Gold award for best esthetician at the Coast's Best of Halifax Awards;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Natalie MacDonald and Blair Beauty Bar on this recognition of their work, and wishes them every continuing success as Nova Scotia continues to pull out from the last difficult two years.

RESOLUTION NO. 243

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Blue Olive Greek Taverna recently celebrated its 10th year in business; and

Whereas Blue Olive Greek Taverna received the Bronze award for Best Greek at the Coast's Best of Halifax Awards; and

Whereas Blue Olive Greek Taverna serves delicious Greek food in the long tradition of Haligonian Greek cuisine;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Blue Olive Greek Taverna on their recent recognition and wishes them every continuing success as Nova Scotia pulls beyond the last very difficult two years.

RESOLUTION NO. 244

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Darling Tattoos won Gold for Best Tattoo/Piercing Joint at the Coast's Best of Halifax Awards; and

Whereas Helena Darling won Gold for Best Tattoo Artist; and

Whereas Darling Tattoos has been at the corner of Oxford and Chebucto since 2018, with its vibrant colours and welcoming atmosphere;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Helena Darling and Darling Tattoos on their well-deserved recognition and wishes them every continuing success as Nova Scotia continues to pull out from the last difficult two years.

RESOLUTION NO. 245

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas the Grade 9 students of Halifax Central Junior High School created 18 colourful banners to celebrate the holidays in 2021; and

Whereas the banners were proudly displayed on Quinpool Road during the holiday season; and

Whereas the banners truly celebrated the diversity of the Halifax Central Junior High community and by extension that of Halifax Chebucto;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates the students for bringing their art and celebration of diversity to the community as a whole.

RESOLUTION NO. 246

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Hannah Kovacs opened Move East on Quinpool Road in late 2019; and

Whereas Hannah Kovacs was awarded Bronze for Best Fitness Instructor and Silver for Best Trainer at the Coast's Best of Halifax Awards; and

Whereas the pandemic has been a challenging time for all businesses, but especially for a new fitness studio;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Hannah and Move East on their recent accomplishments and wishes them every continuing success as Nova Scotia pulls forward beyond the last very difficult two years.

RESOLUTION NO. 247

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Heartwood restaurant has been a Halifax staple since 1995; and

Whereas Heartwood serves delicious and nourishing vegetarian fare at their Quinpool Road and waterfront locations; and

Whereas Heartwood recently won Bronze in the category of Best Vegetarian-Friendly for food and drink in the Coast's Best of Halifax Awards;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Heartwood on their recent recognition and wishes them every continuing success as Nova Scotia pulls beyond the last very difficult two years.

RESOLUTION NO. 248

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Jubilee Junction has been proudly serving Halifax since 1989; and

Whereas Jubilee Junction's convenience store, kitchen, dairy bar, and delivery service offer a wide variety of snacks, meals and grocery items; and

Whereas Jubilee Junction recently won silver in the category of Best Corner Store in The Coast's Best of Halifax Awards;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Jubilee Junction on their recent recognition and wishes them every continuing success as Nova Scotia pulls beyond the last very difficult two years.

RESOLUTION NO. 249

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Oddfellows Barbershop offers quality barbering in an innovative location; and

Whereas Oddfellows Barbershop recently won Silver for Best Barbershop at the Coast's Best of Halifax Awards; and

Whereas Jeremy Naugler received the Bronze award for Best Barber;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Oddfellows Barbershop and Jeremy Naugler on their recent recognition and wishes them every continuing success as Nova Scotia continues to pull out from the last difficult two years.

RESOLUTION NO. 250

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas One Ummah Radio Station first hit the airwaves to mark the start of Ramadan this year; and

Whereas One Ummah Radio Station is run by volunteers in the basement of Ummah Masjid in Halifax Chebucto; and

Whereas One Ummah Radio Station is the first Muslim radio station in the Atlantic region;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Ummah Masjid and its volunteers on this enormous accomplishment, and wishes them many years of broadcasting on the Halifax airwaves.

RESOLUTION NO. 251

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Sweet Hereafter Cheesecakery is renowned for it delicious cheesecakes in a wide range of flavours including vegan and gluten-free options; and

Whereas Sweet Hereafter Cheesecakery offers a welcoming atmosphere and friendly staff; and

Whereas Sweet Hereafter Cheesecakery recently won the Silver award for Best Dessert at the Coast's Best of Halifax Awards;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Sweet Hereafter Cheesecakery on this well-deserved recognition and wishes them every continuing success as Nova Scotia pulls forward beyond the last very difficult two years.

RESOLUTION NO. 252

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Wozzles is Canada's oldest children's bookstore; and

Whereas Wozzles recently moved to Shirley Street in Halifax Chebucto where it is a welcome addition to the community and the commercial landscape; and

Whereas Wozzles won the Silver Award for Best Independent Bookstore at the Coast's Best of Halifax Awards;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulates Wozzles on its recent recognition and wishes them every continuing success as Nova Scotia pulls beyond the last very difficult two years.