



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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First Session

WEDNESDAY, JULY 27, 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS:	
Gov't. (N.S.): Petition for a Liquor License for Convenience in the Woods, C. Palmer.....	2973
Gov't. (N.S.): Petition for a 2 Per Cent Rent Cap to Continue Beyond 2023, G. Burrill.....	2973
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:	
No. 191, An Act to Provide Direct Assistance to Nova Scotian Households, L. Lachance.....	2974
No. 192, An Act to Amend Chapter 5 of the Acts of 2005, the Emergency Health Services Act, to Create Accountability for Emergency Ambulance Services, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	2974
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:	
Saccary, Angela: Prov. Special Olympics Win - Congrats., J. White	2974
Little, Wayne: Retirement - Congrats., Hon. P. Arab	2975
HTE Church Clothing Depot: Com. Serv. - Thanks,	

S. Leblanc	2975
Weym. Cons. School: Ukrainian Relief Fundraiser - Thanks, Hon. J. Balsler	2976
Brouwer, Rachel: Water Purification Project - Recog., B. Clark	2976
Adams, Dennis: Awards for Social Work at LOVE N.S. - Recog., S. Hansen	2976
Lun. Her. Soc.: 50 th Anniv. - Recog., Hon. S. Corkum-Greek	2977
C.B. Horsemment's Assoc. & C.B. Ex. Soc.: Achiev. - Congrats., F. Tilley	2978
Local Students: Social Justice Awd. Recips. - Recog., L. Lachance	2978
Maharaj, Dr. Mandat: Contrib. to C.B. Neur. Svcs. - Thanks, Hon. B. Comer	2978
Tourists: Visiting N.S. - Welcome, L. Nicoll	2979
Canoe '22: Int'l. Races on Lake Banook - Congrats., C. Chender	2979
Butler, K./Coolican, M.: Local Families Init. - Thanks, Hon. K. MacFarlane	2980
Mellish, Janice: Constituency Work - Thanks, R. DiCostanzo	2980
Cost of Living Crisis: Help Needed - Recog., K. Coombes	2981
Murray, Jean: Providing Baked Goods - Thanks, Hon. P. Dunn	2981
Cress, Vangie: Death of - Tribute, C. Kerr	2981
Hfx. Mural Fest.: Art Creation - Recog., G. Burrill	2982
Made With Local: Bus. Success - Congrats., Hon. T. Halman	2983
Cost of Living Crisis: Action - Suggestions, Hon. K. Regan	2983
Wills, Dr. David Guy: Death of - Tribute, L. Lachance	2984
Dugas, Amanda: Educ. Awd. Recip. - Congrats., L. Harrison	2984
Haddad, Joey: Retirement - Best Wishes, Hon. D. Mombourquette	2984
Cmte. Mbrs.: Coal Dust Days Success - Congrats., K. Coombes	2985
Emancipation Day: Prom. of Afric. N.S. History - Recog., Hon. B. Johns	2985
MacNeil, John: Death of - Tribute,	

Hon. Z. Churchill	2986
Miller, Perry: Affordability Issues - Recog., S. Leblanc	2987
Local Students: Graduation - Congrats., Hon. C. LeBlanc	2987
Blackmore, Paula: Com. Serv. - Thanks, Hon. I. Rankin.....	2988
Jefferies, Armon: Citadel HS Class Valed. - Best Wishes, S. Hansen	2988
Pres. & Brd. of Dirs.: Apple Blossom Fest. Return - Congrats., Hon. J. Lohr	2988
EPAs: Raise Deserved - Recog., B. Maguire	2989
Team N.S. Men's Softball Mbrs.: Summer Games - Congrats., John A. MacDonald	2989
Rafael, Dr. Pastor & Family: Perm. Res. Status - Welcome, A. Simmonds.....	2990
Sylliboy, Grand Chief Ben: Death of - Tribute, Hon. A. MacMaster.....	2990
Rida, Rabita: Ntl. Spelling Bee Finalist - Congrats., Hon. P. Arab	2990
Gallant, Josée: Weightlifting Achievements - Congrats., D. Ritcey	2991
Speaker's Office: Work for Mbrs. - Thanks, A. Duale	2991
McCormick, Linda & Craig: Fundraising for RM House - Thanks, Hon. T. Rushton.....	2992
South Shore Exhib.: Organizers - Thanks, Hon. B. Druhan.....	2992
Jamieson, Susan & Jim: 50 th Wedding Anniv. - Congrats., B. Clark	2993
Thorpe, J.G./Tremblay, D.: Cherry Tree Distillery - Congrats., M. Sheehy-Richard	2993
Syliboy, Alan/Down to Earth Art Gallery: Exhib. - Congrats., Hon. M. Thompson.....	2994
Hebb, Betty: Com. Serv. - Recog., C. Palmer.....	2994
Selby's Bunker: Café and Gift Shop - Thanks, L. Nicoll	2995
Melanson, Jacob: Signed NHL Contract - Congrats., E. Smith-McCrossin.....	2995
Miranda: Efforts During Home Fire - Recog., Hon. B. Wong	2996
Affordability Crisis: Relief Needed - Recog., R. DiCostanzo.....	2996
Friends of Muir-Cox Mill: Her. Work - Recog.,	

N. Young.....	2997
Peppard, Al “Pep”: Com. Serv. - Thanks, C. Kerr.....	2997
Robinson, Melissa: Skate N.S. Awd. Recip. - Congrats., Hon. K. Masland.....	2998
Dobbs, Jennie: Drink Sprizzi Launch - Congrats., Hon. K. Regan.....	2998
Kohen Bradley, Karen/Bell, Richard: Com. Serv. - Congrats., K. Smith.....	2999
SPEAKER’S RULING:	
Request for emergency debate on state of emergency departments	3000
ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:	
No. 570, Prem. - Health Care Crisis: Metrics - Define, Hon. Z. Churchill	3001
No. 571, Prem.: Recent Appointments - Justify, C. Chender	3003
No. 572, DHW: Impact of COVID on Emerg. Depts. - Concern, Hon. Z. Churchill	3005
No. 573, DHW: NSHA CEO Removal - Explain, Hon. K. Regan.....	3006
No. 574, DHW: Health Care Crisis Worse - Acknowledge, Hon. Z. Churchill	3008
No. 575, DHW: Primary Health Care Access - Plan, S. Leblanc	3009
No. 576, DHW: Lengthy ER Wait Times - Acknowledge, Hon. B. Maguire	3010
No. 577, DHW - Emerg. Care Annapolis: Dismantling - Explain, C. Kerr.....	3011
No. 578, DHW: Failed Public Health Policies - Admit, Hon. I. Rankin.....	3013
No. 579, EECD: School Safety Under COVID - Ensure, S. Hansen	3014
No. 580, DHW: Surgical Wait Times - Action, F. Tilley.....	3015
No. 581, DHW: Monkeypox Outbreak - Planning, Hon. B. Jessome.....	3016
No. 582, DOJ: Dom. Abuse & Sexual Assault - Action, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	3017
No. 583, DHW: Physician Wait-List Progress - Update, B. Clark.....	3018
No. 584, DHW: Virtual Care Access - Update, Hon. B. Maguire	3020
POINT OF PRIVILEGE, Hon. P. Arab.....	3020
OPPOSITION MEMBERS’ BUSINESS:	
PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	
No. 187, Public Utilities Act (amended),	

Hon. I. Rankin.....	3021
C. Chender	3025
T. Taggart.....	3028
C. Kerr.....	3032
No. 189, Revenue Act (amended),	
F. Tilley.....	3034
L. Lachance.....	3037
J.A. MacDonald	3039
L. Nicoll	3042
Hon. C. LeBlanc	3043
Hon. B. Maguire	3046
A. MacMaster	3047
Hon. B. Maguire	3047
Hon. J. Lohr	3050
No. 186, Pandemic Impact Transparency Act,	
Z. Churchill.....	3051
S. Leblanc	3055
C. Palmer.....	3058
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:	
PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	
No. 185, House of Assembly Act,	
Hon. B. Johns.....	3060
B. Clark.....	3061
S. Leblanc	3066
J. White	3069
F. Tilley.....	3073
G. Burrill.....	3073
Hon. B. Johns.....	3076
Vote - Affirmative.....	3076
ADJOURNMENT:	
MOTION UNDER RULE 43:	
Gov't (N.S.): State of Emergency Departments - Action Required,	
C. Chender	3076
Hon. M. Thompson.....	3080
Hon. K. Regan.....	3085
K. Coombes.....	3089
Hon. S. Corkum-Greek	3092
E. Smith-McCrossin.....	3095
S. Leblanc	3099
Hon. T. Rushton.....	3103
Hon. D. Mombourquette.....	3105
ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Thur., July 28 th at 2 p.m.....	3106



HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, JULY 27, 2022

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Keith Bain

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Angela Simmonds, Lisa Lachance

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We'll begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Mr. Speaker, today I present a petition from the residents of East Dalhousie and surrounding areas for the purpose of obtaining an NSLC agency store, signed by over 400 residents. I have affixed my signature as per the Rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition. The operative clause is: We the undersigned call upon the government of Nova Scotia to continue the present rent cap which is in place until December 2023.

I am pleased to add my signature to the petition, according to the Rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: We'll take the petition under review at this point.

The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 191 - Entitled an Act to Provide Direct Assistance to Nova Scotian Households. (Lisa Lachance)

Bill No. 192 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 5 of the Acts of 2005, the Emergency Health Services Act, to Create Accountability for Emergency Ambulance Services. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

SACCARY, ANGELA: PROV. SPECIAL OLYMPICS WIN - CONGRATS.

JOHN WHITE: I rise today to honour Angela Saccary for her dedication and commitment to swimming, which has led to her winning four medals at the Provincial Special Olympics in Antigonish this Summer. Angela has overcome every obstacle and achieved a gold medal for her 25m freestyle, and silver medals for her 25m breaststroke, 50m backstroke, and 50m freestyle.

Cape Breton is a community where people face and overcome great adversity each day. Angela, with support from her hometown community of Dominion, demonstrates that anything is possible with the right values and supports. With inspirational people like

Angela Saccary setting an example for what we can overcome, I can assure you, more champions will arise from Cape Breton communities.

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

LITTLE, WAYNE: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate and thank a long beloved fixture in Fairview-Clayton Park, Wayne Little. For over 13 years, Wayne has taken care of our residents as the co-owner and pharmacist of the Shoppers Drug Mart on Joseph Howe Drive. Last week marked Wayne's last day behind the pharmacy counter after a career that spanned more than 40 years.

Being a pharmacist, especially over the last two years, brought new challenges and opportunities that Wayne and his staff embraced. They tirelessly continued to provide personalized care and advice to Fairview-Clayton Park with a smile, a Band-Aid, and yes, sometimes even a lollipop.

I ask that all members of this House join me in thanking Wayne for all he has done for our community. I look forward to him enjoying and embracing retirement with this wife Sharon, and their new puppy.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

HTE CHURCH CLOTHING DEPOT: COM. SERV. - THANKS

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Holy Trinity Emmanuel Church Clothing Depot, which runs out of Alfred Street in north end Dartmouth. A special thank you must go to volunteer Sarah, who coordinates the depot, which takes place every Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. until noon.

The clothing bank collects donations and then distributes them to the community for free. When you are struggling with the cost of living, as so many Nova Scotians are, and especially if you are on a fixed income, free clothing can be a big help. Just today, my office called Sarah for an unhoused individual who needs clothes, and she said she would put together a bag of specially selected clothes. They often put together bags of children's clothes for new parents to accompany their baby layettes. These acts of kindness make a huge kindness.

I ask everyone in the House to join me in thanking all of the volunteers at the Holy Trinity Emmanuel Clothing Depot for making life a little bit easier for the people of Dartmouth North.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

WEYM. CONS. SCHOOL: UKRAINIAN RELIEF FUNDRAISER - THANKS

HON. JILL BALSER: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Weymouth Consolidated School. This Spring, Rebecca Leblanc-Baggs's Grade 5/6 French Immersion class ran a quilt-making fundraiser that raised over \$4,000 for Ukrainian efforts. I would like to thank Quilts by the Bay, Clarence's Shopping Mart, Weymouth Fire Department, and everyone else who had helped organizing the material supplies so that this class could hand sew these quilts.

I'd also like to recognize Grade 4 teacher Denise Boudreau and student support worker Margaret Smith, who helped students write and publish a book with Lazy Bear Publishing at Smiths Cove. The book highlights famous Weymouth Falls boxer Sam Langford's professional boxing career in the early 1900s and the racial barriers he faced. This book is dedicated to the Weymouth Falls community and surrounding communities.

Thank you to the teachers, volunteers, and students for their impactful work in the community and abroad.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BROUWER, RACHEL: WATER PURIFICATION PROJECT - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to recognize Bedford South's Rachel Brouwer, a Dalhousie student who will be sharing her water purification project with two countries in Africa.

Rachel's project, the Purification Project, will be launching a pilot in Kenya and Gambia in order to tackle the serious issue of accessible clean drinking water in those regions where millions of people go without clean drinking water on a daily basis.

The Purification Project aims to alleviate clean water accessibility issues in communities in the global south, centred around the use of Rachel's technology using solar pasteurization and everyday materials.

Thank you, Rachel, for your sustainable approach to ensuring that everyone has access to clean drinking water. We wish you nothing but the best with this project.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

ADAMS, DENNIS: AWARDS FOR SOCIAL WORK AT LOVE N.S. - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise in the House today to recognize a true mentor and friend. Mr. Dennis Adams. Dennis is the Executive Director and Chief Harmony Officer for the LOVE program. LOVE supports youth to thrive through programs and healthy

relationships that give them the emotional intelligence to overcome the challenges they face.

He's a registered social worker, and he has combined his skills in non-profit management with over 30 years' experience working with youth in Nova Scotia. Dennis has been working at the LOVE program for 20 years, and Dennis has served youth within regional school boards, large health centres, and private practice. He is well-connected in our community and respected as well.

Dennis' commitment to LOVE has contributed to his receipt of a YMCA Peace Medal and the Ronald Stratford Memorial Award for outstanding contributions in social work in the province of Nova Scotia. He has since been the organization's first point of contact. I know Dennis and his family personally, and he has been an amazing support. He has been inspired by his strong mother and he comes from strong roots. LOVE is all about giving opportunities that normally people would not have, and I know that is what Dennis strives for daily.

I would like the House to join me in recognizing such an amazing person who helped pave the way for my own journey.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

LUN. HER. SOC.: 50TH ANNIV. - RECOG.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate the Lunenburg Heritage Society on their 50th anniversary. For years the society has worked to preserve the built heritage and settlement story of Lunenburg.

Known for organizing heritage house tours, the society also owns the Knaut-Rhuland House National Historic Site and operates this 18th-century residence as a living museum with costumed animators.

This Summer, the society is also bringing back the Nova Scotia Folk Art Festival after a two-year hiatus, and on July 31st, this Sunday, hundreds of people will pour into the Lunenburg Arena to enjoy the creations of some of our province's top folk artists. Put it in your calendars, folks.

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the volunteers of the Lunenburg Heritage Society for their half-century of commitment to Lunenburg's heritage.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

C.B. HORSEMEN'S ASSOC. & C.B. EX. SOC.: ACHIEV. - CONGRATS.

FRED TILLEY: Today I rise to celebrate a great achievement in Cape Breton. I saw a post this morning by the Cape Breton Exhibition Society that says things are moving and shaking in Cape Breton. There will be an exhibition this year in Cape Breton and going forward. Also there will be harness racing that's going to be there in perpetuity or longer.

At this moment, I would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture and his staff and team for the work that they did on this file. It was very much appreciated by me and the residents of Northside-Westmount, and huge congratulations to the Cape Breton Horsemen's Association and the Cape Breton Exhibition Society on a job well done. All their hard work has paid off. Here's to the future.

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

LOCAL STUDENTS: SOCIAL JUSTICE AWD. RECIPS. - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House today to recognize young change makers in my constituency. My office team and I asked schools in our riding to name graduating students who have shown an outstanding commitment to advancing social justice.

At Citadel High School, we awarded this year's book prize to Grade 12 student Ruby Summers. At Saint Mary's Elementary School, we awarded the prize to Grade 6 student Cadence McLeod, and at École Mer et Monde, the prize went to Grade 9 student Sophia Blake. À l'école Mer et Monde, on a nommé et félicité Sophia Blake comme récipiendaire.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues in the House to join me in congratulating Sophia, Cadence, and Ruby for their hard work in making their community a better place.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

MAHARAJ, DR. MANDAT: CONTRIB. TO C.B. NEUR. SVCS. - THANKS

HON. BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to commend Dr. Mandat Maharaj, who recently celebrated almost three decades of making significant contributions to neurological services in Cape Breton.

Dr. Maharaj completed his neurology residency at Dalhousie University before beginning at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital way back in 1996. He has been instrumental in implementing neurology services at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital, including MS, EEG, EMG, and Botox. He is also responsible for setting up one of the first non-academic stroke units in the country. Dr. Maharaj was quoted as saying that there were

a lot of long nights setting up the machines, adding that they were trying years but enterprising years. He's also very good on the doorsteps.

I stand here today to thank Dr. Maharaj and his wife, Gina, and his entire family for everything he's done for Cape Breton.

[1:15 p.m.]

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

TOURISTS: VISITING N.S. - WELCOME

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, I was going to rise today, like many times, and talk about someone in the riding of Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, but today, as I was walking into the House, I met up with a tourist, so I wanted to welcome all the tourists who are here visiting our great province. It is a time when - it is Summer, and we are in here, but I am very grateful for the fact that - and I'm honoured to be here representing, as I'm sure everyone is, even in the middle of the Summer.

That being said, had I not been here, I wouldn't have met this lovely lady from Minnesota who asked me all about this wonderful building. I was so proud to tell her all about it. It's interesting, of all our tourists, how much our heritage here means to them.

In welcoming her, and in welcoming everyone, be reminded to also keep us all safe.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: It's musical chairs.

CANOE '22: INT'L. RACES ON LAKE BANOOK - CONGRATS.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Canoe '22, the International Canoe Federation's Canoe Sprint and Paracanoe World Championships, taking place from August 3rd to 7th on one of the world's top courses, Lake Banook, in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

Over that period, elite paddlers from 70 countries will compete in races. There will be a free public street festival along Prince Albert Road that will include a market, food trucks, and concerts throughout the week.

Congratulations to all of the organizers for their incredibly hard work to bring this event to fruition, and welcome to all of the athletes and coaches from around the world. I

hope that everyone in this Chamber will get out to watch some world-class athletics on a world-class lake in the world-class city of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

BUTLER, K./COOLICAN, M.: LOCAL FAMILIES INIT. - THANKS

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Keltie Butler and Michael Coolican, owners of Small Holdings Farm, for their kindness and generosity with their Local Families Initiative.

This initiative began in the early days of the pandemic, when friends and family of Keltie and Michael gave them financial donations to provide fresh produce to several families. With the assistance of SchoolsPlus in Pictou County, they were able to provide for 10 food-insecure families. The following year, that number doubled to 20 families receiving fresh produce.

Now in their sixth year of operations, the public is welcome to stop and shop at the farm on Friday afternoons, and Keltie and Michael can be found every Saturday at the New Glasgow Farmers Market.

We are blessed in Pictou West to have Keltie and Michael. I ask the members to join me in thanking them for their generosity and pay-it-forward, kind attitude.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

MELLISH, JANICE: CONSTITUENCY WORK - THANKS

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize someone who is very important to me - my constituent, my confidante, and my friend, Janice Mellish. I met Janice during my first election in 2017 when I knocked on her door and she asked me some really tough questions on health care. That's when I asked her, would you sit on my Liberal Association to help me?

Not only has Janice been the glue that holds our Clayton Park West Association together, she co-chaired my last and very successful re-election campaign. I'm sad to say that Janice is moving to Medicine Hat, Alberta, but very happy for her and for her husband Bob to reunite with their four boys and five grandchildren.

I would ask that the House join me in thanking Janice for her service as a nurse in our community and her dedication to the political life in my constituency and just for being our beloved Janice.

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

COST OF LIVING CRISIS: HELP NEEDED - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: As the cost of living rises, it is becoming harder and harder for the residents of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier to put food on their tables, pay their rents and mortgages, pay for their medications, and fill their gas tanks to go to work.

I have spoken to seniors and families and other individuals who are unable to afford groceries and have often put food items back on the shelf due to the prices or are using food banks. They have told me that they have spent their time worrying about how they will pay for necessities. People are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. The residents of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier and all Nova Scotians need a living wage, help in affording medications and groceries, direct assistance in a financial capacity, and paid sick days, just to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, this is the real emergency, and we need to listen to the people of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

MURRAY, JEAN: PROVIDING BAKED GOODS - THANKS

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, in Pictou Centre, we are blessed with the very best baker in the land, Jean Murray. Throughout her life, Jean has played a key role in her community. Each event that Jean attended and still attends, she arrives overloaded with her bounty of baked goods.

Today, whether it is for staff at our local Glen Haven Manor, where Jean's husband, Donnie, is a resident, or for myself and my assistant at the Pictou Centre constituency office, Jean Murray still brings her delicious baked goods wherever she goes.

I invite all members to join me in thanking Jean for her baking expertise, which has brought smiles to so many faces throughout the years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CRESS, VANGIE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, last Fall, we lost an extraordinary community member, Vangie Cress. Vangie was born in Springfield in 1946 and lived for many years in Round Hill. She was always ready to help out her community in any way she could. She coached the Round Hill Sluggers women's baseball team, was a member of the Bishop Park and Round Hill Hall, was an honorary member of the Round Hill and District Recreation Commission, was chairperson of the Round Hill cemetery, and served as treasurer of Topps Nova Scotia Round Hill, among many other contributions. Vangie's

commitment to making her community an even better place to live, work, and play was recently celebrated at the 2022 Annapolis County volunteer recognition ceremony.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in acknowledging the many contributions Vangie Cress made to her community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

HFX. MURAL FEST.: ART CREATION - RECOG.

GARY BURRILL: I would like to register, Mr. Speaker, a word of appreciative recognition of the Halifax Mural Festival, which took place last weekend on Quinpool Road and the Halifax waterfront. The festival was a community-based event which brought both established and emerging artists together in the creation of, just within the constituency of Halifax Chebucto, 10 new murals and reconfigured utility box designs.

Particularly, I would like to draw attention to the stunning mural portrait on the east wall of Pro Skates on Quinpool Road, of the late John Dunsworth by artist JEKS. John Dunsworth was a much-beloved actor, perhaps best known for playing Jim Lahey, the trailer park supervisor in *Trailer Park Boys*, and it's in that role that he's depicted in the mural. John Dunsworth was also the NDP candidate for Halifax Bedford Basin in 1988, about which he starred in the video documentary *The Candidate*. Take it all in on Quinpool Road.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, permission to make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: In the West Gallery, I would like to introduce Claire Belliveau. Claire is the constituency assistant in Dartmouth East, and Claire has served her community for many years, first starting out as our community coordinator and now just recently got the position as constituency assistant. Claire is exceptionally intelligent, hard-working, and dedicated to her community, and I know we all so much rely on our assistants. I ask the House to offer a warm welcome to Claire Belliveau. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: We indeed welcome all visitors to the Legislature to see the workings of government. Welcome to everyone.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MADE WITH LOCAL: BUS. SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

HON. TIM HALMAN: I rise today to recognize Made with Local, a small but mighty local business that creates granola bars and kit mixes with local ingredients. Described as a heart-led company, every granola bar is made by hand in Dartmouth.

To keep up with surging demand for their products, Made with Local partnered with the Flower Cart Group, a community of social enterprises serving a dual purpose: to provide employment training opportunities that enrich the lives of participants, and to add value for local food businesses. From homemade granola bars that were sold at the Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market in 2012, this local business has come a long way.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate Made with Local for all their success and wish them all the best in their future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

COST OF LIVING CRISIS: ACTION - SUGGESTIONS

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, as we are here in this House for a completely made-up emergency, I thought I would share some reasons the Premier might have called us back for actual emergencies and what he could do about them.

So here's one: The Premier could have called us back because there is a cost of living emergency for many Nova Scotians, including those who cannot work or who work minimum wage jobs - what the Premier calls not "real jobs" - or seniors. The cost of living is the emergency.

Take the cost of fuel. The price to fill up gas tanks has spiraled. People are finding their costs from 2020 have more than doubled. For those with large vehicles or who live in rural areas or who have long commutes, the impact is particularly brutal. So the Premier could have called us back because he wanted to help with the cost of fuel.

He could issue a \$500 rebate to those who earn below a certain amount. That's what Quebec did.

He could remove the motor fuel tax, which gets taxed a second time with the HST, but instead we are here to debate an entirely made-up crisis that the Premier could have headed off by showing some leadership.

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

WILLS, DR. DAVID GUY: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to the life of one of my constituents, Dr. David Guy Wills. Born in Saint John, New Brunswick, David graduated from Dalhousie Medical School in 1961. As a student, he was also a member of the Reserve Air Force and later went on to use this experience to apply similar practices here in Halifax as an anaesthesiologist.

With a medical career spanning 44 years, David worked as an anaesthesiologist at the Halifax Infirmary, Toronto East General Hospital, and Camp Hill Veterans Memorial Hospital. He also applied his multi-disciplinary approach to his work as Acting Chief of Anaesthesiology at Camp Hill from 1987 to 1990.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my fellow members join me in recognizing Dr. Wills' years of hard work caring for Nova Scotians.

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

DUGAS, AMANDA: EDUC. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

LARRY HARRISION: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an educator who embodies the theme of the most recent education week, Cultural Responsiveness - Meeting Students Where They Are.

Amanda Dugas is a Mi'kmaw student support worker with South Colchester Academy and recipient of a Mi'kmaq Educator and Student Support Award. Leading her school community with a compassion informed by traditional knowledge, she is known for going above and beyond by taking calls, texting, and supporting students even when she is not on site. Her colleagues say that she supports all of them in their learning journey, challenging them to be better versions of themselves and lifting them up when they need help.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Amanda Dugas on receiving this well-deserved award.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HADDAD, JOEY: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in my place to recognize Joey Haddad from Sydney, who just recently announced his retirement from professional hockey.

[1:30 p.m.]

Many people at home would know Joey for his success on the ice. He played in the Q both with P.E.I. and Cape Breton Eagles on an entry-level deal with the Pittsburgh Penguins organization. He played in the AHL, the ECHL, and the EIHL, where he won two championships with that league.

Joey has had a very successful career in hockey. He has decided to retire but he wanted to come home with his beautiful wife Kristen back home to Sydney, where he started his own business, and he can set up his family with all of his family and community members at home.

I rise in my place to recognize Joey as a great hockey player but a really great guy. I have known him and Chris for a long time and I wish them all the best. I wish him congratulations on a successful career in hockey and wish him all the best as he endeavours in his new business. I wish him and Chris all the best and welcome home to Sydney.

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

CMTE. MBRS.: COAL DUST DAYS SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise to recognize the New Waterford Coal Dust Days committee for a successful festival. After two years away, Coal Dust Days came back bigger and better than ever. The committee put on amazing events, as did the community organizations.

I want to thank all the volunteers and summer students who made it happen. There was much fun that was had by all. I know Rory and so many children enjoyed the annual Susan Coombes Memorial Teddy Bear Picnic, an event that I know is close to the committee's heart.

I ask the House to join me in thanking the Coal Dust Days committee and community organizations for a fantastic week.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

EMANC. DAY: PROM. OF AFRIC. N.S. HISTORY - RECOG.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Emancipation Day, which will occur this coming Monday, August 1st across Nova Scotia. On August 1, 1834, the Slavery Abolition Act, which was initially just across British North America, was expanded to include Canada. It was on this day that the practice of slavery officially ended for millions of African people and their descendants in Canada and around the world.

On April 19th, 2021, members of this Legislature voted unanimously in favour of passing the Emancipation Day Act, which recognizes the importance of this day to African Nova Scotian history.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage Nova Scotians to take this day as an opportunity to learn more about African history and Nova Scotians in their communities, and also reflect and acknowledge our shared history of enslavement of the African people in Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

MACNEIL, JOHN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to recognize Yarmouth's John MacNeil, who recently passed away at the age of 73. John was a proud South Ender and a beloved teacher for over 40 years.

He was famous for the kindness and encouragement that he showed his students. He made sure that no student was ever hungry or went without what they needed, whether that was school supplies, basketball sneakers or a warm winter coat. His care for these students was so legendary and inspirational that local volunteers fundraised and organized Mac Meals, a day when more than 1,400 students were given a free mac-and-cheese lunch in honour of John's constant compassion and support for others.

John's favourite thing to do was to spend time with his family. He was a devoted husband to Arlene for 53 years, a loving and supporting dad to Heather and Corey, and a proud and doting grandfather to Lauren and Katelyn.

I ask this House to join me in sending condolences to them and to the rest of John's family and friends. John MacNeil is already greatly missed, but his legacy will most certainly live on through every act of care and kindness throughout our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, may I make a quick introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I would like to draw the members' attention to the gallery opposite, where we have a guest from Dartmouth North, Mr. Perry Miller. Perry is a resident of our community and this is his first visit to the Legislature. I am going to be reading a statement about him and his family, so thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Once again we welcome all visitors to the Legislature.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

MILLER, PERRY: AFFORDABILITY ISSUES - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a resident of Dartmouth North who has joined us today, Perry Miller. Perry Miller and his wife are both dealing with medical issues that have limited their ability to work. The increased cost of things like food and gas have made it even more difficult for them to manage.

My office hears from and supports many people like Perry, helping them apply for rent supplements, power and heat funds, and emergency funds. Even all these forms of assistance are just not enough now to allow many folks to make ends meet.

Perry Miller has shared his family's story because he knows they aren't the only ones struggling to afford the basics and he hopes it will prompt change. I hope it does as well. I am committed, with my caucus, to making it so, to getting folks immediate help and making long-term, systemic change.

My sincere thank you to Perry Miller and his wife for sharing their story with all of us.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

LOCAL STUDENTS: GRADUATION - CONGRATS.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I rise today to offer my congratulations to the graduates of 2022 in my constituency from Drumlin Heights Consolidated School and École secondaire de Par-en-Bas. The past two years have brought challenges and required students, teachers, and families to pivot. The graduates have persevered and reached a momentous milestone, ready to face the world.

This generation of graduates is resilient, creative, and has the power to excel in whatever path they choose. I am confident that they have the ability to make a difference in the world.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating this year's graduates from my constituency on reaching an important milestone in their lives and wish them success in their future endeavours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

BLACKMORE, PAULA: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise today to recognize Paula Blackmore, founder of Beechville Walkettes.

Paula was eager to reignite her neighbours after the long COVID-19 isolation that separated people within her neighbourhood. The Beechville Walkettes walk laps around the block each weekday at seven o'clock. Circling Munroe Subdivision, the group that includes all ages from tiny tots in strollers to seniors walking with canes, come together to exercise, discuss the topics of the day like community history, or simply to tell a few jokes for some good, hearty laughs. Thanks to portable music, the energy of this group is always high, and many of the participants bust into dance as they take laps around the subdivision. Paula was inspired to start this group to encourage exercise, an active lifestyle, and reunite friends and neighbours.

I would like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Paula for her community spirit and initiative to bring back the neighbourhood spirit in Munroe Subdivision that has been missing throughout the pandemic.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

JEFFERIES, ARMON: CITADEL HS CLASS VALED. - BEST WISHES

SUZY HANSEN: I rise in the house today to recognize a young man by the name of Armon Jeffries, a recent graduate from Citadel High School, Class Valedictorian. As a youth in my programs in the community, I could always count on having in-depth conversations with him about everything - life, community, even politics.

He once said that with racism, "I believe the only way that you can move forward is with education and having those uncomfortable talks . . . People need to be willing and to step out of their comfort zone." This Summer, I was fortunate to be a mentor to him during his time with the PREP Academy, and I hope to hear more about the amazing work that he will accomplish, as I know he will be destined for great things.

Armon is a brilliant young man that I am super proud of, and I'd like this House to join me in sending best wishes to Armon and his future endeavours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

PRES. & BRD. OF DIRS.: APPLE BLOSSOM FEST. RETURN - CONGRATS.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the 2022 Annapolis Valley Apple Blossom Festival President Logan Morse and the festival's Board of

Directors for the return of the Annapolis Valley Apple Blossom Festival following its two-year COVID pandemic hiatus.

The first Annapolis Valley Apple Blossom Festival was celebrated in 1933, and this year marks the festival's official 88th celebration with the appropriate theme Back in Bloom. The Annapolis Valley Apple Blossom Festival celebrates the Annapolis Valley's heritage and culture by hosting a multi-day festival comprised of events that reflect our past, present, and future.

Please join me today to congratulate the 2022 Annapolis Valley Apple Blossom Festival President and Board of Directors for returning this important cultural event back to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

EPAs: RAISE DESERVED - RECOG.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, we are almost halfway through the Summer, and in the blink of an eye school will be back and Summer will be over. A lot of resources and people go into making our schools run successfully. I'd like to recognize all of the educational program assistants, or EPAs. They work side-by-side with teachers and staff. Their hard work, love, and dedication to our children do not go unnoticed. Unfortunately, they are underpaid and overworked.

This government gave a 25 per cent raise to CCAs, a well-deserved raise, Mr. Speaker, and I'm calling on this government to show the same appreciation for EPAs and do the exact same for them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

TEAM N.S. MEN'S SOFTBALL MBRS.: SUMMER GAMES - CONGRATS.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate the members of Team Nova Scotia's Men's Softball who will be representing us at the Summer Games in Niagara, Ontario: Brody Fraser from Nine Mile River; Caleb Isenor from Elmsdale; Riley MacKinnon, Tyler Payne, and Nathan Peters, all from Lantz; and David Watson and Brayden Woodworth from Milford Station. We also have Evan Tilley from Musquodoboit, Callum Bouma from Lower Truro, Keegan Crowell and Rowan Sears from Brookfield, Noah Berniquer from North River, Nick White and Alec MacDonald from Truro, and Cameron Patton from Bible Hill. Coaches are Jeff Fraser, Robin Isenor, and Garth Perrin, all from Hants East.

I would like the members of the House to join me in congratulating, and best wishes to the young men who have already started with two wins at the last two tournaments.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

RAPHAEL, DR. PASTOR & FAMILY: PERM. RES. STATUS - WELCOME

ANGELA SIMMONDS: I rise in the House today to welcome and recognize Dr. Pastor Raphael, his wife and children who are from Ondo, Nigeria.

In 2018, Dr. Raphael came to Canada to attend Acadia Divinity College to study for his Master of Divinity, which he completed in 2021 with a grade point of 3.92 out of 4.

Just last week, Dr. Raphael and his wife, Katherine, their children Gift, Fiona, and Eliana, received their permanent residency here. Pastor Raphael and his wife are very appreciative, and would like to thank Minister Fraser and all of the work of the people that went in to support him. I wish them all the best and wonderful success in their life of ministry.

I'd like to recognize and welcome Dr. Pastor and his family to Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

SYLLIBOY, GRAND CHIEF BEN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Grand Chief Ben Sylliboy has been lovingly remembered by those who knew him since he passed away in 2017. His name will remain well-known.

On June 20th, the new Little Narrows Ferry was officially launched. It was named after the Grand Chief. The idea came from Grade 8 student August Francis of We'koqma'q Secondary School.

Sylliboy's life was not an easy one. He was a residential school survivor and battled tuberculosis as a young man. He went on to become a tireless leader and mentor promoting the Mi'kmaw language, culture, and spiritual faith. Let us acknowledge the Sylliboy family and the community of We'koqma'q for keeping Grand Chief Ben and the memory of what he stood for with us.

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

RIDA, RABITA: NTL. SPELLING BEE FINALIST - CONGRATS.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate eight-year-old Rabita Rida, who attended the National Spelling Bee on June 12th for her second consecutive year. Rabita attends Fairview Heights Elementary School and was one of the three regional finalists from Atlantic Canada competing for the national title in Toronto.

Spelling has become a family affair in the Rida household. Rabita's parents quiz her with words from the official list and dictionary, and even her sister helps her study once in a while.

I ask that all members of this House join me in congratulating Rabita for her outstanding accomplishment. I know we will see her spelling her way to the top in next year's competition.

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

GALLANT, JOSÉE: WEIGHTLIFTING ACHIEVEMENTS - CONGRATS.

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Josée Gallant of Truro on winning the 2022 National Senior Weightlifting Championships. With her win she earned the right to represent Canada at the Pan American Weightlifting Championships in Columbia this week.

Josée is the top-ranked female weightlifter in the 55-kilogram category and co-owner of Bluenose Fitness in Bible Hill. The news of her incredible achievements have come as an inspiration to our entire community.

I ask the members to join me in congratulating Josée on her recent success in her first of many expected opportunities representing Team Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

SPEAKER'S OFFICE: WORK FOR MBRS. - THANKS

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Speaker's Office, specifically Scott in his new role as the manager. I was inspired by the new youth who are the base of this session. It inspires me to see these youth, who are taking this role and making it comfortable for this Legislature and giving us water, coffee, and serving their best. I welcome as a member of this Legislature, all of you. You're home and feel comfortable.

I could tell you, today is actually better than it was yesterday, but also, I could tell you that tomorrow will be much better than what it is today, so I welcome all of you.

I'll ask the members of this House to applaud these new youth. Thank you, all of you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: I want to thank the honourable member for recognizing the Pages and all they do within the House.

[1:45 p.m.]

The honourable member for Cumberland South.

MCCORMICK, LINDA & CRAIG: FUNDRAISING FOR RM HOUSE - THANKS

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Linda, Craig, and Connor McCormick of Springhill. At the young age of 21, son and brother Curtis McCormick tragically passed away following a short battle with cancer.

Parents Linda and Craig sought to honour their son's memory by helping families who are going through similar challenges. With the help of family, friends, and the community, they succeeded in raising over \$50,000 to support the Ronald McDonald House, a charity that helps children stay with loved ones close by while they receive medical care.

The donation will be used to construct a play structure named in Curtis's memory at a local Ronald McDonald House.

I ask the house to join me in thanking the McCormick family for their compassion and work through this difficult time. May it make Curtis's memory rest in peace.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

SOUTH SHORE EXHIB.: ORGANIZERS - THANKS

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the South Shore Exhibition, running this year now from July 26th to 31st. I was sorry to miss the Grand Street Parade earlier this week, as we have been here in the Legislature, but I look forward to participating next year.

A community tradition for over a hundred years, the Big Ex is the largest exhibition of its kind in Nova Scotia. This beloved fair is a celebration of community spirit, farming heritage, and healthy country living. Each year, the Big Ex provides a week of family fun, including friendly competition, music, good food, horse and livestock displays, arts, crafts, the 4-H barn, kids petting barn, and more.

I want to extend thanks to the South Shore Ex board of directors, staff, and all of the vendors, artisans, musicians, farmers, volunteers, and sponsors for bringing this event back to us. Mr. Speaker, I encourage Nova Scotians to come out and join in the fun at the South Shore Exhibition.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

JAMIESON, SUSAN & JIM: 50TH WEDDING ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleagues to join me in wishing Bedford South constituents Susan and Jim Jamieson a happy 50th wedding anniversary.

On July 22, 1972, Susan and Jim were married at the Bedford United Church. Susan grew up in Bedford, and Jim is from Guysborough. They have a beautiful family with two grown children and three grandchildren. Their adventurous life has taken them to different places all over the world. Now, of course, they're living in Bedford South, though they continue to enjoy travel and life at the cottage in the Summer.

Susan and Jim, we wish you a wonderful celebration of 50 incredible years together. Here's to many more.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I would like to draw members' attention to the gallery opposite, where we have Charles Mancini and Margaret Legere who are visiting former residents of Dartmouth South - former members of the NDP caucus team, currently on leave in Alberta, but home soon we hope. Please join me in welcoming Charlie Mancini and Margaret to the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: Once again, welcome to all visitors to the Legislature. I'm going to make a recording of this.

The honourable member for Hants West.

THORPE, J.G./TREMBLAY, D.: CHERRY TREE DISTILLERY - CONGRATS.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Jo Gould Thorpe and her husband Dave Tremblay on their new business, Cherry Tree Distillery. The business operates out of a Victorian-era home formerly known as the Charles Vaughan House, which existed prior to the downtown Windsor fire.

Cherry Tree Distillery is a speakeasy that allows consumers to taste a cocktail prior to purchase. They have focused on the classics to start - rum, vodka, and gin. They hope to educate people on proper mixology and what alcohol consumption looked like during prohibition.

It is so wonderful to see two constituents being able to mix area history with their gin - no pun intended. Please join me in congratulating them and wishing them success in their new venture.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

SYLIBOY, ALAN/DOWN TO EARTH ART GALLERY: EXHIB. - CONGRATS.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Down to Earth Art Gallery of Antigonish and the internationally renowned Mi'kmaw artist, Alan Syliboy. They recently celebrated a 25-year relationship with a spectacular showing that displayed as many as 30 new paintings that Mr. Syliboy created for the event.

Down to Earth Art Gallery, owned by Elaine Rhynold and Gerard Mason, opened on Main Street in 1996. It displays a variety of works from artists known across the world, boasting a collection that includes pieces by Franz Johnston, Norval Morriseau, J. Franklin Wright, and of course, Mr. Alan Syliboy.

Alan is the one of the country's foremost Indigenous artists. His vibrant works contain themes of family, searching, spirituality, struggle, and strength. The scope of his cultural contributions is enormous. He created a limited edition butterfly gold coin for the Canadian Mint, was presented with the Queens Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002, was lead artist at the 2010 Olympics for the group that created the sculpture *Keeper of the Eastern Door*, and presented Queen Elizabeth II with a portrait of the Grand Chief of Membertou.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this house to congratulate Down to Earth Art Gallery and Mr. Alan Syliboy on their recent celebrations and contributions to the art world.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

HEBB, BETTY: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

CHRIS PALMER: I rise today to recognize another amazing volunteer in Kings West. I recognize Betty Hebb. Betty recently finished her time volunteering for the Children's Wish Foundation, where she achieved legendary status over her 37 years of volunteering with them.

During that time, Betty was involved in granting over 90 wishes to children, organizing over 600 events, and raising over \$500,000. Betty has now moved on to doing smaller fundraisers for children in need in our area. She recently held a ticket auction for Mason Boudreau, who requires trips to the IWK and funding for special corrective boots.

Betty, with her volunteer group, The Sticky Bun Boys and Friends - that's what they're called - raised over \$1,500 to help with the expenses and are planning another fundraiser for Mason in the Fall. At 84 years young, she's just getting started in her work for those less privileged in our area. If you want the best coconut cream pie, please go to Farmers Family Diner in Aylesford.

Please join me in thanking Betty for her acts of giving that help so many children and families in need.

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

SELBY'S BUNKER: CAFÉ AND GIFT SHOP - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: I'm pleased to stand and recognize an award-winning independent and locally owned café and gift shop, Selby's Bunker. Opening in 2019, the team at Selby's consistently offers mouth-watering treats and coffee. The atmosphere is second to none, from the incredible warmth of the staff to the super-fun décor or relaxing on their patio. Where else can you enjoy your coffee on an indoor swing?

The gift shop is filled with treasures and is the perfect place to find a unique gift for someone special. Owner Jason Selby has stood by simple principles and values, appreciating quality and beauty while focusing on sustainability. Selby's is truly a gem in the heart of Cole Harbour, creating special moments, whether that's over a cuppa, catching up with a loved one or making someone's day with that special gift.

When in Cole Harbour, make sure you stop at this local favourite. Cole Harbour-Dartmouth thanks Jason Selby, as always.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MELANSON, JACOB: SIGNED NHL CONTRACT - CONGRATS.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I rise to congratulate Jacob Melanson for signing his first NHL contract with the Seattle Kraken.

Jacob has played minor hockey in Amherst, Cumberland County, and also Truro, Colchester County, and also with the Acadie-Bathurst Titan of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. Jacob will be representing Cumberland North, as well as Nova Scotia, in the NHL and I wish Jacob the best as he pursues his lifelong dream of playing professionally with the NHL. Reaching this skill level takes a lot of hard work and dedication. I applaud Jacob - his hard work has paid off.

I want to also applaud everyone who has and continues to help support Jacob Melanson. We know these kinds of accomplishments happen with positive encouragement

and support. His mom is his biggest supporter, and as a mom, I say congratulations to her as well.

Today, please join me in congratulating Jacob Melanson on this honour to play in the NHL and represent his home province of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works on an introduction.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Today, joining us in the gallery, we have two incredible students who are working for the Department of Public Works this Summer. They are also students with our Black Youth Development Mentorship Program. Sukhar Sukhar and Mahdi Abukhar are both high school students who actually graduated this Summer and will be attending university in the Fall. We are super excited to have them working for the Department of Public Works and very pleased to have them in the Legislature today.

THE SPEAKER: Once again, welcome to all.

The honourable member for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank.

MIRANDA: EFFORTS DURING HOME FIRE - RECOG.

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, a tragedy befell a mother and daughter on July 17th. Nine-year-old Miranda woke to a smoke-filled room in their Beaver Bank mobile home. Miranda immediately went to wake her mother, shouting that there was a fire until her mother woke up. Miranda and her mother, Crystal, were able to safely escape, but unfortunately the mobile home was destroyed.

Through the kindness of her neighbour, Michelle Goodwin, Miranda and Crystal were given a place to stay. The community is busy collecting donations and raising funds for this displaced family.

Please join me in acknowledging the brave actions of Miranda, and share with them our thoughts and prayers as they rebuild their lives from this terrible loss.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

AFFORDABILITY CRISIS: RELIEF NEEDED - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I rise today to share with this House the concerns around affordability that are facing the community of Clayton Park West and people across Nova Scotia.

I stand to bring forward the voice of a single father of three who is trying to afford gas, food, and rent, and just can't get by anymore. The woman who is now the sole income

provider after her husband lost his job to COVID is now fighting with Nova Scotia Power over money that she needs to support her family. These are real stories, guys. These are my constituents. The nursing student who might have to drop out of school because she can't afford to live here and attend university. The list goes on.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that this House recognize the need to bring relief to Nova Scotians at a time when it is so desperately needed.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

FRIENDS OF MUIR-COX MILL: HER. WORK - RECOG.

NOLAN YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the Friends of the Muir-Cox Shipyard Saw and Planing Mill, a local group who dedicated their time and effort to preserve this important piece of local history.

To save the aging mill from collapse, retired millwright Mike Hartigan convinced the Town of Shelburne to replace the roof. His effort caught the attention of Bob Sinden, who secured eight friends to help bring the mill back to life. Originally constructed in 1903, the mill is believed to be the last of its kind in Nova Scotia, with much of its machinery remaining unchanged over the past century.

I ask all members to join me in thanking the Friends of the Muir-Cox Shipyard Saw and Planing Mill - Bob Sinden, Lewis Jackson, Mike Hartigan, Harold Locke, Pat Delaney, Wayne Blinkhorn, Phillip Seaboyer, and Doug Huskison - for their critical roles restoring this important piece of Shelburne's heritage.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

PEPPARD, AL "PEP": COM. SERV. - THANKS

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to celebrate an exceptional member of the Middleton community: Mr. Al "Pep" Peppard. Al came to Middleton in 1949 to take a job as a physical education teacher at the brand new Middleton Regional High School. He was a member of the staff there for more than three decades and was active with a variety of school sports throughout his tenure.

In addition to his important work at the high school, Al played an integral role in the creation of the Centennial swimming pool in Middleton, the Middleton and District Arena, the rotary race park, and the Middleton Sports Heritage Wall of Fame. He has also given significant time to his church, the Rotary Club, and the Masons, as well as other organizations. Al's energy, enthusiasm, and tireless commitment has created positive impacts on countless lives.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking Al Peppard for his contributions to education, sport, and the community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

ROBINSON, MELISSA: SKATE N.S. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Melissa Robinson, the recipient of the Skate Nova Scotia 2022 National Volunteer Award. Melissa received her award at the Skate Canada Ice Summit on May 28th.

Receiving her 10-year pin from the Queens County Blades this past Spring, she serves on the club's board, is Skate Canada's Nova Scotia South Shore Region Representative, is the Assessment Chair for the South Shore Region and was chair of the 2021 FallSkate Competition.

Melissa was instrumental in the successful hosting of the first competition after the pandemic restrictions were lifted. Her attention to detail created a safe and welcoming environment for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in applauding Melissa for this well-deserved award, and in thanking her for all that she does as a volunteer in her community and beyond.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

DOBBS, JENNIE: DRINK SPRIZZI LAUNCH - CONGRATS.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Jennie Dobbs, who is a restaurateur in Bedford Basin, and in Halifax as well.

Jennie owns Morris East restaurants, and she has exciting news: She has officially launched Drink Sprizzi. That's super-refreshing - that's how it's described - cider wine vodka spritzer sippers showcasing Nova Scotia real fruit flavours with a little sparkle.

Now, I do want to say that Morris East in Bedford is located on Larry Uteck Blvd., which most people think is in Bedford South, but there is a little tiny bit of Bedford Basin that has part of Larry Uteck Blvd., so I am proud to say that the restaurant is within my riding - just barely. I look forward to trying the drinks.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

[2:00 p.m.]

KOHEN BRADLEY, KAREN/BELL, RICHARD: COM. SERV. - CONGRATS.

KENT SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two outstanding community members, Karen Kohen Bradley and Richard Bell. Although they have lived on the Eastern Shore for seven years, they were just recently sworn in as Canadian citizens.

Richard and Karen are devoted contributors to our community. Together, they own and operate the *Eastern Shore Cooperator*, a local newspaper that goes out to over 15,000 people. They also provide excellent volunteer efforts and are passionate and caring volunteers.

I wish to ask all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating Richard and Karen on their Canadian citizenship, and for them choosing Nova Scotia as their home.

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

I think this was probably the fastest anybody has spoken. Maybe we could adopt that later on to make things easier for all concerned.

Before we move into Question Period, yesterday I indicated that I received two requests for an emergency debate. I then put the lead motion to the House on the request I received first in line. As the House knows, the leave was granted, and the emergency debate put forward by the Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition took place at the time of adjournment yesterday. Today, I will deal with the second request for emergency debate.

The honourable House Leader for the New Democratic Party.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Rule 43(1), I am making a motion for an emergency debate.

Mr. Speaker, over 100,000 people in Nova Scotia do not have access to a family doctor. Walk-in clinics across the province are closing or overwhelmed. People who have nowhere else to turn are being directed to their local emergency rooms, the same ERs that are issuing statements telling people to expect long delays, and those other than the patient cannot wait with their loved one. There is also a massive increase in the number of people who give up and leave the ER without ever being seen by a doctor.

Last year, the number of people admitted to the ER who were unattached to a family doctor grew by 29 per cent. Last year, 43,085 people left an ER without being seen. This is a 60 per cent increase in the number of people from the year before. The number of people with an acuity score of one, two, or three - the most severe - who stayed in the ER for longer than eight hours grew by 34 per cent. Emergency room closures are also growing

year after year, meaning that ambulances and people seeking care have to drive to ERs that are farther away and more crowded.

This, Mr. Speaker, is the government's record on health care. Emergency rooms are past their breaking point, with no relief in site. People can't get the care they need, and it's gotten worse this year. This is the emergency that the government was sent here to fix. This is the work that needs to be done in an emergency sitting, when Nova Scotia Health Authority is sending out messages about how backed up they are and to expect long waits.

Therefore, I wish to move that the business of the House be set aside for the purpose of discussing a matter of urgent public importance. That matter is the clear and present emergency that is under way in this province's emergency departments. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Prior to the opening of yesterday's sitting I received from the honourable NDP House Leader a notice of intention, as required by Rule 43(2), to move for an emergency debate. Under Rule 43(4), I'm now required to issue a Speaker's Ruling to decide whether the matter is proper to be discussed for emergency debate.

SPEAKER'S RULING

There are two factors set out in Rule 43(4)(a). The first factor is the extent to which the matter concerns the administrative responsibilities of government or could come within the scope of the ministerial action. The second factor is whether the matter is likely to be debated by the House by any other means within a reasonable time. I have considered both of these factors.

Under the first factor, it is clear that emergency departments and hospitals fall within the administrative responsibilities of government and could come within the scope of ministerial action. Under the second factor, there are two bills on the Order Paper - Bill No. 135 and Bill No. 136 - that relate to emergency departments. However, the scope of these bills is considerably more limited than the scope of the topic requested for emergency debate. I find that in these circumstances, there is no other way that the subject of the emergency debate request could come before the House within a reasonable time.

The motion is that the business of the House be set aside for the purpose of dealing with an issue of urgent public importance, and the subject of the issue has been described by the NDP House Leader as the clear and present emergency that is under way in this province's emergency departments. Does the House give leave for the motion to be debated?

I hear several Noes. I will ask those who voted in favour to please rise.

As more than 10 members have risen, the member has leave under Rule 43(7), and this debate will take place today at the time of adjournment, as provided under Rule 43(11). That will be at the end of business today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM. - HEALTH CARE CRISIS: METRICS - DEFINE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, nearly a year after being elected on a promise to fix health care, we are now in the midst of an unprecedented crisis in our health care system under this Premier. Our ERs and hospitals are under extreme pressure. I will table that. COVID hospitalizations have doubled. The doctor wait-list is at an all-time high with over 100,000 Nova Scotians and counting. I will table that, as well. Long-term care wait-lists are at record levels with over 4,200 seniors waiting for placement and experts warning that this situation is going to get worse. I will table that.

People are dying waiting for surgeries and many more are waiting at home in pain, Mr. Speaker, and I will table that. Day after day things have gotten worse under this government by every metric and measure possible.

I would like to ask the Premier: Are these the metrics that define fixing health care?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): What the former Minister of Health and Wellness would know is that health care has been deteriorating, particularly over the last eight years where we had Ministers of Health and Wellness that looked the other way.

We no longer have a Minister of Health and Wellness who looks the other way. In fact, we are doing more but Mr. Speaker, don't take my word for it. I will give you the words of Janet Hazelton, the President of the Nurses' Union: Well, certainly this is the only government ever that has guaranteed full-time employment for all nurses who graduate.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, that's a good thing. A major increase in nursing seats is another good move. So this is the most positive move I have seen since I've been president of the organization from any government. We are getting it done.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a former Minister of Health and Wellness, I remember a time when this situation wasn't this bad. I also remember being part of a government that cared less about what people said about us and more about the actual outcomes that are happening in our hospitals. There are now over 100,000 Nova Scotians who are waiting for a family doctor and to date this government has shown a

complete inability to slow or reverse this alarming trend, despite promising to fix health care.

While on the campaign trail, the Premier stated that when this number was at 70,000 Nova Scotians on the doctor wait-list, this was not bad luck, it was poor judgment and poor and weak leadership - and I will table that, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to ask the Premier: With over 100,000 Nova Scotians without a doctor, what word would he use to describe his leadership on health care?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, what Nova Scotians know is things would be a lot worse if the former Minister of Health and Wellness was still the Minister of Health and Wellness. We have recruited a record number of doctors this year. Do you know how hard it is to recruit doctors with the situation that was left by the former Minister of Health and Wellness and his team?

I would say to the former Minister of Health and Wellness: He may have thought things were great, but that's only because he ignored the reality of what was happening in health care. If the former Minister of Health and Wellness wants to talk about substance versus show, he spent a whole week complaining about the Leaders' salaries in this province but when it was time for him to walk the walk, he looked the other way.

Not me, Mr. Speaker. Not this government. We get things done. Our word means something.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope the Premier's word does mean something on something more important than the salaries of people in this Chamber; on the outcomes of our health care system that are deteriorating each and every day.

Let's talk about the Premier's words. Over the last number of months we've seen this Premier walk back on his health care promises. First he was going to fix health care, and I will table that. Then he said he was going to improve health care. Now he is saying that he is planting seeds in health care. Let me be clear: He promised Nova Scotians he had the solutions in place, that they'd been worked on for years, and that he would fix health care. Will the Premier stick to his word and actually make it happen?

THE PREMIER: I will assure Nova Scotians that we will do everything possible to fix health care. We're not just saying it. We're not just picking words and going with words. When that's all you have, maybe that's what you do, but on this side, we have more to do.

That's why we made virtual care available. That's why we dealt with the CCAs situation that the former Health and Wellness Minister looked away from. That's why we've dealt with the nurses' situation, offering jobs that the Health and Wellness Minister looked away from. That's why we have ordered a transfer initiative to help EHS while the

former Health and Wellness Minister looked away. That's why we've addressed the licensing of the EHS while the former Health and Wellness Minister looked away. (Interruption)

If the member from Fairview-Clayton Park has something to say, maybe they'll give her an opportunity to ask it in Question Period, but right now, we're talking about . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The Premier has the floor, but his time is up anyway. I'm going to ask that people consider the time and respect the speakers who are getting up.

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

PREM.: RECENT APPOINTMENTS - JUSTIFY

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier said that he's not interested in providing direct assistance to Nova Scotians during this once-in-a-lifetime inflationary crisis because it might not be sustainable. Meanwhile, the lives of thousands of everyday people across this province are not sustainable. Seniors can't afford groceries, parents can't afford to pack their children's lunches or fill prescriptions, and some can't even get to work because they can't afford to put gas in their car.

Of all of the Canadian premiers, this is the one who has provided the least help to regular people, and so I'd like to ask the Premier how he justifies appointing his friends to jobs where they make more in a day than many Nova Scotians make in a week?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, first off, I completely disagree with the Leader of the NDP's characterization. We have taken a number of steps on child care which will impact a number of Nova Scotian families. We have put a Seniors Care Grant out there, we have done many things to support Nova Scotians, so to say that we're not interested is completely unfair. I hope the member will correct her intentions on that statement when she gets her chance.

But, here's what I would say: Is there more work to be done? Yes, but this province will never move forward when, at the very first opportunity, when quality Nova Scotians step up, step up to help their province in health care, in economic development, the very first reaction of the Opposition is that they're terrible people. Before they can even spell their names, they're running down fellow Nova Scotians. That's wrong.

We will never move forward with that type of attitude. Come out of the negativity ditch and get in the positivity ditch because we're moving forward.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The one thing that those three quality Nova Scotians to whom the Premier is referring have in common is that they are - by his admission and theirs - his friends, okay? So, to make a suggestion that we can't ask why the Premier is appointing his friends who have no particular resumé to suggest that they should be earning six-figure salaries in these positions is a problem. We've got to ask the question. Not to mention the fact that two of these friends happen to be men displacing two of the most senior women in our civil service.

[2:15 p.m.]

Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, the Premier described an assistance program like the ones that we have been proposing as "boutique."

THE SPEAKER: Is there a question?

CLAUDIA CHENDER: People across this province need help. Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier: He's pretty good at helping his friends - when is he going to help the rest of Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I understand the need of a new Opposition Leader to get attention in the media, but to run down fellow Nova Scotians and say they have no resumé, and to run them down just because I know them and they're my friends. I'll tell you what: I have a lot of friends in Nova Scotia, and I pick the very best people based on my surveillance of the landscape because I care more about this province than running down somebody because they put their name forward to step up.

I care more about this province than picking the wrong person because I'm worried that the Leader of the New Democratic Party will have something to say politically. I put politics to the side, and I focus on Nova Scotians every single day, Mr. Speaker. That's why Nova Scotians are so happy with where this province is going.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, yesterday when the Premier explained that he wasn't entertaining more assistance to Nova Scotians struggling with the cost of rent, mortgages, gas, groceries, and prescriptions, he said that everything in government is about priorities. This is the Premier of the province that has the third-highest cost of living increase in the country in the last month, at 9.3 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier likes to talk about swagger and I believe we've seen some of it in the Chamber today but lots of families across this province are just trying to find their footing. My question to the Premier is: When will it be his priority to help everyone, not just his friends?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, it's a little bit out of hand with the mischaracterization. We are always entertaining ideas to support Nova Scotians. We do it

every day, all day, not just in this Chamber looking for political points. We do it constantly. We are always entertaining, so to say that we are not entertaining is completely inaccurate.

What I would say is that the work being done to support Nova Scotians is being seen and well-received by not only Nova Scotians but by those across the country. In fact, the *Financial Post* referred to ours as a provincial government that is well on its way on the housing issue and is a shining example for others to follow.

We are getting stuff done. The Opposition can be negative but Nova Scotians are positive and optimistic under this government.

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the honorable Leader of the Official Opposition, I forgot to say that QP will be over at 2:56 p.m. I am also going to say once more about people - whether they are using their cell phones or not - cell phones do not belong in the Legislature during Question Period and I'll ask that people respect it.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DHW: IMPACT OF COVID ON EMERG. DEPTS. - CONCERN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Wellness is on record as saying she was not worried about the impacts COVID-19 would have on emergency departments, and I'll quote her: "We don't feel that it is inevitable that we will have an increase in hospitalizations or people seeking medical care as a result of it." I'll table her comments.

Mr. Speaker, between March and June, there have been over 900 hospitalizations due to the virus. Last week we saw that hospitalization rate double. I'll table that. We've also heard that there may be up to 350 staff out of work right now with COVID-19.

The government was not concerned then but with emergency rooms at their breaking point and closing down, in many respects, my question for the Premier is: Is he concerned now?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Actually, when I gave that quote about we don't feel that it's inevitable - that was actually a quote that came from Dr. Strang. He actually said in a press conference that he didn't believe that it would be inevitable that we would see increased hospitalizations as a result of the lifting of restrictions, so we continue to follow Public Health advice.

We are watching what's happening in our emergency rooms across the province. We know that part of it is not only related to COVID-19 but also people who are seeking primary care and we are very focused. We continue to work in communities, we continue

to work with health care professionals across this province to address the issue in emergency rooms.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Nova Scotians have been asked to drop off their loved ones at the front door of our ERs because of the overwhelming number of patients seeking care. Folks are arriving with lawn chairs so they will have somewhere comfortable to sit while waiting.

As a former Minister of Health and Wellness, I don't recall that ever happening. We know it's camping season, but we didn't expect people to be camping outside of our ERs.

My question of the Premier is: Will the Premier acknowledge that when it comes to our emergency departments he has not fixed health care, but his decisions, which have been partisan in nature, that have put politics above good policy have made it worse?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, we continue to work in the emergency departments across this province. We know that there are a number of reasons why health care is in the state that it's in.

Yesterday we heard a lot about blame: Don't blame them, don't blame them, don't blame them. It's actually a pattern of behaviour that I've experienced for the past eight years under that government. It's actually a lack of responsibility and self-reflection about how their inaction and actions have created the problem that we have in front of us.

It was never this bad, Mr. Speaker, but I can guarantee you that had they stayed in this position, it would have been far worse.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

DHW: NSHA CEO REMOVAL - EXPLAIN

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier praised the work of the Health Authority's CEO, calling her work "remarkable." What is remarkable are surgery wait times now hitting an all-time high and not enough staff to bring them down. I'll table that. What is remarkable are the 100,000 Nova Scotians without primary care and only 22 per cent with access to virtual care. I'll table that. What is remarkable are the 10-plus-hour waits for emergency rooms and people being turned away. I'll table that.

When the Premier describes the CEO's work as remarkable, did he mean remarkably bad?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just talk a little bit about the health leadership team that's been put in place. We have four very capable people in these positions.

We have a registered nurse with over 40 years of experience in health care who's worked as a global health care consultant. She is a pre-eminent person on strategy, organizational management and we are very proud to have her. We have a front-facing clinician who's worked for over 33 years delivering service to Nova Scotians. We have a global leader who's proven to be effective in logistics, working in multi-stakeholder environments. We also have one of the most senior civil servants, who understands government very deeply, as well as the health care system.

If the folks opposite can't understand how those are transferrable skills to our health care system, is it any wonder we're in the state we're in?

KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, what is remarkable is that a diverse and experienced 12-person board of directors and CEO were replaced by a partisan backroom hand-picked leadership team, buddy of the Premier. I'll table that. What is remarkable is that the CEO of the Health Authority continues to duck public accountability at committees and media availabilities. I'll table that.

I'll ask again: Will the Premier acknowledge that his decision to dismantle the Health Authority board and remove the CEO has not fixed health care but made it remarkably worse?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I would just like to reiterate that if you're unable to find any of the health leadership team, it's because they're out in hospitals and communities talking about what really matters and ensuring that community voice is heard as we continue to plan for health care.

We have been . . . (Interruption). They're not scheduled. If you would like to know, you're welcome to accompany. You know what? We've been out talking to health care workers. You know what I hear every day? Thank you. You're listening. You started listening and you're ending by listening. I can feel change is coming.

I appreciate that their friends probably don't want to hear that, but when I talk to former colleagues, they're grateful for the work that's happened. Maybe it's not visible over there, but it's certainly palpable within the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DHW: HEALTH CARE CRISIS WORSE - ACKNOWLEDGE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaking about what health care professionals are saying - which is important; it is important that we listen to them - in a recent piece, Dr. Robert Martel, an emergency room physician from Cape Breton, said, "The failure to appreciate that health workers would be impacted by a higher infection rate is a prime example of what happens when you choose an action, but fail to understand the consequences of that action." I will table that.

Mr. Speaker, this government pats itself on the back, saying that it's listening to health care workers, as we just saw demonstrated. They're crying out about the state of our health care system and how unprepared they were for this past wave of COVID and the wave that's coming.

Would the Premier agree with Dr. Martel and other health care professionals that his government's actions have directly caused the crisis that we're seeing in health care getting worse?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I'm glad the Leader of the Opposition and former Minister of Health and Wellness brought up the comments about action and inaction. To an earlier point that I made, there's never really been any recognition about the inaction or action that government took.

Because you know what? There are 40,000 health care workers - give or take - in this province. Every one of us were sitting there in 2013 when they took power, and we know exactly what it was like when they left. There hasn't been one day it's gotten better until we came into government.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Honestly, this government has talked about inaction by the previous government, yet nearly every single announcement they have made on health care has been a regurgitation of previous announcements made by the previous government . . . (Interruption) Sorry, but they cannot have it both ways in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker.

I'm sorry that the Premier has taken a seat on the bench for these questions, because I think they're very important.

Dr. Martel also points out that part of the reason our health care system is in crisis is there's no longer an independent arm's-length body overseeing the decisions of health today. We agree, Mr. Speaker. The former leadership team of the Health Authority included doctors, nurses, and allied health care professionals with clinical experience - all replaced with a hand-picked leadership team led by a partisan lawyer. Much like the news yesterday, when the Premier fired five successful experienced professionals and replaced them with two.

Will the Premier acknowledge that his decision to dismantle the Health Authority board and CEO have not fixed health care, but indeed, made it worse?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: The first thing I want to do is acknowledge the work of the board. Certainly, when the board was dissolved, it was no reflection of the work or the people who were on that board.

The reason that happened was because we're in a different time and place, and we need rapid decisions that are made by a team that is represented by not only Nova Scotia Health but the Department of Health and Wellness. For the first time in this province's history, that leadership team is sitting there talking about the issues and making decisions at a system-wide level. That has never happened before in the history of this province.

To my earlier point, I appreciate that they don't want to understand that there are good things happening, but when I speak to health care workers - and I speak to a ton of them - they assure me that they feel that things are changing, and they are happy with the way things are going. They know it's going to take time. They are not unreasonable, as many in this Chamber are in regard to the mess we have been left and how long it's going to take to clean it up.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: PRIMARY HEALTH CARE ACCESS - PLAN

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Since this government was elected, 811 call response times have remained as high or higher than at any other time since the COVID-19 pandemic began. A service that used to take seconds to respond in January of this year took an average of 30 minutes to answer. This is happening while walk-ins are closed or overwhelmed, ambulances are delayed and understaffed, and emergency rooms are crowded or closed. People are feeling like they have nowhere to go, nowhere to turn.

Mr. Speaker, my question is a simple one: What are people supposed to do?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We know that there are a number of gaps in our health care system, especially around workforce development. We know we need to recruit and retain our health care workers. We have opened up a variety of options. There are urgent treatment centres in some communities. There are virtual care options for some folks. There are walk-in clinics for some folks.

We know that 811 is available. It is not an emergency service. We have improved response times by separating EHS emergency calls from transfer units, freeing up paramedics to do the work that they need to do. I can appreciate that it is daunting at times for people to go to the emergency rooms or wherever it is, but we continue to work

diligently on behalf of Nova Scotians to address the critical shortfall in health and human resources left to us to address in this province.

SUSAN LEBLANC: All of those things are happening, but that does not answer the question, which is: What are people supposed to do when they are not able to access any of those services? Since this government was elected, over 61,000 people have added their names to the Need A Family Practice registry. That's a 40 per cent jump. We know the real number is even higher.

[2:30 p.m.]

In 2020, Statistics Canada reported that 260,000 Nova Scotians said they don't have regular access to primary care. For people who are lucky enough to have access, it's common to wait two months to get in to see their provider. Virtual care is better than nothing, of course, but it is by definition a stopgap.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier table this government's plan to get people primary care?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: We have an *Action for Health* plan, which is the first plan for health care in Nova Scotia in a dozen years. In addition to that, we also have a website that will mature over time to look at the metrics in terms of how we - and we're accountable and reporting back.

We know that people are experiencing gaps in primary health care, Mr. Speaker. We are working diligently with our partners . . . (Interruption) They obviously don't want to hear the answer since they haven't stopped talking since I started.

What I would say is we are working diligently with people. We are in communities on a weekly basis, talking to them about what the solutions are for them in their communities. We have started a nurse practitioner and pharmacy clinic. We continue to recruit physicians. We are looking at a variety of options and are very open to solutions in community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

DHW: LENGTHY ER WAIT TIMES - ACKNOWLEDGE

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, a record number of Nova Scotians left the ER last year without getting help. In fact, 43,000 Nova Scotians left, which is up 60 per cent from the previous year. The minister is quoted as saying that there are many reasons people leave after being triaged, including receiving Tylenol. Could the minister tell the House why people are leaving our ERs without receiving the help, and why this

jump of 60 per cent to 43,000, an all-time high during her first 11 months as Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, there are a number of reasons why people leave the ER. One of them absolutely is the wait time, and we understand that. In my experience as a former triage nurse in emergency, sometimes people need reassurance when they get there. Sometimes we're able to treat the presenting complaints, so perhaps it's a fever, perhaps it's pain, perhaps people are able to get an X-ray and then able to go home and wait for the results to come back. There are a multitude of reasons.

We know that people are waiting a long time in emergency, so there are some things under way to support that. We have new graduate nurses in Central Zone working with triage nurses to support people in the triage area and in the waiting room to make sure that they get the care that they need and that they're being continually assessed. We are looking at publishing wait times so that people understand what the wait time will be when they go into their emergency room. There are a number of efforts happening in order to support emergency rooms in this province.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: My next question is for the Premier, although I doubt he'll answer it. I have a constituent who recently visited the emergency department with a broken wrist. She was given painkillers and told to go home and come back another time. Why? Because the ER was full that day and they didn't have the capacity to see her.

This was not a sprain, Mr. Speaker - this was actually a broken bone. This is actually unheard of. Will the Premier acknowledge that when it comes to timely emergency care in this province, he has not actually fixed it, but actually made it worse?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I'm certainly not aware of that case and I'm not able to speak to specific cases in the House on the floor of the Legislature. Again, we continue to work with folks. People are triaged. They come through, and they're assessed by experienced professionals. They use the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale in order to decide who needs to be seen first, and the most urgent cases are seen.

I undoubtedly know that the nurses in that environment would have triaged that person. Do we get it right 100 per cent of the time? No, but we still want people to present to the emergency room when they need to for the emergency care that they require.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

DHW - EMERG. CARE ANNAPOLIS: DISMANTLING - EXPLAIN

CARMAN KERR: Over the last number of months, the constituents of Annapolis, myself, physicians, and health staff have been asking the Nova Scotia Health Authority

and this government for support. Instead of helping us with delivery of emergency services, things are being torn apart.

Our emergency in Annapolis has been closed since early July and there's no plan for reopening. We have recently learned there's a proposal to remove emergency services from Annapolis, and nurses have been pulled from Annapolis into Digby. This is leaving many rural Nova Scotians without emergency care. It's leaving the people I represent anxious, scared, and without hope.

My question is: Why is the minister and Premier dismantling emergency care in Annapolis?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We've spent some time in the member opposite's constituency talking to folks about the health care needs there. We do have emergency closures this Summer, there's no question about it. What we've asked health care professionals to do - and we've worked with them, to ask them to plan wherever possible the emergency room closures, one, so that they can get a much-needed rest. There was no slack in the system prior to COVID, and COVID really has exhausted our health care workers. We do know that there are planned closures, allowing communities to plan, as well as physicians and nurses.

We continue to look at recruitment and retention. We are committed to improving primary care throughout this province, appreciating that it is going to take some time.

CARMAN KERR: Middleton emergency has been closed without warning since last Fall, in October. The hours continue to be reduced. Between Annapolis and Middleton, we have zero emergency services for 18 hours a day, between 1:30 p.m. to the next morning. That's no emergency in the entire county. This is a region with one of the highest, if not the highest, unattached rates between primary care and patients.

Will the Premier acknowledge that as rural emergency rooms close throughout Annapolis, emergency service delivery and health care delivery has gotten worse and is not being fixed?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: We are looking at how we support communities across the system, right from the time that they go to seek primary care but also in the event that they require emergency services. We have some of the finest paramedics in the world. Those folks are available to transport folks, not only with the excellent skills that they have, but to take them to the regional sites where they get opportunity to have emergency services that may not be available in other emergency rooms across the province - for a variety of reasons, not just because of closures but because of the level of emergency that is able to be offered in those spaces.

We want people to have access to the care they need, when and where they need it. We continue to explore options, we will continue to recruit, and we will continue to improve the system.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

DHW: FAILED PUBLIC HEALTH POLICIES - ADMIT

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, people are waiting at home for that phone call to get their surgery and they are in pain. They need that surgery, and they are still waiting for the PC promise for 24/7 surgeries.

During the election the Premier sold them false hope. I'll table a document, "Tim Houston, PCs have the solutions for surgery wait times," promising to meet the benchmark standards for wait times within 18 months of being elected. We've asked for progress in every sitting of this House so far, Mr. Speaker. We are almost a year into this government, and we are further from those benchmarks than a year ago, due to the Premier's approach in handling the pandemic.

My question to the Premier is: Will the Premier admit that his failed public health policies have left Nova Scotians in pain and further behind?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We are making progress, early progress, on the surgical wait-list. In June this year, the Nova Scotia Health Authority performed 172 more surgeries than they had in June 2019, which is the base year that we are using. This month, there are 30 above the surgeries that were done up to this point in July 2019 - appreciating that it is high vacation time.

We do have a plan that is developing, in addition to baseline surgery numbers, to increase that number by 2,500 this year. We are looking at potential latent capacity throughout the province and where we're able to maximize surgeries.

I want to acknowledge the incredible work of the OR staff, who have been working really diligently in order to complete additional surgeries.

IAIN RANKIN: We did hear from some OR staff, particularly during the Omicron wave, about numerous cancelled surgeries that had to take place, due to the public health policies during that wave, Mr. Speaker. Those are obfuscations of numbers. Just because more surgeries are taking place doesn't mean that wait times are going down. Wait times are going up.

On this side of the Chamber, we lost a very loyal volunteer to our organization. He died the day before his scheduled heart attack surgery - cardiac surgery, and I'll table that

- which was delayed because of a lack of available ICU beds. He is not the only one, Mr. Speaker. We've heard of countless others.

My question to the Premier is: Will the Premier acknowledge that as surgical wait times get longer and longer, that he has not fixed health care but indeed, it is going in the wrong direction?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: The health leadership team continues to work with the surgical services throughout this province, particularly in the Central Zone, where there are the most specialized services.

We know that sometimes there are confines on beds and we are working very hard to build capacity. We are working very closely with seniors in long-term care in order to move residents who are waiting for long-term care out and create capacity. We are looking at protecting beds for surgical patients, to ensure that people can receive timely care.

We know that there are system-wide pressures, and we continue to address them. We address them head-on, and we are working with clinical partners to understand how best to increase capacity in our system.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: SCHOOL SAFETY UNDER COVID - ENSURE

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Premier. This government has removed all COVID-19 safety measures and said that it is no longer mandatory that people stay home if they are sick. Last week, Nova Scotia reported more than double the number of people hospitalized due to COVID-19 than two weeks prior, as experts warn that a seventh wave of the pandemic is rolling across the region. I'll table that.

Even though Summer is in full swing, it's only a few weeks until the teachers and kids head back to school. Mr. Speaker, what is this government's plan to ensure that children and staff are safe at school this September?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has worked throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic with the Department of Health and Wellness and Public Health to ensure that we have the right measures in place at the right time to respond to any necessary things that are facing the schools during the course of the pandemic. We continue to do this. We'll continue to work with the Department of Health and Wellness and implement anything that's necessary.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, in response to concerns about COVID-19 spread in the schools, the government announced the purchase of 71 portable

HEPA filtration units for schools with no ventilation systems. Meanwhile, new COVID-19 variants are even more transmissible than before. All mask mandates and isolation restrictions have been lifted. Our caucus continues to receive no answers about further improvements, monitoring, or investments in ventilation in schools.

My question is: Will this government table a plan to regularly test and improve air quality in all schools?

BECKY DRUHAN: Our government, in response to COVID-19 issues and interest and desire from the public and the system, implemented and installed air filtration units in the schools. That action was taken under our government, and we continue on an ongoing basis to ensure that schools are evaluated and inspected. All of those records can be found online in the region's records. We'll continue to take those measures and follow the guidance of Public Health as necessary as COVID-19 progresses.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DHW: SURGICAL WAIT TIMES - ACTION

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I have a constituent who for over a year has been living in unbearable pain. She's waiting for a very crucial bladder surgery. Unfortunately, she has just been informed that it's going to be another 18 months that she's going to have to suffer and have very little quality of life.

My question for the minister is: When can Nova Scotians expect this government to decrease surgical wait times, as they promised during the election?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, if there's anything that we can do to support the constituent, to understand better the situation that they're in, we're happy to understand that. I will say that we - particularly around gynae and neurology surgeries, it is a very difficult subspecialty to recruit to. I am happy to report that we do have a new OB/GYN who is starting at IWK. Perhaps there's opportunity for us to look at that specific situation.

Recruitment is the key in order for us to develop our workforce. We have to look at the folks who are on the list and ensure that we have adequate services, and recruit people to come to this province. The changes that we're making and the momentum that's around the health care system changes are allowing us to do that, recruiting a record number of positions this year alone.

FRED TILLEY: If I was to speak my mind about the state of surgical wait times in this province, I'm sure you would deem me unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker. It is abysmal.

I will speak about another constituent, a young lady in my community who is waiting on a very important surgery. She is waiting on a major bowel surgery, and her quality of life is very minimal. She's in constant pain and suffering, and she's getting no relief. She has been passed around from place to place and has still not received surgery.

I would ask the Premier to acknowledge, with Nova Scotians at home in pain, waiting on surgeries, that he has not fixed health care but in fact has made it worse.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I'm not really sure what the question is, but what I will again reiterate is that we have been recruiting steadily to these positions. We are looking at latent capacity in our health care system in order to perform more surgeries. We are looking at anaesthetics, we are looking at designated beds. There are a number of things that are happening in the background, and we plan to and are committed to doing 2,500 more surgeries this year in order to address surgical wait times.

[2:45 p.m.]

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

DHW: MONKEYPOX OUTBREAK - PLANNING

HON. BEN JESSOME: Recently the World Health Organization declared monkeypox a global health emergency. Canada has nearly 700 cases, and I will unhappily table that.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness: What planning is under way in Nova Scotia to prepare for a potential monkeypox outbreak and transmission in Nova Scotia?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: This is a great opportunity to highlight the incredible work of the public health system. We have come to know Public Health because of COVID-19 and the work that they do, but this is their expertise around surveillance. In collaboration, not only in Nova Scotia but across Canada, they are experts in surveillance and they are experts in communicable disease prevention and control. So the planning has already started.

Dr. Deeks, who is one of our Medical Officers of Health, is sitting on national committees and talking about how we are going to plan for the event that we have an outbreak, and how best to address monkeypox.

I want to reassure everyone in the Chamber and everyone in the House that the expertise that we have in Public Health is certainly watching over this very closely and we are in excellent hands, Mr. Speaker.

BEN JESSOME: I thank the minister for the answer to that question. We are all very grateful for our team at Public Health.

Over 70,000 doses of Imvamune, a Health Canada-approved vaccine for immunization against monkeypox, have been distributed throughout the provinces and territories here in Canada. A follow-up question through you to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: What are the eligibility requirements for this vaccine here in Nova Scotia and have there been any cases of monkeypox identified here at home?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: What can I say about that? There have been a couple of cases of monkeypox that have been contained and we have systems in place to identify that very early and there have been some vaccinations offered in order to prevent that. There is in no way an outbreak of any kind. All of the contacts have been traced very readily and Public Health is on top of that.

We do have a limited supply of the vaccine that the member opposite discussed and we use that based on a number of strict criteria that are not only through the Public Health Agency of Canada but Public Health in Nova Scotia and I can assure the member that we are on top of the situation and Public Health is monitoring closely.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DOJ: DOM. ABUSE & SEXUAL ASSAULT - ACTION

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. My legislative assistant and I have met with several victims of domestic abuse and victims of sexual assault. Many are living scared in our communities, not just in Cumberland North, but throughout Nova Scotia.

Many, when they have gone to police, have felt further victimized, further let down by law enforcement, by Crown prosecutors, and by the justice system. By law enforcement because sometimes there is no enforcement and by Crown prosecutors because of their lack of interest in actually studying the cases. These perpetrators are being let back into the community to continue to harass and threaten and cause fear.

I would like to ask the Minister of Justice: Does the minister condone this culture and if the answer is no, what is his department doing to change this culture of domestic abuse and sexual assault in the province?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Of course, as everyone in this Chamber knows, I do have two daughters myself and it is something I worry about personally on a day-to-day basis that hopefully they will never go through something like that.

What I will say is that the police agencies in this province - you know, I do feel that they do a very good job when a complaint comes in of doing a review of it. The Crowns also review that and I recognize that sometimes some people may not agree with the decisions but there are many steps that they go through to ensure that if there is adequate evidence that those are prosecuted. Sometimes there is just not adequate evidence at the time.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the minister to meet with the victims who have come to me because their experience is not that in many cases and that's why they reached out to an MLA.

It was suggested to my assistant and me that we ask for the policies from law enforcement and Crown Prosecutors that are leading their work. So my former assistant called the Cumberland RCMP and called the Town of Amherst to request their policy - what their policy is on how to manage when a complaint comes in on domestic abuse and sexual assault. She was denied these policies, so during Estimates I asked the Minister of Justice if he and his department would assist us to get these policies.

I shared with the minister some of the experiences. I was very disappointed afterwards to receive this letter - which I will table - from the Cumberland RCMP.

My question to the Minister of Justice is: After he has had a chance to read this letter the RCMP sent me, which basically is denying . . .

THE SPEAKER: Question, please.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Will the minister commit to making significant changes to the misogynistic culture in the Department of Justice and throughout the Province of Nova Scotia?

BRAD JOHNS: What I will say is I have met with that member previously. I certainly would be willing to sit down and meet with the member again. I would like her to table that documentation, just to refresh.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

DHW: PHYSICIAN WAIT-LIST PROGRESS - UPDATE

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the Need a Family Practice wait-list is growing. There are no signs of it slowing down or moving in the opposite direction. In particular, this is a problem in my region, in the Bedford-Hammonds Plains region. Since September 2021 the Need a Family Practice wait-list has increased by 108 per cent - more than doubled. We are among the fastest-growing parts of this province but over 4,400 Nova Scotians do not have access to primary care - and I'll table that.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: When can we expect some progress in the Bedford area?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We recently went through and called a number of the people - all of the people on the Need a Family Practice Registry and actually 35 per cent, around 32 per cent of them, are actually new people to the area as a result of population growth, and another 25 per cent are there because their providers have retired or are closing their doors.

We do have an understanding of how and why the registry is growing, which again speaks to the need for us to continue to recruit. The Office of Health Care Professional Recruitment has done an amazing job. We've had a record number of physicians - 163 this year - and we plan to beat our record next year.

BRAEDON CLARK: I must say, Mr. Speaker, that we've heard many reports of folks who have been on that wait-list for many months and have not received any communication whatsoever from the department. It's one thing to have numbers but they also have to be accurate numbers. All we know right now is that the list is growing and growing, month by month. As I said, in some of the fastest-growing parts of our province, in the Central Zone in particular, the list has more than doubled in one year.

My question again to the minister is: At what point will the tide start to turn, or does she expect that it will just keep going up and up?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: We have said that we aren't surprised, based on the previous planning that was done. We know that we have a number of vacancies in this province, and we know we have a number of physicians who are getting ready to retire or are moving. We are working around workforce development - that is the key for us.

We are working with CaRMS, as an example, to understand how to better target residency programs in this province to make sure that we have the family practice physicians that we need. We are offering incentives to physicians to move to this province and take care of the Nova Scotians. We're looking at nurse practitioners. We hired 90 nurse practitioners in the past year in order to address the primary health care needs. We are looking at innovative models of care.

There are a number of things happening in this province, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to talk to the member about the concerns he has in his area.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

DHW: VIRTUAL CARE ACCESS - UPDATE

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: This government and the Health Authority is on record as saying that by the end of June, all Nova Scotians on the Need a Family Practice wait-list would have access to Virtual Care N.S. Over 100,000 Nova Scotians are on that wait-list, myself included, and only 22 per cent have access to this care. Mr. Speaker, I was never good in school, but 22 per cent is a bad grade even for myself.

My question to the minister is: Can the minister tell me, after committing to having everyone enrolled by the end of June, which was said in Public Accounts Committee, why almost 80 per cent are still waiting for access to virtual care?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, there has been around 60 per cent of those people on the list who have been emailed the link or have been contacted, so the percentage of people are those who've actually called back. Some people are on the list pre-emptively. As an example, we have three physicians in Antigonish we know are retiring by the end of next June and their patients are already putting themselves on the Family Practice Registry in advance of those retirements.

So, we continue to work with that list. The Service Commission called everybody on that list in January, who were on the list at the time, in order to contact them and understand what their care needs were, so we will continue to work with Nova Scotians, we'll continue to work with health care practitioners to address the primary health care needs in this province.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I've been on that list since January. I have not received a call. Neither has my partner nor any of my children. Second, a lot of numbers are being touted by the minister here today. We would ask that she table those numbers.

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

The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I'm rising on a point of privilege, please.

Mr. Speaker, during the beginning of Question Period, the Premier went on record and spoke directly to me, saying that if the member for Fairview-Clayton Park had something to say, maybe they'll let me stand up.

Just since that's on the record, I would like to go on the record as a point of privilege that in this caucus we are a collaborative, supportive, and fully functioning group. I don't need anyone to let me. If I chose to speak, I'd be able to get up and speak.

Again, there's no issue other than to make sure that is on the record. The Liberal caucus doesn't need permission to get up and speak their mind when they have a question or they have something to contribute.

THE SPEAKER: I will, again, make a very quick ruling: That is not a point of privilege. It sounds more like an advertisement at this point.

We're going to take a 10-minute recess.

[2:57 p.m. The House recessed.]

[3:15 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: 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 Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 187.

Bill No. 187 - An Act to Stop Nova Scotia Power Rate Hikes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I'm pleased to rise to talk to this bill. We've brought forward a number of bills that have been precipitated by the request to increase power rates after a very long time of stability, especially under the eight years of a Liberal government, where there was no general rate application. All of this happens in the context of a number of crises, I would say, that the province has faced and is facing, that certainly has exacerbated since this new government took over almost a year ago. Mainly, the climate crisis, the cost of living crisis, and certainly our health care crisis in the province.

We have a government that has voted down, tried to prevent emergency debates on the cost of living just yesterday, and another emergency debate they tried to prevent today on health care. They think that MLA salaries warrant more attention in this House than

discussing potential solutions from the Opposition to help them navigate through some challenging files that they have.

And so we have brought forward over the last year a number of bills that would effectively constrain the Utility and Review Board when they look at this application coming up this Fall. It's a short time away. Previously, we brought forward bills that would prevent what's known as their equity portion of investments on financial projects to escalate higher. We also wanted to prevent a potential increase to the internal rate of return. Both have stayed the same during our tenure, Madam Speaker, and those bills were not considered by the government, even though they said they were prepared to take action to prevent these increases. That's the 10 per cent increase Nova Scotia Power has asked for and will be asking for through the Utility and Review Board.

Our caucus is going to be prepared to be present during the hearings and make arguments why it's unjustifiable to ask for any sort of profit increase, whether it's for their executives, or for their shareholders, to increase those profits in the pockets of people based on the backs of ratepayers.

This bill is a continuation of us bringing forward ideas and looks at trying to find ways to that we can prevent things like increased compensation financed by rates - that 10 per cent that they're asking for - and would prevent the request by Nova Scotia Power to have 50 per cent of the overearnings. That was discovered in a FOIPOP that our caucus was able to ascertain. I'll table a couple of documents here where it was estimated \$131 million was captured in overearnings between 2009-2020 which ratepayers benefited from. If the utility gets its way, they will be able to capture something in that order of magnitude, and that is money that's owed to ratepayers.

The government's own staff - and they're very credible people whom I've worked with within the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. Certainly, I've been working on the just transition for some time, and the need to move to renewable energy. I've done some analysis that's now public through the FOIPOP which shows that in this application, overall they're asking to increase their profits from \$130 million in 2020 to \$213 million in 2024. That's four years. This government has a four-year mandate. Under their watch, Nova Scotia Power might be able to increase their profits by 64 per cent.

If this government does nothing, they are complicit in the increase in profits by Nova Scotia Power on the backs of ratepayers. Their own staff have said that over half of the rate increase asked for is related to increases of profit.

I'm sure the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board will do their due diligence and hear from a number of experts, certainly, that know more than I on the details of how the electricity grid works and what's legitimate. But we think that that caucus should eliminate any possibility of an increase of profit to Nova Scotia Power, who already make a 9 per cent return.

Just as an illustration, what we're looking at here is investments in the grid. They're going to need significant investments in our grid - more so than we have seen in probably anyone's lifetime that's sitting in the Chamber right now - to meet our renewable energy targets of 80 per cent by 2030. Also, to get off coal in eight years, which I don't believe the government will achieve, since they haven't done anything over the last year to start to look at decommissioning the coal plants, we are going to need billions in investments.

Right now, when the utility borrows from ratepayers, their equity portion is 37.5 per cent. That's where they get the 9 per cent return on that investment. They're asking to increase that to 45 per cent. They want ratepayers to finance a larger portion of every dollar they spend on the grid. They also want to increase that cap of the rate of return from 9.25 to 9.5 per cent. Put together, they're actually asking for a 23 per cent increase on every dollar of capital that they spend. That's not just on upgrading lines; that's everything that Nova Scotia Power spends in capital.

That's why we spoke to a way that we could try to eliminate that possibility. It's also why, when we were in government, we made efforts to ensure that Nova Scotia Power doesn't own all the assets. That's why we brought forward the largest renewable energy contract in our province's history by a large margin.

Equal to 10 per cent of our electricity grid in our province will be all wind, because wind is the cheapest form of energy in our province. It's competitive, it's going to create 4,000 jobs across the province, mainly in rural communities.

We know of companies that are setting up offices now that are hiring people across the province, in the six-figure land. These are good jobs for Nova Scotia that will be owned not by the utility, but by independent companies employing Nova Scotians, bringing capital into communities like Colchester, like Cumberland, like Antigonish, Cape Breton, and so on down the list. I'm pleased that the government, after questions in the first sitting, decided to continue down the road of this competitive tender. That is a good thing.

But it is questionable how the utility thinks that it's even possible, with their list and how quickly the list became available, to start to move forward on asking for all of these things from the Utility and Review Board after a new government has come into place - the relationship between Emera, Nova Scotia Power, the Premier's Office, and whoever is advising the Premier.

It was within days or certainly weeks that the Premier asked for me, the other Opposition Leader at the time, to meet with MPs to start discussing the Loop. He had all the top executives at the table with him advocating for sole ownership on how they would create the Loop system and bring power into the province to achieve the renewable energy targets - the type of targets that they used to actually fight against.

There has been a shift in the language that Nova Scotia Power is using. They endorse the plans to get off coal. They want to own more and more to make that happen. But the Premier is certainly on record with having numerous meetings with Nova Scotia Power executives with the knowledge that there is going to be a rate increase request before that was made public.

We just hired a former executive to lead economic development - a former executive of Nova Scotia Power will now lead economic development in this province. I wonder what kind of investments that individual will be advising the Premier, and how Nova Scotia Power will be treated, how they move forward with investments - these types of capital investments bringing hydro and things like that into the province. We'll be watching that very closely, Madam Speaker.

Also, on top of these increase requests that amount to 10 per cent, on top of inflation that people are seeing, we also have the carbon-pricing issue that this government has done nothing on so far since they've been in power.

Approximately \$50 per tonne is what we pay now, and the request is to move up to \$170 a tonne in this province. We believe we should be looking at all options to ensure that we still reduce our emissions, a fair amount of emissions, and that we reach our targets. At the same time, we understand that there are impacts to ratepayers. That's what we did when I brought forward the 2017 Cap-and-Trade Program that minimized the impact to 1 per cent on power rates, to 1 cent on the litre - the only province that can say that.

Why? Because Nova Scotians did the work over a number of years. They paid the price for decisions made decades ago to rely so much on coal. We have embedded in our electricity regulations the need to move off coal, and that presents an implicit carbon price. We took that to Ottawa and we said we're paying an implicit carbon price right now. If you're going to charge \$10 to \$50 a tonne, you have to respect that in the negotiations.

There are very talented people in the Departments of Environment and Climate Change, and Natural Resources and Renewables. I expect and I hope that that conversation is being scrutinized. Time is running out, but we want to see a fair plan that certainly respects the ratepayer but also contributes to how we confront the climate crisis that we're seeing in our province and across the country.

In my view, these types of bills are necessary. We don't have the benefit of the types of staff that I complimented to do the analysis of what is the exact precision on how you can prevent these types of egregious requests from Nova Scotia Power - whether it's the 10 per cent increase, the carbon price, the increase to profits, dealing with inflation.

We're the province that now gives the least to people, as was mentioned in Question Period. Of every province in the country, this is the only Premier who doesn't see the need to help people with some relief during this time, and now we're facing a power rate increase

while gas is going up, while food costs more, while people are struggling to make ends meet to pay for their rent, while seniors are struggling - there are so many issues that that side of the House does not see as an emergency.

At the very least, I'd like to see consideration of ideas from both opposition parties, who want to see a fair plan on how we're going to tackle some of these tough issues. Power rates - you can't keep kicking that down the road. It has been one year. We have the hearings coming up - I think they're two months away. We want to see action, and if we don't see action, we're going to continue to sound the alarm so that the people know it's the PC government that stood by to watch a 10 per cent increase, to watch a 64 per cent increase in profits over their four-year term.

I look forward to the government bringing in something - maybe it's in the form of regulations - over the next little while in Cabinet to prevent - listen to your own staff that's on record here. Some of it's bleeped out. I'm sure it's some of the recommendations of what to do to prevent the increase going from \$130 million in 2020 to \$213 million.

That's just profit alone. That's not greening the grid. That's profits on the backs of ratepayers. I ask the government to give consideration to the bill from my colleague for Annapolis that we have before the House.

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Madam Speaker, I'll be pleased to rise and speak to Bill No. 187. I will start by saying that there is nothing in this bill that we disagree with. We feel like it's obviously important for consumers to be protected from price increases. It is obviously egregious that Nova Scotia Power wants an earnings-per-share mechanism that would allow them to pocket over half of all overearnings instead of passing that back to customers. As with many of the things that we have seen in the general rate application, it just doesn't pass the sniff test. You ask anybody, does this make sense? Does it make sense that when you're losing power all the time, when you're paying ever-increasing energy rates, that shareholders should be enriched? The answer would obviously be no.

We also agree that it's a hard pill to swallow that rates that help keep many Nova Scotians in poverty are contributing directly to sizeable executive salaries. It makes sense to curb that practice. We can applaud - I think applaud might be strong, but we can recognize the Liberals for proposing that all executive remuneration be paid by the shareholders.

Lastly, to this bill, keeping rate increases to no more than 2 per cent a year is absolutely reasonable.

If we're opening up the Public Utilities Act, if we're actually talking about what we do with this Act, what we do with our energy system at a time when people are

struggling to pay their bills, I also want to point out three measures - and we have discussed these before - that no one in this Chamber has tackled yet, and which would have a tangible impact on energy poverty, which is just a fancy way of saying the ability for people to keep the lights on, to keep their homes warm, and increasingly, they have access to a heat pump or an air conditioner in our changing climate to keep their homes cool.

[3:30 p.m.]

First of all, I find it disappointing that the other members of this House continue to ignore the clause in the Public Utilities Act that, if changed, would allow the NSUARB or the government to direct Nova Scotia Power to create a universal service program. A universal service program would ensure that no one pays more than 6 per cent of their household income on home energy, that power cannot be disconnected for a failure to pay in those situations, and that efficiency upgrades are targeted directly to these low-income homes.

This is an idea that has been around for a long time. When we proposed it at the Law Amendments Committee, with the support of many experts and community activists who have been working on this for a very long time, the then-Liberal government expressed some interest in looking into it.

Second, in the absence of a universal service program, a quick change that the government could make today is to bring forward legislation prohibiting Nova Scotia Power from disconnecting people's power. Currently, there is a provision where the utility can't disconnect people when it's too cold, but this could be expanded immediately to prohibit disconnections right now, when we are in an unprecedented - in our generation - inflationary crisis. Truly, we know that people are making the decision every month of whether to put gas in their car and food in their fridge or pay the bills. This is a bill that is a necessity. People shouldn't have to make that choice. People are under enormous financial strain, and they should not be threatened with losing electricity to their homes.

Last, I would point out that this bill doesn't address Nova Scotia Power's proposal in the general rate application to double the fixed customer charge. Synapse Energy Economics, an environmental consulting company that regularly consults with the NSUARB, addresses these changes in their submission to the NSUARB on the rate application and strongly recommends against raising these fees. They have done work over the years showing that increasing fixed charges on bills has a disproportionate effect on low-income people, the people who struggle the most to pay those bills. Unlike rates, which are tied to consumption, the fixed customer charge is the same for everyone, and raising that charge creates greater inequality and puts a greater burden on low-income people.

These are the things which I would like to see in this bill which we believe would directly impact people's ability to quite literally keep the lights on.

With a few remaining minutes, I want to make a couple of points about the long-term changes to power regulation that we need in this province. I know that this is a conversation that will continue. The general rate application hearing before the Utility and Review Board is this Fall. We will be back in this Chamber before too long. We will continue to have this conversation.

On the occasion of this bill and to set the table, I want to be clear that what we need is an overhaul of the way in which we regulate energy in this province. Over the last two terms the Liberal government concentrated on keeping power rates low. That's important. It's important the people can afford to pay their power bill. But the past Liberals and the present Liberals continue to avoid the elephant in the room, which is that when you suppress rates for a number of years, of course the utility is going to come forward with a request for large increases.

The uncomfortable fact for all of us in this House is that we need to stop politicizing power rates for short-term political gain while ignoring what our regulatory system needs to look like in the long term. This is why we have been talking about performance-based regulation. Nova Scotia Power should get paid for what it does. That is not the way it works right now; that's not the way it will work on the other side of this general rate application unless something dramatic happens. This is something that can happen only through legislative action from the government.

We have proposed legislation and argued over the last year that we need to make a switch to a regulatory system that says: Here is what we want and need from this utility, here are the specific measurable targets that we want the utility to meet. That is not the way it works.

We have suggested that beyond a base amount, the utility only makes a profit when they are meeting or exceeding the targets set forth in regulation. Again, this is what would pass the sniff test. If you ask 10 people on the street, is this how we should be regulating our utility, I suspect that at least nine of them would say yes.

These targets we could set could include transitioning to green energy, decentralizing power generation, increasing reliability, eliminating energy poverty, scaling up efficiency savings, and ensuring a just transition for energy workers.

We can continue to tinker around the edges of cost-of-service regulation, or the government can take the opportunity, to change the game entirely. To be clear, I think that right now we need both: We need immediate action to ensure that people can afford to pay their power bills and we need to change the regulatory structure. We can walk and chew gum at the same time. We can protect Nova Scotians today through measures like the one in this bill while also building the regulatory system of the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

TOM TAGGART: I am pleased to stand today to speak on this bill. I'll likely ramble a bit. It seems that everybody else has, so it shouldn't hurt for me to do that a little bit.

I would like to note first off that this government will always be in favour of helping the ratepayers keep their hard-earned money in their pockets. There's no question about that. One of the members opposite - during this discussion - made the comment that if this government doesn't appeal - I forget the exact wording - but doesn't do something we could have these fabulously high rates in four years.

I think it's interesting that in the Spring session of the Legislature we amended the Public Utilities Act to hold Nova Scotia Power more accountable to ratepayers. I think that's action. I think it is. Maybe I am wrong about that, but I believe that's action.

We're working to establish a partnership table that will give Nova Scotians a voice. We will continue to work and look at all options for further steps to take.

We have been and are an active intervener in Nova Scotia Power's general rate application - that's taking action. That's important action that should not be dismissed. Interveners can carry weight in this process, and we trust the NSUARB to hear all the evidence and make a fair decision. I think that has kind of been historic, but anyway, just a couple of notes.

Nova Scotia, for certain, has been a leader in the fight against climate change. We've had some of the most assertive climate change goals in the country: to have over 80 per cent of our electricity generated with renewables by 2030 and to achieve net zero by 2050.

I will note that that's a claim that has been made a lot of times, but this is a government that took action on it, that brought out the climate change and prosperity act or whatever - I can't remember the exact response of it - but those are factual things that this government did to do combat climate change and to look at the reasonable and achievable power rates.

To achieve these goals, our work to pivot to cleaner sources of energy and 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 have made 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 while also leaning on the performance standards that we will set through both these amendments. We have the ability to pull different levers at different times and will continue to look at these options.

In addition, we have - we're active interveners, as I said before - Nova Scotia Power's general rate application currently before the NSUARB. I think that that's taking action, right? It's not a wonder if we're going to do it: I wonder if they're going to do that? Well, I think they are. We're already active interveners, so we are working on that.

Our priority is to protect ratepayers as we move forward in our green energy future. As we work toward our climate change goals, we're committed to protecting ratepayers and ensuring that they have access to clean, reliable, and affordable electricity.

Over the next two years, we are investing nearly \$120 million in programs that reduce emissions and fight climate change. That's action, again. That's action this government's taking, okay?

Nova Scotia's a leader in energy efficiency programs. Each year, we invest \$30 million in our core energy efficiency programs in HomeWarming, in affordable multi-family housing, Home Energy Assessments, green heat, Small Business Energy Solutions. These programs create jobs, and help families save money, and reduce emissions through energy efficiency. Again, that's action.

These investments are helping in the fight against climate change while also reducing their personal energy costs. Our investments have real impacts. For example, they have improved - these are investments, I think that's action, too. These investments have real impacts: They have improved 2,500 Mi'kmaw homes and 11,500 public housing units.

We've helped Nova Scotians save more than \$180 million a year in their energy bills. We helped avoid more than one million tonnes of carbon emissions this year. That's quite a - that's a big number - one million tonnes. Again, we have - that's not action, we haven't done that, we just helped to do that, okay?

We do a great deal of this work with incredible, dedicated partnership with Efficiency Nova Scotia. In partnership with the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs, we are delivering the Mi'kmaw Home Energy Efficiency Project. It provides deep energy retrofits for all homes across all 13 First Nations communities in Nova Scotia while also providing training for their community members to complete this work. HomeWarming and affordable multi-family housing programs provide financial support for energy retrofits for low-budget households and affordable housing.

The Province also provides support for the off-oil program helping homeowners reduce their energy consumption and switch from oil heat to cleaner and more efficient alternatives. Heating oil accounts for 50 per cent of Nova Scotia's space heating energy, the highest in Canada. I don't know why anyone wasn't doing that in the last eight or 12 years, but anyway we want to change that. Nobody did anything about it. We want to change it. That's action.

[3:45 p.m.]

The Home Energy Assessment program provides up to \$5,000 in initiatives for home energy retrofits. We support transition to high-performance building codes through programs such as the New Home Construction program offered through Efficiency Nova Scotia. We provide additional incentives for home builders to build beyond the current code.

All of these programs support the local green workforce, including heat pump installers, lighting specialists, solar PVC installers, and builders. They are currently employing more than 2,500 people in good paying jobs, many in rural Nova Scotia.

Our amendments to the Public Utilities Act - I think that's action, when you make amendments. That's action. Anyway, we're enabling stakeholders and advocates to be part of the oversight and accountability of Nova Scotia Power by creating a new partnership and performance table to provide advice to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board on performance, standards, and penalties. Members of this partnership table may be local renewable energy developers, energy poverty advocates, and people working on programs related to the electricity system, et cetera.

We're also doing scholarships and training for our energy sector. The Department of Natural Resources and Renewables provides scholarships and workforce training programs that support employment opportunities in this new emerging energy sector, our green energy sector. That includes incentives, awards, and bi-partisan Mi'kmaw training programs to promote diversity.

We also have additional energy training programs. In 2021, 13 placements were funded for 10 students to remain employed with these organizations. A total of 23 placements have been selected for participation in 2022. Next year's program started April 25, 2022. A diversity component has been added to the program for 2022, increasing the total subsidy of 60 per cent to eligible placements. We have provided scholarships and grants.

Now let's talk a little bit about the provincial green infrastructure project Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, green stream. Active transportation infrastructure investments are being made in partnership with the federal government as part of the Canada-Nova Scotia integrated bilateral agreement under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure plan - a federal program for building a prosperous and inclusive industry through infrastructure investments. Investment includes projects that meet the federal outcomes for increased access to clean energy transportation, including active transportation.

To date, Nova Scotia has contributed \$13 million to the program, which has leveraged just over \$26 million from federal and municipal governments for a total

investment in the province of \$40 million. On April 6th, core active transportation network projects in the Town of Port Hawkesbury, the Town of Kentville, the Town of Antigonish, the Town of Yarmouth, and two within HRM - the regional centre downtown core and the community of East Preston.

We're transitioning from coal, and we're working towards retiring coal generation plants. We continue to work with our partners across Atlantic Canada on paths to get off coal-generated power. We're expanding all options for the retirement of coal and an essential transition to renewable energy.

It is important to select the right pathway for Nova Scotia. The Maritime Link project gives a 500-megawatt, high-voltage, direct-current connection that enables clean, renewable electricity generated in Newfoundland and Labrador to be transmitted to Nova Scotia to the North American grid. In Nova Scotia, once stable reliable energy amounts are generated by the Maritime Link, it would contribute significantly to the goal of generating 80 per cent of our electricity from renewables by 2030, which we believe is attainable.

The Atlantic Loop is one of many options to help us reach this 2030 target. The broad concept is to upgrade transmission capacity on the East Coast to allow hydroelectricity power from Labrador and Quebec to displace coal in the region.

There are all kinds. I can go on and list over and over all the different accomplishments with respect to Nova Scotia Power, green energy, this province, this government. I just have to say I have stood or sat here for the last couple of days and heard all the things that we're not doing - haven't done anything, I guess. I think that's just the list of the actions that we've taken, and it's just the start. It's only 10 months in.

I listened closely to some of the other comments or suggestions that we're asking for, and maybe I'm missing something here. I can't understand - I think I heard that we wanted to cap, or we should cap energy use in a home at 6 per cent of the income. I'm thinking I might like that, because for 6 per cent of my income, I could do some pretty good things if I didn't have to pay more than that.

The other thing is that I couldn't have my power shut off. I like that too. That's a pretty good deal, because - what's the incentive? I have to ask. I don't know what I'm missing. What's the incentive for me to pay a power bill at my home or anybody else's home? I understand the struggle people face. Don't get me wrong, but what's the incentive to be frugal, and to reduce the use of energy in our homes - try to reduce the use of greenhouse gas? What's the incentive if I don't have to worry about paying the bill?

Trust me, I've talked to a lot of landlords over my time. We've talked about how they can't pay their power bill because their tenants have got the windows up and the heat is streaming out, and I don't know if that's right or wrong, but what's the incentive? If you

can't be disconnected, what's the incentive? I wonder what I'm missing. I'm sorry. I'm ranting.

I guess I'll close my conversation with that, but I've just got to say that this continued conversation, whether it's on Nova Scotia Power (Interruption) - I know you do. I can tell. Whether it's on Nova Scotia Power or it's on affordability or any number of things, we've been given the message here for two days that we've sat on our hands and done nothing, when I personally believe that this is a government of action, has shown that and proven that over the last 10 months.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: Reading glasses are new to me. I'm not sure whether to wear them or not. It's blurry either way, so I'm not going to use them.

I would never suggest that this government or other governments haven't done anything or sat on their hands. I just think I'm speaking on behalf of the constituents I represent, and a lot of people are hurting. That's why I'm here today. (Applause)

I'm pleased to introduce an amendment to the Public Utilities Act. It's respecting earnings and rates. The essence and motivation of these proposed amendments are to offer government real solutions to help make life more affordable for Nova Scotians. The cost of living is unbearable for many I know. They aren't able to pay their power bill. They're trying to balance rising food costs, fuel costs, housing costs, and everything else.

While I do appreciate comments made earlier, or maybe yesterday, by the Minister of Department of Finance and Treasury Board and the Premier, that these challenges are being felt across the country and across the planet, unlike this Premier and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, others are taking what I think to be more immediate action to put money in the hands of Nova Scotians.

We have a moral responsibility, an obligation. Government has the ability to take action today and help people we represent. This amendment is just one of those tools that may be able to do so.

The Clause 1 amendment requires Nova Scotia Power to return excess annual earnings to Nova Scotians. The Clause 2 amendment places a cap on Nova Scotia Power's general rate increase to no more than 2 per cent per year versus the proposed 10 per cent over three years. The Clause 3 amendment removes Nova Scotia Power's ability to recover remuneration paid to executives from rates, charges, and fees.

I've proposed ways in which government can make life more affordable for Nova Scotians. My colleagues in opposition have done so as well, but unfortunately, government has chosen not to implement these suggestions. In May, as critic of Department of Natural

Resources and Renewables, I asked government to consider offering a rebate to Nova Scotians to offset rising fuel costs, especially as government is collecting record revenues through gas taxes. Unfortunately, that wasn't acted on.

Yesterday, my colleagues proposed a number of ideas to help Nova Scotians bear the brunt of this affordability crisis. The member for Sydney-Membertou suggested we offer families immediate support in schools with free lunches and support for their school supplies.

Speaking of the Seniors Care Grant, my CA and I agree with the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care. It was fairly simple, given that government often makes things overly complicated. We did appreciate that it got into the hands of Nova Scotians quickly, but it wasn't subscribed to fully. I would ask if there's a way to use that remaining amount in a Seniors Care Grant 2.0 - maybe a Non-Seniors Care Grant 1.0. Piggybacking on what has worked makes sense to me.

Yesterday, the member for Bedford South highlighted how other provinces have taken action today and previously. Prince Edward Island is taking action with providing school supplies. New Brunswick is reducing income tax. I think Quebec offered a \$500 rebate to Quebecers. Ontario, I believe, is cutting fuel taxes. I think even Alberta is cutting fuel tax and providing an electricity rebate. Other provinces and premiers, representing political parties across the board, are doing the right thing and offering immediate support for their constituents.

This bill will amend the Public Utilities Act and is another suggestion for putting more money in the pockets of Nova Scotians. Not only is Nova Scotia Power asking to increase power rates by 10 per cent, they are requesting to dismantle the ESM, the earnings sharing mechanism. The Leader of the NDP has spoken of that as well. This is an agreement that ensured that NSP overearnings would be directly returned to Nova Scotians. Historically, Nova Scotia Power would return this in full. Now they're requesting to the NSUARB that 50 per cent of these excess profits are kept.

Between 2009 and 2020, Nova Scotia Power saw \$131 million in overearnings. They were required to return this back directly to Nova Scotians, and now more than ever, Nova Scotians could use that money as they battle inflation, the cost of living, and the affordability crisis. On top of requesting to keep the 50 per cent of excess profit, we now know, of course, that there are several other avenues that Nova Scotia Power is proposing in order to drive their profit and increase on the rate of return and the return on equity.

The Premier and this government have described themselves as proactive. Let's be proactive on this in light of the NSUARB hearing. Let's pass this amendment. Let's stop this rate hike from happening. Let's give hope to all those people struggling. We have an opportunity to save Nova Scotians a lot of stress, a lot of uncertainty, and a lot of time by

stopping this rate hike now - before it goes through that lengthy, strenuous process required by the NSUARB.

I have people in my constituency, at the MLA office - many of us do - who are choosing between feeding their kids and grabbing more medication, between filling up their fridge or their freezer and filling up their car, between continuing with internet and some other choice. I have people selling their vehicles to buy food. I have seniors not taking their medication so that they can eat.

I have a woman camped out in my MLA parking lot, my constituency parking lot. She uses the hose to shower. She uses the bench as a dinner table. She's got nowhere else to go. I've hired a Summer student to look at housing as a full-time job, and we have no other options but to let her camp out in that driveway and to seek shade from our building, and look as best we can for other options.

We're getting beat up in Annapolis. I've mentioned it before. We need this government to extend a hand and provide immediate relief and support to Nova Scotians. There are a variety of ways to do so. They have been presented. It's up to government to take action. Thank you.

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

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mx. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleagues on Bill No. 187. Would you please call Bill No. 189.

Bill No. 189 - An Act to Cut Provincial Gas Taxes.

MX. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: Mx. Speaker, I appreciate you calling me. I am here today to talk about a bill that we are putting forward to cut the motor fuel tax by 50 per cent to December 2023.

People in Nova Scotia are suffering. People in Nova Scotia are struggling. People in Nova Scotia need help and they need help now. This government is not providing the help that Nova Scotians need. In fact, they are not providing any help at all, in any way, shape, or form.

Gas prices in Nova Scotia have risen by over 60 per cent in the last year. People are struggling to get to work. People are struggling to get their kids to medical appointments. They are struggling to go and visit their loved ones. They are struggling to get groceries, and they are struggling to purchase those groceries.

As we know right now, Nova Scotia's inflation rate is approaching 10 per cent, which is significantly higher than the national average. People's paycheques are shrinking. Their purchasing and buying power are shrinking and, again, this government is doing nothing to help Nova Scotians to meet this crisis that we are in today.

We were promised by this government on Day 1 that Nova Scotians would have a better paycheque, that they would have more money in their pockets, that they would be able to afford the necessities of life that are becoming much more difficult for them to achieve. Had we actually received this paycheque guarantee, then we may not be in the situation as dire as we are today. Nova Scotians would have benefited from a promise that was made by this government that was not kept. Unfortunately, it becomes a theme of this government in the fact that they've promised many, many things around health care, around better paycheques, around loyalty programs. When we look at this time last year and the election, it seemed like things were so ready to move should they become elected.

There were plans. We were going to fix this on Day 1. We were going to fix that on Day 1. We were going to improve this on Day 1. We were going to complete this on Day 1. I think we are at Day 340-something and nothing has happened. (Interruption) We are at Day 346, so we are only 345 days off our mark of Day 1.

This bill to cut the motor gas tax by 50 per cent will reduce the price at the pumps by 7.75 cents per litre for gasoline, and 7.7 cents per litre for diesel. Think of the impact that would not only have on all of the individuals in this province, homeowners, seniors, but think about those small business owners that rely on their vehicles to make a living. The individual in my community who delivers pizza - their costs have tripled for their gas. They cannot afford to work in those areas. They can't afford to work because everything they make goes right back into their vehicle. They can't afford to work, so therefore it creates more of a labour shortage for the small businesses that are struggling to make ends meet as we speak.

That brings me to another point around gas taxes and prices. Everything has become more expensive. Businesses are struggling. We saw yesterday one of my colleagues table a report that 80 per cent of businesses feel that this government doesn't understand the impact of rising costs on the business community. It baffles me how our government can be so out of touch with business owners in this province.

We see yesterday what happened by appointing people to friendship roles as opposed to continuing to work for Nova Scotians the way we are. Instead, we're playing old school politics, and we're firing people and replacing them with friends of the Premier of this province. That's doing nothing to help Nova Scotians. Select Nova Scotians making up to \$18,000 a month. I saw a tweet today that said you'd have to pay me a lot more than \$18,000 a month to be a friend to that government. I guess I would concur with that.

Mx. Speaker, all we have to do is look across this country to see what governments are doing to help their citizens. My colleague yesterday said it best when he talked about empathy and compassion. We see zero empathy. We see zero compassion - not only from this government, but especially from this Premier. We're seeing them completely ignore the fact that people are struggling, whereas governments across this country are doing things to help their citizens.

In Ontario, they're cutting the gas fuel tax by 50 per cent. Newfoundland and Labrador has reduced their motive fuel tax by 8.05 cents per litre. Alberta - Alberta, another Conservative government - has cut gas taxes entirely - 13 cents per litre. It's not uncommon for Conservative governments to actually cut taxes in this country.

I think when it comes down to showing that empathy and compassion, it's very important that this government take notice. Nova Scotians are certainly taking notice. I hear it every day in my constituency office. They say, Fred, how can I afford gas? How can I afford medication for my family? More is going out than is coming in on a monthly basis, and that gap is widening, Mx. Speaker, as inflation continues to rise in this province.

We're asking this government to really consider this bill, because this bill will actually put more money in the pockets of Nova Scotians. It will allow Nova Scotians to take those funds and spend them on the necessities of life, to be able to eat healthy, to be able to go to medical appointments, to be able to afford that medication. This government is currently talking out of both sides of their mouths. They're saying that they need these gas taxes . . .

THE SPEAKER: It's unparliamentary to refer to the government as speaking out of both sides of their mouths.

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: They're saying one thing and then they're changing it and saying another thing, but it still comes out of their mouths.

Madam Speaker, when this government talks about needing taxes, needing these taxes, they can't cut these fuel taxes because they need this revenue for health, they need this revenue for roads, they need this revenue for all of the services that they're providing, I say that's phooey - is that parliamentary? It's phooey. It's just smoke and mirrors, Madam Speaker. When gas prices are inflated by 60 per cent, the windfall that this government is receiving on the HST for that gas would more than offset a reduction in the motive fuel tax.

When we talk about accounting and we talk about debits and credits, right now, we are debiting the people of Nova Scotia, and the government is crediting their bank accounts. It's really sad to watch, Madam Speaker, because both Opposition parties have provided

very viable alternatives that this government can use to help Nova Scotians today - not next week and not hope that inflation is going to go down and wait and see.

Governments across this country are taking action, and it's time - it's overdue - that this government put our money where their mouth is and put it back in the pockets of Nova Scotians.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I am happy to have the opportunity to rise and speak on this bill today. Off the top, of course all proposals to help people make ends meet at this time are welcome. It would be good to see more of these coming from the other side of the House - this is truly an emergency.

As the finance critic, I - and we as a caucus - have thought a lot about what people need, and I'll touch on the long-term proposals we're putting forward in a moment.

To speak to the bill at hand, absolutely people are struggling to pay for gas. We hear all the time from people who can barely afford to go to work because gas prices are so high. In a province that has very little public transit outside of HRM, many people have no choice but to drive to work.

The housing crisis has also forced many to live outside of the communities where they work. In rural areas, there is no question that getting to work can eat up a large per cent of your paycheque.

We also know that small business owners and others face gas-related charges for their work, such as farmers. We hear from farmers who are warning that Nova Scotia will lose farms if diesel prices stay this high. That said, I think we need a different response than cutting gas taxes for the next year and a half.

We have chosen to prioritize the call for immediate and direct support for households that earn less than \$70,000 annually, in the form of a \$500 cheque. That \$500 this Summer could help pay for school supplies, can help people put groceries on the table, and can help people get the gas they need to get to work.

The government posted a surplus last year. We know they are taking in more money with provincial gas taxes that could afford to provide immediate support for people. Of course, we know that \$500 is not going to provide economic security, so we've put forward a number of more permanent solutions that would help build financial security. This is important because volatile fossil fuel prices are here to stay and supply chain disruptions are a feature of climate crisis.

The climate crisis is here to stay. If we don't get out of the cycle, we will have continual crises around the cost of gas. This is not fearmongering. This is the truth.

As I mentioned yesterday, we have been pushing for a number of permanent solutions. Raising income assistance rates: With rising inflation and no increases, people who depend on income assistance already faced a 5 per cent drop in their purchasing power by this past April; 9.3 CPI is going to result in ongoing drops. We also propose to raise the minimum wage immediately to \$15 hour, with a swift movement towards a living wage. As with income assistance, what minimum wage could provide is steadily declining month over month.

We have learned many things from the COVID-19 crisis in our collective response. One is that workplaces are healthier and more productive when people don't go to work sick, so we continue to advocate for the creation of a permanent 10 paid sick days program. We continue to advocate for the institution of a permanent program of rent control. This would provide stability to renters and landlords. Resolving the housing crisis requires this stability. I also worry about payday lenders and continue to ask the government to consider legislation to rein in payday lenders and also allow credit unions to step up and provide a trusted service.

People aren't able to make ends meet. We all know that. We all have the stories coming into our constituency offices, people on the street, our phone calls and emails - they can't make ends meet. Everyone is making choices. It's a struggle and no one I think is able to provide all that they need. It is not a matter of gas or groceries - it's a matter of enough groceries and a little bit of gas and trying to make it through until the end of the week.

This is a huge opportunity for payday lenders to offer a quick fix, to offer that relief. It means that the family can put groceries on the table for the last few days of this week and, again, to try to get ready to look at the next week's needs. Of course, they have long-term, disastrous consequences.

The last thing I want to focus on is the need for an economic growth plan. We need a regional economic development plan that makes sense for the province. We've been told time and time again that if we want to know what the plan is for economic growth, we just need to look at the platform. But that's not clear and that shows a serious lack of understanding of what an economic growth plan should look like, the level of analysis that should go into it, and how it should be communicated and accounted for.

The economic growth plan should be fully integrated with the climate plan, which is very late. The previous government dragged their feet on this plan, but we were told they had it mostly done.

[4:15 p.m.]

A regional and economic development plan with green transition at the core would highlight, for example, what sectors we want to focus on in terms of growth, where Nova Scotia has an advantage, what we're going to do to leverage our potential, and how to address any gaps and areas where we want to grow our potential.

We now have institutions like Invest Nova Scotia and Build Nova Scotia, and trust me, the amount of time it's going to take to reorganize those organizations will be a long time before we see any results from their work. We do have ministers responsible for them, but everything should be lined up.

So what's happening in Invest Nova Scotia, Build Nova Scotia, the MOST program, immigration, tourism - it should all be lined up in an economic development plan that talks to us about what our goals are, what the outcomes are, and what the timelines are. We need to be able to hold government to account. A plan with specifics is good public management. With that, I will take my seat on this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I'm glad to speak about this bill. I've heard from the Opposition that we should just decrease this because it's going to be great. Right now, on a normal year, we bring in \$250 million from this.

I don't know about any other member, but for me, on my drive from my house to here, there are a lot of potholes. There are a lot of gravel roads that have to be done. Maybe the member for Northside-Westmount doesn't have any potholes, doesn't have any gravel roads. I have all of them. I have a farming community that's going through - they have tons of them.

Just doing this is a short-sighted decision - let's just do this. We have to look long-term. Saying for the next year and a half to take \$125 million and take it out of Public Works, take it out of the Nova Scotia Health Authority? None of that makes any sense.

Just so the member is aware, yes, I am a business person. I own my own software company that deals in transportation. I understand fuel surcharge more than probably most people in this room. We are a small market. We are 1,007,000-ish people in Nova Scotia. The price of gas is not set off of what the people in Nova Scotia have. It's the world market. What we're having in Russia and Ukraine has caused the price to go astronomical, not just here, everywhere.

There are comments that other provinces have done things. Alberta has a huge oil industry. Maybe in five, 10 years, after a government of ours has been looking at what is the next thing so that Nova Scotia is no longer a have-not province, we would be able to

do things like that. Alberta, from what I've seen, is looking at a \$20-billion surplus; we have a \$13.2-billion budget.

Nova Scotia's gas tax rate is 15.5 cents per litre. The change on that is not going to wind up helping when all of a sudden, we're not clearing roads, we're not repairing them. We've had years where the roads have not been maintained, so now we're trying to do catch up. Talk to any of your Public Works people. If you talk to them, they'll tell you it's been worse and worse.

In regard to the gas usage, the numbers are always two months behind, so I wasn't able to get the figure of where we are because of the increase. I won't know until September, so I'm not going to give you a number that I don't have.

The inflation that everybody is having, again, is not isolated to just here. Everything is costing more. I see it. I'm assuming everybody sees it. This change here will cause more damage in the long run than looking at a better solution, which we are looking into options for doing that.

For example, minimum wage was raised. Minimum wage will be \$15 on April 1, 2024, which was recommended by an independent body. We have to get to that. I will agree with the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island that a minimum wage is not a living wage, but we have to go somewhere and we can't go too quick, otherwise what's going to happen? We're going to put Nova Scotia into more problems, and we've already inherited enough problems from the previous government's lack of looking at the future.

The Bank of Canada is the one that has been increasing it to cool it down. The person who can actually deal with cooling down inflation is the Bank of Canada and the federal government. They realize pumping out more money is not going to help it. We have to slow down people from spending. I mean, look at the price of houses. Where I live, a brand-new house on 4,800 sq. ft. is \$600,000. I could not build my house today based on the price of inflation and what things are costing. There is nothing in this bill that is going to help the average person.

What have we done? We've submitted and we've wound up providing over \$13 million in support to vulnerable Nova Scotians. We've increased the child benefit. Minister MacFarlane's mandate included setting a five-year target for reducing child poverty. (Interruption) Is that incorrect?

THE SPEAKER: You can refer to the Minister of Community Services.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I apologize - Minister of Community Services. Thanks. I'm just talking to you anyway, so we're good. Thank you.

Again, this change onto it, all this does is say for the next 18 months let's take tons of money out of the budget that we need. We need roads fixed, we need bridges replaced. And one thing people love talking about is, well, just take the HST off. Just so people understand in case they don't, the HST is an agreement with the federal government. No province in an HST world can just say I'm going to take this off. They would have to - it's not as straightforward as you think it is. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. The member for Hants West has the floor.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Hants East.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East, I'm sorry.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: No problem, Mx. Speaker. Again, this, to me, is somebody saying that here's the small fix that we're going to do. We're going to take \$120 million. I don't know, for me, \$120 million is a lot of money, but I know the roads just going from my house to here that need to get repaved, that need to get patched. We need school upgrades, we need health care. We're running a government. We're looking at what we're going to be doing in two to three years, not in two to three days, because the problem is when you look here, you can't see this. Oh, I'm probably not supposed to do that.

For me, I can't support this because it will, honestly, put Nova Scotia in a worse spot.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The member for Hants East has the floor. I would ask that other conversations are taken outside and that members refrain from commenting loudly on the words of the current speaker.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Thank you, Mx. Speaker, and I'll just finish up with what we've done for housing. Remember, all of these things would not be able to be done if all we started doing was cutting and not bringing in revenue.

The Province introduced a new lending program to help non-profit organizations keep and increase affordable housing units. The Province has improved the Down Payment Assistance Program so that more Nova Scotians have the opportunity to buy their home. The government is investing \$2.5 million to create the Community Housing Growth Fund to strengthen the sector and grow the number of non-profit housing units. In 2021-22, the Province invested more than \$35 million for 1,100 new affordable units.

I've already spoken about minimum wage. Look at the increase that's happened to CCAs - free tuition for CCAs and the MOST program. I've got more people who are under 30 who are excited about this MOST program where they're going to be able to keep working here, not having to go out, and they're going to be able to apply for a tax rebate

on the Nova Scotia taxes. They didn't even know about it. Once they get out and it gets out there, I think you're going to see more youth wanting to live in Nova Scotia.

I could go on. However, I just want to point out again that my view is that I couldn't support this because it's not long-term thinking. We have to be looking at what we're going to be doing in a couple of years, not a couple of months.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: Well, Mx. Speaker, I guess we're going to go into an admission that I grew up on a dirt road, and it's still a dirt road. We all know the cost of asphalt continues to rise. The kilometre you could pave last year is a lot shorter this year.

This bill is about exploring options. We've heard it many times already today from this government that they want to look at options. This bill is going to offer that.

I believe everyone can agree that we are in a period of significant increases in the cost of living. Increasing fuel costs are a large part of that. The latest CPI data shows that gas prices inflated by over 60 per cent in the last year. Currently, gas and diesel are both at \$1.81 a litre. The impacts that families and businesses are actually experiencing - according to the CFIB data, 76 per cent of businesses indicated that high fuel and energy costs are negatively impacting their business, including small businesses, restaurants and, as you mentioned, Mx Speaker, farmers.

The high gas prices hurt Nova Scotia businesses and further fuel inflation, hurting all Nova Scotians, not just a small group. We understand that the current inflationary pressures are a worldwide problem, but that doesn't mean that our government is powerless to provide some relief to Nova Scotians in the areas over which we can exercise some control. This bill could possibly help. It's an option.

The Premier has stated on a number of occasions that his government understands the pressures caused to Nova Scotians by the rising cost of living and the continuation of fuel costs to this situation. He stated several times that they are looking at options and that all options are on the table, yet we have not seen much action to date.

This bill is a concrete step - not just asphalt - to be taken to improve the lives of all Nova Scotians during this unprecedented inflationary period.

I can recall when I was a stay-at-home mom going to pick up my groceries. I stood in the driveway in shock as I looked at a minimum amount of groceries in the trunk that cost \$250 and I just stood there. My eldest came out and said, "What are you doing?," after which he proceeded to pick up a couple of bags of light groceries. I said there's \$250 worth of groceries in that trunk. He looked at me - "Well, you are the one who wanted to have children" - which is funny but it's amazing how many times we can heed from our children.

[4:30 p.m.]

We want to grow the population. We want people to have children. People are making these tough decisions right now to possibly not have children because they can't afford to. That will always be an issue.

He spoke about the HST - \$250 million, the member opposite said. So we are realizing a huge full credit versus debit from the HST. So maybe that's an option. Again, I speak about the option.

This bill would help working people - working people, I emphasize - reliant on a vehicle. That can be a taxi driver. That can be anyone, especially in the rural areas, having come from one. All the gas stations that used to be on every corner are no more. They have to drive further to get gas, and they need to get gas to get to the amenities. Everything is related. It's a domino effect.

If you look at this bill as a means of helping that, maybe they could all afford to at least put some gas in the car so they could get some fuel. Hopefully, they won't be in the shock that I was back in the day, looking at \$250, which now equates to \$500 - \$250, as opposed to that same amount of groceries now would be \$500.

I heard earlier today - the Premier says we're always entertaining options and ideas. I'll hold him to that and ask him to please entertain this bill as an option.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: It's my privilege to rise in the House and speak to Bill No. 189. I've been pondering the comments the Opposition made yesterday regarding the characterization of my good friend, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, as the mastermind behind inflation here in Nova Scotia.

However, I think it's clear that most Nova Scotians can appreciate and understand that the situation we're experiencing here in our province when it comes to rising costs and inflation, including the rising price of gas, is being experienced right around the world. We have to look at the situation - the conflict between Ukraine and Russia - and how that's putting pressure on supply. Many European nations now are looking to alternatives for Russian petroleum, and that's impacting us here at home.

I wanted to put that out there. I know he's heard comments today from the Opposition saying, well, Conservative governments in this part of the country are doing this, and Conservative governments in this part of the country are doing this, and the Conservative government in Nova Scotia should be doing this. Well, again on the record, Mx. Speaker, it's a Progressive Conservative government in this province that we have.

It seems like yesterday we were in the Legislature debating our budget. Members may have forgotten a number that was repeated many times in this Chamber about a \$13 billion budget investing in Nova Scotians, investing in health care, investing in education, investing in our roads - doubling the RIM program, doubling our gravel road program - all things that matter to Nova Scotians. At least on this side of the House we have heard and continue to hear - and we appreciate from our constituents the feedback that we're receiving on this side of the aisle.

I want to point out a difference between the Progressive Conservative government here and the decisions that we've made when it comes to our budget and the initiatives that other provinces may be doing. I think it's very important to draw a line in the sand, that different provinces are facing different issues and have different resources.

As noted, in Alberta they're doing this and that. Well, Alberta, Mx. Speaker - and I'll table this - they report a \$16.2 billion revenue in non-renewable resources each year. In the CBC's story - and I'll table the headline: "Alberta reports \$3.9 billion surplus thanks to skyrocketing oil and gas prices." So perhaps they have a little more flexibility to go off and do those types of initiatives. I'll table that.

The member for Northside-Westmount noted that he's counting the days we've been in government. I'm happy to hear that. I certainly lost count of how many times he said "nothing" - that the government's doing nothing. I want to reassure the member, and all members of this House, that we're not doing nothing. We're not sitting on our hands. All that I hear from the Opposition - and I understand their role - is nothing but negativity.

Members can talk about government being out of touch with the issues that Nova Scotians are facing. However, after hearing some of the comments from the Opposition, perhaps they are out of touch with the complexity of the issues that our province is facing. Understanding that we don't have a magic wand, that it's not a one-solution issue, that things do take time, that where we are today, we did not end up here today, and we were not going to get out of that hole tomorrow, and it's going to take time.

Implying that the Premier is out of touch is frankly ridiculous. I completely dispute and refute the characterization of the Premier being out of touch when it comes to the situation that we're debating later on this evening. The Premier and our government are very aware of the rising costs that Nova Scotians are facing. The Premier is taking a voluntary pay cut - unprecedented. We heard that word earlier - unprecedented. It's the first time in the country. To imply that the Premier is out of touch - I completely refute and dispute those comments.

Going back to we're not doing anything at all: Well, I want to point out some of the initiatives. Perhaps the members will have the opportunity to go back to their constituencies and share the initiatives that we're doing. Open July 1st, property tax rebate for seniors, Mx. Speaker. Up to \$800 in a refund for half of the property taxes paid by eligible Nova

Scotians, a \$9 million investment that we're continuing. As of last week, over \$210,000 has been distributed.

Heating assistance - the heating assistance program rebate coming up later this Fall as part of our government's initiatives. Again, maybe members forgot we did a \$13 million investment prior to our budget to support vulnerable Nova Scotians at a time when they need it the most.

The \$150 top-up. We spent \$15.8 million last fiscal. Eligible Nova Scotians - 45,000 eligible Nova Scotians got up to \$200. As a government we invested \$800,000 in the home energy assistance top-up. We partnered with the Salvation Army to deliver that program to Nova Scotians who need it the most. One other initiative that I'm very proud that our government acknowledged last year is the Seniors Care Grant - stood up very quickly, got the money out the door quickly - \$500.

Government is continuously looking at how to best offer these programs, how to best meet the needs of Nova Scotians, and make it easier and faster for them to take part in these programs. The Property Tax Rebate program - we have a number of municipalities that we partner with. The seniors don't have to provide proof of payment. My department will collaborate with those municipalities.

To imply that government is doing nothing and sitting on their hands is frankly ridiculous. It's very difficult to follow in the footsteps of my honourable colleague, the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care, who very well articulated many initiatives that we have done.

The cost of living impacts many things. It impacts the price of fuel as we're debating right now. It also impacts (Interruption). If the members opposite would like to have their opportunity to debate, I'm more than welcome to take my (Interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The chatter is quite loud. If you want to have a conversation, you can leave the Chamber.

The honourable member for Argyle has the floor.

COLTON LEBLANC: As I was trying to say, my honourable colleague very well articulated what we have done to date. We are coming up on our one-year anniversary of forming government. Regardless of the party in power, the work of government will continue to be there.

What I can say is that I am very happy that I'm part of this caucus - a team that's dedicated, compassionate, collaborative, focused on solutions, that's sustainable, that has empathy, is ready to have a listening ear. (Interruption) I wouldn't go that far. I am very

proud to be part of this team because I know that if the former government were still in power, I don't know where we would be.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Well, well, well. I want to thank the honourable member for standing up and giving us a few numbers. I hear some people mocking me back there, but that's okay. I'm allowed to speak. The government has had their opportunity to speak and I hope they allow me to do the same. A couple of things - some numbers we want to talk about.

More people are using food banks in Nova Scotia than ever before under this government. I didn't hear them mention that. I don't think they are very proud of that, Mx. Speaker. More people are living in poverty in Nova Scotia than ever before. I didn't hear them mention that. They are probably not very proud of that. Rents are going up 100 to 200 per cent. Didn't hear them mention that. I saw some confused looks when I said rents are going up 100 to 200 per cent. If you don't know that, you are not talking to your constituents, because everybody in here knows that rent is skyrocketing.

I can give an example of a lady who came into my office who is a social services provider. She works for a local non-profit and her husband is an EMT. Her job is to find people affordable housing. Her rent went from \$1,200 to \$2,400. I think the member opposite who just spoke may be in charge of the Tenancy Board Act. I'm not sure, but I'm going to give him a little insight on what happens there - is they say, well, that's illegal, go to the Tenancy Board. Do you know what happens? You don't have the resources to fight the developer. You don't have the resources and the money to fight the landlord who has lawyers. I see members shaking their heads. If they don't believe that, they need to speak to people.

They are going up against people with resources, money, and power. They have to take time off work, if they can. They have to find babysitters if they can. Then you know what else ends up happening, Mx. Speaker? They get blackballed. So if they do it against one of these many developers that this government is giving hundreds of millions of dollars to, they tell them you can't live in our apartments anymore. They are put on a list. So those are numbers that I don't hear them speaking about.

We don't hear them speaking about the price of groceries going up 30, 40, 50 per cent. When is the last time they went and bought groceries? It's a lot easier to buy groceries on \$89,000 a year than it is on \$12,000 a year with a zero increase in income assistance. I would be willing to bet that the majority of people on that side of the room spend probably \$12,000 a year on groceries, eating out and food. I'd be willing to bet that. They are spending the same, if not more, than we are giving to people on income assistance to feed their families, to eat out and entertain guests, but they are not talking about those numbers.

[4:45 p.m.]

They keep saying \$5 million for this, \$13 million for this, \$12 million for that. That money has not trickled down and had a positive impact on Nova Scotians' lives, period. Period. One hundred and fifty dollars - what does that do?

If I told everybody in here that you have to make \$12,000 a year and get a \$150 little bit of pittance in your pocket, what would they say? Well, we know what the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board would say: Get a new job. Because that's what he said. He said there are a lot of jobs out there. The Leader for the NDP corrected him on that earlier yesterday and said, that is such an old, Conservative thought process. You could stand up, but we can go through Hansard.

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I just want to highlight for the record that I never said what the member said. He actually said this yesterday as well, so he's welcome to table what I said in Hansard, but to try to say that I said something else . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The member can rise on a point of privilege or a point of order. Was that rising on either of those?

ALLAN MACMASTER: I guess it would be a point of privilege because I don't think it's technically a point of order, but the member is trying to suggest that I said something that I didn't say. I think if Hansard is consulted, it will prove that to be the case. For him to try to suggest something now, to say that I said something that I didn't - for what purpose I think I know, but only he does - it's not fair to me as a member for somebody to try to say that I said something I didn't say.

THE SPEAKER: The point raised is not a point of privilege. It is a matter of discussion and dispute amongst members. I would invite members or the public to review Hansard to clarify what actually was said.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I appreciate the clarification on that. What was said was that there are a lot of jobs about there. In the previous session, there was a comment made about getting better jobs. We know that the Premier of Nova Scotia had to apologize for calling people who are working on the front lines and saying they're not real jobs - that they don't want to work those jobs.

Then we just had the member for Hants East proudly say that they're going to raise minimum wage to \$15 by 2024. But in that time, we know that this government had an

opportunity to pass a bill to protect Nova Scotia Power rates - to protect Nova Scotians from paying an exorbitant amount of money in an increase, but they didn't.

They stood there on their social media accounts and said we're going to protect Nova Scotians' power rates. There is nothing in the government's bill protecting power rates. There was absolutely nothing. It's like when you're a kid and you find a piece of fool's gold and you think you're rich. Look what I found - I found gold. Then you find out it's worthless.

They protected the solar energy, which was great. They denied having meetings with Emera and Nova Scotia Power. The Premier said he didn't remember those meetings. Then he said maybe I did have those meetings. Then he called a point of order on the former Minister of Energy, who knows those files like the back of his hand.

It's hard to get what the real truth is here, because there's so much confusion, but if you stop and you listen and you hear what they're actually saying, it's not a lot. I don't think all members think that. I think there are some hard-working members on all sides. I know that.

I'll be the first to say that sometimes when I hear things, I react. Maybe it wasn't what the member meant to say. I'll give a good example of that. The member for Glace Bay had made a comment about pay. He and I had a discussion afterwards and he clarified to me that that's not what he said. He said, you took it out of context. I apologized, and I apologized on the record. I think he's a hard-working individual.

I will not apologize for a Premier who looks down his nose at people who work on the front line. I will not apologize to a Minister of Community Services who refuses to give any sort of increase to people who need it the most, people living on income assistance. Listen, I don't know how any Minister of Community Services of any political stripe could sit there and think that \$12,000 a year is a great thing, that they're doing a great thing for those people, for Nova Scotians, because those people are starving. Those people can't afford hockey like every other Nova Scotian, those people can't afford to take their kids to the wave pool in Spryfield because it costs money. Those people can't afford to celebrate Christmas like you and I do, and that's why when we throw our annual Christmas event, it's packed. It's packed.

I know it's not an easy thing, but I'll tell you, I would have a hard time being part of a government that refused to increase income assistance, especially in a time of massive inflation which the members opposite think they don't have any control over - inflation and recessions. Again, I had another conversation with my nine-year-old son last night about it. He brought it up again, and I honestly think he knows more about it than some of the members opposite, and that's troubling - and possibly some of the members on this side, too.

The truth is that there are things they can do, and we just heard a member stand up and talk about short-term vision versus long-term vision. Well, the short-term vision is that people can't afford to put food on their plate. The short-term vision is that people can't afford gas in their vehicle. The short-term vision is that people can't afford homes. Know what the long-term vision is? Health impacts, disparity in opportunity, lack of access to education and affordable education. It's such a frustrating thing to have to stand here and explain to individuals - I'm not just saying this government, but just in general have to say, like, these things are interconnected.

When people can't eat, when people can't afford equal opportunity, when people can't afford the right to have a safe, affordable home - that's a thing we always forget about. We always talk about affordability, but it's also called a safe, affordable home. I've had individuals that had affordable homes that have had the door removed from their home by the landlord, by other tenants, they've been assaulted, they've been stolen from, and that's not even considering the people who are living in tents. People with mental health issues, people with children whom I actually went and spoke to, and we had conversations, and we talked to the people who were working on the ground with them, and there's nothing.

Shelters are full. When you're calling the shelters to ask if you can fit in new immigrants to this province, if they could stay in your shelters, if this government is doing that - which they have - there's a problem. You're welcoming people to this province with nowhere to live. You're welcoming people to this province with a pittance in their pockets, and that doesn't even include the people that have been living here, who have been struggling day to day.

This whole idea that the previous government didn't have a vision is an absolute crock. Like, come on, people. Do you think that the Liberals and the NDP were fly-by-night and had no idea what they were doing? There's a lot of great things that are going on in this province today, including the things that you are celebrating now, including the one million Nova Scotians. You didn't do it. You didn't do that in six months.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I would ask . . . (Interruption) Just let me speak. I would ask the member to speak through me to the members opposite.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: So, again, Mx. Speaker, we'll talk about the short- and long-term vision. This is a government that celebrated 350 nurses being hired. Congratulations, 50 per cent of the graduating class stayed in Nova Scotia. When we asked where the other 50 per cent was, they didn't answer. They didn't answer. It was less than the numbers from years previous. One year the whole entire class was hired. Another year, over 400 members were hired. They can shake their head and say no. Numbers are numbers; they don't lie.

They celebrated a million Nova Scotians, and they talked about us having no plan. That started under previous governments. There's a reason why Nova Scotia is the place to come to.

I take deep offence when they act like everything happened under them and is happening under them but everything bad is not happening under them. Virtual care has been a disaster under this government, at 22 per cent, but they act like it has been a success. Family wait-lists - disaster under this government, but they act like it has been a success. If you're a bureaucrat in this day and age, your job is in jeopardy by the Premier's friends. Any of you can be replaced at any time.

Mx. Speaker, thank you to all the bureaucrats who have worked hard and thank you for their short-term and long-term vision, because without them, we wouldn't be here.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mx. Speaker, it is a privilege to get up and say a few words about Bill No. 189.

The irony of events this afternoon is not lost on me. I can remember well when I first arrived in this Legislature eight years ago. We find ourselves, today taking health care advice from the Opposition, but in fact, eight years ago, there was going to be a doctor for every Nova Scotian. We saw that that never happened. In fact, we would say - I don't think there was ever a plan for that. There was no plan for that. It never happened. There was no plan for it. In fact, it went in the other direction.

We're here with a comprehensive health care plan which we're working hard on for the people of Nova Scotia, which we will continue to work hard on with an excellent Minister of Health and Wellness. I'm very proud of that.

But I'm thinking about the irony of that. I'm thinking about the irony of the fact that eight years ago, when we came in, there was the Maritime Link, which was going to solve all our problems. We're still waiting for electricity on the Maritime Link, and I think more electricity might have gone in the other direction than what came this way. It's a near thing. We're all still hoping that it will work out. It likely will, but that was no panacea either. At that time, eight years ago, we were waiting for the . . . (Interruption) Sorry about that. Eight years ago, we were waiting on the break the monopoly.

That was a fundamental promise of that election in 2013: They were going to break the monopoly of Nova Scotia Power. Was the monopoly of Nova Scotia Power ever broken? Not in any appreciable way. Not in any way at all. We're not even talking about it now. Where's your option? We saw supposedly the monopoly broken. Maybe the Opposition can tell us where we can buy electricity for less if the monopoly was broken. We see that.

[5:00 p.m.]

Here we are taking advice on the gas tax. I have to say we have not talked a lot about this in the Legislature, but if you want to know where the gas tax money was spent, go to Annapolis County. Pretty well every road was paved in Annapolis County. That is the truth. The member for Annapolis County can attest to that. The former Premier looked after himself very well in Annapolis County.

I challenge you to go down to the Valley. You'll have a rough ride down through Kings North, a little better right through Kings West, and then a really lovely smooth ride through Annapolis County.

We have a Premier voluntarily taking a pay cut. I can't say that the contrast isn't lost on me when we think about gas tax and roads and what happened. That Premier was well and truly happy to take that \$200,000 a year salary for his tenure.

Let me just say that every Premier works hard. I won't take a penny away from our Premier who's busting his butt for this province. I know that Stephen McNeil did too. I don't want to take that away from him, honestly. He worked hard. Our Premier is working hard - very hard - but he's not looking after himself. He's looking after everybody in this province.

Mx. Speaker, we are in the irony now that we're debating inflation and I know there are some people my age in this Legislature. I remember the first loan that I took . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time allocated for debate on Bill No. 189 has elapsed.

The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Opposition Day is so much fun.

Mx. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 186.

Bill No. 186 - Pandemic Impact Transparency Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I believe this bill is very important, particularly at this time, as we head into what many experts are saying is going to be the seventh wave of COVID-19.

I do want to run through the contents of this bill so that the House is clear on what we're asking. This bill would ensure that the Department of Health and Wellness would report at least weekly on the effects of the pandemic on backlogs in critical surgeries,

emergency room wait times, the scheduling of other health procedures, and staff availability. It will ensure that the Department of Health and Wellness will report at least weekly on the number of hospitalizations resulting from COVID-19, the number of deaths attributed to COVID-19, and any other statistics or information that the Chief Medical Officer of Health considers to be appropriate.

The reason this is very important is because I have heard this government say that Nova Scotians now do have the tools they need to protect themselves and our hospitals from the impacts of this virus. However, one tool that has been taken away from the public under this government is information, which I would argue is the most valuable tool at this point. Admittedly, public opinion has shifted substantially on the COVID-19 situation. We are exasperated with it, we are all over it, but the reality is that it just might not be done with us.

While we heard that the Minister of Health and Wellness said she didn't believe increased numbers in COVID-19 would have an impact on our hospitals and our emergency rooms, we are actually seeing the exact opposite happen, not only having impacts in our ICUs that are being overrun, our emergency rooms being closed, we're also exacerbating the staffing shortage situation that we have in our hospitals. We were up to 800 who were out with COVID-19, unable to provide critical life-saving procedures, contributing to this backlog in surgeries, early scans, things that people need to survive and deal with chronic and/or acute issues.

We've also seen more people perish as a result of this. I do believe that part of the reason why public opinion has changed so much on this is also related to policies that have been moved forward by this government - one, taking information away from people. People don't know what's going on right now. People have no clue what the hospitalization rates are. They went from being reported daily to monthly, at a time when we're dealing with the most transmissible strains that we've dealt with yet, strains that were supposed to be less consequential on our health but that have actually killed exponentially more people in the last 10 months than in the previous three waves combined over two years.

I know members of this Chamber who served in Opposition with the Premier remember his comments when Northwood happened. If you don't remember it, I suggest that everybody look it up - the most severe criticisms you could level against the government where the blood of those individuals was laid on our hands. That happened.

We are now in a situation where more people have perished, exponentially more, than in those previous two years and this government's approach to this issue is very laissez-faire. It's not taking into consideration, I believe, the advice from Public Health. Dr. Strang is out. I don't know if it's an indefinite vacation. We don't know if he'll come back yet. I do not believe that this government has followed the advice of Public Health. I think that was made very clear to the public when Dr. Strang said that if you want to talk

about government policy, you ask the elected officials - all we do is give advice. You do not say that if your advice is being taken seriously and acted upon.

We had the Minister of Health and Wellness say that they are listening to health care workers, all of whom are thanking them, but we had Dr. Robert Martel, an emergency room physician from Cape Breton, who was quoted in the media saying, “The failure to appreciate that health workers would be impacted by a higher infection rate is a prime example of what happens when you choose an action, but fail to understand the consequences of that action.” I tabled that earlier, Mx. Speaker.

This government is now playing a blame game on the previous government for the current state of our health care system. That’s fine. That’s part of the politics of here. But let’s look at the facts and what’s happened.

This government has actually made very specific decisions that have exacerbated an already challenging situation in our health care system. Not only did this government remove regular reporting on the epidemiology of COVID, on hospitalizations, and the speed of its transmission - during what would become the most deadly wave of COVID-19 - this government ran a “get back out there” marketing campaign telling everybody it was safe to get out there.

What happened? Our hospitals were overrun. Our surgeries were impacted. People have died who were waiting for surgeries as a result of this. I’m sorry, but there is a very big difference between how this situation was managed previously and how it is being managed now.

Talking about COVID is unpopular right now. The reality is it will continue to ravage our health care system. It will continue to exacerbate an already challenging situation. A lot of people may not know that unless this information is made public. We also are at a critical moment right now with this virus, I think, where our hospital system is at a breaking point.

This government also did fire a lot of really talented experts who were recruited aggressively by the previous government, including Dr. Brendan Carr, who did that work in B.C. He took a pay cut, I believe, to come out here and work in Nova Scotia. Fired. Replaced with a partisan lawyer, and I’m sure someone who is also a personal friend of the Premier. If we do not think that ignoring the advice of the health care experts in that system is impacting the management of that system, I think the government’s missing the point on this.

With this particular bill, we are advancing it because we do think the government’s right. People need the tools to act responsibly, to take their role seriously in terms of managing this pandemic, to help protect our hospital system - a hospital system that obviously provides lifesaving supports, surgeries, acute care response, ambulatory

response to individuals, that saves lives. This is a life-and-death situation, literally. The public deserves and has a right to know what this information is.

The government can keep playing the blame game all they want on the past government, but the facts speak for themselves. The situation, not just with COVID, has never been worse in our province. We went from being the safest place to live and be in the country to the most deadly, literally. But beyond that, the impacts on our health care system are consequential, and I believe they're going to be long-lasting.

Any time the Premier or the Minister of Health and Wellness want to get up and think that I'm not proud of the previous position I held in this government - by the way, I held that position at a time when there was one individual who was Minister of Health and Wellness. They've now split that position up into three people and we're still falling behind on almost every single account.

The situation still is getting demonstrably worse by every metric that you look at. I think that part of the problem is that this government is focused more on public opinion - which I believe is driving the pandemic response - and what people are saying about them, instead of actually looking at the numbers and the impacts and the outcomes on our health care system.

We heard that today in Question Period. We heard a really glowing quote from Janet Hazelton, a serious person who is a very strong leader for the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union in our province. I know she meant every word she said about the government. The minister herself said, well, you're not listening to health care workers - what they're telling us is, thank you.

Okay, great. I don't mind that people are hearing good things that some people are saying. But the facts matter more than that. They matter more than public opinion. They matter more than good headlines in the press. This is the reality on the ground. In eight years, we never went above 10 per cent of our population without a family doctor. We did protect our health care system from wave after wave of COVID-19 and took it upon ourselves to give the bad information to people on a daily basis, not a monthly basis.

The ambulatory system has never been this strained. We never had so many Code Criticals over the eight years of our government as we do now, and a key difference here is the impacts that this virus is having on our health care system. I believe that until this government takes that seriously, until they understand the link between Public Health and what infectious disease experts are telling us and health care delivery outcomes, this system will get worse under the watch of this government. It will deteriorate. More people will suffer from longer surgical wait times and more people will perish, unfortunately.

Key to improving this situation - yes, we want people to be able to live freely and enjoy themselves. But if we are going to say that they have all the tools they need to do

their very best during this situation and to protect our hospitals, information is the most important tool of all, and that's why I ask this House to support this very important bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mx. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Official Opposition for bringing this bill forward and for calling it. I think it's a really important bill and I'm really happy to speak to it. I constantly find myself in a state of surprise, Mx. Speaker, when I agree with my friends to the right, but I have to say that I am pretty much all on board with what I've just heard. I'll just add a few more comments to round out the time that we have.

As my colleague has just said, the government keeps repeating that we have all the tools we need - or that Nova Scotians need - to protect ourselves from COVID-19. Of course, since the government's been saying this, we have been saying that's not quite true. All the statistics and information that was being published and pushed out was extremely helpful to everyone, though scary at the beginning of the pandemic.

I believe it had a lot to do with how safe we stayed in those earlier months - or, I guess, earlier years - of the pandemic. Nova Scotians heard the information and reacted. When case counts went up, people began to wear their masks more. When case counts got really bad, people got tests all the time - there were lineups at rapid testing facilities. Nova Scotians know how to take care of each other, and with that information, we're able to do it easily.

That kind of information is essential, and I do think we need to have it back, especially as we enter into a seventh wave. We also don't have a number of other tools that would make it much easier to handle this pandemic. So, regular information, I've already said that, and data, really important tool.

Mx. Speaker, paid sick days are also another important tool, and we heard yesterday a fairly confusing answer from the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration as to whether we are looking at permanent paid sick days or not. I think the minister was saying that the department is looking at it, but regardless, how can people stay home when they're sick with COVID-19 and prevent the spread of the virus if they are losing money, especially in the economic situation we find ourselves in?

People are struggling to pay bills anyway, even if they're working a full 40-hour week. Many, many people are struggling to make ends meet, so if you have to miss work - and I know the government says we don't have to miss work now, which is another unbelievable movement in the situation that we're in. However, if you choose to stay home because you don't want to get other people sick with COVID-19, or if you simply feel bad enough with the virus that you can't actually work, then you are really out of luck in terms of being able to pay your bills properly - or many people are, I should say.

[5:15 p.m.]

We need paid sick days. We've always needed them, and we need them even more during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we will need them going into the future.

We also need secure housing and protection from homelessness. Housing and protection from homelessness are tools, and they allow us to stay home if we're sick. If we don't have a home to stay in, then we can't very well stay home. We know that staying home and isolating are very important ways and very effective ways of stopping the spread of COVID-19. We also know that people need income to purchase masks and cover their bills when they are home, as I just mentioned, so paid sick days again.

We need people to have access to affordable internet to know what the Public Health guidelines are or where or when or how to get vaccinated or to get access to rapid tests. All of that information - in the early days of the pandemic in Dartmouth North, we had teams of people working on getting people access to the internet so that they could get the vital and life-saving information about the virus that they needed. Now we have projects like the GEO project, which this government is supporting to make sure that people have access to affordable internet. Not everyone has access to affordable and effective or reliable internet yet, so that is another tool that we need.

People also need transportation to go and get a vaccination or to get wherever they need to go to get tested. People need a robust public health system that can respond to a health emergency at the same time as it continues to do everything else, from vaccinating babies to addressing population-level health and health equity issues.

All that being said, more information on the pandemic's impact on our health care system is not a bad thing. In fact, it's an essential thing and we certainly have lots of information about the impact of the pandemic, actually. However, the information that I'm about to talk about in fact didn't come from the government - it came from a series of freedom of information requests that the NDP made. I know that the Liberal Party is appreciative of our work on that, because one of my colleagues to my right here tabled a bunch of articles that came from those FOIPOP's this morning. It's important to have the information. That's why we did it.

In those series of FOIPOP's, we discovered that since this government was elected in particular, there are now 100,000 on the family practice wait-list, there are 27,000 people waiting for surgery, thousands of people are waiting for tests and imaging, climbing numbers of people are leaving emergency rooms without being seen, higher and higher numbers of people are waiting longer at emergency rooms and in more severe conditions.

We have lots of another kind of evidence that things are not going well in our health care system. People are telling us about them all the time, and I'm sure our caucus is not the only one that's getting inundated by emails and phone calls about terrible experiences

these days with health care. I was just texting my constituency coordinator about one this very day, about someone waiting to be transferred to a room at the QEII who is very sick and waiting to get into a bed. That's just one.

I'm going to read a few stories. I'm not going to give any specifics here, folks, but I'm going to tell you some things, and these are all from actual emails or actual messages that people have sent our caucus.

A parent who waited five hours at the IWK ER with her son and then left without being seen by a doctor. Another parent who spent from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. the next day with their sick child in the ER. People who have to wait two months to get an appointment with their family physician or their family practice provider. An 88-year-old person with a heart condition who just can't find a family practice nearby. A person who is due to have regular MRIs to monitor a brain tumour. Their last MRI was due in 2018 but hasn't been scheduled since. Four years for someone who is supposed to have a regular MRI to monitor a brain tumour. Regular eight-hour waits in the emergency departments. Somebody waiting over a year for hip surgery with no communication about when she might get the surgery.

Someone waiting - get this one - over two years for surgery for a dislocated jaw. Imagine living with a dislocated jaw for two years while you wait for surgery. Someone who was hit by a car in 2020 and waited 10 months before they could see a surgeon who told them they urgently needed knee surgery, but it would likely be a four-year wait. Someone with a brain injury who has waited 15 months to see a neurologist. Someone who needs blood work done right away but can't get an appointment for weeks. Someone who can't get their prescription refilled. A clerk in the health care system who is dismayed at the lack of care that is available to patients. Paramedics who can't get home to put their kids to bed. Someone who hasn't had a GP for over four years. And Mr. Speaker, there are thousands more stories like these.

My point is that we do need as much information as possible about the state of our health care system. The NDP has called for information and transparency for many, many years. (Interruption) Probably eight years, good point.

We also know about the state of our health care system and what needs to be done. So without further ado, I will say I support this bill. I support all measures of transparency. I think that we shouldn't have to get the information that we did by a FOIPOP. That should all be made available to us as well, and with information we have more tools to manage any health care crisis, but especially a pandemic where thousands of people have been sick in our province and many, many have died.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West with a little less than eight minutes left.

CHRIS PALMER: As I have been listening to the debate here over the last little bit, Mr. Speaker, I have been trying to figure out how I would put my words out here today. I have some prepared remarks, but I've also been taking a few notes. I just want to begin by agreeing with the member for Yarmouth, the former Minister of Health and Wellness and the Leader of the Official Opposition, who explained yesterday he has quite a recollection and a memory of when the health care system was in better shape.

I have a good memory as well. I probably have a few years on my friend, and my memory is a little longer probably, but what I would say is that the people of Nova Scotia have a good memory as well. One year ago, I think it was very clear that the people of Nova Scotia, in a referendum on the performance of previous health ministers, gave a resounding no to the work that they had done, and placed their faith in a new government to have better outcomes for health care.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt COVID-19 has been disruptive not only to our health care system, it has been disruptive to our economy and our society as a whole. The challenges of health care are not isolated to Nova Scotia. COVID-19 has had detrimental effects across this country, and we know about them, but I just want to explain something here and that is that this bill, an Act to Provide Transparency Respecting Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I don't believe is necessary. I believe in transparency and our government does, and through our time in government we've been transparent with Nova Scotians on a number of issues, including COVID-19.

By introducing Bill No. 186, the honourable member would have us believe that we have created a void of information around COVID-19, and as a result we have left Nova Scotians to fend for themselves as the virus continues to impact our province. Mr. Speaker, that is certainly not true. For more than two years, Nova Scotia Public Health has guided governments and the public through this pandemic. They provided us with the information and tools we need to protect ourselves, our families, and our communities.

As our province continues to move forward to strike a balance with living with COVID-19, Nova Scotians know the steps to take to protect themselves against the virus, as has been mentioned: handwashing, masking, testing, social distancing, and staying at home when they feel unwell. Mr. Speaker, we are not out of touch with COVID. We are in touch with Nova Scotians and how they're viewing COVID-19 in 2022.

The member opposite mentioned that we make decisions based on public opinion. I believe what that really is, is knowing the people you govern and knowing the priorities. I believe this government continues to do that and to reflect the will of Nova Scotians.

Nova Scotians have another tool at their disposal, data and information, the types of data the member opposite would like to see reported. Let me explain.

Bill No. 186 requests that government make available information on the impact COVID-19 has on our health care system on a weekly basis. We already do that. Information about the health care system is not updated weekly but daily on Action for Health public reporting daily dashboards, which can easily be found on the Action for Health website. This dashboard includes system information such as emergency room visits, patient admissions, discharges, surgeries completed, and in-patient occupancy levels. The information is presented province-wide and by facility.

In fact, we have taken it even further. The dashboard also includes weekly data about the continuing care sector and Emergency Health Services. We heard a great, impassioned explanation of that by my friend the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care yesterday and how we're progressing on those metrics.

Bill No. 186 also requests that on a weekly basis we report on COVID-19 hospitalizations, deaths, and any additional relevant data. Bill No. 186 is asking for something that has already been happening throughout the pandemic and continues to happen. The province issues a news release with this information each week, and the Nova Scotia COVID-19 Dashboard includes this and more information.

I'll highlight for you some of the data that can be found here: hospital admissions, deaths, positive PCR tests, all reported weekly. We have adapted as a government as the pandemic has rolled on. Data since the start of the Omicron wave have been reported, including total number of deaths, vaccination status of the deceased, hospital admission information. Allow me to go on, as there are also data on hospitalizations and the vaccine rollout.

The province also posts on a monthly basis a COVID-19 epidemiological summary. This includes very detailed information on PCR tests, hospitalizations, deaths, vaccination status, and breakdowns by age groups.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are not interested in sound bites and media clips. We're interested in action. It has been said many times before. I have complete confidence in our Minister of Health and Wellness that she is going to do a great job, and she is already doing that in this province.

My wife is a health care worker. She is an X-ray tech for 25 years at Soldiers Memorial Hospital. I can tell you, from the people I speak to, they feel more listened to now than they ever did in the previous eight years by any government before this.

I understand the member is concerned for the well-being of Nova Scotians, and so are we. I'm very fortunate to sit on the Health Committee to see so many of the great things that our Department of Health and Wellness is doing, and the Nova Scotia Health Authority in all the struggles during COVID-19. They are making great progress. A lot of that has been said already. There's no doubt about it: For many years, there wasn't a plan for

physician recruitment when many were retiring - nursing seats. This government is putting many of those things into action.

[5:30 p.m.]

In closing, I will leave the members of this House with the following. We have been nothing but transparent. In fact, we have been more transparent with information and data on COVID-19 than any other province, territory, or government in Canada. We don't need another piece of legislation to provide transparency around COVID-19.

As someone who believes very strongly in the work of this government, the people of this province, the people I represent in Kings West know that the solutions will not be that fast after eight years of mismanagement.

I just want to close and say we don't need another piece of legislation to do what we're already doing. We're doing a great job already.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time for Opposition Business has expired.

The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE. Mr. Speaker, that concludes Opposition Business for the today.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 185.

Bill No. 185 - House of Assembly Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 185 - An Act to Amend Chapter 1 (1992 Supplement) of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the House of Assembly Act - be now read for a second time.

I am pleased to speak in the Legislature on a matter of importance, principle, and responsible government. On July 15th, an independent review panel commissioned by the Speaker delivered a report with binding recommendations. This report called for significant pay raises for provincial politicians; MLAs would be entitled to a 12.6 per cent pay increase.

However, we, the members of the PC caucus, strongly believe that the current base rate for MLAs of \$89,234 should not be increased at this time. Therefore, we've introduced legislation that will prevent any MLA wage increases until after the next general election. Members with additional responsibilities, including the Speaker, Premier, ministers, and opposition party leaders already receive additional compensation for their additional duties. The amendments ensure that this compensation will also not be increased.

Additionally, the panel included a recommendation to decrease the Premier's additional compensation only in the event of a salary increase to the MLAs. This would thereby offset his increase.

Despite the independent review panel finding that the Premier's compensation is fair and reasonable and that it should not be adjusted, the Premier has chosen to voluntarily reduce his salary by more than \$11,000. Mr. Speaker, this is the first time in recorded history that I know of that a sitting premier has reduced his own compensation.

Our government will not be distracted from important work we're doing on behalf of Nova Scotians, improving access to health care, making child care more affordable, creating more affordable housing, and making sure that Nova Scotians have services and supports they need. This is not the time to increase compensation for elected officials. Nova Scotians are facing high inflation, as is the rest of the world, and the province has more important challenges it needs to address.

Mr. Speaker, everyone in this House was aware of the compensation rates before they ran for office, and now these terms should and will remain in effect until the next general election.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, it's great for me to speak to this important bill. I am going to start by saying, as the Leader of the Official Opposition has, that we support this legislation. We'll be voting in favour, so I want to get that on the record to begin with.

I think this is actually an important issue, and there are a few layers to this issue. First and foremost, I do want to thank Dr. Ajay Parasram, Burtley Francis, and Kyle MacIsaac, the three independent commissioners who put in about six weeks' work on this report and did a great job, did a really good job, a thorough job, of course put forth their

binding recommendations, but also several non-binding recommendations that I think are really useful and important that we're not discussing.

I did want to mention them in particular, because their work, despite the fact that the Premier said he respected it, was honoured for about 10 minutes, actually. A news release went out from your office, Mr. Speaker, at 9:00 a.m., and 10 minutes later, the Premier's Office put out a release calling the Legislature back, with prepackaged graphics, with all of the sound bites, all the clips, ready to go. I don't want those three individuals to feel that we don't value their work, because we do. I wanted to start by making that point.

Since this review report came out, and since the Legislature was called back roughly a week ago or so, it's been bothering me because this whole thing, this whole session, is theatre. It's a performance; that's what it is. We all know this. I think the members of the public know this, and this is how we know it is theatre, it is performance, it is public relations. Here's how we know this - because this entire process, and all members should know this - if they don't, it's laid out in the House of Assembly Act. It's in the law. We all know this isn't the first time we've done this.

In the Fall session, the Premier, if he'd wanted to do this, could have called this as part of the regular business of the House in the Fall. I believe that's what Premier McNeil had done in the past. In the Spring - we were here just a few months ago - the Premier could have called this piece of legislation forward, but for reasons unknown he waited until the end of July when we're all sitting here to talk about an issue that is, frankly, not an emergency, and we are talking about this issue as opposed to all of the really important emergencies that are going on.

In the report, which I took a look at, we're talking about an issue that represents about 75 cents per Nova Scotian; we're talking about an issue that represents 0.005 per cent of the provincial budget. That, according to the logic of the government, is an emergency, but 100,000 people without a family doctor, 9.3 per cent inflation, people living with nowhere to live, people not being able to pay rent, people not being able to pay groceries is not an emergency.

I think that fundamental distinction needs to be brought forward over and over again because when I ran a year ago - and I think when all of us ran, to be honest - we know that one of the things that voters don't appreciate are stunts and theatrics. That's not why we're here. We're all adults; we should be a bit more mature about these sorts of things, so it's disappointing that we have to be here to do this. As I said, there was no need to do this. This could have been done almost a year ago now. That is really disappointing and, frankly, silly.

I do want to speak to the recommendations as well of the report and of the committee members because I do think they're important. We all agree that an MLA pay raise right now is not appropriate. We're dealing with an intense cost of living crisis, but I

also think, as the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, it's really important to depoliticize these issues as much as possible. There are obvious conflicts of interest inherent in this process, and I think we as a collective, as 55 members of this House, should remove ourselves from this as much as possible, not for ourselves so much, but also for people who are looking to run in the future.

We've all gone through the process of maybe we were recruited by a party, maybe we put our name forward voluntarily, whatever the case may be, but to run for office is a really significant thing. It's a hard thing to do. I think there's a lot of skepticism, a lot of fear from all kinds of people when you first think about, well, should I run? Well, what happens if I lose? Will I be able to see my kids as often? Will I be able to be home two nights a week? All of these things are huge barriers for folks who are trying to run, and historically speaking, as we all know, in order to be a legislator and a politician, you had to be wealthy. In many cases, actually, you had to own property, originally, in Nova Scotia, and in many other parts of the world.

I worry that if we keep politicizing this process over and over again, we will get to a situation where the only people who are willing or able to run for office are those who have means - and I think we can all agree that that is not what we want. We want people from all walks of life, all races, all gender identities, all religions, all levels of income, all professional experiences - we want folks from across the spectrum of Nova Scotia to run for office. We are seeing more diversity in the Chamber at all times, which is wonderful. We have the most diverse caucus we've ever had here in the Liberal Party, but as we all know, there is a lot more work to be done.

The commissioners - and I pulled this up because I wanted to make sure I had this right - had some very useful things to say in their non-binding recommendations on this issue. I'll quote them here at some length. They say:

“At first glance, the issue of diversity may not appear to be connected to MLAs’ remuneration. Yet it is, in fact, key to the larger question of how we in Nova Scotia can attract MLAs who represent the demographic makeup of this province. When we considered the issue of diversity within the current cohort of MLAs, we found that the issue is twofold. The first part relates broadly to the challenge of attracting people from under-represented groups. Nova Scotia’s Legislature should reflect the ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, ability, sexual orientation, education, and religion of the various communities within the province.”

I think we can all agree with that. The second part relates specifically to the challenges that persist in attracting women and gender-diverse individuals to run as MLAs, especially those who are raising young children.

I think we have many members in this House, including myself, who have very young children. This week has been a scramble for all of us, I think, to figure out child care. Where's my five-year-old son going to go? What's going to happen? I'm lucky, my parents live around the corner. My daughter is at a daycare. My son was there for many years. I'm lucky in that sense, but not everybody has that luxury.

Again, if we put up these kinds of barriers to participation in this institution, we are restricting the potential pool of candidates beyond what it should be. That, again, is what I worry about. That is what we should all be worried about.

The non-binding recommendations in this report are really useful. I would recommend to all members who haven't already, please go ahead and read the non-binding recommendations - in particular around the establishment of a child care fund, around the issues related to women, gender-diverse Nova Scotians, and again, those who have young children. The more people we have in this Chamber with lived experience, the better we will all be.

Again, I am frustrated and disappointed in the theatrical nature of this session. I try my best, and I think members on the government side would agree, to be fair and reasonable as an opposition member. I struggle with the fact that we're here and I struggle with the fact that we had a 10-minute interval where this report existed, and then we had slick graphics and slick social media posts. The member for Kings West said that this is a government that's not interested in sound bites and media clips. Five minutes ago that was said, and yet we have social media graphics in the queue, ready to go, 10 minutes after this report is released. How is that possible?

There are some clues here, some bread crumbs being laid out. I think it's discouraging to voters - to people who are interested in the political process - to see this level of theatrics. I'm disappointed in that.

I very much hope, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, that next time this process will remain outside of this Chamber, because it does not belong in here, no matter who is on the government side, who is on the opposition side, who is on the third party side. I think we can do better as an institution - not for ourselves who are in this Chamber right now, but for those who are going to strive to be here in the years and decades to come.

The last point I want to make here - and this is maybe the journalist in me coming through, the fact-checker - but last night I saw a post here from the Nova Scotia PC Party on Facebook. I have it here with me: "As Nova Scotians are facing cost pressures, Premier Tim Houston has sent a message by cutting his own salary by \$11,000 while introducing legislation to freeze MLA salaries." This is the part that made me think, well, that doesn't seem possible. "This is the first time a sitting Premier anywhere in Canada has cut their salary." I thought, that can't be possible.

[5:45 p.m.]

We heard the member for Argyle earlier today talk about how this was an unprecedented move for the Premier to do this. The Minister of Justice, 10 minutes ago in his opening remarks, talked about how this is an unprecedented move for the Premier to do this. It's just not.

This is how we know: January 29, 2015, CBC Edmonton: "Premier Jim Prentice and cabinet take 5% wage cut." I'll table that. Premier of Manitoba Brian Pallister, April 21, 2020: "Brian Pallister says he is forgoing 25% of his base salary." *National Post*, Premier Jason Kenney "'Simply keeping a promise': Premier Jason Kenney takes 10 per cent pay cut" - August 7, 2019. New Brunswick, February 9, 2015: "Premier Brian Gallant today announced that he and members of the cabinet will take a pay cut, effective April 1."

This might seem silly for me to bring up this point, perhaps, but this kind of petty, petty, petty misinformation and outright falsehood - it is. There are several members of the government side who have shared this post over the course of the day, congratulating themselves and their Premier for taking this unprecedented step, and they're deliberately sharing misinformation, as I have just pointed out.

So I would respectfully ask those members, and the party, to adjust those posts. Take them down. Correct the record. Just put the facts out there. That's all I ask for. Again, it might seem small, but every time something silly like this happens, trust in government, trust in politicians, is eroded bit by bit by bit. It is a fragile thing, as I've said in the past. Democracy is a fragile thing. People's trust in institutions is at an all-time low in Nova Scotia, in Canada, in much of the western world. It is a very serious problem.

The issue is not whether or not what the Premier has done is unprecedented, because I've just shown you that it is not. The issue is that we are spreading misinformation to people. Whether we do it deliberately or not, the record needs to be corrected because once something is out there, it is out there, and people take it as fact. I think all 55 of us, regardless of our partisan stripe, ideology, differences on policy - which are legitimate. That is the point of democracy. But we should, I think, have an obligation, to ourselves and to the people who elected us, to the truth. That frustrates me deeply.

This entire session frustrates me deeply. The way we go about these issues, from a public relations point of view - and I've worked in PR in the past. I can see the fingerprints of PR professionals all over these things. It is slick and it is packaged, and it is manufactured. It is not authentic, and I wish we weren't here. I'm frankly a bit embarrassed that we're all here. I think we can all do better.

Again, those are my comments. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Just when I thought I was going to have to say “Ugh, I agree with them all again,” I do have a couple of differences of opinion on this one than my colleague. But I have to say that all of his points are salient and important.

Where I disagree, or where I have a different opinion, is that I’m glad we’re here. I am glad we are in this Chamber - only because it gives us an opportunity to talk about a lot of other pretty important things that are happening, as we witnessed today. We’ve had some good debates, great debates. We had an excellent Question Period where we asked some really good questions and got some so-so responses.

This is the work that we are here to do, and I am, frankly, flummoxed as to why we’ve been called back to this Legislature, because it is giving us an opportunity, frankly, to take this government to the cleaners on a number of issues where they are falling down.

So I am also, Mr. Speaker, pleased to rise to speak to Bill No. 185. Certainly, I will get this on the record right off the bat. Our caucus also agrees that now is not the time for a raise for MLAs, while Nova Scotians are struggling with a once-in-a-generation cost of living crisis. I’ve got that on the record. Now I’m going to move on.

This piece of legislation came from this important work of the remuneration panel. Like my colleague from Bedford South, I also want to thank the panel for the important work they did and the time they put into this report.

I was our caucus’s representative to that panel to give some of our thoughts about remuneration and about the whole situation. I was very pleased to do that, and we had a great discussion. Most of my presentation was about the work that we need to do to increase equity in representation in this House. We were really pleased to see a lot of the things that we talked about in the discussion with the panel actually reflected in the report - some really good stuff, like the child care issue for instance.

A lot of really good work went into the panel. MLA remuneration aside, I am very concerned that that good work and those great suggestions will somehow be forgotten - jettisoned maybe, so we could gently forget them, but forcibly jettison some of those recommendations. Ultimately, as my colleague has pointed out, this is going to keep our Legislature whiter, older, maler and wealthier. What I mean is the representatives in our Legislature. That’s a fact. So older, whiter, maler, wealthier, Mr. Speaker - much like the Legislature has been since it was established.

I will remind our colleagues, and I remind the House, that there have been more men named John elected to this House than there have been women in the entire history of this Nova Scotia Legislature.

I have just come from a conference in P.E.I., the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference. I will say to my female colleagues in the room that we are

going to try to get some stuff going based on what we learned and what we talked about at that conference. One of the main reasons for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians organization is to encourage women to run. It is really tricky, as we know. I've just said that when I was elected it was a record number of women. It was 17 women out of 51 who were elected that year.

We need to be making active and meaningful changes to the way we do things in this Legislature to make sure that women and gender-diverse and people who aren't predominantly male, predominantly white, predominantly old, and predominantly wealthy people think that they have a place in this House. We need to be active about it and intentional about it.

The other thing I want to talk about is the idea that this topic is an emergency. Like I said, I am happy to be here. I want to be here. I want to be talking about important things that matter to Nova Scotians. However, I, like my colleague from Dartmouth South, don't believe that this particular matter is a matter that would call us in for an emergency. It's not an emergency.

We know that the Premier had the ability to deal with the issue before it got to this point of us coming in. We know that would have been in the style of the former Premier from the Liberal Party, who avoided successive reviews by preventing a panel from being formed in the first place - also not a great move because, like I said, the work of the panel has been really important, and I hope we can salvage some of it. It would have avoided the costs of the review. It would have avoided those intelligent panelists from feeling that their work has been all for naught.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that I hope they don't feel that way, because we do plan on bringing an amendment to this piece of legislation that reflects one of the recommendations in the panel in the Committee of the Whole House.

Indeed, the Premier says he respects the work of expert panels. For instance, he has often referenced the Minimum Wage Review Panel. But it doesn't seem like he respects the work of this panel. In any case, even if he did, we still didn't need to come in for an emergency session. We could have dealt with this in the Fall sitting and not brought everyone back to the House for the Summer. But, like I said, I'm just going to remind everyone, I am really happy to be here because I think it's great to be here in front of the people of Nova Scotia talking about issues that really matter to them.

The Premier and I disagree on what we consider an emergency and so I would like to take a couple of minutes to talk about what I consider emergencies in this province. In fact, we've even had emergency debates, and we are going to have an emergency debate about some of this stuff.

In the past year, food costs in Nova Scotia have gone up by 9 per cent. Shelter costs have gone up by 9 per cent. Transportation has gone up by 21 per cent. Energy costs - wait for it - have gone up by 46 per cent. People have no idea how they are going to fill their fuel tanks.

I also want to say, before I go on with this list - this depressing list - is that yes, sure, inflation is a global problem. We've heard from the government many times that inflation is a global problem. Well, that might be true, but it doesn't change the fact that people in our province are experiencing inflation and are having a really hard time making ends meet. Just because it's global - COVID-19 is also global, but we've taken - well, we had taken some steps to keep people safe from that.

People have no idea how they are going to fill their oil tanks this Fall. Hundreds of people are homeless across the province. People are being re-evicted at a rapid rate in my constituency. I hear about this all the time.

The health care system is short thousands of nurses. Even though we are offering jobs to all graduates, that is not going to be enough to fill the gaps plus stem the tide of retirements.

Farmers can't afford to fill their equipment with diesel.

The Superstore has had to hire police as a response to people having to resort to stealing food. It feels like it is right out of *Les Misérables*, Mr. Speaker. It is unbelievable.

Nova Scotia remains the most food-insecure province in the country. Almost twice as many people visited a food bank for the first time in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the same period from last year. That is from Nick Jennery, who is the executive director of Feed Nova Scotia.

Temperatures are also rising at an alarming rate. Towns are literally burning down. Forests are burning down. People are getting sick from the heat, and we have no idea what hurricane season is going to bring this year.

I could go on and on but I will say this: When the talking point is about this bill and about the Premier taking a pay cut, is that the Premier is standing in solidarity with the people of Nova Scotia, then I ask him to take a look at this list of things that I have just read out and ask him to actually stand in solidarity with the people of Nova Scotia. Make some real changes. Change policies to make sure that we are all going to be able to weather this inflation storm together.

So even though we are here for the Premier's emergency, the government has not put forward a single piece of legislation that would address the real urgencies and emergencies that people are facing every day.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I am going to ask the member for Dartmouth North to come back on the topic of the bill. We are straying big-time here.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: We are talking about pay raises, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about pay raises in a time when - in an unprecedented time of inflation - people cannot afford to make ends meet, and therefore this is not the time for a pay raise for MLAs. But how does that help regular Nova Scotians? Emergencies require real action from leaders. This is an action, but it actually doesn't solve the issue for why it is considered an emergency.

I am wondering: Will the Premier take those savings that the government makes and put them towards a direct assistance program, like what has been created in other provinces? Will the Premier table legislation that puts more money in people's pockets, which builds more public housing, or raises the minimum wage? Will he pass some of the bills that have been tabled in this session by the opposition parties?

I will leave it there, Mr. Speaker. I have much more to say in third reading but I thank you for the time.

THE SPEAKER: Before we move on, I'm going to request a 10-minute break because the Pages are having their photo taken and I have to be with them.

With the consent of everybody, we'll take a 10-minute break. Back at 6:10 p.m.

[6:00 p.m. The House recessed.]

[6:13 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We're going to get back into the discussion on second reading of Bill No. 185.

The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion.

JOHN WHITE: I'm honoured to speak today on Bill No. 185, but before I begin with my notes, which I have to get my thoughts straight, I have to say, Mr. Speaker, I stand here today because I didn't like what I saw when I looked at politicians. I didn't like what I saw as speaking one thing and the actions of another.

Again, today, here we are. We're talking today about barriers to attending the House. We put two motions forward yesterday that were defeated that would have allowed exactly that. I don't know where we're at, but I have to say, it is disheartening. It truly is

disheartening. (Interruption) We asked for unanimous consent and we didn't get it, so thank you.

[6:15 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, I will say that I'm extremely proud to be a member of this government, which has chosen to do the right thing rather than the easy thing when it comes to the MLAs' pay increase.

A little more than a week ago, the MLA remuneration review panel released their report. I know all members expressed here today that we're all thankful for the professionals who have done that work. The report was thorough and thoughtful.

The fact is, it's simply not the right time for MLAs to be getting a 12.5 per cent pay increase. The reasons have been well-discussed yesterday and again today but I want to repeat it one more time: When hard-working Nova Scotians are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, they should not be expected to pay double-digit wage increases to elected representatives. I'll add my concern here: that we all knew what we were getting into when we put our name on the ballot. We all knew what we were expecting to get here, so why we're here today and stretching this out is beyond me.

I will agree that the conversation has been absolutely great - lots of ideas. I agree with every bit of it, absolutely, but today this could have been dealt with very easily, so here we are. By the way, I'm a firefighter so turn the heat up, it doesn't bother me at all. Crank it up, it's a little bit chilly here. If you want to feel the heat, come into the office with me.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to clear up a couple of things. I know there are members in this House who have publicly implied that the report called for a cut for the Premier. That's just not true. That's not what the report said. Those who said it either don't know that it's false or worse, they know and don't care.

We talked about the reputation of elected politicians. I guess the public will decide which way they want to go about this. The panel recommended that the Premier's salary remain the same, that's what it said, remain the same. Our Premier Houston could have accepted the recommendation but I suspect that many people would have done that . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I am going to ask the honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion not to refer to the Premier in his proper name.

JOHN WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's probably the first of many that you're going to cut me off today, I apologize.

He could have accepted the recommendation and I expect that many would have but he didn't. Instead, here we are here today. The Premier voluntarily took a significant pay decrease because it's the right thing to do. I would note that this extraordinary action by our Premier is the first time in living memory that it has been done in Nova Scotia. In my opinion this is an action that speaks of integrity and leadership. Some people might say that he put the money where his mouth is.

In contrast, the Leader of the Official Opposition spent the week saying that the Premier should take a pay cut. Mr. Speaker, in the view of the Leader of the Official Opposition, what is good for the goose is not good for the gander. He spent a week promoting a pay cut for the Premier but when asked by reporters if he was willing to take a pay cut, or even give a portion of his salary back to charity, the Leader of the Official Opposition offered that he gives his money to the Liberal Party - I could table that. Instead of putting his money where his mouth is, the Leader of the Official Opposition puts his money in the Liberal Party. I guess that's his right.

This spin-doctoring appears to be typical of the Liberal caucus. Twice now, government has been challenged to visit a particular homeless shelter. Well, I haven't been to that homeless shelter. I'm no stranger to the one in my area. On a regular basis I deliver soap, shampoo, T-shirts and hoodies, and I take great pride in that.

I'm embarrassed that I have to stand here and say it to defend my character, because my personality and my character, my reputation matters to me. I'm not going to be a good politician if this is what politics is, because my word means something, it actually means something. I will agree that the negativity spun in this House is negatively impacting elected officials. It has been mentioned by both parties in the opposition.

Allow me to speak about actions. The actions of the government are being recognized. The Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care detailed that very clearly yesterday. The Minister of Health and Wellness detailed again today actions that matter, actions that matter to Nova Scotians and I don't know who you folks are talking to but Nova Scotians I'm talking to are recognizing it, they're seeing it. They see a government that is doing something.

I'll even add this: maybe, just maybe, the Need a Family Practice Registry list is growing because people realize there's a reason to be on it now. You're actually getting a call. You're actually getting virtual care. Yes, that's what. Maybe people are actually getting a response now instead of being ignored.

The actions of Premier Houston speak volumes - sorry, Mr. Speaker. The actions of the Premier speak volumes to the character of this side of the floor. Again, I'm extremely proud to be standing here because I don't think I would last very long with what I'm seeing otherwise in the other parties.

I have to say, since we're talking about challenges, and I'm bringing this up. When you can match my community involvement, I'll consider my actions. I will change my actions. I'm embarrassed to stand here and say this, but I want to defend myself because when I'm challenged, I'm going to respond. I'm a 42-year veteran working with youth in my community. I have eight years or so working with the food bank board of directors. I don't just visit a shelter; I actually work there. My hands get dirty . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm going to ask the member for Glace Bay-Dominion to come back to the topic of the bill that's present before us.

The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 185 speaks about refusing a pay increase for elected officials. I haven't done very much in my life for money. I have taken a cut in money home to be here today. I knew that. We all knew that. We all knew that when we took this position. I don't see how money makes you involved in your community. Yes, I am a 22-year volunteer firefighter. I didn't get paid for that. By the way, I also have a charity that's fed thousands of families. When you can match that resumé, I'll reconsider mine. (Interruption)

It is very good. You're welcome to attend sometime too.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The member for Glace Bay-Dominion is straying again. Please talk about Bill No. 185.

The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion.

JOHN WHITE: I warned you, Mr. Speaker, you're going to shut me up a few times, so I apologize.

I will return to my original point, though. This is not the time for a 12.6 per cent hike for MLA salaries. That's why this government acted quickly, to let taxpayers know that it wouldn't be happening. That's why we're here today, and that's why I'm so pleased to be a member of this government.

This could have been dealt with quickly. Again, I do not want anybody spinning my words. I agree with the points the Opposition have been bringing up the last two days. But today we were called to this House to deal with this motion. That's what we're here for, and it is just as much of an emergency, and it could have been dealt with quickly. Turn the heat up. Let's get her going.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: Listen, I love the member for Glace Bay-Dominion. He's a good Cape Bretoner, but what we just witnessed here in this House is ridiculous. Everybody in this Legislature is here for the right reasons. Everybody in this Legislature has a resumé as long as their arm of their volunteer experience, of the work they have done in their community, of what they want to accomplish as an MLA. None of us want to vote for this raise. However, the opportunity that - we talk about - the member for Glace Bay-Dominion saying this could have been dealt with earlier.

This could have been dealt with on September 1, 2021. This committee that put this together didn't even have to be struck, Mr. Speaker. For us to sit here and listen to the ramblings of a person speaking about their own volunteerism has nothing to do with a pay raise. With regard to the comments about the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Leader of the Official Opposition makes the exact same salary as every cabinet minister in the government, and the Speaker. No offence to you, Mr. Speaker, another good Cape Bretoner.

The fact that the member would suggest that the Leader of the Official Opposition take a pay cut without also asking the members of Cabinet to do the same thing is ridiculous. When we look at the Premier of this province being the third highest-paid premier in Canada, MLAs in this province being the tenth-lowest paid in this country - the Leader of the Opposition makes identical to a Cabinet minister.

The fact that we're trying to deflect the altruism of our Premier - who I don't think an \$11,000 pay cut is going to affect his standard of living at now still around \$200,000 - well under the 1 per cent in this community.

I stand here to defend my Leader of the Official Opposition, to defend the Leader of the third party and to actually defend every MLA in this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: I would like to direct just a few quite short comments to this piece of legislation. The main thing I want to say about it is that whoever invented the word "posturing" must have had something very close to Bill No. 185 in mind. In fact, I would like to introduce and table some dictionary definitions of the word "posturing": *The Oxford English Dictionary* - "Posturing: acting in an artificial or affected manner; posing for effect; adopting a certain attitude so as to impress." *Chambers English Dictionary* - "Posturing: to pose for effect." *Webster's* - "Posturing: assuming an artificial or pretended attitude, as in" - and these are Webster's words, Mr. Speaker, not mine - "posturing as the friend of the oppressed."

I don't even think we need a dictionary to provide us an illustration of what it means to posture. About as vivid and precise an example of posturing as you could ask for is being provided in the government's response to the report of the Remuneration Review Panel.

So the panel reports its findings on the morning of July 19th, whereupon the House is convened to overturn the panel's recommendations and the convening is accompanied by these very carefully chosen Premier's Office's words, which I will table: "When inflation is at a 40-year high, gas prices are at historic levels and many hard-working Nova Scotians are struggling to make ends meet, it is not the time to increase the pay of MLAs," said the Premier in a news release, which then continued, "As soon as I learned about the proposed raise, I took immediate action to stop it".

[6:30 p.m.]

We are reminded here of the familiar nesting behaviour of the partridge. Many who are at all familiar with the woods will be aware that the partridge, when you startle it and interrupt it and come upon it by surprise in the woods, in its roost, it immediately moves away from the roost and unfurls its wings, as big as it can, and flaps them as hard as it can, while it kicks the dirt and makes as many sounds as it can while it is kicking the dirt and flapping its wings, and the partridge does this . . . (Laughter and applause.)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. That was quite the demonstration, but I don't think it really applies to the bill.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: In this way, Mr. Speaker, I think you might think that it is reasonable to think it applies to say that the partridge does all of this performance in order to accomplish two objects in Mother Nature: one, to make itself appear other than what it is, and, two, in order to divert attention from the thing that the partridge wants attention diverted from.

So here, Mr. Speaker, is the government's partridge-ish diversion. Six weeks ago, on June 2nd, in the midst of what the Premier precisely describes as 40-year-high inflation, in which hard-working Nova Scotians are struggling to make ends meet, the Premier and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board announced - I will table the coverage of the announcement - they announced that contrary to what they had indicated a couple of weeks before, Nova Scotia would not be joining the many provinces that are taking actual concrete measures to provide people directly with relief in consideration of the sudden dramatic escalation of the cost of living, with the result that Nova Scotia became the only province in Eastern Canada where some form of direct income supplement is not being offered in the current income crisis by the government of the province.

There would be no gas tax relief as in B.C., no accelerated increases in the minimum wage as in Newfoundland and Labrador, no tying income assistance to inflation as in New Brunswick, no direct transfers as in Quebec or in P.E.I., and as we in the NDP have called for here in Nova Scotia, no - in fact no nothing, except for the comforting words of the

Minister of Finance and Treasury Board - which I have already tabled - that we're going to continue to monitor the situation.

THE CHAIR: Order, please. Once again, Mr. MLA, I have to interject because we're straying from the intent of Bill No. 185.

GARY BURRILL: I will say only, Mr. Speaker, as briefly as I can, that what is continuing to be monitored, and this is the matter that Premier Partridge is wishing to create the diversion from . . .

THE CHAIR: Order, please. I'm going to ask the member to withdraw that statement. The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto, can you withdraw while your microphone is on?

GARY BURRILL: I do withdraw that statement.

Returning then to the idea about continuing to monitor - what's being monitored? What's being monitored is a situation which the member for Dartmouth North spoke to eloquently a few moments ago, a situation in Nova Scotia today in which we have more food banks than we have Tim Hortons. We're monitoring a situation where we have more food banks than we have McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger Kings times two, all put together. That's the situation that's being monitored, a situation where, as the member said earlier, our food insecurity is the worst of any province in Canada, which we've seen reflected in these recent sad days where for the first time in Nova Scotia we see uniformed police officers standing in our grocery stores.

How convenient in this situation, that within a few short weeks of the government having made exactly all of this their chosen path and their chosen position, how convenient that the remuneration review panel should be bringing forward its report, providing the Premier with an opportunity to flap, flap, flap, kick, kick, kick, hiss, squawk, squawk, and hiss about what I did immediately as soon as I learned about the proposed raises - flap, squawk, hiss.

If there were an Olympics for posturing, the Premier should take the podium with this bill in his hand and be presented with the golden partridge.

THE SPEAKER: Before we move on, I might have missed it, but I'm not sure if the member for Glace Bay-Dominion - he had a quote from the Leader of the Official Opposition. I would ask that that be tabled, please.

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

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: I rise to close debate on Bill No. 185.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 185.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: That concludes government business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Thursday, July 28th, between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m. Law Amendments Committee will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. tomorrow. Government business will be Committee of the Whole House on Bills on Bill No. 185, if unanimous consent is received.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn business for the day.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We will now move into the emergency debate, and the topic that has been brought forward by the New Democratic Party.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 43

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'm pleased to rise and say a few words about the pressing issue of the state of our emergency departments. We just heard from the government that we should be here only discussing the matter of MLA pay raises. With respect, and as far as I can tell, contrary to the wishes of the government, the passage of this emergency debate shows that that is categorically false and that in fact the state of our emergency departments fit the definition of a matter of pressing public concern that needs to be debated by the House at the first available opportunity. We have been debating it the last few days, but we will continue to, and we should continue to.

Earlier my colleague for Northside-Westmount said we're all here for the right reasons. I agree with that statement, and I believe it. I think people put their names forward

for public service because they want to serve, and they want to make a difference. I guarantee you, Madam Speaker, that every one of us in our office has more heartbreaking stories about what's happening in our health care system than we could possibly tell in this Chamber. It's a systemic problem. There's no question. I think we can say it's a systemic problem without immediately moving to cast blame.

Unlike any other election campaign that I have seen in my political life, this government ran a campaign on a single issue, one issue - that was to fix health care. They were clear, they were decisive, and they were repetitive, and they won a majority government. They were given a mandate to fix health care. Here we are a year later, and health care is worse.

As we have talked about, it's worse by every measure. More than 25,000 people added to the wait-list for a family doctor - not because they think now being added to the wait-list is useful because maybe they'll get one. That is one of the strangest arguments I have heard put forward in this Chamber. Why are they on the family wait-list registry? Because they need a doctor. They need access to primary care, and they don't have it. We know that there's a multiple of that number. For 100,000 people on the list, there's that many more, probably twice as many, who aren't on the list but don't have access to primary care. We know that the number of people leaving the emergency department without being seen is up 60 per cent.

The member for Halifax Atlantic, I think, mentioned earlier today that someone with a broken wrist was sent home and told to come back. My nine-year-old broke his wrist last Summer. We were just talking about it because he's going back to the camp where he broke his wrist last Summer. It shows you the kind of parent I am, I guess. (Laughter) We'll hope for better outcomes this year. I was talking to him, and he said, oh God, Mom, this year I promise I'm not going to break my wrist. I said okay, Sam, I believe you. I don't think you're going to break your wrist.

We were talking about it, and I was trying to remember what happened when he broke his wrist. I said, Sam, do you remember? Anyway, my mind is kind of like a sieve these days. I said, what happened? Do you remember? He said, yes, Mom, remember, you picked me up and you picked up the girls and you dropped them off and the babysitter came, and we went to the emergency room. I said, yes, we waited a long time, right? He said, we waited for a while, and then they put my cast on and we left.

From that perspective, it was kind of unremarkable. I don't really remember, which is kind of how it should be. If my child breaks his wrist, I need to know that I can take him to the emergency room and get the wrist set. I need to know that I can do that anywhere in this province. If the IWK has the waits that we've seen, what of the other emergency departments - if they're open?

Madam Speaker, this is an emergency. We know that people - our emergency care system is still functioning. Frontline workers are still working. If Sam breaks his wrist again this year, which I really hope he doesn't, we'll go back to the IWK and we'll wait as long as we can, and I have a good amount of faith that eventually his wrist will be set. But I shouldn't have to hope that that happens. I should be able to know that that happens.

As we spoke about in the Chamber the other day, Evelyn Hornbeck doesn't have a family doctor and can't get the medicine she needs, can't get to a walk-in clinic. Vickie Gray, waiting for carpal tunnel surgery, can't use a doorknob, can't lift anything, can't zip a zipper - and she's looking at a wait of two to three years.

Are things happening in the health care system? Sure. But that doesn't mean that we can ignore the fact that things are bad. I would like to hear from the government what is being done right now that is going to alleviate some of the deep fear that people are facing when they're trying to access basic health care.

One of the things I want to say is that I turned on CBC Radio the other day, and the health care hack was how to access private health care without breaking the law. That was a health care hack on the morning news - how to access private health care without breaking the law.

This is a well-documented process - things get so broken that it suddenly appears that only the private sector can fix it. Beware. You know, I hope I don't have to revisit the words I'm speaking right now, but we are at a dangerous crossroads in our health care system. People are losing trust in their ability to find health care.

We talked about Spencer Thomas, who tried to go to six walk-in clinics. He tried to go to a private clinic, and they wouldn't take him because his kid was too young. But he would have done it, and why? Not because he's a bad person, not because he doesn't believe in public health care, but because he was desperate. He had no other choice.

The idea that it's not appropriate for us to be discussing the state of our health care system right now, in this Chamber, is frankly offensive to all of the people that we represent. We know that it's getting worse and worse. So what do we do about it?

Well, we've heard that there's progress being made. We've certainly seen some announcements that we're happy about. New seats for nurses is great. Guaranteed employment is great. But the reality is we are in a global competition for health care talent. I thought we all knew, after Premier McNeil ran on a promise to deliver a doctor for every Nova Scotian and was unable to do that, that that wasn't actually going to happen. It's not going to happen. We're not going to have a doctor for every Nova Scotian. But Nova Scotians need to know, everyday people and families and seniors across this province need to know, that when they need access to care, they can get it.

How do we do that? Well, we haven't heard a plan. We know that the government tabled a plan, but it didn't talk about what the future of primary care was. It didn't talk about how we're going to do things differently in a time when our population is growing. When we know that, as a province, we are older and we tend to be sicker than much of the rest of the country. When our health care transfers remain frankly insufficient to cover the costs of what we need to do. So what are we going to do? Well, we have to do things differently.

One way that we could do things differently is to think about a different way to run our public health care system. The NDP embarked on this path when we were in government and that is collaborative care. That's finding a way that people can access primary care and emergency care without necessarily having to have fully-staffed facilities with physicians all the time. We can use paramedicine. We can use nurses. We can use nurse practitioners. We can use physician's assistants. We can use non-medical personnel to do certain tasks that may not require medical training. These are things that could happen now, but what we are hearing, in fact, is a move away from that model. So, what's the plan? We don't have enough doctors.

I think it is great that there is an emphasis on recruitment, although last I heard, the head of recruitment mysteriously disappeared, and we haven't heard why. Notwithstanding that, great - recruitment. It's not enough. It's not going to fix the problem. So what is going to fix the problem? We need a new approach. We need to know that it's happening. It's not enough for us to hear that seeds are being planted.

If I hired a gardener and asked how did things go out there today, and they said, seeds are being planted, my next question would be what seeds? What is going to come up? What is my garden going to look like? Are you planting swamp milkweed so I will have a bunch of butterflies? Are you planting goutweed so that I will be upset for the rest of my life every time I go outside my door?

I don't know what seeds are being planted. We are just being told that we should trust that seeds are being planted. Also, those seeds are being planted by four people, or maybe three - I don't know what's happened to Dr. Orrell. Frankly, without any transparency, without any clarity, without any conversation about what this innovation looks like, it's very difficult for us and for the Nova Scotians we represent to have faith in this.

Yesterday the minister, in response to a question about overcrowding at the IWK, seemed to suggest that parents might not be used to having sick children, or children might not have been used to going to the emergency room. I found that response really troubling. As a parent of three, my strong belief is that if you feel like there is something wrong with your kid, you go to the hospital and you get it checked out, because you never know. You never know. I'm not a doctor. If I think my child is sick, I take them to the hospital and I should be able to expect that they will get care there. I think that goes for all of us.

I think when we are sick, when we need medical attention, we should trust that we can get the help we need, and there are a lot of steps that could be taken to accomplish that. I think moving to a different model, as I have discussed, is one. I think actually looking at wages is another - not just of continuing care workers in long-term care, but of people throughout our medical system.

More generally, with the disposal of an entire government department, we are asking the question: What seeds are being planted? When are they going to grow? How long do Nova Scotians have to wait? I hope we get answers to that.

I am glad that we have the opportunity to talk about this in the Chamber tonight, although I know it wasn't on the government's agenda, and I look forward to hearing the comments of my colleagues.

THE CHAIR: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: It is a privilege for me to stand today and talk about some of the work that is happening in our health care system, and to talk about some of the work that we have been doing, not only as government but as a system as a whole.

I want to first start by thanking the emergency room staff who have been working tremendously hard, not just over the past two years, but for a number of years. I am a former emergency room nurse. I worked in a department for a number of years, and managed an ER as well. I managed the ER ICU in renal dialysis at a regional hospital for several years, and so I understand what is happening at the front lines.

I know that things are tough on the ground, and I want to acknowledge that. I also want to acknowledge all health care workers for the work they've done over the last two years in particular. Our system was stretched before that, because of a number of issues.

The last two years during COVID-19, I think the strain on health care workers was really incredible - not just physically and mentally, but also emotionally and spiritually, morally. I think those of us who worked in all aspects of COVID-19 response, but particularly at the front line, are forever changed by our experiences. I want to acknowledge my colleagues for that.

Today I want to talk a little bit about some of the work that is happening around access and flow, how folks can actually access primary and specialist care and some of the work that is happening, as well as some of the initiatives that we've taken in workforce development.

Right now, we know that emergency room wait times are long in a number of places, and that's for a number of reasons. To all of those actually, the number of people

who are seeking care, there is a lack of primary care in a number of communities related to availability of staff, for a number of reasons.

Just in the immediate, we have to support folks in their wait times. The volunteers are returning to a number of the ERs in this province; they were suspended during COVID-19 times, as a result of infection control. That group of individuals who offer support in emergency rooms has been recalled to support people in terms of how they are and requiring support in the emergency room.

In addition, there has been a new model that has been stood up where graduate nurses following their graduation while they wait for their exams work under the tutelage, or work alongside, registered nurses while they await their license. Those graduate nurses actually in some emergency rooms are being coupled with emergency room nurses in order to support people in the waiting rooms, and actually gaining really important skills.

It's really a very key mentorship model where they work in the emergency room where typically, in the old days, we had to earn our time in the emergency room - we needed a number of years' experience. That's no longer the case. Giving these folks an opportunity in the emergency room not just for assessment but to learn about triage and around some of the critical care that happens there is essential.

Performance and analytics are about to trial a wait-time system that would be displayed so that people really understand where and when they should access care and what the wait times will be. There's also a rapid assessment zone that's being tested and tried in one of the emergency rooms in Halifax, which allows people to be rapidly identified and triaged in a different way, particularly when there's a high influx of people.

I apologize that some of this may not seem immediately like it's emergency, but we are all connected. It's very much an interwoven system.

In regards to access and flow, I really do want to commend the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care and Minister Adams and the team for the work that she so eloquently described to us yesterday. That is incredibly important work. The success of long-term care and the filling of the beds in long-term care actually alleviates pressure in our acute care system. I want to acknowledge the work that has happened.

A number of closures were related to the lack of CCAs. Certainly, coming from long-term care in the last six years, we were constantly trying to figure out how to attract people to this meaningful and important work for our seniors, and those who are vulnerable, living in long-term care. I am very proud of the fact that this government did offer CCAs a significant wage to acknowledge and honour the work that they do and to lift a predominantly female workforce up, in terms of their pay rate. I do think that's important.

In addition, when I think about how many people were graduating from the CCA course in 2018, the numbers were incredibly small. The registrants were small, and the classes graduating were smaller. So to have 1,000 people who see this as a meaningful career that will allow them to sustain their families is not only a help to long-term care but it's also a help to acute care. I'm really grateful that those spaces are available.

I also want to talk a little bit about access and flow and to tell folks that there's a command centre that is being trialed. The command centre allows emergency room staff and decision-makers in acute care to have a look at the system and understand where there's capacity. It's really important, particularly in Metro, where we can move patients around to specialty services because of the number of emergency rooms and critical care units that we have in a very small, kind of geographic area.

As we start in Central Zone, we will move that command centre out to the rest of the province, and I do think it will have a significant impact. It's been shown to be effective in other jurisdictions, and the early signs are that it's been an excellent tool.

I will say there's a lot of excitement around the emergency room staff and the decision-makers who look at access and flow around having the ability in real time to understand how the system is performing and where it's jammed.

The use of virtual care is going to be an incredibly important tool for us, and I think it was always on the horizon. Certainly, if there are any successes in COVID-19, it did push us. We often get really caught up in policy and trying to make a decision, and what's right and what's wrong, so we had to move very quickly to virtual care options, and I think that's been a very successful change.

We are trialing a number of different things, like virtual care kiosks in the emergency room, so even though you may not be there, it doesn't mean you're not getting emergency care. It means that if you're there and you're triaged at a low acuity scale, you have the opportunity to go with a supportive health care worker, not a physician, and access virtual care in the emergency room. That came from a clinician. That was an innovative idea that came from a clinician. She wanted to try that and we wanted to support her. So far, that's been very effective and may be something that we're able to scale.

There's also been some virtual care options partnering with libraries in communities, so folks who have minimal access, as an example, to computers or internet would use their libraries for a number of different reasons. We've been able to empower libraries to support Nova Scotians in accessing virtual care.

The other thing we do continue to hear a lot of but less of - I'm proud to say less of - is separating the EHS transfer system from our emergency calls. This allows paramedics, who are very skilled, to focus on the emergency calls that they are qualified for and should be tending to, and allows us to transfer patients who don't need that acute medical care

between facilities. Freeing them up and separating those two systems has had a significant impact on response times, but also in the transfer times.

I know before I was elected we did see something that I hadn't really seen over the course of my career. Because of the demands on the EHS system, we had patients who were being transferred really late at night. Transfers generally happened, in the early days in my career, through the day. We were seeing residents being returned to long-term care or actually being admitted to long-term care in the middle of the night as a result of the pressures on the emergency room system. It wasn't patient-focused in any way.

This is a huge help in terms of how we separate that and provide the right care to Nova Scotians at the right time. I'm sure it does still happen, those transfers late at night, but I do believe that it's happening less and less as a result.

The 100 positions that were just posted by EMCI, someone asked if they thought that they would be applied for because there's a work shortage in this province. We actually had over 300 applicants, I believe - roughly around 300 applicants for those 100 positions. That is certainly a sought-out position in this province, and jobs are available throughout the province, so we're really grateful. Those are some of the things around access and flow that are happening.

I want to talk a little bit as well about primary care and specialist care and how we access that. We can't continue to do things the way we've always done them. Our system is more complex, the people in our system are more complex, so we need to look at innovative ideas. The data that we have available to us is really important - how we inform our decisions around emergency rooms, and how we inform our decisions around urgent treatment centres, and what type of care is required in different communities, and what's our capacity to provide emergency services.

Again, emergency care has changed over the years. In the old days, we used to stop at local hospitals. I grew up in Baddeck. We went there for everything. We even went there originally if you had a car accident, as an example, or if you had a stroke. As emergency medicine has evolved and become more specialized, we really want you in a regional centre for some of those more acute things - like stroke, as an example. We want you at a regional hospital, we want you to get to a CT scanner, we want you to get to a specialist physician so that you can get the treatment you need in a timely fashion in order to dissolve that clot and diagnose you.

We do want to bypass those smaller hospitals, and we're not used to that as Nova Scotians. We're not accustomed to that, because we haven't been communicated that this is now what the level and standard of care requires.

I do think we need to leverage technology, and there has been some really excellent work happening. An example of how we keep people out of the emergency room, how we

keep people with specialist care, is a physician who's working with the Nova Scotia Innovation Hub.

I would really encourage anybody who's not familiar with the Nova Scotia Innovation Hub to have a look at that website. There are world-class clinicians and there are world-class researchers. There are private-public partnerships that allow physicians and researchers to monetize and commercialize these brilliant ideas so that instead of just helping two or three people, we are helping hundreds or thousands of people.

We have a physician in our community who came here to Nova Scotia who has created an incredibly innovative device that allows her, as a wound specialist, to look at blood flow and wound bed in a digital way, far away from where she is.

[7:00 p.m.]

Also, for the first time, it is a device that does not diagnose based on the colour of skin. So much of our technology has been evaluated and researched on white skin. This device that she has developed, pigment doesn't affect it, so you get excellent digital views. It alleviates people from travelling to specialties. If you have a wound, you don't want your leg in a car, hanging down. These are some of the things that are happening in order for us to increase people's capacity to see specialists in primary care in their communities.

We have recruited 163 physicians. There are 90 vacancies for physicians in this province with pending retirements. We know that. We have looked at innovative incentives - generous, competitive incentives - in order for us to have physicians come here.

We know that the new physician doesn't work like the more senior physician. Panel sizes of 2,000, 2,500, 3,000 - those are not the panels that our new physicians want. They want a different type of practice. So we're working in communities, we're working with recruiters, we're working with recruitment teams in some communities, so that we can look and tailor these practices.

We have physicians who want to do half-time, front-facing, primary care and half-time palliative care or emergency rooms. We're trying to negotiate and manage all these different ideas with physicians so we can give them meaningful careers and keep them here in Nova Scotia.

We've expanded the scope of practice for nurse practitioners so they can now admit to hospital. We've expanded the scope of pharmacists. We continue to look at the colleges around how we look at maximizing our providers across this province to make sure that we are - I didn't think I could speak for 15 minutes but here I am - looking at different models of care. They laugh and they know I could speak for two hours.

Recently in Metro we're working with practices. We're working with a practice right now and with a little bit of support from us - the collective us, the health leadership team - that practice now believes they can take 3,000 people off the Need a Family Practice list as a result of working with them around their processes and some of the staffing that they have.

Workforce development: We brought the Michener Institute in to look at our allied health care professionals. We have increased the nursing seats and it will have a demonstrable change. The 25 nurse practitioner seats that were temporarily funded are now permanently funded. We have increased the medical school seats by five at CBU, with a return to service agreement for people to work in rural areas.

We've met with the colleges. We are working with the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration because we can't grow our own. We need to bring people in from other countries. We're working with our universities and community colleges to reach into those countries and do some pre-employment education with them to make sure they are as credentialled as they can be before they get there.

We're working with CaRMS to look at streams so that we can get the medical graduates and residencies that we need in this province. That's something that we have not dabbled in in the past. I talked about raising wages.

The last thing I want to say is that I know things are difficult, but there are wonderful things happening in health care. The other thing I want to just caution all of us as we have this discourse is that health care is a noble and meaningful career. We need to speak positively about this profession and this opportunity in this province. The opportunities for our young people are huge and we want them here. We want them to do this work and we need to be mindful of how we speak to and about one another.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I would like to start off - not because the Health and Wellness Minister wanted me to speak positively about the people who work in the health care system, because that was my intention. I would like to say that people have worked so incredibly hard over the last number of years. They have worked their guts out. I have heard stories of compassion and people going above and beyond continuously from constituents.

I have also heard stories from constituents who are up to here, who are angry, who believed what they were told last year: that they had a plan, and they were going to fix things. But as we have said repeatedly, by every measure, things have gotten worse. So there is a reason to have an emergency debate today, in fact, because by every measure, it's worse.

MLAs, if they're honest with themselves, know what they're hearing at their offices. They know. They're getting calls from people who are upset.

For many years, I have kept a list at my office of people who are looking for doctors. We would keep the names, and then when we would hear of a doctor coming to the area, we'd give everybody a call, and they would call up the doctor, and they would get a doctor. It worked.

We haven't seen doctors coming to our area at all. In fact, my colleague, the member for Bedford South, talked about that in Question Period today. Suddenly, over 10 per cent of our population in Bedford-Hammonds Plains doesn't have a doctor. You can say, well, it's people coming from elsewhere. But you know what? Some of those people who are coming from elsewhere are actually coming from elsewhere in the province. It's not just about immigration. It's about people moving around. It's about doctors who are retiring. I talk to people, and they're scared because they know that if their doctor is in their sixties, that day is coming, and they're going to be out on their ear, and they'll have no doctor.

I'm really lucky. I got my doctor fresh out of med school. He's way younger than me. We used to call him Doogie Howser, but he's got grey hair now, so he's not Doogie Howser anymore. He used to take family members. If a family member's doctor retired or they moved back to Nova Scotia, he would take them. He can't anymore, because he has too many patients. That's a situation that so many Nova Scotians are in.

Now, for the first time, I'm being stopped when I go to events and people are saying to me, I don't have a doctor, I have this, this, and this wrong with me. We're talking about older Nova Scotians who have a number of illnesses. They have comorbidities, and they don't have a doctor. So I say, well, I can put you on a list. Make sure you're on the family practice list. Call my office. We'll get your phone numbers and if we hear of anything, we'll let you know.

But I have to say I haven't been hearing. I haven't been seeing about doctors coming to Bedford-Hammonds Plains. If I hear about a doctor going to Sackville, I'll let them know, because that's really close too.

We have not been hearing that. We've been told that 95 doctors have been recruited. I don't know where they're going, but they're not coming to our area, according to what we've seen. We've had no notice of it, and we've seen no indication of it, so that's a big concern for us.

That's one of the hard parts, I think, of being an MLA. We hear about heartbreaking situations. We hear about families who are going through difficult times. Recently I had a constituent who had to take her daughter to the IWK. She said, this is my second child.

I've gone to the IWK before. She said it was like a war zone. She couldn't believe it. It was jammed to the gills. She said, I've never seen that before.

It's not just that children aren't used to being sick. It's not that parents aren't used to having sick children. It's that there is sickness that is resulting when you don't protect the health care system. If you take off all of the controls that kept people safe during COVID, and you do that all at once, you're going to have a whole lot of illness out in the citizenry. You can't be surprised that everybody's going to get sick.

I have another constituent whose parent is in palliative care. She had a big, long list. Her parent was in the Abbie Lane for, like, 43 days. She was there changing her parent's diaper and doing all the things that are normally done by health care workers. They just couldn't do it, and they were so grateful to her. She was in there doing the work looking after her parent because it wasn't happening.

She said the Abbie Lane is filthy. I don't think that's because we don't have good workers or anything like that. We have exhausted workers. What happens when you throw open the doors - health care workers who are the front line, who are protecting Nova Scotians for two years are taking the brunt of that because they're sick too. This is deeply unfair to them - that they are being put in this position because we wouldn't ask people to mask a little bit longer. We ripped off the band-aid that kept us safe for so long. You can't suddenly throw open the doors and expect that there isn't going to be an influx - not just of COVID, but of every other illness that was happening as well.

What my constituent said to me is that these workers are upset, and they're exhausted. I know that the Minister of Health and Wellness is hearing all kinds of great things from the people she's working with, but just a word of caution - and I will say this as a former minister. The folks around you are going to tell you you're doing great, and you probably are doing great. But just remember they're there to make you think that you're doing a good job because they have to keep your confidence up. So you may be doing a good job, or they may be keeping your confidence up.

All I'm saying is that you need to actually talk to the people on the ground. Sorry, the ministers need to talk to the people on the ground because it's not just the people around you who know how you're doing. Again, they're doing this with the best of intentions. They're not trying to blow smoke or anything like that. They're just trying to make sure that you are confident when you go out there and you do your job.

I recently had an experience with the health care system. I got COVID. I didn't have a great experience with it. My husband had a cold or something like that. I had somewhat worse. Then a couple of weeks later, I seemed to have a relapse. It wasn't a relapse of COVID. In fact, it was a skin infection, but I didn't know that right away. I was thinking, should I wait? I have a regularly scheduled doctor's appointment coming up. I should do that. I got sicker and sicker, and the rash spread, and it was really hot. I thought,

well, I'll call 811, and they'll tell me whether I should go in or not. My husband had a lovely conversation with the person on the end of the phone from 811 who told me that in 10 hours a nurse would call me back - 10 hours as my rash was expanding.

[7:15 p.m.]

I thought, should I wait? This was Monday. Should I wait until my doctor's appointment on Wednesday? I decided, no, I'm going to go into emergency. I'm going to go into emergency because this thing is expanding, I'm hot and I have this fever. It turns out it was a fever of 102 degrees.

I thought, well, I'll go to the Cobequid Community Health Centre, except that it looks like earlier that day the Cobequid was turning people away because there were so many people going there because they can't get into their doctor - if they have a doctor - and there are no walk-in clinics open. So can't go to the Cobequid. Well, I'll go to the Infirmary. It turns out that that just happened to be - Nova Scotia Health says - extremely high volume, full waiting room at Halifax ER, don't go into the Halifax ER because you're going to be there for hours.

On the advice of one of my colleagues, I went to the Dartmouth General. I used to live just down the street from the Dartmouth General, so I went to the Dartmouth General. It wasn't bad when I got there around 7:30 or 7:45. I was there for five hours. It was a good thing that I went when I did because I had cellulitis. Cellulitis can turn into something much more serious. If I had waited - if I had thought, I don't want to sit in the ER, I have a doctor's appointment in a day and a half, I could well have been in there on intravenous drugs combatting that skin infection. Once it goes into your blood, once it goes over from your skin, then you're in trouble.

I was lucky I went when I did. I was seen after five hours. The place looked like a war zone. They're under construction. It was hot as blazes in the waiting room - but maybe that was just the fever. Got back into the treatment area. It was nice and cool. I was treated quickly. They gave me medication. Then I got my prescription filled the next day, and everything was fine. What if I hadn't gone in? What if I was like so many Nova Scotians who didn't want to sit there and spend five, seven, ten hours in the ER? That's what could have happened.

The Minister of Health and Wellness says they're planting seeds. I do believe her. I do believe they are making some changes that need to happen, but we also need to deal with the situation on the ground now. What is happening now is that Nova Scotians are not getting the health care that they need in a timely manner.

You've got to be careful. Saying we're planting seeds is great, but you know what? If we don't know what the plan is - because we really can't tell because the plan wasn't a plan. It was just some high-minded statements. If you plant a wisteria tree, they look great,

but the fact of the matter is they're not great trees. They send up roots everywhere, and they destroy other trees and plants and houses. It's brutal. You've got to know what you're doing, and we don't know what the plan is right now. That's part of the problem.

You can say there are more doctors who have been hired, but we're not seeing any evidence of it. We know that nurses and other health care professionals who are working in the system are exhausted. We don't see any evidence of any help for them. We see that they are working harder than ever, and the health care system is pressed to its limits.

Earlier today, one of our colleagues across the floor - it might have been the Premier - suggested that the Opposition was fearmongering. I don't know if he was talking about the recession or whether it was about the health care situation, but if MLAs are honest, they know what they're hearing in their offices. They know what's going on in their ridings. It's not fearmongering to say that health care workers are tired and they're beyond their limit. I just want to say it's not fearmongering.

It's our job to come here. It's not a distraction from governing, just to be clear. The Premier could have avoided being in here. He chose not to. We're here now. We're going to make sure as the Opposition that we let you know what's going on out there. You have to know what's going on out there if you are in government. It's our job to make sure that you know.

I have to tell you that Nova Scotians don't think you're doing a great job on COVID at all. Our offices have a continuous run on those tests, and why? Because Nova Scotians want to know what's going on. We don't know, because we're not getting information from the government in anything close to a timely manner. There is a problem here and trying to keep people in the dark is just not on.

This is not how Nova Scotia managed the pandemic. We managed the pandemic by making sure that Nova Scotians knew what was going on and by giving them good advice. Pretending that COVID doesn't exist, disbanding the infrastructure that dealt with a pandemic, is not on. That's what's happened here. It's pretending like there isn't a pandemic out there. There is a pandemic, and it's continuing to have effects here.

You can't go from 65,000 people waiting for a doctor to 100,000 people. That's up by 50 per cent. You can't say that there's an improvement there. It isn't. I don't care how many doctors you've hired. It's not an improvement. Wait times are up by every measure.

THE CHAIR: Order. The time has elapsed for the current speaker.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mx. Speaker, Cape Bretoners continue to struggle to access health care, with reports of lineups out the door at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital,

hospital units working short, and stories of people waiting hours for paramedics. This is the reality. As the former speaker just said, it's not fearmongering. You can't fix what you don't acknowledge. This is the reality that many Cape Bretoners, and my constituents of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, are facing on a daily basis.

When patients are waiting in pain and crowded at the regional ER, and people are waiting for hours for an ambulance to take them into Sydney, it is clear that we need a government that is not content with letting things get worse before they get better - as the Premier continues to say - without letting us know what getting worse before it gets better even means.

According to the data that was tabled earlier in a FOIPOP, almost 10,000 people in the Eastern Zone left the emergency room department without being seen last year, which is an increase of 47 per cent from the year before. Let that settle in. That is 10,000 people in Eastern Zone alone.

People in Cape Breton have been dealing with the lack of health care services for far too long, and now it has gotten even worse. While the Progressive Conservative Government has made some commitments and increases in hiring, that hasn't translated into help for the parents waiting hours in the emergency room with their sick child, or a senior waiting in pain for an ambulance to arrive.

At this point, I actually do want to share two stories.

I have a constituent who was taken by EHS in severe pain. This person had a history of heart attacks and chest pain. It was about 11:00 at night that this person was taken by EHS, and arrived back home by a taxi at 5:00 a.m. When the caregiver asked why they left, the constituent said the ER was filled. The nurse had told this person that there was only one doctor in the emergency room that night, and it was likely he would not be seen until much later. The constituent waited for as long as they could, but they couldn't wait any longer. As you know, when you are in severe pain, sitting and waiting can often exacerbate the issues.

I have another constituent who took their child to the ER with a suspected gallbladder . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. While I know that the current speaker is appearing virtually, perhaps any conversations could be taken outside. Thank you.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, Mx. Speaker. The constituent had a suspected gallbladder attack. The parents took the child and they arrived at the ER at noon. The child was in extreme distress, including vomiting. They waited for five hours as the child's health

deteriorated. They left that emergency room because they could no longer stay there - again, because staying was exacerbating the problems that this individual was facing, and they went to another place. But they did say - and it seems to be the theme of the day - that the emergency room was like a war zone. The nurses appeared to be overworked, and the emergency rooms were overcrowded.

This is the reality that is facing many people, many Cape Bretoners. All areas of our health care system are struggling, with almost 95,000 people on the Need a Family Doctor wait-list - 25,000 more than there were on the list last year. The FOIPOP that was tabled earlier also shows the number of people admitted to the ER who didn't have a family doctor grew by 40 per cent in the Eastern Zone.

For eight years, we had a Liberal government that pushed this system, and people working in it near collapsed, Mx. Speaker. I know my colleagues to the right are probably not too happy with that statement at the moment, but it is true. Now the Progressive Conservative government say they're going to fix it, but in 11 months now, we have seen things get much worse. We need a government that shows enough concern to take action, take real action to make sure people have the care that they deserve and that they need when they need it most.

As my colleagues have previously said, we in the NDP started the collaborative care system. I know in my area of New Waterford, that emergency collaborative care centre worked so well that many people from outside of the area would come because of its reputation of getting you in, getting you triaged, getting you seen, and getting you out the door as quick as possible. It helped make sure people could access primary care.

In Cape Breton, again, I will also say this - we have one of the worst wait times for mental health care. Many people who are suffering from mental health find themselves in the emergency room because that's where they're going to get the care because they can't get it anywhere else. As well, we have so many people in Cape Breton without a family doctor who often have to go to emergency rooms in order to get prescriptions filled. When we said that our emergency rooms are crowded, and I often hear people say, well, they don't need to be there - they do because it's the only place where they're going to get that prescription. It is the only place where they're going to get the help they need.

Mx. Speaker, Cape Bretoners and all Nova Scotians deserve a health care system that works, and we can't fix what we don't acknowledge as a problem. We need to fix our health care system. We need to fix our emergency rooms. That includes looking at why there are backlogs. I have said this many times before. One of the reasons is because there are not enough long-term care beds, and many people who should be in acute care are in our emergency rooms taking up beds so that others who are in the emergency waiting room can't get into emergency. Then we have the paramedics and Code Critical, and that is also due to the backlog in emergency.

Mx. Speaker, action is needed. This is a real emergency. This is a real reason we need to be in the House. This is a real crisis that is facing not only my constituents of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier but all Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: A year ago, I stood in front of the sign at the entrance to Fishermen's Memorial Hospital in my hometown of Lunenburg - the hospital where I was born. Where my grandmother Timmy Corneau was a long-time head nurse and because she was a head nurse, I got to have all the ice cream I could eat after having my tonsils out - or so she told me. Where I took my now 23-year-old son so many times for an epinephrine mask to treat his severe childhood croup. Where I sat with my now-departed dad following a heart attack, knowing - and I really, really did - that he would make it through.

On that day last year - literally July 26, 2021 - I stood there because Fishermen's was closed. My concern over that phenomenon, which had become more and more frequent in my community, was part of what prompted me to step forward as a candidate. It was no accident that I did so as a Progressive Conservative, and importantly, as part of a team led by our now Premier.

As I have told this House before, my late parents were PC through and through, but not me. I had voted across the map. So it was not some kind of brand loyalty. It was a recognition that this was a leader I could get behind, someone with a passion and a plan. A real plan to address the crisis in health care, as well as growing our economy for every Nova Scotian.

It was not going to be quick or easy. It would require us to run deficits. It would hinge in so many ways on working with those very people working on the front lines of health care. People like the honourable Minister of Health and Wellness and the honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care - ministers with deep personal experience and understanding of this critical sector and the hardships faced by those working within it, as well as those seeking care.

It is very distracting, Mx. Speaker, to watch across the aisle which has - the seats have emptied - and see the representatives ... (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, you're not allowed to refer to the presence or absence of any particular member.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I do apologize for that. As well, that the tone from the moment I stood up, directed at you when you didn't know my place - that was inappropriate. You've done a stellar job in that Chair in a number of contentious days here.

But if I may continue, these individuals on our team, these ministers have impressed me so much. I told the Minister of Health and Wellness in one of our earliest days that she reminded me of my grandmother. I didn't get time to tell her that what I meant when I said that was how much she reminded me of that unique blend of compassion and practicality that seems to reside in so much of the nursing profession. She looked at me and said, my god, is this job making me look that old?

So, none of us came into this, Mx. Speaker, thinking it would be easy or fast, that we would fix things in a day. I'll acknowledge that I still cringe when I see any of my colleagues on either side of the House having to post notices about ER closures in their communities, much less how it feels to me when I see Fishermen's Memorial Hospital having to close early at 1:00 p.m. Some years ago, we said goodbye to 24-hour emergency coverage in my community. That coverage that allowed me to show up at emergency at 3:00 a.m. when my then little boy was barking like a seal. Today, and for some years now, we've had to schedule our acute illness and accidents to fall between 7:30 a.m. and 10:30 p.m. - clearly something that is not possible. At the time, we accepted this as a community, that there was nothing to be done. That, my colleagues, is what changed last Summer.

After electing the former government on the strength of a doctor for every Nova Scotian - and I'll tell you, I bought it because it spoke so succinctly to what we all wanted. It wasn't entirely that I believed it, but boys oh boys, it's what I wanted. Then, they weren't able to deliver. I even may understand some of the reasons why that was not possible. But there was no immediate political cost, and so why not continue that strategy? We're doing everything we can. It's not our fault. For lack of a real strategy, that became the plan they had.

Finally Nova Scotians said enough. Nova Scotians rejected that nothing further can be done right now. They chose a government with a plan, and based on that plan that they chose, they chose hope. In spite of the calls - and I certainly get them too, from folks who are frustrated, who are concerned for their loved ones - I still talk to people about working in health care and individuals who stop to tell me that they are seeing improvements.

There is no question that people shouldn't have to think twice about where to go for emergency care. Nova Scotia needs more health care professionals. That is the issue we are facing. The shortages we're dealing with are affecting services and causing staff burnout, and this can't continue. That's why we created the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment. We're working hard to recruit more doctors and other health care professionals, and we're succeeding.

It's not as fast as any of us want: 163 new doctors recruited this year, 75 of them family doctors. For every Nova Scotian still waiting, I get it. They are still waiting. We are also offering every graduating nurse in Nova Scotia a job, created 200 new nursing seats at Dalhousie, St. FX, CBU, and NSCC.

Another part of the issue is access to primary health care, because we know that's important in keeping people out of our emergency departments. The statement's been made. We have ministers of illness right now, and we need our province to get to truly having ministers of health.

As mentioned, we are working hard to recruit more family doctors and other health care professionals. We've made virtual care available to people on the Need a Family Practice registry. I have had people come up to me and, again, say thank you because for their immediate health needs, virtual care fills the bill. Is it a long-term fix? No one has suggested that.

Invitations have gone out to people on the wait-list and by end of Summer every Nova Scotian on that list will have further invitations to participate in virtual care. We acknowledge the health care system is connected, and it's important for us, as the minister has earlier alluded, to make changes in each part of the system in order to relieve the pressure on the whole. We are working to reduce the surgical wait-lists, but in order to do that we need to ensure there are beds available for those who need one post-op. That's what Nova Scotia Health Authority has done.

I'm pleased to tell you that in most specialties, the wait-list has declined slightly. Again, we are seeing slow, steady improvement. We are moving in the right direction and we will continue to push to help people get the surgeries they need, with a goal to complete 2,500 more surgeries in the next 12 months.

We're committed to expanding operating room hours and capacity across the province. Another key part of our response is supporting our paramedics and our EHS system. We are hiring 100 new transport operators to handle routine patient transfers. This frees up paramedics so they can get back on the road. We have supported a new direct-to-triage policy that allows paramedics, rather than waiting with low-risk patients, to get back to responding to emergencies, and we'll have installed new power stretchers and power loaders in all ambulances by the end of the year.

Madam Speaker, two weeks ago I arrived home from meetings all day in Halifax in my department to learn that my son was complaining of severe abdominal pain. By 11 o'clock, he was doubled over in pain. I'm sure all the parents in this house know that what you can ignore in yourself, you do not ignore in your children. Though Fishermen's Memorial Hospital was closed, my husband who was thankfully home drove him to South Shore Regional, where he waited nine hours to see a doctor - a wait time that we know is not at all out of sync, particularly with what I know of that particular hospital.

Nine hours of watching other people triaged, the individuals who continued to arrive all through the night. When he got home the next morning and was describing it to me, he said, yeah, it stunk. But he understood that there were others who needed to go first,

and that every nurse, doctor, orderly, or technician - everyone was working at capacity in a system that was strained long before the pandemic.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to close, as others have, by acknowledging the health care workers who right now are supporting Nova Scotians in settings across this province - people who, by and large, are working with us even though they are exhausted. People who are the embodiment of dedication. People who, for the first time in a long time, tell us that they have hope. So do I.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to speak on behalf of the people I represent in Cumberland North today at the emergency debate on Nova Scotia's emergency departments.

This is a big topic. If I could speak on behalf of the nurses and the doctors who are working in our emergency departments in Cumberland County, but also throughout all of Nova Scotia, some of the things that I would say on their behalf are that they can't continue at this pace, that the work they're doing in our emergency departments is not sustainable. They would say that they're barely staying afloat.

Our last speaker shared that the problems existed before the pandemic, and there's no question. There were a lot of problems with our emergency departments, but it's safe to say when you speak to our doctors and our nurses and our health care professionals, what they're experiencing now today is a whole new level of stress. I don't think it's fair to put blame on the current government. I don't think it's even fair to put blame on the past government. It's really not helpful, putting blame.

Rather, what's most helpful is saying let's get down to work and let's fix these problems together. I think - actually, I know that's what Nova Scotians want. Nova Scotians want us to put all of our energy into making things better for them. That's why they elected us.

Today, on behalf of the physicians, the nurses, the ward clerks, the staff who work in our emergency departments, and all our health care professionals, I'm going to share some of the things that they have shared with me and asked me to say today.

They believe that there are three main underlying causes for the current situation that we're in. First is lack of physicians, lack of basic primary care. Second is lack of acute-care beds due to a nursing shortage and long-term care beds taking up the acute-care beds - long-term care patients, rather, waiting for long-term care in the acute-care beds. Finally, third, staffing of the emergency departments - in particular, the lack of registered nurses and LPNs to help staff the emergency departments.

[7:45 p.m.]

Those are the top three. There are other reasons too, other causes, but those are the top three that the physicians and the nurses are telling me that we need to address if we're going to fix the problems that we're currently facing in our emergency departments.

So let's talk about some of the fixes. The first one that people are recommending to me is the governance structure. It's funny because I heard the Official Opposition talk about this in Question Period today and in the last month I've actually had a lot of members of society - in particular health care workers - talk to me about the governance structure.

Most people I spoke to supported the Premier's decision to remove the board when the new government took place - just make a change - but they are not supporting that decision now and it is because a lot of people are taking a closer look at who is there and who is leading.

When you research governance of health care systems, you will almost always find that professionals and researchers recommend people to lead in health care systems that have three things: education, experience, and expertise in health care. Right now we do not have that in our Nova Scotia Health Authority.

It does cause me to pause, because when I was a member of the caucus with the current government, we talked a lot about when the former Premier did not have any health care professionals on the Nova Scotia Health Authority board of directors. We talked about that a lot here and thankfully he listened and put health care professionals on the Nova Scotia Health Authority board. So I was quite surprised and still concerned that we have a non-elected professional making what I am hearing are most of the decisions for health care in Nova Scotia, who has no education, no experience, and no expertise in health care. That causes me great concern.

Our Minister of Health and Wellness is a registered nurse, or at least used to be. I know that she brings a great deal of experience to her position and I am sure it keeps her up at night - especially if other people who are not health care professionals and don't have her expertise are making the decisions. I think that is one of the first things that we could change that would improve the decision-making.

What I was going to say, and I am sure the Minister of Health and Wellness would share with me, is that I've been a registered nurse for 31 years as well. The longer that you are a health care professional, the more you know what you don't know. If you have no health care education, experience or expertise, you definitely don't know what you don't know. It's no offence to anyone. It is just a fact.

If you look at the health care system governance of the Mayo Clinic - one I often use as a model - all of the CEOs, the people who are responsible for making the decisions,

have education, expertise, and experience in health care. I believe that is the number one thing that must change because every decision you make in health care impacts the patient and their family. If you don't understand the impacts of the decisions that you are making - again, it goes back to when you don't have the education, experience, and expertise, you don't know what you don't know.

The second recommendation is to fix primary health care. I know there has been a lot of discussion already here in the Chamber over the last couple of days about the over 100,000 people waiting on the family doctor wait-list, but the fact is that one of the reasons with overcrowding of our emergency departments is because there are so many Nova Scotians without a family doctor or without access to a nurse practitioner. In fact, almost all newcomers to Nova Scotia do not have a family doctor.

I recently had a conversation with someone who moved here during the pandemic and they had some pretty harsh words for our province. They said they felt deceived because they came here and had no idea the state of our health care system. I've had every newcomer who has moved to Nova Scotia since the pandemic started share with me how upset they are. They said that they came from another province that they thought the health care system was bad there, and they just had no idea that ours was that much worse.

Fixing primary health care is key and there are so many things we can do to fix that. Number one is fix the hiring practices. I know that Dr. Kevin Orrell recently lost his position for recruitment. I am not sure if the Premier has a replacement in mind yet but usually when I ran a business I didn't fire someone or let them go until I had a backup plan in place. That should be top priority for the government. I think Nova Scotians would agree that we need to have a formal recruitment plan for this province.

Those of you who have known me for a while know that my husband is a family physician, so I had a little bit of insight into their life and how hard it is. We were recruited ourselves back in 1995 - we went to Wisconsin. If you own a business, or if you've ever tried to hire and recruit someone, it's not always easy, especially if you're looking for highly trained and highly educated people. You have to work at it.

The people who recruited us to go to Wisconsin called our house probably three to four times a day for about five or six months. They sent us letters, they talked at any opportunity that they had. They were persistent and it worked. We need to take that same approach. In my opinion, we need to hire professionals to recruit family physicians and all physicians, including psychiatrists, to the province of Nova Scotia. We need to hire people with expertise, and we need to get them going yesterday. That is a huge need. There's so much and such a short amount of time to talk about it.

Going back to family practice and primary health care, the Summer months have been known in our health care system. Typically, the emergency departments are usually always busier because family physicians will sometimes take vacations, and if there's no

locum pool in place, then family physicians don't have anyone to cover their practice. So you have a lot of people who do have a family physician who cannot get into their doctor for an appointment, so they are also going to the emergency department as well.

One of the solutions is creating a locum pool. There's a lot of new physicians especially who do not want to make a commitment yet to a location and they want to join a locum pool of physicians, tour around the province, work a week here, a couple of weeks there. From that, they get a bit of a taste of the province and then can make their decision of where they actually want to set up their practice.

Looking at hiring practices and licensing, that's a whole other big topic, but I can guarantee that if we set up a program tomorrow that welcomed Nova Scotia persons who studied medicine abroad and told them that we have a home for you here in Nova Scotia, my guess is that we'd have 100 physicians within a week. We'd have probably triple that number. I know of five, just top of mind.

There are many Nova Scotians, students who cannot get into Dalhousie med school. They study medicine in the United States, or abroad like Ireland, and they want to come home. They want to live here in Nova Scotia, and they can't, because they can't get into a residency program, and they had difficulty with licensing. I would call that low-hanging fruit.

The last point I'll make, and I've talked about the importance of Maritime co-operation, I believe there is a need for a Maritime clinical health strategy. Just today alone, the emergency department at Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre is overloaded with patients from our neighbouring home in New Brunswick. We need a Maritime clinical health strategy.

We have the IWK that is shared amongst the Maritime Provinces. Many of our specialists here in Halifax and in Saint John are shared. We need to have an actual strategic plan. Our licensing should be the same, whether it's in New Brunswick or Nova Scotia, and right now it's not.

Back about seven years ago, we lost a ton of psychiatrists and a lot of other family physicians and specialists. We lost them out of Nova Scotia because of our licensing standards. Many of them went right next door to New Brunswick because they didn't want to write the Royal College exam. Many of them had been practicing for 20-plus years. Those are just a few things that I would add.

I do want to say on behalf of the people I represent in Cumberland North that I can't state enough the urgency that we must take on behalf of our health care workers if we're going to keep them, if we're going to retain them, on behalf of our people here in Nova Scotia. I know it has been said many times already, not by myself but by others, that it is disappointing that we're brought in for an emergency session, and it's not about this. It's

not about the state of health care and the urgent, urgent need to help our physicians, our nurses, who are currently drowning.

One of the last things that I'll ask the government to ponder is something that was in the health care plan that we don't hear anything about: local decision-making. Local decision-making was something that the government talked about, yet we're not seeing it.

We still see if a registered nurse or nurse wants to apply for a job at Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre, it has to go through a central office in Halifax. Historically, sometimes they don't even get a phone call back or sometimes they don't even get an email back. We need to change the way that we're hiring nurses. We need to get away from this centralization. We need to get back to local decision-making. People are desperate. People are desperate.

Now, it's easy for me to say, I'm an Independent, but I see so much energy wasted on the back and forth. Let's put our energies together. Let's be collaborative. Nova Scotians want that. Nova Scotians expect that. Nova Scotians deserve better than vindictiveness and malice. We don't need that. It's wasted energy - each one of us that put our thoughts and our energy into that. Let's put our hearts and souls into working collaboratively for the people of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Hey, y'all, I called this emergency debate. I just want to say before I begin my remarks that I'm really grateful for the debate that we have had tonight, for the stories, the personal stories, of experiences with the health care system. We all have those. I was thinking, I'll tell my story about when my kid broke her arm, or I'll tell my story about . . . we don't need to. We all have those stories.

So I'm very grateful for the things that have been shared tonight and our personal connection to health care workers, the ones who we have in this room - who I'm deeply grateful for - and the ones who are working right now as we're in here debating. We all know health care workers. We all have health care workers who are living in our constituencies who are our neighbours, who are our family members. We know that it's a terrible and difficult time.

Yet we also know, and I have been in a hospital lately, visiting people, and it is amazing. Given what we know about the system and how difficult the system is right now, when you go onto a floor in a hospital right now, or at least the ones that I have been in, you wouldn't know from watching the staff and the way they present to the public that there is a massive crisis. They manage somehow to keep it together for the benefit of the people that they are working with and for and on. So shout-out to them.

[8:00 p.m.]

I'm a big fan of not repeating information, Madam Speaker, and adding something new to the conversation. I'm really going to - honest to God - try to do that. I will say just a couple of things.

Today in Question Period, I rattled off the statistics about the acuity scale. I just want to share this part. The debate is about emergency rooms, so I want to start by saying this: At the Dartmouth General Hospital last year, more than 30 per cent of the patients with an acuity score of Level 1, 2, or 3 waited for longer than eight hours.

Here's what Level 1, 2, or 3 means: If you're a Level 1, you have a condition that threatens your life or limb requiring immediate aggressive intervention. If you're a Level 2, you have a condition that is a potential threat to life, limb, or function, and you should see a physician in less than 15 minutes. If you're a Level 3, you have an urgent condition that could progress to a serious problem, and you should see a physician in less than 30 minutes. That means that people in the Dartmouth General emergency room who should see a doctor in 30 minutes or less are regularly waiting for more than eight hours.

Somebody earlier in the debate talked about somebody having a stroke. I know, the Minister of Health and Wellness actually talked about when in the olden days, if you had a stroke, you went to the hospital in Baddeck, you went to the community hospital. But now, because of our systems and our technology, we want to see people at regional hospitals. The Dartmouth General and the Halifax Infirmary are the regional hospitals - acute care regional hospitals - in HRM, and people are waiting eight hours with acuity levels of 1, 2, or 3. It's frightening.

Again, I have more statistics in my notes here. I'm going to actually avoid saying some of them because we all know the problems. We know that ERs in Nova Scotia are chronically overcrowded, and our friend from Cumberland North has talked about the reasons. We know that the reasons are lack of access to primary care, lack of access to long-term care beds, and I forget the third one, but yes. We also know that when ERs are overcrowded, it is endemic, or it is describing what is going on outside the ER. People don't have access to primary care, people are unable to get the care they need, and they're getting sicker, and they're coming to the ERs and they're sicker when they get there.

We also know that this is a real issue with paramedics. Because of all of the issues at the ERs, paramedics are having serious issues with having to wait with their patients at the ER. We know that there are new solutions being put in place for paramedics, but I talk to paramedics often, and I'm hearing from paramedics that everyone has an exit strategy. It's just getting worse and worse, and the government keeps putting new plans in place: we've got new ambulances with backup cameras, and we've got new triage things, and we've got this and that. And yet the paramedics are suffering deeply with the stress that they are under and none of them are able to do their jobs, or they feel they're unable to do

their jobs. I shouldn't say they're unable to, they are able to. They are doing them, again, despite all odds.

This is why we are debating this. It is truly an emergency, Madam Speaker, and emergency services in Nova Scotia - or anywhere - are the canaries in the coal mine of a very troubled health care system, so I want to talk a little bit about solutions to that system. I'm going to spend my time on collaborative care and upstream health care because, as one of the people from across the way said, we want to make sure our Minister of Health and Wellness is not the minister of illness, but the Minister of Health and Wellness, and wellness even more than health. And the Minister of Addictions and Mental Health is the minister of mental health and not the addictions part. We want to make sure that we have a healthy society, a healthy population for all of the right reasons.

We need to address the social determinants of health. Our ERs would be in a different state right now, Madam Speaker, if every person in the province had access to adequate housing, food, and a decent income. People are healthier when they're housed. Housing is health care. Income, a living wage, is health care, and nutritious food - or food of any kind at this point, let's face it - is health care, and these folks would not be dealing with the myriad of impacts of systemic inequities.

This government will need to make significant investments in various aspects of our public health care system - primary care, mental health care, and, of course, don't forget the connection between primary care and mental health care. Primary care is an important starting point for people who need mental health care, and often if they have adequate primary care, they may not need more acute or longer-term mental health care in the future, but because of the lack of access to primary care, folks are getting more severe mental illness and longer-term mental illness.

I'm going to talk about solutions, and I'm going to talk about the NDP's solution, which was collaborative emergency centres. When the collaborative emergency centres were brought into Nova Scotia, they were recognized around the country, and probably beyond, as true innovation - true innovation - in emergency care. Many provinces copied the plan, or the format, and they are still working in other provinces. The CECs improved access to both primary and emergency care in rural areas, and they reduced unplanned emergency room closures by 90 to 100 per cent.

When we're talking about the Fishermen's Memorial Hospital having to close and someone having to go to the next one down the road and waiting nine hours, CECs would address that problem, and yet, when the Liberal government came in eight years ago, they ceased their investment in CECs. Makes no sense.

We have asked this government again and again, and the previous government, to respond to the Nova Scotia Association of Community Health Centres ask for stabilization funding. We know that community health centres provide effective and cost-effective care,

achieving important outcomes in improving health and reducing health systems' costs. Community health centres offer significantly more comprehensive services than other primary care models, like fee-for-service and clinical care only teams.

Clients of community health centres report higher satisfaction scores across factors such as accessibility, prevention and health promotion, client and family centredness, and chronic disease management compared to clients of other models of primary care. They provide superior chronic disease management.

Clinicians in community health centres find it easier to promote high-quality care through longer consultations in a professional collaboration. They're community centres. I could go on, but the point is that community health centres provide a triple bottom line solution: improved individual health care, improved community and population health, and more cost-effective health care and social service systems.

A comparison of primary care models in Ontario found that in urban areas and rural areas, community health centres had emergency department visit rates that were considerably lower than expected. If we're talking about the problem with emergency departments, then we need to look to community health centres - collaborative care models that are based in community health centre models, where we have physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers, chronic disease management specialists, all of these folks, physician assistants.

Of course, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to speak about midwives. Why are we not investing in midwives in Nova Scotia? I know the minister has been asked this, I know the minister is looking at it, but this one seems to be a very simple fix. Midwives would allow people to not be going to their primary care provider, would free up primary care providers' time. They'd be followed by a midwife, there would be less need to go to emergency departments and have emergency services related to births. It only makes sense.

The community health centres, back to them, which could include midwives - frankly, they're asking for stable operational funding. They're not getting it. We have not seen it in this budget. We didn't see any operational funding for community health centres or sexual health services, and no new funding for collaborative care in the 2022-23 budget. Other provinces have done it and they have better outcomes.

We need to develop a model and an implementation plan for collaborative care clinics across the province. It's essential. We need to do it now.

Given all of this, this is why we're also talking about issues around the cost of living. We're fighting to end income inequality and to recognize the right to housing, because we know housing and income equality are both forms of health care. They're both forms of wellness. I'm going to leave it there.

Again, I want to say I appreciate deeply the conversation that has happened tonight. I hope that we can get past our he said/she said, they didn't/they did, eight years, blah-de-blah that we hear about so much in Question Period, and we can get to work on real solutions that are cost-effective, that are going to make our population healthier, and that will solve the crisis that we are experiencing in emergency departments.

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I'll be very brief. I do want to share a few thoughts, comments, and some statements that I've shared over the last four years of being elected for Cumberland South. I believe it was the NDP government - I'm not throwing sticks or stones here. I'm sharing a story, and then it is going to come around, so please bear with me. I promised five minutes.

The CEC model was introduced during the NDP government. We thought it was a great thing for South Cumberland Community Care Centre at the time. The fact of the matter is it didn't work for the Parrsboro area. It didn't work. It was working in the Springhill area, but it didn't work in the Parrsboro area. When I got elected in 2018, that hospital emergency room, or whatever it may have been called at the time, was closed more than it was actually open, and we shared the same story about what was going on in Springhill. There were many times when I would get up and ask questions or write the minister of the day and inform him weekly about the hours it was closed.

Where I'm coming back to - where it revolves around is the CEC model did work in other spots. I will recognize that. It didn't work for that area in Parrsboro, but I guess my point is that one piece of the puzzle isn't the same for every part of the province. We have to be open-minded about how we are going to fix health care. And I said, I'm not throwing stones. I'm sitting up here going to share a story from Cumberland South and it's not all rainbows and unicorns.

We had a previous government that didn't want to admit that there was a crisis in health care. We heard from physicians who predicted that what is happening today was going to happen. We heard that ten years ago. We knew that this was going to happen. We have nobody to blame but ourselves, but the issue is we are sitting in this House talking about it. That's good. We're sitting in the House talking about it, which will give issues, ideas to whoever the government of the day is, but throwing stones is not going to fix the problem.

One other story I want to share is when we got elected, I had two hospitals that were closed, two hospitals in Cumberland South that were closed. By December of last year, in Parrsboro, where the CEC didn't work, we now have an urgent treatment centre, and we have people calling from all over Nova Scotia asking how that happened. How did that happen? Well, there are MLAs in this House who sit on their own local committees that are recruiting physicians, are having communication with Nova Scotia Health, are

actually getting involved with other leaders in the community to take that initiative. It is not all doom and gloom. It's not all rainbows and unicorns. I know that. I'm not up here to say that we have everything fixed. We know that there are issues.

Something else that we've been after in Cumberland South for many, many years from previous governments is to commit to us that our South Cumberland Community Care Centre in Parrsboro is not going anywhere, and that our All Saints Springhill Hospital is not going anywhere. This is the first time that I can remember in my adult life that we ever had somebody who stood up and said, we are not going anywhere. All Saints Springhill Hospital, you're there. We are investing in the future for health care because we need that in rural Nova Scotia. We need that in rural Nova Scotia.

Will the CEC work in the future model? I don't know. I am not a health care professional, but what I do in my community is I reach out to the leaders who are in that health care profession. Yes, not everybody is happy with the things we do as government. Well, guess what? The previous government on that other side - not every health care professional was happy with what they were doing. At the end of the day, this House is working to better the health care system for Nova Scotia. We are doing that.

Well, I said I'd be five minutes and I have a minute and a half, and I am going to share a happy story, because I know that this debate is about emergency rooms. I'm not denying that my emergency rooms are not closed. I'm not denying that I don't hear that from my constituents. The Minister of Health and Wellness sitting here, she knows that I hear it, because I share those concerns with her almost every single week. We work through them. The same as previous governments, we work through them. Not one of us here got into politics to make our area worse. Not one of us did, and we don't hear from our constituents on their best days, but I want to share a best day for me.

On February 12th my father, 75 years old at the time, went into the hospital. For him to walk into a hospital without a tow truck towing him, something was seriously wrong. Long story short, he was airlifted to Halifax. People in the janitors' area that do the sanitation in our hospitals, the nurses, the LifeFlight crew, the physicians, the clerks, everybody who works in our health care system - I was supposed to do it last session but I couldn't stand up and do it without bringing a tear to my eye. My father wanted to say thank you to every single person that is in this health care system.

That's the main reason why I wanted to stand up and speak for a few minutes tonight. Things are bad. We're not denying that. I don't think we've ever heard our Minister of Health and Wellness say that things aren't bad. We have the commitment from every single person on this side of the House, and I want that side of the House to know you have the commitment of every single person on this side of the House. We are going to do everything we can to make every Nova Scotian's life better.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

[8:15 p.m.]

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm literally going to take just a few minutes. Listen, I know that people are tired, it's part of what we do. You guys haven't been here for three days in a row - I have - so you don't really know tired. The member for Inverness knows tired. Some of us have been around here multiple nights.

I just want to say this, and it's really almost to the point that the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables said, the member for Cumberland South, and it goes to a lot of the back and forth. It's a case of the government is going to defend their record and we're going to give it to each other back and forth in Question Period.

I will say this. For the new members, you haven't seen Question Period over the last seven years, so when you see us get upset or we come back, Madam Speaker, to them, I could give you a list of questions that our health ministers were asked over the years where they were personally blamed for deaths. They were. The members who have been around for as long as I have, or longer, know that. I would never do that to the Minister of Health and Wellness because I do think she cares.

So when you hear the back and forth - and I hear the clapping - that's part of what we do. It's democracy, but let's not forget - and I heard it a couple of times tonight - let's not forget there are a lot of people outside of this Chamber who are doing amazing work.

I've said it a few times. When I hear, oh, eight years of mess, Dr. Paul MacDonald is one person who comes to mind. David Brake, Kevin Orrell, our nurses on the ground in Cape Breton, the CBRM Health Care Redevelopment Project team - you're not insulting me at all because all we did in government - \$1 billion in Cape Breton, by the way, the largest investment in health care in the history of the island. If you want to compete, get your chequebook out and write a cheque for \$1 billion.

A new Master Agreement for doctors. We actually provided more nursing seats than the government did, to Cape Breton University, during our time. We paid nurse practitioners. We started looking at putting them into the practices and into the ERs.

The moral of the story is it's been chippy in here over this. In Question Period we've been coming back and forth at each other, and do you know what? That never goes away, it never goes away. It happened when the NDP were in government and we were in Opposition, and we got into government and this government did the exact same thing, but I would argue that they were way worse on our ministers, way worse, and nobody can deny that.

I encourage new members on all sides of the House to go back on YouTube or into Hansard and see some of the questions that came at Leo Glavine and Randy Delorey

because it would keep you up at nights. Again, I say this: I would never put questions like that to a health minister, that came at those two.

I don't want people to forget that this has been going on. This cycle happens, and I'm going to say this: I've won elections and lost them. Some of you are losing the next election. Some people over here are going to lose the next election. Health care will be an issue. It always is.

Keep in mind when we have these debates that we're going to blame government. The government is going to criticize us, but as it has been said tonight, there are doctors on the ground, there are nurses on the ground, there are medical professionals all over this province who are working day and night to support families. As a Cape Breton MLA, I have seen first-hand the complete transformation of health care on the island, driven by the doctors, the cancer specialists, the engineers. I get frustrated when I see the shovels coming, when it was criticized so hard - not by this minister, she gets it. I believe it. But your leader, the Premier of this province, wanted nothing to do with that. Not only did he take it out on us, as politicians, he took it out on them. He took it out on the people on the ground.

It drives me crazy when I see that. I don't care what side we sit on, I do not want us to get to that point and lose sight of the fact that all of those three developments - it wasn't eight years of waste. It was eight years of work for the people who are looking after us every day.

Anyway. I'm passionate the last two days, it's been good. I do want to say this to close: I appreciate the debate. Let's not lose sight of it. We're going to come at each other back and forth. We're going to come at you. You're going to blame us. I'm going to blame them. This is what we do. But let's not lose sight of the people on the ground who are doing the work.

The member for Dartmouth North - thank you for the debate tonight, very good. Aside from the fact that we really didn't have to be here this week, I think she's right: These conversations are very important.

Thank you. I'll stop there. Have a good night.

THE SPEAKER: The House will rise and meet again Thursday between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m.

The House stands adjourned.

[The House rose at 8:21 p.m.]