



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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First Session

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2022

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2022

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Keith Bain

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Angela Simmonds, Lisa Lachance

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable member for Chester-St. Margaret's.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I rise today to make an apology for an inappropriate exchange of gesture with a member opposite. Although it was in jest, I shouldn't have done it and I am sorry.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Please be seated.

Before we get into the Daily Routine, on Friday there was a point of privilege brought forward by the House Leader for the Liberal Party and a decision has been made. The Deputy Speaker heard the point of privilege that was brought forward, and she has made her determination.

I will now cede the Chair at this point for the Deputy Speaker to give a ruling on that point of privilege.

[1:03 p.m. Deputy Speaker Angela Simmonds assumed the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order please.

SPEAKER'S RULING

(Point of Privilege by the Leader of the Opposition [Hansard p. 3315, October 14, 2022])

Not a point of privilege

THE SPEAKER: On October 14th, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition rose on a question of privilege. Having provided the Speaker with the requisite notice of the question as required by Paragraph (2) of Rule 29 of the *Rules and Forms of Procedure*. Because the Speaker realized that he would be a witness in the matter, the Speaker recused himself and ceded the Chair to me, as Deputy Speaker, to hear the question of privilege.

The Leader of the Official Opposition quoted a statement made by the Speaker during a media scrum on October 13th, where the Speaker was asked whether the Premier asked the Speaker for his resignation. The Speaker's response was "... yes, he did. His reason was a couple of times that as Speaker I put the Premier and government in a hard spot with some of my rulings."

The Leader of the Official Opposition then alleged that the Premier and Speaker met, and continued to meet, to discuss the removal of the Speaker from his position, and that these communications were occurring in a manner that amounts to intimidation by the Premier. The Leader of the Official Opposition went on to assert that the Premier's action had a chilling effect that impeded all members in the performance of their parliamentary functions.

Following the question being raised, no member rose in the House to speak. The Premier was not present in the Chamber at that moment and thus was unable to respond. Furthermore, while Rule 10 provides that the Speaker may participate in the proceedings of Committees of the Whole from the place of the Chair of Committees, it also precludes the Speaker from taking part in debate in the House.

Accordingly, I recessed the House to meet with the three House Leaders, the independent member for Cumberland North, and the Deputy Premier. I indicated that I would meet privately with the Premier and the Speaker to give them an opportunity to provide information in relation to the question of privilege. Returning to the Chamber, I resumed the Chair and took the matter under advisement before ceding the Chair back to the Speaker for the remainder of the day's sitting.

After the day's sitting ended, I conducted separate in camera meetings with the Premier and with the Speaker. The Premier was accompanied by his chief of staff. I advised both individuals that they were free to answer questions, to indicate that they stand on their public statements, or to not participate at all in my information gathering. The Premier made representations to me about how he felt the matter should be resolved, drawing to my attention various precedents that he considered relevant to my deliberations. He did not provide any statement in relation to the allegations contained in the question of privilege. The Speaker stated for me his version of the events that gave rise to the question of privilege. I thank them both for their willingness to meet with me.

Before I continue, allow me to state that I do not think that my meetings with members in private should be taken as a precedent to be followed generally. The challenge here was that while debate on the question of privilege could have been postponed until the Premier was in the Chamber and able to rise and make representations on the matter in the usual way, the Rules provide no mechanism for the Speaker to partake in debate in the House, even when the Speaker has left the Chair.

This is usually unproblematic, except in an instance such as this in which the Speaker has effectively become a witness to the alleged breach and is needed to provide his version of events to establish whether a prima facie case has been established. Because of this, I felt it necessary to meet with the Speaker in private outside of the House.

For the sake of consistency, I met with the Premier in private as well. I declared my intention to follow this course of action to the House Leaders and independent member, and they voiced no objection. I consider this approach peculiar to the unique circumstances of this case. Normally, all discussion on a question of privilege should occur on the record in the House.

This question of privilege presents a somewhat novel situation. As I interpret the question, the Leader of the Official Opposition is effectively claiming an indirect breach of his privilege. He alleges that by demanding the Speaker's resignation and threatening dismissal if not tendered, the Premier has engaged in the intimidation of the Speaker, and impaired the Speaker's ability to discharge the duties of the Speaker impartially and independently. As a consequence of the Speaker being impeded in discharging his duties, the Leader of the Official Opposition appears to allege that he and all members of the House are consequentially impeded.

The role of the Speaker on hearing a question of privilege is not to adjudicate the question by finding facts and make a determinative ruling of whether an individual or corporate privilege of the House has been breached; only the House itself may determine whether a breach of privilege has, in fact, been committed. Rather, the Speaker must determine whether a prima facie case has been established which would justify giving the matter precedence over other business of the House. See *Beauchesne's Parliamentary*

Rules and Forms, sixth edition. As stated by Speaker Murphy in his ruling of March 27, 2019:

“...the decision I am called upon to make is whether or not a prima facie case of breach of privilege has been raised. It is not for me to decide whether the action complained of actually happened or not. All I am to consider is whether the alleged action would constitute a breach of privilege if it were true.”

Speaker Gosse described the test in his own words in the course of delivering a ruling on April 23, 2013: “The duty of the Speaker is limited to assessing whether the point presented is arguable on its face at first glance.”

Turning to the specific privilege to which this question relates, freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation, and molestation has long been recognized as falling within the scope of a member’s privilege.

To repeat and expand on the quotation from the ruling of Speaker Bosley on May 1, 1986, in the House of Commons, cited by the Leader of the Official Opposition in posing his question:

“If an Hon. Member is impeded or obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties through threats, intimidation, bribery attempts or other improper behaviour, such a case would fall within the limits of parliamentary privilege. Should an Hon. Member be able to say that something has happened which prevented him or her from performing functions, that he or she has been threatened, intimidated, or in any way unduly influenced, there would be a case for the Chair to consider.”

The second sentence from this quotation is important. In addition to there being an act of intimidation, a ruling by Speaker Scheer in the House of Commons on January 28, 2014, makes it clear that “a direct link must exist between the situation giving rise to the complaint and the ability of members to perform their parliamentary functions.”

Accordingly, one may view the test to be satisfied as comprising two questions:

1. Objectively, was there an intimidating action; and
2. Is there a direct link between the intimidating action and an impairment of a specific parliamentary duty or function?

If there is no prime facie evidence of intimidation, the inquiry stops there.

In this case, the Leader of the Official Opposition has alleged that the Premier has intimidated the Speaker in the course of demanding that the Speaker resign from the Office of the Speaker so that a new Speaker might be elected. The bare assertion requires more information to make a determination. Had the allegation been made in relation to any other member being intimidated, that member could have risen and made representations about the events to provide evidence allowing - or precluding - the finding of a prima facie case.

Because it was the Speaker and the Speaker cannot participate in debate in the House, it was necessary to obtain his representations outside of the House. Because the Premier chose not to state his version of events, my determination will be made on the basis of the Speaker's statements to me, which I summarize below.

I emphasize that what follows do not purport to be findings of fact. They are the assertions of the Speaker and are being taken at face value, the same as would be statements made by a member rising to participate on debate on a question of privilege. The question is whether these statements, if believed to be true, contain the necessary elements to establish a prima facie breach of privilege.

According to the Speaker, approximately five weeks ago, the Speaker was asked to meet the Premier. The Premier asked the Speaker to resign from the Office of Speaker, or risk the Premier having him removed from office. He was told by the Premier that the Premier was unhappy with the Speaker's decision to require that masks be worn to impede the spread of COVID-19 during the Spring sitting of the House, and his decision to appoint a panel to inquire into certain rates of remuneration payable to members of the House as was required under Section 45A of the House of Assembly Act.

The Speaker did not provide an answer to the Premier's request. There was a follow-up call some time later which did not end conclusively. Finally, this past week, the Speaker was asked to sign an unaddressed, undated paper stating that he was resigning as Speaker effective April 1, 2023.

The Speaker did so and was told by the Premier that the letter would be held in confidence until April, at which point it would be acted upon. The Speaker stated it was his hope that the Premier would change his mind between now and April. However, on October 13, a public announcement was made by the PC caucus that the Speaker had provided his resignation, effective April 1, 2023.

Much of the foregoing has already been reported in the media or is otherwise a matter of public record. However, there is some additional information that the Speaker provided that is specifically relevant to the question of privilege.

The Speaker indicated that the Premier never asked him to change the way he conducted himself or the nature of his rulings in exchange for the Premier withdrawing his request for a resignation. It was made very clear to the Speaker that the Premier wanted

him to resign and there were no circumstances under which the Premier was willing to countenance the Speaker's continuation in the role.

[1:15 p.m.]

Similarly, the Speaker indicated that he has not and will not change his conduct in office to appease the Premier. The Speaker was unequivocal in indicating his commitment to ruling impartially in accordance with the rules, precedents, practices, and customs of the House, and to being fair to all members.

He further indicated that when he said he hoped the Premier would reconsider, he did not mean that he hoped his rulings would be received more favourably; he simply hoped that the Premier would think better of removing a Speaker doing his best to discharge the duties of the Speaker without favour or partisanship.

Before going further, I should make something clear. The Speaker does not answer to the Premier, and the Premier has no power as Premier to dismiss a Speaker. The Speaker may only be removed by a resolution of the House. However, the Premier is the leader of a caucus to which a majority of the members of this House belong and, to the extent the members of that caucus will follow the lead of the Premier, he can procure the removal of the Speaker via such a resolution. The Speaker was well aware of this reality.

Whatever one may think of the Premier's request that the Speaker resign, I do not think the Premier's actions can be construed as an attempt to intimidate the Speaker or as having had that effect. As stated by Speaker Murphy in his ruling of March 26, 2021 in response to allegations of intimidation, "intimidation occurs when one frightens or threatens another, usually to compel the other to do something or to deter the other from doing something."

There is no indication that the Premier's statements toward the Speaker sought to or had the effect of coercing or compelling the Speaker to change his conduct in the discharge of his duties as Speaker or deter him from making rulings unfavourable to the government, and thus no breach of the Speaker's privilege that impaired his ability to act impartially and independently. A finding of intimidation would have required a more conditional threat through which the Premier might have compelled the Speaker to behave differently, or a corresponding offer by the Speaker to alter his behaviour.

Having considered the representations of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Premier, and the Speaker, there is no indication of coercion or compulsion, and thus no basis on which to establish even a prima facie case that the Speaker's privilege has been breached. The breach of the privilege of the other members of the House was effectively dependent on finding a breach of the Speaker's privilege. Without such a finding, it is unnecessary to consider whether a breach of the Speaker's privilege had the indirect effect of breaching the privileges of the other members of the House.

Nothing in my ruling should be taken as condoning anything that has taken place. Such judgment is beyond the scope of this decision. I have been asked to rule on a specific question of privilege, namely whether the Premier has engaged in an act of intimidation of the Speaker that had the effect of impairing the Speaker in the impartial execution of his duties as Speaker and consequentially had the effect of impairing the Leader of the Official Opposition and other members in the discharge of their duties.

I have not conducted an investigation, as that is not the role of a Speaker in deciding whether a prima facie case exists. Rather, I have considered the representations made on the matter by the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Premier, and the Speaker to determine whether, on the basis of those representations, facts have been alleged that, if true, would constitute a breach of the privilege specified by the Leader of the Official Opposition. For the reasons already stated, I have ruled that there was no indication of the attempted or actual coercion or compulsion necessary to establish a prima facie case of intimidation with that effect.

In concluding, I note that we must not tangle the three separate branches of constitutional power: the executive, the courts, and the Legislature. As Justice McLachlin - as she then was - of the Supreme Court of Canada held when upholding the distinct constitutional power of this Legislature in *New Brunswick Broadcasting Co. v. Nova Scotia (Speaker of the House of Assembly)*, “[i]t is fundamental to the working of government as a whole that all these parts play their proper role. It is equally fundamental that no one of them overstep its bounds, that each show proper deference for the legitimate sphere of activity of the other.”

I want to ask the Speaker to resume the Chair.

[1:19 p.m. Speaker Keith Bain resumed the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: We’ll begin the Daily Routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I draw the members’ attention to the gallery opposite, where we have joining us from Protect Our Southdale Wetland Society and Protect Eisner Cove Wetland, Bill Zebedee - I’ll ask you to stand when I say your name - Margaret Moffett, Lisa Isaacman, and Darlene Gilbert. I ask all members of this House to join me in welcoming these folks to the gallery.

THE SPEAKER: Indeed, we do welcome all visitors to the House. I hope you enjoy today's proceedings.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I beg leave to introduce a petition entitled "Protect Eisner Cove Wetland in Dartmouth." It has 328 signatures, and my signature is also affixed.

The operative clause reads: "We the undersigned residents of Nova Scotia, are calling on the Government of Nova Scotia to legally protect and preserve Eisner Cove Wetland also known as the Southdale Future Growth Node or the Southdale Lands."

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

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

KENDRA COOMBES: I am tabling a document from the Disability Support Program Financial Eligibility Policy for a member statement I'll be reading today.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, in consideration of a member's statement to follow, I would like to table the September 26th edition of *Springtide Magazine*, an article on seniors homelessness in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The paper is tabled.

As Speaker of the House of Assembly and pursuant to Section 163 of the Elections Act, I'm pleased to table the following reports from Elections Nova Scotia: *Statement of Votes and Statistics Volume I; 41st Provincial General Election, August 17, 2021; Report on the Conduct of the August 17, 2021 Provincial General Election and Recommendations for Legislative Change, Volume II; and Recommendations for Legislative Change 2022.*

Pursuant to Subsection 24(1) of the Ombudsman Act and Section 28 of the Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act, I'm pleased to table the *Office of Ombudsman Annual Report 2021-2022.*

The reports are tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

RESOLUTION NO. 399

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

Whereas October 18th is Persons Day, marking the Persons Case in 1929, which declared women as persons under the law, and established women's rights to fully participate in politics and affairs of state; and

Whereas the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women supports women leaders and those aspiring to hold leadership roles in the public service through the Campaign School for Women, a program to help participants run for office, organize campaigns, or pursue non-elected political roles; and

Whereas increasing women's representation in politics and leadership can lead to greater gender equality and to better social, economic, and political outcomes for all;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly recognize this important day, promote women in all their diversity as the leaders of Nova Scotia, and work together to advance gender equity and remove barriers for all women and girls.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 400

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

Whereas Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff worked long hours during Hurricane Fiona, reaching out to industry members to assess damage levels and provide sector information to EMO's provincial coordination centre; and

Whereas staff worked with our federal partners to both understand industry impacts and coordinate a response; and

Whereas staff quickly and diligently began sharing information on both provincial and federal disaster-relief programs with our industry clients;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House extend a sincere thanks to our Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, as well as our industry partners, for their efforts in ensuring our world-class industry recovers and continues to prosper.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 208 - An Act to Amend Chapter 1 of the Acts of 1994-95, the Environment Act. (Hon. Tim Halman)

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

With the consent of the House, could we revert back quickly to the order of business, Government Notices of Motion?

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION]

The honourable Minister of Public Works.

RESOLUTION NO. 401

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

Whereas many Public Works employees worked tirelessly to help the province recover from the damage of Hurricane Fiona; and

Whereas from clearing trees and fixing washouts and roads, to providing traffic control to support key partners - including our Emergency Management Office colleagues and Nova Scotia Power - many Public Works staff took time away from their loved ones to work extra hours and support cleanup efforts; and

Whereas I had the opportunity to go and tour damaged sites in hard-hit areas like Pictou County and Cape Breton, and saw first-hand just how challenging the conditions were across Nova Scotia;

Therefore be it resolved that I want to thank Public Works employees for all the work they did and continue to do to help Nova Scotians after the devastating damage of Hurricane Fiona.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

RESOLUTION NO. 402

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas provincial parks offer excellent opportunities for recreation, education, research, tourism, and enjoyment of nature; and

[1:30 p.m.]

Whereas Dunns Beach and Monks Head in Antigonish County include areas of sandy beach, small wetlands, and forests, and both areas have been long favoured spots of boating, swimming, and fishing; and

Whereas designating the Crown lands of Dunns Beach and Monks Head as new provincial parks furthers the provincial goal of protecting 20 per cent of Nova Scotia's land and water mass by 2030;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House recognize the important role our parks play in shared stewardship of natural resources and Nova Scotians' enjoyment of the outdoors.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 209 - Entitled an Act to Improve Access to Pharmaceuticals. (Claudia Chender)

Bill No. 210 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 393 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Regulations Act. (Hon. Brad Johns)

Bill No. 211 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 277 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Builders' Lien Act. (Hon. Brad Johns)

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

MEN OF THE DEEPS: PLAT. JUB. MEDAL RECIPS. - CONGRATS.

JOHN WHITE: I rise to congratulate the Men of the Deeps on being awarded the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal on October 7, 2022.

The Men of the Deeps received this very special award in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the arts and culture of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and Canada. Through their performances, the Men of the Deeps have been increasing awareness of our culture since 1966.

The Men of the Deeps have released 10 albums and one book. They have been featured in documentaries, including being the subject of two National Film Board of Canada films and have toured around the world preserving the rich folklore of our Island's coal-mining communities.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to report that one of the founding members, Jim MacLellan, was in attendance for the recognition. At the age of 88 years young, Mr. MacLellan remains an active performer of the Men of the Deeps choir. Congratulations, gentlemen.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Before I read my member's statement, I was wondering if I could beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, we have a few folks here from the Valley for this important member's statement which I had hoped to do quite a number of months ago but COVID-19 did not permit the attendance of the subject matter for my member's statement.

I would like the following from the West Gallery to stand: Captain Clem Fairclough, his partner Beth Moore and his brother Chris Fairclough. Please accept the warm welcome of the House. (Standing Ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Once again we welcome all visitors to the House and hope you enjoy your stay.

The honourable member for Kings South.

FAIRCLOUGH, CAPT. CLEMENT: 60 YRS. OF FIREFIGHTING - THANKS

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I want to pay tribute today to a remarkable Nova Scotian: a volunteer firefighter who has spent 60 years committed to being a first responder.

If you want to see the beating heart of a rural community, look no further than the fire department. The men and women who volunteer as firefighters spend countless hours training, fundraising for equipment, educating the public on fire prevention, and most importantly, dropping everything at the sound of a pager.

Among this extraordinary group of citizens is a superhero - Captain Clement "Clem" Fairclough of Coldbrook - a member of the Kentville Fire Department for 60 years. He exemplifies the values of service to community and commitment to his fellow firefighters.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in thanking Captain Clem Fairclough for 60 years of volunteer service protecting life and property throughout Kings County. (Standing Ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

BROTHERS MEATS: BUS. SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate a local family business located in the North End of Halifax.

Established in 1951, the original Brothers Meats is a family-run business that has been a Halifax tradition for over 60 years. The Old World recipes were brought to Halifax from Poland by Maximillian Kielbratowski for all Canadians and visitors to enjoy. His legacy lives on through his family, who have continued to perfect the art of true hardwood smoking.

Twin brothers Peter and Andre carried on the legacy for over 30 years and have taught the art of specialty smoking to their eldest children, Crystal and Jessica, who now own and operate Brothers Meats.

Located in the heart of North End Halifax, Brothers Meats is especially famous for its world-renowned pepperoni, which is available in a variety of flavors. Brothers produces over 2,000 pounds of pepperoni a day and it is sold in supermarkets and convenience stores all over Nova Scotia.

I would like the members of this House to help me congratulate Brothers Meats for over 70 years in the business of making delicious deli meats in the community of Halifax Needham.

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

CHESTER HIST. SOC.: CABOOSE ARRIVAL - RECOG.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to announce the arrival of a 1970 Canadian National Railway Company caboose to the Chester Train Station.

The members of the Chester Historical Society have worked for five years to track down a real train and recently found a caboose available through Tri Province Enterprises in Moncton. The owners, Bruce Nolan and family, have ties to the South Shore and when they heard where it would be headed, they generously donated it for free. I'd also like to add that The Daniel Haughn Trust contributed the funds to cover shipping.

The train travelled through Hurricane Fiona and has finally arrived. It will serve as a tourist attraction and assist in the preservation of a proud part of Chester-St. Margaret's history.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

DAUGHTER, ANGELINA - BIRTHDAY WISHES

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I rise in my seat today to acknowledge 24 years ago that I and my husband Dean were blessed with a beautiful daughter. Although if he'd had it his way, she would have been born on his birthday, but luckily 12:07 is October 18th.

"Phenomenal woman," as Maya Angelou says, "that's me. I walk into a room just as cool as you please. And to a man, the fellows stand or fall down on their knees." My girl, Angelina, that is you.

I adore you. Happy Birthday. Please let your light shine. When those don't want it to shine, shine brighter. I love you. Happy Birthday. I can't wait to celebrate with you and I'm so super proud of you. I am so blessed to be your Mom and I hope you have a great day. I love you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

SRS. HOMELESSNESS: INCREASE - RECOG.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I want to draw the attention of the House to a recent essay I tabled earlier, which appeared in the online journal *Spring* on September 26th, about homelessness amongst seniors in Nova Scotia.

Author Joanne Hussey points out that amongst the 586 people who identified themselves as homeless in Halifax in the most recent Point in Time survey, 87 were over the age of 60. She also points out that of those who identify themselves in that count as having become homeless for the first time in the last 12 months, 26 per cent were seniors.

These startling facts, writes Hussey, reflect a situation in which seniors who rent have the lowest incomes of rental households compared to other age groups in the province. There are, in fact, 3,400 senior households today paying more than 50 per cent of their income for housing in Nova Scotia. This, she rightly argues, is a terrible indictment of the government's overreliance on market mechanisms to address the housing crisis.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

VOLUNS.: LITF - RECOG.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, the 15th Biennial Liverpool International Theatre Festival took place this past weekend from October 13th through October 16th.

The executive, artistic directors, and their team of volunteers stayed the course through the pandemic, keeping a visible profile with an innovative virtual film festival and a podcast series. Finally, after postponements and rescheduling of the 2020 festival, they once again welcomed the world back to Queens County for their world-renowned event.

By all reports, the festival was a tremendous success and troupes from Belgium, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, the U.S., Wales, and Toronto entertained audiences with a diverse range of performances, all while enjoying the warm hospitality and beauty of their host communities.

I ask all members to please join me in applauding the commitment and efforts of the entire LITF team and in congratulating them on another successful festival.

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

CHILD CARE CTRS. STAFF: IMPORTANCE OF WORK - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: On the second day of Small Business Week I'm going to cheat a little bit. We only have seven days in Small Business Week, and I only have one member statement. I want to recognize the hard-working owners, operators, and early

childhood educators who work at the 14 child-care centres that operate in Fairview-Clayton Park.

I've had the pleasure of visiting many of these centres and witnessing first-hand the quality care that they are providing to our youngest residents. Staff are engaged and children are building, creating, and developing essential skills. Over the years they might not remember the things that were taught to them, but they will actually take all of these lessons that they've learned in these centres with them for the rest of their lives.

Our children deserve the best possible start in life to help them develop their full potential, and each day, in centres across the province, the staff are demonstrating their extraordinary dedication to ensuring that this happens.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and the members of this House to join me in celebrating these important educators in our community.

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

NAT. DIS. EMPL. AWAR. MO.: BARRIERS TO EMPL. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise today to recognize October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

This October, employers are encouraged to take part in a nationwide campaign that highlights the positive contributions that employees with disabilities make to Canadian workplaces. Persons with disabilities contribute so much to our province but face many barriers to employment.

One of these barriers is the loss of support if they are on the disability support program. Should they exceed \$350, an applicant or participant - and I'm quoting the just-tabled document - "An applicant/participant who is earning an income from wages, tips, gratuities, commissions, or net business income shall retain the first \$350 of the net earned income. For any income earned in excess of \$350, earnings shall be applied to their DSP support costs." For example, should a person make \$350 and a penny, they will be clawed back 25 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we must make employment accessible - that means individuals should not be penalized for making over \$350.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank.

HENDSBEE, ZACHERY: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this moment today to honour the memory of a young man from Beaver Bank who left us much too soon.

Zachery Hendsbee had just graduated from Lockview High School, where he not only played football for the Lockview Dragons but also for Team Nova Scotia. Zach was an avid outdoorsman and loved his job with Buck Coughlan Roofing & Repairs in Beaver Bank. His antics, comedy, and “rather ask forgiveness than permission” attitude will be missed by many.

Mr. Speaker, Zach’s time on this earth, while short, touched many hearts in our community and his loss is truly felt by all. Please join me in remembering Zach Hendsbee.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

SPRINGFIELD ELEM. SCHOOL: CULT. EVENTS - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge Springfield Elementary School’s many continuing efforts to showcase culture through the school year. The school is dedicated to preserving Gaelic culture through presentations and school-wide projects as well as combining elements of different cultures and giving students an all-round unique educational experience.

I thank Springfield Elementary for their efforts, and I look forward to attending any cultural event that the school is planning in the months to come. As somebody who cherishes cultural values, I am delighted to have a school like Springvale in my constituency.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North. (Interruption)

Order, please. I’m sorry, my microphone wasn’t on so I’m now going to ask the honourable member for Dartmouth North - your microphone wasn’t on either because mine wasn’t.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

BAGEL MONTREAL STYLE: 5TH ANNIV. - BEST WISHES

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, when the question is asked, “Where is the best bagel in the city?,” the answer, hands down, is Bagel Montreal Style in Dartmouth North. So, this Small Business Week, I rise to wish Bagel Montreal Style a very happy 5th anniversary.

[1:45 p.m.]

Located on Wyse Road - and this is important, folks, because you need to go there - beside the Macdonald Bridge, Bagel Montreal Style is famous for their hand-rolled and boiled bagels which they then cook in a wood-burning oven.

The family business was started by Labana, Kulwinder, and their daughter Parabhjot Singh. The family moved to Nova Scotia from the business's namesake, Montreal, where Labana had spent 20 years making wood-fired bagels.

Bagel Montreal Style currently offers 20 flavours of bagels, including sun-dried tomato and basil, chocolate chip, steak spice, za'atar, rosemary and sea salt and jalapeno cheddar. My favourite is the TLC on everything and I also get my family lots of sesame seed bagels.

They are truly delicious. I ask the House to join me in celebrating five years of Bagel Montreal Style in Dartmouth North and encourage everyone to do themselves a favour and go and get one.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

UNSHELTERED PEOPLE: INCREASING NOS. - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, homelessness is not a crime. Today I rise to bring awareness to the increasing number of people living unsheltered in my constituency of Cumberland North, as well as to the stigma that is often attached to those who may be homeless.

Being homeless is not a crime. Those who are homeless find themselves in an extremely difficult situation for a variety of reasons and they are simply trying to survive. Many unsheltered people are actively seeking a permanent place to live and, as well, they may be among the working poor but are not able to find a home, due to the lack of availability or affordability.

When thinking of those in our community who are unsheltered, we must consider that it could be someone we love or even ourselves, in time of need.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to join me in acknowledging the growing number of Nova Scotians who find themselves needing shelter as the difficult Winter approaches.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

CONNOLLY, KENNETH: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember Kenneth Connolly, who passed away at the age of 97 on August 20th, in Guysborough Intervale. Kenneth was a hard-working man and a farmer who lived off the lands. He raised livestock, chickens, and pigs, and had large potato fields and vegetable gardens to provide for his family. Even in his early 90s, he would still lend a hand when hay season came.

Kenneth was a sharp card player, enjoying many family and community card games with his wife Margaret, who passed away earlier this year. He enjoyed music, singing and travelling to dances with his beloved Margaret.

He and Margaret raised 10 children and lived their out their days in the home they shared near family and friends in their community of Guysborough Intervale. His love for nature often had him in the woods hunting or at the lake fishing. He was always interested in politics, especially when election time came around.

I ask the House to join me in remembering the life of Kenneth Connolly, who will be missed by his community and his wonderful family.

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

SMALL BUSINESSES: RISK - RECOG.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, this week marks Small Business Week here in Nova Scotia. I'd like to recognize all the different organizations that have made their home in Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. Our constituency is home to restaurants, child care, the forestry industry, building resources, accounting, insurance, commercial wharf construction, garden centres, farming and recreation, solar installation, grocery construction and development, hairdressers, barbers, communications and marketing services - the list goes on.

I just want to thank all those Nova Scotians who have taken it upon themselves to take those risks and put their lives on the line to make their way here at home in Nova Scotia, in particular in the beautiful community of Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

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

THREESIXFIVE: VIDEO PROD. CO. LAUNCH - WELCOME

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, today for Small Business Week, I'm spotlighting ThreeSixFive, a video production company founded by Dave Culligan that provides comprehensive film production. Their new office recently opened across the street from this Legislature.

Founder Dave Culligan kickstarted ThreeSixFive in 2018 with a wildly ambitious video-a-day project that highlighted the beautiful and unique people and places in our beautiful and unique province.

Dave and his team are no strangers to giving back to the community. Recent projects in Nova Scotia include highlighting the 100th anniversary of Easter Seals Nova Scotia, showcasing Brigadoon Village for families living with health challenges, documenting the Paint the Park project in Mulgrave Park, and covering the launch of the new North Preston basketball court.

I ask that my fellow members join me in welcoming Dave Culligan and the ThreeSixFive team to downtown Halifax and providing world-class production help to so many community organizations.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

BOUDREAU, BLAIR: WEDGEPORT BOOKLET - CONGRATS.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Blair Boudreau on his recent project.

With the construction of the new École Wedgeport under way, there are a lot of mixed emotions, including excitement for the new school and nostalgia for the old. Blair, a former principal of École Wedgeport, with the involvement of students, staff and the community, created a keepsake booklet entitled *Livret Communautaire de Wedgeport*. The recently unveiled booklet speaks of the polio vaccine trial in 1962, the sinking of the Silver King in 1967, the high points of the international tuna tournaments in Wedgeport, and more.

I would ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating Blair Boudreau, the students and staff of École Wedgeport, and community members on their joint effort in keeping the rich history of their community alive.

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

JOHNSTON, DOROTHY: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, I stand today to recognize Dorothy Johnston, a long-time resident of Cole Harbour who passed away unexpectedly last December.

Dorothy was a wife, mother, former schoolteacher, and lifetime quilter. Her quilts were made with precision and never to sell, only to donate. During her lifetime, she lovingly made small quilts for children, which were given to local police organizations to

comfort children in stressful situations. Some of her masterpieces were given to the IWK Auxiliary for fundraising.

After her passing, her family generously donated her supply of quilt fabric to the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, who then sold it and raised over \$17,000 to help African grandmothers who are struggling to raise their orphaned grandchildren.

I ask the members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking the Johnston family and posthumously recognizing Dorothy Johnston for her generosity during her lifetime.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

FORTUNE DOUGHNUT: BAKED GOODS - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: In the theme of Small Business Week, if you're craving a delicious dessert, the North End is where you need to be. Home to some of the best baked goods in town, Fortune Doughnut will not only satisfy your taste buds but will also give you an unforgettable experience at the same time. This local business is guaranteed to have you seeing doughnuts in your future.

Located at 2306 Gottingen Street, Fortune Doughnut offers an array of freshly made doughnuts. Just imagine this: walking into a shop and being greeted by a three-eyed cat, gigantic doughnuts floating above your head, and so many eccentric pieces of artwork you don't know where to look.

That is Fortune Doughnut. This small space is guaranteed to have your senses stimulated and your mind blown. Not to mention, the colourful design offers the perfect aesthetic to snap some pics for your Instagram. Before opening Fortune Doughnuts in April of 2019, owner Erin was in the candy business for 20 years.

I would like to invite all members visiting the North End of Halifax to make sure to stop into Fortune Doughnut for a sweet treat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

VOLUNS.: SHAG HBR. MUS. - THANKS

NOLAN YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the 1967 Shag Harbour UFO Incident Society.

The October 4, 1967, event is generally regarded as Canada's most famous and important UFO case. The society is dedicated to the collection and promotion of history

associated with the event, including hosting the Shag Harbour UFO XPO, which brings together experts and eyewitnesses from around the world.

The museum, which opened 15 years ago, is located in the village of Shag Harbour, welcoming visitors to view their collection of documents and artifacts.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and thank all the volunteers who support and maintain the museum and are dedicated to promoting the story of this incident.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

STEVENSON, CST. HEIDI: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to remember and honour a Cole Harbour community member, Constable Heidi Stevenson, who was killed in the line of duty on April 19, 2020.

This past weekend, the annual event to honour fallen peace officers was held at the Grand Parade here in Halifax. A plaque was placed for Constable Stevenson on the memorial for those who were killed in the line of duty, the 27th such name. She is remembered for her love of family, her community, and especially for her love of the RCMP, with which she served 23 years.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask everyone here today to keep Constable Stevenson, her husband, children, and the RCMP family in their thoughts.

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

MACNEIL, LYNN & STEVIE: SELF-CARE BAGS CREATION - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two community-minded individuals who together make a formidable pair: Lynn McNeil and her husband Steve, a volunteer firefighter.

While Lynn McNeil's mother was undergoing cancer treatments, someone gave her a blanket to keep her comfortable. Inspired by this kind gesture, Lynn felt compelled to pay it forward. She had the idea to create self-care bags in honour of her late mother, Georgina, and her father, Charles "Chickie" Bennett, who were both cared for in the Cancer Centre.

With the help of Steve, Lynn put together comfort packages which were shared with patients undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital Cancer Centre. Thank you, Lynn and Steve for your kind gestures.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

PATHIRANA, DARINI: BLOCK PARTY ORG. - THANKS

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Eastern Passage resident Darini Pathirana for organizing a neighbourhood block party so fellow community members could have a day to meet each other.

On September 10, 2022, I was honoured to be part of the first Rock the Block Briarwood Subdivision gathering. Neighbours got to know each other over BBQ and snacks provided by local businesses like Tricia Lishous Food Truck and Coulomb Electric, to name a couple. Children played games including a fun cake walk.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in thanking Darini for renewing a sense of community spirit for so many and for the inspiration in uniting all of her enthusiastic community volunteers for recognizing great relationships and good neighbours.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize my aunt, Barbara MacKenzie, my mother's sister, who is celebrating her 90th birthday.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

MACCORMICK, MYLES: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Myles McCormick for his outstanding community involvement. Myles is a retired school principal who is always willing to give his time to further community and government initiatives.

He is a board member of the Lung Association, he holds the Grounds Committee Vice Chair for HRM, and he is also a member of the Litter Prevention Committee in our constituency in Clayton Park West. Recently, he has decided to lead the Rockingham Walking School Bus. Despite it being a great sacrifice of time, he was incredibly motivated to be involved in this initiative so that more children can walk to school safely and also improve their health.

Such spirit of volunteerism keeps Nova Scotia turning. I would ask that the House join me in recognizing Myles for his community involvement. Thank you, Myles, for all that you do.

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

FIRST SIGHT COFFEE AND BAR: GRAND OPENING - CONGRATS.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, many members can probably relate to the integral role of coffee in life as an MLA. One can only imagine my excitement when a brand-new coffee shop opened just down the street from my constituency office.

First Sight Coffee and Bar opened shortly before this House reopened, and the staff and leadership have been nothing but impressive so far. The reimagined retail space boasts tasteful and modern decor, a working kitchen, a full espresso bar, and a fully licensed bar. Meals and beverages are thoughtfully arranged and served with a smile, and you can enjoy them while looking over the recently revamped streetscape of Spring Garden Road.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like all members to join me this Small Business Week to congratulate First Sight for its successful grand opening and for adding one more bright new business to the province's most iconic shopping areas.

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

[2:00 p.m.]

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: POWER RATE HIKES - INFORM

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, an article by the CBC shows that what started as a 10-per-cent rate hike for Nova Scotia Power ratepayers is now looking like a 26-per-cent rate hike due to the impact of skyrocketing fuel costs. I'll table that.

I believe the Premier could have intervened on this when the hike was at 10 per cent. The Premier could have intervened in the Summer when this rate hike was increasing to 11.6 per cent. I believe he chose not to. Now that we are about to see a potential 26 per cent increase on power bills in Nova Scotia, will the Premier please inform this House if he plans to intervene on this very critical matter?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Look, like all Nova Scotians, we're watching the cost of living go up. The affordability crisis that we're under here in this province is of concern, certainly to the government and to most Nova Scotians.

On the Nova Scotia Power situation specifically, I think the member would know that there are two possible elements: One is rates, one is fuel adjustments. The fuel

adjustment, I think, was added on and certainly no government has ever intervened in any fuel adjustment mechanism process. The rate process is another discussion. We'll see. Of course, the member, in his concerns with affordability, will probably take this opportunity to stand up in the Chamber and tell Nova Scotians that he supports this government in saying no to a carbon tax to the federal government.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Not only did we support the government's motion to stop the carbon tax, but we also had a plan in place in Nova Scotia - a cap and trade system that protected Nova Scotians from increased costs at the pump. We just heard recently that this government is actually going to scrap that plan - a plan that not only protected Nova Scotians from higher fuel prices, but also had a green fund that allowed Nova Scotians to invest in fuel efficiencies in their homes.

Recognizing all these accruing costs that are affecting Nova Scotians - their ability to pay their bills and put food on their tables - when will we see consequential action from this government, particularly on the power rate side, to ensure that this does not happen any further?

THE PREMIER: I appreciate the member's attempts to rewrite history, but facts matter. The reality is that the cap and trade system that was put in place was just a stopgap. I do applaud Premier McNeil on pushing it down the road, but the time is now. The cap and trade could not be renewed. It expired. There was never a single trade under it. It wasn't a real thing.

Now we have to deal with real things. We put forward a plan that's much better than a carbon tax. It's a build-on on the prior government's plan, actually. We've said it's much better than a carbon tax. It is better for the planet. Now, we have members opposite who are saying to the federal government that they agree with the carbon tax on Nova Scotians. We don't agree with the carbon tax. The Opposition should step up and support Nova Scotians.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm not sure how we could be more clear in that, particularly in the fact that we took the time to negotiate with the federal government to save the cost of fuel for Nova Scotians while this government sat on their hands for a year and let that carbon tax come into place. Not only have they sat on their hands when it comes to negotiating a better deal for the carbon tax that Nova Scotians are now going to face, they sat on their hands for the last year on this rate increase that Nova Scotians are going to be impacted with, which now could be up to 26 per cent.

The Premier can sit here and make excuses for the fact that Nova Scotians are going to see a 26 per cent increase on their fuel bills this Winter, but certainly on this side of the House, we'd actually like to see some solutions.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I assure the member that on this side of the House, we're not in the business of excuses. We're in the business of action. We don't have the luxury of sitting on our hands, because after eight years of neglect from the Liberal government, there is a lot of work to do, and we have gone to work doing it, and we will continue to do that.

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

PREM.: DOCTOR WAIT-LIST - EXPLAIN

CLAUDIA CHENDER: My question is for the Premier. The government has finally released the family doctor wait-list numbers for October, and it's not looking good. There are over 40,000 more people on the list than when the government was elected last Summer. The band-aid Virtual Care NS program is also bursting at the seams with people now logging on in the morning to see that the platform is full for the day, unless they pay a fee.

The Premier has questioned the accuracy of the doctor wait-list numbers, but one thing that can't be questioned is that thousands of people in this province don't have access to the health care they need.

My question to the Premier is: When will the people of this province have access to a continuous primary care provider?

THE PREMIER: Well, Mr. Speaker, honestly, it's the goal of our government, of all Nova Scotians, that every Nova Scotian have a family doctor. That's our wish, for sure. That's also the wish for every Canadian. Unfortunately, it's not a reality right now, just with the changes of demographics, but we're committed to making sure that Nova Scotians have access to care.

I don't want to allow the Opposition to confuse the fact that being on the list does not equal not having access to care. We have a number of people on the list who are accessing Virtual Care NS. The Leader of the NDP, the third party, can refer to that as a band-aid, but I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the thousands of people who access care through Virtual Care NS are happy that they have that mechanism.

We'll continue to build on it. There is work to be done, but there is work being done as well.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, ask anyone in this province who has any serious medical condition whether a walk-in clinic or virtual care and no continuous health care is sufficient and every single one of them will say no.

The Need a Family Practice Registry probably isn't accurate. It is almost certainly much higher. The wait-list says 116,000 people don't have a doctor, but according to Statistics Canada, it's upward of one in four Nova Scotians who, in fact, do not have access to primary care.

Mr. Speaker, how long will Nova Scotians have to wait before they have access to a doctor?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I assure the member that there is an incredible amount of work being done on this side of the House.

There is a lot of work to be done, there's no question. We know what we inherited. We inherited it with our eyes wide open, and we were forthright with Nova Scotians that it would take time.

It's taking time. It will take more time. It will take time and it will cost money. We have a significant investment in health care. We are investing the time. We recruited a record number of doctors. We offered jobs to every graduating nursing student. We're adding more nursing students. We are exploring a new medical school.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of work being done, but I assure you there will always be work to be done and this is the government that is rolling up their sleeves again to work on it.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about what this government inherited. We know that the primary care situation is bad all across the province, but in the words of a local columnist, it has exploded in the Central Zone. In 2020, the government inherited 4,000 people in the Central Zone on the registry. There are now 47,000 people in the Central Zone on that list.

People in all areas of the province need care, but recently, the Premier quietly ended the incentives for new doctors setting up in the Central Zone. As one family medicine resident put it, it boggles the mind. It does not appear that government is making the primary care situation better. Will the Premier admit that it was a mistake to cancel that incentive?

THE PREMIER: No, Mr. Speaker. The issues in health care are province-wide for sure, there's no question about that. The solutions are also province-wide. That's why we're opening up urgent care centres in North Sydney, Parrsboro, Pictou County. We understand that all Nova Scotians, regardless of where they live, have a right . . . (Interruptions)

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

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: We understand this is a province-wide issue and I assure you that with the work being done, we will get to the bottom of this. We will make sure that we fix health care in this province or we will give everything we have trying to do that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

NRR: POWER RATE HIKE - INTERVENE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: On February 2nd the Premier told reporters - and I quote - that his allegiance lies with the ratepayers of this province. I'll table that, Mr. Speaker. Yet the Premier has known about this Nova Scotia Power rate increase since the Summer before the public was made aware, and has had three sessions where we could have seen action on this.

Will the Premier demonstrate his allegiance to the ratepayers and intervene before it's too late? Or does he believe that this is another story that has been manufactured by the media?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. Look, affordability is on the top of everybody's mind in this House and all across Nova Scotia. As a matter of the allegiance that this government has with the ratepayers of Nova Scotia, we were very clear from the start that we did not want to see a rate increase from Nova Scotia Power.

We were also very clear as a government, that in eight years - eight years - this hearing has not happened under the previous government. There are a lot of stakeholders who wanted to have their say about what they wanted to see with Nova Scotia Power. We've allowed that to unfold - something the previous governments haven't done.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the minister that for eight years we had rate stabilization in this province because of government intervention and legislation on the matter. We have seen the cost of living skyrocket. Of course, that's not because of decisions that the provincial government is making, but we have not seen any action from this government to address these issues. In fact, we've only seen proposals come forward from this government that tax Nova Scotians or non-residents more in this province, at a time when everybody is spending more.

We've had three sessions in this Legislature where this government could have taken action on the issue of the power rate increase. That power rate increase is now looking to be close to 30 per cent higher than what it was before. We haven't seen that in over 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: When will we see the intervention that's been promised by this government to stop this from happening?

TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, in the last 11 minutes and 38 seconds, the rate increase went from 26 per cent to 30 per cent just in this room alone in the last 30 seconds.

There are two parts to that increase: One is the rates, and one is the fuels. The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is in the last eight years, we've seen in the last two hurricanes what the reliability has been with the power grid system.

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

NRR: NSP RATEPAYERS - PROTECT

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has a lot to say on this rate hike, but we've seen no action. During the Spring session, the Premier stood in this House and said that we on this side of the House understand the importance of protecting ratepayers, and we will do exactly that. I will table that.

How can the Premier understand the importance of protecting ratepayers while allowing this 26 per cent rate hike to happen?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, time and time again, we were very clear on this side of the House that the hearing hasn't happened in the last number of years. We can argue about why the hearing didn't happen. Was it because they hid behind the solar plan that they put out in 2015 that was supposed to be 1,000 kilowatts, but when Nova Scotia Power showed up at the Law Amendments Committee, for some reason the previous government put it back to 100 kilowatts?

Mr. Speaker, we took action this Spring and we made sure that we protected the solar industry in Nova Scotia.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I've heard the minister reference several times that they need to wait and hear what ratepayers are saying at the UARB hearings. Is the minister waiting to hear Nova Scotians say that we need higher power rates in Nova Scotia while we deal with the cost of living crisis that is not only impacting our household spending power for fixed-income seniors and working-class families alike, but is also driving our economy toward a recession?

This is not acceptable, particularly from a Premier who said that he will do whatever is necessary to protect the ratepayers of this province. I will table that. When will we see action in this House to stop this issue from happening?

TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. Look, we have always said that the ratepayers are at the top of our mind. We will do whatever we can. We will not presuppose what could happen today, tomorrow, or the next day. We believe in process, and that's why we allowed the process to hear out.

We were not the government that actually shut down this Legislature for 12 months. We believe in the process, and that's the hearing from the UARB.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

NRR: POWER RATE HIKE - STOP

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, historically, any over-earnings from Nova Scotia Power were returned back into ratepayer pockets, but now Nova Scotia Power is requesting to keep 50 per cent of the over-earnings. I'll table that. Nova Scotia Power is now taking money out of Nova Scotians' pockets, and on top of this, people are also facing a 26 per cent power rate increase. Will the Premier finally stand up to Nova Scotia Power's greed and stop this 26 per cent rate hike?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: As I want to reiterate, there are two parts to that. There's the rate increase that was applied for, and there's the next few years' budget pricing that has been indicated that the NSUARB needs to hear and the fuel regulation portion of it. Of course, the ratepayer is very important to us.

Look, Mr. Speaker, I can stand here and repeat it all afternoon. We will do what we need to do as government. There are still many days and, as it looks, many hours left in this legislation session, and the NSUARB hearing is not completed yet.

KELLY REGAN: An internal government memo revealed that the Premier and his caucus were aware nearly two months prior to the Spring session that over half of Nova Scotia Power's rate application was directly tied to increasing their profits, and I'll table that. Yet they have stood in this Legislature, day after day, delivering a lot of words, hands on hearts, but zero action to protect Nova Scotians.

Knowing what they knew then and what we all know now, will the Premier finally stand up and put an end to this 26 per cent rate hike?

TORY RUSHTON: Something we were very clear on from the initial meetings, from standing in this House in the Spring on that whole question - we were very clear to Nova Scotia Power as this government. We did not want to see a rate increase. We stand by that. The hearing is still going through, Mr. Speaker. Let's not presuppose what might take place in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

[2:15 p.m.]

DHW - HIGH-DOSE FLU VACCINE: COST - ACTION

SUSAN LEBLANC: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Flu season has begun, and Public Health is urging everyone to get their flu shot, especially people over 65. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization says that seniors should get the high-dose flu vaccine, but many will not because of the cost, which can be \$80 or more. My question for the minister is simple: Will her government cover the cost of the high-dose flu vaccine?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: High-dose flu vaccination is available in congregate settings, high-risk settings, this year as it has been for the past number of years. We do feel and know from science that the regular flu shot, which all of us get, is effective in the community, and we will continue to publicly fund that flu vaccine this year.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, seniors in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, New Brunswick, P.E.I., Yukon, and the Northwest Territories will have their high-dose flu vaccine for free. The average cost of an influenza hospitalization in Canada is over \$10,000 and in 2020, it killed almost 6,000 Canadians. Why does the minister believe that seniors in Nova Scotia don't deserve as much access to the high-dose flu shot as seniors in the other provinces and territories?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, the evidence would show that the regular flu season vaccination covers influenza well. We have also made it more available, actually, in communities this Fall by making sure that we partner with our pharmacy partners. You can now book and plan your immunization online. We continue to support seniors in this province, and we will offer high-dose flu shots in long-term care and other high-risk settings.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

NRR: POWER RATE INCREASE - ACTION

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, people are struggling. They are struggling to pay for necessities like putting food on the table, gas in the car, a roof over their heads, and heating their homes. Now they're ending a cap and trade program that saved Nova Scotians 10 cents a litre every time they filled up their car. This government is making matters worse by sitting by and allowing Nova Scotia Power to pitch a 26-per cent increase on rates. Considering people are already struggling to afford the bare necessities, why won't the Premier do something to end this potential rate increase?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: This is an important issue, and we can trade comments back and forth all day if we want. The reality is the affordability of everything for Nova

Scotians, for Canadians, and quite frankly all across the world - fuel prices are up. We said as a government when the rate increase came from Nova Scotia Power, we were not pleased with that, and we would take action. We have the ability to take action, and I ask the members opposite, you can support it when the action is taken.

IAIN RANKIN: We're waiting, and we will support good action on this file.

Day after day, the Premier and his ministers stand up and dismiss the concerns of Nova Scotians being brought to this House. He tells Nova Scotians how great this government is doing. It can't be further from the truth and is out of touch.

Nova Scotians are struggling to pay for the basics and they cannot afford additional costs. What started as a 10 per cent increase is now at 26 per cent due to government's inaction and, I would submit, Nova Scotia Power's inaction in moving away from these fuel costs that are susceptible to these types of increases in commodity pricing.

When will the Premier get in touch with Nova Scotians and do the bare minimum by doing something with this 26 per cent increase in power rates?

TORY RUSHTON: I just want to reiterate for the House and for all Nova Scotians: The application that's being heard before the NSUARB right now is not 26 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

There are two avenues that are being discussed in the media. We can spell it out for the members opposite - I see the hands waving - but we're not sitting on our hands over here waving them. We're sitting over here doing the work, communicating, and we're actually taking a part in the NSUARB hearings to defend Nova Scotians. That's what we will continue to do.

The fuel price is the second part of what is taking place. The actual NSUARB hearing is hearing the rate increase that Nova Scotia Power applied for this past winter. We said we'll take action and we will be there for the ratepayers in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

AGRIC.: POWER RATE HIKE EFFECT ON FARMERS - ACTION

HON. KEITH IRVING: I am hearing from lots and lots of farmers. They're struggling and they're worried. Farmers are already facing high fuel costs, very high fertilizer costs, and labour supply issues. Supply chain issues have made it harder than ever to get their products to the table.

There is much to worry about in farming and that is accentuated today. Our farmers need our support. They don't need a huge spike in their power bill. Why does the Premier believe that our farmers can afford a 26 per cent rate hike now?

HON. GREG MORROW: I would say that farmers have taken full advantage of the CleanTech program that was available for solar energy to help reduce their energy costs on farms. That was an extremely popular program.

There are a number of ways that the government can help with farmers and their costs. We've done that through a number of methods that we talked about through the Spring and through the Summer. We'll always continue to look at ways we can help, Mr. Speaker.

KEITH IRVING: Before Hurricane Fiona, farmers were already struggling, as I mentioned, due to the high prices and this government's lack of action to support them. This storm has made matters worse.

Tim Marsh, President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, stated: We've got barns that are open. We've got at-risk situations, feed shortages, roofs off, silos that are open so you can't store feed. It's going to have a huge impact because right now it's prime harvest for corn and various other crops. I'll table that.

While some support from Fiona, and I acknowledge the minister's work here, has been announced to help, there is another storm brewing. We've had a forecast now for several months. Mr. Speaker. The last thing that a farmer needs is another power rate increase of this magnitude . . .

THE SPEAKER: Question, please.

KEITH IRVING: Will the Premier give our farmers a break and stop this 25 per cent rate hike?

GREG MORROW: I thank the member opposite for the question. I've been to these farms. I've talked to Tim Marsh. I've talked to farmers in Antigonish, Guysborough, Cumberland, Pictou, Victoria County, Cape Breton County. I've looked in their eyes. I've seen the tears. I've heard the emotions in their voices. I've listened.

The number that the member is referring to is \$19 million that the province has stepped up and provided and made available for farmers just on the provincial level. There's plenty more help available through the federal programs, through business risk management, through insurance.

We'll continue to look at all of those, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell you that this government has stepped up in a number of ways and we will continue to listen.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

NRR: POWER RATE HIKE - STOP

FRED TILLEY: Earlier in Question Period, I heard the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables talk about how this government loves to follow process. It appears that the only process they love to follow is when it's going to affect the ratepayers of Nova Scotia as opposed to other processes maybe around democracy.

Mr. Speaker, food is a necessity. Unfortunately, though, inflation is having a direct impact on food prices which have risen by more than 10 per cent. I'll table that. Every day, people are finding it hard to feed themselves and their families. This government has provided no support to them, and now they are going to allow a 26 per cent rate hike.

At a time when people are struggling to pay their food, when will this government not follow process and put a stop to this rate hike?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: No support? Seniors Care Grant added on to, two years; home heating reliability added on to; a hundred dollars for everyone who lost power to replace some of their food. Is it enough? No, it's not enough, but . . . (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Order. The Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables has the floor.

The honourable minister.

TORY RUSHTON: To say that nothing's been done for Nova Scotians, that's truly not the case.

FRED TILLEY: I would point to a previous session where the member from the NDP took you on a tour of the grocery store. Try to make that \$100 stretch out so that you can eat.

More Nova Scotians than ever are accessing food banks. Feed Nova Scotia has seen double the number of new clients this year, which I'll table. One in three children are at risk of going to school hungry, which I will table. At a time when Nova Scotians are struggling to keep food on the table and keep the lights on as well, when will the Premier see the light and put a stop to this 26 per cent rate hike?

TORY RUSHTON: I can't even respond. You can't decide whether it's 26, 11, or 30. What is the rate hike, Mr. Speaker?

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

FTB: COST OF LIVING CRISIS - INTERVENE

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

Our caucus has been raising alarm bells about the cost of living crisis, but Nova Scotians' concerns have gone unanswered. The minister's financial plan, as stated in March of this year, was a belief that inflation would go down and prices would become more normalized and fall. I'll table that.

Eight months later we know the exact opposite has happened. Many analysts and the federal Minister of Finance now anticipate a recession at the start of 2023. Nova Scotians are struggling more than ever, and meaningful, ongoing supports have yet to be seen. The minister has stated that this is a compassionate government.

I ask the minister: How much worse must it get before the compassionate government will intervene?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I think about the compassion in that party when they sit silent when we look at the cost of the carbon tax. It's going to hit people at the gas pump; it's going to hit them when they're heating with oil. We know 40 per cent of Nova Scotians heat with furnace oil. Many of them can't turn on a dime and change their heating system. I would encourage the NDP to think about that kind of compassion and to take action themselves. (Interruption)

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

LISA LACHANCE: In response to previous questions on this topic, the minister has often pointed to things like the Seniors Care Grant, child benefits, or rent caps, but never toward any direct cost of living solutions as we have seen in other provinces and as our caucus has proposed.

We know that inflation is a worldwide crisis, but this doesn't detract from the Nova Scotia government's responsibility to intervene for Nova Scotians. People need help. We have seen almost every other province introduce supports such as direct income-based relief payments, increased income supplements, and fuel rebates. Will the minister explain why similar measures have not been taken in Nova Scotia?

ALLAN MACMASTER: There is no question. Targeted measures are critical, and that's what we focused on. There are other provinces that are making windfalls right now on oil and gas revenues. We don't have those in Nova Scotia. I can tell you what we have been doing. We've been opposing the carbon tax, something the NDP refuses to do despite the obvious impact it's going to have on people in a few months' time. (Interruptions)

[2:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of the Department of Finance and Treasury Board has the floor.

ALLAN MACMASTER: The member herself has listed off a number of direct targeted supports that we're offering to people who are in most need. We believe those are the people we need to be focused on right now.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

NRR: POWER RATE HIKE - OPPOSE

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, not only are people struggling to afford to eat, they also cannot afford rent and housing. A new report shows that Nova Scotia has the second-highest rent in the country, a higher average rent cost than Ontario. I will table that. Nova Scotians are facing some of the highest rent prices in the country. They do not need to lead the country in cost of power as well. My question to the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables is a very simple question: Do he and his government believe that Nova Scotia Power's proposed rate hike is reasonable - yes or no?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: No.

BRAEDON CLARK: I thank the minister for his honest and succinct answer. I appreciate it because if the minister - and I presume the government - believes that this rate increase is not reasonable, then they have an obligation to do something about it. The obligation to do something about it is not in some stuffy UARB hearing. It's right here on the floor of the Legislature. My question to the minister is: Will this government do something?

TORY RUSHTON: The simple answer would be yes but, Mr. Speaker, we intervened in the UARB hearing. We know there are crunches in every household here in Nova Scotia. It doesn't matter where you are at, whether you are in Yarmouth, Cape Breton, Cumberland. It doesn't matter where you are at, Mr. Speaker, this is a topic, but you need to stay on the facts. The rate application was for 10.2. We were intervenors, and all I can say to the member opposite is to stay tuned.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

NRR: RISING ENERGY PRICES - RESPOND

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, energy prices have soared in Nova Scotia in the past year. Nova Scotia's inflation for energy has gone up 25 per cent in the last year. I think this is well above the national average of 19 per cent - I'll table that. Nova Scotians have

seen the second-highest energy inflation in the country, and this isn't an area in which we want to lead.

Nova Scotians are suffering. There is a looming 26 per cent rate hike. I acknowledge that it includes the fuel regulation on the budget pricing and I'm looking for a simple answer as well. Will the minister take action? If so, when?

TORY RUSHTON: There are some key things that we need to look at as government, and I know the member opposite would understand. Affordability for ratepayers is paramount to our government, it's key, but also is a reliable grid system.

I can only think locally, back in my constituency, of conversations that I've had with a local grocer in Parrsboro who for the last number of years has consistently reached out with concerns about the reliability of the grid system feeding his grocery store. Before Hurricane Fiona, that independent grocery group actually had to go out and spend \$100,000 of their own money in order to get a backup generator.

We know the importance of this to Nova Scotia, Mr. Speaker. We are a government that is paying attention and we're going to be a government with action as well.

CARMAN KERR: Over 147,000 households in Nova Scotia are facing energy poverty. That's up almost 40 per cent, and I will table that. The 26 per cent rate hike will only see the amount of Nova Scotians in energy poverty increase. Could the minister prevent more people from falling into energy poverty by putting an end to this 26 per cent rate hike - he has asked us to stay tuned - and take action? When will he take action?

TORY RUSHTON: I thank the member opposite for the question. It gives us an opportunity as a government to point out the fact that the HARP opened on Monday - the home heating program.

Mr. Speaker, we're listening, as a government. I've sat in almost the same seat as the member opposite who is asking for the time frame. Let's not be silly in the House - it doesn't necessarily get shared on the tables here. We were active intervenors in the UARB. Nova Scotia ratepayers are at the top of our mind in this government.

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

NRR: POWER RATE HIKE - UNAFFORDABLE

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, people's paycheques are not keeping up with this government's policies and inaction. Inflation is almost at 8 per cent and food inflation is even higher, and I'll table that. Most Nova Scotians' paycheques are stagnant. With paycheques being able to afford less and less for Nova Scotians, does this government believe that they can afford a rate hike on their power bills? In this current economic

pressure, can this government actually feel that Nova Scotians can afford a rate hike at this time? A yes or no will do.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: We've been very clear that ratepayers are the very top of our concern, and a very short answer: No.

LORELEI NICOLL: The Premier promised Nova Scotians a better paycheque on Day 1 of this government, but now over a year later, people are seeing their paycheque being able to afford less and less.

Considering people's paycheques are becoming worth less and less and I believe the Better Paycheque Guarantee has been shelved, I would like further clarification from the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables. In this process of participating in the current Nova Scotia Power application, did he say earlier today that Nova Scotians will not receive a rate increase?

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Just one point: Instead of saying "he", you just ask "the minister."

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables has the floor.

TORY RUSHTON: I didn't say that specifically. That's not what I said. I said we're going to stand up for the ratepayers of Nova Scotia. We've been very clear about that. We are interveners of the UARB process. Conversations take place all the time. What I said was there are many hours left in this legislative session. There's still time in the UARB hearing, and I said stay tuned.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SNSIS: PERMANENT RENT CONTROL - CONSIDER

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This government's current rent cap is still set to end in December 2023. While this may seem like ages away for some in this room, I can tell you that for Nova Scotians, it is not. With so much that is unpredictable right now and costs that are skyrocketing, Nova Scotians need certainty that they will be able to afford their homes.

News reports from earlier this week showed that rental prices are continuing to rise at an alarming rate, and people are worried. Even former critics of the rent cap have recently acknowledged the value of rent control in addressing the province's housing crisis, and I'll table that.

Will the minister assure Nova Scotians that their rent will not jump by hundreds of dollars next December by instituting a permanent system of rent control?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Understanding that affordable housing is an issue top of mind for many Nova Scotians including our government, having the actions of many departments at the table to tackle the housing crisis in our province. We understand the interest, of course, in permanent rent control, but we're interested in pursuing sustainable options for both tenants and landlords. We'll continue to dialogue with both the tenant and landlord stakeholders as we move future amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act.

SUZY HANSEN: Thank you for that, minister. I really appreciate it.

One feature of the current rent cap system is that it excludes tenants on fixed-term leases. The leases offer significantly less protections for renters than a standard lease, as landlords can discontinue tenancies or increase rents at the end of the period. Tenants are left without knowing where they're going to live and how much they're going to pay. I will table an article published yesterday that suggests they're increasing in popularity as landlords seek ways around the present rent cap.

Mr. Speaker, why has the minister allowed this loophole to continue?

COLTON LEBLANC: As I stated on the floor of the Legislature before, there are purposes of fixed-term leases whereas, you know, for example, folks coming from out of province to work for a short period of time, students who are studying in a different part of the province for a certain period of time, but I've heard loud and clear that there are differing opinions about fixed-term leases.

That's why that's a topic that's brought to the table with both sides of stakeholders, of landlords and tenants. It's a topic that we're discussing at the department and looking forward to bringing future amendments to the floor of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

NRR - POWER RATE HIKE: IMPACT ON BUSINESS - ADDRESS

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, the 26 per cent rate hike would devastate small businesses still trying to recover from the pandemic. CFIB's latest status shows that 65 per cent of Nova Scotia's small businesses remain burdened by pandemic debt, and only half returned to normal, pre-pandemic revenue levels. Fuel and energy costs are top cost constraint for two of three small businesses.

With businesses still recovering from the pandemic, why does the Premier believe they can afford a 26 per cent rate increase?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that on this side of the House, we understand that there's a 10.2 per cent rate increase that was applied for. We understand that there's a division between the fuel adjustment as well. Not once did we say

that we agree that small businesses should have to go through this. We know that affordability is a key issue everywhere - in households across Nova Scotia, but also small businesses across Nova Scotia.

On this side of the House, we haven't said or agreed that the rate increase has been approved, but it seems like on that side of the House, they already have their minds made up.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I understand the breakdown between the two, but what Nova Scotians are seeing is a 26 per cent increase in overall costs. That's the issue. They're also seeing an 11.6 per cent potential increase in power rates when I'm proud of our government at the time, which kept rates stable for eight years.

Mr. Speaker, the CFIB notes that on average, the proposed increase by NSP will result in an extra \$2,500 in electricity costs per year for the next two years, and 84 per cent said they cannot afford the proposed rate increase by Nova Scotia Power. Almost 8 out of 10 small businesses say this increase will force them to raise prices, adding to the inflation table. This was said before the rate hike doubled from 13 per cent to 26 per cent.

Knowing that these rate hikes will force small businesses, will the minister do the right thing for Nova Scotians and our small businesses by stopping this 26 per cent rate increase?

TORY RUSHTON: The point that I want to raise again is that it's two different factors there. I know the member opposite understands that. Mr. Speaker, fuel prices are up worldwide, and if that side of the House wants to assist us on the government side of the House, give us a hand with the carbon tax that we have been fighting the federal government on.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

NRR: RATE HIKE ANXIETY - ALLEVIATE

FRED TILLEY: I guess a year wasn't enough time to put a plan together.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, the people in Northside-Westmount are struggling. They're struggling to buy their prescriptions. They're struggling to put gas in the car. Working families are struggling to get their kids to their activities. They just can't afford it anymore. They're struggling with food on the table. The last thing residents of Northside-Westmount need is a 26 per cent increase in rates on their power. When will the Premier do the right thing and stop this 26 per cent rate hike and alleviate some of the anxiety that my residents are feeling?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: The concerns on that are felt all across Nova Scotia. Mr. Speaker, if he would like to send his constituents my way, I would certainly have a conversation with them and encourage the constituents of all Nova Scotia to help us out on the government side of the House. Fourteen cents a litre brought to you by the federal Liberals, and we need some assistance in having that battle. We're willing to have some help on this side. With good ideas, we're open-minded. (Interruption)

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

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I would send my constituents down to speak to the minister, but they can't afford to get there. They can't afford the gas. Again, this government brought a blueprint of what you needed to do to work on carbon.

This government's inaction continues to drive up the cost of living for my constituents. Now the government is making things worse by allowing this 26 per cent rate hike in power. From Alder Point to Florence to Sydney Mines, North Sydney, Westmount, and Coxheath, my constituents have told me loud and clear that they cannot afford this additional rate hike.

Will the Premier show some compassion and put a stop to this rate hike?

TORY RUSHTON: I can certainly appreciate the affordability to get in the car and be driving, especially with the concern of 14 extra cents per litre coming on for gas with the federal carbon tax. But there's phones in my office. I'll certainly answer it for them.

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

NRR - POWER RATE HIKE: STUDENT CONCERNS - ADDRESS

HON. BEN JESSOME: We can all agree that the cost of living is hitting households across this province, and the households of young Nova Scotians are not an exception. A recent study conducted by a group called Youthful Cities, in partnership with the Royal Bank of Canada, demonstrated that Halifax is now receiving accolades as the most expensive city in Canada for young people aged 15 to 29 - and I will regrettably table that.

The cost of living can and will steal the future of young Nova Scotians from across this province if this government doesn't step up and take some action. Young people are being priced out of homes. Rent is going up.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us when they'll step in and deal with this rate hike that Nova Scotia Power has proposed?

[2:45 p.m.]

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I appreciate the questions. Affordability is not just in Halifax, it's all across Nova Scotia. It's not lost on everyone sitting on this side of the House, and I know it's not lost on everyone sitting on that side of the House.

It's a worldwide issue. We have said on this side of the House that there are ways that we can have affordability and assist with HARP, with the Seniors Care Grant. We've said that we are going to be active interveners in the NSUARB hearing, which we were, Mr. Speaker.

We take this job very seriously. We've said right from the get-go, ever since Nova Scotia Power announced this rate hike, that there were levers we can pull. We've been looking at those levers, and in time frame - stay tuned.

BEN JESSOME: As young people look at budget deficits on a monthly basis and rents averaging around \$1,290 as per the study that I just tabled, they are looking for some confidence about making the choice to make Nova Scotia home.

We talk about some of the showmanship that goes on in this House and not attaching ourselves to timelines in this House, but the minister has a choice to make in talking about a timeline and being concrete and sharing with young Nova Scotians who want to make Nova Scotia their home, that this government is going to step in and intervene.

TORY RUSHTON: I thank the member opposite for the question. They're right. I take this job being in the minister's seat very seriously, Mr. Speaker, but let's be realistic. We're on Day 4 of the session right now, and not once have we said that we're not going to do something about this.

To get back to the youth coming to the province of Nova Scotia - it's very important. It's very important to our government for the youth to come back to our province of Nova Scotia and stay. That's why we've introduced the MOST program for our tradespeople.

I've sat in this House since 2018, and I've heard from CCAs for many, many years. Well, this government acted right away on the CCA wages. Most recently, the raise hike for the ECEs, as well, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

ECC: COASTAL PROTECT. REGS. - IMPLEMENT

SUSAN LEBLANC: My question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Storms are becoming more and more frequent, but people continue to build on the coast without clear direction from the Coastal Protection Act while we wait and wait for the government to release regulations. Hurricane Fiona was a devastating reminder of the urgent need for regulations, but we're now seeing cases where development is accelerating in coastal areas as people seek to be grandfathered in under the old rules.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister see that every day that goes by without regulations is a day that puts people at greater climate risk?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the question. It's a very critical question for the future of our province.

I can assure the honourable member that the work is ongoing with respect to the Coastal Protection Act. I want to take this opportunity and thank my team for the work that they're doing on the regulations. This is going to be a significant piece of regulations that will be coming forward in early 2023.

SUSAN LEBLANC: It's not soon enough, Mr. Speaker. We also know that the regulations that are coming won't be broad enough and they won't cover things like septic systems and wells. Municipalities have a role to play in this situation, but there is a clear need for provincial leadership. Will the minister accept that, as every day goes by, he is endangering people and their properties?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I reject that. This is a government that takes climate change policy very seriously. That is why we passed the most ambitious piece of climate legislation in Canada and that is why we've invested over \$100 million in climate change programming.

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

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic on a point of order.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a point of order. Being a strong democracy means we as Opposition have the ability to ask the Premier of Nova Scotia questions. This has been the right of the members of this Chamber for 260 years.

Dozens of questions were put to the Premier today, yet he answered only four. In the last session, he answered less than 5 per cent of the questions put to him. He is the head

of the government and yet he refuses to answer questions from us, as if we are nuisances - the same way he treats media.

I ask that you, the Speaker, look into our abilities as Opposition to ask the Premier questions and have those questions answered. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: A quick ruling. It is not a point of order.

You made the remark that the Premier is the head of government and, as head of government, he has the right to pass on to his ministers to answer the questions.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I move that pursuant to Rule 5(C) that the hour of adjournment today be not 9:00 p.m. but 11:59 p.m., and that the hours of meeting and adjournment for the remainder of this week and for the following weeks be not as provided by Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Rule 3 but instead, as follows:

- Wednesday, October 19th, 1:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.
- Thursday, October 20th, 12:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.
- Friday, October 21st, 9:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m.
- Monday, October 24th, 5:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.
- Tuesday, October 25th, 11:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m.
- Wednesday, October 26th, 12:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.
- Thursday, October 27th, 12:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.
- Friday, October 28th, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: I'm not going to read each one of them, but I'm assuming that the time of adjournment is 11:59 p.m. for every day, correct?

KIM MASLAND: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: The member has made that motion.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: We will not be supporting this motion. It's obvious . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. It's not debatable.

The motion has been made.

There has been a request for a recorded vote.

Ring the bells until the Whips are satisfied.

[2:53 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Prior to the bells ringing there was a motion put to the floor that - and I'm not going to say them all, I'll just give the same wording that I gave before - that the House hours be extended to 11:59 p.m. every night for the next two weeks.

A recorded vote has been called for, so I will recognize the Clerk.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[3:54 p.m.]

YEAS

Hon. Brad Johns
Hon. Tory Rushton
Hon. Barbara Adams
Hon. Kim Masland
Hon. Allan MacMaster
Hon. Karla MacFarlane
Hon. Michelle Thompson
Hon. John Lohr
Hon. Pat Dunn
Hon. Timothy Halman
Hon. Steve Craig
Dave Ritcey
Hon. Brian Wong
Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek
Hon. Brian Comer
Hon. Colton LeBlanc
Hon. Jill Balser
Trevor Boudreau
Hon. Greg Morrow
Hon. Becky Druhan
Larry Harrison
Chris Palmer

NAYS

Hon. Patricia Arab
Angela Simmonds
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Hon. Kelly Regan
Hon. Zach Churchill
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Iain Rankin
Susan Leblanc
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Rafah DiCostanzo
Hon. Tony Ince
Lorelei Nicoll
Hon. Ben Jessome
Hon. Keith Irving
Ali Duale
Carman Kerr
Braedon Clark
Ronnie LeBlanc
Fred Tilley

John A. MacDonald
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
John White
Danielle Barkhouse
Tom Taggart
Nolan Young
Kent Smith

THE CLERK: For, 29. Against, 21.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 206?

Bill No. 206 - Underground Hydrocarbons Storage Act (amended)

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 206, the Underground Hydrocarbons Storage Act (amended), the umbrella hydrogen bill, be now read a second time.

In recent months, excitement has been growing about the benefits of green hydrogen and what it can do for Nova Scotians, how it could help with our transition to clean energy, and how it can boost our green economy through a healthy export market. I've introduced amendments to several pieces of legislation that pave the way for the production and use of green hydrogen in Nova Scotia, and they are covered by two different bills.

Before I get to the specifics of the amendments, I want to provide some background on what green hydrogen is for the benefit of my colleagues in this Chamber. Hydrogen is a clean-burning fuel. Not all forms of hydrogen are green. To be considered green, it has to be produced using renewable electricity, like wind power. Then it is called green hydrogen because there are no greenhouse gas emissions when the hydrogen is produced or when it is burned.

[4:00 p.m.]

There are several reasons why we are pursuing the development of green hydrogen in Nova Scotia. It's a clean alternative to fossil fuels. It's easy to transport and store for weeks or months, so it has the ability to meet energy needs in the Winter when they are highest. It can help industrial processes, heavy transportation, and the marine sector get off fossil fuels faster. In these ways, it can help Nova Scotia meet our ambitious climate change goals. It can also help us grow our green economy. That's because there is lots of appetite for it on the international market, so it would become an export industry creating green jobs right here in Nova Scotia.

The great news is that Nova Scotia is well-positioned to be the world leader in green hydrogen production and export. We have many natural built-in assets and the capacity to advance on these projects. First, we have some of the best offshore wind resources in the world. There's plenty of capacity for both local and international green hydrogen markets. We're getting the industry started with onshore wind, but we expect to build its sustainability on the offshore wind.

Also, our gas grid is among the most ready in Canada for green hydrogen. Our natural gas infrastructure is relatively new. It uses polyethylene pipes that are compatible with green hydrogen. This will make our implementation much easier.

We also have proximity to the European markets looking for clean fuel options, lots of fresh water, land for facilities, deep ice-free harbours, well-established port services, academic researchers right here in Nova Scotia with the expertise in clean technology, companies that are eager to advance green hydrogen and wind projects, and a reputation as a world leader in the emerging technologies. With all these advantages, we have what it takes to get ahead of our competitors.

Wind energy goes hand in hand with green hydrogen. That's why we're setting our targets of offering leases of five gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030. This sends a message to the world that Nova Scotia is the place to do offshore wind and green hydrogen business.

We're making sure that we have a robust regulatory regime in place for this new industry. This will ensure that our people and our environment are safe and protected. That includes considering the outcome of the regional assessment of the offshore wind and how it can inform our future decisions.

That also includes consulting with our Mi'kmaw communities, as well as engaging with our fishers and local communities. It includes amending some existing legislation to close regulatory gaps that could impede the safe development of these projects.

Which brings me back to Bill No. 206, Mr. Speaker. Through this bill, we're amending three pieces of existing legislation that will apply when green hydrogen projects

are being designed, built, and operated. The amendments in this bill will include expanding the scope of the Underground Hydrocarbons Storage Act to include hydrogen, ammonia, carbon sequestration, and compressed air energy storage.

Including pipelines built for hydrogen and hydrogen blends in the Pipeline Act allows the board to also consider hydrogen as part of the gas distribution system in the Gas Distribution Act. I want to assure my colleagues that these are just a handful of administrative changes that we need to help get our budding green hydrogen business and industry off the ground.

I also introduced amendments to the Electricity Act that we will talk about later. The legislation this Fall is not the full extent of the regulatory regime that we will need to put in place for this industry. There are many more steps to take and we'll be outlining them in the green hydrogen action plan that will be released next year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: The Hydrogen Strategy for Canada outlines actions to hit our zero-emission targets by 2050 and position Canada as a global industrial leader on clean renewable fuels.

Nova Scotia is in a position to capitalize on this federal strategy. We're in a position as we have the skilled workers, we have the experience, we have the access to deep harbours for transport to Germany and other European markets, and we must modernize this legislation that allows us to compete and attract investment from around the world to further develop this sector.

These proposed amendments are to the Acts of 2001, the Underground Hydrocarbons Storage Act. The bill, as the minister mentioned, is mostly housekeeping, as the language is focused on changing from underground hydrocarbons storage area to subsurface energy storage areas. This proposed amendment will allow for subsurface energy storage of hydrogen gas, hydrocarbons, compressed air, carbon dioxide, and anything else prescribed by the regulations as subsurface energy.

I look forward to hearing more from stakeholders at Law Amendments and will have more to say at the third reading.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise and speak very briefly to this bill.

We all know in this Chamber that we need to take action on the climate crisis and we need to take it now. It's not clear what role green hydrogen will take, although the

minister has just outlined a little bit of his ideas, and hopefully plans, for green hydrogen in Nova Scotia but we don't have any evidence of the role of green hydrogen because we have not seen the climate plan yet. We also have not heard what will happen with carbon tax revenues or how we will meet our greenhouse gas reduction goals.

I am very happy to see these steps being taken. I will point out that the bill does not actually differentiate between hydrogen and green hydrogen or hydrogen from green sources or other, so I hope that is clarified as we carry on with this process. I, like my colleague from Annapolis, look forward to hearing from stakeholders at Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member for Richmond.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to stand up in support of Bill No. 206. It's a great start and thank you to the minister for bringing it forward.

Nova Scotia's environment and our economy go hand in hand; one cannot succeed without the other and we are committed to succeeding on both fronts. That's why we've set some of the most ambitious climate change goals in Canada and we're building our renewable energy industry to get there. We're pursuing all opportunities for renewable energy and green hydrogen is quickly becoming an important one.

We all know that the transition to clean energy will take time. We can't flip a switch and be off fossil fuels overnight, but green hydrogen is one option to help us get there faster. Hydrogen is considered green when it is produced with renewable electricity, like wind power. It is a clean-burning fuel that industrial processes, heavy transportation, and the marine sector can use to get off fossil fuels faster. There's also a great demand on the international market as countries shift to clean energy and to reduce reliance on Russia.

We are seizing the opportunity to meet this demand because Nova Scotia is uniquely positioned for producing green hydrogen. Bill No. 206 is an umbrella bill that amends several pieces of legislation, including expanding the scope of the Underground Hydrocarbons Storage Act to include hydrogen, ammonia, carbon sequestration, and compressed air energy storage, including pipelines built for hydrogen or hydrogen blends in the Pipeline Act and allowing the board to also consider hydrogen as part of the gas distribution system under the Gas Distribution Act. These changes will help ensure our environment is protected and the path is clear for businesses to make Nova Scotia a world leader in green hydrogen.

We set a goal in September that signals to the world that Nova Scotia is open for business in green hydrogen and offshore wind. We aim to offer leases for five gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030. This will work much like offshore oil and gas development. Leases will be awarded for offshore wind projects through a competitive federal-provincial bid process.

The first call is expected to be issued in 2025, and all leases will be awarded by 2030. After that, calls for bids will be based on market opportunities. This is as much about green hydrogen as it is about wind. We expect the main use for our offshore wind energy will be providing renewable electricity to produce green hydrogen and its associated fuels for export. This target will be a major attraction for local and international players. It helps establish our province as the place to conduct offshore wind and green hydrogen business.

We expect that by unlocking Nova Scotia's untapped offshore wind resources we will create more than 15,000 jobs during the construction phase of projects and about 2,000 of those will be permanent positions. The creation of these green jobs will help Nova Scotia reach our environmental goals.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the minister it is to close debate on the bill.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: As I said in my opening statements, it is an exciting time for Nova Scotia. We have the world coming to us looking for green hydrogen and the opportunities are here. As we've said many times before in the last few months, Nova Scotia, with these changes and amendments, we're certainly going to say that the door is open for business. With that, Mr. Speaker, I rise to close debate on Bill No. 206.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 206, the Underground Hydrocarbons Storage Act (amended).

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 207.

Bill No. 207 - Electricity Act (amended).

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I move that Bill No. 207, the Electricity Act (amended), be now read a second time.

I've just shared a bit with you about green hydrogen in Bill No. 206. This is an exciting new industry with many benefits for Nova Scotia, but I won't take up much more time to repeat myself.

Through Bill No. 207, we are amending the Electricity Act to help pave the way for green hydrogen production and use in Nova Scotia. Currently, this legislation only considers Nova Scotia Power and municipal utilities to be wholesale customers. We're expanding this definition to include businesses that are advancing green hydrogen projects for domestic use. We're working on a separate path for developers who are interested in export.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will also allow us to create a new hydrogen innovation program to support this budding industry. It will help us make sure that green hydrogen projects align with provincial goals for reaching our net-zero goals. It will also help ensure that there are regulatory consistencies in this new field.

All together, the changes we're making in the bill and in Bill No. 206 are among the many steps we're taking to make Nova Scotia a world leader in green hydrogen. I look forward to seeing the economic and environmental benefits of these efforts right here at home in Nova Scotia. With that, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: I want to thank the minister and Shelly, Michael, Megan, and the rest of his department staff for inviting me to the briefing yesterday afternoon. Much appreciated.

This is a proposed amendment to the Electricity Act, as mentioned, respecting the hydrogen innovation program. The essence of this proposed program is to open up and encourage green hydrogen development here in Nova Scotia, which we're clearly excited about and support. Energy systems are changing rapidly around the world due to climate change targets, war, and other factors. Governments around the world are developing hydrogen strategies, including our own federal counterparts. Our federal government has a hydrogen strategy, and it makes sense to introduce our own strategy and amendments to our Electricity Act to keep pace with these developments and encourage companies from around the world to invest in our province and our people.

The thoughts of our friends and family members returning home from Alberta with all those acquired skills to work in this industry is an encouraging prospect. The idea that our small province could be a North American leader in this technology makes the entrepreneur in me supportive of this. With world events being what they are, energy reliability is questionable for many countries, and Nova Scotia could be the energy solution with a full green energy economy.

The concern with this amendment would be that the program doesn't yet exist. Our team is keen to learn more detail about this program. I would like further detail on what the development of the hydrogen innovation program will achieve, its intent, and how it will be implemented. I'm looking forward to learning more.

My understanding in talking to the minister is that this amendment is not meant to regulate. It is simply to provide a yes-or-no answer to those companies applying as a wholesale customer. Currently, Nova Scotia Power and a handful of municipal utilities receive wholesale energy rates, and this would open this up to these hydrogen facilities.

With that, I look forward to seeing what stakeholders have to say at Law Amendments, and I will have more to say at third reading.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm happy to speak to this bill as well. I echo the comments from my colleague for Annapolis. The excitement around this idea is palpable, and I hope that it can happen quickly in Nova Scotia. It's essential that we transition from fossil fuels as soon as possible. We all know this, but I will continue saying it.

We're glad to see the government move forward on this front, but we have some questions. We look forward to getting some clarification either at Law Amendments Committee or in Committee of the Whole House or - well, hopefully before third reading.

For example, we have no details on the cost of the hydrogen innovation program. The bill does not specify, as my comments for the other bill referred to, whether hydrogen from non-green sources will be covered by any incentives, and as of its introduction, we have no details on how green hydrogen plays a role in our greenhouse gas reduction targets, or many other details about our overall approach while we wait for the carbon plan. It seems like an encouraging step, but it's inside of so much uncertainty that it leaves Nova Scotia wondering how we are meeting our climate goals and doing our part to tackle the climate crisis.

I look forward to hearing more at the Law Amendments Committee and saying more at a later date.

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

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Nova Scotia is on the verge of becoming a world leader in offshore wind and green hydrogen and reaping the environmental and economic benefits that come with it. We are well positioned to be a global green hydrogen producer and exporter, with many natural and built assets and the capacity to advance projects. Our gas grid is among the most ready in Canada for green hydrogen. Our natural gas

infrastructure is relatively new and uses mostly polyethylene pipes that are compatible with green hydrogen.

[4:15 p.m.]

We have the industry to make all this happen. They are working to develop local green hydrogen production to support the province's emission reductions targets. We have land for facilities and water for producing it. We have deep harbours and port facilities for transporting it. We have a decommissioned pipeline running from the former Sable Deep Panuke site to Goldboro and could serve as a conduit.

And of course, we have our natural asset, the wind. In fact, we have among the best wind resources in the world right off our shores. We'll get our green hydrogen industry started with offshore wind and then we'll really build with the offshore wind energy that our new target will spur. With all these advantages, we have what it takes to get out ahead of our competitors and establish our place as a world leader in this market.

There is very much a market for green hydrogen. Several companies are already making green hydrogen investments in Nova Scotia. Interest is concentrated in the Strait of Canso area. There are natural deep harbours existing, industrial space, and key connections to pipelines and transmission infrastructure. When companies like these invest in our green economy, it's a win/win for Nova Scotia because they create green jobs and help us reach our environmental goals.

We're making sure we have a robust regulatory regime to ensure environmental protection and safety requirements are met as our green hydrogen industry gets under way. That includes considering the outcome of the regional assessment for offshore wind and how it can inform future decisions. That also includes consulting with the Mi'kmaw communities as well as engaging fishers and the local communities. It includes amending some of our existing legislation to close some regulatory gaps that could impede the safe development of the projects.

They are in two separate bills, though Bill No. 207, an amendment to the Electricity Act, will expand the definition of "wholesale customer." Currently only Nova Scotia Power or a municipal unit are considered wholesale customers. The bill adds businesses that are advanced in green hydrogen projects. The bill will also give us the ability to create a new hydrogen innovation program to support this budding industry. It will help us make sure projects align with provincial goals for reaching net zero and that there is a regulatory consistency in this new field.

With that, I say this is a fantastic bill, and I'm proud to stand here and support it today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Economic Development.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill No. 207, amendments to the Electricity Act, Respecting the Hydrogen Innovation Program.

Mr. Speaker, our province sits on the cusp of a number of truly outstanding opportunities - transformative, in fact - and the development of offshore wind and green hydrogen are high among them. We are in a position to be a global green hydrogen producer and exporter, and we have a number of natural-built assets - including, as already mentioned, a gas grid that is among the most ready in Canada to receive green hydrogen. We have land for facilities, we have abundant freshwater for production, we have infrastructure capable of repurposing geographical proximity to key markets in Europe, as well as the U.S. eastern seaboard and an industry poised for new challenges.

And we have wind. Boy, do we have wind - and that's even when we move away from the Hollis and Granville area. Nova Scotia is the would-be Saudi Arabia of the offshore wind world. Collectively, this puts Nova Scotia in a particularly advantageous position to be first to market. But to retain that advantage, we must be ready. This is the purpose of this bill and others that my colleague, the honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables, has and will bring forward this session.

As Minister of Economic Development, I have been tasked by our Premier to focus on innovation driven, green and sustainable businesses, as well as to work with existing businesses across our province and support them in taking actions to reduce their emissions. The promise of green hydrogen for export and domestic use speaks to so much of my department's mandate, and I am honoured to speak in support of this bill which gives us the ability to create the new hydrogen innovation program and support this budding industry.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the minister, it's to close debate on the bill.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: It's been an honour to introduce these two bills today. It's quite something when you're given an opportunity to sort of set the stage for what's going to come forward for the future of Nova Scotia and, as government, we're excited about the way that we're going to modernize Nova Scotia with these endeavours and projects.

Also, Mr. Speaker, it's the right thing to do. We need to have a greener economy, we need to be getting off fossil fuels and meeting our targets, and what a better way to do it than right here in Nova Scotia where we can be world leaders once again.

With that, I move to close debate on Bill No. 207.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 207.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PRIVATE AND LOCAL BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 205.

Bill No. 205 - St. Francis Xavier University Act (amended)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move second reading of Bill No. 205.

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

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I close debate on second reading for Bill No. 205.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 205.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Motions.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 385.

Res. No. 385, re Dep. Spkr. Salary: Change Req'd. - Recog. - notice given Oct. 13/22 - (Hon. John Lohr)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I move the adoption of Resolution No. 385. I do have it in front of me, so I can read it again:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. In addition to the honourable member for Preston and the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, the honourable member for Chester-St. Margaret's, the honourable member for Eastern Shore, and the honourable member for Shelburne be the Chairs of Committees and Deputy Speakers of the House of Assembly;
2. That the honourable member for Eastern Shore be the Deputy Speaker within the meaning of Subsection 14 (3) of the House of Assembly Act and within the meaning of the House of Assembly Management Act; and
3. The annual salary of the Deputy Speaker, established pursuant to the House of Assembly Act, be divided equally between the five Chairs of Committees and Deputy Speakers.

Mr. Speaker, I so move.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I would like to start by bringing the House's attention to some previous arguments made in this very Chamber:

“...but before this House we now have two Deputy Speakers: one elected, one not. I think when you think about that in that context it's like the House of democracy is not interested in democracy...”

I think what we should be doing in this House, if you're going to have one person in that position elected and one not, think of the message that that sends. Maybe what we should do is we should

elect one MLA in the province and let them just nominate and drop other MLAs in there. It's not the way our system works. It's certainly not the way this House should work.

...we have an elected Deputy Speaker and an unelected Deputy Speaker - any time you make the distinction between positions in that manner, it's a really, really slippery slope.

...So what I would say is I would appeal to the members of this House to think about the message that we're sending to Nova Scotians. Is it a message of working together? Is it a message of humility? Or is it a message of aggression? Because that's what you see when you say well, this person is elected and this person - we're not going to have an election, we're just going to put them in there because we can. That's not the way that it's supposed to work."

The sad reality is they could have come to the floor of this House and put those [names] before an election, and they could have used their majority and won. But to cut that step out of the process and say we're not even going to bother exercising our majority and win an election because we don't have to, we're just going to put a resolution through and circumvent that process - that sticks in my craw, Mr. Speaker."

Mr. Speaker, I probably couldn't have said it any better myself. These are the words of the member for Pictou East when he was in Opposition. I'll table those.

Mr. Speaker, words matter in this Chamber, particularly when the words we're expressing indicate our principles, our philosophy - that which grounds us in our purpose here in the Chamber. Of course, we're all able to change our minds on things. We can change our minds. That should usually be based on new evidence, new arguments that have convinced us otherwise. But that's clearly not the case in this situation.

We have a Premier who, not so long ago, as I tabled, fought vigorously against a very similar situation. He questioned the validity of our democracy, said this was a very, very slippery slope, used some of the strongest language I think you could use in this case. Here today we have a resolution doing the exact same thing that the Premier in Opposition railed against.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say, this is not the first time that we have seen this - say one thing in Opposition, do the opposite when you have power. I believe we have seen it when it comes to the independence of your Chair and exerting influence over the position itself. I think that we have seen it in today's motion to extend House hours. This was also a tactic

that past governments have employed - one that I was a part of as well - to get out of the House more quickly. When the Premier was in Opposition, again, this was something that was undemocratic, was wrong to do. Yet we have another example of the Premier doing the exact opposite of what he stood for in Opposition. We have seen this with transparency.

[4:30 p.m.]

I sat in this House, and I listened to the Premier when he was in Opposition espouse the values of transparency. It was a big part of the PC platform - very much part of the narrative that they would argue for here in the Chamber and outside, yet let's look at what has happened with that. It's harder to get FOIPOP's, longer to access freedom of information requests. It's almost to the point where it's not even worth the dollars to try to access those because we can't get them, they are being delayed. There is actually not supposed to be political interference in the freedom of information process. I wonder if that's happening or not.

We've seen it in the approach to the media. We literally had the Premier run from the media on Friday because he knew he was going to get very uncomfortable questions about the nature of his conversations with you after it was revealed that you had, indeed, been negotiating for your seat, and that the Premier's assertions that that story was manufactured were inaccurate. Instead of facing the cameras and answering those questions, the Premier choose to leave. I've served under four premiers now, from all three parties, and I've never seen that happen before. I've never seen that happen before by anybody.

Our words do matter. Our purpose really does matter. There is a difference between power and purpose - power for the sake of power, or power used to advance one's purpose. I really have to question the nature of the execution of that power, which we know is highly concentrated. It's not unusual in the Premier's Office, although more so than in previous governments, most likely, and I think being executed a little more ruthlessly than in the previous governments.

If the principles we stand on, if the philosophy we have on democracy and how this institution is supposed to work when we don't have power - in this case when the Premier didn't have power - if it can change so quickly when that power is grasped, I think that tells a very concerning story. I do worry that what we're experiencing here is power for the sake of power, and not power for the sake of purpose.

Of course, the jury is out on that, Mr. Speaker. Time will tell if that thesis is accurate, but we have certainly seen some very concerning events and decisions that are being made - one being this resolution here, something that clearly was very much against the principles of the Premier a few short years ago.

We've also seen it with an approach to governing the Public Service. We've had dozens of deputies, executive directors, CEOs, independent CEOs fired unceremoniously. Again, it's the purview of the Premier and Cabinet to make those decisions. In eight years under Premier McNeil and the member for Timberlea-Prospect when he served as Premier, I think we saw that happen maybe three times. We are now seeing this replicated dozens of times.

We are seeing a consolidation of power with Crown corporations, their independent boards and their CEOs, arm's-length organizations that were there for a purpose: They hand out hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayers' money. The intention of having them at arm's-length is so that partisan considerations don't interfere with that deployment of dollars.

We've seen three top CEOs with demonstrable records of success - Laurel Broten with NSBI, who, in working with the elected government, helped expand our trade network overseas; Malcolm Fraser, a former CEO of Innovacorp, who I think scored one of the biggest gains on a venture capital investment that we've ever seen in this province - 375 times on an investment; and Jennifer Angel, who successfully oversaw the expansion of our broadband initiative to bring high-speed internet to Nova Scotians. These three in particular were so successful that within, I believe, a week or two of it being announced that they had been fired - to be replaced, by the way, with, according to the Premier himself, his personal friends - they were picked up by national organizations.

These individuals were so good that national organizations picked them up almost immediately, but they weren't good enough for the Province. We saw this with Dr. Brendan Carr in Nova Scotia Health, one of the leading health care administrators in the country. He was recruited from a bigger jurisdiction, British Columbia. They paid him more; he still chose to come here to help us deal with the health care situation. He was actually very effective, particularly in managing the system and deploying resources during the stress of the pandemic. You've actually seen that situation get terribly worse, in part because I think we had lost a senior medical administrator who knew what he was doing, and replaced him, again, with a partisan Progressive Conservative lawyer.

We're also hearing that other partisans, former candidates, are replacing many of these individuals in the public service. This is concerning. It's one thing to make those decisions when there is reason for it. It's another to do it for the sake of it and to fill those positions with friends and partisans.

I want to bring our conversation back to the resolution at hand. Again, I think it's a resolution that speaks to the challenge we have here with the nature of the Premier's government doing one thing in Opposition, saying one thing, then doing another.

I think we should point out how historic the election was of the deputy speakers in this Chamber. We elected the first female African Nova Scotian to the seat of deputy

speaker and the first genderqueer deputy speaker, something that we all celebrated. Now it's very clear that their role in the Chamber is being diluted pretty significantly as a result of this resolution.

Perhaps we are not going to see either of those individuals in the Speaker's Chair again, or it might be very rare, because it is not normal to have five deputy speakers. This is also something that is totally contrary to the precedent set in our country.

In the Yukon, we have one deputy speaker. In P.E.I. we have one deputy speaker. In New Brunswick we have two deputy speakers. In Newfoundland and Labrador there is one deputy speaker. In Ontario there is one deputy speaker. Manitoba has one deputy speaker. Saskatchewan has one deputy speaker. Alberta has one deputy speaker. British Columbia has one deputy speaker. It's very clear that having five deputy speakers is very odd in our parliamentary system.

One has to really question the intention for this. First, I do want to congratulate the individuals for their appointments, although we will not be supporting the motion for the reasons I'm articulating. This has nothing to do with the individuals who are being moved forward here in these positions. I'm going to give all those individuals the benefit of the doubt until we see their performance in the Chair and how fairly we're being treated, but there is an issue of principle.

I think it's fair to say that we do have some concerns on the independence of the Speaker's position, and the independence of the deputy speakers, based on what we've seen, and what's been discovered and reported publicly over the last number of weeks.

Mr. Speaker, allow me also to say thank you for standing up for yourself, for standing up for your integrity. You have performed admirably in that seat. I think I speak on behalf of the majority of the members in this Chamber, even those who haven't defended you publicly, when I say we feel treated fairly in this Chamber. We feel there is process and precedence that are directing your decisions, and we're comfortable coming to you with concerns, with points of order and points of privilege.

The message that is being sent here is that if you do or act impartially, whether it is the Speaker's Chair, the Deputy Speaker's Chair, or if you're working in the Public Service, or you disagree with decisions that are being made in the centre of government, that there are pretty serious consequences for you that you have to face. That's what's concerning, because how can anybody do their job in that Chair with the threat of reprisal and reprimand hanging over their shoulders? How can anybody do that? It is unfair to the people in those seats. It is unfair to the Chamber. It is contrary to what the Premier has previously argued for in here, and I believe it's wrong.

We've seen examples in the Chamber where - particularly in Committee of the Whole House - where there have been attempts to stifle debate and limit arguments from

the Opposition. We will remain optimistic that doesn't happen, but I do think that this is a very concerning situation. I think it is a situation that we should all, at least, think about a little bit and pay some attention to because at the end of the day, the overall authority in this province - the top authority in this province - is not held within one office. It is held in this Chamber, and if enough of us stick together, we can ensure that remains the case.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Very often, I say I'm pleased to rise in my place to speak on a particular bill or subject. Today, I have to say that I am very disappointed that I need to stand and speak to this motion and the circumstances surrounding its introduction.

As we've heard from my colleague, the Leader of the Liberal Party, this government promised to do things differently. Since he was elected Leader of the Official Opposition, the Premier - and probably before that - railed against the previous government for its lack of transparency. In the 2021 election, Nova Scotians got a government that they expected would represent change. They voted for change. Unfortunately, Nova Scotians are getting more of the same from this government, and I would say worse.

With this resolution, this government is using the power of its majority to undermine diversity, equity, and opportunity, and not to mention democracy. This Premier has shown Nova Scotians that he will prioritize the needs of himself and his friends above all others.

Madam Speaker, as you would know, and as I know, being named deputy speaker is a tremendous privilege. The naming of the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and you, Madam Speaker, the member for Preston, as deputy speakers broke some significant barriers for this House. The appointing of the first African Nova Scotian deputy speaker and the first non-binary or gender-diverse deputy speaker is no small thing in a Legislature that traditionally has struggled to reflect the diversity of the people it represents. When you and the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island were named deputy speakers, Nova Scotians from all communities could better see themselves reflected in the work that is done in this House.

The role of the Speaker and the deputy speakers hold a special place in any democracy. The Speaker and the deputy speakers are entrusted to protect all members of the House, regardless of which party they're from or what region they represent, and whoever sits in that chair is the arbiter for all, not just for one person or one party.

As my honourable colleague has pointed out, there is no need for additional deputy speakers. The appointment of additional deputy speakers marginalizes the work and commitment of those deputy speakers already in place.

[4:45 p.m.]

The Speaker - you, Mr. Speaker - is there to protect the rules and integrity of this Chamber, and may I say, Mr. Speaker, that you, as the current Speaker, have done that job well. You deserve much better than what is taking place right now in this Chamber.

The Premier has suggested that this whole business is about succession planning, that the discussions are private and between two or more people. It doesn't quite add up that these private discussions were released in a press release.

Of course, we know that the following day, the Premier refused to speak with the media, and today, he refused to answer questions even though he was in front of the media. These are hardly the actions of someone committed to transparency, as this Premier says he is, or at least, used to say he was.

But even if these moves by the government are about succession, I will remind the House - my honourable colleagues - I will remind the House that this is not actually a role for the Premier or the Premier's Office to undertake. Rather, the election of the Speaker is the role of all of us in this Chamber. Succession planning shouldn't even be coming into the conversation.

It's important to note that there are still two important rulings to come from you, Mr. Speaker. Both arose on April 22, 2022, from the member for Bedford Basin and the member for Cumberland North. Interestingly enough, both have to do with the Premier directing the Chair and trying to intimidate other women on this Opposition side of the House.

It is the hope of this side of the House, or at least my caucus, that those rulings will be forthcoming soon, without regard for what kind of tough spot they might put the Premier in. Every person here in this House was elected to do a job: to work to make a better province and, one would hope, to work together to make Nova Scotia a better province.

There was a time when no matter what the debate or the topic, each side could work together to find a compromise that put the best interest of people first. That proud tradition seems to be over. We see it in committees, and we see it here in the Legislature. If people aren't willing to do the bidding of this Premier, they will be removed, fired, or replaced, usually with some version of a close friend of the Premier.

Five deputy speakers for a Chamber that meets among the fewest days of any Legislature in the country does not add up. Adding three government deputy speakers also changes, by the way, the working conditions and pay for the two members who are already deputy speakers without any consultation or notice. This further demonstrates that this government has no appetite for growing and encouraging more diversity in this Chamber.

Might I just say, on that note, that the motion that we voted on earlier about the House hours does the same thing. I was speaking to someone who - God love him, I didn't think he would pay attention to this - but when I told him that we were voting on hours until midnight for many days in a row, his first response was: Well, that kind of leaves out women who have small children who want to serve in this House, doesn't it? I was like: You're darn right it does, actually.

Not only are we making sure that fewer women with small children are going to run for office because of the bananas House hours that we are being asked to serve - and for nefarious reasons, in my opinion - but also, we're limiting the diversity in this House and the diversity of the Chair.

I will just conclude by saying that this demonstrates that this government has no appetite about growing and encouraging more diversity in the Chamber, and it seems this government has little appetite for working in any kind of collaborative way with the Opposition . . . (Interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I just wonder if the member could bring it back to the actual motion that's on the floor.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: It seems that this government has little appetite for working in a collaborative way with the Opposition. This is a cynical move, Mr. Speaker, and very disappointing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I rise today in support of Resolution No. 385 deputy speakers. This is a resolution in an effort to improve the effectiveness of this House. Rule No. 11(1) of *Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly* details that deputy speakers shall . . . (Interruption)

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

The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Rule No. 11(1) details that deputy speakers "...shall take the chair of all Committees of the Whole House and who may, at the request of the Speaker, take the chair of the House with . . . all the powers of the Speaker".

With only two deputy speakers at present, a member who is not a deputy speaker was often in the Chair. For members' information, one of the deputy speakers was in the Chair 10 days during the Spring session. However, on 11 days during the session, a member

who was not a deputy speaker assumed the Chair during the Committee of the Whole on Supply and Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

Mr. Speaker, it was made clear that there was more work than was possible for two deputy speakers to reasonably perform. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou on a point of order.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: At what point does counting how many times somebody sits in a seat - I want a ruling on that. I believe that the member is not allowed to reference how many times someone - we talk about that rule all the time, how you're not supposed to talk about what other people are doing in the House. That's a terrible speech, man.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member - in consultation with the Clerk, the Clerk has informed me that the discussion is not talking about individual members by name, for one thing, and whether or not they were in the chamber. I have to rule against your point of order.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I guess my clarification is actually the member is referencing people who were in the Chamber at a time. So they were in here. Whether they were here or not - we have always been told that we're not allowed to have that conversation about what other members are doing within the House. That's my concern with what I'm hearing right now. Why would it be any different?

THE SPEAKER: Maybe what we'll do is take a brief recess for five minutes. We'll recess for five minutes.

[4:53 p.m. The House recessed.]

[4:56 p.m. The House resumed.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. In discussions with the Clerks there is one rule that is followed where it can't be referenced that a person is either absent or present in the House. That's the only rule that would apply, and in this event there were no specific names pointed out, the rule hasn't been breached so there is no point of order. (Interruption) Well, that's the ruling that we made.

The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: In closing, Mr. Speaker, this resolution will ease the burden on the two existing deputy speakers and decrease or eliminate the need for members who are not deputy speakers to act as Chair of the Committee of the Whole House, which happened so frequently in the last Spring session.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I am kind of blown away that this is actually happening. I can't believe that the Premier thinks we need three more deputy speakers. I can believe that there might be a reason why he wants to give people some more money because he is trying to quell a rebellion on the back benches or something like that, but I can't believe that it has actually come to this, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at the number of deputy speakers across the country - my colleague alluded to this . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Argyle on a point of order.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a point of order. During the member's point of order, I believe he referred to my honourable colleague's speech as a terrible speech. I don't think that's parliamentary in any sense of democracy, especially in this Chamber, so I would ask the member: Are you to rule on whether the member has to apologize or not for referring to my honourable colleague's speech as being a terrible speech?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I never responded to the minister or the member as being terrible, but I had an opinion that the speech was terrible. The speech went after another person in this House for their absences. I think there's no class to that, I think it's a terrible speech, but I never indicated that the member was terrible in any way, shape, or form - we're in the middle of a debate.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, these are words spoken from my honourable colleague so to infer that the words coming from out of her mouth, representing her constituents, representing her opinion about the resolution that we're debating on this floor right now, in any reference to say it's terrible in any sense I'd argue is unparliamentary and I'd appreciate your ruling.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou and then we're going to stop discussion.

[5:00 p.m.]

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Again, I've served in this House for over seven years. I've never called anybody terrible or anybody by a negative name, but I will call out when I hear a speech, whether it is on this side or in that party or anywhere else, attacks somebody else in the House for their absence, whether they are here or not. I'm going to stand up and defend anybody here. I've done that for the last seven years.

In this case, I called something terrible because personally, I felt that the words that were being brought forward against one of my colleagues were terrible, not the member. The speech probably was prepared by someone for tonight. It never represented her constituency. The member never talked about her constituency at all. She was talking specifically about another member of this House. I've never seen that happen in seven years since I've been here, so I'm going to stand up and defend my colleague.

THE SPEAKER: Once again, I'm going to go back to the ruling I made previously, that you can't refer to the absence or presence of a member in the Chamber. That did not happen, so therefore, the rule hasn't been breached, so there's no point of order.

The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Nova Scotia now is going to have three new deputy speakers for a total of five, for what? Probably the shortest number of sitting days out of the whole country. Wow, that's amazing.

When you look across the country, and you look at how many there are, one deputy speaker is the norm. There are some where they have a few more. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta; B.C. has a deputy and one assistant deputy; P.E.I. has a deputy; Newfoundland has a deputy. A few of them have a few more. Ontario has a deputy plus three deputy chairs for Committee of the Whole House, which, gosh, you can understand.

It's like it's a bad joke. How many speakers does it take for Nova Scotia to come through the shortest House session in the country? Apparently, the answer is five. Amazing.

Here we have a Premier who is so controlling, and let's face it, we watched him sit there and direct, as I was in debate, we watched the Premier sit there and direct the committee chair as I was speaking on the bill that was trying to tax Nova Scotians who had moved away and who were lucky enough to have been able to afford a cottage back here - he repeatedly interjected and tried to knock me off what I was saying. That was the Premier leaning over and directing the Chair repeatedly. We all saw it. We can pretend that we didn't see it. The fact of the matter is, we all saw it.

This is just another way for the Premier to lean over top of the Chair of the committee. Clearly, the member for Preston and the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island were too darn fair. Now we have to have some other folks, all of whom are members of this Chamber, some of whom I've interacted with quite a bit and quite like, but let's be clear. The Premier has control over those members on that side in a way he doesn't have control over the members on this side. He wants to ensure that he has control over debate and control over them, so he's adding three more.

I think back to the day when we elected the members . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: We made national news.

KELLY REGAN: We made national news when we elected the members as deputy speakers. The Premier said about my colleague from Preston: "That's obviously an important milestone, and she's a quality, quality person and will be an excellent MLA, so I'm very, very pleased that she's advanced as a deputy speaker."

Then suddenly, we have three people come in and fill in. To me, what adds insult to injury even further is that he's decided unilaterally to cut the pay of two people who historically would never have been in this Chamber, and historically did not get anywhere close to that seat. The Premier has decided he's going to cut their pay and he's going to share it with his backbench. Once again, a Black woman and a genderqueer person are going to take a pay cut and make less than some white men and a woman.

The point is he decided. There was no debate. He decided that he's cutting their pay. Women of this Chamber, how long did we fight for equal pay? This is one of the few places where we actually do get equal pay. We have a place where competent women were making more money, where a competent genderqueer person was making more money, and the Premier couldn't let that stand. He couldn't let that go. He had to share it with his own members.

So Mr. Speaker, here we are. We went from making national news because we had a couple of historic first members now in the Chair as deputy speakers, and now we're going to be the butt of "how many Speakers does it take to go through a two-week legislative session?" That's what we're reduced to here, folks. That's what's happening here. Instead of being a beacon on the hill for Nova Scotians, for Canadians who have historically been discriminated against, who've been marginalized, who've been paid less - instead, we're going to share their salary with three other people because the Premier wants to have control.

And Mr. Speaker, I admire you tremendously for your fortitude over the last number of weeks. It was obviously going on before many of us knew about it. If anybody thinks that the actions that the Premier have taken in recent weeks did not have a chilling effect on the members of his caucus, if they haven't all learned that they'd better march

along with everybody else, or else - if they haven't learned what the consequences will be when you go against this Premier, by gosh, they sure know now.

I can't tell you how disappointed I am today. I can't tell you how disappointed. But we'll be watching to see how often those members actually get called to sit in the Chair.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments on this resolution. Shortly after the previous Premier took office, my friend the member for Timberlea-Prospect then invited me to a conversation about general areas where, perhaps, our parties might find some common cause, a conversation about thinking together about some of the ways we might be able to contribute to overcoming some of the partisan pettiness that often can diminish the quality of the work that happens with elected representatives.

One of the things that he and I talked about in the course of a wide-ranging conversation was the position and the appointment of deputy speakers. I don't recall our conversation with great precision, but my memory of it is that somehow in the course of that conversation, I told the then-Premier about my own experience with the deputy speaker position when I first came to this work following the election of 2009.

At that time, as any new MLA would be, I was trying to figure out why this happened at such-and-such a time, and why this person was doing that when they were doing it, and so on. I remember asking, since the NDP had a majority in the election, why was it there were Progressive Conservative and Liberal deputy speakers? It was explained to me that this was something that had come out of the years of minority government. It was something that had been something that had been found to be helpful as a means of improving co-operation in the House by respecting - through these deputy speakers' roles - the important place in the work of the Legislature of the Opposition.

In other words, it was explained to me that this wasn't something that was required by any rule, but it was something that was important as a gesture. I remember, when that was explained to me, thinking how quite wonderful this was, how I was glad to be associated with something that had this kind of thinking. It seemed to me something not small- but large-spirited. Something that was worthy.

The government which followed that government - I was first elected in 2009 - the government elected in 2013 abandoned this practice. I think I remember saying to the then-Premier in our conversation early in 2021 that I thought that was a mistake, and it had been a regrettable thing when the Liberal governments in 2013 and following had not continued with the practice that had been in the years previous of having deputy speakers from the opposition parties.

My memory is that we had a really good discussion about this, and it was some little time after that that I think something significant happened. That was that the Liberal government under the leadership of the then-Premier in early 2021 made open the appointments for deputy speakers in a time of Liberal government from the Progressive Conservative and NDP sides of the House. At that time, the member for Dartmouth North took up the position as Deputy Speaker from the NDP side.

I thought it was a really welcome development last Fall following the 2021 election when the current government decided to continue with this practice. It was an important gesture when the member for Preston and the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island took up their new Deputy Speaker appointments. I remember at the time when that happened, I think we all had something of that feeling I was describing from 2009 - my own experience - that this was a worthy thing. It was not a small tawdry thing. This is a gesture that has a quality, but I think we felt something of a feeling that this is something that we are glad to be associated with.

I'm pretty sure I'm remembering right that there were quite a number of us who took the opportunity at that time to say that we thought the Premier's thinking about this was quality thinking, that he had made the right decision in making those appointments of those deputy speakers.

I think I said at that time, and I certainly want to say now, that in the matter of governance, one thing that is extremely important is tone. It could well be argued that the setting of a tone is one of the most important things that a leader has the opportunity to do. If a leader sets a tone that is, say, vindictive, then there's an air of negativity that can come over the whole body of work that that leader is giving leadership to.

Conversely, if a leader sets a tone of respect and a tone of largeness, even if there may be some real knock-down-drag-them-out policy disagreements that take place, if that tone of respect and largeness has been set, that work can be infused with a sense of largeness. But if a leader sets a tone that is petty or if a leader sets a tone that is in this sense small, the danger is that the whole enterprise that surrounds them can be shrunken and diminished.

I would like, Mr. Speaker, to just say a little word about my own experience in this regard, as a minister of the United Church. I have quite a bit of experience in dealing with congregations where there's a majority side and a minority side. It has just happened that my whole background as a minister - all the congregations that I've served have been ones that have been interdenominational and ecumenical, and shared ministries in which there has been a majority side and a minority side.

The United Church isn't involved in very many shared ministries in Eastern Canada, but it just happens that my whole experience as a pastoral leader has been in

congregations of this sort. They are notoriously short-lived arrangements. They are notoriously fragile.

[5:15 p.m.]

I have noticed over the years that in those shared ministries - those interdenominational congregations that are successful and where the relationship really gels and something really good takes place, where those arrangements of the majority and the minority are successful - there tends to be one thing in common. That is, that in the basic way the situation is set up, the majority party extends to the minority party some form of respect, place and authority that the minority party would not, just by virtue of their numbers alone, be able to attain.

I won't go into the mechanics of how this works in church governance. That's not what matters - it's the result that matters. The result is that gestures of that sort where the majority signals a respect to the minority in a way that the minority would not be able to attain for itself by virtue simply of its numbers - where there is that kind of a gesture of largeness - a tone of respect can be built into the fabric of the relationship between the majority and the minority, with the impact that a certain overarching largeness of spirit can be established. When we have a largeness of spirit, real work towards a mission and a purpose can be that much better accomplished.

I think this is a significant matter because it really is the case that in our present culture there is a great hunger for leadership that has a tone of largeness. There is a great hunger for leadership that has a tone of character. There is a great hunger for leadership that has a tone of spirit. And there is a weariness - I don't even think it's too much to say there's a revulsion - for politics that is partisan and petty.

It is for these kinds of reasons that the change in the composition of the position of deputy speaker that this resolution brings about is a disappointment. The impact of the resolution will be that opposition members will move from 100 per cent of the deputy speaker positions to holding 40 per cent, or two out of five, of those positions.

It is the direction here that is troubling. It is a direction away from something that helps support a tone of respect and a direction towards a tone that is lesser in that much-needed area of largeness. The resolution diminishes the overall scope of respect in the fundamental constituting of the Legislature's affairs by diluting and shrinking the scope and role of the minority, the Opposition.

The great Nova Scotia novelist Charles Bruce had something to say on this general subject of largeness and smallness in his epic novel *The Channel Shore* about the people in the communities of the Port Shoreham and Guysborough County area, which was his home. In the course of that exploration in that novel, he says something to the effect - I am not quoting it exactly - that these people he portrays in the book may not have been perfect,

but whatever else you could say about them, he writes, you could not say that they were small.

I am afraid this is not true today of the Government of Nova Scotia. The government is enacting a self-diminishment with this change in the composition of the office of deputy speaker. They are shrinking and diminishing the scope of what was a meaningful gesture and they have thereby marked themselves with the stain of smallness.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to start out with a simple quote, if you don't mind. The quote goes, "And said *unto them*, what will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him."

To those of you who are religious, you know what that's about, and that's what I feel is happening right now.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you about someone I was told about when I first got elected in 2013. It was a different-looking Chamber at the time. Actually, I think you had by some fluke lost the election, but you came back in 2017. It was a different-looking Chamber at the time.

I remember having a conversation with one of the MLAs I got really close with - a gentleman by the name of Gordie Gosse. Gordie and I used to sit in the lunch room and have conversations. That's when I first heard of this MLA in Cape Breton who had lost, and they were shocked. I asked what made him such a good MLA. Gordie said to me, you know, he'll pick people up from their homes and drive them to the grocery store. He'll pick people up and drive for hours to get to the hospital and the doctor's appointment. He's an old-fashioned kind of politician who hasn't forgotten where he came from and what he was elected to do. In fact, he said, he's less of a politician and more of just a regular person. I thought maybe Gordie was blowing some smoke at the time, because at first I thought the MLA they were talking about was an NDP MLA.

I actually went to another old-timer, Leo Glavine - if anybody here remembers Leo. I asked Leo about this individual and he said the same thing.

The member for Sydney-Membertou has told similar stories. He talks about a time when he was at a hospital getting some work done and in walked this young, short, happy MLA. (Laughter) He came into the hospital and the member for Sydney-Membertou asked him how he was doing, if everything was fine. He said he was just there dropping off a constituent who needed to get to the hospital. I can guarantee you the majority of the people in this room have not done that, have not driven for hours to pick up someone, drop them

off and wait for them. But the member I'm speaking about and heard about for the 10 years of my career was the current member for Victoria-The Lakes.

I just want people to know that when you cut the feet out from someone, that's the individual whom you're cutting the feet out from under. We talk about the deputy speaker role here, but the truth is that those five individuals are going to replace one of the best MLAs who ever sat in this Chamber. If you talk to the people of Victoria-The Lakes and you ask them - if you're an MLA in Cape Breton right now, you're hearing it and you're going to continue to hear it because they know the quality of the human being you just did that to and you continue to treat that way.

I'm shocked, Mr. Speaker. I'm absolutely floored, and this is coming from someone who's been kicked out twice by the member for Victoria-The Lakes, and I'm sure will be kicked out again. (Laughter)

When the media came to me and asked me about the member for Victoria-The Lakes, I could have said we've butted heads, that member did this, or that member did that, but I was honest, and I said he's actually a great human being. I've met him. I've met his wife. We've been away. They're fantastic human beings, and he's a fair Speaker. I say this as someone who was in the role of Speaker for about three years. I know what it takes to be in that seat, and I know how difficult it is.

I want to just say that I can tell you on this side of the House, and I can tell you when we were on that side of the House, we stuck together like glue. We were a family, and we were friends, and we would never let anyone, especially our own, do that to each other. I know that to be true.

I don't want to speak for the NDP, but I know the quality of human beings on that side. I know that the current leader of the NDP and the former leader of the NDP would go to hell and back for their members.

That's what builds a team, and that's what builds a family. Listen, I was on that side, and when we were making tough decisions, I remember the Opposition of the day saying the same thing to us. Some of you are only going to be here for one term. Everybody thinks they're bulletproof and they're going to be here forever, but some of you are only going to be here for one term. This is what your term is going to be. When you look back, this is what it's going to be.

I try to put myself in the position that other people are in. I do that all the time when I'm dealing with issues or things that people are facing. I get a sense of desperation. I'll use an example quickly. We just went through the hurricane. I have members from my community who are homeless who we just found out actually had no contact as of today from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing nor the Department of Community Services to help them find a new home. Those are their words as of today.

I put myself in that position, and I think, if I were in that position, how hard would I work? I just heard the minister say, why wouldn't you call me? Why wouldn't you direct your staff to do their job?

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'll ask the member to go back to the resolution that's been tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I put myself in that position and I work hard. I work desperately to try to get that stuff and to try to do whatever I can, to the point where we were buying groceries over the weekend out of our own pocket.

I look at what's happening now, and I look at someone who is universally respected by every member of this House. The only people I can find to say anything bad about the member for Victoria-The Lakes are the people from his own team. Nobody has said anything negative on this side about him.

I put myself in that position and I think, you're replacing him with five deputy speakers, which I think should be an honour for him, because it takes five people to do the job of the one person from Victoria-The Lakes. Congratulations, Mr. Speaker. That says a lot about the load you carry.

I want to touch on some of the stuff that was said here today. I've done that job. I've done that position of deputy speaker, and I take offence to some of the comments that were made here today.

I want to talk about how the now-Premier spoke glowingly of the two current deputy speakers. He said that they were fair and equitable, and that they were the right people for the job - it was historical.

Mr. Speaker, is that security to remove me? Hope not.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Would the member go back to discussion on the resolution?

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, they've taken voices that have been historically muted, not only in this Chamber but in Nova Scotia and across Canada, and they're muzzling them and quieting them, and they're relegating them to the back corner again.

[5:30 p.m.]

On one hand we have a Premier who celebrated the choices made by the previous Premier, the member for Timberlea-Prospect. They got the good news story out of it. They waited a little bit and then in the cover of night - because that's where we are - they pulled the rug out from underneath him. I will guarantee you that the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and the member for Preston sit in that chair for less time than the amount of questions the Premier answers in Question Period, and that's minimal.

It is becoming abundantly clear that if you have a voice on that side, a voice that you were democratically elected to voice, that you are not allowed to have an opinion that strays from the core, the centre of power. I see members shaking their heads. Well, there's a whole list of bureaucrats - sorry, Mr. Speaker. I know that some of the members opposite disagree with me, but what I will say is we've seen qualified bureaucratic members like Brendan Carr - Dr. Brendan Carr was brought up earlier in this Chamber.

I'll tell you a little story about Dr. Brendan Carr. The first time I ever heard his name, he disagreed and was critical of the current Liberal government at the time. So what did we do? Did we attack him? Did we discredit him? No. We said, have the job. You've got the ideas, have the job. Let's see what you can do - somebody who was world-renowned. The very first move they did was to remove him and the members of the Nova Scotia Health Authority, which other members have brought here in this debate, and replace them with a single person who is a known political Progressive Conservative operative, who, in Public Accounts Committee, refused to answer questions.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: That was brought up already.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I should have ruled it out of order then, but we are talking about the resolution that's before the House right now. I'm going to ask the member once again to go to back to speaking on the resolution concerning the appointment of deputy speakers.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I would like to make a connection, and maybe it's just the way my mind works but I would like to make a connection between what's happening now with the Speaker, the member for Victoria-The Lakes, with the member for Preston and the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and the deputy speakers who are replacing them, members who sit on the Public Accounts Committee with me who have time and time again refused to call in topics that, as the Speaker of the House has said in the media, when asked why this was happening, that had put the government in a difficult spot on issues.

Those were not my words, those were the words of the Speaker in the media. The new deputy speakers did the opposite. They voted to keep out issues that were difficult for the government, not for Nova Scotians. Nova Scotians are having a difficult time with Nova Scotia Power, for sure, but those members who are now being put in as deputy speakers and receiving a financial stipend voted against those topics, for no reason other than it really has no impact on the finances of Nova Scotians or the finances of the province, is what we were told.

Mr. Speaker, we heard the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island talk about leadership and how important leadership is. It's really important to set the tone. When the tone is to go after somebody who has the respect of what we thought was everybody in this House - we heard one of the members opposite, when asked by the media, if they thought the Speaker had done a good job, the member said, uh, all right, I guess. I have sat in that Chair. The decisions you make there are difficult decisions.

I heard the member for Hants West, in the member's speech, talk about the ineffectiveness of the deputy speakers. The ineffectiveness of the deputy speakers is an insult to the current deputy speakers, to say that they're doing an ineffective job. We just saw the member for Preston give an explanation - a non-partisan explanation - that actually sided with the government because it was the right thing, in her opinion, to do. I didn't understand the whole ruling, but she assured me it was well-thought-out, that it was what it was supposed to be. I look at that decision, Mr. Speaker, and I say if that was a government deputy speaker making a decision that went against that government, you know there would be repercussions because we're seeing it here now with the current Speaker.

I know this is an awkward thing, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize. I'm probably the last person you ever thought would come to your defence, but the truth is that this can't all be about politics. It can't all be about NDP, Progressive Conservative, Liberal, Green, whoever else is out there. People are sick of that. They're sick of vindictive governments. They're sick of partisan governments. They're sick of decisions being made based on who their MLA is. They're sick of people being rewarded, or attempts at rewards, for doing what the Premier asked them to do. That's why we have fewer and fewer people voting. I also think that's why this government decided to have an election in the Summer, the very first piece of legislation they ever brought in.

People may not be watching this now. I think back to one of the first sessions when I was first elected. There was some controversy, and one of the members really got into it about something. Someone said you think that people aren't watching this. You think that people are sitting at home and they're not paying attention. But they do pay attention, and they know that their member has leapfrogged up to become the Speaker of the House by being partisan. They know that because I have actually heard from people in those communities.

What is terrible about the way our democracy is is that we have no repercussions right now on this side of the House. We're going to take it. We're going to fight like heck - oops, I almost said the H-word. We're going to fight it, but the truth is the government is going to get their way. They're going to put partisanship in the spot there, and those members are going to stand up and tell us to sit down. Those members are going to say no more emergency debates - no more emergency debates.

We heard from the current Speaker that that was one of the things that annoyed the Premier, that he did his democratic duty as Speaker of the House and allowed for emergency debates. Imagine - imagine kicking someone out of their seat and removing them from that Chair for allowing emergency debates on housing, on inflation, on gas prices, on health care. Those are what we had emergency debates about. And the Premier was upset about this

We know that some of the comments that were made, that there was an agreement or negotiations, or something was being done with the Premier's Office, that they had met with the Speaker of the House several times. I think if this government truly believes in their own rhetoric and they believe that they're transparent, maybe they'd release what those negotiations and what those conversations were with the Speaker of the House. What was said, what was offered, what was told to the Speaker of the House, if you do our bidding?

Again, I know what it's like to be on that side of the House, so listen to somebody over here. You're one year in. You're made of steel. Right? Three years is a long way out. We're going to be in government forever. We've got the power.

But it goes away quickly, and then you have to look at yourself in the mirror and decide if, when you had the opportunity, you did what's right, but more importantly, that you treated people right. You were leaders in your community. You're leaders. I mean, I feel like right now - I mean, I don't think anyone's listening on that side, if I'm reading faces. And that's fine. I don't think they've listened on several things, and part of it is how you treat people in this House, and how you treat Nova Scotians. It's a lot of: Something's coming. We're going to listen. We're going to take care of every one of them. And not a single one gets taken care of.

I'll recall last Winter when I stood here in my place and begged and pleaded for the ministers of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Community Services to go visit homeless people and people who had no homes in HRM. They could have just walked up the street. They didn't. They said, we're going to find them homes, and Winter's coming, and they'll have a safe place to go.

There are more homeless people now than there were at that time last year. Over 500 people are homeless. No visits. No talks. Nothing.

[5:45 p.m.]

It's about how you treat people. We're the highest-taxed province with one of the worst health care systems when it comes to outcomes. This is a government that promised 24/7 surgery. We can't even get seven, let alone 24/7. We have a government that's refusing. They want to get rid of lists.

This is about democracy. It's about transparency. These things are going to be ruled on. We're going to have these conversations. We're going to have these conversations, and we're going to fight it, and we're going to say government is trying to hide this information. Government is trying to keep this information - Mr. Speaker, Mx. Speaker, Madam Speaker, we need you to rule on this. And do you trust people who - not all of them, but some of them - who climbed over their own members to get in that Chair, to make those decisions? I mean, really. I don't.

Madam Chair, it is fantastic to see you in that Chair. It's historic. But I'm going to let you in on a little secret: they don't care.

THE SPEAKER: I'll remind the member for Halifax Atlantic to stick to the motion.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Because if they truly believe in the importance and the independence of that Chair, we wouldn't be here today. We wouldn't be doing this. Sometimes I feel like they can't get out of their own way.

There are so many issues that we should be debating here tonight. So many issues. We're hearing of a 26 per cent power rate increase in this province, but we're debating deputy speakers.

There are people in hotels from Hurricane Fiona who have very little assistance. They're scared tonight. They don't know what is to happen, but we're not debating that. We're debating deputy speakers.

We have a health care system that is beyond crisis; it is broken. One of the media reports said that one of the doctors has said that it exploded over the last year. We could be debating that, but we're debating deputy speakers.

It's important that we're here, and that some of us on this side of the House will fight for democracy. We're not going to have this kind of debate. We're not going to have these individuals like the member for Halifax Chebucto get up and give one of his famous speeches. We're not going to hear that on health care and on housing, because they're not going to bring it up. They don't want to bring it up. By changing the deputy speakers, it darn well ensures that there'll be no emergency debates on that. I guarantee you.

So we have to decide if this is the People's House or if this is the Premier's House.

THE SPEAKER: I'll just ask the member to not speak to other people's intent or government intentions, or the names. Just stick to the motion.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We do have to decide what is expected of us as leaders and not take for granted the seats that we sit in. When you take historic appointments away from the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and the member for Preston, it undoes so much.

I would say I'm sure that my colleagues from the NDP have all read the biography on Alexa McDonough. She was my MLA for a long time and a highly respected individual. She went through some of the craziest things in this House. She did not have a washroom. They didn't think she deserved a washroom. She fought tooth and nail for women in this House and it continues to this day.

The work of Alexa continues. It continues with all the members here. We have the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier who is a new mother and has changed the rules for women in this House for the better. It's great because as a man, I didn't think of that. We have the member for Dartmouth South who could potentially someday - am I allowed to say this out loud? - become the first female Premier of this province. She's in the running. We laugh, but let's see in three years.

Then, having to be here every night until midnight. We heard members talk about leadership, and vindictiveness, and how you lead, and how important that is. Now we're here until midnight every night. We have people here who have brand-new babies. We have single moms. We have me with three kids. It's difficult because there are rulings that are going to have to happen around these decisions on if this is fair, if this is right, and if you've been appointed as a wink, wink, nudge, nudge, then are you going to go against it?

It also shows when we try to go out and encourage women to run in here, and people of diverse backgrounds and cultures, and then they see this stuff. The first thing I hear from people is I've got no chance, no chance.

I was very proud of my colleague from Timberlea-Prospect for continuing with - I'll call it his tradition, of bringing it back to having a member from the NDP, or the Opposition, and a member from the government, or opposite. (Interruption) All Opposition, sorry. I was thinking about the Speaker in my head, sorry. I apologize - for having both deputy speakers as opposition members.

Most of you know that we're all close over here, but the member for Timberlea-Prospect is someone whom I consider a close friend. He might not consider me that, so I

probably shouldn't say that publicly. (Laughter) Wipe that off the record, wipe that off the record. He told me that soon after he became Premier, he met with the opposition leaders to try to find common ground - the member for Halifax Chebucto and the Premier now, the member for Pictou East. I'm sure they had a whole laundry list of asks.

It's funny to hear the member for Halifax Chebucto talk about the importance of the deputy speaker role and making sure that everybody's properly represented. He's not just saying that having been the Leader of the NDP at the time, but he's saying that from personal experience, as somebody who was deputy speaker and understanding the role of deputy speaker.

I think it takes a lot of courage. I think it takes a lot of morality, and I think it shows who you are as a person. You're the Premier of the province, you're the leader, and you're not trying to control everything. You're saying, you know what, you're right. We're going to give the deputy speakers to the opposition parties. Parties that he can't control, or she can't control, or they can't control. Parties that they can't control, but trusting in the democratic system because it's the right thing to do.

That will be part of his legacy, and this will be part of all your legacies. You think it's nothing, you think it's simple. We've got lots of runway; we've got three years. We'll spend \$8 billion on this, and we'll spend all the money we can to get re-elected. But people are tired of that. They're tired of the same old, same old.

I think it's shameful, absolutely shameful, that we had historical nominations in this Legislature that made national and international news. That because we had a Speaker of the House who's one of the most respected MLAs - definitely the most respected MLA in Cape Breton from what I hear. Definitely more respected than the member for Sydney-Membertou, that's all I'm saying. (Laughter)

That all stemmed from the Premier being upset that COVID protocols were put into this Legislature by the Speaker - the Speaker's words, not mine - and that the Speaker followed the rules and did the MLA salary committee. We all agreed on and voted it down, but under the Rules of the House, he had to do it. So the Premier decided he was going to call an emergency debate on the Speaker's ruling at the time for the committee's results.

That week of emergency debate over MLAs' salaries blew up in the government's face, because guess what? They were talking about MLAs' salaries. The Speaker orchestrated it because it was under the law that he had to do it. We wanted to talk about housing, cost of living and all that stuff and they didn't want to and it blew up in their face, so do you know what? Someone has to pay for that.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'm going to ask the member to speak to the motion and not to the intent of the government.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm just trying to figure out how we got here. How did we get here? I heard one of the members say that they had to do a succession plan. Are they saying the Speaker is too old to do his job? I think he did a great job. He did a fantastic job, and I don't think it's right to tell him that without his knowledge you are going to do that. So now we're saying that the current members . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'll just ask the member for Halifax Atlantic to stay on speaking to the motion and not any unparliamentary comments and intent of what government was going to do.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: For those who are about to take the seat, I want you to take note of what the current deputy speaker is doing. She is being unbiased, unpartisan, and fair. We are colleagues and she is putting me in my place for wandering off topic. That is what a deputy speaker is supposed to do and you are telling me - I heard today from the member that that current deputy speaker is ineffective. That was the word that was used in a speech: ineffective.

I was deputy speaker for three years, I think. We weren't lacking for resources. There are times where a member is sick or something happens and one of the committee chairs has to come in and sit. Not a problem, not an issue. (Interruption) You are right, it's not ineffectiveness, it's called life and it has worked that way forever.

Off the top of my head, I don't know the population of Alberta but I'm pretty sure it's more than a million here in Nova Scotia and they have one deputy speaker. How is that deputy speaker so effective and our current deputy speakers are so ineffective?

I have not seen anything in my time here to show that any of the deputy speakers who have sat in that Chair have been ineffective. In fact, I have not, until recently, seen a Premier insert himself in such a way with the deputy speakers and the Speaker of the House until recently. I have not, until recently, seen a Premier of this province try to direct and influence and - I don't want to say "intimidate" but when you raise your voice and start yelling at a committee chair, we've got issues. I've never seen that until this last year.

Again I will go back to what the member for Halifax Chebucto said: Leadership matters. It really does. If your tone is angry and aggressive and if your tone is go get them, punch them in the mouth or whatever, like take the low road, then it sets a pretty bad tone.

I think it was Michelle Obama who made the comment about when they go low, we go high. The high road is the one that's less travelled, I think they say. What's happening right now is that there's a traffic jam for miles on the low road, Mr. Speaker. That's what's happening right now. You're disenfranchising communities that have fought to put representatives here to not only be their voice, but now they have an ability to manage and lead this 260-year-old House. That has been taken away.

[6:00 p.m.]

I'm not a betting man. I don't like to gamble. I have never been to a casino - I don't think so. I'm trying to think just in case someone has a picture that's going to be on Twitter tonight. I don't think I have ever been. But I'm willing to bet right now that the end of this mandate, these two members combined have not sat in that chair more than one of those members. I actually don't see where they're going to sit in that seat. They're definitely not going to sit in that seat for tough decisions.

Again, maybe the Speaker knows, maybe the deputy speakers know, maybe they have had this conversation with the powers that be, and they told them why they have done such a horrible job. I know our member, the member for Preston, wasn't told anything. She was actually caught off guard. Imagine that. Imagine coming into work one day - I think some of us experienced that in our private life - and someone just saying, you're gone. Why? You're gone - I've got a buddy over here who can do the job better. Well, can he? No, but he's a buddy of mine. That's what is happening here.

This debate is happening right now at night outside of a media cycle. That's the other thing about democracy. I think that there has been this movement afoot to delegitimize democracy. Part of that is to delegitimize the media, which I think has been considered the third arm of democracy, or the third wing of democracy. (Interruption) What is it? I don't know. *The Fifth Estate* is a great show, though.

We heard that when it was brought up by the provincial media. CBC, CTV, the *Chronicle Herald*, and *allNovaScotia* had approached the Premier, questioning what's happening to these deputy speakers.

What did he say? You're making it up. You made it up. His first reaction was to say that it was all made up. Wait a second - your office verified it. All made up. Listen, Gorman, Laroche and Flynn, you guys you're spending all your time, you're wasting your weekends looking into this. It's your time. What are you doing? You should be out watching the Red Sox, who are a terrible team. You're wasting your time - there's nothing here. But the truth is there was, there is, and there's still more. That's the thing. If there's more and this thing really blows up, I will guarantee you that it's not going to land on the Premier. I mean, it's going to, but he's going to do everything to make sure it lands on all of you first.

That's the difference in leadership. You may not like previous leaders and previous Premiers. I have heard a lot of great things about Darrell Dexter and his loyalty to his caucus. Certainly, Stephen McNeil was very loyal. I didn't always agree with him. I can say that on the record now. I didn't always agree with him, but we don't always have to agree. You don't always have to agree, but he always had your back. If anyone said anything or did anything, he was honestly to God the first person by your side. That's

exactly how the member for Timberlea-Prospect was. He had your back, and would never do something like that.

We're all adults here. We've all had private sector jobs. We've all had careers in our lives. We've all seen things like this happen. I almost guarantee you, when you saw it in the private sector and you weren't involved in it, you were like, oh my God, that is horrific - who does that? But now you're all complacent. When a ball of paint blows up, you're all going to get splattered on. That's what's going to happen. As this progresses, and as the public . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic is getting very close to the line with some of the expressions.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The ball of paint? Sorry.

THE SPEAKER: I'll ask that you retract that, please.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What I'm trying to say is that you're all going to shoulder responsibility for this, whether you realize it or not. I know it's early on in your mandate and you've got years to go, but you're all going to. Then another decision is going to be made, and another person's going to be cut out, and another person. I think about the member for Cumberland North and about leadership and about how people were treated. Now we're seeing this to our members and we're seeing it now to your own members.

It would be interesting if you could sit alone in a room with someone and have a private one-on-one conversation and they could be completely honest, who would you speak to? I've always said it would be great to have a conversation with Obama. It would be great to have a conversation with the Pope. I mean, there are so many people out there who it would be great to have these conversations with.

Right now, I'd just like to have an honest one-on-one conversation with the members of government and see how they actually feel about how the deputy speakers and the Speaker are being treated in this House. I guarantee you that there's not unanimous consent for how these people are being treated. If there is, Lord lifting - that's not a bad word - I'm telling you. (Interruption) That's not using the . . .

THE SPEAKER: One more close call and you know what's going to happen.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I was joking about a third time. I'll get back to where we're at. I see certain members reacting every time I do something.

I just think that in the fairness of democracy, in the fairness of this House, we need to make sure that Chair, that position, has no undue influence on it. The Premier can say all he wants that there is no undue influence, but just by holding someone's job over their head, by rewarding people and removing deputy speakers - let's be honest - they'll say, well, we're not removing deputy speakers, we're just adding three more.

Well, you're not. You're removing the duties of those deputy speakers. I'm assuming one of the members over there is going to be the new Speaker, and then you'll have a couple of deputy speakers, but you're going to have the majority of them on the government side. So when there is an issue with the Speaker's decisions, when there is an issue in this House, are these individuals even going to have input? If they do, we know what's going to happen. They're going to be overruled by the three individuals it takes to replace you, Mr. Speaker, because they're all on the same side.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I have to say that the conversation has been going on for quite a while. I want to stress that this discussion is not about me as Speaker. It's about the three appointees for deputy speaker.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Ten more minutes, Mr. Speaker, sorry. So now we have five deputy speakers. Three of them are on the government side, and two on the opposition side, which has never happened before in the history of Nova Scotia or any province. I do have questions about the whole structure of the Speaker's Office, to be quite frank with you, Mr. Speaker.

With five deputy speakers, it's going to be very difficult. Will there be levels for each deputy speaker? That's what I'm trying to get at. I'm only talking about the deputy speakers . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Once again, I'm going to say that if you have a problem with the direction of the Speaker's Office, you're welcome to come to my office at any time to discuss it further.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Let me be clear: I don't have an issue with the Speaker's Office. I have an issue with appointing five deputy speakers and understanding the hierarchy. That's what I'm trying to get at here. It has nothing to do with your office, the integrity of you, or the integrity of the office.

I'm very confused about five deputy speakers. When the Speaker steps away, who goes first? Who goes second? Is there a pecking order? How do they decide who goes where and what they're assigned to do?

When there are committees, we know that the deputy speakers sit at committees, the Committee of the Whole House. They sit through all that stuff where, to be honest with you, some of the most intense conversations and debates we've ever had in this House have been in the Committee of the Whole House and a deputy speaker will sit in that chair.

Who sits in it? Are they drawing random numbers? No. I'm assuming when we get into it, it'll be probably a government deputy speaker. That's a good guess. I know that members are looking at you every time I talk to try to say that I'm saying something wrong, but I'm not. I'm just trying to understand who sits in there during committee.

THE SPEAKER: Once again, I'll answer that for you right now. When somebody is sitting either in this chair as deputy speaker or at that table as deputy speaker, it's usually at my request that they'll be the ones to sit.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you for clearing that up and I hope that it remains that way. I hope that it stays that way.

Why at this point do we need to go down this route? Why do we have to give two historic appointees a pay reduction? Because that's what happening. We're bumping up three members of the government's salaries and we're reducing two members of the opposition - whom they celebrated - we're reducing their salaries.

We heard the member for Bedford Basin talk about how that's a real issue - when you're taking opportunity, finances, and leadership roles out of the hands of these two deputy speakers and replacing them with deputy speakers who look like just about every other deputy speaker who's been here.

I understand the member for Chester-St. Margaret's - I applaud her on her appointment and I applaud the other two members on their appointments. I sit on committee with them. I think it's terrible that they got caught up in this. I think they're respectful individuals. I have a lot of faith in them that they'll do a great job as deputy speakers. I expect that there'll be a lot of "the member for Halifax Atlantic, you're out of order" - even more so than you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just very concerned about the way this is going and if this is a trend that is really about: I'm the Leader and you're going to do what I say.

Again, I go back to the decision that was that was made today. We had a Liberal MLA who's a deputy speaker make a very difficult ruling today and took the partisanship out of it, as she should. There should be zero partisanship in that Chair. As a former deputy speaker, I'm going to tell you that people are looking at you and they're making signals at you and they're doing all this stuff, and they're trying to get your attention when someone is speaking. You've got to see past that, and you've got to concentrate on the words that are coming out of that person's mouth and make sure that they're doing their job correctly.

[6:15 p.m.]

When you take that away, and people are - listen, I've been up there and people are making faces, they're doing this, they're doing that, pointing and stuff. You've just got to block it all out, because you've got to be fair in that Chair. You've got to make sure that each and every person who was elected in this House, they have the right to speak in this House until they don't. The moment they don't have a right to sit and speak is when they're no longer elected. That's what's at stake here.

Even if they are the most honest and fair deputy speakers who ever took the Chair, there's a cloud over it. When decisions are made, there will be some lingering thoughts. There will be. Some people in this House are going to be like, you know how they got there. I hope that they understand that, and I hope that they rule in that seat fairly, and they understand the opportunity that's before them.

I know one of the members - from Shelburne, actually, who is now going to be deputy speaker, sits on the Public Accounts Committee with me, and painfully watches every video of Public Accounts. He's a student, he reads, he learns, and he does all that. That's fantastic, because what you see is somebody who is taking the history of this House, and they put a lot of weight, and they put a lot of emphasis behind it. I think your constituents should be very proud that you act that way in the House and that you look at precedent and you look at how things are done, that the member does that. I don't think a lot of members do that.

We had a conversation one time, I don't know if the member for Shelburne remembers, but I said, when we got into opposition, first thing I did was go back and watch a ton of opposition tape to see how the now-Premier and that government, those members, acted in opposition. Just because you're on this side of the House doesn't mean you don't respect the people on the opposite side of the House. In fact, you should respect those people. You don't always have to agree, and sometimes you get sick of hearing them speak for 58 minutes, but the truth is that I respect a lot of people on that side of the House, and I respect the member for Shelburne.

I shouldn't say just him. Chester-St. Margaret's, and from the Eastern Shore. They've got a difficult job to do. I know they're very prepared, but what I would say to them is that you have an opportunity. Your name is going to be etched in history because you were in that seat. You want to be remembered as somebody who did the job correctly. You want to be remembered as somebody who did the job fairly, that you put partisan politics aside, because people are so sick of it. They're so sick of partisan politics. It comes from all sides. I'm not just looking over there. I'm looking within. I'm looking to the left of me too. People are sick of it.

If you really want to prove to people that you can be the best possible representative and the best possible MLA, one of the ways you can do that is when you take that seat. It's

not the most comfortable seat, but it's historic. When you first sit in it and you're looking out over everyone, I don't know what the member for Halifax Chebucto felt but I felt a bit of history. You think about all the people who sat in that Chair before you and the first thought that went through my mind was, am I worthy enough to sit in this Chair where so many great individuals sat before?

There are two individuals on this side of the House who sat in that Chair, and I hope that you don't use your majority to take their voice away, not only for the constituents, but for the people and the communities they represent, and the three members who are going to take those seats, I honestly wish you all the best and I hope and really do sincerely hope you all the success.

THE SPEAKER: Before we move on to discussion, we have a group of individuals above us who endured those 60 minutes.

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services on an introduction.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to make an introduction. This morning I had the opportunity to attend the 2002 Trunked Mobile Radio System forum at Pier 21. It is apparently the first time in 20 years that they had a minister participate and open up the forum, so I was very pleased to attend.

Mr. Speaker, up in your gallery, and thank you for allowing them to sit in your gallery, are members of the Public Safety and Field Communications Team within my department. They truly do exemplary work and their dedication to Nova Scotia is in the highest regard. They support our volunteer and career firefighters, our EHS, our law enforcement, Correctional Services, Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. I could go on, Mr. Speaker. I believe there are over 12,000 users of the Trunked Mobile Radio System. They provide service to Nova Scotians, 24-7-365.

I'll ask Paul Maynard, Colleen Nesseth, Scott Hawkes, Stephanie Murray, Jeffrey Moffat, Nicole MacIntyre, Matt Boyle, Todd Brown, and Al Cycles to please stand and on my personal behalf and on behalf of the House, welcome and thank you very much for your hard work. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: On behalf of the Assembly, I'd like to welcome you here and thank you again as the minister has already done for your wonderful work. Thank you very much.

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I want to speak briefly to this motion and maybe just bring us back a little bit, as you have valiantly attempted to do. I want to actually

read the motion because I really think that although this may not mean much to folks outside this Chamber, it should mean a lot to folks in this Chamber, and I think there are a few points that are worthy of discussion.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. In addition to the honourable member for Preston and the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, the honourable member for Chester-St. Margaret's, the honourable member for Eastern Shore, and the honourable member for Shelburne be the Chairs of Committees and Deputy Speakers of the House of Assembly;
2. That the honourable member for Eastern Shore be the Deputy Speaker within the meaning of Subsection 14 (3) of the House of Assembly Act and within the meaning of the House of Assembly Management Act; and
3. The annual salary of the Deputy Speaker, established pursuant to the House of Assembly Act, be divided equally between the five Chairs of Committees and Deputy Speakers.

So that's where we are. I want to speak directly to this motion, but I need to say at the outset that to understand this motion we also have to understand the context in which this motion is made and what its impact will likely be.

First, nowhere in this motion does it say that the historic appointment of two deputy speakers whose voices are among the least represented in this House throughout history, and I'll remind the Chamber that there have been more MLAs named John than women who have sat in this Chamber, let alone women or people who are genderqueer, who are African Nova Scotian, or who come from other diverse communities.

It doesn't say in this motion that the roles of these two historic deputy speakers will be diluted but, in fact, they will. In an employment context - which this, of course, isn't - but if this were a regular job, this might actually be thought of as somewhere along the lines of a constructive dismissal. They will make less money, they will have less responsibility, and they will still be required to be here. Those changes have been made unilaterally without any conversation.

Now, whether or not that is within the rules, I think it appears that it is. Is it appropriate? No, it isn't. (Applause)

Further context is that prior to the appointment of these two deputy speakers there were, in the political realm, many questions about this government's lack of diversity in their caucus and in their executive council. Again, this is important context, and it is part of why all parties banded together to celebrate the appointment of these two individuals to

this role because it was widely acknowledged that this government had a representation issue and that the appointment of these two deputy speakers did go some way to elevating the voices and the roles of certain folks in this Chamber. (Applause)

Second, the middle section of this motion is very important, and I think it goes a little bit to what the member for Halifax Atlantic was pointing to. It contemplates that the Speaker will vacate the Chair because while it appoints five deputy speakers, it appoints one within the meaning of the Act, and the meaning of the Act is that that one deputy speaker will take the role of Speaker of the House if that role is vacated. By putting this in the motion, it contemplates that this Chair will be vacated, and that is very important.

I remember when I was first elected there was a piece of legislation that quietly came through the House that replaced the words school board in the Education Act with the word minister, and I was the education critic, and it landed on my desk, and I said: They're going to get rid of school boards. Everyone said: What do you mean they're going to get rid of school boards? I said: Well, they don't need to be here anymore. The word's not in the legislation anymore. I give this example to show that this is as important for what is in the motion as what is not in the motion.

Unfortunately, this motion contemplates that the Chair, the role of the Speaker, will be vacated, and regardless of the decision that was made today around the conversations that have happened between the Premier and the Speaker - which, of course, we accept as the Speaker's Ruling - I would suggest that when the Chair of the Speaker is vacated, that the next Speaker who will be elected to that Chair - if such an election happens because here there can be an appointment pending an election - will be a partisan Speaker. That will be a partisan Speaker because that Speaker will know that when they make a decision that goes against the will of the government, that that Chair will once again be vacated.

So, to go back to the point that the member for Halifax Atlantic brought up earlier about who decides which deputy speaker is in the Chair, the Speaker decides, and if that is an impartial Speaker elected by this Legislature, whom we know to be fair, then we can live with it. If it's a partisan Speaker, who was elected after some shenanigans around how this role works in this House of Assembly, that becomes very problematic.

With 60 per cent of the deputy speakers - after this motion, we assume, passes - representing the government, it's unlikely that the opposition deputies will take the Chair, as has been said. We have seen time and time again in the short life of this government that the chance that someone might speak, let alone rule, against them is too much for them to bear. (Applause)

As to the necessity of this motion, which I feel compelled to address, there is none. There is no need for this motion other than to continue to follow the pattern of steamrolling the opposition and the democratic process in favour of greasing the wheels to "get things done".

[6:30 p.m.]

Unfortunately getting things done in this context, most people assume, is doing the work of democracy in a robust democratic process. That does not happen. Sitting for days and weeks rather than the months and seasons that our colleagues across the country sit to contemplate bills, to take them into committee, to hear from experts and the public, instead putting people here for 10, 12, 15 hours a day for a couple of short weeks. We don't need to work 9 to 5, but surely we need to work more than four weeks a year in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker.

I'll say it again - there is no need. Have there been times that deputy speakers haven't been available? Yes, and this is another place where context is very important.

First of all, the Rules of this House of Assembly, in several places, contemplate what happens when the Speaker or Deputy Speaker is not available. Another member may take the Chair. That has always been the case so the idea that there have been times when deputy speakers haven't been available doesn't come close to a reason why we would need additional deputy speakers who are put forward in this way. It happens all the time.

Just to cite a few rules: Subsection 39(1) in Committee of the Whole House, Subsections 12(1) and 12(2). There are lots of places where a member may take the Chair. But let's talk about why, in the opinion of the government, this happened so many times recently.

Despite wishing it weren't so, this government was in fact elected in the middle of what was still a raging pandemic. During our first in-person sitting here, this government set the current pattern of keeping us here late into the night, running the Law Amendments Committee in tandem with the proceedings of this House, which I think might be unprecedented - if not unprecedented, highly unusual.

While this was happening, we were severely short-staffed. We had one Clerk. In fact, we had what may have been one of the first significant rulings of the Speaker that was unfavourable to the government - when he wouldn't let the Government House Leader call the hours that she wished to call, which were until midnight, because there simply was not enough staff in the building to accommodate that request.

Although the Premier and the Government House Leader had been told that and had been asked, they didn't care. They didn't care about the people who were out sick with COVID-19, about how stressed and overworked the staff were, or how difficult the working conditions were. They still wanted to keep us here until 11:59 p.m. in this room in the middle of a pandemic. Why? To push through their agenda with no debate.

Mr. Speaker, that is the context around which we may not have had the Deputy Speakers here for 12 or 15 hours a day in the middle of a pandemic with simultaneous

proceedings in a budget session. So you'll excuse me if I don't think that that's a normal situation, or that there isn't lots of ways - and it happened - that other members could have taken the Chair.

This is not how government should work. We should be debating policy. We should be making laws together. Is that a pie in the sky idea? Maybe, but I think that that is the largeness that my colleague, the member for Halifax Chebucto, spoke of that people long for and need from us. They need all of their elected representatives to have a role here. To have respect in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker - not only the majority and those who are partisan and loyal to them.

This government said that they were different. They campaigned on being different, and so it seems they are - in their disrespect for the Rules of this House, the spirit of this work, and the tone of government that Nova Scotians deserve.

I hope that the government will think carefully about this vote and about the motions that are surely still to come regarding the Speaker's Chair. The ability for Nova Scotians to have a voice in this Chamber and to expect fairness hangs in the balance.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other speakers, so I'm not going to take too much time right now, but I do want to say a couple of things that I think are important. There has been a lot said when it comes to tabling of documents and the Premier's comments when he was in opposition about the independence of the Speaker and democracy, and I could go on and repeat all of that stuff, but I won't.

I do want to start by saying what an honour and pleasure it has been to work with you as the Speaker. As the House Leader for the Official Opposition, we've known each other for a long time, and I've got to say that I'm so extremely happy and proud of how Cape Breton has come to support you in a very difficult time. I've never seen this in politics in the 20 years I've been involved with it in Cape Breton, but boy, there's a revolt on. It's a reflection of your character, the work that you've done not only in the Chair but the work that you've done as an ambassador for Cape Breton. I know - I'm going to stop there.

The reason why I say that, the reason that I want to talk about - I'm going to reference a couple of things that happened in the House tonight that I think speak to a speech that I gave this past Summer during the emergency debate on the cost of living. That was around the word "empathy" and the ability for government to put themselves in the shoes of others. I'll say this again, and I said this in the speech before. This is not a reflection of everybody who's in the room on the other side of the floor.

I've worked with people, we've worked on projects, we have a strong relationship to Cape Bretoners, we always have. It's the unwritten rule. It's the fourth party in this place

that nobody talks about - the Cape Bretoners. I'll say this: When I come in tonight - and again, this no reflection to the member for Hants West. She's not in the room right now. I'd say it if she were here. She just left.

THE SPEAKER: You can't ...

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm just trying to be nice. We had a point of earlier. Okay, I won't say that.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I just want to get the message out that you can't say that a person is not in the Chamber.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: It was not a reflection of the member. She chairs committees, she's been great. I do want to say that on the record.

I am concerned, though - and I don't think this is a reflection on the speech. Instead of coming in here and celebrating the three people who are going to become deputy speakers - I know them all, a good relationship with you all, through you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of celebrating that, instead of coming in here and saying, look at these three members who've been elected to represent their constituencies, they went on the attack. Instead of coming in and celebrating their own people - they're taking on historic roles - they came in to attack the member for Preston.

Again, I go back to the conversation I had this Summer about the core of this government and empathy. In what realm is the advice: Let's go in, we're going to nominate three of our members who worked hard - they're part of our caucus, we're proud of them - but instead of celebrating them, let's attack somebody else? Think about that. This is a historic moment for them and their families, and instead of celebrating them, we're going to attack somebody else. It's terrible.

Also, it's who you attacked - somebody who represents a historic moment in this Legislature. That letter, instead of celebrating their own people, was trying to question the attendance of somebody else. That is why I said it was terrible. Not the person, I don't think the member wrote that speech, I think it was a stump speech and whoever wrote it, shame on them.

Again, we're in a situation where I could go on, but the member for Halifax Atlantic probably said it all. My thing is that I'm really floored at that speech coming forward when this is supposed to be a great time for people who are going into the seats. Their families are watching this. Congratulations to you all. It's nothing personal. It's not at all. I knew some of the members before they were even here. They were councillors and I was doing my thing as Minister of Municipal Affairs five years ago, travelling around the province. I

want to congratulate them, and so does everybody else. It's been said multiple times tonight.

Again, I go back to empathy. Again, it's like they're on defense. I've seen it again tonight - and I'll give the minister of - he's not here. Another member came to the defense of another member tonight over there when we got into the notice of motion, when I came up and I raised a point in the House.

I'll say this - I can't mention who it is, but I saw something. It was the first time I'd seen it in a while, and I'll make reference to it. I'm surprised that the government is at this point in their messaging. It was the first time I saw somebody defended. I've seen members running away from committee meetings. Nobody's protecting them. The media's coming at them, they have no messaging, and they're trying to figure out what to say. I'm reading this going, oh my God, they're being hung out to dry.

The point I'm trying to make, to bring it back to the motion, is that if you're going to do this, do it the right way. Celebrate your own people. I'm standing in my place in opposition congratulating the government's people, and I don't attack other people who represent, who serve well in the seats, who represent their communities well. I'm really just shocked at where we are on this tonight. I am.

I watched the decisions with you, Mr. Speaker. In what reality does somebody say, you know what, we need to make a change and we're going to make it this way, and look what happens. Again, we're here tonight - same thing. Who is advising this stuff? It brings so much negativity upon the government for no reason at all.

So here we are. I'll make a few points. Five deputy speakers is going to be a bit of a logistical challenge. You have five. No offense to the five - they're all wonderful, good people who've earned the right to be here, and they sit in their seat. But my concern is this: the two deputy speakers we have who have served their communities well, who represent historic appointments - as has been said multiple times tonight - will never sit in that seat again. They won't.

People can disagree with me, but they won't. They won't. We can have that debate. They won't. To bring in three more people - one, two, three, four, five. This is my personal opinion, Mr. Speaker. It is my opinion that they will never sit in that seat again. That will be about the size of it. There will be some roles that they'll play, but if you're bringing in - if they were bringing in one, I get that, but you're bringing in three. My personal opinion is, they're never sitting there again. So that's really unfortunate, because they're both amazing people and they have both done such an exceptional job at it.

I say that too because the speech that came out tonight was one that was attacking the member for Preston and her attendance. That's how you started the night. It wasn't a

celebratory thing. It was “this is why we’re doing it, and let’s go on the attack,” instead of celebrating everybody.

It’s almost like the government is taking - I have a bat in my hand and they’re throwing a beach volleyball up there, and I’m just swinging for the fence. I can’t even believe that these are decisions that are being made. Who’s advising the stuff? All week it’s been like this. It’s been a media nightmare for the government, like it was in the Summer. So now here we are again, another decision - let’s bring in three people, good people, congratulations - but now you’ve got five, and the two that are there, in my opinion, are not going to get there. Very little.

They were called inefficient. That was also said in that speech tonight. The member was called inefficient in that speech. And let me tell you something about my friend - she sure is efficient. She’s raised a family, she went to law school, she got elected, she ran a business, she’s sitting in this House. She does an amazing job, whether she’s sitting there or sitting in that Chair.

The government called her ineffective. The government did. Think about that. That’s the speech that came out tonight, that the member is ineffective - instead of celebrating everybody.

The point I’m trying to make is that it’s empathy from the core of this government that I just scratch my head and ask, why does it have to be like this? Why do you have to be on the attack all of the time? Why does it have to be a confrontation?

There are good people here. Mr. Speaker, you’ve done an outstanding job. You don’t deserve anything that came your way. We have two deputy speakers who are amazing people whom we should celebrate. There are three other people who are going to be appointed who we should celebrate. I just don’t get it. I really don’t get it.

I’m going to leave my comments here for now. We’ve got a lot of speakers tonight.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I think it is what it is. The government has a majority. They’re going to make the decision. This is what they put forward, but I would be remiss if I didn’t make this a teachable moment.

As the member just said, who’s writing this information? Who’s putting this stuff forward? Did anyone from the government side ask the two deputy speakers how they feel about this change? Did anyone?

So, then my next question would be, and I don’t need you to answer it because I can see it in your faces, and I see it in your reactions. This is really important. These are

very teachable moments. You'll understand in a minute. Did anyone think about how this would affect these folks in this position? Did anyone think about that?

[6:45 p.m.]

First and foremost, the first African Nova Scotian, first-ever to sit in this seat as an African Nova Scotian woman sitting in this seat. No one thought about how this would affect this person. The first genderqueer ever in Nova Scotia to sit in the deputy speaker's seat - no one thought that this would affect them in their seat.

Traditionally, these two deputy speakers, because of who they are and who they represent, have experienced discrimination, microaggressions, and possible traumatic experiences just being. Think about that. I know it may be hard to understand because I know there's not a diverse group that are on the opposite side, but I need you to understand how this plays out.

We have young Black folks who actually stand in here as Pages, who are working in this House, and this is what we want them to see and hear. I don't quite understand that.

We have gender-diverse people who work in this House who are watching this behaviour and listening to the dismissal of folks who are in positions because they deserve to be there. I'm not dismissing the other folks, by no means. I'm not even going to include them.

I just need you to understand that the two folks who were put in these positions take their job very seriously, not because they are deputy speakers, but because one is an African Nova Scotian deputy speaker who holds African Nova Scotian on their back every single day. The other, a genderqueer folk who sits in this seat and represents not just who she is but the gender-diverse group of people who represent Nova Scotia.

I need you to understand that from that point. What's happening right now by putting this resolution forward minimalizes the role and the purpose of those two deputy speakers. You may not understand that, but it minimalizes their opportunities and the opportunities of other African Nova Scotians, genderqueer, and diverse people who want to come and sit in these seats and want to represent their communities and their constituencies.

If you think it doesn't, it really does. This is the first time ever, like I said, that we've had an African Nova Scotian member sitting in the seat and no one thought to speak to that member and even give them a heads-up or ask them what they thought about it. Not one person thought about that because no one's thinking that they have any experiences of racism or discrimination or just anything other than just being a person sitting in this House.

It speaks volumes. I wasn't going to say anything, but as I said before, sometimes things can be a bit uncomfortable. I can't not speak, especially when I know that there are people who could be learning from these moments and especially learning from what we say here in this House. It speaks volumes to the lack of diversity and acknowledgement and understanding of the adversity and barriers that women, Black women, and genderqueer folk experience.

Does this party want to be remembered as the party that continues to undermine and discriminate against people of colour and LGBTQ communities? I don't think so, and that's not the government that we have here. But by putting something forward that speaks that volume is exactly what people are going to take from that.

I know this is not against the members whose names are put forward - I understand that - but this is the reason why it's so important that we look at things from the lens of the diverse communities we serve. If you had thought about that when you were putting forward this resolution, you would have asked the deputy speakers how they felt about this. You would have taken that into account, and you would have said this might not be the best time to bring this forward.

I know a succession plan needs to happen, but you didn't even think about how they would feel in a position of being African Nova Scotian, being genderqueer, being women in a seat that doesn't necessarily always look like them.

I say this because sitting here, this is how I felt. Doing this particular change is the same as asking Viola Desmond to leave the whites-only section. I know you may not understand that, but for me as a Black woman - I can't speak to the deputy speaker - I can tell you that's how I felt when I hear that we're going to be pushed back from the role that we have had.

Then adding on to that as well, discrimination of the LGBTQ people in our workplace. We do not want to be the government that is saying, you know what, you're different, we're just going to move you to the back and continue on forward with our own government right now.

I didn't want to be remiss by not saying anything. That's how I felt, Mr. Speaker. I have to tell you that we sit in these seats because we represent communities and constituencies of people who are from a wide range of groups. We have to remember that when we're thinking and we're making changes to this government. This is a huge piece. We may think it's small and it's only housekeeping items, but it's huge to the people who are sitting in the seats that represent more than just their communities and more than just their constituencies.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: My colleagues all have said a lot of what I wanted to say, but I have to add a few things that I really felt as I heard this resolution. How would I feel if I was those two deputy speakers? I have sat in that Chair and replaced my colleague for Lunenburg many times as deputy chair without being appointed. There is no need to appoint those three people. If there was need of availability, you can ask any member, and I was asked many times. You remember that, Mr. Speaker. I replaced the Speaker many times.

The feeling of diluting and hurting those two amazing women who have made it to this House is much bigger than my colleagues on the other side can understand. I looked across, and I thought, if they had just one member from the African Nova Scotian community sitting with them or one member from the LGBTQ community, would this have happened? Would this have come in?

When they sat down with their Premier, did any of these members speak up and say that this is wrong? This is so wrong what we're doing here - the message we're giving to any members whom you hope to ever come to join your party from the LGBTQ and African Nova Scotian communities, or any multicultural community - what are you telling them? What are you saying to them? Their value - they are unable to do the job because you are from a minority or from the African Nova Scotian or the LGBTQ communities. It is a strong message.

How can my female colleagues on the other side not have said a word in the meeting when this came up? I wonder. I truly wonder how you can live with yourselves and not say things like that. It is wrong. It is absolutely wrong what is happening, and you will have to live with this.

The other point I wanted to make is I have witnessed this Premier attack or try to influence the Chair at the Committee of the Whole House meeting. He did it and I wondered why this is happening - because he can't influence those two educated, very strong women. He knows he can't, and he has a reputation of getting rid of very high achievers, leaders, women. He just did that to a couple from Develop Nova Scotia and they were hired on the spot by Toronto - on the spot because people see their value, but this side of the aisle don't. My colleagues, I am disappointed that you did not put some sense into the Premier about this decision. I'm truly disappointed. That's all I wanted to say.

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, I've been blessed enough to play competitive sport for my entire life. This situation is almost very familiar to me, having been in a situation where our team picked three backup goalies at one point in time. To look at those three people, in addition to our starter, and how much chaos it caused in their lives, how unfulfilled they were, how that transcended to the team and around the room, it was very poisonous.

In this case, I'm trying to draw a comparison. I know there are people who have played hockey on the other side of the House. There are people who have played soccer on the other side of the House. In situations where there is a goaltender, you have your starter, there's your lead person. There's no need for five backups.

This is absolutely arbitrary. There's no jurisdiction in Canada that has more than two. We are amongst the smallest jurisdictions in Canada and for some reason the government, the Premier's Office, has deemed it necessary to bring in five deputy speakers - three of whom will, in fact, undermine the presence of the two acting, active deputy speakers who are in the role - the first female African Nova Scotian to sit in that seat, the first genderqueer person to sit in that seat. We have effectively pushed them out by adding these members to the docket.

When I heard the member make these remarks in his first speech in the House, I sat there, and I was pretty distraught. I was pretty disappointed. I was frustrated because the member he was referring to is a friend of mine whom I thought acted very effectively in the Chair, who was a fair Speaker. The person I am speaking of is Kevin Murphy.

The now-member for Eastern Shore, in his first speech in the House, in part two of his speech, said, Mr. Speaker:

“The previous member sat in the Speaker's Chair from the time of his election in 2013, so the last time a member for the Eastern Shore stood here was in 2009, when the late Sidney Prest stood and offered remarks. I am proud to now provide the constituents of the Eastern Shore with a proper voice in this Chamber and a proper voice within the Progressive Conservative caucus.”

To me, what that says is the member in that Chair, by his own words, is not effectively able to represent his constituents, and that that member doesn't respect the Chair that he is now about to step into. I would also . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'll ask the member to table that quote when he's through his speech.

The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

HON. BEN JESSOME: I would also add, and I will table this, because I have another quote from that very same speech:

“In addition to the 54 members on the floor, I wish to also extend a heartfelt congratulations to the honourable member for Victoria-The Lakes for winning a second election on September 24th, to the Speaker's Chair. The role of the Speaker is typically overshadowed

by the goings-on of the Assembly, but we could simply not fulfill our respective obligations to our constituents without your unbiased poise and sound decision making. Congratulations and thank you, Mr. Speaker.”

[7:00 p.m.]

After a committee meeting, that member was the first one to talk about succession planning as a justification for his part in this whole process. It frustrates me to no end to now, through all that we’re seeing here in the House is an abuse of power. By the member’s own words, putting himself into that Chair, into a situation where he cannot effectively represent his constituents, by his own words.

What I would propose is that if the member does not agree with that, that he get on his feet in the House and formally apologize to Kevin Murphy for making those remarks.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ALI DUALE: I rise tonight to speak to Resolution No. 385. This resolution is historic in two aspects of this House. One, it’s a very historic aspect and secondly, to me this is personal. I’ll urge the members of the other side to reconsider this resolution.

We know for the fact we make decisions; we bring forward resolutions, bills, ideas, and sometimes they may not be the most fruitful. They may not be the best ideas, and that’s the reason we have this House and have this debate and this discussion. There’s no right or wrong, but we have that ability as elected officials, when something comes to this floor, to have an open dialogue and discussion and listen to one another. That power gives us the ability to produce the best ideas of Nova Scotians.

I’m going to say this again. I do my best to see this House be one of the best Houses in this nation, and we deserve that. If I’m not making a mistake, this is the first House of the Commonwealth. That’s not a title. That’s history. Those of us who are here tonight, we will be in history, what we made here, what we do here.

Because of that reason, we need to think about this twice. The Speaker’s seat is the ultimate judge, referee, guide, for this House. Whoever sits in that seat has the power, has the wisdom, and we need to honour that. We need to think about that twice.

It’s not something we can play with. I can tell you that. You know why? As I said in an earlier session, my personal story, I crossed two oceans to live and to raise my family in a place where I have dignity.

The Chair of the Speaker’s House, of this House, is the foundation of democracy. You can’t play with it. You cannot play with that.

There is no need for political partisanship. There is no need. We as elected officials actually have the privilege to vote for who that person is. We make that decision collectively. It's mind-boggling that somebody just sits somewhere and says, you know what, I'm going to make the decision. Isn't that ironic? And it's okay to accept that.

Coming from a profession that's very heroic, I think tonight we're playing with fire. I think tonight we're playing with fire, and we need to be cautious. We need to be mindful.

Just to share a personal story, I had an interview two weeks ago. Somebody, a reporter, asked me, do you see any discrimination? Do you see anywhere you're being undermined? He used another term that was a very, very interesting term. I can't remember right now, but I think it was a very interesting term. I responded to him, yes, I do every day, and I see it every day.

We as a province have a history that oftentimes we regret. Oftentimes, most of us, actually, when we have that discussion, we say, I was not there. I didn't make this decision. I don't know why they did this. But do you know what? We're doing it today right here. Every time we take one step to correct past mistakes, we take two steps backwards.

Right here in this House, and you are a witness, and you will be going into history books because this happened in your eyes. Do you know why I believe that? We have the first-ever African Nova Scotian who has been elected and been voted by members of this House to sit in that seat.

I'm going to ask this question for Nova Scotians, and I'm going to look at the camera. I need to know anybody in Nova Scotia who is willing to share his salary or her salary with four other people - one person. If you need my contact it's public information, please reach out to me. As simple as it is, anybody who is willing to share his or her salary, her income, with three other people, please reach out to me and I will be admiring you, your generosity. This is what's happening.

On top of that, it has been claimed performance - you go to kindergarten, you go to primary, you go to junior high, you go to high school, you go to university, you become a lawyer. How far should I go? I'm asking this question to Nova Scotians: How far should I go?

We have two leaders who have been sitting in this seat, deputy speakers who perform excellently. The member for Preston was sitting here just today, I think she read maybe six or seven pages of a very, very interesting subject matter with taking no breath. Who could do that? I want to know who can do that - raise your hand.

We are talking about performance; we're talking about ability to deliver a service. We're talking about fairness and to uphold this democracy. This role, by the way, is not an

easy task and we can see that testimony, our own Speaker of the House, what he goes through day in and day out.

I remember actually through my experience, I saw Geoff Regan when he was elected as the Speaker of the House of Commons, I saw the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition holding his hand and they were dragging him. I said, what's happening here? Is this a joke place?

I've learned that this is actually a tradition. In this role it was not an easy task, an easy responsibility to take over. I had the opportunity to ask him why this is happening. He told me that people used to lose their lives through the king with a sword - not even a bullet. Can you imagine somebody putting a sword in your neck? That's the tradition and that's the history of the Speaker and the deputy speakers. Do you know why? That is the survival of democracy. That is the foundation of democracy.

My colleague for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville was actually a very simple contact because we Nova Scotians love to play hockey. Imagine a team having five goalies, what is your chance to be in that goal? What is your chance to actually play a game? This is what we are doing here tonight. These two leaders will never see the seat - and you think this just happened out of nowhere? No, this is a part of Nova Scotian history. This is what happened 400 years ago and it's happening here tonight because those leaders should not be in that seat.

That's exactly what we're doing tonight. I urge members of this House to be mindful of each other. Our collective is what makes Nova Scotia a place to live. Our collective is what makes us serve our constituents. Our collective is what will make us do a good job. If you're thinking that the short-term gain of your party and the people you associate yourself with, your time is short.

There is something else that I want to remind you all: Your title will not matter. You know what matters? Your character, because you're not going to be here forever. What you do here will remain with you.

There's nothing wrong with correcting each other. There's nothing wrong with challenging each other, because that's why we've been elected. That's why we took these seats. These seats belong to the public. This is the People's House.

I know politics, sometimes they say it's a game, even though it hurts me when I hear those terms because you know what? This is people's lives. It's not a game. It's not politics.

I know that maybe I'm repeating myself. I know there might be some other members who spoke before who've said the same thing, but I think it takes courage to keep reminding each other what's right.

[7:15 p.m.]

Those individuals who put their name: I applaud you, you know why? Because it's not an easy task to take it. I'm sure that you'll do a good job, but what's important is how we do it. It's not who is doing it. What matters is how we do it and who we do it to. That is what matters.

I'm sure that the Premier is watching me, or he will see what I'm saying. I urge you as the leader of Nova Scotia to reconsider this resolution. I urge you to lead us.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: So many people have had so many strong comments to say. I thank everyone for all of their words. They were very passionate, from some.

I stand, Mr. Speaker, in opposition to this resolution, to this motion. I think that having five deputy speakers seems unnecessary. Being an Independent MLA, I am elected to bring the voices of the people of my constituency to this Legislature. Based on the conversations that I've had with my constituents I can confidently say that I am in opposition to this resolution.

People have clearly communicated to me that they have lost faith in politics and in politicians. They speak about the wasted energy on partisan politics, the wasted energy on games that are around ego and power instead of working on what really matters to the people of Nova Scotia.

Things like affordability, the increasing cost of living, a lack of available housing, people living on the streets, living in a shelter because they have no place to live. They have no food. They do not have shoes to put on their feet. They literally are walking around shoeless.

The pressing issues of health care - in Cumberland North, last weekend, our ICU was closed. Just today I received about 10 emails from people desperate - surgeries cancelled, their loved one can't get into a specialist, waiting eight months for an ultrasound. These are the things that matter to the people that I represent, and I believe these are the things that matter to the people that all of us represent.

Just about an hour ago, someone messaged me, and they said, oh my gosh, how can you be discussing this when we have a health care crisis and entering a recession? This is no time for games. Taxpayers expect more. Taxpayers expect us to rise above.

I will be the first to admit it is not easy. It is not easy when emotions are involved. Honestly, for the first four days of this Fall session, it has been challenging, to say the least,

to sit in my seat in this Legislature and watch what has happened to our Speaker. If I go down that road, I will get emotional because I know exactly what it feels like to be betrayed by the people you believe are your team. I know what it feels like to have it played out in the media day after day and to have people be told mistruths, things that are absolutely not true.

I know what that feels like, and my heart goes out to the Speaker. But he will know who his friends are. He will know who matters in his life. He will know his family, and those are the people who will stand beside him and speak the truth, even when it's uncomfortable. I know what it's like to be in his shoes, and my heart goes out to him. I wasn't planning on getting emotional, so I'm going to set that aside.

I am proud - I am very proud - to stand in this Legislature and be an independent voice because I can speak the truth. I can support the government. I can support my former colleagues when they're doing the right thing, and I always will. But I will also stand and oppose things when they are wrong. The fact is that what is happening right now in this Legislature is wrong.

It was also wrong of the previous Liberal government when they did choose also to monopolize the deputy speaker positions, and it also is wrong today for this PC government to take over the deputy speaker positions. It was wrong to pressure the Speaker to resign. The ruling today may have been in favour of the Premier, but it does not change what he did, and it does not change that it was wrong.

What is happening with taking the partisan control of the deputy speaker role is also wrong. As I have said, I believe it is wrong to have five deputy speakers. It just seems unnecessary. It will place additional pressure on the legislative staff, in particular the Clerk's Office to provide training and support to additional members. This could lead to inconsistency in how the rules of this Legislature are interpreted and applied. The Speaker and the members of the House establish a certain rapport over time, and this relationship could be impacted if there are too many Speakers taking the Chair.

Given the previous concerns we have heard in this House regarding the Speaker being able to maintain independence, having five deputy speakers seems like another opportunity for the government to try to influence decisions that are supposed to be impartial. I am concerned about the impact the decisions will have on the legislative staff supporting them, similar to the effect of the extended hours that it had on our legislative clerks, our Pages, Legislative TV staff, our Sergeant-at-Arms - all who had to be here for extended hours in the Spring session during a COVID-19 outbreak. There was no compassion for all of the people who run this House of Assembly.

The House of Assembly staff helps us to uphold democracy in this province, including the Speaker's role and the Deputy Speaker's role. Their role is to serve all MLAs regardless of party, or in my case independent status. The Speaker and the deputy speakers

are not to be a tool of the governing party or the Premier. When and if a Speaker or deputy speaker are no longer independent, our democracy suffers, and the people will suffer.

This resolution brought today is brought forward at the same time that it was made public, that the Premier was pressuring our Speaker to resign, that he had placed the Speaker in some hard spots.

I am here to say that that could all have been avoided. The Spring session, as I mentioned, had extended hours and everyone was put under too much pressure. I personally witnessed House Leaders crying because of the pressure. I witnessed people who were sitting in the positions of Chair crying. There's no need of this. There's absolutely no need of it.

We do not have the quality of debate that the people of this province deserve when this is the way that this House of Assembly is managed. Democracy suffers when our Legislature is placed under such unnecessary stress in the workplace. If this is what we're doing right here in this Legislature, in this workplace, how will Nova Scotians ever expect government to take action to improve the workplace conditions in health care, in education, in any other government department when they do it right here in this Legislature? This is a completely toxic, unhealthy workplace and it only creates a negative impact on democracy.

Democracy also suffers when decisions are made autocratically along with non-elected staff. I have no proof of this but I'm pretty sure, knowing what I experienced before, that a lot of the decisions that are being made - there's probably a lot of members in government who do not agree with them, but the decisions are being made by non-elected persons. That also contributes to poor democracy and democracy suffers when you have non-elected people making decisions and elected people are silenced. That creates a negative impact on democracy.

I want to speak for a moment in support of the current female deputy speakers. My constituents who are part of the 2SLBGQ+ community want to see themselves in this Legislature and they want to see their voices represented. To have the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, believed to be the first genderqueer MLA elected in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly and be a Deputy Speaker here means something. It matters. It means something to many people, including many people in my constituency of Cumberland North.

Members of the African Nova Scotian community have made it clear to me that they are not happy with the current representation, but they were so pleased to see one of their female women, strong women of the African Nova Scotian community, sit as a Deputy Speaker. Having both of these women sit in the leadership role in this House of Assembly, in this Legislature, it matters.

[7:30 p.m.]

Don't ever underestimate the power - when the decision was made to elect those two women in these positions as deputy speakers, people noticed and it mattered to them. Women represent over 50 per cent of the population in this province. We need to do everything we can to bring gender parity to this Legislature. The government's decision to add three more deputy speakers is marginalizing their voices and it's wrong.

I know - I can see the body language - I know that the government doesn't like it when I speak my truth. Again, I will say this: My role here is to be the voice of the people of Cumberland North. I know that. I will support the government and my former colleagues when they make the right decisions and they were doing the right thing, but I will also stand in opposition when I know that it is wrong, and this is wrong. I will not be silent. I will speak truth to power because I believe truth is where the power lies.

Democracy is important and if we want government services to improve we need to strengthen democracy and it starts right here, right in this Legislature. Partisan politics has gone too far. I hear it all the time, especially during the campaign last August. I am here in this Legislature, a living example of what people think of partisan politics.

In preparing for my thoughts to share tonight, I thought back to when I was first elected in 2017 and I got my first mandate letter. I was so excited. I was reading through it and it said, your number one mission, your number one goal is to blank. Guess what it was? It's going to be to represent the people who elected me. It's going to be the voice of the people who brought you to the Nova Scotia Legislature. No. My mandate letter said my number one goal was to get re-elected. I was so disappointed.

Partisan politics, when it is taken too far, disrespects democracy. It disrespects the people. We are here to be the voice of the people, and every MLA, regardless of what party you belong to, should be able to be the voice of your people.

I know there are people in government that there's no way they agreed with what happened to the Speaker and, I believe, do not agree with this resolution. I can tell you that before I was removed and before I refused to sign a document that would have been a lie, I had two of my former colleagues call me just hours before I was removed to tell me how proud they were that I stood with the people who had been ignored for over 15 months, people who had to go to work in the trunk of their husband's car to get to work every day, people who missed their own daughter's funeral because it was 10 minutes away.

I could go on for hours. Fifteen months of this, and only hours later they silently sat while someone made a decision that I was going to be removed. It takes a lot of character to speak the truth. I can tell you it's worth the price. Mr. Speaker, I stand in opposition to this resolution.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I move the following amendment to Resolution No. 385: Section 1 be struck out and be replaced with:

“in addition to the honourable member for Preston and the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, one additional member elected by the House be the Chair of Committees and Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly;”

I'll table that. We can have the pages send that out to members to take a look at.

THE SPEAKER (Angela Simmonds): We'll call recess for about five minutes so that the amendments can be distributed.

[7:33 p.m. The House recessed.]

[7:43 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Prior to the recess there was an amendment presented concerning Resolution No. 385. The amendment reads that Section 1 be struck out and replaced with:

“1) in addition to the honourable member for Preston and the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, one additional member elected by the House be the Chair of Committees and Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly;”

Are there any comments on that amendment?

The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: It's an honour for me to speak to this issue and this amendment. Again, I'll just reiterate for the benefit of the members here the amendment which all members, I assume, have with them - Section 1 be struck out and replaced with:

“1) in addition to the honourable member for Preston and the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, one additional member elected by the House be the Chair of Committees and Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly;”

In thinking about this issue over the past couple of weeks, I guess, since it began to make news a couple of quotes or lines that I've come across stood out to me. For those of you who may not know, I'm a journalist by training and a newspaper reporter at heart still.

The slogan of the *Washington Post*, which is one of the world's great newspapers, of course, is: Democracy Dies in Darkness. It is dark outside now, Mr. Speaker, and I am

not suggesting that democracy is dying in Nova Scotia, but I do think it is suffering. I think it's under attack, actually. I think there's a pretty consistent and disturbing pattern that we've seen over the past 14 months with this government when it comes to the democratic process.

The other line I thought of that was drilled into my head - and I don't know where this came from originally - by my political science teacher in high school, the great Rick Plato, who is the head coach of the Dalhousie men's basketball team now and a great guy, and a great coach and a great teacher, the line he would drill into my head over and over again as we talked about history and politics is: Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

I think in a democracy like ours when you have a majority government, it's as close to absolute power as you can get in a democratic system. When we see that power get used and abused over and over again, as we see it get used and abused to circumvent the conventions of this House, and the standards and institutions of this House, I think that's when we should all be worried about where we're heading.

I have no issue with a majority government doing what they want, they have the votes, that's fine. I think when that begins to distort their thought process and corrupt the independent institutions of this House, whether it's the Speaker's Chair, whether it's the Deputy Speaker's Chair, I think we should all be very worried.

This amendment, as I mentioned, to me, really speaks to fairness and decency. We've all spoken to this issue tonight. I think it's pretty clear that there's no need for five deputy speakers; that's obvious. Fine, okay, we don't want to have five, let's go with three. Let's be fair and reasonable, let's have the member for Preston, the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and let's have one member from the government side, and have an election. The government has the votes to win that election, so the result is preordained, so let's do that.

As the Leader of the Official Opposition pointed out earlier today, our Premier is on record on this issue, very clearly. Several years ago, this was April 19, 2016, a long, long, long passage from the member for Pictou East and now Premier, on the issue of deputy speakers. One passage in particular that stood out to me here: "The sad reality is they could have come to the floor of this House and put those before an election, and they could have used their majority and won." It sounds familiar.

"But to cut that step out of the process and say we're not even going to bother exercising our majority and win an election because we don't have to, we're just going to put a resolution through and circumvent that process - that sticks in my craw, Mr. Speaker." It's sticking in the craw again today, I would suspect.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Would the member for Bedford South please table that quote.

The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRADEON CLARK: The document will be tabled there with the Pages.

I think what we can sometimes dismiss as inside baseball, or things that don't matter, or things that happen in this Chamber, and nobody outside of this Chamber is paying attention, that's easy to say, that's easy to think, but the reality is that for all of us in this Chamber, we'll be here for some period of time, some longer than others, but we'll all be gone at some point, and this Chamber, this institution, will last and persist long after we're all gone. I think the way we treat it, and the way we treat the rules that govern this place, are really important and we should have some sense of decency, some sense of moderation when it comes to how we conduct ourselves in the House. This issue of deputy speakers is exactly the opposite.

So many members before me tonight have spoken of the competency, the tremendous leaders who are the members for Preston and Halifax Citadel-Sable Island. Again, I don't want to suggest that the member for Shelburne, the member for Eastern Shore, and the member for Chester-St. Margaret's do not deserve to be deputy speakers. I think they're all quality people who will try to do their best, and that's not the point.

This is not an issue of personalities, this is not an issue of partisanship, at least on this side of the House, I believe. This is an issue of fairness and decency. Again, we are not putting forward this amendment solely as an exercise in speaking, but because I think it is fair. If we have one member from the government caucus, one member from the Official Opposition caucus, and one member from the New Democratic caucus, that strikes me, and I think it would strike anybody, as a really fair answer to the situation we've put ourselves in.

The past few weeks I think have been pretty terrible for the reputation of our democracy here in Nova Scotia, and in fact, I think the past year as well. We've heard other members mention the first bill that was introduced by this government a year ago now was to set Summer elections, which I think was anti-democratic. I spoke at that time on that issue. I think that was Step 1. We're now seeing the Premier being unwilling to answer questions from media on issues. That is another hallmark of anti-democratic behaviour.

We're now seeing the Premier accusing the media of manufacturing stories, which is another hallmark of anti-democratic thinking and action. We are setting some bad benchmarks, I think, for our province. We are now the only province or territory in Canada with elections in the Summer. Assuming the government is not willing to bend on this issue, and I don't expect they will, we will soon be the only province in Canada with five deputy speakers, for reasons unknown.

I can't say this for certain, but I would imagine we are one of a very small number of legislatures in Canada that are sitting until midnight all the time, from Day 1. I know that directive is not necessarily coming from the members opposite; it's coming from the top down, as the member for Cumberland North suggested. These decisions are extremely centralized. We find ourselves racing towards a 10- or 14-day session of the Legislature. We should be embarrassed, to be honest. We should be embarrassed that that is happening.

This is not a check mark. This is not a place where we check the box, we've got to go to the House, oh God, we've got to do it, let's get our extended hours in, make everybody miserable for two weeks, and get out. That is short-sighted. I think it's disrespectful to the government. I think it's disrespectful to the opposition parties. I think it's very disrespectful to Nova Scotians, to the staff, to the Pages, to the caucus office staff who are here late hours, to all of our families. There are many of us here in the Chamber who have young children, young grandchildren whom I'm sure you would much rather be spending time with than listening to me. I'd much rather be there with my kids than listening to myself.

This is important stuff, and I think this government, and in particular the leadership, I think the Premier - I don't want to cast aspersions too widely, but I think the Premier in particular in the past few weeks has been very clear about his disregard, I would say, for democratic norms and democratic processes. Again, the rank hypocrisy of that, I think, is what really turns people off. I think it can be very easy to switch sides in the House, to go from opposition to government, and I think you naturally adopt all of the things that you once hated. I think that's what has happened here very quickly. Within a year, I think we are seeing behaviours, a lot of trends that the Premier, when he was in opposition, screamed from the rooftops about, over and over again, as I mentioned when I tabled that document earlier.

Again, on the amendment here, I don't believe this amendment to be punitive in any way. That's not what it's supposed to be. It's not supposed to suggest that two of the three members who are being put forward by the government are inadequate or unfit to serve as deputy speakers. I'm not suggesting that at all. What I am suggesting is that we should restore a modicum of fairness to this process.

I think all of us, deep down, whether we want to say it on the floor of the Legislature or not, recognize that the process is, if not broken, on its way. We have broken an axle perhaps, and we're veering off the road. I don't think we should just shrug our shoulders and be complacent because that's what the person at the top wants - whatever party it is. I really don't care what party is in power exercising these sorts of decisions. I think they are mistakes, no matter who is making them.

My hope, and maybe I'm being naïve, is that we can start to move beyond some of this silliness, some of this pettiness, some of this vindictiveness that we have seen over the past few weeks of personal attacks, of rumours and innuendo. It's unbecoming, I think, of all of us.

I think this amendment and future amendments that we will put forward on this issue are designed to do that. They're not designed to punish anyone as I said. They are designed to restore some fairness, some decency, to this entire process.

I would just say as well that I think also about some of the constituents in my riding. As I have mentioned a few times, I have an extremely diverse riding with many people - hundreds and hundreds - who have come from all different parts of the world.

One of the most exciting things for me, when I was out door-knocking last Summer, was meeting people who are new to Nova Scotia, who are new to Canada, who loved the concept of democracy and were really excited about it and really wanted to participate. (Interruption) Exactly, including the member for Halifax Armdale.

People who really wanted to participate and be involved in a process that in their past life perhaps was impossible or difficult or dangerous for them to do. When people come to the Chamber, when they turn on Legislative TV, and they're trying to wade through the minutiae of all that's going on, I don't want them to be embarrassed. I think over the past few weeks, they would be for the most part embarrassed about this fall from grace, I think, for what is a really important and worthwhile institution for all of us in this Chamber.

I will just reiterate: This Chamber is not for us. It is not for those of us who are here temporarily, however long we have the privilege of serving. It's for the million Nova Scotians who are outside these walls, who really care about this place whether they think about it or not, because it affects their lives immensely.

I think the decisions we make on independent institutions like the Speaker and like the Deputy Speaker are really important, and we should give them much more thought and much more decency than we have shown over the past few weeks. With those words, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat, and I'm sure there are other colleagues who would like to speak.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm the only one who did an hour. I guess I'm doing two tonight. Let's start out with some of the comments that were made here by the member for - I apologize, I'm pretty tired. The member for Cumberland North struck a chord when she talked about this motion and this amendment - and the member for Bedford South touched on it, too. It's that this Legislature, this place, has become toxic. We all have something to do with this, but the truth is that the last year has been almost like toxic on steroids and very vindictive feeling, and disrespectful.

I think, Mr. Speaker, what really took me back about this discussion about our deputy speakers was when the Premier denied all this in the media. This is a common

pattern for this Premier who will do things, instigate things, and then when caught, deny it. We're actually still waiting on a ruling on an incident that involved this Premier with the member for Cumberland North. Everyone in this Legislature heard what was said. It was plain as day.

[8:00 p.m.]

Some of the older people who were in this Legislature would talk about how they would come in here and they would debate, and they would go back and forth. It would be very heated at times, but afterwards they would go out for a meal or a beer or a coffee or whatever and everything was okay. That doesn't exist in this Legislature.

I guarantee, because I've had members on that side tell me that they have been told to avoid people on this side, and maybe not to trust them. I'm sure that's happened both ways. That's where we are in this Legislature now. We're at a very toxic point.

There is a way to kind of bring it back a little bit, and I think this amendment helps. I think what this amendment does is truly reflect what democracy in this province is supposed to look like, which is multiple parties. Having every party have an equal member is pretty novel. There's nothing like that.

That goes to the bigger question about is first-past-the-post and the way we elect and govern being truly effective, and if it is the right way to govern a province. I think the difference between the Progressive Conservative government and the Liberal Party over here was 1 or 2 per cent of the vote, yet it garnered a majority government.

We have a third party that's usually rendered voiceless. I don't mean that insultingly. They're very effective, but what I'm trying to say is that both the Official Opposition and the third party should have more say in the way things are done, especially when it comes to scheduling and the hours that you spend in this House. What we can do to stem an olive branch and work together is pass this amendment. It's very simple, but I expect that when we call a recorded vote it's going to be no, no, no, no.

This is important. People have come into my office and have asked me who to talk to about this. I had a lady come in yesterday. I was meeting with a constituent, and I heard her speaking about this, which kind of surprised me. I had a gentleman come in the day before to comment on this. They said that this is a fight worth having. I had someone reach out to me from Lawrencetown to talk to me about this, asking whom they should speak to. I had an individual from Lunenburg reach out to me asking whom to speak to.

Mr. Speaker, in the fairness of democracy and on this amendment, for everybody watching tonight, I will put it on Facebook and social media and all that stuff. If you have questions about this amendment, here's who you reach out to. General public, instead of coming to people who are not your MLAs - and, listen, we'll gladly take it, we'll answer

your questions - I'm going to give them who they can reach out to about this amendment and about this motion.

In Antigonish - the member for Antigonish is at 352 Main Street, Site 325, (902) 863-4266.

Let me just go through these here. I have to pair them up. For Argyle, it's at 4200 Highway 308, Suite 6, Tusket, (902) 648-2020.

For Colchester North it's at 10653 Highway No. 2, Masstown, Nova Scotia, (902) 641-2335. It's important that Nova Scotians know where to file their complaints when it comes to this amendment and when it comes to the Speaker and the deputy speaker of this House. It's extremely important.

For Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley - probably one of the nicest people to ever sit in this place - it's at 87 Main Street West, P.O. Box 219, Stewiacke, Nova Scotia, (902) 639-1010.

If you have questions about this amendment and you live in Cumberland South, you go to 6 McFarlane Street, P.O. Box 250, Springhill, Nova Scotia, (902) 597-4039.

For Dartmouth East, it's at 73 Tacoma Drive, on the second floor, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, (902) 469-7353.

For Digby-Annapolis - also a fantastic member, they're all fantastic - it's at 138 Highway No. 303, Unit 2, Digby, Nova Scotia, the second-best place in Nova Scotia to get lobster, Sambro is the first - (902) 308-1992.

For Eastern Passage, it's 1488 Main Road, P.O. Box 116, Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia, (902) 406-0656. Also another great place to get lobster.

On the Eastern Shore it's at 6321 Highway No. 7, Head of Chezzetcook, Nova Scotia, obviously, (902) 989-3772.

Where's one of my good buddy MLAs - there he is. At Glace Bay-Dominion - if you have questions about this amendment in Glace Bay-Dominion, it's at Suite D, 219 Commercial Street, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, (902) 849-8930.

For Guysborough-Tracadie, it's at 9996 Highway 16, Chedabucto Centre, Unit P1, Guysborough, Nova Scotia, (902) 533-2777. It's all public information if people forget where I'm talking about.

For Hants East, 204-8 Old Enfield Road, Enfield, Nova Scotia, (902) 883-8649.

For Hants West, 58 Gerrish Street, P.O. Box 3201, Windsor, Nova Scotia, (902) 798-0121.

For Inverness, it's 15759 Central Avenue, Inverness, Nova Scotia, (902) 258-2216.

For Kings North, it's 347 Main Street, Kentville, Nova Scotia, (902) 365-3420.

For Kings West, it's 195 Cottage Street, Units A and B, Berwick, Nova Scotia, (902) 375-2554.

For Lunenburg, it's 97 Kaulbach Street, Suite 201, P.O. Box 220, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, (902) 634-8708.

For Lunenburg West, it is 100 High Street, Box 286, Bridgewater, Nova Scotia, (902) 530-5449.

For Pictou Centre, it's 342 Stewart Street, Unit 3, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, (902) 752-3646.

The most important one is Pictou East: 2042-1 Queen Street, Westville, Nova Scotia, (902) 695-3582. If you visit that office, there's a really nice museum beside it that you can go to, actually.

For Pictou West, 37 Water Street, P.O. Box 310, Pictou, Nova Scotia, (902) 485-8958.

Another good one, from Queens (Interruption) What? That is a mean thing to say. And they're all good. I say that jokingly. It's 271 Main Street, P.O. Box 1206, Liverpool, Nova Scotia - beautiful Liverpool - (902) 354-5470 - 5470 used to be my home phone number. There you go. I'll remember that one.

From Richmond, Brass Door Professional Centre, 10095 Grenville . . .

THE SPEAKER: Bras D'Or.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Bras D'Or. Sorry, I know. Bras D'Or Professional Centre. It's 10095 Grenville Street, St. Peters, Nova Scotia, (902) 535-2297.

Sackville-Cobequid, Unit 104, 445 Sackville Drive, Lower Sackville, Nova Scotia, (902) 864-6271.

Sackville-Uniacke - someone I have known for quite a long time - Unit 103, 1710 Sackville Drive, Middle Sackville, Nova Scotia, (902) 865-6476.

[8:15 p.m.]

One of my favourite colleagues from the Public Accounts Committee, from Shelburne, 164 Water Street, Shelburne, Nova Scotia, (902) 875-3632.

One of the nicest human beings you'll ever meet from Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River - 141 Victoria Street, Truro, Nova Scotia, (902) 897-0884.

Bras d'Or Professional Centre. I was going to go up to Cape Breton. I don't think I'm allowed to now.

Finally, and I haven't forgotten about you, Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank - 1265 Fall River Road, Suite 101, Fall River, Nova Scotia, (902) 576-3411. Just to be fair, if none of them answer, you can go to 349 Herring Cove Road, Suite 2, (902) 444-0147. To put a little cherry on the top, my cell phone number is (902) 499-5500. Everybody's got it. Give me a call.

It's important, Mr. Speaker, that people have their voices heard on this. I don't think people fully understand what's happening here and I think that's part of the problem. I couldn't have said it better than the last two speakers, who talked about the toxicity of this work environment.

If we were in any other job, there would be Labour Standards Code violations left and right - seriously. After we got to work, we had our hours changed from about 35 to 40 to 60-plus. I actually looked up the Nova Scotia Labour Standards Code and this is why it's important that we have equal representation in that Chair.

Very few workforces in Nova Scotia have the ability to do what we do here. It would be interesting to find out from the minister in charge of labour codes - I don't know who the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration is . . . (Interruption). Oh, my God, Digby-Annapolis, sorry, who brought forward a fantastic bill this session. (Interruption)

I know. Listen, I'm usually getting to bed right about now. Nobody wants to hear about that.

THE SPEAKER: You can consider it at any time now. (Laughter)

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I wish, Mr. Speaker. As much as I love your beautiful face, I'd rather be home.

The truth is that I would be interested because I started going through the labour laws and the codes and the policies to see if what is happening here and what's happened in the past is actually legal, and if we as MLAs actually have a case for a complaint. I think we do.

These kinds of things would have to go toward the Speaker and the multiple deputy speakers, I would assume, and that's why we want to be able to have equal representation on that Chair. We want to make sure that we have equal representation on that Chair so when tough decisions and asks like the one I just put forward go to the Chair, maybe one of the deputy speakers, like we saw earlier today with the member for Preston, has to make a very difficult decision. Maybe it's about hours of operation or access to child care which we saw. Things like that.

When you have the game tilted in one direction, it's very hard to trust. If we had equal representation as the deputy speaker and decisions are made for and against the opposition and the government, we'd have a little bit more faith in the process, I think.

I actually think that before the last election, if you asked the members of the opposition about the way the member for Timberlea-Prospect conducted himself when it came to the deputy speakers, I would say that they thought it was equal. Why not continue that process and add an extra person - one, not three - so that the government side feels like they have fair and adequate representation in deputy speakers? Elected, right.

I would say that they were pretty happy. They were pretty happy with it, so why not continue in that vein? Why not continue to work with all sides because what we're doing here today is we're disenfranchising parties and elected members.

I remember being on that side of the House. Someone once said: What goes around comes around. It's all circular, and that's kind of what's tough about this stuff, too, is: Who breaks the cycle? Who has the courage to break the cycle?

I remember my first year sitting here hearing about certain members on each side who didn't like each other, and they would be butting heads over hours and policies and stuff, and one side wouldn't give an inch to the other, and you're all caught up in this stuff. And that's not the word I want to use. It's almost like collateral damage.

I had a conversation with a non-elected official about what it's like to be over there and how, eventually, your eyes open up and you realize that it's only a short period of time that you're over there. Whether you're here for - I think the average MLA is 4.5 years or 3.5 years. That's the average. Three and a half years is actually, if you look at it, the average career - 3.5 to 4.5 years the average career for an MLA. Do you want to spend your nights until midnight debating this, fighting over this?

I think somebody in the Gallery is waving the white flag up there. Caught my eye.

Is that what you want to be doing? You want to be talking about five speakers to three instead of having wholesome debates about hurricane relief, health care, income assistance, housing, and the environment? Do you want to be having these debates in the middle of the night when nobody's watching, when nobody's listening?

I remember a young, strong, outspoken Leader of the Official Opposition when we were in government who was going to change the world and do things differently. That Leader of the Official Opposition is now Premier, and it feels like what he's done is taken what was done in the past and put it on steroids.

Instead of having one-month sessions, we're going to have two, two weeks. Instead of having two deputy speakers, we're going to have 5, 10, 20, bazillion. Everybody gets it. Instead of answering all the questions put forward to you in Question Period, you answer six. You answer 5 per cent of the questions put toward you since you became Premier.

Instead of making yourself available to the media, you run from them, and then you accuse them of lying. I don't know how many times we have to say this: The media is non-partisan. They'll grill us as bad as they grill you. That's their job. Their job is to hold us all accountable. When you treat them with such disdain like we're treating the Deputy Speaker's Chair, it's a huge problem because, again, I'm looking over at faces there, there are some of you who are going to last forever.

You're going to be here as long as you want. I'm looking at some of you. Some of you got, like, 90 per cent of the vote, which is incredible, and you're going to be here for a long, long - you're going to be here as long as you want. The member for Argyle, he's got another 60 years. I think he's 20. He's got another 60 years. There is going to be a time when you're back - you're not going to be in government forever.

The other one is the member for - the minister of trees. The member for Cumberland South. I'm sorry, I'm tired. The member for Queens. There's a bunch of you who are going to probably - the member for Pictou West, probably going to be here - Truro. There are a lot of you that I would bet a lot of money on - I'm not a betting man, it sounds like I am, I keep saying this - who are going to be here for as long as you want.

That is an honour and a privilege, and it's something that few MLAs get. When you take what you're doing with the deputy speakers, and you turn it from two to five - the tables are going to be reversed someday. They are. Probably within four years, five years, six years, somewhere around there.

If you look at the average length of how long governments last, you're going to be back over this side. It's going to be like *Groundhog Day*. You're going to wake up, and the member for Argyle is going to be like, we need two deputy speakers, and we need one from our side and one from the other guys' side. Whoever's leader on this will be like, no you don't. We need five, maybe 10 deputy speakers from the government side.

That's what's frustrating here. People may think I think one way about certain people who are in this House. I have respect for all of you. I've said this a million times. I don't have any disdain for anyone in this House. It's part of our job to do what we do. I have respect for every person who has taken the chair of the Premier. I think they all work

extremely hard to get where they're at. It's a rare place, to get to that spot. Anyone who occupies that spot is a hard worker and is driven.

I had great hope for this government. I remember introducing my children to the current Premier, and they talked about - this is during the swearing in - they asked me about him, and I said: He's the Premier. The first thing they commented on was he wasn't that tall compared to the past one.

I thought that looking back, I spend a lot of time reviewing things that were said in opposition, and I thought things were going to be different, really different. I was excited.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Can the member come back to the amendment, please?

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I was excited. I was. I thought that we heard a lot of great ideas. There were things that were done when we were in government; you're not going to agree with everything, and I'll continue to say that. Maybe this is of our own doing. If it is, I apologize. I do. It's not easy to be on that side.

I was a little troubled when the member for Cumberland North had stated that her mandate letter was to get re-elected. Ours wasn't. Ours was to serve the people of your constituency and always be there for them.

The most important thing you can do is to be there for people. That's what Premier McNeil said to us. That's what Leo Glavine said to us. That's what Karen Casey, that's what . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order again, please. You're straying from the amendment.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The reason I bring this up is because the current Premier agreed with everything I'm saying right now. I want to repeat that: The current Premier agreed with everything I am saying right now. He agreed aggressively and on the record. I will read that and table it, Mr. Speaker.

This was Friday, April 15, 2016, Mr. Speaker: "...before this House we now have two deputy speakers: one elected, one not. I think when you think about that in that context it's like the House of democracy" - wait for it - "is not interested in democracy..."

"I think what we should be doing in this House, if you're going to have one person in that position elected and one not, think of the message that that sends. Maybe what we

should do” - wait for it - “is we should elect one . . .” That is literally what this amendment is now saying. The words of the Premier of Nova Scotia are: Democracy is crumbling; if we want deputy speakers, we should elect them on the floor of the People’s House.

[8:30 p.m.]

So, Mr. Premier, this is your opportunity to put actions to words, to be solutionists, like that big, giant bus said, Mr. Speaker. This is the Premier’s opportunity to actually back up what he said, because a person who doesn’t back up their words with actions is someone no one can trust. If your words ring hollow over and over and over and over again, how can I trust you?

If every time I turn around you kick me in the backside and then you tell me to turn around again, and I turn around and you kick me in the backside, it’s my own fault for trusting you. It’s one of the oldest sayings: Actions speak louder than words.

This is an opportunity for the Premier of Nova Scotia, the leader of this province, or one of the leaders in this province, to actually stand by his words, because he certainly got media on it in opposition. He said these words, he left this Chamber, he went right out that door and I think at one point he said “showtime”. He walked out that door, he stood in front of the cameras and he railed about democracy and how it’s dying in Nova Scotia and he said, I will be different, I will be a Premier for people and not party.

The message that was put out there over and over and over again, not just on this but on everything - health care, the Need a Family Practice list, three Speakers to two, housing, the economy, inflation, COVID-19 - is completely different. His words are completely different than his actions.

I challenge all of you to go back and look at some of the things, some of the horrific stuff that was said to our former Minister of Health and Wellness, Randy Delorey, the member for Yarmouth, some of the horrific stuff that was said to them around COVID-19. Accused them of taking the lives of Nova Scotians and devaluing their lives - his words - and does - I wouldn’t say the exact same thing - he completely destroyed the system. The deconstruction of that system has been something that scholars will study.

So Mr. Speaker, with these few 24 minutes left, what I will say is I think a lot of people in this Legislature do and say things because they don’t think their constituents are watching, they don’t think people are paying attention, they don’t think that the Chair of the Speaker matters and that the position of deputy speakers matter. If they did, on the government side, they wouldn’t be treating it so disrespectfully.

What we’re proposing is to allow the very first African Nova Scotian female to take that seat to keep her voice. We’re asking for Mx. Chair, the very first one in our province’s history, to keep their voice.

To be fair, we're saying, give the member for Shelburne a voice, too, give the member for Eastern Shore a voice, too - one of them. Put everyone's name on the floor. It would be interesting to see who was voted in. Do what they do in the feds. It would be interesting to see. We're asking for democracy but it allows the government to still have the majority - they have the Speaker and the deputy speaker - and they prevent the disenfranchising of some very important voices and marginalization of voices in communities.

I find it very hard that that's not sinking in, that right now I am just a nuisance and he's just up talking and most people aren't even paying attention, Mr. Speaker. If you look around, right, and you get those looks like, oh, whatever.

I want to say, if I could address the member for Inverness, I did give out your office phone number and your - I pulled a Gordie Gosse. I gave out the member for Inverness's office number and phone number, as I do with every MLA, and I gave out my own, to be fair. I just didn't want him to be surprised when he gets thousands and thousands of calls to his office tomorrow morning.

I joke, but again I think that individuals on that side of the House have to remember that you are just continuing the cycle of toxic work behaviour. What I would say to everyone here in this House, again I'll go back to the way the Speaker and deputy speakers are being treated, I would hope that if you were doing your previous job before this and you saw something like this happen that you would stand up, speak out and do something about it, but I don't think you would, because you are certainly not doing it here.

If you were at your previous job and an African Nova Scotian woman was being treated this way, would you say something? No, you wouldn't, because you haven't said anything here. If somebody from the queer community was being treated this way, would you say something? I would hope so, but they're not saying anything here and that's my point. I can't assume what they were going to say, but I know what they're doing here. Not a single member stood up to defend this decision and to me that shows the actions of people who are complacent.

All I'm asking is for you to stand up, one by one . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member is speaking of the last motion that came. I'm going to ask of you - when you're asking about standing up and realizing what you have done, I'm going to ask you for the final time to honour the amendment that has been brought forward.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What I would say is we have an amendment on the floor. We will call a recorded vote. Each and every one of you is going to vote no - I'm assuming.

Maybe there's a couple of yeses over there, I don't know. I'm assuming you're going to vote no on this.

But before they vote no, Mr. Speaker, how about a little bit of courage? Take five minutes each and stand up and talk about why you're going to vote no on this, why you feel that diminishing the voices of the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and the member for Preston is the right thing to do - not just for this House but for the people you represent.

Because, Mr. Speaker, two of the three deputy speakers that we're asking for them to keep - each and every one of you has constituents whom they represent, and those constituents deserve an answer. They deserve to know why you want to water down the deputy speaker role and take money out of the hands of these two women - sorry, of this woman and Mx. Chair. I apologize.

Part of them being two of the three deputy speakers - I'll be honest with you, Mr. Speaker, I have learned a lot. I have learned a lot from both of them, and I will say especially from the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island. We have had some really frank and open and honest discussions. I don't know if we would have had those discussions if she wasn't - if Mx. Chair wasn't the Chair. I apologize again. I'm just tired.

If the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island wasn't the deputy speaker, I don't know if I would have had those conversations. It has certainly opened my eyes around a lot of things, especially what the member for Preston and the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island have gone through in their lives to get where they are today. Those are stories and those are lessons that I tell my children.

Now we're going to essentially remove those members. I'm proud to say that I was here when they were put in place and that I learned from them. I would hope that the government members learned something from them because if they did, they would realize the value of keeping them in the position that they're in and continuing to give them a strong voice.

Again, I will echo the statements of the colleagues on this side of the aisle who stood up. This has nothing to do with the members who are being appointed. I want to make that very clear. I also find it very strange that in this democracy, instead of going to a vote, Premiers can unilaterally do whatever they want with this non-partisan seat, which in itself makes it partisan, I would argue.

If the Premier can decide who the deputy speakers are and who the Speakers are, then the role is partisan. Maybe that's something we can learn from our federal counterparts, where they do a true vote. We have seen members of the opposition put in a position when the government is there. Maybe that's not the perfect system, but I think we have to start reflecting on these things.

[8:45 p.m.]

Maybe what we need to do, instead of being here at 8:45 at night and being here till midnight every night, instead of talking about three deputy speakers, let's talk about what's working. When is the last time this Chamber of government had a wholesome discussion about our democracy, what's working, and what's not working? Things have changed a lot over the last 260 years, Mr. Speaker. A lot. Maybe it's worth having - I shouldn't say "maybe." It is definitely worth having this discussion. We're probably 100 years behind having this discussion.

I think it would be brave of the members opposite to want to use the example of what's happening here with three deputy speakers and use it to have a larger discussion. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you've been here for quite some time, and maybe I'll ask you offline if you've seen any type of true discussion around democracy and the way this House performs. The fact that we're sitting here until midnight tonight, and we'll be here until midnight for the next two weeks, I'm promising you - not all of us over here will be, but all of you will be - and that a lot of you over there - Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please don't say "you."

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I know. I apologize. Wait until my third hour. I'll be even worse.

I think that - Mr. Speaker, when I look at the colleagues we have around here, we have people who are fantastic parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts and friends. But more importantly, a lot of them have young kids or children or spouses at home who they should be with.

For the next two weeks, all of this goes on my partner. While I'm in this House until midnight every night, it puts all of the responsibility - and we're debating three deputy speakers to five. It's not fair. It would be easier to understand if they would step up and talk about things that Nova Scotians want to talk about - income assistance rates, housing, poverty, health care. But we're talking about three deputy speakers.

I would argue that it's pretty insulting that I just had to spend two hours of my life trying to explain to the members opposite why it's important to have equal opportunity for deputy speakers, why watering down the position of deputy speaker from two to five is a bad thing. We're compromising. We're coming back and saying, you know what, you want five, why don't we do three? Just three? Maybe the member for Inverness will be the one to say, you're right. We're going to do this. Maybe. I've got faith. Right here.

So Mr. Speaker, with 10 minutes and 55 seconds left to go - which probably seems like an eternity for some, including yourself - I'm just getting started. I wonder what the record is in one sitting.

It's just painful to stand here to say that we are compromising, and we will compromise - and we'll vote it. Change it. We'll vote. I don't know if the Third Party will, but I bet you they will. I can't speak for them. I can tell you that on this side of the House, right here, if you change it, it's going through. We voted. It's out.

This is what's going to cause extended hours. I mean, really. You can end it here tonight. I wish they would listen. I wish they were listening. The difference between sitting in your seats and actively listening.

I hope that some of the senior MLAs over there who have the ear of the Premier and his staff would say that we, the MLAs, have to bear the brunt of this in the House. We have to put in the long hours and listen to the member for Halifax Atlantic, the member for Halifax Chebucto, and the members for all over the place talk for hours and hours, and hours on end.

Why don't we take the compromise? Then we're done. Then the member for Antigonish, for example, can go back to regular hours as the Minister of Health and Wellness. The member for Dartmouth East and the member for Argyle and Lunenburg, Eastern Passage and all the other members who have the privilege of sitting in Cabinet can go back to their departments and not be here until midnight debating five deputy speakers.

The non-Cabinet ministers can go back to their constituents, some of whom are still feeling the impact of the hurricane. Many of them are dealing with an explosion of homelessness and finding places for people in their communities, but we're here talking about three deputy speakers.

I know that none of them want to be here and that's part of the problem. The member for Bedford South talked about that - this has just become a nuisance for government. Question Period has become a nuisance for government. Being in this House has become a nuisance for government. That's why they extend the hours on three deputy speakers, five deputy speakers - because they want to be out that door faster than Flash Gordon. I bet you no one has ever said Flash Gordon in here. Maybe in the '50s.

They want to be out fast and that's part of the issue that we have here. All this stuff that's happening now - the frayed nerves, the agitations, the outbursts - that wouldn't be happening if we had normal hours. It's weighing on all of them that we're going to be speaking until midnight for the next two weeks and a lot of it is on three deputy speakers.

I think that I've been substantially calmer this session in my speeches, Mr. Speaker. It's something that I'm working on. I'm trying to not let feelings and my passion and

emotions control me as much. I think it offends some people when they think that I'm being personal with them. The only thing that is personal to me is my family, the people I represent, and democracy. There's other stuff, too, but those are the mains - my kids, my partner, my family, and the people I represent.

Because I'm here until midnight tonight, ironically, I can hear in my head right now someone saying that to us when we were on the other side. I hope that this side of the House, when you get a chance to govern, will stop this madness. If you don't, and I'm still elected, I'm out of here, done. (Interruption)

No, I'm just saying that if we have the privilege to ever govern again and we are here debating this kind of stuff until midnight, three deputy speakers till midnight, I don't think I could take it anymore. I know I can't.

I think that you've asked for the advantage, and rightfully so. You have the advantage, you won the election by 2 per cent or whatever it was. You won a majority government, but not everything has to be this way. It's what disenfranchises people, it's what disenfranchises good people to run in politics when they see the way these deputy speakers are being treated, and the fact that you are taking five - you want five, we're trying to compromise to three - you have two deputy speakers who represent people and individuals who have been put down their entire life and it is being done again. Then during an election, or before an election, you're going to go out to those communities and ask for people to run for the party. It's not going to happen, or it shouldn't.

People have long memories, and they'll remember how these two deputy speakers went from having a voice in a 260-year-old institution to having little to no voice because they want five, and that's why it's good to have the three.

I know they have been called ineffective tonight, which is insulting. To me that's a character attack on them. I know we've been told that the current crop of deputy speakers can't handle the load. It reminds me, Mr. Speaker, that the reasoning to go to five and not take three, reminds me of when you catch your child stealing a cookie or something, and they come up with some excuse and you know it's not real, but they were caught so they had to say something, right?

That's what is happening here, they are saying deputy speakers and three deputy speakers and ineffective and can't carry the load, even though they carried the load for 260 years. But the Premier has changed so much, that those individuals are no longer capable of carrying the load.

Those two members whose voices are being muted are two of the most effective Nova Scotians you'll ever meet in your life. Mr. Speaker, if people in this place don't know about the member for Preston, I advise you to use Google and find out. (Interruption)

[9:00 p.m.]

It's important to know the past and the history and the human beings whose lives you are impacting before you make these decisions. I only have a minute left? (Interruptions) Okay.

I hope that before you blindly vote "no" - I'm sure the messages have already been sent in - that you take a moment to have a real conversation about this, about what you are about to do to two individuals and two communities that have been put down, beaten down and treated terribly, forever, and you are just perpetrating the same old, same old.

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next speaker, I will tell the member for Halifax Atlantic that, yes, he is much calmer in his delivery, but he still uses the full hour to talk.

The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to speak to this amendment put forward by the Liberal caucus on what seems to be a fairly inconsequential change put forward by the government. But it is not inconsequential, and our amendment brings in an extremely important word that is missing from the motion and that word is "elected." While we all know that there are far more important issues to be speaking about for Nova Scotians, we are legislators and at times when democracy is being violated and is under threat, we have to get on our feet and stand against those attacks on democracy.

Before my colleague, the member for Inverness gets up to give us a history lesson in rebuttal to this, we're talking about now and we're talking about the members of this Legislature, and what you as one of 55 MLAs are going to do and put on the record of how you feel about this democratic institution.

How did this begin? There was an announcement on October 13th for a series of changes within government. A complete surprise was the change for the government to make decisions for this House on who our deputy speakers are. This is our decision. This is the decision of each of us as democratically elected members of this Legislature. These are not decisions of any one caucus or any one person.

Why this is so concerning - and I want to agree and commend our colleague from Dartmouth South in revealing what was there in front of us on paper - is that this was actually a very calculated move by the government. They actually wrote it into their motion.

Again, removing the role of this House, they wrote it into their motion that they were anticipating the Speaker being removed, and who they wanted to put in. So unreal.

That's a decision for this House. It's not a decision to be communicated by Communications Nova Scotia. This was a carefully calculated affront on this House.

Today, we had a member from the opposite side who defended this decision. I have to say the idea, the concept that this decision is being made by workload - the need for more deputy speakers to handle the workload. There are 10 provinces in this country far bigger than us that seem to be able to do it with one or two deputy speakers. Then compound that and put it in the context of Nova Scotia, where this Legislature has the unfortunate reputation of having the shortest sessions in this country. There's no demonstrated need for this - no demonstrated need for us as MLAs to require five deputy speakers.

Let's look a little bit to the background of how we got to where we are and why we are where we are now, and how we are about to take a step backwards. I want to refer to a paper, a study of provincial and territorial legislatures that was authored by Jennifer Smith and Lori Turnbull, whom you know as a commentator. This was back in 2008. The title is *The Nova Scotia House of Assembly: On the Cusp of Change?* The most important part of it is the authors put a question mark at the end of this.

Obviously, I won't try to read a lot of this, but really it began in a minority government in 1998. The MacLellan government features the first real election of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker for the House of Assembly. Then it goes on to talk about the minority governments in 2003 and 2004. Maybe I'll quote this: "the governing party clearly negotiated in advance an outcome that all three parties could support, thereby avoiding unwelcome surprises." It talks about how three parties worked together, each with a representative from their various caucuses, in a spirit of collaboration for the health of this House, went forward and elected three deputy speakers.

What is the absolutely most important quality of a Speaker and a deputy speaker? It's unbiasedness, impartiality and not being partisan. Our duty as members of this Legislature is to look around this Chamber, look around your caucus, and figure out who is the most non-partisan person who can sit in that Chair, hold the decorum in this House and deal fairly with each of us as individual members. It is not the place for partisanship. That's why individual members need to consider, in their own personal view, who can best sit in that Chair and ensure that this House operates in a way that we can be proud of our democracy.

It's the members who have that judgment, individually. We know our colleagues. We know some are more partisan than others. Partisanship has its role. We can put the partisan people to work in partisan ways, but in this Legislature, we need the most unpartisan members to take that seat. If all members of this House do not have the confidence in the Speaker and the deputy speaker, then we can see how it breaks down - the shouting, the bad behaviour, the calls for the Speaker to intervene or not intervene. We all, individually, need to be selecting the best people for these important positions.

I was recently at a parliamentary conference with MLAs, Speakers and MPs from all across the country. There were two conversations that were in the off-sessions. One was the dramatic resignation of the Minister of Education in New Brunswick and the other was what was going on in Nova Scotia.

What was going on in Nova Scotia? I can tell you that Speakers from across the country are watching what is happening. If our Premier's Office can make a calculated move to remove someone from the Chair and place someone that one MLA wants in the Chair, then the fear is that would go across this country. We can't let that happen. We can't let that kind of behaviour begin in the first responsible government of the British Commonwealth, as it says on that plaque.

I know that it's one little motion. We're all going to vote on party lines. We've watched the debate with some passionate views from this side of the House. We've watched on the other side of the House, many folks with their heads in their phones.

This is important. We cannot take democracy for granted. We cannot put our heads down and look at our phone when we're talking about the fundamentals of our democracy. An elected Speaker and deputy speaker is fundamental.

I, like many Canadians, friends, and colleagues, are very concerned about the state of democracy in the world. We watch what's going on in the U.S. and it's very concerning. Some of that is reaching the Great White North. We all bear the brunt of some of the outrageous behaviours of citizens towards their elected officials - and it's a slippery slope.

Things changed dramatically over the last six years in the world with what happened in the U.S. When the U.S. voters decided to elect a bully: someone who is going to break norms; someone who loved firing; someone who took over ownership of their party through getting themselves to a position of power and then whipping everyone else to follow in the lead; the undermining of our democratic institutions, including our press. The vilifying of our press. The creation of the concept of alternative facts. Fake news.

All of these things that were happening south of the border are eroding the fundamental democracy in this country as well. They are small, little cuts to democracy. Let's not let it slip away because we've got our noses in our phones.

We're individual MLAs elected for our constituents, to represent them and to uphold democracy. You wouldn't be here unless you were elected. You have to believe in the elected process. You wouldn't be here without that. Now, under the rules of our House, we elect our Speaker and our deputy speaker, but not with our current government.

Bit by bit democracy is being eroded. We've spoken earlier about Summer elections. We debated and talked about the importance of engagement of citizens and elections and how Summer elections did not encourage and expand democracy.

[9:15 p.m.]

Just today we learned about House hours in that green book, that were agreed upon under the Rules of this House. The Rules were created by this House and in the blink of a motion we throw the rule book out.

Now to change the rules you have to have a two-thirds majority but hey, you can get around it: Just put a motion out at the beginning of every session and then we don't need our rule book. That's an abuse. Those rules were made by 51 - now 55 - members of the Legislature, who took into consideration what was fair and reasonable and what was good for democracy. Is it good for democracy to be meeting until midnight? It's embarrassing.

We shouldn't be embarrassed about the work we do; it is important. It should not need a dedicated press person up at 9:17 p.m. to hear these things. Our press should be here hearing the debates of the House and they should be meaningful.

Why are we doing all the work? Are we afraid to stand out in front of the press and answer the questions to the debate? It's sad. One of the most outrageous things I think we've seen to date is what has happened with our Speaker. If we wanted an unbiased, impartial, non-partisan person who had experience in this House, years of experience, who was well-liked by all members of this House - I didn't agree with all of his rulings but that's not the point. We have to believe in the institution, we have to believe that the people sitting in that Chair are elected from the hearts and the beliefs of each of the 55 MLAs.

One other item that has been troubling me since the day it happened, when our Premier in response to the abuse that was being launched at our civil service, including Dr. Strang, the Premier, as the big, tough guy, I guess, said don't attack those public servants, flip me the bird. All I could think of was you, my colleagues. We have all been there, we have walked through the farmers' market with our wife, or our kids, and we've taken abuse. That kind of abuse is expanding more and more each and every day, and here we had a Premier who is inviting it, who is saying that it is okay, Joe Citizen, to treat politicians and MLAs that way.

It happened to me in the farmers' market. It rattled me and my wife for the whole day. She didn't deserve that. Lots of people say, well, you deserve it. You bought into it. This is civil society. We need each and every member of this House, including the Premier, to be better. Democracy is under threat. Each little decision that you make is either strengthening democracy or weakening it. You should be electing . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'll just ask the member for Kings South to refer to members, not "you."

KEITH IRVING: Thank you. I'm wrapping up and getting tired.

Each and every member is electing the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker that you feel can hold this House in the highest regard, and hold the processes, the rules, and the decorum to the highest level. In this motion, we feel that we have brought a compromise. We need to elect our Speakers and our deputy speakers as individuals.

Other provinces, including New Brunswick - I forgot to mention this - moved from a Speaker appointed by the Premier to an elected Speaker. They moved to a secret ballot, as we did, and as I think is probably pretty consistent across the country now. It's secret for a reason. The Premier doesn't control any one member of this House when it comes to your views on who your Speaker is. Give that some thought, please.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: I wanted to speak on this amendment and the motion in general as well. It's clear to me that we have a Premier who is a "my way or the highway" sort of Premier. I'm not sure if I'm in the Legislature or if I'm on the Christmas version of Ellen DeGeneres - oh, Deputy Speaker for you, Deputy Speaker for you, Deputy Speaker for you. Oh, we'll make you head of a committee. Spread the money - \$5,000 here, \$5,000 there.

It's clear to me, from the outside looking in, that this Premier is - it's almost like blood money, you know? You keep quiet, you do your thing, here's five grand. Don't worry about it. You do five grand, you do five grand, all the while taking away from other people. The Premier couldn't give a pay raise because that wouldn't look good, but there are other ways for him to reward people in his caucus. But I digress on that for a moment. I'm going to move on.

Madam Speaker, again, this has been said a few times. People may think that this is not a big issue but I can tell you, in Cape Breton, this is a big issue. I'm hearing it every day in my constituency: What the heck is this Premier and this government doing to the Speaker? The Speaker is a well-respected person in the community. They do their work for the community. They're very non-partisan. The Speaker of this Assembly does a fantastic job.

People in my community respect him, and what they're seeing being done because the Speaker did not agree, made some rulings that ticked off the all-knowing Premier . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, I'll ask the member for Northside-Westmount to please stick to the amendment.

FRED TILLEY: We had to put this amendment in place because of a vindictive Premier and what he's trying to accomplish. When we think about the position of Deputy Speaker, Madam Speaker, you as the member for Preston, the member for Halifax Citadel-

Sable Island are role models. Role models in not only your respective communities, but role models for the province. (Applause)

For the first time in history, little Black girls and young genderqueer people can look at a position and aspire to those positions. They can see themselves. They have historically been left out, and now they can see these wonderful role models at the highest level of democracy in their province. That will give them that drive and energy to move forward.

We hear the Premier talk all the time about moving Nova Scotia forward. We're taking this province forward. By putting this amendment in place, by putting this motion in place, he's bringing Nova Scotia back 50 years, not driving this province forward.

I would like to quote the Premier, as well, as some of the others have, and this quote really stuck out to me in the Premier's speech of April 15, 2016, and the fact is he said:

“So what I would say is I would appeal to the members of this House to think about the message that we're sending to Nova Scotians. Is it a message of working together? Is it a message of humility? Or is it a message of aggression? Because what you see when you say, well, this person is elected and this person - we're not going to have an election. We're just going to put them there because we can. That's not the way it's supposed to work.”

And I quote the Premier: Mr. Premier, this is “not the way it's supposed to work.”

If this motion passes, which it's going to do, of course. Believe it or not, 11 per cent of the members of this Assembly will either be Speaker or Deputy Speaker. That's ridiculous.

The fact that we feel we need to have five Deputy Speakers for an Assembly of 55 MLAs is absolutely mind-blowing. How did we end up here? In my opinion, again, my way or the highway. We ended up here in this particular case with this particular motion because the Premier didn't have enough votes in his own caucus to do what he really wanted to do, which was to oust the Speaker, and that says a lot. That says a lot about . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: I'll call order and ask that the member for Northside-Westmount not impute motive for government.

FRED TILLEY: I'm not really sure what “impute” means, but I'll take it that I can't continue down that vein of where I was headed.

[9:30 p.m.]

You know, I want to speak kind of directly right now to the Cape Breton caucus. As Cape Bretoners, we have a strong affinity to one another. Whether we're on one side of a party or another side of a party, it has always been Cape Breton first. Wherever you go in this country or the world and you run into a Capers, there's automatic kinship between Capers.

From my perspective, what I'm seeing happen to an amazing Cape Bretoner, I'm really reaching out to the Cape Bretoners on the other side. Have some courage, speak up against this crazy thing that's happening to the Speaker of this Assembly, and you know what? I did it myself and that's why I feel I can say that. I came out against my own party earlier this year about a situation. I did that because I didn't think it was right. You know what? The leader of my party came to me and said, I hear your perspective, let's talk about it. That's the way democracy works. That's the way we make things better. It's by working together.

Again, the folks on that side who are Cape Bretoners, at home people are going to be looking to you for leadership. They are going to be asking, why did you not publicly support the Speaker of the House? He's a Cape Bretoner, he has done a good job, there's no reason to remove him, he has done nothing wrong.

I am going to come back to the amendment. The reason that we have to put this amendment in place is basic math, we've got it figured out. We can understand that you have the votes to put this motion through. So if this motion is going to pass, what are we going to try to do? We're going to try to make it better.

How can we make it better? First of all, instead of 11 per cent of the Assembly being Speakers, maybe it's six, maybe it's seven - three deputies. Okay, we can live with that but let's have an election. We know it's a foregone conclusion. You have the votes, so there's nothing to be afraid of. We can't pull a fast one on you. But let's do it right and let's show the people of Nova Scotia that rules are in place for a reason. We're here to set examples and if we're not going to set those examples and follow them, what the heck is the good of that little green book of rules?

From that perspective I really think you should have second thoughts about not only this motion, this amendment, but I think you should have some real second thoughts about what has been happening in the last 10 months. We've had a Premier who accuses the media of fabricating a story - clearly not fabricated, not fake news - real news, facts.

At the end of the day the way that this whole piece of work has transpired has really put a sour smell on democracy in Nova Scotia. As previously stated, two historic appointments to the deputy speaker position are now going to be diluted with three other

government speakers. They are going to take pay out of their hands and just hand it over to government members.

That's not the way this should work. As our Premier said in 2016 - I'm tabling this - that's not the way it should work. It's a slippery slope, he said.

At the end of the day, I really hope that common sense prevails on the side of the government. Again, I hope our fellow Cape Bretoners can rally within their own caucus. This letter of resignation that's on file now should be torn up, burned, shredded and thrown to the wind. The Speaker is here doing his job, keeping us all in line, as you have seen some of the rulings that have taken place.

Please take a second look at this amendment at the very least. We understand where you're headed, but this amendment is a compromise, and sometimes that's what it's all about. You want one thing, and we want another thing. Generally, we can meet somewhere in the middle. I think what has been proposed in this amendment accomplishes that, saves a little face for the Premier. He'll get partially what he needed. One person will get paid off, but the rest won't, and then find out other ways to figure that out.

With that, Madam Speaker . . .

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Is that all you've got?

FRED TILLEY: No, that's not all.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I did two hours. You're done speaking in 10 minutes.

FRED TILLEY: Well, we're not all brainiacs like you. Okay, we'll keep going.

At the end of the day, this is about democracy, and it's about doing what's right. In this particular instance it just makes zero, zero sense. We have two quality people in the role of deputy speaker, and they have been doing this role now for 14 months. When I hear folks talk about the fact that we need to have extra people just to cover off when someone's not available, there are mechanisms for that as has been previously said.

We know that that's not the reason. The reason this is being done is because people may have needed some sort of remuneration. There may have been some - I see the Speaker's fingers going for the microphone, so I'll change my train of thought on that.

I just want to go back to the idea of fairness. The Speaker and the two deputies were elected to this Chamber through the appropriate process - nomination, election, victory - and that's the only way they should be taken out. They shouldn't be taken out or diluted in any other way, by motion or otherwise. It should be done through the democratic process.

Again, when we look at the historic positions that we have placed here, our job is to protect that history that we have created.

Again, for the young people of Nova Scotia, to be able to aspire to come to this Legislature like we all have and to take roles of leadership within this institution. I think if we can just willy-nilly change people, turn people, throw people away, then we certainly aren't setting that example for the young people of Nova Scotia.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'm going to take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

HON. TONY INCE: Madam Speaker, thank you - to you and all the speakers for the wonderful work that you have done, for holding up the tenets of this democracy and for doing your job in a non-partisan way.

I stand to talk about this amendment, and I suggest my voice will be ignored and possibly not even considered. I want to be on the record and speak, so that's why I'm standing up for the members for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and North Preston. I am concerned. The actions by the government provide me with skepticism, and that skepticism comes out of their motivation - or they just don't want to share why they are making this type of decision. It makes no sense. It may make sense to others, or we just don't understand your motivation.

As a member from a community that has been traditionally marginalized, a community that has never had these opportunities, not only the African Nova Scotian community but the other communities that are also disenfranchised. We're all standing here this evening talking about democracy. Well let's look at that word: "demo" means for the people, and "cracy" is rule. People rule. Not some people rule - that's an oligarchy.

I'm going to ask you to think and consider about a few things. Here I go sweating again whenever I stand up to speak. When citizens are divided on an issue, as they often will be, whose views should prevail and in what circumstances? Think about that.

As the member for Halifax Chebucto said, should a majority always prevail, or should minorities sometimes be empowered to block or overcome that majority rule? These are things we have to consider when we're standing here doing the people's work.

As I said, and I'm going to go back to that, I come from a community that has traditionally been marginalized. I'm going to share when the two members were elected to the Chair. That move by the member for Timberlea-Prospect did something unprecedented, I believe - no, it was done one other time. However, I will say, at that precise moment, I didn't realize how powerful, how impactful that move was to have these two beautiful, strong, powerful women put in that position.

[9:45 p.m.]

My community was quite excited and happy. I mean, the current government has taken a few steps already to show my community that okay, step back, by removing some key positions. It's sad for me to say that as I stand here, I see what has been happening to marginalized communities for the last 300 years. We'll give you a little taste. Go back there. We'll give you this. Go back there.

I thought that the current Premier was different. I thought that the current Premier would at least truly sit and consider some of those issues that I've raised. Let me go back and share something. Back in 2014-15, when I was the Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs, we had reached out to the current government through my office. We had a program, and I had said to my staff, you let them know that if the current group was going to be the Official Opposition, and they're going to have somebody criticize African Nova Scotian Affairs, they need to understand the true perspective, the background.

I offered, through African Nova Scotian Affairs, to provide a program that we were doing within the Public Service Commission already, perspectives on the heritage of African Nova Scotian people. I'm still waiting to hear from somebody to say they are willing to listen.

Coupled with that and some of these moves, I can't help but be skeptical. I know many members across the floor may look at this as a trivial issue. It is not trivial. You only have to understand. It is not trivial when you look at historical perspectives and contexts of people who are continually marginalized. You tend not to understand the trauma, you tend not to understand how that can impact that individual with the slightest of comments.

We are here. I've heard the Premier say many times that he's looking out for Nova Scotians. We are here. On several occasions, he's criticized us for not wanting to work collaboratively. Well, here we are. We've proposed an amendment that would help to lessen the sting of some of the things that you're doing.

We've proposed an amendment that would give the strong woman from my community who sits in a position that is important to this House an ability. It gives her the ability to show that she is competent. She doesn't need to do it here, because she's already proven it and done it many times before, but I guess, as a person of colour, you've got to show it again. She's already proven it by being elected. She's already proven it by the numerous things she's done before she even came to this House, the People's House.

I am really concerned. As we said, death by a thousand cuts. I'm seeing a trend. I had the nerve to talk to people outside this House who say that some of these trends are - as my colleague, the member for Kings South said - too reminiscent of the games being played south of the border. I don't know how anybody else feels, but that worries me. I've got family in the United States that I've spoken to on numerous occasions who talk about

that climate. Folks, we don't need that climate here. That's not to say that you are really going down that path, but I'm concerned, especially with a move like this.

We have come a long way - and I say that softly. We have come a long way, but when you walk in my shoes, it's not very long. It's not very far. When you walk in my shoes - and I look at a person who has the same skin colouring as me, having the ability, having been given the honour by the people in her community - it bothers me to say that we're going to reduce her participation in this House.

Talking to a number of young women in Ontario who had asked if they could meet with the member for Preston. This is a Black community in Ontario that really watches what goes on here. I'm a little surprised by that, and I am because if you know most marginalized communities, they're not even paying attention to us. That is part of why I'm standing up, because what we are doing is causing more people to be disenfranchised with our system.

What we are doing is taking those individuals who may have had a spark, those individuals who said, yes, I can do that. We are taking those individuals and we're saying, yes, you can do it, but only for a little bit - or, yes, you can do it, but then once you've put a little time in, then we've got to put you back here. Again, I'm going to repeat myself - that's been our lives. I'm not trying to say it's just an African Nova Scotian issue - 2SLGBTQ+. There are many, many individuals who suffer in silence, who are afraid to speak up because they know what the status quo is going to do.

Folks, we're not asking for anything unreasonable. Let's consider this amendment. Please, let's just take a pause and think about why we are here, standing and having this discussion.

I'm going to ask a question and I'd like you all to think about it and then, Madam Speaker, I am going to sit down: "Will you permit the sacred fire of liberty, brought by your fathers from the venerable temples of Britain, to be quenched and trodden out on the simple altars they have raised?" Thank you.

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: I know that we all collectively value our opportunity, our privilege to be here in the House and debate into the wee hours of the night, early hours of the morning, whatever the government dictates we shall do. We as Opposition members will abide by the hours set forward by the government.

I got elected in 2013 and I've had the opportunity to see a variety of different spins put on the way we conduct business in the House. On either side of the House, I don't think anybody truly enjoys being here until a late part of the night. When we took it upon ourselves to extend the hours, there was generally something consequential that needed to

be done, that had to be pushed ahead. I can't quite figure out why we have collectively - by "we" I mean the government has forced us into a scenario where we're discussing amendments such as this into the late hours of the night. I guess that is left to be determined.

[10:00 p.m.]

One can only suppose that there is something on the horizon that members of the government do not want to be around for. They do not want to face the music, face the press, face further protests. But in this scenario, we will try to make the best use of our time by enabling amendments - and in this case, to a very important element of our procedure in the House - to adjust the circumstances by which the supporting cast in the Speaker's Office is put together.

We know that the motion from the government is to, indeed, comprise the supporting cast of Speakers, the deputy speakers, with a total of five members - something that would be completely unprecedented from one end of this country to the next, from the north to the south, from the east to the west. I can't even say that with a straight face.

There is no other Legislature in this country that has any more than two - count them, one, two - deputy speakers, and yet we have a government poised, ready, waiting, here, present, available, subject to debate the circumstances by which we would do this unprecedented move. However, as members of the opposition, we are bringing forward an amendment - an amendment that we do believe is not unreasonable.

We do, in fact, believe that there is an unreasonable nature to the government's motion. As I alluded to in previous comments earlier tonight, no team is successful with this many backup roles. No sports team is effective when you have four backup goaltenders - or five backup goaltenders, in this regard. We want to enable an opportunity for this House to operate at its best form, and a big piece of that has to do with the cast of people - representatives from all parties - the cast that does their best to ensure that the proceedings of the House move forward in a careful, positive, healthy, considerate, functional, appropriate manner that represents the interests of not just the people who are in this room but all Nova Scotians.

This is an opportunity, with this amendment, for us as opposition to make suggestions to the government, to have some constructive criticism. Under these circumstances, we do believe that our amendment is a constructive one. As many of my colleagues have alluded to, this is not an effort to grandstand around partisanship. This is what we believe is, in fact, a reasonable effort - a reasonable amendment. An amendment, if I may, that states that "Section 1 be struck out and replaced with:

1) in addition to the honourable member for Preston and the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, one additional member elected by the House be the Chair of Committees and Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly;"

In contrast to the submission that we require five deputy speakers to do the job that many have submitted, and I would add to that, that two supporting Speakers do quite admirably, effectively, fairly, and justly.

That's what this amendment is all about. Part of my concern is, what is going through the minds of members of the government around this amendment? Are they concerned that this is the right choice to move forward with their plan for five deputy speakers, to vote down the amendment that we have presented? Are they concerned about what repercussions might take place if they were to vote their conscience and say, you know what, this makes reasonable sense?

I hear it not infrequently, and I would think that members of the Progressive Conservative party throughout the province philosophically support the ideals of less government rather than more. My confusion is, why would we be adding more cooks in the kitchen, so to speak? It doesn't quite make sense to me, and I regularly hear it from people throughout the province, throughout my riding. We don't need more government. We don't need more people debating strange things into the wee hours of the night.

We need sharp people with great life experiences to come together and conduct business in a way that is efficient and considerate and ensuring that we have - if the government's intent is genuinely to complement the work of the Office of the Speaker by adding some support to that cast, we do believe that in an effort to find a compromise here this evening and perhaps into tomorrow and the next day as long as we have to consider this amendment and this particular resolution, we believe that one person may be available.

It could be that we use this time to contemplate and debate other considerations that might be relevant as amendments and might be intertwined with this amendment to an extent. Again, we're talking about enhancing the supporting cast in our Speaker's office. What could that look like? Is there an amendment tied to this that could complement that sentiment about supporting the Speaker's office in requiring gender parity in the Speaker's office?

I have learned, having had the good fortune to work with a strong female cast on both sides of the House over the last 10 years - that we make better decisions when women are present at the table in leadership positions. I say that with all sincerity because it has been a privilege to be a part of the constructive conversation that we have been able to establish as a whole, like I said, these past 10 years.

That's in keeping with the amendment about supporting the Speaker's office efforts. What if we took it upon ourselves to create a scenario where we rotated the supporting cast of the Speaker's office? We all know that having different experiences is important. We all have our own personal experiences that would in our own way lend themselves to the Office of the Speaker, to the ideals of democracy, and to the operations of this House.

It seems fair to me that if succession is an organic thing that the government has chosen to normalize as a rationale for some of the things that we've experienced over the last several weeks, why not embed that in a democratic way through debate on the floor of the Legislature? Why not, to support the cast that's in the Speaker's Office through amendments like this, why can't we suggest that every six months we change up that supporting cast? It would create a scenario where representatives from one end of the province to the other would be able to support the Office of the Speaker, such as the one member that we've presented in this particular amendment this evening.

We often hear about the rural, urban, Cape Breton, the South Shore, the rivalry that can exist and the importance of ensuring that we have geographic representation. In this amendment and perhaps a like amendment down the road, we could work to ensure that embedded in that supporting cast of deputy speakers, that we have geographic representation. We've heard the government during their time in Opposition talk about the value in geographic representation, and in this House we would be supportive of measures to ensure that we're complementing the philosophies, the needs, the desires of people throughout the province.

An easier way to do that is to break things down regionally so that we can ensure that representatives from every part of the province are involved in the decisions. We have that ability collectively through the Legislature but, as I've learned, you need to be intentional about the composition of offices, you need to be intentional about the composition of leadership boards.

In this circumstance, we have before us a great opportunity to continue with the Speaker who has done a fair and just and important job for all members of the House. We have an opportunity to move forward with the two supporting deputy speakers who have brought a complementary addition to that office that brings to this House a perspective on leadership that is unprecedented - without a doubt unprecedented, because traditionally this place has not been an accepting place for people from their communities.

I, as a representative, a humble representative from Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, have the opportunity to represent two of Nova Scotia's historic African Nova Scotian communities. That's a privilege that I greatly respect, I truly appreciate, and I will frankly do as long as everyone will have me in my riding (Laughs).

To see the member from Preston in the Chair and elected to that role, as a sign of respect from colleagues throughout the House, I can't undervalue what kind of impact that has had through testimonials in my community.

We have decisions to make here. The opposition proposes amendments such as the one we've discussed here. A number of my colleagues have discussed to some length - some longer than others, some shorter than others, some perhaps an appropriate amount.

[10:15 p.m.]

As we have these conversations I think it's important that we take on this responsibility of debating these amendments and think hard about the next generation that is considering being part of the electoral experience, the parliamentary experience, whether it is a municipal, provincial, federal level, maybe it's getting involved in a community organization, I believe it's safe to say that many of us have played roles on community volunteer boards that resulted or are directly tied to our presence in the House today.

We have a responsibility to take that opportunity, that privilege that has been bestowed upon us by people in the community, by people who have encouraged us to run and to take that seriously and to work hard to put forward legislation and resolutions that help us make the system better, because that's what is demanded of us. That's what the next generation should be able to expect from us.

I have some concerns - and a previous member alluded to it - with how this move by the government shakes out, in terms of adding the additional three deputy speaker positions. I'm not talking about the individuals in those positions, I'm talking about the positions themselves - functionally what this does in a situation where we all came back to the House, led by the Premier, to freeze our collective wage package.

We all froze those wages. We all agreed that that was what was going to take place. But effectively what is happening here is we're seeing two members of the opposition receive a pay reduction and three members of the government receive a pay raise and one member . . .

THE SPEAKER: I'll ask the member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville to please stick to the amendment. Speak to the amendment.

The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you, and to that point, one democratically elected additional member does not create the imbalance that exists with the government's original resolution. That is why, through whatever methods we have as members of the opposition, we have submitted this particular resolution to elect - elect - one additional supporting cast member. If there is any truth, which I dismiss the intent that there is - if there is any need for an additional supporting cast, that it is one elected in the House versus three government members.

It is true that while in opposition, there was a great deal of disruption that was caused by members of the then-opposition around decisions to stack the Speaker's Office with government members. That's not lost on me. I think that it's also important to recognize that during the time that the Liberal government was in office, we did make changes that were well received by all parties throughout the House under the member for

Timberlea-Prospect, who made a choice to reinstate the circumstances whereby representation in those three roles throughout the Speaker's Office, the representation in those roles was to include members of all three parties, perhaps not in an equitable way, as is the case here, but at least in an equal way by number.

With all of that being said, I wonder if this is an attempt by the Premier and the government to make Nova Scotia great again. It's concerning that the resolution that has been proposed is in fact an abuse of power, the same abuse of power that they suggested was so untoward when they were in opposition. I know that not everybody was here, and over the course of time, I'm sure that if you look to your left, look to your right, and you tap members of your caucus who were here, they will share anecdotes about what the House was like before, as was the case when I first got elected in 2013.

I certainly relied on those relationships and the back-and-forth between members on all sides of the House in quieter conversations, to hear about what it was like in here before. The reason that we get on our feet to debate the circumstances around the Speaker's Office is so that we all have the opportunity to have those respectful conversations amongst one another in our own caucuses, amongst colleagues on opposite sides of the House. It is truly important that the Office of the Speaker is well-equipped to conduct the business from their Office in a way that has a truly considerable impact on the decorum of this House.

As I alluded to previously, we do believe in the Liberal caucus that this amendment to elect one additional deputy speaker, in addition to the two supporting members to the Speaker who are presently there - being the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and the member for Preston - we do believe that one additional member is a reasonable tactic. One that would demonstrate our collective commitment to democracy. As I alluded to, our collective effort around representation from all parties, representation from different geographic regions. Representation that enables people to come in with their own experiences and perspectives and place them in those roles in such a way that gives us a shared ability to experience what is important in terms of the functions of this House and the role of the Speaker, which extends beyond this House.

Frankly, I have sought the opportunity to engage the Office of the Speaker and to connect with individuals on a community level. There is a scenario that creates a strong presence, political presence, non-partisan political presence in our communities and our school communities that I would encourage all members to tap into. At the time, previous Speaker Murphy came to visit one of my schools.

We do not believe that a supporting cast of five is appropriate, but in keeping with this particular amendment, the addition of one would be a reasonable step forward. It could enable more of us to receive visits from representatives from the Office of the Speaker.

[10:30 p.m.]

We have talked about the value in extending our reach as far as we can and the value in engaging not only people generally throughout our communities but people in the next generation, young people, about what goes on here at Province House.

What are the different ways that we can reach out to our constituents? What are the different ways that we can reach out to build those relationships in a world that, in many cases - and I know we all hear about this - we hear about the mistrust of government, the mistrust of our institutions collectively. The fact that people from all walks of life cannot see themselves in leadership positions in our institutions, in our governments.

When you look to this amendment, it provides what we believe to be an appropriate addition to the office that could empower all members because all of us have the ability to reach out to the Office of the Speaker and say, listen, I've got a group of young people, I've got a group of Scouts, I've got a group of individuals who are really interested in democracy and the functions of government.

As I've said before, as has been demonstrated in my community through engagement with former Speaker Murphy, it's a great opportunity. We had an experience whereby the Speaker actually came into the classroom and we conducted a mock session of the Legislature. There were students on one side of the room, we split the room up, we split them up and Speaker Murphy presided over the debate.

It was so engaging, so much so that there was a student, who is now in high school, but there was a student from Madeline Symonds Middle School who was actually just walking down the hall and saw that in his former classroom we had the Speaker of the House in. He said, what's going on in here, to his old teacher. I know him from the community. He saw me and he said, what's going on in here?

That opportunity for engagement, extended by the Speaker's Office and the supporting cast of the Speaker's Office, was so interesting to this particular student that he went down the hallway and banged on his teacher's door and said, can I skip your class so I can go and participate in this mock legislative session?

When we talk about amendments on the floor of the Legislature, amendments such as this one, we want to make sure that we create scenarios that provide the strongest possible opportunity for interactions like this, interactions with the next generation, which I believe in in a big way. As the former Ministerial Aide for Youth to former Premier McNeil and now Critic for Youth, I believe that's an important thing for me to stand on my feet in this House and reiterate. To bring light to, and to try and encourage, through amendments such as the one we are looking at tonight and perhaps more amendments down the road, that the presence of youth is considered.

As my uncle said when I was first seeking election - he got up and nominated me. He's a much more eloquent speaker than me, so I led with him and it seemed to work out well. Thank you, Woody, if you're watching. I'm sure you're not but that's fine too. He said that the House would not be best represented with 51 people who were Ben's age, who were my age, which I totally agree with.

That is the unique thing about democracy, that every House, every legislature, every team that comes through this door, from all sides of the Legislature, we're all unique. We have a unique collective experience.

In my case, I guess the longer I'm here, the longer I risk not being one of the youngest members in the House, so I'll say that carefully. What I brought to the table was a voice for young people, and I still make an effort to bring that presence.

When there are scenarios where we as an opposition are confronted and conflicted about whether or not to support or oppose the policies, the rules, the regulations that our government proposes, we have to take every opportunity that we can to offer amendments such as this. Whether it's the entire composition of the House, the entire composition of our respective caucuses, the different departments that are out there that respective ministers are responsible for, or as we're brought to the table to discuss tonight, the Office of the Speaker, we need to ensure that that office is a sincere reflection of the different experiences, circumstances, perspectives, situations.

Whether it comes from different socio-economic backgrounds, from the private sector, from health care, from law, from student government, from small business - we need to make sure that offices like the Office of the Speaker are ones that not only us, but all Nova Scotians can see themselves in.

As a former, though briefly, Minister of the Public Service Commission, I know that there is a mandate within that organization to ensure that our collective offices do reflect the diversity that exists throughout our province. It is a sincere hope and desire that we as a Legislature can continue practices such as that. I do have to give kudos to Public Service Commissioner Andrea Anderson, who has spent her career ensuring that there is a place throughout our collective Public Service for people from all backgrounds.

I know that philosophically all members of the Legislature appreciate that lead, appreciate that sentiment. But unless we're taking it upon ourselves, as I have said before, to be intentional about the structures that we set up because we as legislators are the ones who have the opportunity to do this. We all go through our respective processes, through nominations, some contested, some not so much. We all have to go out into our communities and meet as many people as we can, solicit that feedback, build that trust and those relationships in such a way that we're able to acquire the information that gives us the perspective to come to this House and to debate circumstances such as what we're doing tonight.

As a member of the Opposition, I value the opportunity to stand and ask questions about the government's rationale for certain policies. I value the opportunity to debate amendments and motions such as the one that my honourable colleague for Fairview-Clayton Park introduced this evening. A considerate contrast, I would say, to the government's motion to create a lopsided scenario in the Speaker's Office that I know they were opposed to while their position was on this side of the House.

We've often had the opportunity in the House to get up and speak to things that perhaps may be observed as not so consequential, but in this case, as we debate the composition of a nonpartisan organizational arm of our collective democracy, we have to acknowledge that very consequential things are very possible as a result of how we comprise the Office of the Speaker. Which composition of positions - I make that distinction for members - we choose to complement the role of the Speaker.

It may seem futile to be debating on the floor of the Legislature about whether it's more important for there to be three members to support the Speaker individually, whether it's five members, whether it's seven, 10. Maybe it's one. It may seem futile to be doing that, but it is important, and it is a centre point from which we as members get to do our job.

I've always felt, be it through Speaker Murphy, the Speaker from Victoria-The Lakes, the various cast of supporting members from all parties over the course of my 10 years in office, that regardless of whether I agreed or perhaps disagreed - which, frankly, is not what is collectively important, or what is important as it pertains to the administration of the duties of the Speaker's Office. I've always felt that my place in this House was available. It was safe. It was a place where I could come and be supported, whether it's by one or three or four deputy speakers. I felt that my role as an MLA could be enabled because of the supporting cast that we have in the Speaker's Office.

I know I say that, and it is important to highlight and acknowledge and pay attention to the fact that, though I am a younger member of the House and that comes with its pros and cons, it's not the same as - I am a white man.

Preferably, to ensure that the composition of that Office of the Speaker represents the interests and creates that scenario for all Nova Scotians, where they can come to the table, and they can run for office. They can get on their feet in this place as a representative of their communities - regardless of where they came from and regardless of what opportunities they did or did not have through their upbringing, what experiences they have - to lend themselves to the legislative process.

We create opportunities through the work that we do in this House, such as this particular amendment and ensuring that the institution of Province House, the Nova Scotia House of Assembly is a place that reflects the very diverse population that we have throughout the province in our respective communities.

[10:45 p.m.]

As everyone is well aware, we have a growing population, which makes it ever more important that we be intentional in circumstances like this. As my colleague for Bedford South alluded to earlier, he and I represent border communities that are amongst some of the most diverse in the province.

We have a government that seeks to be intentional about continuing on the success of our government and previous governments to increase the population here in Nova Scotia. Increasing the population of Nova Scotia, and the work that we've done for the past decade or more, that's inspiring people to come here.

The institutions that we have in this province are ones that receive global acknowledgement. You look at the International Decade for People of African Descent and the plan that was initiated here in Nova Scotia, because of not only our commitment to diversity but our collective ability to rally around a positive cause and try to create change.

We need to continue to punch above our weight, and it starts with circumstances that again may seem relatively futile like the one we're faced with today around the composition of the supporting cast of the Speaker's Office.

As I know all members of this House would, if asked, would testify to it. Folks in the Legislature would testify to it, that Nova Scotia is a place that not only does but has to punch above its weight. We are one of the, by number, smallest places in the nation, so we have to act as leaders all the time. We have to act proudly all the time. We have to create a culture in all levels of government - municipal, provincial, and extend it to our colleagues at the federal level - we need to be intentional about boasting about Nova Scotia as a big player in the big scheme of things.

That ability does not happen for us if we cannot come to terms, reasonable terms, on the very institutions that govern our ability to make decisions to deploy the tools that enhance our ability to punch above our weight. When we debate a resolution such as this and disagree with the government about their perspective on how to enhance this office and we offer an amendment such as this, that provides a reasonable compromise, that provides an opportunity for democracy to enable the compromise, we do so as a starting point for enabling our collective, corporate, institutional, departmental abilities to express ourselves not only to the people who are our neighbours, our friends, our family, the people we represent, not only those people who expect us to be here and have these conversations, these constructive conversations, but far-reaching.

We have a role to play, as legislators, to enable the best-case scenario for our departments and our businesses to tell their story far beyond the walls, the metaphorical walls, of our province here in Nova Scotia.

As I've tried to draw a line to it, I think that if we don't take it upon ourselves to take advantage of circumstances such as the one we're faced with this evening, then we are not doing the role that is expected of us by our constituents. We are not giving ourselves the strongest possible opportunity to, as I've said, punch above our weight. Anything short of standing here and sweating through an hour of debate is, frankly, unacceptable when we're talking about something as important as our shared - I say that very explicitly - our shared ability to come to this House to advocate for our constituents in such a way that empowers us as a collective to brag about Nova Scotia, to enhance Nova Scotia.

I know that we've all thought about why we get elected and why we come to this House, and at times have felt perhaps a little discouraged about not being able to achieve something in particular, but it is truly important that if we walk away feeling perhaps discouraged about not being able to achieve something on behalf of our constituents in particular, that we have at least enabled a work environment in this House that does enable us to come to the table and have the conversation in a meaningful way, and not walk away from the House feeling discouraged because there was inequity that was enabled here, there was inequality that exists, be it for partisan, representative, whatever meetings.

In closing, I do want to thank our Clerks' Office for their support over these long hours and for their sage advice on impacting and supporting the supporting cast of our Speaker's Office and our deputy speakers, whom I would end with submitting that we are so impressed by the work that you are doing. Though we do not always agree with the decisions that come down the pipe, we respect the Chair, we respect the people who are doing the work, and I appreciate the opportunity to have this discussion.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I just want to stand in my place in support of this amendment. Clearly, we've heard a lot of our colleagues here quite eloquently describe why this resolution is a bad idea. I don't want to repeat everything that's been said here tonight, but it has been quite moving.

On the government side, I say that I've yet to really hear a reason why this resolution should go forward other than it's to support the two deputy speakers we have in place right now because of the workload, and to make sure that there's somebody to sit in that position when they are unavailable. If that's the case, then this resolution actually does do what the government is trying to accomplish, and it is doing it by protecting the democracy of this institution by allowing it to come forward to a vote.

If the government is prepared to stand up and make a strong argument as to why this resolution doesn't meet what they are trying to accomplish, I'm ready to listen, but I think, honestly, we have two excellent deputy speakers, historic appointments. I have the fortune to be on this side, to have those conversations with them and see what it means to this institution and to our community.

[11:00 p.m.]

There are only two ways to look at this: Either it's actually to try to help or support the Speaker we have, or they're trying in a roundabout way to diminish what these two deputy speakers have brought to this Chamber, and that, I find, is extremely sad.

I say that. I hope the government really reconsiders this resolution but considers supporting this amendment. I do think if they really want to think about it, it does accomplish their rationale for bringing this motion forward. With that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the Liberal amendment to Resolution No. 385 do now carry.

There has been a request for a recorded vote.

We will ring the bells until the Whips are satisfied.

[11:01 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The Clerk will now conduct a recorded vote.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[11:56 p.m.]

YEAS

Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Gary Burrill
Hon. Tony Ince
Hon. Ben Jessome
Ali Duale
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin
Braedon Clark
Ronnie LeBlanc
Fred Tilley

NAYS

Hon. Brad Johns
Hon. Tory Rushton
Hon. Barbara Adams
Hon. Kim Masland
Hon. Allan MacMaster
Hon. Karla MacFarlane
Hon. John Lohr
Hon. Timothy Halman
Hon. Steve Craig
Dave Ritcey
Hon. Brian Wong
Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek
Hon. Brian Comer
Hon. Colton LeBlanc

Hon. Jill Balser
Trevor Boudreau
Hon. Greg Morrow
Hon. Becky Druhan
Chris Palmer
John. A. MacDonald
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
John White
Danielle Barkhouse
Tom Taggart
Nolan Young
Kent Smith

THE CLERK: For, 9. Against, 27.

THE SPEAKER: The amendment is defeated.

We've reached the hour of adjournment. The House will reconvene tomorrow at 1:00 p.m.

We are adjourned.

[The House rose at 11:59 p.m.]