



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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First Session

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2022

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2022

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

9:00 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Keith Bain

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Angela Simmonds, Lisa Lachance

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

We'll begin with the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I am tabling a document with regard to a member's statement I plan to do later this day.

THE SPEAKER: The paper is tabled.

As Speaker of the House of Assembly, pursuant to Section 33(7) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and Section 4(3) of the Privacy Review Officer Act, and Section 93B of the Personal Health Information Act, I am tabling the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia's *2021-2022 Annual Report*, and *Accountability for the Digital Age: Modernizing Nova Scotia's Access and Privacy Laws, June 2017* special report.

The reports are tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Gaelic Affairs.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: The celebration of Halloween is rooted in the Gaelic tradition of Samhain. It marked the end of the harvest and the beginning of Winter. It was also a time when pre-Christian beliefs held that the boundary between this world and the next, the spirit world, was quite thin.

For the early Christians, Samhain was an opportunity to explain Christian belief in the afterlife and it is why we see All Saints' Day celebrated on November 1st and All Souls' Day celebrated on November 2nd, just after Oidhche Shamhna. It is why in Gaelic culture there is a strong faith and belief in Christianity but also a strong belief in the supernatural.

The late Gary MacDonald of Queensville was a man of faith, a Gaelic speaker, and a step dancer. He and his wife Lorraine raised nine children. He was a member of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada. He helped to counsel many who suffered with addictions. He could see and hear dead people. Some people would say that is foolish talk, how convenient - but what if you had no choice in the matter?

I heard about him, and our paths crossed years later. Of course, I was interested in this, and in the culture that I grew up in, there's nothing foolish about it. If you had not had an experience yet yourself, just wait.

I asked Gary about it. He first described it as kind of a curse, but he suddenly corrected that and said, "It was a gift, I suppose." It was not something he ever asked for. He said that experiences would occur more frequently at certain times of the year - at Christmas, at Easter. He recalled hearing a man speaking Gaelic - and Gary could speak Gaelic himself - and this man was obviously under some duress about something. Sometimes it would be a sign - a photo falling over repeatedly for no reason.

I asked if there were places that were touched by events of the past, and he described those places like a biker bar: If you hang around long enough, trouble will find you.

Well, one night, trouble found Gary. He was driving down the Long Stretch Road and up ahead he sees this woman staring into his eyes. As he gets closer, he gets very emotionally charged by this. She is giving him an awful look. He drove past, but there was no one there in the rear-view mirror.

Troubled by it all, he went to see the priest, Father John Angus Rankin, who said, "You have to go back there. You have to find out what she wants."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I could spend an afternoon telling you stories about Father John Angus. It's never talked about, but in every diocese there's an exorcist priest, and Father John Angus was that priest. If he were still around, I'm sure each of you in here could pick at least one other member in the Chamber here that you could put him to work on. (Laughter) I digress.

Chi sibh spioradan - Ach chan eil comas bruidhinn aca - mura bruidhinn sibhse riutha an toiseach. Spirits can appear, but they cannot speak to you unless you first give them permission by speaking to them. The spirit is not at rest. That is why they are appearing: They are seeking help.

Reluctantly, Gary got back in his van and started back to reach out to the spirit. He got out of the van and started to say the Rosary, as any good Catholic would do. Almost immediately, a bolt of lightning struck by the roadside where she had appeared. I found that to be a bit unbelievable, Mr. Speaker, but when you're hearing a story first-hand from somebody who's experienced it, it's more believable.

You can bet it didn't take long for him to get back in the van. When he returned to Father John Angus, he was told that whatever it was was malevolent, and nothing could be done to bring peace to the soul. So I asked Gary what he thought it all meant, and he told me, "Bha I cur na droch shuil." She was giving him the evil eye.

He told me that back in the old country, there were the old pre-Christian beliefs, hundreds of years old, that still survive today. Not all of them were bad, but the evil eye was a bad one. Gary felt that this woman followed a path into the next world where she chose to condemn rather than to forgive, and because of that, and because she continued to choose that, she could not be helped.

Gary was a good person. The kind demeanour of his large family was just one mark he left on this side. He is remembered today as we approach Oidhche Shamhna, Halloween, a time of year when the spirit world is most close to us, unless you had a gift like Gary had.

Now, don't let this story bother you. If you're driving back home to your constituency some night and you're by yourself in the car, don't think something like this could happen to you. It's just foolish talk, right?

[Thunder sound effect in the Chamber.]

With that, Mr. Speaker, Beannachdan na Samhna oirbh uile. Happy Halloween. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect. Are you going to try to top that one?

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I appreciate the minister letting me know about this so I can contact somebody whom I know who can actually speak Gaelic at home in Mabou. I want to thank Kenneth MacKenzie, my cousin, for providing some remarks for me.

This is a ghost story from Mabou called “A Forerunner From Mabou,” and I’ll do my best to speak a little bit of Gaelic.

Uair a bha siud, bha teaghlach nan suidhe anns a' chidsin. Chua la iad fuaim shuas an staidhre - "brag!" Ruith I fhein suas ach cha robh sian ann. Uine as deidh sin, bha stoirm mhor ann. Bha iad a-rithist nan suidhe sa chidsin. Bha gnog aig an dorus. Bha te ann, 's thuir i gun robh tubaist dhona ann agus a duine ann an eiginn.

Ruith bean an taighe shuas an staidhre gus plaide fhaighinn, dh'fhosga il i ciste aig cas na leaba, agus thoisich I mach an t -seombar. Direach an uairsin, chuala i fuaim mhor ' " brag", le mullach na ciste a' tuiteam sìos. 'Se an dearbh fuaim a bh' ann, agus bha fios aca an uair sin gun do chaochail an duine, agus gur e manadh a bh' ann.

In English: At one time there was a family sitting around the table in their kitchen. They heard a loud sound upstairs: bang. The woman of the house ran upstairs to investigate, but there was nothing to be seen.

A good while after that, there was a bad storm. They were again sitting in their kitchen and there was a knock at the door. There was a young lady there saying that there had been a car accident down the road and her husband was in dire need of help.

The woman of the house ran upstairs to get some blankets, opened the old chest at the foot of the bed, got them and turned to leave. Just then she heard a loud sound as the lid of the chest slammed shut: bang. It was the same sound they heard weeks earlier. They all knew at that moment it had been a forerunner and that the man in the accident had died. Thank you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I’m happy to stand, and I want to thank the minister for his comments. That evil eye reminds me of the story of the Long Bog on

Prospect Road, but I'm not going to tell that story today. We had a lady with the evil eye in Prospect.

I wanted to tell another story. A few nights ago, I was walking across the MacDonald Bridge after a late night in the Legislature. It was engulfed in fog - it's been a very foggy week. When you get up on the bridge and you're in the fog, it's called the Bridge to Nowhere.

So I was walking along and all of a sudden, I saw ahead of me, this form in the fog appearing to me. As I got closer, and I was a little bit frightened, I realized that it was a figure of a woman, and she was reaching out to me with a bloodied hand. She was trying to hand me something. I was scared, but no more scared than I am generally in this House on any given day. (Laughter)

I reached out and I tried to grab what she was handing me. It was clear that she was sending me some kind of message. As I reached, the thing that she was trying to hand me dropped onto the pavement on the bridge, and the fog just went away, and she went away. But I brought what she dropped. It seemed to be some kind of a letter.

Once I'd read what was on this, I realized that the person I had seen was the ghost of Dr. Helen Creighton. It wasn't that unusual that I would see a ghost around Halloween, as the minister explained - especially of Dr. Helen Creighton. She was a great collector of ghost stories in Nova Scotia, and she lived in Dartmouth. Maybe she hangs around the MacDonald Bridge. I don't know. I'm just going to share with you what she shared with me. It says here:

“My own town of Dartmouth is not immune to ghostly visitations, but again I must be careful not to give the location away. Mrs. Hirtle said, ‘I lived in a house in Dartmouth when I was fifteen or sixteen. It was built on a hillside and had a basement kitchen and dining room, both above ground’” - not unlike the Leader of the NDP's home, I might add.

““One day we were in the dining-room, father, mother, a visitor, and I, and I heard what sounded like a breathing just beside me. It frightened me so that I ran to my father and he thought I was crazy, but my mother stood holding the teapot in her hand and said, ‘Did you see that?’ She and the young man who was visiting had both seen it. This was a man without a head standing right behind me. We learned later that a pedlar was supposed to have been murdered in that house.””

That's the end of Mrs. Hirtle; now, this is back to Dr. Creighton:

“I was fortunate” - Dr. Creighton - “was fortunate in knowing a man in the town who had lived there until his marriage . . . He had never heard of a headless man being seen, but he said there was one room where it was impossible to sleep. Sounds were heard and he has slept there himself when not only the bedclothes were taken off, but the bedspring itself would be lifted up off the bed. The family closed it off and it was never used again for any purpose while he was there.”

“There is another house in the same vicinity where a sailor got into trouble one night and had his eyes gouged out. He left in the utmost agony and fell over a bank and was killed. For years, according to our Dartmouth historian Dr. John Martin, his agonizing cries could be heard and from that time on, there were strange and unaccountable noises in the house.”

[9:15 a.m.]

I will table that. (Laughter and applause)

THE SPEAKER: Maybe we could just adjourn the House. Everybody's too scared. (Laughter) Thank you all very much for that. It's becoming a tradition in the House the last while, I think, to have the stories, especially with the honourable member for Inverness. He started this whole thing, so we can all blame it on him. It certainly changes the atmosphere in the building, let's put it that way. There are times that it could be pretty tense in here, but this is the lighter side of it, so thank you all.

Any other Statements by Ministers? (Laughter)

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 473

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

Whereas Nova Scotia's long-term care sector has achieved many significant accomplishments, and there are thousands of people working in it who are committed to exceptional care, innovation, advocating for and growing the sector, diversity, inclusion, collaboration, and excellent leadership; and

Whereas Long Term Care Awards of Excellence were awarded to six individuals and teams that exemplify these exceptional qualities by the Nursing Homes of Nova Scotia Association at its inaugural gala on October 26th; and

Whereas Georgette Decoste from Oakwood Terrace, GEM Health Care Group, Windsor Elms Village and Equilibrium Engineering, Nanette Velasco from Evergreen Home for Special Care, Dr. Naomi Black from Parkstone Enhanced Care, and Dion Moulant-Pettipas from Ocean View Continuing Care Centre received awards recognizing their excellence in leadership, diversity, innovation, and advocacy;

Therefore, be it resolved that all members of this House recognize these four individuals and two teams for their outstanding commitment to the people they care for and their contributions to our province, and congratulate them on receiving Long Term Care Awards of Excellence.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of motion 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?

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 474

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

Whereas the Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council is celebrating its 30th anniversary as the key fisheries, human resources, and training organization in the province of Nova Scotia, and has been an excellent partner to our department over the years on a number of initiatives; and

Whereas the sector council has helped form Fish Safe NS and played a leadership role in establishing the Fish Harvesters Registration and Certification Board of Nova Scotia; and

Whereas the Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council successfully administers the department's Team Seafood Nova Scotia Pilot Bursary Program, which introduces students to the seafood industry as a rewarding career while helping to contribute to their advanced education costs;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Legislature recognize the Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council on their 30 successful years helping to equip the industry with human resources needed to bring locally produced seafood to the tables of Nova Scotians and markets of the world, while contributing to the safety of the workers and economy of our province.

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.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 238 – Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 31 of the Acts of 1996, the Sales Tax Act. (Hon. Iain Rankin)

Bill No. 239 – Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 70 of the Acts of 1938, An Act to Incorporate the Amherst Curling Club. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

BOWEN, SGT. TYSON (RET'D): DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: I rise today to honour the life of Retired Sergeant Tyson Matthew Bowen, age 35, of Lorne, Pictou County.

Tyson was a proud soldier who began his military career in 2005 with the 1st Battalion, Nova Scotia Highlanders. He became a valued member of 2RCR, the 2nd Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment, serving 15 years in the Canadian Armed Forces. He quickly rose through the ranks from rifleman to section commander.

Tyson served two combat tours in Afghanistan in 2007 and 2010. Several years after his return home, Tyson was diagnosed with PTSD. His wounds were not visible but instead were in his memory and heart.

Tyson founded Real Canadian Recreation, a veteran's retreat in Pictou County. His vision was to develop a therapeutic, eco-friendly park where other veterans who struggled with PTSD could find healing and empowerment. He was the rock of many of his comrades as they leaned on him. He was a devoted husband to his Jenna Marie, and he was a loving father to Amelia and Sadie.

I ask all members to join in a moment of silence to honour Retired Sergeant Tyson Matthew Bowen.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

LIBERAL LEADER: 12 YRS. AS MLA - RECOG.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to note that yesterday marked the day 12 years ago when my colleague, the member for Yarmouth, first took his seat in the House. That's a dozen years. We actually just looked at a picture from that day, and boy, we both looked a lot younger, I have to say. I will note that the member was still wet behind the ears. I think I was the Whip at the time, or maybe I was caucus Chair and then I became the Whip. Part of my job was to keep him in line. He's still here, so I figure I did my job.

He has gone on to serve his fourth term in the House. He has gone on to serve as the minister of a variety of departments - Natural Resources, Municipal Affairs, Education and Early Childhood Development, and Health and Wellness come to mind. I just want to wish him a dozen more years in this House, but perhaps back on the other side.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

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

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'm going to introduce my youngest son Sam, who joins me today in the gallery. He came because he heard there were going to be ghost stories, and he wore a handmade T-shirt of a muscle car to honour also the minister who brought our ghost stories to the House. Maybe he'll let him sit in his sweet ride later. Who knows? (Laughter)

MLA FAMILIES : SUPPORT – RECOG.

On a more serious note, I do want to rise and say that as always, these legislative sittings are taxing on our families, our support systems and the people who love us. I know that's true for the outside members, but it's also true for us who live closer to this building. So I just want to take a moment and thank Sam; his sisters, Molly and Anna; my husband, Jamie; and my mother. Thank you to all those members of all of our families who pick up the slack when we are in here sometimes doing really great work and other times trying to do really great work. Thank you for welcoming Sam to the House, and thank you to all of our families.

THE SPEAKER: I want to make you very welcome here, Sam. It's good to see you. You're going to see your mother misbehave every once in a while.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

GOUDEY, BOB & KELLI & ROB: BASEBALL EVENT PARTIC. - THANKS

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Bob, Kelli, and Rob Goudey, a Dartmouth East baseball family.

Over the Summer, Dartmouth East was host to the U22 Canadian Men's National Baseball tournament. Bob and Kelli undertook a significant role in planning and hosting the tournament while Rob was the head coach of the Dartmouth Renegades. Over the first weekend in August, Bob and Kelli, as well as their many volunteers, welcomed eight teams and the large crowds who came out to see the games at Beazley Fields. Due to the hard work put in by the Goudey family, the U22 Canadian Men's National Baseball tournament was a huge success.

On behalf of Dartmouth East, I would like to thank them for all their time in preparing for this event, and also congratulate them on their success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

ELDRIDGE, PETER: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to honour the life and acknowledge the passing of one of Yarmouth's best-known citizens, Mr. Peter

Eldridge. Peter recently passed away at the age of 89. He was a teacher and vice-principal to generations of students for many years. He was known as a thoughtful and supportive teacher and administrator who always wanted to see the students do their very best.

[9:30 a.m.]

Peter was also a dedicated volunteer in our community for many organizations, and worked with his wife Mary to establish the Yarmouth area community fund, which was created to improve our community's quality of life by supporting the social needs of the area, including education, culture, the arts, health, heritage, sport, recreation, the environment, and people in need.

I ask this House to join me in sending condolences to Mary, who was Peter's wife for over 60 years; his children Susan and Brian and their families; and all of Peter's family and friends. He was a shining light for many in our community. He will be deeply missed, but his legacy will live on in the hearts and minds of all those whose lives he touched.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

MAR. CONSERV. OF PERF. ARTS: 135TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

GARY BURRILL: I wish to express the congratulations of this House to the Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts on Chebucto Road, in the heart of the peninsula, on the occasion of the conservatory's 135th anniversary, marked September 15th.

Since 1887, the conservatory has provided quality education in both music and dance, with an enrolment that has often exceeded 1,000. The conservatory marks amongst its distinguished alumni: contralto Portia White; soprano Sheila Piercey; tenor John Arab, cellist Denise Djokic; violinist Ingrid Matheson; and singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan. It continues to offer quality and accessible music and dance instruction through private and group lessons, as well as music therapy, Kindermusik, and other programs.

One hundred and thirty-five years as a central and continuing part of the landscape of arts education and appreciation in Nova Scotia, I am sure that all members of the House will agree, is an achievement worthy of real celebration.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

BURNES, GEOFFREY: SPEC. OLYMP. PERF. - CONGRATS.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take an opportunity to congratulate Geoffrey Burnes of Mount Uniacke on his achievements at the Special Olympics Provincials that were held at St. F.X. University in July. Geoff and his team won gold in bocce.

Geoff has been involved in Special Olympics over 15 years now. He has competed at national levels and in 2020 at the Special Olympics Canada Winter Games that were held in Thunder Bay.

I personally know Geoff, who has helped me DJ Special Olympics Bowling Tournaments over the years, and I'll certainly tell you that he is one heck of a great dancer.

I'd like to congratulate Geoff on his success at Special Olympics Provincials and wish him all the best of luck in his future accomplishments.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

ROY, WILLIAM DOUGLAS: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: On September 19th William Douglas Roy, better known as Doug, passed away at the age of 48. Doug attended Dalhousie and had a successful career, including Director of the Mining Association.

Doug met the love of his life, Becky, at age 18 and they were side by side for the next 30 years. They were best friends and had three beautiful children - Patrick, Megan, and Olivia.

Mr. Speaker, Patrick, Megan, and Olivia could not have asked for a better father and role model. Doug was an amazing husband, father, and friend to many.

Rest in peace, Doug. To Becky and his kids, we love you, and the community will always be there for you.

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

WILBY, DR. KYLE: ADVOCACY FOR 2SLGBTQI+ PATIENTS - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, one of the most important parts of health care is the support provided in the community by pharmacists. As a professor of pharmacy, Dr. Kyle Wilby, at Dalhousie since 2021, knows that some communities face more barriers than others to equitable and non-discriminatory health care. He is a champion for the rights of 2SLGBTQI+ patients and makes this known through his research, advocacy, and teaching.

He has helped lead several projects around the world on modernizing pharmacy curriculum to be more representative of a contemporary range of patients, ensuring that gender and sexual diversity remain at the forefront, not only in teaching but also in curriculum development, assessment, evaluation, and optimizing student learning environments.

The Dalhousie College of Pharmacy's modernized curriculum was his most recent challenge, just after he modernized the curriculum at the University of Otago in New Zealand, for which he won an Excellence in Teaching Award.

I ask my fellow members to join me in recognizing Dr. Wilby's efforts to improve and enrich students' learning experiences.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

VOLUNS.: SHEL.B. WHIRLIGIG FEST. - RECOG.

NOLAN YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the volunteers and participants in the Shelburne Whirligig and Weathervane Festival held on September 17th and 18th. For over 20 years, this unique festival has been held on the Shelburne waterfront, located on the third best natural harbour in the world.

Visitors enjoyed a variety of beautiful, hand-built whirligigs and weathervanes created by local artists from across our province and further afield. They also had the opportunity to vote for their favourite pieces from many categories. Participants also had the opportunity to participate in several workshops, allowing adults and children to try their hand at building a whirligig or weathervane.

I respectfully ask all members of this House of Assembly to join me in recognizing another successful Whirligig and Weathervane Festival in Shelburne.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

CLAYTON, LINDA: CONST. ASST. WORK - RECOG.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and give a shoutout to one of my CAs, Ms. Linda Clayton, who is celebrating her birthday today. She has been with me since I started, and she is an amazing support. What we call her in the office is the Fairy Godmother who saves us and teaches us.

One thing that I have to say is that I'm extremely thankful for her coordinated outfits and stilettos that she wears daily because at least once a month, I get a new wardrobe from her. She's known in the office for her famous saying, "I can't even, Angela. I can't even."

Linda, enjoy your trip to P.E.I. as you watch your son play basketball. Celebrate and have a wonderful weekend and I will see you Monday, my friend.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis. I'm sorry, I'm jumping the gun here.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

WORKER PROTECTIONS: INADEQUATE – RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still love you.

Mr. Speaker, in my community of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier and across Nova Scotia, workers want to see more health and safety protections for workers - workers in low-wage jobs especially. Government does not do enough to support and provide these protections.

Workers making minimum wage deserve 10 paid sick days, as do other workers. The government must extend labour standards to all workers currently exempt, and proactively enforce these standards. Workers in my area and across Nova Scotia deserve more coverage for statutory holidays, additional paid vacations and leave to cover personal time.

Mr. Speaker, workers deserve better.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

WHARF RAT RALLY: RETURN IN 2022 - CONGRATS.

HON. JILL BALSER: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to congratulate the return of the Wharf Rat Rally.

In early September, Digby celebrated the 2022 Wharf Rat Rally after a two-year pause due to COVID-19. It could not have happened without the efforts of countless volunteers, organizers, and sponsors. The streets were full of bikes, vendors, and many locals and visitors having a great time.

I had the pleasure of attending some events at the rally this year, which included participating in a Uria's Globe of Death. As scary as it may seem, it's one of the most popular events at the rally - watching daredevil stunts performed by professionals in a 16-foot diameter globe. I even had the chance to stand in the middle of the globe while the bikes spun around me.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of the Legislature share a round of applause to congratulate the Wharf Rat Rally Motorcycle Association on all their success this year. I look forward to seeing everyone at the 2023 Wharf Rat Rally.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

HFX. DRIVING SCHOOL: DRIVER EDUC. - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge the team of skilled professionals who run the Halifax Driving School.

The instructors at the Halifax Driving School are patient, experienced, and are amazing teachers. They have helped many community members to gain confidence and obtain a driving license.

Mr. Speaker, instructors and services like the Halifax Driving School play an essential part in keeping our roads safe and our drivers responsible.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

SUZ HANSEN: I would like to introduce my three littlest ones. They're up in the West Gallery. They've been here before and they enjoy coming into the House. Today's a PD Day, as we all know, so I have Sijora on the end, Sage in the middle, and Syvaya on the other end. Welcome, you guys. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Indeed, we welcome all visitors to the Legislature. You'll be seeing your mother misbehave today too.

The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

VOLUNS.: ABC MEMBERS - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize all Nova Scotians who take time out of their days to be a part of agencies, boards, and commissions.

ABCs are created to provide advice and services in different areas consisting of advisory committees, councils, corporate boards, and adjudicative bodies. Being a part of an ABC allows you to help shape your communities. As a volunteer, you all impact the future of our province, and you make a positive difference in the lives of your neighbours.

As a member of ABCs, your passion for your community and your expertise is valuable and is important. I would like to acknowledge that here in this House.

I would like all members of this House to help me recognize and thank the volunteer work of all Nova Scotians who put their names forward to sit on the ABCs of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

NURSE RECRUITMENT: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I rise today to draw attention to the ongoing need to recruit registered nurses to work in hospitals in Cumberland County and, in fact, across the entire province.

During the last election campaign, this government's platform very much focused on improving the delivery of health care - which, unfortunately, there is very little evidence of. Another election promise was to move decision-making back to local areas again, and again there's little indication that this is happening. A prime example of how these two promises remain unfulfilled are the fact that many nursing staff vacancies at Nova Scotia Health Authority facilities exist.

I call upon the government to once again allow all regional hospitals the flexibility to advertise, recruit, and hire the needed staff for jobs in their local area without the need to involve Nova Scotia Health Authority's human resource hierarchy at the zone or provincial level.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MEISTER, GUY: DONATIONS TO PORT-AUX-BASQUES - THANKS

CHRIS PALMER: As we've heard from many other members of the legislature, countless Nova Scotians stepped up in the wake of Hurricane Fiona to offer their support. Guy Meister of Aylesford is another one of those who stood up for his fellow man.

Guy contacted his neighbours, friends, and local businesses, and within a few hours had a truck and trailer loaded with generators, building materials, socks, footwear, locally-milled lumber, ladders, numerous cases of nails, a generous supply of tools, and even some local apples to donate to the people of Port Aux Basques, Newfoundland.

Many others offered gas cards to help Guy cover the cost of his transportation. When Guy arrived, he didn't take his donations to drop off at centres. He drove around to the harder-hit areas and personally let the people know what he had available. He encountered a senior who managed to save his home, but his shed and tools were taken out to sea. Guy gave him enough lumber, metal siding, roofing, screws, and nails to build a new one. He didn't have enough tools, so Guy gave him a table saw, skill saw, hammers, square level, measuring tape, and more.

I ask members of this Legislature to join me in thanking Guy for his selfless acts and for helping those in need.

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

O'BOYLE, PAUL: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Today I stand to recognize a dedicated volunteer and true gentleman. Paul O'Boyle served in the Canadian Forces for over 30 years, and upon retirement, he continues to serve the veteran community through organizations such as the Royal Canadian Navy Benevolent Fund, the Royal Canadian Legion Somme Branch, and the Last Post Fund.

Paul's superb leadership, outreach, and can-do attitude have contributed to their success both locally and provincially. For example, his efforts related to the Royal Canadian Navy Benevolent Fund and Last Post Fund have had a direct and positive impact by ensuring the continuity of loans, grants, and funeral services to indigent veterans. When not involved with veterans, Paul often delivers food hampers to needy members of his community via the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Mr. O'Boyle is a dedicated, compassionate, and consummate volunteer within his community, and consequently, he is highly deserving of the recognition in this House today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage on an introduction.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: I beg leave to make an introduction. In the West Gallery behind me, I'd like to welcome Cadets from 18 Dartmouth Lions Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron from Shearwater. I'll ask them all to stand up, please. (Applause)

I know my colleague, the honourable member for Dartmouth East is particularly excited to have them here today. The Cadets is an amazing youth program that instills teamwork, leadership, discipline, and civic duty. I would like to welcome all of these amazing young Nova Scotians, along with their officers, to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to all of you. We hope you enjoy your visit to the legislature today.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

ÉLÈVES: RECIPS. DES PRIX - FÉLICITATIONS

SUSAN LEBLANC: Je me sens très chanceuse que l'École secondaire Mosaïque - l'école francophone de la 9^e à la 12^e année - soit située à Dartmouth Nord.

[9:45 a.m.]

Je prends la parole aujourd'hui pour rendre hommage à plusieurs élèves de l'école qui ont reçu des prix provinciaux et municipaux. Au mois de mai, Mika Armstrong, élève de 9e année, a reçu le Prix de la citoyenneté de la municipalité régionale d'Halifax des mains du maire Mike Savage et du conseiller Tony Mancini. Le Prix de la citoyenneté est décerné aux élèves exceptionnels de 9e année de la municipalité.

Au mois de juin, deux élèves - Anne Savage et Charlotte Smith - ont reçu la Médaille du Lieutenant-gouverneur pour l'éducation lors d'une cérémonie à la résidence de gouvernement. Les écoles nomment les élèves en fonction de leur rendement scolaire, de leur leadership et de leur service à l'école et dans la communauté.

Je demande à l'assemblée de se joindre à moi pour féliciter Mika, Anne, et Charlotte de leurs réalisations à l'école et dans la communauté.

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

1st RIVERDALE SCOUTS: ALPS TRIP - RECOG.

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, it's taken two years and two postponements, but the 1st Riverlake Scouts in Fall River finally made their 10-day excursion to the Swiss Alps. They were joined by 80 other Canadians and over 300 scouts from around the world.

These young scouts, many of whom have never been outside of Canada, earned many badges on their trip. They engulfed themselves in the local culture and history and made memories of a lifetime with each other as well as with other scouts worldwide. This was a wonderful, unforgettable experience for our youth.

Please help me in recognizing the amazing efforts of the 1st Riverlake Scouts in Fall River in teaching valuable life skills to our youth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

BHALLA, SUDESH & SURINDER: BOMBAY BISTRO - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sudesh and Surinder Bhalla for their entrepreneurial spirit. With a desire to share Indian cuisine in Halifax, Sudesh and Surinder opened Bombay Bistro. It's actually in the Rockingham South, a new development of Rockingham South - a beautiful, large restaurant, beautifully decorated, and it can take wonderful large groups as well. Bombay Bistro offers everything from biryani, tikka masala, naan, curries and more.

I congratulate Sudesh and Surinder for realizing their business idea and wish them the utmost success in their future endeavours. I would ask the House to join me in recognizing Sudesh and Surinder for their business success.

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

FRIENDS OF PUB. GARDENS: NEW BENCH - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, almost any Nova Scotian who has had the pleasure of visiting my constituency will know about the beautiful Halifax Public Gardens. The Friends of the Public Gardens are a volunteer board who take charge of the maintenance, care, and promotion of this beautiful site.

They have had a challenging few months. Multiple incidents of vandalism have occurred in the gardens, and some of the oldest trees onsite were rendered unsalvageable. Nonetheless, the gardens continue to evolve.

Earlier this Fall I was honoured to join the Friends, along with the Monarchist Society, to unveil a new bench honouring the 70-year reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues in this Chamber to join me in recognizing the efforts of the Friends of the Public Gardens in one of their more difficult times and wishing them well in their ongoing work to keep this urban sanctuary safe.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on an introduction.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery. We have a host of private child care operators here. I know I speak on behalf of everyone in the House when I say how important the work is that these folks do, particularly for us who have young kids - critical work for not just our families, our economy, our communities, but also for the youngsters themselves - so critical for development and their well-being and growth.

Thank you all so much for the work that you do. I ask the House to join me in welcoming this group here today. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Again, we welcome all visitors to the Legislature. We hope you enjoy your visit.

The honourable member for Lunenburg.

HUTCHINSON, SALLY: MHFNS AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sally Hutchinson and officially congratulate her on being named Outstanding Health Care Provider of the Year by the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia.

Sally has been an integral part of the team at Second Story Women's Centre for nearly 20 years. As a support worker, she offers counselling services to women and gender-oppressed individuals. She believes that true presence and listening deeply can do much to inspire healing. Indeed, Sally would say that her true learning has come from the courage and resourcefulness of the people with whom she sits every day.

Mr. Speaker, it is a true honour to have this opportunity to congratulate Sally on receiving this richly deserved recognition.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

SOUTHWEST STORM: HOCKEY CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, on April 16th the Southwest Storm beat the E.H. Ryson Construction Penguins, winning the best of seven series in the Nova Scotia Junior Regional Hockey League Championships.

This result is particularly noteworthy as this was the first year for the Southwest Storm in this league and the first Junior C hockey team based in Barrington in years. This team's roster included players from every part of my end of the province including Leon Boudreau, Maxime Hanna, Nicholas LeBlanc, Simon Muise, and Nathan Tufts from Clare.

The Southwest Storm's success was possible because of the commitment of the players to their team but special recognition goes to Leon Bouchard who was named to the league's first all-star team.

I ask that all members join me in congratulating the Southwest Storm on winning the Nova Scotia Regional Hockey League Championship. Merci.

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

LIVING WAGE PLAN: TOO SLOW - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, the question asked in the CCPA document entitled *Living Wages in Nova Scotia 2022* is "What does it say about the current minimum wage of \$13.35 when the lowest living wage is over \$20.00?"

The plan to reach a \$15 minimum wage by April 1, 2024 is too slow and too far away for the people living in Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier and all of Nova Scotia. Raising the minimum wage would create a level playing field. A substantial increase to the minimum wage results in more money in the pockets of low-paid workers.

Low-paid workers, when paid a substantial wage, spend virtually every dollar they make to stimulate our economy. Nova Scotians need a raise. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS: NURSE CARE IMPORTANCE - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to focus attention on the need for more trained nurses to assist victims of sexual assault.

If an individual in Cumberland North is a victim of sexual assault, there is a good likelihood that they will be required to travel to either Truro or New Glasgow to meet with a SANE nurse - Sexual Assault Nurse Educator - who has the training and expertise to help them. In many cases, transportation to another location is a barrier to accessing this important care.

To ensure that anyone who is a victim of sexual assault receives proper care, there should be 24/7 dedicated SANE nurse coverage at every regional hospital. At a minimum, at least one nurse with the proper training should be working at every regional emergency department at all times.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. In the West Gallery, you'll see my husband Todd Richard, and my constituency assistant Ashley Imlay with her two beautiful boys, Carter and Hunter. If you guys could stand and give a wave. Welcome. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Hants West.

IMLAY, ASHLEY: CONST. ASST. WORK - THANKS

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to rise today to express my pure gratitude and thanks to my constituency assistant Ashley Imlay.

Ashley came to work for me last January and we immediately formed a bond that has grown into a friendship. She has been a driving force in my office. She is kind,

compassionate, efficient, and always goes above and beyond every single day to help meet the needs of our local residents.

The roles in our offices are not easy ones but Ashley treats everyone she meets with a smile and an offer to assist in any way that she can. I consider us a team. We finish each other's sentences, laugh together, sometimes cry together, and both share the love our community that we are both so very proud of. Ashley is truly a beautiful person inside and out and I do not know how I could do this job without her.

I ask that all the members of the Legislature join me in thanking Ashley and her family from the bottom of my heart for all that she does and for being the glue that keeps me together.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

CARE AND FUN CHILD CARE: COM. SERV. - CONGRATS.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize constituents Hoda and Basma Elhefnawi - Basma is here with us today - the owners and operators of Care and Fun Child Care.

Hoda, Basma, and all of their team at Care and Fun provide a place of fun, love, and care for dozens of children every day, including my daughter Heidi, who is there as we speak, and my son Beau, who spent three years at Care and Fun. Running a daycare is not an easy business, and the last couple of years have been especially busy and complicated as the team adjusts to a new system and operational model. No matter what, I know that Hoda and Basma will continue to educate, entertain, and enrich the lives of the children they care for.

I would ask all members of the House to congratulate and recognize everyone at Care and Fun for the invaluable service they provide for the community and our children.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

NEEDHAM EARLY LEARNING CTR.: CHILD CARE - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to acknowledge the Needham Early Learning Centre. They have been serving the needs of Halifax and neighbouring communities since 1983. Through play, they provide learning opportunities for well-being, discovery, invention, language and communication, and personal and social responsibility, promoting healthy development in a safe and inclusive environment. The staff of this centre love and care for the children as if they were their own.

As we know, child care is essential to our daily living, and ECEs and staff should receive tangible recognition of this critical work and should be paid a living wage.

I would ask all members of this House to join me in acknowledging Needham Early Learning Centre, and I am very proud to say that they are in my riding.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: I beg leave to make an introduction, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, in the West Gallery behind me, I have my favourite people with me here today and wouldn't mind if they stood up.

Here we have with us today my daughter Kate, a local celebrity chef on Kate's Bistro. I encourage you all to take a look at Facebook, and if you're looking for some good recipes, she is the woman for you. I have my son Luke, a musician extraordinaire - fiddle player and piano player. I have my international student - my wife and I have been taking international students for over 10 years, 24 international students. Lilou is with us from Belgium, so she's living with us right now.

Finally, on my left, my rock, and certainly everyone here can appreciate that our partners are incredible in holding us all together. So I would like to acknowledge my wife and how lucky I am. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Once again, welcome to the Legislature.

The honourable member for Annapolis.

RECIPS.: VALLEY'S BEST BUS. AWDS. - RECOG.

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, each year the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce Valley's Best initiative gives residents the opportunity to vote for their favourite business in 25 different categories. Recipients can take great pride in knowing that their efforts are appreciated by so many in their community. The chamber handed out the awards recently, and five business in my constituency were awarded.

Today I would like to take a moment to recognize these businesses: Spurr Brothers Farm won Best Agriculture Business and Best Beverage Business; Training for Life won Best Fitness Club; Neily's Greenhouse and Gardens won Best Horticulture Business; The Pup Shop Pet Services and Daycare won Best Pet Care; and Brown's Auto Salvage Ltd. won Best Automotive.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating these exceptional businesses on receiving the 2022 Valley's Best award and thank them for their contribution to our community.

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

HAYDEN, ERIK: CAN. GAMES MEDAL WIN - CONGRATS.

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a talented young athlete, Erik Hayden.

Erik was Cobequid Educational Centre's Basketball MVP and Male Athlete of the Year in his senior season last year. He graduated from CEC in June and has just begun kinesiology studies at Acadia University.

In August, Erik and his teammates brought home the bronze medal in basketball at the Niagara 2022 Canada Summer Games, where Team Nova Scotia won in a 90 to 83 victory over Alberta. Erik displayed his dedication this summer as he regularly travelled to Halifax for practices while preparing for his post-secondary path and still finding time to practise at home in Truro any time . . .

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

The time is now 10:00 a.m. We'll begin Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers, which will go until 10:50 a.m.

[10:00 a.m.]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: PRIV. DAYCARE CTRS. FUNDING - ACTION

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, it has been over a year since the bilateral child care agreement with the federal government was signed and we are hearing that many private child care centres are actually looking at closing. One of the reasons for this has been the delay in giving out money for wage increases and for sustainable funding and also because there was a very short timeline given for child care operators to sign. Operators were given 30 days to sign a completely new funding formula that could drastically change the whole nature and scope of their business.

When you also consider that parent fees have been frozen and the inflationary pressures that are impacting that sector as well, we cannot afford to lose any more child care centres in this province, or spaces.

Will the Premier please tell the House what the plan is to ensure that our private daycare centres are protected and that there is sustainable funding in place for them?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): I thank the member for this important issue that is on the minds of so many Nova Scotians. Access to affordable child care is front and centre; it is what everyone wants. Obviously, as the member referenced, we are working with our partners in the federal government under a framework that was signed by the former provincial government.

Other provinces had different arrangements but we're working with the arrangement we have. We want to make sure that Nova Scotians have access to affordable child care and we have great respect for those private operators who have been providing this service to communities, for generations in many cases, Mr. Speaker.

We want to work through this. It's a difficult transition, there's no question about that, but we certainly don't want to lose any operators or any spaces in this province.

ZACH CHURCHILL: During our time, when that deal was negotiated, protecting the private daycare operators, child care operators, was absolutely critical because we know that without that sector, we lose thousands of spots in this province, which affects families, which affects those children, which affects our economy overall, and our society.

We need to have a sustainable funding model in place. We need to ensure that a year after this agreement has been signed that that sector gets the support they need so they can stay viable and sustainable in our communities.

THE PREMIER: I absolutely agree that we need to make sure that those operators are viable and sustainable in those communities. That is a focus of ours.

We are working with the arrangement with the federal government. We want to make sure that that works for Nova Scotians, make sure it works for the private operators.

The reality is that the agreement was signed with the federal government. We're working within that framework as best we can. Other provinces did have different arrangements, and there's no benefit in re-litigating that but one thing that would have been good for Nova Scotia is if Nova Scotia would have had follow language that we could have seen what other provinces were able to negotiate and maybe participate in that.

We'll work with the framework we have. We want Nova Scotians to know that access to affordable child care is absolutely what's driving us and we'll continue to make sure that's available to Nova Scotians.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, we all watched the Premier and the Prime Minister take credit and talk about the signing of that agreement that was after the last election. We all watched that on TV as the Premier took credit for this.

Now, a year later, we're seeing that funding has been delayed. We're wondering why. We have child care operators that are closing, including one in Fall River. The Fall River Childcare Centre, which is co-owned by Lindsay Awalt, leaves two dozen children without child care in that community. A local mom, Cindy Duggans, actually said in a news release that she feels the reason why they have to close is because they were mismanaged by the government, and I would love to see some accountability. This was printed on October 6, 2022.

My question to the Premier is: Will the Premier please act and ensure that that funding is released and that private daycare centres and child care centres are protected?

THE PREMIER: I want to make sure that the member knows that this is certainly a priority for our government. These are active files. We're looking for solutions. We don't want to lose child care opportunities, for sure. We want to make sure that every Nova Scotian has access to affordable child care. We're seeing that. There's some good news sprinkled in here and that's in the name of Nova Scotians, but we don't want to lose private operators. We don't want to lose any spaces around this province. We will continue to look for solutions to make sure that we don't.

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

PREM: CHILD CARE ACCESS - ADDRESS

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We know that parents' participation in the workforce, especially women's, is closely tied to the ability to find suitable and affordable child care. One mother in Antigonish, who is struggling to find a space right now, said, "I would like to work full time but I've been staring down the barrel of the gun now of having to quit." I'll table that.

The owner of another daycare related the story of a mother who "was crying, saying if we couldn't take him she'd lose her job." I'll table that. According to them, this conversation is a daily occurrence.

Access to child care is crucial for a healthy workforce and a healthy community, and I'll ask the Premier again: Will he ensure that no more Nova Scotia families have to choose between work and child care?

THE PREMIER: These are heartbreaking situations, and there are other scenarios, too, where people just say it's more financially effective for our family if one doesn't work instead of paying for child care. We know affordability is a big part of the equation. We know access is a big part of the equation. That's why, with the federal government with the framework we have, we're working with the operators of this province to make sure that there is access to affordable child care from one end of this province to the other. That is our only goal.

We're looking at solutions for those situations where there are challenges. We don't want to lose any spaces in this province. We want more.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Unfortunately, it looks like we will be losing spaces. When the Premier and his colleagues formed government and undertook responsibility for the future of this sector, they were well aware that over half of this province's child care providers were privately owned, and that sustaining these child care spaces was essential.

The Canada - Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement explicitly states: "It will be important as we transform our early learning and care system, that we do not destabilize the sector to the point that families no longer have access to care in their community." I'll table that.

We are now hearing that as many as 25 per cent of existing centres will have to soon close their doors. Can the Premier explain why this government has failed to work with their federal counterparts and child care providers to prevent this reality?

THE PREMIER: I'm going to draw the line there. I absolutely do not agree that we have failed to work with the federal government. I absolutely do not agree that we have failed to work with the industry and the sector. There are many discussions going on. Over 200 meetings have happened. Absolutely, it is true that there are some private operators who are looking for specific solutions. We're working with them. There are also many who are happy. I've received many letters from private operators who are delighted - that was the word that was used in one of them - with what's happening here.

We are looking for a solution that cuts across the entire sector, absolutely, for sure. Different situations are unique. We'll work with them. We want solutions. We want access to affordable child care in this province, across the entire province. There are difficult discussions. There are difficult situations. There are unique situations, but I want Nova Scotians to know that our focus is very singular, and that is access to affordable child care for every Nova Scotian.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: One of the main challenges still faced by child care centres is recruiting and retaining early childhood educators due to chronic low wages in the sector. The Canada - Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement

expressly states that the new compensation framework was to use “living wage/self-sufficiency standards as a minimum.” I’ll table that.

Under this government’s new wage scale, most ECEs will still earn below a living wage. Will the Premier adjust the wage scale to ensure that all ECEs will earn a living wage?

THE PREMIER: Wages are a primary focus on this. We know that there are labour shortages across the province. Every sector, every industry, we know that. That’s a national issue as well, so wages are a part of it, for sure. There’s been a lot of discussion in the wage format that’s come forward, for sure.

We’ll look for ways to improve wages and raise the standard of living across this province. That’s a primary goal of our government. The actual wage discussions that have come out in this first round, that’s the result of a number of discussions. I certainly know that we want to make sure that people are properly compensated. Caring for our children is the greatest responsibility in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

EECD: LACK OF COMMUNICATION - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: One of the major concerns that we’re hearing from the child care operators is the lack of communication from the department. In a letter that child care operators sent to the minister, they said that no responsible organizational leader would sign a legal contract without understanding all the impacts and consequences. They were given 30 days to sign this contract, something that would fundamentally change their funding agreement and fundamentally change the actual structure and concept of their businesses - businesses that these folks have put years into developing and creating and serving our communities with.

My question to the Premier is: Why does he think that’s fair, to ask them to sign this contract without the proper level of communication?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I thank the member opposite for the question. One thing that we are incredibly proud of, and that has been really important in the work that we are doing, is the engagement that we are doing with this sector. We’ve stood up a sector engagement table that consists of operators, private and non-profit. This was a table that wasn’t envisioned in the agreement, and it wasn’t addressed in the agreement. This is a table we created.

Not only are operators at the table, but we also have ECEs at the table, academics at that table, and we have parents at that table. We work with that table to understand what

the next steps need to be, and we work with the sector to understand what the next steps need to be.

We have, in the last month, as we've rolled out ECE wages - which that table and the entire sector told us needed to be our first priority - engaged in a variety and multitude of ways with people across the sector.

I can continue and explain to you exactly all the ways that we're engaging with the sector.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, why would the sector be saying otherwise? Please tell me that.

We have private sector operators who are worried about the future of their businesses. We're seeing many of them close. This agreement was signed over a year ago. They've had to wait over a year for disbursement of funds. They have had very little information in terms of what this contract is going to look at. I've talked to some locally here who are like: Do I sign this? We don't know what to do. We don't know what our future holds. We don't know if we'll be able to have control over our organizations anymore. What's going to happen?

Mr. Speaker, this is not acceptable. The sector does deserve the time and attention and proper engagement from this government, and they deserve that money to be dished out as quickly as it possibly can. Otherwise, we are going to lose thousands of spaces in this province, and students, kids and families are going to suffer. Our communities are going to suffer.

Please, will the Premier tell us what the plan is to ensure that that does not happen?

BECKY DRUHAN: So many things in 45 seconds, Mr. Speaker. Let me just talk about the engagement that we're doing to support the operators to deliver this first priority that everyone agreed needed to be first priority.

In the last month, we have had multiple sector conversations. We have had six written communications with the operators. We have hosted multiple calls with hundreds of operators. We have had 250 outreach calls from our consultants. I personally have met, and our team has met with the engagement table. I have spoken with the federal minister. We are wrapping our arms around this sector to understand the steps as we move forward.

Let me also say that the funding agreement that has been rolled out supports the \$100 million investment that we are making in ECE wages to increase wages 14 to 43 per cent. It would be irresponsible of us not to implement an agreement associated with a \$100 million investment.

That is what this agreement is about. We have the supports in place for our operators to understand what it is and to move forward with us together.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

EECD: ECE WAGE FUNDING - CLARIFY

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the minister is celebrating the agreement and the Premier is criticizing the agreement.

Child care operators have been asking the government for more support but have been met with silence. The government has given operators 30 days to sign a new funding model. This funding model doesn't give long-term sustainable funding to operators that addresses their inflation concerns, forcing many operators to close.

A letter from the operators to the minister said: Without a roadmap of what is to come operationally, we will continue to see more centres close due to inflationary pressure, rising wage costs, and simply not having the autonomy to make decisions for our organizations. I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to long-term operational funding that takes the rising cost of inflation into account?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Let me be clear again. The funding that we just rolled out to support increased wages for our ECEs - 14 to 43 per cent, \$100 million funding. The package that we just rolled out and the agreement that we just rolled out support that.

What the member opposite is asking about is a future funding model, and let me say, that is the next step at our engagement table. We are working with the engagement table and the sector to understand the steps as we need to follow them.

I can assure the members opposite that we are supporting the operators with their significant operational pressures right now in terms of wages with that \$100 million investment, and we're going to continue to support them as we move toward a funding model that supports and sustains a sector that has been neglected for decades.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, in the past, 20 per cent of the funding to operators was able to be put into the operational costs of the business, but in the latest agreement put to operators, it is unclear if any of that money will be able to go towards their operational costs.

[10:15 a.m.]

In the past, 20 per cent of wage funding has been allocated to operational expenses. My question to the minister is: Can the minister clarify this as being offered in the new package?

BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, every single dime and grant that the operators previously received, they continue to get. The funding we have provided is in addition to all that.

I'd like to read from a letter that we received from one of the operators about this change, and it says:

“I have had the opportunity to calculate what I will be receiving now with the new wage scale . . . I calculated it twice because I was sure I made a mistake! The new wage scale is beneficial to Centres. For example: we are open 10.5 hours a day and the QIG was limited to 8 hours a day . . . I currently have 10 educators employed at my Centre, with the QIG I only receive funding for 7 educators. The new wage scale and the total allotted hours based on the formula, I will receive funding for all of my educators. For this, I want to thank you for helping to create more cash flow in the Centre to help . . .”

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the member for Timberlea-Prospect I would ask the minister to table that letter, please.

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

EECD: ECE WAGE AGREEMENT - ACTION

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that it has taken over a year for this government to increase wages for ECEs and the department has given operators only 30 days to look at their business model to ensure that they can operate within the deal that is being proposed.

My question to the minister is: Given that it has taken them over a year to act on this file, will they give the sector more than 30 days to come to an agreement?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about what the agreement we inherited says and what we actually did, because the agreement that we inherited called for ECE wages to be increased by the end of this year. We're doing that. We're doing it early and we're doing it retroactive to the middle of the year because that wasn't enough.

I will also say that this government has kicked in an additional \$40 million a year to support those ECE wage increases, because the agreement we inherited didn't get us there. It didn't get us far enough. It did not get us to the point that we needed to be . . . (Interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development has the floor.

BECKY DRUHAN: We're working collaboratively with the federal government, but I can say that the commitment the prior government made to ECE wages would not allow us to deliver 14 per cent to 43 per cent increases, would not allow us to deliver a wage scale that recognizes experience in education.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I am quite aware of the agreement that I signed, which was to protect the private sector and all the existing spaces they had, and it was going to increase wages to ECEs. That's why we were the second province to sign on.

Last Thursday, the Premier put out a call for ideas to reduce red tape. Meanwhile, his Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is only adding red tape to the small business operators. Part of the new funding agreement requires operators to log employee hours, then wait 10 days to get funding from the province. This would leave small businesses to pay the upfront costs and will add financial pressure on child care operators.

Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier say he is reducing red tape when they are adding it to child care operators?

BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, every step of the way with our improvements to child care in Nova Scotia, with the decrease in fees - a 25 per cent decrease that already happened, down to 50 per cent decrease before the end of this year - with the ECE wage increases that we're rolling out, these funds flow to operators first. So it doesn't come out of their pocket.

That's how we set up our wage increases for ECE operators. That's how we set up our fee reductions for families, so that our operators are supported in advance, to make these changes so that it doesn't come off the backs of the operators themselves.

We've supported the operators through every step so far and we're going to continue to do so.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

SNSIS: FIXED-TERM LEASES IMPACT - ACKNOWLEDGE

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services. In an interview earlier this week about the doubling of homelessness over the last year - which I will table - Katie Brousseau of Dalhousie Legal Aid Service said that the proliferation of fixed-term leases is having a real role in the marked increase of homelessness in the city. She spoke about how people sign fixed-term leases because it's their only alternative. The fixed-term lease concludes, the rent skyrockets and the next thing, people find themselves being handed a sleeping bag and a tent by a social worker.

Does the minister agree that the proliferation of fixed-term leases is having a significant role in the recent very marked increase of homelessness in the city?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, to the point of homelessness in our province, it is a real situation. I would say that it's not just in Halifax. Unfortunately, we see it in communities across rural Nova Scotia as well. It's a reality that our government is facing head-on and taking very seriously.

Regarding fixed-term leases, that's one of the topics that stakeholders bring to the table and we respect those conversations and respect their input. Again, I'll say - despite what the member opposite will say - when I look to bring forward amendments to the floor of this Legislature, we're always looking to balance the rights and needs of both tenants and landlords.

GARY BURRILL: The minister has not addressed the question.

I want to emphasize here that Dalhousie Legal Aid is now dealing with a caseload which is, in the majority, residential tenancies, and at the core of which are fixed-term-lease-related advocacy and cases. They speak with authority and great experience here in making the point that the proliferation of fixed-term leases is one of the primary culprits when we look at the astronomical increase - the doubling increase - of homelessness, not just in the city but in the province. The minister is right, but the core cause is the proliferation of fixed-term leases.

I think the minister ought not to evade this question. Does he agree and acknowledge that fixed-term leases, and their proliferation, is contributing to the doubling of homeless in Nova Scotia?

COLTON LEBLANC: I certainly heard the question loud and clear with the yelling and screaming over there. I'm not dismissing the work that Dalhousie Legal Aid does. They do provide input to the department, and that's input that we certainly greatly appreciate and value.

As I've stated before, there are instances where fixed-term leases do serve a purpose. When people move across the province or move into the province for a short period of time, whether it be students travelling in a different part of the province to further their studies. When a tenant and a landlord agree on a fixed-term lease, they're agreeing that there is a start and end date.

Again, when I bring forward amendments before the Legislature, I will always be looking through the lens of balancing the rights and needs of both tenants and landlords.

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

EECD: ACCESS TO CHILD CARE - ADVISE

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, we are all hearing from parents in our communities regarding child care spaces. The demand for child care spaces in the past year has drastically increased and we need to make sure that those spaces are there for people who need them, especially for families who have been on wait-lists for years now. The urban areas have the largest population, but the number of child-care businesses do not reflect the demand.

Can the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development please let the parents know when they will see more spaces for child care under 18 months available at their local daycares, particularly in growing areas?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Fundamentally, that's what this transition is about. Children deserve access to care that gives them the best start in life. Parents deserve access to child care regardless of where they live, when they work, and their financial means.

Communities deserve access to care. ECE operators and our ECEs deserve to be supported in delivering that care. This is about building new centres. We have announced hundreds of new centres already, and we've already built new centres and added new spaces in places like Oxford, Hubbards, Windsor, Lower Sackville, and Lower Onslow.

We look forward to continuing to add spaces and to better support the families in this sector that's been neglected for decades.

LORELEI NICOLL: I thank you for that response but that does not address where the most population is - in the core of HRM. That's exactly where all the immigrants are coming as well, and they need child care.

We understand that affordable child care is extremely important for getting parents' costs down and only part of the equation. But without actual spaces, huge access gaps will remain, and given the significant change in the operations of this entire industry, daycare centres can't and shouldn't be left to take care of this on their own.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister commit more to help daycare centre operators ensure that they have the staff and resources they need to handle the huge influx of demand? What is the minister doing to grow more operating daycares?

BECKY DRUHAN: To be clear, we have space expansions happening all across the province in our centres - in our urban centres, in our rural areas. All across the province, we're working with operators to expand the spaces that are available. A significant portion of the work that we're doing is to support the operators in the development of those spaces.

We have heard very clearly from the sector, from the operators, from ECEs, and from families that our first priority was to stabilize and grow the workforce. How do you do that? This is a workforce that has been neglected and ignored for decades. The way we do that is by increasing wages 14 per cent to 43 per cent. We know that for our operators, a significant portion of their operations - 75 per cent to 85 per cent - is in wages. That \$100 million investment is an investment in our operators to expand that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

EECD: DAYCARE FOOD COSTS - ASSIST

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, daycare operators, like everyone else, are also struggling with the affordability crisis in our province. Hoda Ibrahim and Basma Elhefnawi, constituents of mine who run Care and Fun Child Care, tell me that they're struggling with the cost of food and other essentials at their two locations.

Does the minister have any plans to help daycares deal with rapidly rising operational expenses like food?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: As I just said, that \$100 million a year investment is a significant portion of operational costs. But in addition to that, we are also supporting all of the increases that we're doing. The parent fee reductions, those are fully funded by the government. Those ECE wage increases are fully funded by the government.

I want to continue reading from the operator letter that I read from earlier because this addresses that exact point, and I will table it. There's just so much information in here I want to share. Continuing on, this operator will receive funding for all their educators. For this, they want to thank us for creating “. . . more cash flow in the Centre to help with the higher cost of food, heating and supplies so we can continue to provide high quality, inclusive child care to the families and children we serve in our community.”

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, the administration of the ECE wage increase will also mean new costs for daycare operators. It means more hours for accountants and more costs for operators who are being squeezed with the rising cost of everything, as we all know.

Is the minister aware of this concern, and are there plans to help offset these new costs for operators?

BECKY DRUHAN: We want to be really clear: Transformation is not easy. This is a huge change. This is a four-year change. We know it's not easy. We are prepared, though, to make those changes.

One of the things that we have done to ensure that we fully understand how this is impacting our operators, and our ECEs, and our families is to pull together an engagement table to work hand in hand with us as we move forward to understand the complexities of this change, and to deliver timely supports and resources to make sure we move through this change.

The first priority was ECE wages. We did that with the \$100 million investment. We know that one of the items that's next on the table to be considered and to address is the funding model to support all those issues.

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the member for Annapolis, I'm going to ask the minister that the letter be tabled - that a copy at least be tabled at the desk for the members.

The honourable member for Annapolis.

EECD - SCH. SUPP. WORKERS: EQUAL PAY - SUPPORT

CARMAN KERR: I'll switch subjects, so I'll give the minister time for that.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard from dozens of school support workers over the last few days, picketing through Annapolis and in front of my MLA office. One of their main concerns is the disparity in pay between the work they do in the Annapolis Valley and HRM. They're asking for equal pay for equal work.

Does the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development believe that it's fair that some school support workers in Annapolis are paid significantly less than their counterparts in HRM for the same amount of work?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I can say, and again, we're not parties to the negotiations at the table, but our government fully supports wage parity across the province. An EA in Digby should make the same as an EA in Onslow. or in Yarmouth, or in Halifax. We absolutely support that. We understand that a path to that parity has been tabled. We're supportive of that and we're hopeful that the parties can get back together and come to an agreement.

[10:30 a.m.]

CARMAN KERR: I may have misheard the minister not being part of the negotiation, but across the Annapolis Valley, hundreds of pre-Primary students and students who require an EA are currently being denied access to important educational opportunities as a result of this strike. We're hearing this government isn't at the table, and I think that was confirmed by the minister. Why hasn't the government come back to the bargaining table as of yet?

BECKY DRUHAN: We do know that strikes are disruptive in labour - situations like this are disruptive, and for that we want the parents to understand that the regions are working as best they can to support families through a challenging time. I would also like to say that the member opposite should understand, because it was the prior government and the structure around the school boards and the adjustment from the school boards to the regions that really were the foundation of the disparity in pay across the province.

I will say to the member opposite again that our government supports the work of the regions and supports the parties in getting back together and working toward a deal and getting our children back in schools.

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

DAE: LOW DAL. FACULTY WAGES - ADDRESS

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Premier. CUPE 3912 is now on their 10th day of striking for fair wages. One member, Lucas Thorne-Humphrey, is a nursing instructor at Dalhousie. He says he is lucky that he has some other employment with the Nova Scotia Health Authority, but many of his colleagues don't and they're greatly impacted by the employer's unfair behaviour and by being amongst the lowest-paid academics in the country.

Does the Premier agree that unsustainably low wages paid to part-time faculty at Dalhousie are unfair and must be addressed now?

HON. BRIAN WONG: The work of teaching assistants, part-time instructors, and markers does not go unappreciated. We absolutely respect the ongoing bargaining process, and we hope that they're back at the table and can reach a conclusion in the best interests of students very soon.

LISA LACHANCE: Lucas is not the only person impacted by Dalhousie's unfair wages. He says he knows first-hand how this has dramatically affected the education of his students in nursing, and that if it continues it may delay graduation of our direly needed Nova Scotia nursing grads at a time of emerging crises in our health care system.

Instructors at comparable universities are paid up to 60 per cent more than part-time faculty at Dalhousie. Does the Premier agree that Dalhousie's low wages could have a dangerous effect on our entire health system?

BRIAN WONG: Students are always top of mind for me, and when I think about students who aren't getting what they need at the time, it's always of huge concern. As I mentioned previously, I strongly encourage both sides to get to the table and to work this out.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

EECD: DAYCARE SPACES INCREASE - UPDATE

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

I'm not sure if she really has an understanding of the shortage of spaces in our riding. I actually spoke to her yesterday about an issue - the daycare operator is here with us, Linda Liao, and this issue has been for months. We've gone through the process, and this daycare has changed from toddler to infants, and now those infants are growing to the age of being toddlers. The daycare has a licence for 18 spots, and the department is only allowing them just 10 spots. She also has another location that she'd like to fill ...

THE SPEAKER: Question, please.

RAFAH DICOSTAZO: When will they allow more spots for our daycares in Halifax?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I can assure the member opposite that we have plans in place for spots in Halifax and work is under way right now to address the expansion of spots in Halifax and all across Nova Scotia. Halifax has spaces, for sure.

Do we need more? Absolutely. I lived in Halifax and when I was pregnant and expecting my children, I had to be on a list because, let's be clear, the difficulties in this sector are not created by this transformation that is under way right now. The difficulties in the sector have existed for decades. For decades we have had not enough spaces - not enough in Halifax, not enough across the province. We've got areas in the province that don't have licensed spaces at all. That problem has been a problem for decades. This has been underfunded for decades.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, this is about private operators who are struggling to get answers, to get information on the contract. They are told, you've got to sign here, without knowing what the details are. How many times do we explain this over

and over again? Nobody should be expected to sign a contract without details for the future. How are we going to operate that?

There is more need for Halifax and there are locations but they are not being given permission, so please look into that.

BECKY DRUHAN: I want to bring this back again to what this is about. This is about supporting Nova Scotia families and children to get access to child care. To do that, we are all in agreement that we need more spaces and we need to support the sector - our operators in our private sector and our non-profit sector - to be stable and to be supported.

I want to encourage the member opposite and encourage the child care centre that she is talking about to continue the dialogue with the department, as with any other child care centre that has individual challenges. We have our arms out to embrace the sector.

I want to go through a number of the things that we've done. We've had six calls with operators with hundreds of participants on those calls. We've had over 250 individual discussions with operators.

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

DAE: UNIVERSITY LEG. REVIEW - CLARIFY

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, in the Spring, the Minister of Advanced Education said during Estimates that he was undertaking a review of university legislation and bylaws focusing on governance, structure, accountability and reporting, the university board of governors, and Senate composition and powers. I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very broad mandate for review, and universities may be concerned about what the review is leading to. Will the minister be proposing significant changes to the operation of Nova Scotia's universities?

HON. BRIAN WONG: Yes, a review of the governance models and the structures of our universities is absolutely part of my mandate. It is something that we have done the jurisdictional scan for. We're looking at where we may move forward. We're looking at things that are going to help students in the end, to make universities better and to help students.

We have nothing specific that we can share yet but we're looking forward to doing the full review.

BEN JESSOME: I understand that universities can improve and want to improve, but I think our universities are pretty wonderful as is.

When I questioned the minister early this year, he stated that he had nine months to fulfill the obligation and that he would have a full report on the matter. That was in March; we are almost here to November. Universities and colleges around Nova Scotia are nervous about what exactly is going to come of this.

On their behalf, can the minister please give an update to the House on the review and commit to a timeline in which the review will be publicly released?

BRIAN WONG: No doubt, Mr. Speaker, we have a first-class post-secondary system from one end of this province to the other. For the member to suggest that everything is great the way it is, I will never say that any system that we have in Nova Scotia can't be worked on and improved for the betterment of students.

We have Students Nova Scotia, advocacy groups always asking us, how can you help, how can you help? That's what we're looking for. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DHW: AMB. SERV. WAIT TIMES - REVIEW

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is to the honourable Minister of Health and Wellness. There are times when people in Cumberland North, and, in fact, residents across the entire province, do not have timely and safe access to ambulance services, either because locally based ambulances have been diverted elsewhere in the province or there's not enough paramedics available.

From my understanding, the total number of ambulances and transfer units officially allocated to Cumberland County are actually rarely available. In fact, earlier this Fall, I was contacted by a constituent, Audrey Purdy, who had fallen in her garden and 911 was called. She waited outside on the ground with a fractured hip for six hours. Six hours is not acceptable.

Will the Minister of Health and Wellness commit to reviewing ambulance wait times in the Cumberland County area, and following up with local EHS and health officials to ensure this issue never happens again?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We've undertaken a lot of work with our paramedics, not only the company, but also with the union. We also are working with the Department of Health and Wellness and Nova Scotia Health Authority to better understand how we can serve Nova Scotians.

The EHS system is actually a provincial resource, and the days that we were all accustomed to a number of years ago prior to the review and the development of EHS was that there were spaces with X-number of ambulances. We actually now have a system that's

in flux all of the time, and our ambulances and paramedics are a provincial asset in order to meet the needs of Nova Scotians. We continue to look at that service, understand where the gaps are, and how we can best improve services across the province.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Well, I can assure you there's a huge gap in Cumberland County that needs to be fixed. Nova Scotia's Emergency Health Services used to be cited as one of the best in all of North America. The skills of our paramedics remain exemplary, but now their ability to continue to provide highly rated service is seriously impacted.

Nova Scotians expect and deserve the best. They expect a reliable ambulance service and should never be put in a situation where an ambulance does not arrive in a safe and timely manner. There must be accountability from Medavie to provide emergency services as outlined in their contract. If they cannot meet these standards, then the government must look for another approach to ensure safe and timely ambulance service.

What steps is the minister prepared to take to ensure EHS service standards are being upheld so no other senior has to wait six hours outside in their garden with a fractured hip?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I've said before in the House, we continue to work with EHS, we work with the paramedic union, we work across the system to better understand how we can serve Nova Scotians. We know that the system has been under incredible strain for a period of time. We need to look at recruitment and retention. We need to look in terms of how we train paramedics.

One of the things we did was implement non-paramedic drivers, reducing the number of non-urgent transfers from 86 per cent to 22 per cent, Mr. Speaker, allowing paramedics to respond to emergencies across the province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: EHS RESPONSE TIME - ADDRESS

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. There has been lots of talk this session, including just this moment, about this government's underwhelming performance on tackling the health care crisis. One area where this is strikingly, startlingly obvious is the state of our EHS system.

For example, in the last six months, the average response time when someone calls 911 for help has grown from 18 minutes to 33 minutes at the end of September. This is an 83 per cent increase in just under six months, and it means that people are waiting even longer for help under this government.

People deserve to know that there is available help for them when they call. Why has the government made this situation worse?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I'd like to thank the member for the question. It gives me an opportunity to highlight the triage system that's been implemented through the medical comm centre that EHS has implemented, which has been a result of feedback from the medical director as well as the paramedics.

Right now, we know that there are times when patients call 911 for a variety of reasons, and they are able to be triaged and speak to a physician directly. We recently hired a registered nurse in the comm centre in order to support people in order to be transferred to hospital or to be triaged and taken to primary care when required. There are a number of initiatives that we are undergoing in EHS in order to better serve Nova Scotians.

SUSAN LEBLANC: All of the things that the minister has said are tweaks to the system and they have been helping, but it doesn't change the fact that the response times and the offload times are getting worse.

Mr. Speaker, people who need emergency care in this province are not getting it fast enough. In the last six months, the average offload time once an ambulance gets to the ER has grown from 63 minutes to 90 minutes. That's an hour and a half that a paramedic is tied up waiting to offload a patient and that patient is waiting for care.

We've heard this government say again and again that improvement in the health care system will take time. Paramedics and the patients they help want to know - how much time?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: The other thing I'd like to highlight in terms of recent implementation of a single paramedic emergency response unit: These are spare units where paramedics can go out into the community and support people in triaging them or treating and releasing them based on medical comms.

We know that there are struggles around offloads. Our health and human resources are the priority of this government. We're working with the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment. We're working with the training facilities to try to increase the number of paramedics in this province. We're looking at end-of-shift overruns. We're trying to ensure that there's a balance for paramedics between work and life.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of initiatives under way and I'm confident that, over time, things will improve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

[10:45 a.m.]

MAH: ANTIGONISH CO. AMALG. - POSITION

HON. TONY INCE: The town and county of Antigonish have been discussing amalgamation of the two municipal units many months now. Residents of the town, of the county, and the staff who work in both, are anxious about what this may bring and have yet to hear from the provincial government.

I ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: What is the minister's position on amalgamation of the town and the county of Antigonish?

HON. JOHN LOHR: We are very aware of the ongoing relationship between the town and the county of Antigonish and the recent decision to amalgamate. We look forward to working further with the town and county in that process.

TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, the town and the county have decided to move forward with the motion to request that the Province circumvent the Municipal Governance Act's requirements for a plebiscite and a UARB review of the amalgamation. I can table this.

I will also table the Premier's comments to encourage every resident in his constituency to have their say on the amalgamation in Pictou. Will the Premier commit to allowing the fine residents of the town and the county of Antigonish the very same opportunity to have their say on amalgamation?

JOHN LOHR: I should say that it's a "consolidation," not an amalgamation. It's my mistake in using that term.

In terms of the process, the municipal councillors in the town and the county have chosen that this is the way they want to go forward. That's within their right. If there were a plebiscite, it would not be binding in any case. We certainly respect the decision.

I do want to point out how impressed I was with the level of co-operation that I saw in the town and county during the recent Fiona event, when they consolidated their EMO and really had an extremely effective functioning EMO put together. It was very impressive.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

DHW: RURAL EHS COVERAGE - CLARIFY

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, in addition to hearing from many of my constituents who have waited hours on end for an ambulance to show up, often for serious health emergencies, I am now hearing that many, if not most, nights ambulances are being

pulled out of my community, leaving little to no EHS coverage for many across rural Nova Scotia.

My question to the minister is: Can she confirm that EHS is being pulled out of rural communities like Clare to cover other areas?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I mentioned earlier, EHS is not community specific. EHS is a dynamic system. We have a number of ambulances throughout the province and they are actually a provincial resource. It's very important that they have the freedom and that the system allows them to move throughout communities as required.

We do know that there are times when ambulances need to move towards the city in order to transfer high- needs patients. That's why we've implemented the medical transport units . . .

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

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. Everyone in this Chamber knows the importance of having a high-quality reliable CA. Mine is here with me today. I have been blessed in my time in office to have two excellent full-time CAs, first Sue, now Amanda van Veen. Thank you, Amanda, for everything you do for the people of Pictou East. Maybe she can stand and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie on an introduction.

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, it seems to be a trend today. A couple of days ago on your birthday, we talked about being long-suffering Leafs fans. I would like to introduce my long-suffering wife Suzanne up in the West Gallery. She is joined by my two daughters.

The other day, about a week ago, the member for Pictou West mentioned the Fundy Highland Stars. In the interest of balance, I thought I would bring a couple of Quad County Whitecaps - my daughter Kate from the U15 AAA team and Lucy from the U13 AAA team. I would like to welcome them. (Interruption) No, they're up here. They're up here - very shy. They're so excited right now to be recognized in the House, okay. I can't tell you how mega-excited they are. (Laughter)

In the spirit of the Halloween stories that we heard from the members for Inverness, Timberlea-Prospect, and Dartmouth South, they didn't come empty-handed. There's some popcorn in the back.

THE SPEAKER: Again, we welcome all visitors to the Legislature. We hope you enjoy your time here.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: 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. 225.

Bill No. 225 - Halifax Regional Municipality Charter (amended).

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 225 be now read for a second time.

Today I am pleased to speak about amendments to the Halifax Regional Municipal Charter that will help ensure expedited housing development. The amendments will give the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing the legislative authority to nullify an HRM bylaw or part of a bylaw if the minister thinks the bylaw is impeding housing development.

Mr. Speaker, we have an urgent need for more housing in HRM. If we are going to ensure as many people and families as possible have a place to call home, we need to be looking at ways to speed up housing development, not slow it down. These amendments give me authority to intervene on behalf of Nova Scotians on matters of broad public interest that relate to housing and construction. It is my hope that no minister will have to use this power.

We have demonstrated that we are willing to try different approaches to increase supply, address issues, and speed work up so we can find housing solutions for more people. These amendments are a direct response to changes HRM has voted on to make their noise bylaw earlier this year reduce the permitted hours for construction noise on weekdays. The reduction would reduce construction hours, slow down work, lengthen

projects and increase labour costs during a housing crisis in Nova Scotia. The minister's authority under the Halifax Regional Municipal Charter amendments only pertain to HRM. No other municipalities are included.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: The minister has introduced amendments to the Halifax Regional Municipal Charter. A release from the province said legislation would ensure HRM bylaws will not stand in the way of fast-tracking housing development and increasing supply.

We just heard him say it's about expediting housing development - we don't want to have to use our power, is exactly what he just said. I was waiting for the "or else," because it sounds like an ultimatum. We heard earlier, in speaking about climate change, the acronym FUD, which means Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt. I can't say there's a higher level of FUD right now with regard to this proposal.

I'm not convinced this is about fast-tracking housing development. Perhaps it's more about the inability to agree with individual councillors who are following public policy - public policy that was arrived at democratically with extensive input from all involved, even those who are requesting the minister get involved now.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing stated that right now the Province is only looking to address the city's approved changes to its noise bylaw to address construction noise, but the wording in this amending clause doesn't specify it is simply for the HRM noise bylaw. In fact, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing tabled legislation to amend the HRM Charter, which would allow the Nova Scotia government to override any municipal bylaw that impedes housing development and construction.

It is specified that the bill would allow the minister to override the democratic process and veto HRM council bylaws within six months of them being passed. Given the far-reaching scope of the proposed amendment, is the Province eventually, or at any time, or without notice or consultation - as was done in this case - going to override the HRM Municipal Planning Strategy, which by the way, is a land-use bylaw?

Municipalities are integral to Canada's constitutional design and need to be empowered, and put an end to the term "creatures of the Province." Provincial governments have regularly used this idea to justify heavy-handed intervention in municipal affairs. This amendment before us is blatantly a display of exactly that. I am quoting and referencing an article that was made back in 2019 by Kristin Good of Dalhousie University where she referenced exactly that.

She also referenced that in Ontario, the Province recently cut the size of Toronto City Council in half only weeks before a municipal election. I bring this to your attention

because it is very concerning to me, especially when the Premier, at a PC convention on October 22nd, stood up and said, “I just want to assure you, I would stand shoulder to shoulder with Doug Ford any day, I don’t care about anyone else, I would do it every single day of the week, every day of the year. Thank you so much.” I’ll table that. You can see why I’m full of FUD.

As Mayor Savage said publicly, “Not only is this a dramatic intrusion of the municipal jurisdiction, but we had no notice, no heads up that this was coming.” I’ll table that. While the minister contends that we - whoever we might be - have immense challenges to have more housing units built, I see no interest in helping those who find themselves unhoused.

Increasing housing stock must include housing for the homeless - an area this government relied on HRM council to address, fund, and take the brunt of public shaming, in spite of the fact that housing is a provincial area of responsibility.

If it is a provincial jurisdiction, why hasn’t the minister intervened with the homeless needing housing? Build new housing stock for the unhoused. This amendment to the Charter, as worded, could be overriding HRM’s entire and extensive land use by-law, and that needs clarification by the minister. What exactly is the intent of this amendment?

I don’t say this lightly: The behaviour of most across the room the other day in response to a comment supportive of HRM council from the member for Kings South tells me that there’s no respect for the work of HRM council by this government. It is truly disheartening, and that laughter was very unprofessional and not at all in the spirit of collaboration.

I’d like to point out that municipal representatives are elected members, just like MLAs, and are deserving of respect. As an HRM councillor who did not reoffer in 2020, I can tell you with all honesty that the construction you see happening in the downtown today was initiated or approved while I was on council. During my time on council, many other development applications were approved and still have not been started for various reasons, including skilled trade shortages. The pandemic escalated these delays.

It has also been evident to me that there are two types of development applications, one from land developers - I want to acknowledge the great work they have undertaken and built in this city - and the other is land speculators. They buy land, obtain necessary approvals, and then sit on it, waiting for a buyer to come along with the right price and take the application to actually build the project. Delays in development don’t rest solely on the shoulders of HRM.

Those are my comments, and I hope that in closing, the minister will address my concerns. I am sure they will be shared at Law Amendments Committee when this goes through that phase but for now, I am full of FUD. Thank you.

[11:00 a.m.]

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Here we go again. I am feeling a repeat - and I am sure my colleague across the way feels a repeat - of the last session, when we had these bills come before us that nullified or put a short leash on municipalities - stuff that municipalities aren't even asking for. They are not asking for provincial government interference into their noise bylaws and into their other bylaws. They are not looking for the government's intervention.

This is not enabling legislation; this is restrictive legislation. It is deeply concerning because most times, on average, when the HRM Charter amendments come before the Legislature, it's often at the request of the HRM. I'm sure my fellow former municipal council colleagues across the way will understand the deep concerns that I am presenting, as well as those in the HRM would present - and that is the government's interference into their bylaws.

This bill is not democratic. In fact, it is heavy-handed, Madam Speaker. HRM councillors agree, and the mayor has also expressed concerns about the powers that this bill will give to the minister in squashing HRM bylaws.

In my time on the CBRM council, we would ask the government for things that we wanted. There was sometimes a lack of action on those things, and sometimes it was on our end, sometimes it was on the government's end. But the one thing we in the CBRM didn't care for was overreach from the provincial government. It's not hyperbole. It's, in fact, true.

To interfere in a democratically elected government - they were elected by the people. They went through a noise bylaw. They went through hearings. I'm going to tell you something: Those hearings are not for the faint of heart at times.

My colleague, the member for Sydney-Membertou, is remembering his time with those hearings. They are not for the faint of heart. You have people from the community come before you for hours to tell you why a bylaw is good, and why a bylaw is bad. Then eventually, through that decision-making process - similar to what we have in Law Amendments Committee - there are oftentimes things that are amended because the people who have come before us have made great arguments.

Not only was this bylaw created by a democratically elected government, it was also created with the input of the residents, as are all bylaws. They're created with the input of residents, because in the governance system of municipalities, you cannot just change the bylaw. You have to have public hearings. I am deeply concerned that this government

is attempting to interfere in another government's bylaws that elected officials have created and that the public has had input on.

This government says that this is so housing development can be fast-tracked. But it's the same government that's not dealing with the renovations crisis or instituting a permanent system of rent control so that people can have affordable homes and can stay in them. Low-hanging fruit right here. Right here in this Chamber, we can't deal with low-hanging fruit, yet we're going to interfere in another government's bylaws.

They're also not tackling the short-term rental issue. More and more long-term housing is lost to the sector all the time. Again, low-hanging fruit in this Legislature that we can deal with instead of interfering in a democratically elected government's bylaws. We saw the same thing with the special planning areas. Municipal bylaws exist for a good reason. They've been developed, as I've said, with the input of residents for whom the municipal level of representation is the closest to in their day-to-day lives.

This government continues to use a command-and-control approach to this issue without listening to what we know is really needed. Also, I would be so bold as to say that they are not listening to the other elected officials. As a former municipal representative, I find this disrespectful, appalling, and insulting.

I am sure we're going to be hearing from stakeholders at the Law Amendments Committee. I hope we hear from stakeholders at the Law Amendments Committee. I look forward to hearing from them and hearing what they have to say about what I can only say is undemocratic and heavy-handed.

Again, I'm going to stress that we are interfering in a democratically elected government's bylaws that were created with the input from the residents - also the people we represent, don't forget.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Madam Speaker, I just thought that as a former municipal councillor, I would make a few comments . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: My apologies.

The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

KENT SMITH: I'm pleased to rise and offer a few brief comments in support of Bill No. 225.

Although this legislation is a short and concise piece of legislation, it's clearly caused some concern for some of the members opposite, and clearly some of the members of HRM council. I would like to take this opportunity to be clear that with this legislation, we mean no harm. With this legislation, we mean no offense. This legislation exists for one reason and one reason only, and that is to ensure that we can do everything under our power to make sure that we can bring housing supply to the market as quickly as possible.

We know that supply is at the crux of the housing crisis that's been acknowledged in this House and acknowledged with HRM council. To talk a little bit, briefly, about economics, when we have a demand that exceeds supply, the relationship with price is price increases. When demand is less than supply, the price comes down a little bit. Our goal is to make sure that we bring the housing to market, and then ultimately, when we have the supply that matches demand, we can see some of those prices come down.

In terms of the numbers associated with this - and although this bylaw does not specifically target the noise bylaw that was recently introduced by HRM, there's certainly some math that will help my colleagues here understand the impact that that noise bylaw may have on potential development in the HRM. If you take a project that has 10,000 hours from start to finish, under the previous noise bylaws, they had 93 hours a week - 93 and a half hours a week to work.

The noise bylaw reduces that to 86 hours, so what does that do? It takes a 10,000-hour project that under the previous noise bylaw would take 107 weeks to complete and adds nine weeks on to that development. We cannot sit here in this House and complain that we have a housing crisis, and then also complain when we put forward a solution that will bring housing to market faster.

I'll wrap this up by saying that it's clear, and our government has shown leadership in that we're going to take the steps that we can take to ensure that housing gets to market as swiftly and efficiently as possible, and Bill No. 225 is a step in that process.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I just want to speak briefly on this, and I mean that. I will be brief. I've had a lot of comments from people in my community about this bill in particular. I heard the member for Eastern Shore talk about the impacts to projects and stuff like that. I will say to that member, there's also an impact to quality of life. There's a reason why HRM decided to do this, and when you're rock-breaking outside of a residential area at six, seven o'clock in the morning, there's an impact to quality of life.

I used to work for Halifax Water, and we were very aware of this when we worked at Halifax Water, about children sleeping at night, children sleeping in the morning, people sleeping, and the ability for families to raise their kids at a decent hour and make sure that there was an impact. This is the reason why it was done.

What I will say is, what they're not telling you is this isn't about the noise complaint. This is about much more than that. This is about lack of accountability in communities. If you want to build around or near wetlands, or residential areas, or if you have zoning, and the developer comes to the minister, the minister can override that without public consultation, and the purpose of HRM by Design has been thrown out the window. I know that the other day, they stood there, and they laughed when the member for Kings South had mentioned HRM. That's very disrespectful to your partners. Every single person across there laughed at the councillors and the mayor of Halifax, and it's on the record. You can hear it.

I can tell you, in my community, there are thousands of apartments going up right now. There are thousands of buildings being built. Is there more to be done? Absolutely, but there's a reason we have the Department of Environment and Climate Change. There's a reason why HRM looks at where these things should be built and not built. I'll give you a prime example of why things get built, how they get built, and when there's political interference, what happens.

I look at the community of Harrietsfield. Thirty years ago, the Progressive Conservative government of the day decided that it was a great site to be a construction and demolition debris disposal site, and then they removed - as they're doing out in Otter Lake - restrictions around there and allowed for materials to be put there in a residential area that should not have been put there. The municipality at the time had reservations around it, but the Province gave it an okay. Those councillors know their communities, they know their area.

I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, I think a lot of him, but if I asked him to tell me where Primrose Avenue is, if I ask him to tell me where Lancaster Drive is, if I ask him what is the address of Harrietsfield Elementary, he can't tell you, he doesn't know off the top of his head, just as I wouldn't know. I know a little bit about his community because I've got some in-laws there. The truth is that's why we elect councillors. For the member for Eastern Shore to stand there and say that this is just about noise is, quite frankly, not true.

They won't hear it, and I'll bet you that if they did, if there were rock being blasted outside of their homes at six o'clock in the morning, they would be pretty upset. If they had parkland next door that the minister could universally say that this park is gone and it is now housing, or it is whatever the developer wants, they would be pretty upset.

The fact is that it looks like they don't trust elected officials. It looks like they don't trust municipalities, and that is what's sad here.

I know that my current councillor and my former councillor - I'll give you an example. My former councillor served for almost 30 years in my community. No one knows that community better than he does, but this piece of legislation says we, the

government of the day, know the Sambro-Purcells Cove loop better than you. No one on that side - one member on that side might be able to go road for road with me, person for person, spot for spot. I couldn't do that in your riding, I couldn't do that in anyone else's riding, but to say that this is just about noise is a distraction, because what they don't want to talk about is that this is going to have an environmental impact. This is going to have an impact on properties.

[11:15 a.m.]

We know they are also giving a list of properties across Nova Scotia - we don't know the details of that, whether it's going to be given free to developers or if it is going to be given at a discounted price. We know they have given \$30 million to Clayton Developments, or close to \$30 million, to combat homelessness.

On my way in today I saw more tents than I've seen anywhere, at any point in the HRM. The homelessness has actually doubled in the HRM over the last year. If people don't believe that, take a three-minute walk up the street and you'll see people living in tents.

It is freezing cold out, and nothing is being done. They froze income assistance. If you want to help people, you can help them by giving them more and giving them the ability to do more, but they are helping developers.

I would ask - maybe the minister could speak on it - do we know if these homes that are going to be built are going to be, for example, the house in Herring Cove that four years ago sold for \$200,000 and is now on the market for \$800,000? That's not affordable housing.

Do we know that this bill is going to be able to curtail those types of developments and to make sure - there's nothing in this amendment to the HRM Charter, and what I would have liked to have seen, if you are going to open up the Charter there are so many things that the HRM would like you to do. One of the things I would like to see them do, if they are going to open up this Charter and make amendments to the Charter, would be to specifically define what affordable housing is, what is affordable housing.

When you build, if you are going to open up the HRM Charter, you should be working with the HRM on a definition of affordable housing and where and how it should be built.

I spoke to a group the other day, the Spryfield Community Association, we had conversations about this stuff and this was brought up. Marjorie Willison, who has been in Spryfield forever, and some of you may or may not know Marjorie - again another person who knows the area like the back of her hand - she and Martin, her husband - they asked

about this, they said what does this mean? I said, well, it means that the minister has the ability to override anything, and maybe I'm wrong.

Does this mean that they're going to be able to build on parkland if a good enough proposal comes through? Does it mean that you're going to be putting housing in places where they really shouldn't be? We know that there's no investment in public housing.

Public housing is falling apart and there's no investment to build new public housing. Madam Chair, I would argue that that is what real affordable housing is. If this government was so concerned about affordable housing and putting roofs over people's heads, they would do something about the public housing situation.

I'm not saying that this is all bad. I know that there's a bylaw in Spryfield, for example, and it's something I'd like to see the minister address, where apartment buildings can't go higher than four floors. It makes no sense. On Herring Cove Road, an apartment building can't go over four floors unless they go to HRM and fight that. Those are things that I would like to see the minister look at and work with HRM on. That doesn't make sense anymore, especially with the population boom we're seeing in our community.

I understand the frustration when it comes to housing, I really do, but I think you have to work with your partners. If you are just bulldozing your partners, at some point you're going to need HRM. At some point you're going to need the different municipalities and when you treat them like their opinions don't count and you know best, when difficult decisions need to be made it may be harder for those decisions to be made. I would like to see the minister, when he stands up, please address public consultation on this.

If something is to be built on Herring Cove Road - we saw one recently where there was a lot of public consultation, and the developer changed it based on some of that consultation. It's still a beautiful building; it's still unaffordable at \$2,500 for a two-bedroom apartment. There's some commercial property on the bottom which is exactly what I would argue that Spryfield needs more of. But what happens if there's public consultation and they say no to certain things - does the minister have the ability to override that public consultation? I think they do.

There are a lot of questions that need to be answered. The main reason why is: Who brought this forward? Did you meet with the developers? Did you meet with regional council? Did you meet with the mayor? Did you have these discussions? We know that they didn't meet with the mayor and the regional council because councillors were online the day-of saying that they were blindsided.

I don't get it. When there are members on that side who were former members of HRM and regional councils right across this province, and there are members on this side - and everybody on that side is quiet about it. If they were in council - whether it's HRM, CBRM, or any other municipal council across this province - when this bill was coming

down, they would be screaming; they would be upset about it. You have friends on those councils, I'm sure.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to wrap it up. I just wanted to say that I'm worried that this government is framing it as you're losing an hour. We heard the member for Eastern Shore say that - you're losing an extra hour or two in the morning. That's why we're really doing this. But this has much wider-reaching tentacles.

There's a reason why we don't want to build near Roachs Pond in Spryfield - it's because it's an environmentally sensitive area. There's a reason why we celebrate McIntosh Run in Spryfield, Long Lake Provincial Park, and Sambro Creek. Purcells Cove Backlands is a beautiful example. How would this government have acted 10 years ago when developers wanted to take the Purcells Cove Backlands, or a chunk of it, and build housing on it? It is the largest green space now in HRM and one of the most visited spots in Nova Scotia. Would they have said yes, go for it?

I understand that there are tough decisions to be made, but there's a balance here. In order to live a good life, and a healthy life, people need green spaces. They need water. They need fresh air. They can't be just packed in like sardines all the time. I just hope that the minister will stand up on his feet and verify that the views, the needs, and the wants of the community that this will impact will be listened to and that they will try to better their relationship with regional councils. Right now, it's at an all-time low. I have never seen it worse, not just in HRM but right across this province.

Stop leaning on the noise thing because it's not just about the noise. It isn't. It's much bigger than that. At least recognize that the noise bylaws were put in place because it has impact on people's well-being and quality of life.

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next member, I just want to let folks know that there was a phone found in one of the MLA washrooms. If anyone is missing a black phone, I'm just letting folks know.

The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I want to rise as a former municipal councillor to express my utter disappointment in this government and in this minister with actions such as this. We clearly have a government, through multiple pieces of legislation here, that is taking a blatant attack on good governance and democracy.

As my colleague for Halifax Atlantic pointed out, this is not a bill about one and a half hours of noise a day. This is a bill about our democratic structure in Canada in terms of federal, provincial, and municipal jurisdiction.

[11:30 a.m.]

Let's talk about municipal jurisdiction. Long-standing pieces of legislation - the Municipal Government Act as well as the HRM Charter - have governed this relationship for decades. It is set out very clearly what is provincial responsibility and what is municipal responsibility. When we have a government that, on the tiniest of issues, is willing to totally disrupt that relationship and undermine the relationship with municipalities, that fundamentally hurts the citizens of Nova Scotia.

I'm trying to understand how something like this gets to the floor of the Legislature. What we had is citizens of HRM saying, we have an issue, and we would like a change in our noise bylaw for our quality of life. This is disruptive, and we think some changes need to be made for our families, for neighbourhoods, for our communities.

So HRM does what a good elected, democratic, responsible government does. They hold hearings. They hear from those citizens. They also hear from the construction industry with the other side of the argument. They deliberate. They talk. They consult. They hear from neighbours. They hear from developers. They use their experience, expertise, judgment, and knowledge of their community and make a decision.

In fact, they made a compromise. They didn't keep the citizens completely happy nor the developers completely happy. They cut it down the middle. Some citizens wanted it to stop at 5 p.m. So they found a compromise.

So what happened? How did a bill like this suddenly get on the floor of the House? I will hope that the minister will tell me what has happened, because there's only one thing that I can see happened here: Somebody got into the minister's office or the Premier's Office from the developers and said to override things. Backroom politics going around elected governments, going around processes set out in the MGA, and under some auspices of a housing crisis.

That is - and I learned this a long time ago. When government is in a crisis, that is the time that you can go and make money. You can circumnavigate the rules, as we saw in the last session around planning. Now it's the housing crisis.

Is this government now ready to say we've got an affordability crisis and interfere in another institution? They stopped the processes of the UARB and interfered and threw that under the bus. Now that this government is so concerned about the affordability crisis, are you going to now bring in a law that says HRM can't raise taxes? It's the same possibility of overreaching and disrespecting the democratically elected municipal officials.

The minister has a lot of power. He has the MGA. His other tool is the Statements of Provincial Interest. He has not used those. Instead, he's brought in heavy-handed

legislation, not consulted with the neighbourhoods, not consulted with the councillors who made the decision. Again, I will reiterate Mayor Savage's quote: "Not only is this a dramatic intrusion of the municipal jurisdiction, but we had no notice, no heads up that this was coming."

HRM has worked in good faith with this government. HRM is not responsible for housing, but they have stepped up. They have dealt with the homeless situation in building units. They have begrudgingly tried to work side by side. In fact, HRM collects taxes and gives it to the government for housing, as they do with education and corrections.

Now that the minister wants to overcall HRM councillors, I expect the minister to take calls from those neighbours. He is now accountable to them. I would like the minister to circulate his number to all members of the public in HRM, so they can launch their displeasure with the decision he has unilaterally made without consulting them or their neighbours.

I want to finish up on this lack of respect that this government is showing municipalities. It was unfortunate laughter and I made those comments in my question because the HRM was doing the heavy lifting on the housing file and this government was doing actually very little in terms of housing starts in the HRM - in fact nothing accomplished.

I will table Wayne Mason and Zack Taylor's opinion piece, "The public should understand that the Nova Scotia government's unprecedented assault on Halifax's democratic planning process has not yet produced a single unit of housing."

This legislation - and the previous one as well - has severely damaged the relationship between the Province of Nova Scotia and the municipalities. It has severely damaged the relationship with those neighbourhoods that went through the democratic process of consultation, public hearings, to have their voices heard and to influence the decision and the minister, at the stroke of a pen, is reversing all of that and devaluing the citizens' opinions and interests.

I look forward to comments from the Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: I would ask that the member for Kings South table this paper, please.

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

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I do want to make a few comments. This has been a year of unprecedented activity by our government in housing on multiple fronts.

We've invested in rent supplements, we've followed the guidelines of the Affordable Housing Commission's report. In fact, that report called for \$25 million in quick-start programs. We put \$35 million in the quick-start program that that commission had recommended. We continue to work.

We started the Community Housing Growth Fund to develop community housing. We have a land inventory program which is to seek out and find government-owned property across the province we can make available to housing. We've also invested more money in the Down Payment Assistance Program. Individuals have more opportunity to purchase their own homes. We have the HRM Housing Task Force, which we are working on very closely with the HRM to expedite housing . . .

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

LORELEI NICOLL: A lot of comments were made, and I am speaking on a point of order. I would like the minister to address the questions and the concerns with this particular amendment to the noise bylaw in the HRM, not the grandiose ideas that have been already presented in this House.

THE SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I was responding to questions posed by the Opposition during their comments on this bill. I think I did hear them ask me to respond to those questions.

We've done inclusionary zoning, which had been asked for since 2016. We provided that last year for not only the HRM but all of the municipalities across the province. We have the Rapid Housing Initiative, which is for deeply affordable - and I heard across the aisle the question about the definition of "affordable." The real definition is that there is a spectrum. There's no one - we're meeting Nova Scotians wherever they're at. For some people, it needs to be deeply affordable. For others, it needs to be somewhat affordable. Just as there's no one single answer for any given Nova Scotian that's going to apply to every other Nova Scotian. This is across the spectrum. We are working on affordable - and we recognize that that's how this has to be addressed.

The Rapid Housing Initiative, for instance, I'm very proud of. The Travelodge, which will be open soon, will provide 60 spaces right here in HRM for homeless people, in conjunction with my colleague, the Minister of Community Services. Furthermore, we're doing more things than that. We're doing a needs assessment across all municipalities across the province.

This past Summer, we created a new program called the Community Housing Acquisition Program to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing with the Housing Trust of Nova Scotia. We helped them purchase five apartment buildings - almost 300 units in the HRM - to keep naturally occurring affordable housing.

We have more programs. The Community Housing Infrastructure and Repair Program. We're doing a lot.

Not to belabour the whole conversation in terms of this bill, my colleague, the member for Eastern Shore, unpacked a little bit - the effect this would have. The reality is if you have a two-year build, you've added two months to that construction time. What does that do? That adds significant added costs to the bill. That adds more time for someone who is waiting to move into that unit to wait. That's an extra two months to wait. I would contend, as I think about the noise bylaw, that adds noise because there's the daily start-up and shutdown noise, which you've just increased by two months. That's the reality.

The total amount of noise actually has probably increased in reality. I mean, I operated equipment. I know that you don't start work and there's no noise. You start things up, you warm up equipment, you make things run. I know that. I've operated a lot of machines.

The reality is that the question comes down to: Are we in a housing crisis? Is it a crisis, or is it a conversation about various inconveniences? We would say it's a crisis. We see that housing crisis. It cascades right down to the most vulnerable. They become the face of this, because the most vulnerable are the ones who, when everything tightens up, when supply tightens up, we see that it affects everybody in the whole housing market. It cascades down and we see the increase of homelessness, which we are very concerned about.

I'm very concerned about homelessness, as is my colleague, the Minister of Community Services. In fact, I would say that every member of this House is. I have no doubt about that. I've been directly involved in that homeless challenge. I can't really unpack it, due to the fact that I signed confidentiality agreements, but we've had homeless people in our own home, literally, pre-COVID-19.

It is a concern to me. It's something that I've been directly involved with in my life, and I'm not happy about the number of homeless. I see this bill as affecting the overall supply, the need. This bylaw that we are saying that this bill will overturn, we see that as a necessity to address the crisis, and we will stand on the fact that this is a crisis. It's not a matter of inconvenience. I respect inconveniences. I know that they are real, but this is a crisis.

With that, I move to close second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 225.

All those in favour? Contrary minded?

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. 222.

Bill No. 222 - The Housing Supply and Services Act.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 222 be now read a second time.

Today I am pleased to speak about the Housing Supply and Services Act. This province is in the midst of a housing crisis. Over the past year, we have been working on a number of fronts with all levels of government, business, and community partners on solutions, but we need to do more, and we need to do better.

The proposed legislation will replace the Housing Act and, at a later date, the Housing Nova Scotia Act. It is designed to modernize the government structure for provincial housing programs and will increase accountability by creating a new Crown corporation responsible for public housing in Nova Scotia.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission for their recommendation of creating a separate entity responsible for housing. I would also like to thank the Office of the Auditor General for their review and report on the management and administration of our public housing properties.

The Auditor General found that public housing assets were being underutilized while the wait-list for units continued to grow. The Auditor General also found that the governance structure for public housing was inadequate, lacking the necessary oversight from government, and that there were inconsistent policies and practices across the five separate housing authorities. Frankly, the report confirmed many of our own findings and it helped lay the groundwork for the proposed legislation that I am speaking about today. As government, we owe it to our tenants and to all Nova Scotians to manage our public housing properties more effectively and efficiently.

[11:45 a.m.]

The AG's Report identified a number of issues. It also provided us with many recommendations to improve the administration and management of public housing. I am pleased to tell you that we got to work on the recommendations right away. We knew we had to do more. We knew we had to be bold, and we knew we had to take strong action because our clients absolutely deserve better.

The proposed legislation will amalgamate the five regional housing authorities and bring them together under one roof. As a Crown corporation, the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency will have a dedicated focus on public housing and provide consistency in policies and procedures across the public housing system. Under the proposed legislation, the new Crown corporation will be accountable and solely focused on improving public housing from one end of the province to the other.

The department will provide strategic oversight to the new Crown corporation to ensure alignment with government priorities. The department will maintain responsibility for all other non-public housing related programs, agreements, and initiatives.

This is important work. It will help to improve public housing for the clients we serve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his remarks. It is a privilege to speak here to Bill No. 222, the Housing Supply and Services Act. I think this is a really important piece of legislation that, unfortunately in some key respects, misses the mark of where we should be going.

The minister in his opening comments mentioned the Affordable Housing Commission and the recommendations they put forward. What is interesting is that the very first of 17 recommendations made by that commission was, and I'll quote it here, "Establish an arm's length independent" - I think that's the key phrase there - "provincial housing entity."

This entity that is being created as a result of this bill is not that. That's my opinion, of course, but when the minister introduced this bill last week, or whenever it was, the media asked if this was an independent arm's-length entity and the minister said no.

I appreciate the minister's candor on that point - it's good to have that - but to understand this is not independent, this is not arm's length. This is not meeting the number one recommendation of the Affordable Housing Commission. As many other members have made the point on many other pieces of legislation that are currently before this

House, I think it is just another example, and a really significant one, of a trend toward control and centralization.

The minister mentioned that the entity will have strategic oversight from government to make sure that it aligns with government priorities, which is a nice way of saying that they're going to run the ship. That is not what the recommendation was in any way, shape, or form from the Affordable Housing Commission.

As I've mentioned in the past, that commission was broad-based and comprehensive. It included developers. It included affordable housing advocates. It included senior bureaucrats, academics. It was a really fantastic group of people from across the housing system who really know the system well.

In speaking with those members, they told me - and I'm sure they'd tell anybody else - that this was the number one recommendation, and it was unanimous. No matter where you were on the housing file or the housing question, everyone agreed that this was the number one most important recommendation to be implemented and resolved in order to deal with the ongoing housing crisis in our province.

If the government, by the minister's own admission, does not want to follow that first, most important recommendation, I have real questions about whether or not the other 16 can be achieved as well. That's the first point and, I think, the most significant point that we all need to be aware of here. This does not meet the primary recommendation of the Affordable Housing Commission.

As the minister said - and I certainly agree with him on this - we do find ourselves in a housing crisis in Nova Scotia that continues to deepen and hurt people. The minister has talked about steps that the government has taken - whether it's special planning areas or zoning changes - that they believe will lead to more housing. We'll see. A lot of that housing, I'm sure, will come online over the next few years. A significant proportion of it will be market housing which, in many cases, is unaffordable not just for lower income Nova Scotians but for middle income Nova Scotians as well.

I think there is a huge gap here in terms of where government is investing its time and its resources. The Auditor General's Office this past June released a report that 5,950 public housing applications are on the wait-list. Almost 6,000 Nova Scotians on the wait-list for public housing. Over 50 per cent of that list is seniors.

We know that now more than ever, public housing is one of the only ways for low-income Nova Scotians to find housing that they can realistically even come close to affording. Yet we see from this government for some reason - I'm not sure why, maybe it's philosophical, maybe it's direction - a complete refusal to invest significantly in new or even renovated public housing stock, so far at least.

The other day there was an announcement about the Community Housing Growth Fund, which I think is a worthwhile mission. But again, that's \$2.5 million. That's nothing to sniff at. In a lot of ways, that's a drop in the bucket when we're dealing with an issue that requires hundreds of millions of dollars in order to get ourselves back to a situation where we don't have 6,000 people on a public housing wait-list - where we don't have 700 people in HRM alone who are homeless, and certainly well over 1,000 people across the province, at least, who have nowhere to live as we approach the Winter months. That's a really scary thing to think about.

Another issue here is related to student housing. Dalhousie University Student Union says that there are more than 100 international students without a place to live. We see that issue cropping up in Cape Breton. We see it cropping up across the province. Our universities are one of our greatest assets, but if we don't have places for university students to live, they're not going to stay here, and they certainly will not live here after graduation. That's a shame.

Again, rent: The price of rent has gone up an average of \$600 in the province this year alone. A new report that I've mentioned in the House in the past says that Nova Scotia has the second highest average rents in the country - an average of \$2,453, and that's all types of housing from bachelor apartments to detached homes. That's \$410 over the national average. Again, we are more expensive than Ontario; we are more expensive than Quebec. Only B.C. has more expensive rent than we do in Nova Scotia, and that is not something - a lot of the time we want to be first or second on lists, that is not one that we want to be first or second on.

People are struggling deeply with housing, and I don't see much evidence thus far that the situation has improved over the past 14 or 15 months, and, again, there's two sides of the coin here. The government - and I'm sure the minister will talk about action that they're taking on housing starts and development - but, again, I think an overwhelming majority of that housing is going to be expensive and unaffordable for most people. This government is ignoring the Number 1 recommendation of the Affordable Housing Commission. They are, in my view, sitting on their hands when it comes to investing significant real dollars in public housing and affordable housing across this province, and until that problem is addressed, our housing crisis will only get worse and worse.

With those words, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I truly appreciate the words of my colleague on this side of the House here. I have a lot to say, and I know you guys know I'm very passionate about a number of things. Public housing is not a stranger to those things because in my riding, I have a large portion of public housing units that over the years have seen disregard and non-help in many ways. I'm just going to say that there is no doubt that these changes to

housing management and oversight are needed. Absolutely. I mean, I think we can agree to that. I think this might be one of the many things that come across our table that we can actually agree on, that there needs to be changes to housing management. This is why the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission recommended an independent, arm's-length body to oversee housing, and it was recommended for a specific reason. We see this here when we sit in the House over these past few days when we talk about the theme: resting power and control in the hands of ministers and the government side of this House.

It's very concerning to see that we don't listen to the recommendations of those experts, and the expertise of the people who have done amazing work to continue to help us grow in Nova Scotia.

We know change is badly needed, but what this government is proposing is not what the Housing Commission has recommended. The Housing Commission called, like I said, for an arm's-length body, and oversight is very important, absolutely. The minister knows this. When we ask questions - this was one of the things that was put forward when a question was asked of the minister about housing. If you're going to ask me questions, I need to be able to know what's going on, which rightfully so is your job. As the minister of whatever portfolio you hold, that is your responsibility, to give us the information and to be able to know what's going on within your departments, because you're the minister of those departments.

I don't think that this particular consolidation and removing of - and I don't even know what you'd call - absorbing of the housing authorities takes away that. I don't want you to think that because you are the minister of housing - oh, sorry, Mr. Speaker. Because the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is the minister of that particular portfolio, absorbing it doesn't do anything other than give this minister more control over, and less accountability, and less transparency for all of us. We're all MLAs in this House, and if we're saying that we don't have answers and we don't get information, and we don't know what's going on, imagine what the tenants and the Nova Scotians who are going to be asking questions of these departments, imagine the wall that they're going to receive when they ask these particular questions about their own personal situations with housing. I'm very, very deeply concerned about that.

The commission explained in their report that this recommendation was supported by a broad range of stakeholders and a jurisdictional scan of housing providers across this country, and the commission used the word "critical" to describe the importance of this recommendation. The government says their model will create more transparency and accountability, and like I said just now, given this track record of transparency and accountability, it blows my mind to think that it's going to change because we give complete power and control over to the minister. It's a lot.

I'm concerned that this bill represents a failure of the government to put its energy where solutions are most desperately needed to address the housing crisis. I'd like to share

some recent statistics that underline the scale of the housing crisis in Nova Scotia: 11.4 per cents of Nova Scotians, more than one in 10, are in core need of housing. A recent survey from Rentals.ca showed that rents in Nova Scotia increased by 35.5 per cent last year - the highest increase in the country. My colleague also shared that information.

[12:00 noon.]

This is completely disturbing, to think that this is where our energies and our minds need to be, on consolidating and removing boards of a large magnitude, yet we still see these numbers of people in Nova Scotia who are struggling and in crisis.

As of September, 6,596 people who have applied for public housing are on the wait-list, including 2,443 families. That number has increased. It's huge. It's extremely large.

I want to say that when the minister was asked in the press conference, will this bill do anything to address the wait-list, absolutely not was the answer. No, it will not. I'm confused as to why we are bringing this to the forefront, among many other bills that have to do with removing boards, while Nova Scotians expect this government to address the housing crisis head-on. I know from talking to constituents in my community and across the province that there are considerable challenges facing Nova Scotians in accessing their right to safe, accessible, and affordable housing.

The wait-list for public housing is far too long. In fact, it is years long, and they will tell you that. When you call and apply, you call and you put your name on the list, they tell you two and a half years minimum to be able to be in a unit. That's just to someone who's in a crisis, someone who may have a priority, someone who is literally days away from being put on the street. It's way too long, and the system struggles to deal with even emergency placements in a timely manner.

Those on the wait-list, when they do finally access an affordable unit, many of them move into buildings with serious deferred maintenance problems. For instance, in my own constituency of Halifax Needham, routine maintenance at the Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority property revealed that the building had been so neglected that it was no longer safe for tenants to live there. One of the policy levers this government has over the private sector is to set a standard - standards - for best practices when delivering services, and it is failing to maintain a property to the point it becomes unsafe for tenants to live there. I'm definitely not proud of this, but is this government proud of this particular standard?

To paraphrase a brilliant quote from Mark Culligan, a community legal aid worker at Dalhousie Legal Aid Service, we need the government to build and maintain public housing on the same scale and with the same urgency as we build and maintain highways.

I want to sum up what I'm going to say, because I have a lot to say, and it will be condensed in a way that's going to be extremely - may possibly be hard to hear, but I have some things to say about public housing. We talk about affordable, and I agree with my colleague that this is probably the only option to affordable housing. When I say affordable, I mean rents geared to income.

Then, on top of that, because we've been talking about this while we've been sitting in this House - many days, hours and hours of conversation about the cost of living. People are struggling right now. It's not just everyday people. It's not just low-income people. Every single person in Nova Scotia right now is struggling with something, and housing is the top of the list for the majority of them. It's really interesting that we can't actually put a number on affordability when the percentage, as we know, is 30 per cent rent geared to income. People are applying to public housing and the wait-lists are this extreme? These numbers don't lie when it comes to the wait-list.

People are struggling. If this bill does nothing to address that - because that's what the minister said, it does nothing to address the wait-lists on public housing - it does nothing. They're not going to create any more new public housing. We're hearing a number of programs that this minister is speaking about. I've got to give kudos to the minister - these things are really great. They're really, really great. But it's not enough. There's not enough funding put in place to be able to address that.

I will say, simply put - I say this, and I'm not even going to apologize that I'm saying this. I say this because it gives the minister full control. I don't know if they knew this, but they already have control. They're the minister of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. It's under their umbrella. It just means that you need to change the structure in how housing is worked. It doesn't necessarily mean you need to completely remove boards, consolidate, absorb - all of these things. There are mechanisms in place to be able to do that work.

I will say this because I'll talk about this after we hear from the Law Amendments Committee, because I already know what I'm going to say when it comes to boards. The reason I'm sitting in this seat is because a board was dissolved. So if you want more people like me sitting in these seats, you might not want to dissolve boards. I'm only saying this because I can tell you, Nova Scotians know. They all know; they know why I'm here. They know why they get in positions. We come because we have a passion behind the feelings of our own constituencies and our own areas.

I'm going to tell you, when it comes to boards, we need to be very cautious and very aware of the things that we do because boards actually run on governance. Boards actually have accountability and oversight. Boards actually have transparency. I can't stress enough that right now, in this moment in time, while I'm standing here, I have yet to see that from this government that we have that is representing Nova Scotians right now.

I really wish I could say this to Nova Scotians. I truly - I hear the same information that you do. I get the same information as an MLA on the same day that you receive it. I really wish that the collaboration and the process of working together was for all of us here in this House but, unfortunately, Nova Scotians, I can't say that.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I just wonder if the member would speak to us and not to Nova Scotians. Speak to the Chamber, please.

SUZY HANSEN: I get very fired up about some things, and I apologize because I truly feel like I can't - maybe it's Halloween weekend. Maybe this is it - we're in *The Twilight Zone*. I don't know. I just can't understand our whole reasoning behind the amount of bills that have been put on this table that we're going to bring forward that all have to do with boards and dissolving and absorbing things that the ministers are already responsible for. It really is mind-blowing.

With that I will say I cannot wait - cannot wait - to hear from Nova Scotians in the Law Amendments Committee when we sit down and talk about these serious issues that affect all Nova Scotians here in this House. (Applause)

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

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I do want to address one or two of the comments from the member for Halifax Needham. I certainly admire her spirit.

In fact, in the bill briefing, I did not say this would have no impact on the wait-list; in fact, I did discuss how it would have an impact on the wait-list. Just to clarify for the member, I will unpack that again.

One of the issues that the Auditor General had identified was that the five housing authorities were not all implementing policies the same way. One of the policies that was not being implemented the same way was that not all of the five housing authorities were dealing with overhousing. Overhousing means we have a single person living in a four- or five-bedroom unit. How that happens, of course, is a family gets into a unit that's the right size for them, but over time the children grow up and move out. Maybe ultimately, Mum is left in the house with five bedrooms. That's what happens.

It's not an easy move. We recognize that. It's a difficult move for a senior or somebody who's older to downsize, to pack up the bedrooms, your children's bedrooms, to deal with the stuff. It's hard. We're not saying that. We know that in our department. The reality is the Auditor General identified that if we could deal with that, then we could take 1,000 people off the wait-list.

Will this bill give us the ability to reduce the numbers on the wait-list? Absolutely. With a Crown corporation, we can implement these policies the same across the province. In fact, this is one of the areas that will take people off the wait-list.

I will say that it absolutely wasn't the way it was said, whatever you heard. I am not saying what you thought you heard, but in fact that was not the case. This is, in fact, a move that will add better governance, better structure to our housing authority.

One of the other things I said in the bill briefing was that the province is too small to have some of these procedures duplicated. We have five housing authorities. They all have certain functions that could be in one. Not only will we achieve uniform policy implementation, we'll achieve some efficiencies.

To the member for Bedford to addressing the number one recommendation of the Affordable Housing Commission was to create a separate entity to manage this, I will recognize that that was the recommendation and we looked at that very seriously.

The reality is the Affordable Housing Commission report came out in May 2021. The report really - that recommendation was an indictment of the lack of management that this previous government had given to this file, frankly. What we see, just to give you an example, was that Housing Nova Scotia in six years was in three different departments. It was a football; it was kicked around. That's not a sign of good management. Anybody who knows anything about government will know that's not the sign of focusing on this. That's a sign of passing it around.

The Affordable Housing Commission was not satisfied with the management of it. So layer in over top of that the report that we get from the Auditor General on what are the actual problems. The Affordable Housing Commission didn't take a deep dive, not nearly as deep a dive as the Auditor General took. When we look at what the Auditor General told us about the various ways that these various housing authorities were implementing policies about the differences in structure, how they were working, the reality was that, in fact, these five housing authorities had been operating very independently.

Then you ask yourself, do we want further independence? The reality is these five housing authorities were pretty well standalones, they were operating extremely independently. As minister, I asked myself: is that what I want? My nature, as minister - I am a farmer, I don't shirk work. I say that I want to manage this, I want to take it on, I want this to be my responsibility. In any case I will answer in this Legislature for whatever we create, I will answer in Cabinet. As the minister, I am responsible. I am not abdicating my responsibility.

There are messes that need to be cleaned up, frankly, one of which is the overhousing issue. Another mess would be maintenance issues, and there could be more messes to clean up. I am not abdicating my responsibility as minister to deal with this.

We'll deal with this, I'm taking it on. We'll clean up this mess. That's my responsibility and we're going to do it. With those words, Mr. Speaker, I move to close second reading on this bill.

[12:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 222.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 223.

Bill No. 223 - Municipal Finance Corporation Dissolution Act

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'm earning my pay today, aren't I? Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 223 be now read for a second time.

I am pleased to introduce legislation that will facilitate the integration of the Municipal Finance Corporation into the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. As part of government's review of Crown corporations, the Municipal Finance Corporation's operations and staff will move into the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. This change will address duplication, improve efficiency, and improve accountability. Mr. Speaker, the Nova Scotia Municipal Finance Corporation and its staff have been doing important work on behalf of Nova Scotians and our municipalities.

The Municipal Finance Corporation Dissolution Act will repeal the Municipal Finance Corporation Act and dissolve the corporation, transferring its assets and liabilities and employees to the Province. As a result, amendments will be made to the Finance Act providing the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board with the authority to make loans to municipalities and municipal enterprises, leveraging the work that is already happening at the department. Consequential amendments will also be made to the Municipal Government Act and Halifax Regional Municipality Charter. For the client municipalities, we expect this to be a seamless transition and anticipate a smooth continuation of operations.

Since 1980, the Municipal Finance Corporation has loaned over \$3.6 billion to municipalities. We will continue to provide capital infrastructure financing to our clients at the lowest available cost and provide the advice and assistance that they have come to

expect over the last 40 years. As the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, I know staff look forward to continuing their role in working with municipalities to review and recommend temporary borrowing resolutions for approval.

Mr. Speaker, we are nearing the end of a transition period as corporate structure is addressed through this legislation and the staff integrate into the operations of the Department of Finance and Treasury Board.

In closing, municipalities will continue to be well served with low-cost financing for capital projects under this transition. With those remarks, I take my seat.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: The Municipal Finance Corporation provides long-term, low-interest loans to municipalities for important projects such as water, waste water, streets, buildings, and recreation - many projects most take for granted. The minister said he's going to continue to provide low-cost financing to the municipalities in Nova Scotia. This bill is to dissolve the Municipal Finance Corporation and consolidate its roles and responsibilities into the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Department of Finance and Treasury Board.

This means the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board will have final approval of loans to municipalities instead of a corporation that operated independently under a strong governance model and legislated representation from municipalities. This will open municipal finance loans to political interference from the Province. Will the Province be approving loans based on political expedience? How will this be transparent and accountable to taxpayers in Nova Scotia? Will the Province be forgiving loans for municipal units of its choosing?

I heard many buzzwords yesterday in this room attempting to justify changes taking place under the guise of streamlining, collaboration, and needing structural change. As we heard from all members on this side of the House yesterday, there is a theme forming, and this Act is yet another example of a power grab by this government, weakening local control and centralizing power in the Premier's Office.

I ask the minister if the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities was involved in this process and was the Association of Municipal Administrators involved in this process? The first step to a hostile takeover is to take control of the funds, which is what this Act has the appearance of doing. I understand the Municipal Finance Corporation was, in fact, disbanded in July, so I want the minister to explain that. Is this just like what the member for Argyle referenced yesterday? Is this just a legislative formality?

I hope these concerns are addressed, Mr. Speaker, in the minister's closing remarks.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: In a way, I do echo the words of my colleagues, and I do have concerns about the independence of this, and I do have concerns about the concept of playing politics with municipal units. I think those are always concerns when consolidation is occurring, especially when consolidation of finances occurs.

I do hope, though, if this change is to go ahead, that there is going to be transparency, that there is going to be built-in transparency into the policies and into the bills, and I also do look forward to hearing from the NSFM and AMANS, and hopefully we'll hear from them at Law Amendments Committee, as well as other municipal units.

Like I said, this is just concerns that we have that I think need to be addressed with regard to the transparency of how this is going to play out with government controlling those funds instead of an independent corporation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I just want to get up and speak a few minutes to Bill No. 227. Being a former municipal councillor for over 20 years, I fully understand the importance of the Municipal Finance Corporation and the way it operates. Municipalities have very few options when it comes to raising money. Other than essentially property taxes, there are other smaller mechanisms, but when we try to create projects or build projects for our communities, we do apply for federal and provincial funding.

The reality is those applications aren't always accepted, and sometimes, to meet the needs of our residents, municipalities go a little bit outside of their jurisdiction, I'd say. They're forced to around housing or health, telecommunications, many other areas where municipalities decide that in the best interest of their residents, they have to borrow money from the Municipal Finance Corporation.

My concern with the dissolution of the board is that if the minister has final approval and municipalities are trying to meet the needs of its constituents but it's not completely in line with the provincial platform or their priorities, then will the minister see that as something he might consider? That's a question I have. While the Municipal Finance Corporation was independent, I'm sure they looked at the project in terms of if it's viable, is the municipality able to meet its commitments, but it wasn't looked at in a political lens.

I guess I'm speaking on behalf of a lot of municipalities who really need, at times, to borrow money that doesn't fall within or completely within municipal jurisdictions. Will the decision become a political one or one based on what the municipalities are looking for?

I look forward to hearing what the NSFM has to say, and others at Law Amendments Committee. With that, I'll take my seat.

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

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I realize that the Municipal Finance Corporation is not something that is maybe well understood. I'll just say a couple of words about the process.

As members may not know, there is a requirement of all municipalities to report their finances through a document called the FRAM - the Financial Reporting and Accounting Manual document. Every municipality reports to us, in turn, their financial statements in the same way. We can see in a snapshot, we can make comparisons and see what - in fact, that document is available every year. It's publicly available, but through the information provided by that and through our municipal advisors - so we have municipal advisors that work around the province with every municipality. When municipalities need to make or borrow a temporary borrowing, they'll make a resolution and they'll provide it to our municipal advisor. It will come to me as the minister, and I sign off on it.

Every Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the last 40 years has had that process. Nothing changes, and in terms of what's changing with this bill, that doesn't change, either. The other side of that is - and as minister, I recommend that to the Municipal Finance Corporation, which are the people who literally move big blocks of money around. I will honestly say that I have very little understanding of how they do that or what they do. I am not an accountant, I don't understand that, but that shop, so to speak, moves that money around. That function is moving to the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, which is what they do on a much larger scale. This is what this is about.

From the point of view of the municipalities, from the point of view of the minister's approval, from the point of view of working with the municipal advisors, it doesn't change, it's the same.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to close second reading on this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 223.

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. 224.

Bill No. 224 - Perennia Food and Agriculture Corporation Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 224, the Perennia Food and Agriculture Corporation Act, now be read a second time.

This legislation that we are introducing will be another step toward improving the way government works. Not long after our government came to office last year, we committed to reviewing all provincial agencies, offices, boards and Crown corporations. Establishing Perennia Food and Agriculture as a Crown corporation was a recommendation from that review.

Perennia provides important services for the agriculture, seafood, and food and beverages sectors in our provinces - extension work, food safety, analytical testing and product development. Its work supports competitiveness and sustainability in these food resource sectors. As a Crown corporation, Perennia will provide the same services to the agriculture, seafood, and food and beverage industries in a way that aligns with our government mandate, and with more transparent reporting requirements.

With this change, we are helping to improve government effectiveness and accountability to Nova Scotians. This change will also help to increase Nova Scotians' awareness of the services Perennia provides.

This proposed legislation will establish the structure, mandate, and authorities of Perennia as a Crown corporation. The current decision-making board will become an advisory board to provide advice to me as minister. The chief executive officer will report to the deputy minister of the department. All staff, activities and assets of Perennia will transfer to the Crown corporation. The advisory board and CEO will be appointed by the Governor-in-Council.

We take it very seriously that we are responsible and held accountable to Nova Scotians. We are governing with a long-term view with long-term goals. This legislation is part of that forward-looking focus.

Perennia, as a new Crown corporation, will continue to support growth, transformation, and economic development in Nova Scotia's agriculture, seafood, and food and beverage sectors. With those few comments I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

[12:30 p.m.]

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say a few words on Bill No. 224. I will not dwell too long on this bill. It's similar to the other bills that the House has been considering, which I have spoken about at length, about the need for proper governance - which I feel the structures of these bills, including this bill, are sorely lacking in terms of good governance.

I have reiterated how the review of government's framework for Canada's Crown corporations has clearly indicated how good governance works. Unfortunately, this government continues to go down a route of concentrating power in the Premier's Office.

In the bill briefing, I asked a senior official from the department if there were any concerns with the governance of Perennia. The response was that there were no concerns expressed about the governance of Perennia. So if it's not broken, why are we changing it?

I know there are concerns and nervousness throughout the agriculture industry. My colleague from Clare has indicated there are concerns, as well, in the fishing industry. In essence, the disbanding of the board, turning it into an advisory board with absolutely no power, makes them ineffective. We are losing the advice and the expertise to help with the decisions of the work at Perennia.

Perennia is a very important organization to the agricultural sector, and I assume the fishing industry as well. To make changes like this puts at risk the good work that is happening. One of the biggest fears is that this will slow down the responsiveness of the organization to the industry, as we now have to go to the deputy minister or the minister for Perennia to take action and respond to problems that happen and need to be addressed within days - issues like that. We're putting at risk something that is not broken.

The other interesting note about this hostile takeover - if I can use the words of my colleague with respect to what's happening with municipalities - is Perennia in their financial statements, which I will table, was an \$11 million operation last year, but the government operating grant for Perennia is \$2.6 million. Less than a quarter of the revenue for Perennia comes from government, but now government is swooping in and taking over control. This, I would suggest, puts the organization at risk, and I'm not sure that all unintended consequences have been thought through.

I'll leave it at that for today and look forward to comments from the Law Amendments Committee next week.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I will echo the words of so many, that this proposed structure change is another in a long line of consolidating power in the hands of

ministers and Executive Council, and ultimately in the hands of the Premier's Office. It's another example of where we're really concerned.

The minister just now talked about the goal for increased transparency, that this will contribute to long-term goals of the government. Unfortunately, we have not been made privy to these. This Crown corporation and ABCs review was undertaken. We don't know the criteria, the process, and the stakeholder engagement that happened in each case. We've been provided nothing in terms of process and very little in terms of results.

I think this is just another concerning move for the agricultural sector, in particular, which I don't think asked for this. I think our agricultural sector is struggling and has been on the front lines of climate change. This is only reinforced through Hurricane Fiona, as folks assess the short-term and long-term damage that they have, and have had increased recovery costs.

We know our farmers have been struggling through this cost of living crisis because for them it's also cost of production, harvest, and transportation, the increased costs this year in terms of inputs, labour shortage, housing shortage. There are actually so many pressures in the agricultural sector that there's a great emphasis, in fact, on farmers' mental health.

I think it's really important to put that all in context - that the agricultural sector values the work of Perennia as it is.

Like my colleague from King South, I also reviewed the financial statements, and I actually have more questions. I would invite the minister to respond to those. There is approximately a third of the budget coming from government inputs and there is actually a lot generated from consulting fees. Is that the financial model that is going forward for Perennia? I don't understand why government's getting involved in a well-functioning, well-regarded organization that is doing quite well on its own. It's just not clear.

If the minister has some rationale that he's able to share, that would be very helpful. What analysis was conducted? You talked about more transparency. I'd love to understand that because as a private organization, Perennia is responsible for providing us financial statements every year, and it provides an annual report. It's also ironic to use transparency in the context of this ABC review that has been completely not transparent.

I am also concerned about the level of stakeholder engagement. As I understand it, people in this sector don't feel that they were particularly engaged. If the minister wants to counter that again, I would welcome to hear more about how engagement was undertaken, and to see the results of that engagement.

I would also just like to point out that Perennia has responsibilities for agriculture and for fisheries and aquaculture, and is taking those with them under this new structure, but will report strictly to the Minister of Agriculture.

On the fisheries and aquaculture side, I'm wondering how engagement will be maintained and how decision-making will happen. Will the same decision structure be followed when it goes to the Department of Agriculture? That doesn't seem to make a lot of sense, since we have a Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture with a great deal of expertise in that organization.

I guess just to say again, I don't know why this is being proposed. I'd love to hear why it's being proposed. I can't see the rationale for this major change at this point.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise here today and speak to this bill.

Perennia is a leader in supporting growth and development in aquaculture and seafood, relative to fisheries. It is an entity that our department relies quite heavily on. They provide products and services to enhance the industry here in Nova Scotia and throughout the world but, in particular, here in Nova Scotia.

They do a lot of work. For example, we just had the Ministers of Fisheries and Aquaculture Conference. Perennia led that and did all the work for that. Also, in Perennia, we have the Centre for Marine Applied Research. This is a group over in Dartmouth Cove and elsewhere that is doing a lot of work for the province and looking at, in fact, one of my mandate items - a coastal classification system. It is a very important entity.

The structure will help Perennia work more closely with government. We work closely now. This will enable us to work more closely with them. We're looking at a government now that's looking at more accountability and line of sight, if you will, to those who are being held accountable. We as a government are being held accountable and we hold ourselves accountable. The public holds us accountable.

When I take a look at some of the comments, I just want to talk about the highly skilled, highly engaged members of the board now. They provide specialties and currency in understanding the industry. Their guidance, input, and engagement is still critical, and they will be engaged. What we're doing is we are providing, again, the ability to engage in a way that unencumbers them, perhaps, from some of the other details of governance.

I listened over the last couple of days to some of the comments in the House here. I respect each and every one of you. You were all elected, you are all here to do your job as best as you see fit, individually and collectively, in your caucuses, as we are in our

caucus, as well as in Cabinet. When I hear some wording that I do not agree with nor do I accept, that the premise of not being in the public interest but being against good governance and democracy, I know those are words that are perhaps used in the heat of the moment in this particular case, but in my heart of hearts I don't believe that any one person in this Chamber agrees that any one of us would ever be against good governance and good democracy, not at all.

I think it's appropriate - and I will digress a little bit - a number of us are wearing the poppy today. My father was in the Second World War and in the Korean conflict, my late father. He always told me that in a democracy - which he fought for, and all our service people have fought for over many years, past and present; they fought for a democracy, not only for this country but other countries. In a democracy you do not always get what you want, and if you do get it, you do not get it when you want it. That's the beauty about this democracy we are living in. We all have a role to do. We are in the legislative branch here collectively. There's the executive branch that has the role and responsibility to govern as best as they see fit.

Our civil servants are the professionals, they are here for their careers. We are but a fleeting moment, who are elected by the people, so the line of sight to our civil service is through us. I take that very personally and respectfully to each and every member in this House. I might add that - I am going to turn it back over to you, Mr. Speaker, at your pleasure, naturally - but one thing I would say is I would be happy to talk with each and every one of you separately, over a coffee or your beverage of choice, to talk about the importance of our democracy and how we practise it and the fact that we can practise it differently from each other. That is the power of democracy.

I'll take my seat now.

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

HON. GREG MORROW: Just a couple of comments on some of the questions that were raised. First of all, the change from a decision-making board to an advisory board, I have spoken to the board members. I recognize and respect that they are the subject matter experts here, so I certainly respect their opinions and their advice that they will be bringing forward.

To a question about the change from Fisheries and Aquaculture, with this legislation, this is the first time that Fisheries and Aquaculture will be enshrined in legislation around Perennia Food and Agriculture, so that brings in some more consistency there.

Perennia is a model. Perennia is working very well. Members opposite have acknowledged that, but we can always improve. That's part of being a forward-thinking

government - how can we improve, how can we make things better? We can bring in more consistency and more transparency.

[12:45 p.m.]

As far as how does it make it more transparent? Perennia operated as a separate company, all on its own, with the minister as a single shareholder. Now we're bringing it in as a Crown corporation, to a minister, to a government that is accountable to the House of Assembly, to the media. That's just one way.

One of the members referenced Hurricane Fiona, and this ties into the great work that Perennia does. In the aftermath, every day after Hurricane Fiona, I was out visiting farms, seeing devastation, finding out how we could help - on my own, with my colleagues from Antigonish, Pictou West, Cumberland, Victoria-The Lakes. With the member for Pictou West we went to see a maple producer and just complete devastation - trees everywhere, didn't know where to go.

In those situations you don't always know what to tell them. You say, how can we help? They haven't even got their head wrapped around it yet. The question was, what do you need right now? The response was, can you put me in touch with Perennia? That, to me as the minister, showed me the valuable work that Perennia does. It's just one example.

I am not here to stand in the way of that work going forward, because it's valuable for our farmers and it's valuable to the government moving forward and accomplishing what we want to accomplish.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I close debate on Bill No. 224.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 224.

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. 230.

Bill No. 230 - Provincial Lichen Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

HON. JILL BALSER: I move that a bill entitled an Act to Declare the Blue Felt Lichen to be the Provincial Lichen of Nova Scotia now be read a second time.

I know that there is much anticipation for this bill and maybe folks in the House are going to want to know more about Blue Felt Lichen and, of course, how this species was brought forward to be identified as the provincial lichen.

I really do have to recognize two lichen enthusiasts in Digby-Annapolis. Jonathan Riley and Harold Clapp came into my office and asked whether or not this would even be possible. I said that I would bring this bill forward to the House to hopefully see it through to the finish line and be able to declare the Blue Felt Lichen as the provincial lichen.

If we do so, Nova Scotia will become the first jurisdiction in Canada to designate an official lichen. I think it's really timely and fitting, because Nova Scotia is home to an extraordinary amount and abundance of rare lichen species. Our foggy, cool climate is the perfect combination for lichen to grow and thrive, so we have over a thousand different species that live here in our province. I think this is to Jonathan's words - living here, we can easily take it for granted how many different species are clinging to trees in forests and of course on rocks, but Nova Scotia is a very special place, which I think all of us can also agree on. For this reason, it is very fitting that we are leading the way in declaring an official lichen for the province of Nova Scotia.

For members in the House to know, how did the Blue Felt Lichen get chosen? Well, there was actually a public vote in conjunction with a national campaign to choose a lichen for Canada. The goal of the campaign, of course, was to raise awareness around lichen and recognize their importance in ecosystems throughout Canada. Of course, it was a hope that all provinces and territories will follow suit if Nova Scotia leads the way and declare a lichen for their own province or territory.

In 2019, led by Dr. Troy McMullin of the Canadian Museum of Nature, lichen enthusiasts across Canada organized 14 public votes. Based on those votes, of course, nominations were brought forward, and so for Nova Scotia, that's how Blue Felt Lichen was identified as the species of choice for us.

In 2020, McMullin further organized the public vote for the national species of Canada, and 18,000 Canadians voted. So the species for Canada is actually the Star-tipped Reindeer Lichen. I know that everyone is very excited to know about that.

So, Mr. Speaker, what makes the Blue Felt Lichen very special? Well, it can be found along the shores of the Bay of Fundy, especially in the Digby area, which is why I am incredibly proud to be able to stand up and speak to Blue Felt Lichen for the folks back in Digby. Of course, it can be found along the Atlantic Ocean near Shelburne and the southern shores of the Bras d'Or Lakes in Cape Breton as well.

Blue Felts are listed as a species of special concern, but I think it's important that we recognize that this bill doesn't make the Blue Felt Lichen a protected species, but rather the recognized provincial species for the province.

Blue Felts are usually found on mature hardwoods like sugar maples, red maples, and white ash, and they are happiest in the mature hardwood forests or swamps or in the regularly clean and cool, humid environment, which is, of course, near the oceans. Blue Felt Lichen is blue-grey when dry, and turns deep blue when it's moist, and this is my favourite part: it resembles the shape of a scallop shell, so it has rigid and rounded edges, and its surface is covered in small round discs like tiny red hockey pucks.

Of course, if folks are out enjoying different trails, especially in the Digby area, you can come to the Acacia Valley Trails, as well as the Van Tassel Lake Trails, to be able to see this beautiful species for yourself. Of course, I invite all members of the House to come down to Digby-Annapolis to see the beautiful Blue Felt Lichen for yourself because the Blue Felt's dependence on the humid air and the ocean and the rich blue colour make it the perfect symbol for the maritime province, for Nova Scotia, Canada's Ocean Playground.

With those words, I will take my seat. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I am likin' this legislation very much. (Groans) But I have to say, I did a little research on the Blue Felt Lichen and I'm pretty excited about this, but I am unexcited - not excited - about the fact that - and I kind of knew this was going to happen, but I didn't know - or, I expected but am disappointed that this does not mean that the lichen is protected. The lichen is really a precious part of our biodiversity in Nova Scotia, as the minister, the member for Digby-Annapolis, has pointed out. These types of species are really important to us and to our ecosystems.

Some of the threats to Blue Felt Lichen: a serious threat is coastal development in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. It continues to be at a significant rate, but no data seems to be available on the rate of forest loss in areas with Blue Felt Lichen. Renewed gold mining activity, deforestation from mine footprint, road development in Halifax County may affect this lichen - that's an extreme threat, but a negligible threat because there's not a lot of lichen in Halifax County. Still, though, logging and wood harvesting may remove potential host trees available for colonization and may remove Blue Felt Lichen.

Two invasive slug species in Nova Scotia - and I am not talking about the Leader of the Liberal Party - have caused . . . (Interruption) I said I'm not talking about him. (Laughter) Seriously, though, folks . . .

THE SPEAKER: Must be Friday.

SUSAN LEBLANC: . . . have caused grazing damage to lichens. The impact of grazing slugs on Blue Felt Lichen has yet to be studied, although observations to date suggest that grazing is less common on other rare lichens, and the reason why those slugs are proliferating is because of climate change. Milder Winters resulting from climate change may increase the survival and activity of the invasive slug species. A reduction of fog frequency documented in Nova Scotia may particularly affect this cyanolichen, and there is uncertainty about the timing and severity of this threat.

I mean to say this all in goodwill because I know that the member opposite cares about biodiversity, cares about the environment, cares about climate change, and also cares about lichen. We need to do what we can to protect our precious rare lichens, and with that, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I just want to rise and say a few words because Mr. Clapp, who brought this legislation, is a Summertime neighbour of mine, and I know of his passion for the lichens. He is the resident lichen expert at Harbourview Cottages, but, also, probably in the province and possibly in the country, so I'm very pleased to see this Act move through. I have hiked the Acacia Valley Trails, I have seen the Blue Felt Lichen, and this is a wonderful first step, as my colleague pointed out, and, certainly, a victory for Mr. Clapp and his colleagues, so thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I just want to congratulate the minister on bringing forward the most well-researched, thought-out, and least-damaging piece of legislation that we've seen this session, so congratulations. The Liberal caucus will support this.

THE SPEAKER: I'm hesitant about having the member close debate because there might be a recorded vote called for or something. (Laughter)

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

The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

HON. JILL BALSER: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the remarks from the members opposite. This was a very fun and interesting process to learn from both Jonathan and Harold, of course - more about Blue Felt Lichen. Like I said, my favourite part is the fact that it is shaped as a scallop shell.

With those words, I move to close debate.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 230.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

[PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 227.

Bill No. 227 - Financial Measures (Fall 2022) Act.

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I rise here to move that Bill No. 227 be read for a second time.

Mr. Speaker, this is the Financial Measures (Fall 2022) Act, specifically amendments to the Act that will expand a tax credit that helps businesses offset the cost of investing in new capital equipment and also a change to align Nova Scotia's fertility and surrogacy support with new federal definitions.

Nova Scotia's Capital Investment Tax Credit is a refundable corporate income tax credit that provides credit for capital costs of new equipment used primarily in manufacturing or processing goods for sale or lease, for farming or fishing, logging, storing grain, or harvesting peat. It was established in 2015 and is closely in line with the federal Atlantic Investment Tax Credit. The Capital Investment Tax Credit will increase from 15 per cent to 25 per cent, and the tax credit cap from \$30 million to \$100 million for all applicants, including those who have already applied and purchased equipment after October 1, 2022.

By increasing the Capital Investment Tax Credit, we are encouraging businesses to expand and invest in our province. The legislation would also extend the sunset date of the

tax credit by five years to December 31, 2029. Changes to this tax credit will be effective as of October 1, 2022.

[1:00 p.m.]

This is for companies in the province or coming to the province making significant capital investments. We have seen it happen in the past. They have created good jobs, and of course, they're credits, so once the investments are made, they would be eligible for them.

This other part of this legislation will also harmonize our province's fertility and surrogacy supports with new federal rebates. Following the tabling of our 2022-23 provincial budget, the federal government brought in its definition of medical expenses under the Medical Expense Tax Credit to include payments for individuals using a surrogate or donor to become a parent. Under this legislation, Nova Scotia will use the new federal definition to cover both fertility and surrogacy.

The fertility and surrogacy tax credit will be administered by the Department of Finance and Treasury Board and will provide a 40 per cent refundable tax credit, up to a maximum of \$8,000 per year on expenditures for these medical expenses.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate the opportunity to get up and say a few words on this, just about fertility and surrogacy.

We're happy to see the alignment with the federal government on the rebate, but we do have some issues around the wait until you get the money back on your income tax return. People will find it very difficult to attend a clinic or receive this kind of treatment from a medical practitioner because it's not offered on MSI at this time. Many of these people find the upfront costs a real barrier, so that's something to keep in mind as we move forward with this.

People really don't have the thousands of dollars that it will cost to pay up front for fertility treatments. Although this is helpful for some, this bill does not help those who cannot pay for those costs up front. While the intentions of the bill are good, the unintended consequence is that there still may be more Nova Scotians who will not be able to realize their dream of being a parent because of this financial barrier.

Even many of those who can afford the upfront costs for fertility treatments still go far beyond their means to get there. We've heard stories of folks spending their entire savings, getting loans from family members, or selling or remortgaging their homes to afford the chance to possibly become a parent. Getting 40 per cent of the money back is helpful, but the cost is not the only barrier to fertility treatment in this province.

Those are some of the issues around that piece of the legislation. While we do agree and we're happy to see the alignment, we do have concerns that we're hearing from families that the financial barrier is still there.

On the capital investment side of it - this is really something that's an extension of the Liberal government. Governments do this all the time with capital investment tax credits, but I would also argue that we've sat through the session where we've had a very large conversation and debate back and forth about the cost of living for everyday Nova Scotians.

Along with providing an investment tax credit, if you're opening up the Financial Measures Act, we could be looking at other incentives that would help support people who are probably going to go into one of the most expensive Winters on record. Many Nova Scotians don't qualify for the programs that are offered, whether it's through the Seniors Care Grant or the Heating Assistance Rebate program. While capital investment is something that governments are involved with, as a caucus we want to see more support for everyday Nova Scotians to help cover the incredible costs that families are facing to keep the lights on and keep food in the cupboard.

With that, I'll leave it at that for second reading and we'll have more to say as we go through the process.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I'm pleased to rise and speak to this bill at second reading. First of all, I do want to single out concerns and questions. Again, I really would welcome the minister to explain around the actual process.

Tabling kind of like a Part 2 or a sequel to the FMA (2022) is highly unusual. It's only happened three other times in this Legislature, and it's always been connected to the immediacy of a change in government: in 2006, before the government fell; in 2009 and in 2017, immediately following elections and change of government. I think, first of all, we just need to understand why we would come forward with FMA amendments at this unusual time, and we would like some more transparency about that.

I think that in terms of the capital credit, we do have questions. Again, it's unusual timing, it's unusual process. There were calculations and estimates made for the first FMA and for the first budget, so why, six months later, have things changed so much that it's actually necessary to bring an unusual piece of legislation to the floor of the House?

I know the minister has been quoted in the media, and I'll table that, about this not being directed at any one project or any one company. But, again, why six months after the first FMA are we considering this, and why that amount? We'd love to hear some more

about the analysis and recommendations that were brought forward, and where they came from, that led to the development of this piece of legislation.

It is difficult to see this measure being proposed - essentially, an inflationary adjustment for corporations - while we've been calling for cost of living help for Nova Scotians this whole session and before. We've been asking for help for workers, we've been asking for help for people with housing, we've been asking for help for people with Pharmacare co-pays, and on and on. We've been bringing ideas to help Nova Scotians with the cost of living crisis, and none of that has been picked up in this session, and none of that is reflected in this FMA (2022) Part II. It is an opportunity to come forward with measures that can help Nova Scotians and not just help companies.

I think as well, in thinking about what's the analysis, why this now, it's also hard to put in context because we don't have an economic development plan. With due respect to the minister, who talked about the tenets of an economic development plan, the tenets of an economic development plan that starts with population growth is not an economic development plan. It's hard to understand the specific recommendation. It's hard to understand how this fits within the larger plans of government. Again, I'm all ears. I'd love to know how this all fits together. We do need an explanation about why this measure now and why this amount now.

On the fertility side of things, of course, being congruent with federal legislation is essential and important, but I would also like to signal that, again, this doesn't provide any further relief for Nova Scotians. Only Nova Scotians who can pay out of pocket can benefit from this piece of the bill. We don't see that it's enough for Nova Scotians who need fertility services.

With that Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

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

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I now move to close debate on the second reading of Bill No. 227. I'll just give some quick feedback to the members opposite.

On the issue of the increase in the value of the tax credit, I know the members had indicated there'd be a preference for having more of a focus on supporting everyday Nova Scotians or people who are most being affected right now by the impact of inflation. There's no question that is important, and we're certainly doing that in other ways.

This legislation, of course, is only specific to this tax credit. What I would say to that is we must always be mindful of ways that we can attract significant capital investment to the province. This credit is only for significant investment, over \$15 million capital

investment. We've seen that kind of activity happen in the past, and that has benefited everyday Nova Scotians - people who now have good jobs, making wages well in excess of the minimum wage. There's no question this tax credit is giving a little, but the hope is that it does get a little in the future for everyday Nova Scotians too in the form of good jobs.

If we can attract them to the province and the employers are good and the employees are happy, that's how I think we'll measure the success of this increase in the tax credit.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I close debate on this.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 227.

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, that concludes government business for the day. I move the House do now rise to meet again on Tuesday, November 2nd, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Business will include third reading of Bill Nos. 196, 198, 200, 203, 204, 206, 207, 210, and 211. We'll also look at second reading of Private and Local Bill No. 239 and, if time permits, Resolution No. 385.

Happy Halloween and have a great weekend.

THE SPEAKER: I think - is it November 1st and not 2nd?

KIM MASLAND: You're right.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House meet again on Tuesday, November 1st, between 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded?

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until Tuesday, November 1st. Enjoy your weekend.

[The House rose at 1:11 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 475**

By: Hon. Karla MacFarlane (Pictou West)

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

Whereas Constable David Fulton is a police officer with the New Glasgow Police Department; and

Whereas Constable Fulton recently celebrated 25 years of devoted and exemplary service to the local citizens; and

Whereas Constable Fulton was presented with the 25-year medal bars from Chief Stephen Chisholm and Deputy Chief Ryan Leil;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate and thank Constable David Fulton for his service and dedication to the local citizens and community.

RESOLUTION NO. 476

By: Hon. Karla MacFarlane (Pictou West)

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

Whereas Pictou West resident Constable Kelly Moore-Reid is a police officer with the New Glasgow Police Department; and

Whereas Constable Moore-Reid recently celebrated 25 years of devoted and exemplary service to the local citizens; and

Whereas Constable Moore-Reid was presented with the 25-year medal bars from Chief Stephen Chisholm and Deputy Chief Ryan Leil;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate and thank Constable Kelly Moore-Reid for her service and dedication to the local citizens and community.

RESOLUTION NO. 477

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Bobby Comeau has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with his fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Bobby has displayed was rewarded with a gold medal in bocce:

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Bobby Comeau and wish him continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 478

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Brianne Comeau has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with her fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Brianne has displayed was rewarded with two gold medals and a bronze medal in swimming;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Brianne Comeau and wish her continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 479

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Élise Thibodeau has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with her fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Élise has displayed was rewarded with two gold medals and one bronze medal in track and field;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Élise Thibodeau and wish her continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 480

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Jody Thibodeau has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with his fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Jody has displayed was rewarded with a gold medal in bocce;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Jody Thibodeau and wish him continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 481

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July: and

Whereas Joey Saulnier has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with his fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Joey has displayed was rewarded with a gold medal in bocce;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Joey Saulnier and wish him continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 482

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Justin Martin has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with his fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Justin has displayed was rewarded with a gold medal in bocce;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Justin Martin and wish him continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 483

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Mandy Crouse has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with her fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Mandy has displayed was rewarded with a gold medal, a silver medal and two bronze medals in track and field;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Mandy Crouse and wish her continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 484

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Michael Giguère has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with his fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Michael has displayed was rewarded with two silver medals and two bronze medals in track and field;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Michael Giguère and wish him continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 485

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Michelle Dugas has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with her fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Michelle has displayed was rewarded with a bronze medal in track and field;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Michelle Dugas and wish her continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 486

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Nicolette Deveau has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with her fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Nicolette has displayed was rewarded with two gold medals in track and field;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Nicolette Deveau and wish her continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 487

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Sara Muise has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with her fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Sara has displayed was rewarded with two silver medals in track and field;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Sara Muise and wish her continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 488

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Sherry Boyd has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with her fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Sherry has displayed was rewarded with a gold medal, silver medal, and bronze medal in swimming;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Sherry Boyd and wish her continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 489

By: Ronnie LeBlanc (Clare)

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia's 2022 Provincial Summer Games were held in Antigonish this past July; and

Whereas Timothy Comeau has been a committed member of the Clare Special Olympics team, training with his fellow team; and

Whereas the hard work and dedication Timothy has displayed was rewarded with a silver medal in swimming;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Timothy Comeau and wish him continued success in the future.