



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

## DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

**Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain**

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### First Session

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2022**

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House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2022**

**Sixty-fourth General Assembly**

**First Session**

**1:00 P.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Keith Bain

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Angela Simmonds, Lisa Lachance

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

**PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

**PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a *Report of the Superintendent of Pensions on the Administration of the Pension Benefits Act for the Years Ending March 31, 2021, and March 31, 2022.*

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Related to a member's statement, I'd like to table something from the *Globe and Mail* on September 13<sup>th</sup>, entitled "Inside Ashley McKenzie's filmmaking paradise."

THE SPEAKER: The paper is tabled.

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table an update to our plan from October of last year: *A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for Housing and Homelessness*. This is a progress update that was committed to for October of this year, and I'd like to table that.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

#### **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

#### **GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 493**

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

Whereas for more than two decades, Divert NS has been recognizing the achievements of innovative Nova Scotians who are leaders in reducing waste; and

Whereas the annual Mobius Awards brings together environmental leaders who are committed to finding solutions to environmental challenges and are helping Nova Scotians to think differently about waste; and

Whereas recycling and creating less waste supports our legislated goals of advancing the circular economy and achieving 300 kilograms of waste per year per person;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature recognize the 2022 Mobius Environmental Leadership Award winners recognized in Halifax last night: Monica Rivers, Luke MacDonald, Alicia and Miranda Teasdale of Teasdale Apothecary, Loblaw's Halifax Distribution Centre, the Mi'kmawey Green Communities Program, Tideview Terrace long-term care facility, and Sustane Technologies.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Advanced Education.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 494**

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

Whereas Russia is waging an unjust and cruel war against Ukraine and displacing many, including students like twin sisters Mariia and Yuliia Lytvynchuk, who arrived here with their mother in August; and

Whereas both sisters had many offers to study in other countries and provinces, but chose to study in Nova Scotia, where post-secondary partners and communities have stepped up to support many Ukrainian students; and

Whereas the resilience of the Ukrainian people is clearly represented by those who will continue their studies at our world-class colleges and universities;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Legislature thank those who stepped up to support these students, and wish all Ukrainians studying in Nova Scotia well with their studies.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.



The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Public Works.

**RESOLUTION NO. 495**

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

Whereas the Construction Association of Nova Scotia is celebrating 160 years of building excellence; and

Whereas the construction industry plays a vital role in our continuing efforts to build a strong and vibrant Nova Scotia; and

Whereas the businesses in the construction sector employ thousands of workers, inject millions of dollars into our economy, and support the advancement of important provincial infrastructure projects like hospitals, schools, and housing;

Therefore be it resolved that this Legislature recognize that the Construction Association of Nova Scotia's commitment, expertise, and willingness to collaborate are valuable resources as we work to improve the lives of all Nova Scotians and grow our economy - and extend a happy 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary to all members of the Construction Association of Nova Scotia.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

**RESOLUTION NO. 496**

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

Whereas for over the past 50 years, our province has sent a beautiful Christmas tree to Boston to thank their city for their support following the tragedy of the Halifax Explosion; and

Whereas the Tree for Boston tradition is something near and dear to Nova Scotians and is a symbol of appreciation, friendship, and unity; and

Whereas this year's tree, a 45-foot white spruce, will come from the aptly named community of Christmas Island, Cape Breton, and was donated by landowner Roddy Townsend along with his children, Angela, Carmen, and Andrew;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature join me in thanking this year's Tree for Boston donors for helping us carry on this important tradition as we send the tree off to Boston with thanks and very much appreciation.

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. 246 - An Act to Protect the Green Fund. (Hon. Iain Rankin)**

**Bill No. 247 - An Act Respecting Physician Recruitment. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 248 - An Act to Amend Chapter 32 of the Acts of 2014, the Health Authorities Act, Respecting Local Decision-making. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 249 - An Act to Amend Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2011, the Medical Act, Respecting Sexual Assault by Medical Practitioners. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 250 - An Act to Stop the Burying of Plastic in Nova Scotia. (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 Queens.

### **GRANDSON, ATLAS: BIRTH - RECOG.**

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, becoming a grandmother to Easton seven years ago gave me an entirely new purpose in life. Today I am over the Moon to announce that on Monday, October 31<sup>st</sup>, at 10:17 a.m., weighing in at a whopping 8 lbs. 2 oz. and measuring 19 inches in length, Atlas Starrett Robar was born in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. (Applause)

Now I'm the nannie of two, Mr. Speaker. I have another cheek to kiss, another little hand to hold, and another little man to love. Older brother Easton is so excited to finally fill the role of big bro. Witnessing his instant love and admiration for his baby brother filled my heart. He quickly shared with me, "Nannie, I am going to love him so much forever, and I will protect him the rest of my life, even though he took over my toy room for his crib."

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to please join me in congratulating parents Kelsey and Adam and big brother Easton on this precious addition to their beautiful family. They're all looking forward to bringing baby Atty home and beginning their new adventures as a family of four. Welcome to you, my grandson Atlas Starrett Robar. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Congratulations.

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

### **KORKOMAZ, G. & J.: LIVING STONE BUS. SUCC. - CONGRATS.**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: With November being Lebanese Heritage Month, I want to share a success story of a Lebanese-born immigrant who lives in Timberlea-Prospect and is the owner of a growing business called Living Stone.

In 2004, Georges Korkomaz moved to Canada from Lebanon with his wife Joanne, who was born and raised in Halifax. Before coming to Nova Scotia, Georges was a practising architect while Joanne was a student at Dalhousie University, working toward a law degree. Living Stone started with a very modest beginning, with Georges fabricating

stone from a garage using a hand tool and no running water, while Joanne ran the office from the bedroom of a small apartment.

[1:15 p.m.]

It was pure dedication, determination, and heart that allowed Georges and Joanne to shape Living Stone into the successful business it is today. Living Stone has grown to become one of the largest stone importers for fabricators in Atlantic Canada, with over 50,000 square feet of warehouse and fabrication space and over 70 employees servicing the commercial and residential industry.

Georges and Joanne say the most rewarding part of their journey is the creation of employment opportunities and building a legacy. They credit all their employees as being the heart of the company and are grateful they share the values and standards of Georges and Joanne.

I'd like the members of the House to join me in congratulating Georges and Joanne for embracing Canada, taking a risk, operating a successful business, connecting with the local community, and providing good jobs for Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**CHIASSON, S./SHARRATT, J.: 1<sup>st</sup> CHILD - BIRTH CONGRATS.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise today to recognize Sophie Chiasson and Jesse Sharratt, two wonderful Dartmouth South constituents on the birth of their first child, Rowan Alexander Sharratt.

Rowan, who couldn't wait to enter the world and meet his parents and canine and feline siblings, arrived a full day early on October 14<sup>th</sup> weighing six pounds, 14 ounces. He will no doubt bring the same kindness, joy, and commitment to community that his parents have demonstrated.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Sophie and Jesse on this momentous milestone.

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

**DAUGHTER, KENNEDY: GRADUATION - CONGRATS.**

JOHN WHITE: Today I would like to congratulate the more than 300 hard-working students from around the world who, as we speak, are walking across the stage at Cape Breton University to accept their degrees. I especially want to congratulate my daughter

Kennedy Marie White, as she's accepting her Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Psychology.

Kennedy is a brilliant young lady filled with love, compassion, and dedication. She has an amazing ability to read body language, emotions, and behaviour. Kennedy, I am sorry I am unable to be there with you today, but I want you to know that, along with your mom, Robyn, and Ryley, your nanny and poppy and all of your friends, I am extremely proud of you and your accomplishments.

I know you are only just beginning, and I can't wait to see your accomplishments in life, but will you please stop growing up so quickly? Kennedy, when you were a child, we told you to reach for the Moon, and even if you miss, you'll land among the stars. I want you to know that today and always you are a star in my eyes, as always, and continue being as great as you are.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**GRADUATING CBU STUDENTS: FALL CONVOC. - CONGRATS.**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I am also doing a member statement to recognize Cape Breton University. There are hundreds of students who are graduating today. CBU is such a huge part of the Island, and to see it grow and to see them expand their programs and to see them moving into Fall convocations over the last number of years, reflecting the size of the campus and the success of the campus, it's been a really wonderful story for the Island.

I rise in my place today as a former CBU graduate to congratulate all the graduates who will walk across the stage today. It's a big day for them, it's a big day for their families, and I want to wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

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

**FERGUSON, CRAIG: DEAD IN HALIFAX BOOK LAUNCH - CONGRATS.**

LISA LACHANCE: Today I'm happy to rise and recognize a Halifax Citadel-Sable Island constituent on the publication of his latest non-fiction work.

Last week, Craig Ferguson published *Dead in Halifax: Stories of Adventure, Scandal, Heartbreak and Heroism*. He has run the same titled Twitter account for years to share the stories of those buried in my constituency's many historic cemeteries.

Craig's book details the lives and adventures of more than 50 individuals who are buried around downtown Halifax. Among the people he chronicles are Viola Desmond, Robert Stanfield, and Joseph Howe. He also explores lesser-known stories of injustice in

the city, such as the segregation of African Nova Scotians, even after death, in the Camp Hill Cemetery.

Anyone who takes an interest in Halifax history will learn new things in his work. I encourage my colleagues in the House to join me in recognizing Craig's work in turning a Twitter account into a published chronicle.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

**TAKE OUR KIDS TO WORK DAY: OPPORTUNITY - RECOG.**

HON. JILL BALSER: Today, many Grade 9 students across the province will be heading to work, accompanying parents, guardians, and mentors for Take Our Kids to Work day.

On this day 22 years ago, I went to work with my dad, the honourable Gordon Balser. I had the opportunity to follow him around his department and tour the Legislature, and he even introduced me to the House of Assembly as I sat in the Speaker's Gallery. I also had the opportunity to visit Premier John Hamm in his office. For 14-year-old me, this was an incredible experience, and yes, Mr. Speaker, I also wore this awesome tie on that day too. That day has clearly left a mark for me because now, all these years later, I get to work in the Legislature, just like my dad.

My dad has been an incredible inspiration to me. Following in his footsteps as MLA for Digby-Annapolis is a privilege, and I'm extremely fortunate to share this journey with him.

To all the kids going to work today, anything really is possible. To my dad, thank you for believing in me. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

**RECIPS.: YAR. FIRE DEPT. AWDS. - CONGRATS.**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the Yarmouth Fire Department recently held its annual banquet and awards night. Firefighter Hank Nickerson received his 30-year pin and fire services exemplary service medal. Guy Muise received this for 35 years and Roger Nickerson for 40 years.

I would like to ask this House to join me in recognizing Hank Nickerson, Guy Muise, and Roger Nickerson for their combined 105 years of exemplary service to the Yarmouth Fire Department and thanking them for their bravery and dedication to the safety and well-being of our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**VOLUNS. & PROVIDERS: FOOD BANKS - THANKS**

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank all of the food banks, food service providers, and volunteers who provide meals and food for families in need that are in my community.

People aren't food insecure because they don't have enough food. They're insecure because they don't have enough income, and a variety of factors can contribute to this: systemic racism and oppression, precarious work and low wages, lack of affordable housing, lack of affordable child care, inadequate income assistance levels, inadequate disability support, mental health and physical health challenges, and increased costs of living.

I would like to name a few providers in my riding that I'm very proud of: the Brunswick Street Mission food bank, Jesus House Halifax, Mulgrave Park Tenants Association, The Salvation Army Community and Family Services, St. Mark's food bank, Canadian Mental Health Association, Sharing & Caring Social Club, Saint George's Soup Kitchen, Souls Harbour RESCUE Mission, Parker Street Food & Furniture Bank, and Hope Cottage, to name a few.

I would like all members to join me in thanking a few of our heroes here in Halifax Needham.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

**FATHER, JOHN: TRIBUTE - RECOG.**

CHRIS PALMER: Mr. Speaker, I had a prepared statement, but with the conversations around fathers, I want to take a minute. I realized this morning that 13 years ago on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, my dad, John Lorenz Palmer, passed from this world into the next.

This is kind of off the cuff here, but I just wanted to stand and say my dad was my role model. He was 10 feet tall and bulletproof, like a lot of our dads are - he was six foot seven, so he was close. He was a real great example of what it means to be a father. He raised six kids - I'm the baby of six. My father taught me my love of history, my love of politics, my love of debate, my love of being opinionated, sometimes. I just love him so much, and not a day goes by where I don't think of him.

I just wanted everybody to know that John Lorenz Palmer truly was a larger-than-life figure, and he was an awesome guy. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**MLA FOR COLE HBR.: AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to congratulate one of our colleagues here in the House, the honourable member for Cole Harbour, who was named one of the top 100 most influential Black Canadians this past weekend in Toronto. I'm glad the rest of the country is finding out what our caucus has known for quite some time.

I would also like to mention that the event was hosted in Toronto by a friend of many in this House, the Member of Parliament Greg Fergus. Also honoured at that particular ceremony was Nova Scotia Senator Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard, of East Preston, whom many of us know and love; and from Bedford, the founding president of the Black Business Initiative, Dr. Rustum Southwell.

I would like to congratulate all the winners, but especially those from Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**MCKENZIE, ASHLEY: NEW FILM SCREENED - CONGRATS.**

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, the congratulations of this House are in order to filmmaker Ashley McKenzie, who has followed up her ground-breaking portrait of addiction in her 2016 debut *Werewolf* with the triumph of *Queens of the Qing Dynasty*, screened at the Toronto International Film Festival and the Atlantic International Film Festival in September.

The film explores the worlds of neurodiversity, race and gender fluidity through the lens of the solidarity and friendship between Star, a patient hospitalized in Cape Breton in connection with mental health and An, a Chinese genderqueer hospital volunteer.

*The Globe and Mail* reviewer Barry Hertz rightly refers to *Queens of the Qing Dynasty* as a genuine triumph, a view which critics have broadly shared. McKenzie's work is deeply and authentically grounded in post-industrial Cape Breton. Hertz writes truthfully that *Queens* is evidence that the world's most exciting cinematic voices are right here, waiting for the support and spotlight they deserve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, before I do my member's statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, by all means, please.



BECKY DRUHAN: As the member for Digby-Annapolis mentioned, it is Take Our Kids to Work Day today. I am honoured and very excited to draw your attention to the West Gallery where my daughter Gabriella Druhan, who is a Grade 9 student at Hebbville Academy, is visiting with us today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Indeed, we welcome all visitors to the House. You are going to see your mother in action.

The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

**PLEASANTVILLE & DIST. FIRE DEPT.: 65TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: The Pleasantville and District Fire Department is celebrating its 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary this month and I rise today to honour the dedicated volunteer firefighters and auxiliary, past and present, who have served their community and surrounding area over these years.

Since its inception in 1957, the fire department has grown to a team of 24 courageous and committed firefighters and 10 dedicated auxiliary members. The equipment originally deployed by Pleasantville and District consisted of wooden adjustable ladders, a few hoses, and Ardie King's station wagon, which served as the fire truck.

In 2013, the department purchased a brand new International pumper tanker and through continued fundraising efforts, it welcomed a 2020 Rapid Response Unit. It is now working hard through catering and suppers to raise funds needed to upgrade their 2002 tanker truck.

I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating the Pleasantville and District Fire Department on reaching this significant milestone and thank them for protecting and caring for their close-knit community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

**NAHAS, SAM: LEADER IN LEB. COM. - RECOG.**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: On Lebanese Heritage Month, I'd like to recognize Sam Nahas. Sam came to Canada in the 1970s without a nickel in his pocket, fleeing civil war in Lebanon.

Through hard work and ambition, Sam became a leader in the Lebanese community and in the HRM. Sam was also instrumental in bringing Saint Antonios Antiochian Orthodox Church to the HRM.

Sam met his beloved wife Linda and raised three incredible boys who have all become leaders - Norman, Nicholas, and Andrew.

Sam is a leader in the Lebanese community and all of Nova Scotia. He is a role model for lots, including myself. He and his family, especially Norman, are always there to give me advice. On Lebanese Heritage Month, I want to recognize Sam for being one of the true leaders in all of Nova Scotia.

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

### **DAL. CUPE STRIKE: BENEFITS & WAGES - SOLIDARITY**

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, today marks Day 15 for CUPE 3912. Teaching assistants, markers, demonstrators, and part-time academics have been on strike for better, fairer wages and benefits.

Today, November 2, 2022, marks the first time Dalhousie University has agreed to return to the bargaining table after they walked away on October 18<sup>th</sup>.

One individual with a Ph.D. who has had it since 2005, states that when they go to Starbucks, the part-time employees there have benefits that they do not. Another, a political scientist, said that some will say maybe you studied the wrong area. Well, the university I work for does not think so, as they have continuously hired me over the years.

We are in solidarity with CUPE 3912. We look forward to seeing this strike end and for better, fairer wages and benefits to all those who are on strike.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

### **WESTHAVER, DAWN: GARDEN HERO OF 2022 AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, Dawn Westhaver has been a member of the Pictou and Area Garden Club for 25 years. She is the driving force behind many fundraisers, including the popular Spring plant sale in Pictou. She was recently awarded the Garden Hero of 2022 from the Nova Scotia Association of Garden Clubs.

As the Canadian Garden Council proclaimed 2022 the Year of the Garden as a way to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ornamental horticulture in Canada, I would like to use this opportunity to bring attention to the good work being done by Dawn.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate Dawn for being awarded the Garden Hero of 2022 from the Nova Scotia Association of Garden Clubs.

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

**ATTWATER, STEPHANIE: ACAD. ACCOMPLISHMENTS - CONGRATS.**

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I want to rise today and acknowledge Stephanie Attwater, who is a huge support in our community and in membership.

There are those of us who consider ourselves to be lifelong learners. Some people take extra courses for work as a hobby but for Stephanie, learning is basically an Olympic sport. She already holds 17 degrees and is currently the most accredited woman in North America and second most accredited person in North America.

When she is finished her current round, a whopping four doctoral degrees, she will have completed in two years her second Ph.D. This is especially exceptional for Stephanie because she sustained a brain injury during her first year of university, at which time it was difficult for her to even speak, read, or do math.

She's worked in our community as a rehabilitation specialist and applies her knowledge to her patients' recovery. If you ask her why, she'll tell you that exercising the brain is just as important as physical activity, and this is one of the ways that she can do that.

I would ask this House, for whatever reason, to congratulate her and wish her the best success in her future endeavours. Thank you, Stephanie, for all your hard work and donation to community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**SURKAN, PAULINE: ARM WRESTLING CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate and congratulate Dartmouth North resident Pauline Surkan, who recently brought home the gold at the Battle of the Atlantic Ladies Left Hand Open Arm Wrestling Championship at the Parkside Pub.

Pauline began arm wrestling just over a year ago. She did so to have something to work toward and stay fit during the pandemic. After only one year of training, she defeated the long-time Nova Scotia champion and did it with her left arm.

Pauline works as a nurse at the Nova Scotia Hospital, a challenging job made more stressful because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Arm wrestling has allowed her to stay in the moment, manage stress and improve her work-life balance.

Pauline is now training for the national arm wrestling championships, which will take place in Sydney next Summer. I ask all members to join me in congratulating Pauline on her achievements and wish her all the best at the nationals.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

JOHN LOHR: In the gallery behind me, I have two key members of the staff of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Vicki Elliott-Lopez and Tatiana Morien Fraser.

As others have mentioned, it's Take Our Kids to Work Day and we have four Grade 9 students up there: Lachlan Fraser, Maddock Lopez, Katherine Odamitten, and Claudia Zhao. I just would like the warm welcome of the House for these students. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Once again, we'd like to welcome you to the House. Enjoy the proceedings.

The honourable member for Kings North.

**BAKER, OLIVER: COP27 PARTICIP. - RECOG.**

HON. JOHN LOHR: I think I can speak for all members of this House in saying we hope that they will consider a career in the civil service or in this Legislature.

I rise today to recognize Oliver Baker, a Grade 12 student at Northeast Kings Education Centre. Oliver will travel to Egypt this month to participate in the 27<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - COP27.

Oliver Baker has participated in several Canada-wide science fair projects and is a member of the NKEC's Decarbonize Club, which led to his selection as one of two Canadian participants attending COP27. He will take part in the pre-COP event, Conference of the Youth, and attend the finance, science, youth, and decarbonization days during COP.

Oliver is an outstanding youth who is involved in music and sports. He was also a deputy returning officer in the last federal election and a keynote speaker at WE Day in Halifax in 2018. Please join me today to congratulate Oliver Baker as a local youth representative at COP27.

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

**CROGGAN, CHRISTIAN: NEW DRUGSTORE OWNER - WELCOME**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome the new pharmacist-owner of the Joseph Howe Shoppers Drug Mart, Christian Croggon, to Fairview-Clayton Park. When Wayne Little retired this Summer, there were big shoes to fill, but Christian jumped in with both feet.

Christian has had a busy year. In February, he was named Associate/Owner of the Year Atlantic by Shoppers Drug Mart, a designation he also received in 2015. In addition to the Joseph Howe location, Christian is also the pharmacist/owner of the Fenwick Street Shoppers in beautiful Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and the Bridgewater and New Germany locations.

When he's not behind the counter ensuring his customers are well taken care of, Christian volunteers with the United Way of Lunenburg County. He is a board member of the New Germany Area Medical Centre, which I believe is in beautiful Chester-St. Margaret's. Am I wrong? I'm probably wrong. Sorry.

I ask all members to join me in welcoming Mr. Croggon to Fairview-Clayton Park. I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to encourage everyone to get your annual flu shot.

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

**HOLOCAUST EDUC. WK.: HRM EVENTS - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic Jewish Council's Holocaust Education Week is back with in-person events from November 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>.

On November 1<sup>st</sup>, Menachem Kaiser's debut memoir, *Plunder: A Memoir of Family Property and Nazi Treasure*, was highlighted at the Halifax Central Library.

On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, Laurence Siegel's dance film, *Footprints/Lábnyomok*, will screen at Pier 21, followed by discussion with the filmmaker.

The closing program takes place on November 6<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m. at Pier 21, with both an in-person and livestream option. The keynote speaker will be Holocaust survivor Fishel Philip Goldig on his memoir *The Survival Story of a Six-Year-Old Boy*.

Holocaust Education Week programs are presented by the Atlantic Jewish Council, co-sponsored by and with the support of the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21,

the University of King's College, Halifax Central Library, Hillel Atlantic Canada, the U.S. Consulate General - Halifax, and the Azrieli Foundation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**GOULD, DAN: CONST. ASST. WORK - THANKS**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank my constituency assistant, Dan Gould, for being such an amazing servant to the people of Cumberland North. I want to wish him a happy birthday today.

Dan Gould is the foundation. He provides a firm foundation for the constituency office in Amherst. He started with me in this role in December 2017, and he has been a loyal, trusted man.

We all know in this House that politics can be a minefield, but Dan keeps his mind and soul focused every day on serving the needs of the people who contact our office. About 50 per cent of the people who contact our office are residents of Cumberland North; the other 50 per cent are from all over. He responds to each and every person professionally, with a heart to serve. He deals with heart-wrenching stories of heartache, as well as some unstable, threatening people. He strives to protect me and help everyone who he is able.

Today I would like to wish Dan Gould a happy birthday and thank him for his service to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

**DAUGHTER, RACHEL: BIRTHDAY WISHES**

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to wish my daughter Rachel a happy 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday. Born on All Souls' Day in less than two hours from start to finish, Rachel is an old soul. She is kind and fiery. She is wise, and as the middle child between two brothers, she knows how to hold her own. She is a champion campaigner, a devoted friend, an amazing daughter and granddaughter, and a tough but loving sister.

My husband, Darren, and I are so proud of Rachel. She brings us joy and keeps us on our toes, and we love her beyond measure.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join my husband Darren and I and our sons Matthew and Stephen in wishing our fierce and wonderful Rachel Jessie Thompson a happy 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**CLUB INCLUSION: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize Club Inclusion for their continuing effort to build a welcoming community for all people with disabilities. They are a registered charity that offers all kinds of creative programs to help make Armdale a very welcoming community.

I would like to thank the staff and volunteers who work with these programs that help young children to succeed by offering their time, care and activities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**PORTLAND STREET CRÊPERIE: 7<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the Portland Street Crêperie on reaching a significant business milestone. Last week, they turned seven years old - no small feat for a young business weathering a pandemic.

The neighbourhood favourite spot offers a variety of sweet, savoury, and classic takes on French crepes. My family would recommend the Bon Matin, but they're all delicious. In the Summer, the crêperie's bubble waffles and ice cream draw even Haligonians to the bright side of the harbour.

The Portland Street Crêperie was started by a father and son duo and remains a family affair, like many small Dartmouth businesses. I ran into Neil on the way to work and told him I'd be in soon. Now it's in Hansard, so I will.

Happy Birthday, Portland Street Creperie.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

**D'ENTREMONT, LAURENT: BOOK PUBLICATION - CONGRATS.**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I rise today to recognize local author Laurent d'Entremont. The West Pubnico freelance writer is notorious for his colourful stories of the old days. His latest, *The Man in the Wrinkled Suit*, is being launched today, November 2<sup>nd</sup> at Le Musée des Acadiens des Pubnicos et Centre de recherche.

Laurent, a well-known stand-up comedian and storyteller, is easily recognized by his Acadian accent. He hosts a weekly country music show on CIFA-FM radio and is a CBC Radio community correspondent.

Laurent has a passion for antique cars. Among his collection is a 1927 Model T that he built himself. He also built and donated a 1915 Model T to Le Village historique acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating Laurent d'Entremont on his latest book and wish him continued success in all his endeavours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**SCOTIAN GOLD COOPERATIVE: 65<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

HON. KEITH IRVING: Today I rise to recognize Scotian Gold Cooperative in Coldbrook, a grower-owned apple co-operative that has been a keystone of the Annapolis Valley economy since 1957.

With roots back to 1912, Scotian Gold specializes in high-quality, premium apple varieties such as Honeycrisp, SweeTango, and Ambrosia, along with others. The co-operative currently stores and packs 60 per cent of the apple production in Atlantic Canada.

Fruit arrives from more than 50 family-operated apple orchards across the province, which Scotian Gold markets to the world. With state-of-the-art sorting, grading, and packing equipment, the company aims to provide the highest quality apples possible. With more than 50 storage rooms featuring both controlled and dynamic-controlled atmosphere, they are equipped to store fruit year-round.

Today I ask all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in congratulating President and CEO Dave Parrish - and all the employees and apple growers of Scotian Gold Cooperative - on celebrating 65 years in business, bringing the best apples in the world to the world.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**CAFÉ LARA: NORTH END HFX. BUS. - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize a nice, warm café in Halifax Needham called Café Lara.

Café Lara welcomes you in to experience their stylish, European-inspired café. It's a place of reprieve or to gather. When you visit, you will adore its warm feel and excellent coffee and treats. Located in the trendy north end of Halifax, I know you will be inspired to explore the neighbourhood with a coffee to go.

I would like all members of this House to join me in wishing Café Lara the best success in this year and many more to come.



THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**CARROLL, S./VANCE, V.: MARATHON PARTICIPS. - CONGRATS.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I rise today to congratulate Shelley Carroll and Victoria Vance of Amherst.

These two dedicated runners both ran in the 2022 Irish Life Dublin Marathon on October 30<sup>th</sup>. Shelley and Victoria finished the marathon together. In a field of close to 15,000 runners, Shelley finished 6,253<sup>rd</sup> and Victoria finished 6,254<sup>th</sup> - literally one second behind Shelley.

They trained very hard together to represent their community at the Dublin Marathon, and I'm very proud of their achievement. I would like to congratulate Shelley and Victoria for this accomplishment and their effort to prepare for what most of us could only dream of doing - certainly myself.

Please join me in congratulating Shelley and Victoria for their achievements in the 2022 Irish Life Dublin Marathon.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**RUSSELL, ELAINE: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

HON. PAT DUNN: I stand in my place today to recognize the incredible work of Elaine Russell of New Glasgow. Elaine is the driving force behind the Sheppard's Lunchroom, held every Thursday at the Trinity United Church in New Glasgow.

It would be nearly impossible to know how many of our most vulnerable residents have been welcomed and fed over the past many years at this church. Students, seniors, and those down on their luck look forward to this service, and are treated as if entering a five-star restaurant.

It is under the direction of Elaine that the menus and tasks of cooking and serving these meals take place. She is joined by a large number of volunteers who show up every Thursday to be a part of this generous endeavour.

In these difficult times, these acts of kindness are what make the difference in so many people's lives. People like Elaine Russell are true heroes among us. I am proud to have this opportunity to acknowledge the continued gift of giving that Elaine provides her community.

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

[1:45 p.m.]

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

**HENMAN, PAUL: COVID EFFORTS - THANKS**

LORELEI NICOLL: I rise today to recognize Paul Henman, a resident in the neighbourhood of Colby Village and a local musician. During the lockdown in 2020, Paul was chatting with his partner about how much he missed playing and singing for other people. He, along with most of us, were struggling with isolation due to the pandemic and then the horrific mass casualties in April.

These dark days led him to bring his voice and music to others in his community and he made a decision to start singing on his front porch to his neighbours. Most were already aware of the musical talents and came out onto their lawns to listen. He continued to entertain for over a year, following proper protocols, of course. Some of his musician friends came and joined him after a year as well.

All ages look forward to Paul's music to lift their spirits. You knew you were a hit when a neighbourhood child asked you to play for her birthday party after COVID-19 protocols were lifted.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in thanking Paul Henman for his gift of music during some of our province's darkest days.

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

**MACLEOD, KAREN: ECP ADVOCACY - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Karen MacLeod, her family and friends who have been advocating for the provincial government to bring extracorporeal photopheresis treatment to Nova Scotia. Karen is battling graft versus host disease which occurs when the donated stem cells recognize the recipient's body as foreign and attacks the body. ECP is used to treat a variety of conditions, including graft host and other adverse reactions to donor transplants and autoimmune disorders.

Through their advocacy they are bringing attention to donor transplant rejections, especially graft host disease and the ECP treatment used to make those symptoms manageable.

Mr. Speaker, sadly, Karen is in hospital at this moment battling graft host disease. I wish her a speedy recovery and I wish her family well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

**PIRATE DAY FEST.: EVENT IN ST. PETER'S - RECOG.**

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge the Pirate Days Festival in St. Peter's. From September 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>, the Village of St. Peter's transformed into a village of pirates as they held their well-attended community festival. There were various events, including Trivia Night, cardboard boat races, children's events, food trucks, a pub crawl through the village, and a parade.

Each year the event continues to grow in popularity and is becoming an event attended not only by local people, but by visitors from all over the province and, in fact, from other parts of Canada.

A thank you to community members, especially Shanna Burke, Stephanie Stone, Jill Kirby, Susan Butts, Katie LeBlanc, Allison Martell, Sandi Fougere, and Colin MacDougall for all your commitment to the community. Hopefully next year I will see all of my colleagues here in the House, next September in St. Peter's, in your best pirate attire.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

**LONEY, BRETTON: *JOE HOWE'S GHOST* BOOK PUBLISHED - CONGRATS.**

HON. TONY INCE: I would like to speak about a friend and former media advisor, Brett Loney. Brett worked for me when I was the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage and Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs and retired from the Public Service in September this year. Prior to that, he worked as a journalist for 20 years in Halifax and St. John's, Newfoundland.

Brett has channelled his years of service and knowledge of the House of Assembly into a new book called *Joe Howe's Ghost*, available on Amazon, Kobo, and in several bookstores around the HRM. The book centres around a rookie MLA who encounters the ghost of Joe Howe and the effect that it has on her life and her career trajectory.

*Joe Howe's Ghost* is a reflection on Howe's tumultuous political era and the politics of today. It explores the personal struggles between the desire of political power and upholding heartfelt personal convictions that are common in both eras. I would encourage everyone to support the local author and get a copy of this book.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

**MAHONE BAY QUILTERS GUILD: 30TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Mahone Bay Quilters' Guild and extend my congratulations on the recent occasion of their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. For three decades the guild has been bringing together a supportive

community of quilters on the South Shore. Encouraging of all skill levels, its members share their passion for quilting and enjoy opportunities to learn new techniques in a variety of quilt styles.

I was especially fortunate to participate in the opening of the guild's spectacular annual show, aptly named A World of Colour, and view first-hand these exceptional pieces of fabric art.

Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful to see a local quilting tradition alive and well on the South Shore. Congratulations to the Mahone Bay Quilters Guild on this impressive anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**ST. BEN. CHURCH CARE TEAM: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and thank the care team at Saint Benedict Parish Church, who dedicate themselves daily to helping those experiencing poverty. The team is made up of Judy Lewis, Noreen Smith, Chris Yetman, Dinah Simmons, and Charline MacDonald.

Our office is grateful to have the support of the Saint Benedict Parish care team, as the response from the Department of Community Services has been very limited, cumbersome, and very slow to the urgent needs of our constituents who are experiencing poverty. The Saint Benedict team has been helping people find shelter, pay for groceries, pay for furniture and security payments for apartments and above all, giving them moral support.

I would ask that the House join me in recognizing the care team at Saint Benedict Parish Church for their genuine kindness and community generosity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

**HAMILTON, ELLEN: 90<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of Ellen Hamilton of Lower Onslow.

Ellen was born in Boston on October 28, 1932. She was raised in Glenholme, being the youngest of five children. In 1956, she married Keith Hamilton and moved to Lower Onslow, where she resides today.

Ellen is a lifelong member of the Lower Truro United Church and has always been committed to her community. For 35 years, prior to the current fire pager system, Ellen

received the initial call for help on a special phone in her home. Ellen then called a series of other residents, who had their call list as well. As a result of this dedication and other supports, Ellen has been named a lifetime member of the Onslow-Belmont Fire Brigade.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**SYD. MINES CLEANUP CREW: LITTER REMOVAL - RECOG.**

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the Sydney Mines cleanup crew, led by Wyatt Jackson and Tristan Hamilton. These two Memorial High School students recognized a need in their community to clean the litter that surrounds our streets. I met with these two young gentlemen at my office last weekend, and I was inspired by their dedication to the community.

I ask everyone in Northside-Westmount to join with them this Sunday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, at 12:30 p.m. outside Jubilee School to come and help clean up the community. If you can't make the day on Sunday, the Sydney Mines cleanup crew has asked residents to just pick a yard or pick a street in their community. Let's all make our communities more beautiful.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

**MARSHALL, ROWLAND: 95<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

KENT SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mr. Rowland Marshall of Seaforth for his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Rowland is an accomplished artist who recently held an open house to share his colourful artwork and celebrate his birthday. He is a former artist-in-residence and director of Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. He also taught philosophy and aesthetics.

Rowland works in both realist and abstract forms. The former display characteristics of neo-symbolism and minimalism in terms of content and detail. The latter works vary between semi-abstract and abstract expressionism. His artistic works include the use of acrylics, oils, and printmaking. He also uses various materials to create collages and small sculptures.

I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in wishing Rowland a very happy 95<sup>th</sup> birthday and continued artistic expression in the days and years to come.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

**COMEAU, FRANCINE: IRONMAN WORLD CH'SHIP PERF. - CONGRATS.**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, the Iron Man World Championship in Kona is known as the pinnacle of the triathlon. Its course through a lava field in Hawaii tests the strength and grit of participants. The day-long event starts with a 3.8-kilometre swim followed by a 180-kilometre bike race and ends with a 42.2-kilometre marathon.

Francine Comeau, who started participating in triathlons 20 years ago, qualified for this prestigious competition with her time from the Iron Man in Kalmar, Sweden. In Hawaii, Ms. Comeau did extremely well, finishing second with a time of 14:32:59 in the 70 to 74 age division and recorded the fastest time in the marathon.

I ask that all members join me in congratulating Francine Comeau for this phenomenal finish and wish her well in future competitions.

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

**LUN. CO. CHRISTMAS TREE PROD. ASSOC.: HARD WORK - RECOG.**

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Lunenburg County Christmas Tree Producers Association. I had the pleasure to join this hard-working group at their Spring session in New Ross.

To produce the trees that fill our homes with scent and beauty for a month each year, the members of the Lunenburg County Christmas Tree Producers Association work year-round ensuring this product is brought to market in an innovative and sustainable way. They are expanding export markets and encouraging others to enter the industry.

This is a growth industry for Nova Scotia. I ask the members of the Legislature to join me in honouring the contributions of these hard-working Christmas tree producers in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring the attention of the House to the Speaker's Gallery today, where we're joined by Tiondra Bernard-Jones, who is age 14 and in Grade 9 at Caledonia Junior High. She is here for Take Your Daughter to Work Day with Legislative Television's very own, our man Reed. (Applause)

I'd like to wish them both a great day together and welcome them both to the Chamber today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

**PAGES: WORK IN LEGISLATURE - CONGRATS.**

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to rise to recognize, thank, and pay tribute to all of the Pages here at the Legislature.

We all know that this place simply wouldn't run without them. They do an amazing job. It's a fantastic opportunity for all the young people who get a chance to experience the Legislature for all of its highs and lows through the course of a session. I know I'm not supposed to play favourites on this kind of thing, but I do in particular want to recognize a constituent of mine, David Tong, who is a Page here this session as well.

I'd like to ask all members to congratulate and recognize the Pages. Thank you.  
(Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

**DEAN, JUDE: SWIMMING MEDALS - CONGRATS.**

HON. BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge Jude Dean, son of Ally and Shelley Dean, formally from Bateston, who now attends Mount Allison University.

Jude is the captain of the Mount Allison swim team who recently won gold in five events and silver in another, winning the Top Male Swimmer. This enables Jude to compete at the World Lifesaving Championships in Italy later this Fall as a member of the Canadian National Lifesaving Team.

Today I would like to take this time to congratulate Jude on this recent accomplishment and wish him the best in his championships.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

**ANNAP. BREWING CO.: CAN. BEER CUP AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, the Canada Beer Cup is a national competition that celebrates independently owned and operated breweries across the country. It showcases quality and innovation in Canadian craft beer.

Earlier this month, the inaugural Canada Beer Cup Awards were held and I was pleased to learn that the Annapolis Brewing Company from Annapolis Royal took home gold in the stout category for their Courthouse Vanilla Stout. The brewery describes the beer as having a fine balance of dark-roasted malt, hops, coffee, and vanilla. I describe it as being delicious.

Courthouse Vanilla Stout was named after the courthouse in Annapolis Royal which is one of the oldest in the country.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating the Annapolis Brewing Company on winning gold at the 2022 Canada Beer Cup.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**SPORTWHEELS: FREE TO PLAY COLL. PGM. - RECOG.**

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to applaud Sportwheels Sports Excellence and the Sackville Library.

In celebration of Sportwheels' 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this small business wanted to share a token of their appreciation with the community. In conjunction with the Sackville Library, they launched a program entitled the Free to Play Collection whereby community members can borrow new sporting gear in the same manner as borrowing a book.

Sportwheels' vision was to provide a gift that would be utilized for years to come while providing affordable and accessible sporting gear such as baseball gloves, lacrosse sticks, basketballs, soccer balls, and disc golf equipment.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in applauding Sportwheels for helping families stay active and for the Sackville Library for providing a venue for the community to access and test out this generously . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The time allotted for Statements by Members has expired.

The honourable member for Cumberland North on an introduction.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome to the Chamber today two of our female municipal councillors from Cumberland County, Kathy Redmond and Jennifer Houghtailing. They're here for the NSFAM conference.

I wish them a wonderful time here and thank them for their service to Cumberland County.

THE SPEAKER: We always are glad to welcome people here into the Legislature. Enjoy your time.



[2:00 p.m.]

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

### **ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM.: N.S. LOYAL PGM. BENEFITS - UPDATE**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia is plunging towards an economic recession after eight years of growth in our province. To date, we have not seen a meaningful economic plan from this government. There was one that was promised to Nova Scotians that would help boost our local economy and also generate billions in revenue for the province. That is the Nova Scotia Loyal program, but to date, the only thing we know about that program is that there's a wrapped truck that's making the rounds in parades with Progressive Conservative MLAs.

Could the Premier please tell this House when we'll actually start seeing the benefits of the Nova Scotia Loyal program to our local economy?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): I want to assure the member that we are loyal to the Nova Scotia Loyal program. That is a program that will incentivize Nova Scotians to buy local and support local - give them a reason to do that. We're excited about that program, but we know that it takes time to make sure you get these things right. A lot of work is happening, talking to local businesses, talking to consumers about their consumption patterns.

We are very excited about the Nova Scotia Loyal program, and I'm glad that the member opposite shares that enthusiasm.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Don't confuse humour with enthusiasm over this. As most things we have seen with this government, we see a lot of hype on marketing and communications, and very little when it comes to substance. This isn't the only program that we have seen this government not come through on when it comes to their economic plan that they promised to Nova Scotians. We also saw this with the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee. I think that any Nova Scotians who were expecting that Better Pay Cheque Guarantee program are now looking for their money back.

My question to the Premier is: When will the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee Program that was promised in the platform come into effect for the people of Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Look, I disagree with the member's commentary on the substance. I think Nova Scotians would see programs like the MOST program. It encourages young,

skilled tradespeople to stay in or return to this province and help us build this province under a situation where they won't pay any personal provincial income tax on their first \$50,000. I think that's substance. I think that's a nation-leading program that many jurisdictions are looking at.

Nova Scotia Loyal is a very innovative program that will encourage people - actually give people a reason. It's one thing to say buy local, support local. We're actually getting behind that, because I know that when Nova Scotian consumers consume a Nova Scotia product, they will love it.

ZACH CHURCHILL: We have not seen the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee. We have seen a Nova Scotia Loyal program that so far literally seems to be one truck that's driving around the province doing branding - no points, no incentives to purchase local, no revenues into the province. Yet if we look at the numbers that are facing our province, they're pretty stark. We have GDP growth that is forecast in Nova Scotia to plunge below 2 per cent next year. I'll table that. Interest rates have taken a huge upswing, and inflation is over 7 per cent here. It's time that we got serious about economic and fiscal stewardship with this government because Nova Scotians need it. Our economy needs it.

Enough of the marketing gimmicks. When are we actually going to see a real plan of substance?

THE PREMIER: Of course, historic high inflation is causing a lot of pain in Nova Scotia - but also across the country and around the world. We know that the world's economy is slowing down as well. These things are real issues that are impacting the entirety of the world, not just Nova Scotia.

Here in Nova Scotia, Nova Scotians recognize a government that is looking to the future - not governing for today and tomorrow, but governing for 10, 15 years so we can put Nova Scotia on a path. Nova Scotians are seeing innovative ideas, like Nova Scotia Loyal, like the MOST program. We can quibble about our progress to date, but I will guarantee you this - the progress that we have made in one year is far more than that government made in over eight years.

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

### **PREM.: AFFORDABLE HOUSING - ENSURE**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I was driving down Robie Street with my daughter on the weekend, and at the site of the QEII Hospital, where I went to high school, there was a tent. My daughter asked me, is someone living in that tent? I said, yes, I think there is someone living in that tent. She said, does the Premier know? I said, I don't know. I think so. She said, will you ask him about it? I said yes.

My question to the Premier is: Will his government ensure that no Nova Scotians need to weather this Winter in a tent?

THE PREMIER: I thank the member for this important question. We can certainly assure your daughter that not only does the Premier know about it, the Premier spends a lot of time focused on this very issue. The concerns around homelessness are shared by all Nova Scotians. Every single Nova Scotian is concerned about homelessness.

We know that homelessness is a complex issue. Different life situations impact people in different ways. We know that there are mental health issues. We know that there are employment issues. We know there are family issues sometimes. We know these are complex.

I want to assure the member and her daughter, and all Nova Scotians, that this government is very focused on the issue. We are committed to supporting every single Nova Scotian the best possible way we can.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Despite a rent cap, this government has presided over a 35 per cent increase in annual rent crisis. They have not closed the fixed term lease loophole despite the explosion of rental costs and the doubling of the number of people finding themselves homeless. They've also not implemented a permanent system of rent control that would bring stability for tenants and for landlords.

When will this government implement policies that will ensure that regular Nova Scotians can afford a place to live?

THE PREMIER: The issues around the housing crisis, the issues around homelessness are very real. That's why we have a certain approach to that. That's why we are so focused on building more homes, building more development. We believe that the solution to a housing crisis is more housing. That's why we've taken steps with the housing task force. That's why you get our attention when we see a municipality putting up by-laws to slow down housing.

We know that more housing is the answer to a housing crisis, and we are very focused on that. We will continue to be focused on making sure that we have appropriate housing stock in this province.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Let's be crystal clear. Addressing the affordable housing crisis is going to be hard when this government has said that they will build exactly zero new public housing units. It will also be difficult to build affordable housing when they won't even agree to the CMHC definition - that is housing that costs not more than 30 per cent of a person's monthly income.

They think that giving away \$22 million in a forgivable loan to build unaffordable housing is going to help this situation. It won't. When will this government seriously address the housing crisis in this province and actually build affordable housing?

THE PREMIER: This is just a philosophical disagreement between two members. We know that when there is more housing, there will be more housing at various price ranges across the spectrum. (Interruption)

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

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: If you have more housing, then there will be more housing across the spectrum at every price range, and certainly some of that will be affordable. The answer to a housing crisis is more housing. That's why we're focused on building housing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **DED: NOVA SCOTIA LOYAL PGM. - EXPLAIN**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: We on this side of the Chamber are certainly confused about the Nova Scotia Loyal program. I think there are some indications that the government is actually a little confused about it too. Earlier this year, in fact, the PCs put out a survey to Nova Scotians asking what Nova Scotia Loyal meant to them. Being Nova Scotia Loyal means modest or bold, traditional or modern, fun or exciting.

Bad grammar aside, Mr. Speaker, I think one can presume that this is a very confusing line of questioning for a program that's supposed to have points tied to purchasing local goods.

My question to the Premier is: Can the Premier describe the Nova Scotia Loyal program now as either being confusing or indecipherable?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: God forbid - I don't think that's unparliamentary - that we would discuss our province in positive terms like "exciting" or that we would use optimistic language to describe the path ahead.

The Leader of the Official Opposition will likely know that there were a whole series of questions. Some of them were in a very fun style like you would see in a coffee shop, this or that. There have been tens of thousands of Nova Scotians who have responded to those surveys.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm sure they're as confused about the nature of those questions as anybody else because it's confusing. It's nonsensical. It doesn't even make sense.

The Nova Scotia Loyal program has a stated goal of increasing local food to a 10 per cent share of our economy. I will table that. That's very ambitious. We certainly would like to see it accomplish that, but we have not seen a path that has been laid out that's actually going to accomplish that.

There's been consulting and prototyping for over a year now, but we're still no closer to knowing what this program actually is. Again, the government is already branding this. They have this truck in parades all over the province.

My question to the Premier is: Would he describe the timeline for this project as either being delayed or slow?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: A close look at the branding on the truck will give you an idea. It's purposely done to show that this is a program in development.

To correct the honourable member, the prototyping stage rolled out this Summer. No, we have been in government for 14 or 15 months, but that prototyping work has been taking place over the last few months. It's very exciting and I have a feeling that I'm going to have a lot more opportunities to tell you more about it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

#### **DED: N.S. LOYAL PGM. EXPENDITURES - DESCRIBE**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, right now we have a program that exclusively exists in the minds of highly paid Progressive Conservative consultants, when this program is supposed to be benefiting the working class and local businesses. There has been branding, marketing, a fancy website, and an awful lot of business cards and logos, but nothing in the way of actual on-the-ground impact.

Would the Minister of Economic Development describe the expenditures of the Nova Scotia Loyal program as exorbitant or frivolous?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: If there's one thing that I often poke fun at in my hometown, it's if Lunenburgers can get 11 cents out of a Bluenose dime, we'll do it.

The expenditures to date have been quite modest. They are in the range of \$672,000. They have, as has been noted, included a lot of consultation with Nova Scotians. It is essential that Nova Scotians are engaged in this; that Nova Scotians help us understand

what truly impacts consumer behaviour. That is across the diverse socio-economic spectrum.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Perhaps the biggest way that the average Nova Scotian has been impacted by this program to date is by seeing a wrapped Nova Scotia Loyal truck. It's been driven all over Nova Scotia to be shown in every parade and PC MLA social event.

Mr. Speaker, it's just like the government: Window dressing covering up empty promises while most Nova Scotians are struggling to afford their visits to the gas station. This truck is being driven all over the province on the taxpayer's dime.

Would the Minister of Economic Development describe this use of taxpayers' dollars as wasteful or unnecessary?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: It's clear that the Opposition does not understand the nature of consultation. To suggest that the Nova Scotia Loyal truck only visits PC or government-held constituencies would also be incorrect.

We have had our teams and, dare I tell you, there are two trucks. We have been in HRM, West Bay, Ingonish, Yarmouth - imagine that - Shelburne, Berwick, Digby, Mahone Bay, Sydney, Glace Bay, Windsor, Greenwich . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou on a new question.

#### **DED: N.S. LOYAL PGM. REVENUE - COMMENT**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, the minister shouldn't be talking about consultation. They just violated the municipal charter with the HRM by not consulting.

This is not only a tiny hole in the provincial budget that they are creating, it's a huge one. In fact, they promised that the Nova Scotia Loyal program would bring in almost \$4 billion in new revenue to the province - \$4 billion. I'll table that.

To put it in terms, this would equate to about 80,000 wrapped trucks.

My question to the minister is: Would the minister describe a promise to raise \$4 billion in revenue wildly inaccurate or totally unachievable?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM GREEK: While I do love the opportunity for someone to write my script, the script would be very poorly informed. We have made it clear that

the goal here is a shift of 10 per cent in consumer spending. The math will work out to that kind of huge advantage.

[2:15 p.m.]

Nova Scotia Loyal is more than the consumer rewards program that we will be rolling out on the basis of the information and feedback we are getting right now. That is, we will not ask Nova Scotians to do what we will not do ourselves. We are also looking at procurement departments across government - Agriculture, Education, Health, Fisheries, and more.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, when this government campaigned on the Nova Scotia Loyal program, they told Nova Scotians that the massive amount of revenue this program would bring in would help pay for the improvements to health care and infrastructure.

With this key platform promise still without a plan or a timeline, we're left to wonder if there's any plan to raise the revenue to fix the health care system out of the new taxes and big deficits.

Would the minister describe the total revenue received by the Nova Scotia government from Nova Scotia Loyal as absent or non-existent?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: The only thing that has been absent for eight years is new ideas on how to approach the crisis in health care. We came into government on a promise to fix health care. We're delivering on that and we're delivering on all of the promises on which we ran.

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

#### **DHW - GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE: CHANGE - CREATE**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. In July, this government announced that it would no longer require letters of support for people seeking gender-affirming surgeries within the province. This is a good but limited first step and we need much bigger changes in order to align our health system with the 2022 World Professional Association for Transgender Health standards and to assure gender-affirming care is truly accessible and available to all Nova Scotians.

When will this government create ongoing systemic change in what's available for people in Nova Scotia seeking gender-affirming care?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We did make changes in July in terms of the referral process for those seeking gender-affirming care outside of the province. We are

working very closely with the 2SLGBTQI community to make sure that we are addressing the concerns that they have had over a number of years.

There is a group of individuals that is working with the Department of Health and Wellness, and we are really pleased with the progress so far on that file. We will continue to work with the community to make sure they have a health care system they can trust and is responsive to their needs.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, at the recent Standing Committee on Health, which focused on gender-affirming care, in fact the two witnesses, who are well-regarded, said they hadn't been contacted by the Province in six months. There's no clear path. There's no clear engagement. We don't have any information. We don't have any timeline for gender affirming care.

As well, organizations that support people seeking gender affirming care do critical work but are chronically underfunded. It was good news to hear Sexual Health Nova Scotia received a small amount of additional funding this year, but prideHealth is tasked with improving access to care for 2SLGBTQIA+ people across Nova Scotia and is still massively underfunded, with only one navigator position serving the entire province. There is a review under way since January and still no news.

When will the government increase funding to prideHealth?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, we are working with members from the community and also looking at a health equity framework, Mr. Speaker, in order to ensure that we are responsive to the needs of equity-seeking individuals across this province. I have confidence in the team, and we will continue to look at what funding is available and how we can best meet the needs of the community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**DED: N.S. LOYAL PGM. RED TAPE - AGREE**

FRED TILLEY: Parade season is coming up, so I'm just wondering where the sign-up sheet is for the truck.

Mr. Speaker, when prototyping a version of this program earlier this Summer, local businesses sure knew the answer to some of these questions. Some of the comments on the program included: silly, offensive, and a real pain in the - I better table that. It just goes to show that small businesses weren't part of the equation when this government was meeting with the highly paid consultants.

Which of these statements does the Minister of Economic Development agree with: The program is silly, offensive, or a real pain in the . . . ?



HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I sometimes struggle to even dignify a question like that. Perhaps those were responses submitted by members of the Opposition because, Mr. Speaker, the response on the ground at shopping venues of all sorts - from farmers' markets, from the smallest and most simple of roadside stands to the big box stores and Nova Scotians of every socio-economic strata, and as well of various cultural and ethnic communities - very much telling us this is a great idea, but here, importantly, are our ideas of how it can be best.

FRED TILLEY: I'm sure the members of the small business community in Nova Scotia would love to hear that their Minister of Economic Development doesn't dignify their responses. Those were their responses, not mine.

Mr. Speaker, when we speak to small businesses, we hear that they're already overburdened with paperwork and government-mandated administration. They don't need a program that will provide them with no additional revenue and more red tape.

My question for the Minister of Economic Development is: Would she describe the program's additional red tape as unwieldy or cumbersome?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I'm glad the member opposite got a thesaurus for Christmas last year.

Again, we have spent time with Nova Scotians both as consumers . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. This is really starting a loud discussion - I know that.

The honourable Minister of Economic Development.

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: As part of this consultative process, Mr. Speaker, we have been talking both to Nova Scotians as consumers and Nova Scotians as small- and medium-sized business people. You know what? They can wear the same cap too because most people have to buy as well as anything they're selling. We sought their feedback, and we take it very seriously. This program will not be a burden as is suggested by the member opposite. It will be of value to those selling locally made, produced, and grown goods.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

### **DED: N.S. LOYAL PGM. CONFUSION - PLAN**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: When asked about the Nova Scotia Loyal program, some small producers expressed confusion, saying that the government didn't tell them anything about how it was supposed to work. That is a question that producers, businesses,

growers, and consumers all have. My question to the Minister of Economic Development is: Why is there still confusion, and what is her plan to clear the air?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I would hope that the member opposite directed anyone with questions to our offices because, again, this is a consultative stage. It's very important that we get the feedback, but equally, that we are communicating with businesses across Nova Scotia.

I will only say that we are coming to decisions, and I encourage all members of this House to encourage businesses in your communities, if you do know of concerns, to share them. We want this for our province. We believe in this province. Join us.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It's not only the businesses that have questions about the program, it's consumers. We all want local products to succeed, and we want to support local businesses and small producers. We have heard random things about what the PC points are going to be used for, from government services to lottery tickets to T-shirts. Maybe they could be used for access to health care.

Mr. Speaker, for a thesaurus, you ready for this one? Can the Minister of Economic Development tell us which words best describe the use of her loyalty program: nebulous or ambiguous?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I'm going to give a shout-out. It's a strange thing to do in the middle of Question Period with only 45 seconds to answer any questions, but I had a teacher in high school. His name was Mr. Bob Sayer and he taught us wordcraft. I'm hearing words - I know that you searched deeply to find these terms, but there is nothing difficult to understand here.

We have gone to Nova Scotians as consumers and as business people, as producers and growers, and we've said to them, this will be good for all of us. Tell us what we need to know. Tell us what makes this an accessible program and a workable program and a useful program for you as businesses and for you as consumers.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

### **DED: PANDEMIC SUPPORT INSUFFICIENT - AGREE**

HON. KELLY REGAN: We think it's quite clear this government isn't actually listening to small producers and local businesses about their economic issues. We hear from businesses that are still struggling to recover from the pandemic, and we know this government has provided next to no support to help them.

We know 65 per cent of Nova Scotia's small businesses remain burdened by pandemic debt. Only half have returned to normal pre-pandemic revenue tables. In fact,

the average pandemic debt for a small business in Nova Scotia is \$105,000. I don't think they're using the government's PC points to make those interest payments.

My question is for the Minister of Economic Development. With so many small businesses struggling to stay afloat, would she agree that this government's efforts to help are insubstantial or insufficient?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: None of us would deny the fact that small business has been put through the wringer these last number of years. We all acknowledge the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic, when entire sectors were - for good reasons, I believe, at the time - closed for business. They adapted and they pivoted, and we all clapped our hands as they undertook the debt, which was referenced - that figure that was given just now - as an average debt.

They came through a Summer where many industries resumed, but labour was tough, and they sure as heck don't need a Liberal carbon tax.

KELLY REGAN: Speaking of the PC carbon tax, which they are choosing to implement, fuel and energy costs are the top cost constraint for 67 per cent of small businesses, followed by wage and insurance costs. The current tightness in the labour market is severely limiting many businesses' ability to increase production or sales - 51 per cent reporting shortages of skilled labour, and we can table that information.

Businesses are not saying they need a loyalty plan that has already cost two-thirds of a million dollars. They need actual help with operational costs, with debt, and with the labour shortage. My question is for the Minister of Economic Development: Is the ability of the Nova Scotia Loyal program to address small businesses' biggest concerns severely limited or lacking in capacity?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, whether it is an economic recession, labour shortages, or other pressures, one of the best things that we can do for our businesses is to assist them in building resiliency.

As a for instance, investing in new processes and equipment that will allow them perhaps to not have the number of workers - or at this point have a shortage of workers - but to sustain the jobs that they have. As well, new markets, diversification, and export are all solid ways to address this.

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

### **DCS: LOW IA RATES - HELP**

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is to the Premier. The 2022 Hunger Count shows that a number of people using food banks in Nova Scotia has jumped by 17 per cent

since 2019. The main reason is that incomes are too low to keep up with the rising costs of groceries and rent; 41 per cent of food bank visits are from people who get their income from income assistance.

[2:30 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier find it acceptable that people who rely on the government for their income have to depend on food banks to survive?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: As mentioned yesterday, we as a government are very dedicated to investing in our food banks. We are acutely aware of what is happening globally - forces that we have no control over.

What I will assure everyone in this Chamber and Nova Scotians is that we will continue investing in food banks. We will continue investing in food banks in our schools. We will continue doing that . . . (Interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Minister of Community Services.

KARLA MACFARLANE: I just want to assure Nova Scotians that we will continue believing in them and we will continue investing in our food banks as they need that service.

KENDRA COOMBES: So no investing in people, no investing in raising income assistance rates but investing in food banks. Great - that's going to help people.

Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier scoffed at the Leader of the NDP when she said that it's hard to put food banks out of business, but this is the position of food banks themselves. Feed Nova Scotia recently said, ". . . food is not the solution to food insecurity. Food support is critical to meeting the immediate need for food, but only bold policy intervention will create lasting change."

Bold policy interventions include raising the minimum wage to a living wage, indexing ESI rates to inflation, and implementing a permanent system of rent control. Why does the government refuse to do these things?

THE SPEAKER: I'd ask the member to table those quotes.

The honourable Minister of Community Services.

KARLA MACFARLANE: I promise I will not be as theatrical as the Opposition member. What I will . . . (Interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The Minister of Community Services has the floor.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Let me just remind people that Nova Scotians - we are having a hard time, absolutely. What this government has done, though, has worked across all departments. Let me begin. We introduced legislation to cap power rates; took a strong stand against the Liberal carbon tax that is supported by the NDP. . . (Interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Minister of Community Services with two seconds left.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Again, having the NDP support the Liberal carbon tax . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order please. Order, please. We have 16 minutes left. Maybe we might be able to get some questions in.

The honourable member for Bedford South.

#### **FTB: BETTER PAY CHEQUE GUARANTEE - UPDATE**

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, if I may, I'd like to return to this government's other disappearing campaign promise, the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee. In July 2021, the Premier said: On Day 1, our Better Pay Cheque Guarantee will put more money into the hands of working people in this province. As the Premier well knows, we're about 400 days overdue on that promise. This Premier has not delivered on this promise, by any means. This government has made no effort, zero effort, to even convince us that they want to deliver on this promise. Did he ever intend to follow through, or was this simply an election ploy?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I had the same question in my mind at one time and it was around a doctor for every Nova Scotian. I can't remember how many days the member just said but . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. It's almost like we're going to have to cancel Question Period.

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

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I remember another time I had that same question in my mind - break the monopoly of Nova Scotia Power. It was a lot more than whatever the member said, 100 and some days.

The reality is that that government left the health care system feeling so overwhelmed that we are focused on trying to help people who are working in the system. We're trying to help the people who are being cared for in the system because the last government, the Liberal government before us, did not care.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, I've been in this Chamber for a little over a year, much less time than the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, but I've learned something in that year. Whenever a member on the government side digs deep into history, it means they have no leg to stand on from the question that you asked. It's pretty simple. It doesn't take long to figure that out.

The Premier said last Fall:

“We only made commitments that we were serious about making, that we know will help Nova Scotians.

I want Nova Scotians to know that nothing has changed. We are serious about making those commitments and we will do whatever it takes to make it happen.”

He was right about one thing, Mr. Speaker: Nothing has changed. My question to the Premier is: When are people in this province going to get the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee he guaranteed them?

THE SPEAKER: Once again I'd ask the member to table that quote.

ALLAN MACMASTER: History, Mr. Speaker - we're not that far away in time from the previous government. In my mind it's not even history. It's certainly not ancient history, as much as we'd all like to forget about it and as much as the member of this party now who is newly elected with that party would like to forget about it. Unfortunately, it's certainly not ancient history. It's something we're still dealing with today.

In our budgets you will see a 10 per cent increase in the Department of Health and Wellness outside of COVID supports, Mr. Speaker. That is a very meaningful improvement for all the people who are working in the health care system, people who are feeling overwhelmed, and for all the people who are being cared for in the system.

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

### **FTB: BETTER PAY CHEQUE GUARANTEE - IMPLEMENT**

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's Speech from the Throne stated that his government will position Nova Scotia to compete with other provinces and

countries and invest in ourselves by putting more money in employees' pockets. I'll table that.

Other provinces are providing cost of living support. Newfoundland is giving nearly every working resident a cheque for \$500 and P.E.I. just announced a similar cost of living support. Not only are we not competing with other provinces, but we are also falling behind.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier: Was it in the fine print of the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee that you have to move to another province to get it?

ALLAN MACMASTER; Mr. Speaker, I tried to make this point yesterday. I am surprised that the Opposition is still raising it today. We heard the member talk about broad-based supports yesterday. One of the members questioned last week about why don't we give - I think suggesting a \$500 cheque to everybody.

The reality is, what good is that to somebody who is earning \$100,000 a year and has no dependents? What benefit is it to give them a \$500 cheque when we could target supports for people?

I also want to say that we are all feeling the effects of higher interest rates. To do such a measure in a broad-based way actually counters the work of the central bank rate now in trying to get rid of inflation.

LORELEI NICOLL: Now that we've identified a salary, the Premier's Throne Speech also indicated that this is a plan for the middle class and those struggling to join it. This means better paying jobs and growing businesses. I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, as Nova Scotians struggle to pay their rents and their mortgages and heat their homes and pay for groceries, the middle class in this province is disappearing, and the businesses that the Premier said his program would help grow are cracking under the weight of the pandemic debt. The Premier also acknowledged earlier that we are in an inflation.

Considering the hard times working people are facing, why has the Premier shelved giving Nova Scotians a better paycheque?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Middle class disappearing? We have massive labour shortages in this province. We are pouring money out in our own capital plan. We can't do all the work we want to do because we don't have enough people to carry the work out, so to say that the middle class is disappearing in this province, I completely disagree with that suggestion.

There is opportunity in this province, and I think particularly about young people and the MOST program, and the incentive that provides to young Nova Scotians who are in the province, or people who are young wanting to move to the province to help us build this province because we are a growing province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

### **DOJ: STREET DRUG PREVENTION - ADDRESS**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is for the Minister of Justice. The number of youth, in our communities, who are facing drug addiction is very, very real, and a very real concern to the people of Cumberland North. I understand the teams at Addictions and Mental Health are doing their best with the given limited resources once help is requested, but once people become addicted, however, the road to recovery can be very, very difficult.

What is the department doing to help get drugs off the streets in the first place before our young people can access them, and can the minister commit to providing the House with statistics on the number of drug-related thefts and other crimes that the Department of Justice is dealing with, and what is the department doing to reduce these?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Of course, whenever we have drug addiction in our communities, it's concerning to everyone. The Department of Justice does work closely with the Office of Addictions and Mental Health to try to address some of these issues, and we continue to do ongoing training with our police throughout the province to try to address some of these issues.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: It is well known that many of the drugs coming into Nova Scotia are coming through New Brunswick, often from Quebec. There is a need for our Maritime region to work collaboratively to combat illegal drugs. A collaborative approach with law enforcement to work interprovincially would be beneficial. Will the minister commit to addressing the illegal drug problem with his counterpart in New Brunswick, and commit to setting up a meeting to discuss this very important issue to Cumberland North, but, really, to all Nova Scotians?

BRAD JOHNS: As some members of this House know, when the House was going in this session, Halifax was actually hosting the federal-provincial-territorial meetings of the Departments of Justice, and Attorneys General from across Canada. There were a number of issues that we talked about at that time. Working with our other partners across this country, we discussed gun violence, we discussed border crossings with drugs, as well as illegal weapons. So, we continue to work on those, and I believe Cumberland is also in the process of doing the review currently as well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.



**FTB: BETTER PAY CHEQUE GUARANTEE - CLARIFY**

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, when this Finance and Treasury Board Minister was asked about his team in the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, he said he had “. . . many people - over 200 people - helping me in the Department of Finance and Treasury Board: very capable people, very intelligent. I’ve never been so well supported in all my life.”

It absolutely sounds like the minister is very well-supported indeed, so it’s surely not his department’s fault that Nova Scotians are still without a better paycheque. Will the minister today accept responsibility for the fact that the only Nova Scotians seeing a better paycheque are Progressive Conservative consultants and friends of the Premier?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: No, Mr. Speaker.

FRED TILLEY: No, he won’t commit to it, Mr. Speaker, but it’s clear from all of the things that we’ve seen from this government over the last number of months, those are the only Nova Scotians getting a better paycheque.

Yesterday, we asked the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board multiple questions about how he’s planning on helping hard-working Nova Scotians with the cost of living. The answer, after several comments, was, “I won’t even bother.” We’ll table that. Then he moves on to complaining about a PC carbon tax his own Environment and Climate Change minister is responsible for bringing in.

Mr. Speaker, it seems like the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board forgot to stop telling his ghost story from last week. Now it’s only about the Liberal bogeyman. When will the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board drop the scare tactics and take some responsibility for being one of the only finance ministers in this country trying not to provide the middle class with a cost of living support?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I have noticed this member likes to focus on personal attacks. I know he mentioned in the media one day, questioning my competence during a budget update that, curiously enough, his own previous Liberal government set the stage for when they introduced their budget.

There were changes along the way because economic assumptions swung wildly during the pandemic. The only thing I would say to the member is he might want to avoid the personal attacks lest he make something out of himself in this Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

[2:45 p.m.]

**DED: SMALL BUSINESS SUPP. FAILURE - ADMIT**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, when asked about her plan last session, the Minister of Economic Development said - and I'll table this - "The frank truth is that Nova Scotians are not looking for our recovery plan".

She may be right. With 65 per cent of businesses still paying off pandemic debt, with an average debt of \$105,000, and half the businesses still below pre-pandemic revenues with no support from the government, they're not looking for a recovery plan; they've already hung up their Closed signs.

Will the minister admit that her government has failed to support our small businesses?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. Again, I go back to how do we help our businesses to not just recover from the pandemic but be able to endure the various bumps in the road, no matter how big or small they are? That is through resiliency.

We took a program, a program that was piloted by the former government, the IRP, the Innovation Rebate Program, and we said this is a great program because it helps businesses over that hurdle of, I might have an opportunity, should I invest? It gives them that rebate. We made it a permanent program at \$12 million a year, and it is fully subscribed.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, a year ago the Minister of Economic Development referred to her position as the portfolio of ultimate possibilities, and I can table that. After a year of this government managing the economy, most people's possibilities are now, should I heat my home or drive to work? For our small businesses the possibilities are, do I lay off people or do I cut wages?

Will the minister admit that her government's actions have forced hard-working Nova Scotians into an impossible situation?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Talking to businesses across this province, I am not hearing people talking about layoffs. I am hearing about people saying, I need access to labour. We are a growing province with a growing population and much opportunity. People, in spite of the very many and true challenges, are feeling optimistic. But optimism is an asset, and you can either leverage it or alternatively it is also a perishable. We as a government are going to leverage the asset.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic, with a reminder that we're going to 2:51 p.m.

**DED: ECONOMIC GROWTH PLAN TIMELINE - INFORM**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, in the Auditor General's Report of December 2021, it was highlighted that the province had not yet released a long-term economic recovery or growth plan. It has been almost a full year since this report, and here we are in the same place - no plan.

To the Minister of Economic Development: Given her new role as the CEO of Invest Nova Scotia, when will the minister follow through on delivering an economic growth plan?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: We have been very, very clear about the pillars of our plan for economic growth: population growth; a commitment to supporting our existing businesses to grow and to green; to have an environmental plan that will give us a competitive advantage, which - let me tell you - is not a Liberal carbon tax.

As far as Invest Nova Scotia, when we have the new CEO, there will be a strategic plan undertaken immediately.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the response, but again, to the new CEO, given that every single Atlantic province has published a long-term economic growth plan, and the Auditor General said that you had to release one, when will she follow through with the advice of the Auditor General and actually publish one?

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

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm rising on a point of order. In Question Period today, we heard the Minister responsible for the Status of Women use the term "theatrical" when describing a member of the NDP caucus when they were asking a question.

I am a theatrical person, but I would say when used in this context, words like "theatrical" or "dramatic" or "hysterical" are synonymous with each other and they are meant to be derogatory. I'm asking you as the Speaker to rule the word "theatrical," when directed at a person in a derogatory way, unparliamentary.

THE SPEAKER: To the honourable member for Dartmouth North, we'll take that under advisement and check further into the wording.

The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Out of nine years, I've never had to stand up and retract a word, but I will retract that word. It was never intentional to hurt. It was just my feeling in the moment that the member opposite of me was being theatrical. My apologies.

THE SPEAKER: Therefore, the point of order is now looked after. The apology was made.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I do appreciate that, but I do wonder, this is not the first time we've seen this, so I'm wondering if it could be added to the list of unparliamentary language.

THE SPEAKER: We will be checking into whether or not the word "theatrical" is in other jurisdictions throughout the country as well.

The honourable member for Eastern Passage on an introduction.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: I would like to draw everyone's attention to the West Gallery, and I would ask the members to stand, please. We have our very own Mr. Doug Bacon from Cumberland South here, Premier Roger Bacon's son, and his beautiful granddaughter, Patricia Auchnie. We welcome them to the Legislature. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Again, we welcome everyone to the Legislature, especially you, farmer.

### **OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

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

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

### **PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

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

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 209.

### **Bill No. 209 - Improving Access to Pharmaceuticals Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm very pleased to rise and speak to this very important bill, Bill No. 209. This bill would require the government to pause collection of premiums under the Seniors' Pharmacare Program and deductibles under the Family Pharmacare Program for one year during this cost of living crisis.

This is a very important idea that would help a lot of people and would have positive knock-on effects on our entire health system. There are families right now who can't afford the insulin that their children need. There are families that are deciding whether to fill prescriptions for blood pressure medications or to buy groceries for dinner. There are folks who go off medication for depression that would help them live a normal life because they simply can't afford to pay for it. There are people who want to be on birth control but can't make the monthly cost work.

A few years ago, it was estimated that 26 per cent of Atlantic Canadians don't take their medications as prescribed because they cannot afford to. This number is likely much higher now, now that we have experienced a one-in-a-lifetime explosion of costs, everything from rent to groceries to other bills.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that come January, some bills are going to go even higher. We know power is going to go up and we know the cost of fuel is rising.

The June 2019 final report of the Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare, established by the Government of Canada, pointed out that approximately 20 per cent of Canadians have inadequate drug coverage or no coverage at all. Atlantic Canada has some of the lowest levels of access to prescription medications in the country.

This government seems surprisingly out of touch with what life is like for people right now. We've heard this throughout Question Period today. People are struggling to pay for their prescriptions, and they need help. Full stop.

We have heard this government talk a lot about how they are providing targeted support to help people - things like the Seniors Care Grant, but that grant doesn't cover the cost of medications and it is only available for seniors with very low incomes, below \$37,500 and that's per household, and it can't be applied to the cost of medications. It can be applied to the delivery of medications but not the cost of the medications themselves.

I will say this when speaking about the Seniors Care Grant: My office, I think, may hold the record for how many people we have helped to apply for that Seniors Care Grant and it is great. There are lots of great things about it but there are plenty of people who have come into the office to say, I hear you can help me apply for the Seniors Care Grant, and it turns out that they don't qualify because they make \$40,000. There's not much difference between \$37,500 and \$40,000. The fact is that those thresholds have to be raised.

Families are struggling, too, with the cost of prescriptions and this government has not provided relief. This idea is a straightforward, targeted support that this government could enact now that would help people right now. When people don't take their medications, they end up needing more intensive health care later on. God knows, we don't need more pressures on the health care system right now, as we speak.

Doing this now, that is passing this bill and eliminating the deductibles and the fees for Seniors' Pharmacare and Family Pharmacare for one year, doing it now will save the health care system money in the long run and will prevent human suffering.

I will quote from the Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare. Helping people access prescriptions - and I will table the report:

“can save billions” nationally “by lowering the price we pay for prescription medicines and by avoiding the greater costs that accumulate when a manageable condition becomes a serious health crisis or when complications develop because someone could not afford to take medicine as prescribed. It might be the person recently laid off who stops taking medicines for preventing heart attack or stroke. They don't feel an immediate, daily difference when they take those pills. So, they question the expense when money is tight. They mean to get back on the medicine when they get back on their feet. But time runs out. They end up in an emergency room in crisis. They may now need ongoing home care. Any return to work is delayed or maybe never happen. Barriers to accessing prescribed medication can and do result in additional visits to the doctor's office, emergency departments and hospital inpatient wards, all costing our society much more than the cost of that preventive medicine. Improving access to prescription medicine improves health outcomes, reduces health care visits, and saves billions in downstream health care costs.”

Early last year Liberal Members of Parliament voted against a federal NDP bill that would establish a national framework for pharmacare. While we wait and wait for this process to unfold, there are steps that this government could take right now to make medications more accessible to people here.

I will note that the federal Liberals have promised a universal pharmacare program dating back to the 1997 election. This is 25 years, Mr. Speaker. While we wait for the federal government to deliver on its promise of a universal pharmacare program, and during this cost of living crisis, this government needs to ensure that people have access to lifesaving and life-improving medications.

[3:00 p.m.]

I'll point out that neither the Liberals when they were in government, nor the Progressive Conservatives now, have supported an NDP bill to lay the groundwork for a universal pharmacare program in Nova Scotia. I wonder how much Nova Scotians have paid out of pocket for prescriptions in that time.

This idea is a no-brainer. People need help now. The NDP in Nova Scotia has a history of helping Nova Scotians access medication. When the NDP was in government, there was the Fair Drug Pricing plan. It capped the price of generic drugs, leading to lower prices for Nova Scotians who were enrolled in the Pharmacare program and a better deal for taxpayers.

The NDP also created the Nova Scotia Insulin Pump Program to help families pay for the costly devices. We know that over the last couple of years, that program has been underused because the thresholds were too low, and also that the folks who are living with diabetes are calling for continuous glucose monitors. That's another example of a cost-saving measure in the long run. It will save human suffering, and it will save a lot of money in medical bills and health care costs down the road.

I'll also mention that neither party, the Liberals nor the Progressive Conservatives, have supported an NDP bill that would make birth control freely available, even though now that the Liberals are in Opposition, they seem to think that's a good idea. A whack of organizations have called for governments to ensure full access to contraceptives: the Canadian Pediatric Society, Oxfam Canada, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, the Canadian Association of Midwives, the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives, the Canadian Medical Association, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. They all have called for free contraceptives. Even in the face of all of that expert advocacy, this government is turning a blind eye.

The government has been repeating since it was elected - and I'm sure we'll hear it again in this debate on this bill - that they are performing a review of pharmacare programs. Not once have I heard an explanation or been provided with any information about the review. Here are some questions: What is the scope of the review? What are its goals? What is the timeline? Will it result in greater coverage or less coverage? Will it reduce the fees associated with pharmacare programs? When will it be completed? Some pretty clear questions there, Mr. Speaker.

I would invite the government to provide some of the details, but in the meantime, we will wait. Quite frankly, given the track record of the government, we will wait with concern and with trepidation. People need help with these costs now. Let's be clear. People in Nova Scotia die prematurely and suffered needlessly in ill health because of the cost of prescription drugs.

Through this whole session, we have been talking about the cost of living crisis. We have heard from this government that affordability is their top priority for Nova Scotians. We have heard about investments in “affordable housing,” which is not really affordable housing - it’s attainable housing. We’ve heard about the investments in housing. We’ve heard about the seniors grant many, many times. We have heard about investments in food banks.

We don’t need investments in food banks when we could have investments in people. We could have investments in people’s pocketbooks. Ending or pausing Pharmacare premiums and deductibles for a year during this most difficult time for Nova Scotians is a way to do that. It is targeted support. The government likes targeted support. This would offer some relief to seniors and to families who live with low incomes. Instead of investing in a place where people can get their food for free because they can’t afford to go to a grocery store, let us allow them to have more choices by freeing up some of the low income that they have.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues across the aisle, and next door here, and from folks in our party on this very important subject. I appreciate the debate and look forward to some support of this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise today to speak on this bill. I would like to thank the member for Dartmouth North for bringing it up. It does talk a lot about health care. I think that’s an important topic that is top-of-mind for a lot of Nova Scotians. I think the conversation is a good conversation to have. It gives us an opportunity to talk about the things that our government is doing in health care. We’ll address a lot of what’s in the bill here in my presentation.

We know that many Nova Scotians are struggling right now. The cost of almost everything has increased. Whether it’s food, clothes, housing, building supplies, or the cost of borrowing, everything does seem to be going up. Unfortunately, Nova Scotians will suffer even more soon when their federal Liberal government imposes a punitive carbon tax on them very soon.

It seems that nothing has been immune to inflationary pressures. Every decision that we make is evaluated and targeted to make the biggest difference in the lives of Nova Scotians. I’ll speak to some of those targeted decisions in a few moments.

We would love to be able to pay for everything, but we know that is just not possible. We owe it to all Nova Scotians to use their money - and it is their money - wisely. Indeed, that is one of the biggest responsibilities that governments have.



There are many pressures on our health care system, and like all Nova Scotians, inflation is impacting health care as well.

That is why we are a member of the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance. Our work through this national partnership ensures that Nova Scotia gets the best deal possible on the price of their medications. This helps keep copays and deductibles down and keeps more money in the pockets of Nova Scotians. In my 25 years in the insurance business, the topics of copays and deductibles were a big part of my work.

We work very hard to keep Pharmacare premiums at a minimum. We know there are still some seniors who struggle to pay these premiums. That is why, for our most vulnerable Nova Scotians, Pharmacare premiums are already waived. In fact, almost half of Nova Scotian seniors Pharmacare recipients pay a reduced premium already, or no premium at all.

Likewise, deductibles for family Pharmacare are income-based. We recognize that many Nova Scotians have different means, and we are working to support those who need our help. That help includes having a ready, responsive, and reliable health care system.

For too long, our health care system has been neglected. No longer, Mr. Speaker. This means change. Increased recruitment of physicians, increased numbers of nursing seats, patient transfer units with EHS, are just a drop in the bucket of the changes that we are making.

I recently had an opportunity to attend a physician welcome event in Greenwood, Nova Scotia with my good friend, the member for Annapolis. I recognized the good work that a lot of people in the area are doing with a group called the Mid Valley Region Physician Recruitment & Retention group. They are a group of volunteers who are doing great work in bringing doctors to rural Nova Scotia in that part of the Valley.

I was very pleased to hear the chair of the event give a report that in the catchment of the area that they look after - between Aylesford and Bridgetown - the people on the need a family doctor list has gone down from 6,000 to 5,000 in the last year. That's making progress. People that day felt that there's optimism about where we're going.

Our Action for Health plan outlines how we're going to do this, but we know the ways that we have always done things have not worked. We are a government of action on this side. We have invested in new technology such as the Ethos. It will be able to find cancerous tumours with more precision, and then focus the therapeutic radiation on those tumours without damaging healthy tissue.

The new hybrid operating room at the Halifax Infirmary is the first of its kind in Atlantic Canada. Patients can receive diagnostic testing if complications arise during a procedure without having to leave the room. CAR T-cell therapy is ground-breaking for

cancer treatment, and Nova Scotia is the first province in Atlantic Canada to offer this treatment.

We know seniors who are on fixed incomes are particularly feeling the financial punch - pinch, or punch, I guess, if you want to put it that way. This is why this government expanded the Seniors Care Grant program - to cover more expenses so they can continue to live comfortably at home. Many seniors have come to my office in Kings West and have been the beneficiaries of this investment. We have also added a one-time grant to help with the cost of home heating. These two programs amount to a \$29.1 million investment to help seniors just this year. We are increasing the number of long-term care beds for those who are unable to remain in their homes.

We also know that some families are hurting right now with higher costs of food, clothes, fuels - pretty much everything. This is why we have increased the Nova Scotia Child Benefit for Nova Scotia families who have lower incomes. Families will receive as much as \$1,275 per child a year. That is at least \$350 more than they received last year. We have worked with our federal partners to lower the cost of child care to help working families make ends meet.

We are investing in more housing for Nova Scotians . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I wonder if the member could speak more about the pharmaceutical bill that's before us.

CHRIS PALMER: There's a delicate balance between reducing the personal cost of care for Nova Scotians and ensuring that we adequately fund the existing and new program of services that they need. Removing Pharmacare premiums across the board means taking away money from other programs that Nova Scotians desperately need. It is like using a hammer when you really need a scalpel. Not all Pharmacare recipients have the same financial circumstances. That is why this government has a number of programs in place to help Nova Scotians who need help.

We will continue to work with Nova Scotians and our health care team members to find solutions for our health care system. We are a compassionate government, and we'll continue to deliver compassionate solutions. There is much to do. That work will be this government's focus going forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect on an introduction.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, in the gallery opposite, we have a couple of guests this evening. We have Hayley Mills, a good friend of mine I went to school with growing up. It's Bring Your Daughter to Work Day, so she has her daughter, Layla Cowie, with her who is attending Five Bridges Junior High in Grade 9. They missed Question

Period - I was disappointed. They would have seen some better entertainment, but they'll come back on another day. Thanks for coming. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I don't know how entertaining I'm going to be. It is nice - a privilege actually - to stand up and say a few words on this NDP bill, An Act to Improve Access to Pharmaceuticals.

We talk a lot in this Chamber about how so many people are struggling. We talk a lot in this Chamber about the gaps in our health care system, the failings on all levels within health care. Sometimes we do talk about actual solutions, but a lot of the time it's a lot of what's wrong, what's not working - rhetorical what-can-we-dos.

We have a bill in front of us that our caucus is very happy to support because it is actually something that is putting practicality and policy to good use, which is lacking a lot. We hear a lot of politics and not a lot of policy, and this is something that is good policy.

Families struggle, seniors struggle. I heard the honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development mention the Seniors Care Grant. Kudos to the Seniors Care Grant, but the Seniors Care Grant does not cover prescriptions. This is something that is geared towards prescriptions, for the costs of prescriptions.

Families struggle. There is a family in my community who has an ill daughter, and ill child, and they have to make the decision on a weekly basis between buying groceries, paying this bill, or getting prescriptions for their daughter. They are not unique. This is not a unique situation.

When I hear members talk about all the good things happening in the province, this is not to negate any of those good things. It is to show that there are holes, there are still things that are not being talked about, or there are still groups or facets to the cost of living to our health care system that are being left behind.

It is not to take away from or to criticize what is being done. It's to point a spotlight onto the things that are not being done. That's what my colleagues in the NDP caucus have done in providing this bill. They have shone a spotlight on something that is not being focused on, not being looked at in any way, and have given a practical positioning in order to alleviate some of the stressors that are out there in regard to prescriptions and having better access to pharmaceuticals.

[3:15 p.m.]

One of the big things is no premiums for the people enrolled in the Seniors Pharmacare Program. I think that is easy and cost-effective - it's an easy win. For those who are listening who make these decisions, even if the bill in its entirety can't be accepted or debated further than this, finding that one little caveat could mean a world of difference to our seniors. Another is no deductible charged to the people who are enrolled in the Family Pharmacare Program.

Again these are two really easy wins. I know the government is on record to how important those who are in low-income households, those who live in poverty - how committed they say they are to those groups. It is not my place or my role to discount that, but what this piece of legislation and those two particular points could do would prove that that is accurate. It would be sustainable realities for the individuals involved who are enrolled in these programs.

I would like to commend my colleagues for bringing this forward. I think it's an important lesson that when we're talking about the cost of living crisis, which I believe all 55 of us should acknowledge is real and that it is happening across our province, any way we can help one another, any way we can find ways to work together, or to get ideas, or to help Nova Scotians who are struggling, and there are so many more of them today, I think we should take advantage of that.

We had a great example of putting politics and partisan politics aside last week within the Labour and Advanced Education bill. I think that when it comes to our health care, when it comes to our cost of living crisis - if we have pieces of legislation like this in front of us, it's important that members take the partisanship of politics and put it aside. Worry less about where an idea comes from, and more about the practicality of it and the impact that it would have on the lives of Nova Scotians who are struggling right now.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to support this piece of legislation and I would encourage the government members to do the same.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I stand in full support of this bill tabled by the NDP caucus.

When I read this bill, I couldn't help but put on my nursing hat and think back to the 20-plus years that I worked in family practice. One of the biggest frustrations when you're trying to help people in health care is when they do not access the medications that have been prescribed by family physicians or a nurse practitioner simply because they cannot afford them. One of the things that people working in primary care hear time and

time again is that they cannot afford the medications that are being prescribed. Seniors are at the top of that list.

Many seniors don't understand the bureaucracy of the Pharmacare Program - they don't know how to fill out the form or the paperwork or they miss sending in the payment. The result is that when they go to fill their prescription that their doctor or nurse practitioner has ordered, they have to pay the full amount and they simply cannot afford it.

When you speak with people who work in family practice and primary care, if you speak to them about the Pharmacare Program, I can guarantee you, you're going to hear a huge sigh. You're going to hear a lot of frustration back from that primary care provider. It's very, very frustrating, not just for the money but for the fact that pharmacare here in Nova Scotia is the furthest behind in the country as far as approving and making accessible the drugs that people are being prescribed.

For example, Xarelto. A physician will provide Xarelto instead of warfarin, and even though the physician takes the time to fill out the paperwork and all the bureaucracy, often you have people working in the Pharmacare Program who have no medical experience and are denying people access to these drugs.

Mr. Speaker, the Pharmacare Program should be made accessible at no fee to seniors. I fully support this bill, but I think other changes need to come along with it. In addition to making the program accessible to seniors, the bureaucracy needs to be removed so that when physicians prescribe medications for their patients - the best medication to ensure the proper management of that illness - it's not being denied by the Pharmacare Program.

We see this with all kinds of disease entities, such as cardiac disease. You can speak to any internal medicine physician and you will hear about their frustration with the Nova Scotia Pharmacare Program. We see it with diabetic management, where someone is taking insulin, but the physician wants them on the newer diabetic medications and Pharmacare denies them, or they say they have to take insulin and prove that they're not being well-managed on the insulin in order to qualify to get the better, more improved medication.

That just frustrates primary care providers. It frustrates physicians, it frustrates nurse practitioners and nurses who work in family practice. Why would we want a patient to have to prove that they don't have good diabetic management on insulin in order to get the best medication for the management of their disease? You're putting the patient at risk. It's very, very frustrating.

One of the reasons I support this bill is because in practice, I've seen many, many times where a senior either can't afford the premium to get the medication or they don't understand how to fill out the paperwork, so they miss sending their money in. Again, it's

leading to them not getting access to the medications they need to properly manage, in many situations, their chronic disease.

What happens in family practice is that you try to help that patient. You'll call up the pharmacy and ask, is there a compassionate care program? Thankfully, many pharmaceutical companies do have a compassionate care program, but, again, you're asking a physician or a nurse practitioner to fill out more paperwork, which takes away time from them possibly seeing another one or two patients. So they fill out this paperwork with this pharmaceutical company to ask, will they cover the drugs for free?

Then you also have access to samples in your clinic, where you're trying to provide somebody pharmaceutical medications with your free samples. That's not sustainable. If we want the best health care for patients, that includes having access to the right medications to manage the disease properly.

Our seniors, most of them, are living on fixed income. The cost of the copay for the Seniors' Pharmacare Program is too much for many of them. In Cumberland North and throughout Cumberland County and I'm assuming all Nova Scotia, many seniors still live in their own homes, and many of them still have oil furnaces. The messages that I'm getting every day now from people who are trying to fill up their oil tanks is that they cannot afford to fill up their oil tanks. Something has to give. They either heat their homes or they buy their medications or food, or sometimes maybe one of those three.

A lot of times, people will decide to go without their medication. What nurses and doctors will also see is patients will try to scrimp and say, maybe if I take half of my medication - we see that all the time in primary care - they'll say, maybe to save money, I'll take half of the medication that the doctor or nurse practitioner prescribed so that I can get through and save money. In the meantime, their disease is not well-managed.

For these few examples that I have given, I want to stand in full support of this bill that my colleagues in the NDP caucus have tabled. I think it is in the best interests of seniors. It is in the best interests of health care. The end result, the outcome of this bill if it goes through is that you will have improved health care and health care results here in the province of Nova Scotia.

**THE SPEAKER:** The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**GARY BURRILL:** Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the comments of the member for Cumberland North and the member for Fairview-Clayton Park. I must express some disappointment in the view that has been expressed by the member for Kings West - I presume on behalf of his government and his party.

When raising previously in other formats the proposal for a 12-month waiver on Pharmacare deductibles and premiums, we have been encouraged by the response from the

Premier and from the Minister of Health and Wellness. They have given us an indication that they saw this as an idea worthy of investigation and exploration. So we had been hopeful, on the basis of those responses.

I am disappointed to hear the government's position that a 12-month waiver, in consideration of the cost of living crisis, on government Pharmacare programs deductibles and premiums - this is an idea to which they are opposed, which they stand against, which they do not want to be associated with. This is a real disappointment.

I find it a little hard to understand too. I would think that the government might really find this quite a welcome proposal to have before them. It's a proposal that's really in the category of good, practical suggestions the government could in fact do which would have a practical, real, immediate, tangible impact on the lives of people in the province. Particularly, as has been mentioned, on the lives of seniors at this particular moment, when the cost of living pressure is on people. Particularly the cost of living pressures, I'm mindful of - of the seniors living on fixed incomes - are so singularly intense.

Mr. Speaker, I want to confine my comments just to one part of this bill. That's the part of the bill that applies to the waiving of premiums on the Seniors' Pharmacare Program. I want to say about this that, as I have spoken about this before in the House, the current cost of living crisis is really having a negative and deepening serious impact on seniors living on fixed incomes.

We see sharp evidence of this all around us. Evidence in hand about the increasing number of people in their senior years who are, in fact, unhoused in the province. Evidence from all over the province, and particularly a report a couple of days ago from the North Sydney food bank about the increasing numbers of seniors they've noticed just recently taking advantage of help from the food bank on the Northside.

It's a moment when tangible government measures to take some of the heat off - not to solve this problem, but to take some little bit of the pressure off, the screw, the cost of living crisis off one little notch are very much called for and required.

Tangible, concrete financial measures to back the screw of financial pressure of the inflationary crisis off a notch or two are being taken all around us. As the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth mentioned a little earlier this afternoon, yesterday Prince Edward Island brought forward a program by which every household that's bringing in less than \$100,000 a year will receive \$500 in help towards dealing with the recent crisis in the cost of living.

In this, P.E.I. has copied, I think exactly, the proposal that was brought in just a few weeks ago in Newfoundland and Labrador. The government's position continues to be, however, here in Nova Scotia, that they are not going to bring forward this kind of inflation-directed direct cost of living relief for the people of this province.

[3:30 p.m.]

If I could just say, parenthetically, for a second, the government's position that they're not doing this because they prefer targeted assistance doesn't entirely make sense, since those programs in Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and P.E.I. are in fact targeted programs. If you're a wealthy person in P.E.I., Quebec, or Newfoundland and Labrador, you don't apply. Those are means-tested programs - means-tested is the definition of targeted.

I would say also, while I'm in this little parenthesis, that when we provide a power rate cap that's going to provide John Risley the same rate cap as it is to somebody who's living on income assistance, it's a little difficult to say that we're the party that's really in favour of targeted assistance. (Applause)

But I'm digressing here a little bit. A pause on seniors' pharmacare programs is just the kind of very direct and, potentially, very helpful kind of inflation-related relief that Nova Scotia so far has been behind on and has been failing to provide.

I think that the source of this particular proposal is relevant to this discussion. The source of this proposal is not the New Democratic Party. The source of this proposal is Feed Nova Scotia. The proposal comes from Feed Nova Scotia in two important documents that I'd like to table.

These are documents which were put forward by Feed Nova Scotia a little earlier this year. They're called the *Feed Nova Scotia Policy Advocacy Survey Report* and the *2022 Report to Our Community of Feed Nova Scotia*. I'd like to say a few things about these documents, where this proposal for a premium waiver comes from.

The advocacy survey document reports that 56 per cent of food bank users in Nova Scotia say that they have to sacrifice spending on food in order to pay for prescription medications. Fifty per cent of the people who responded to the survey said that they didn't fill or collect a prescription for their medicine because of the prescription's cost and that they had done that within the last 12 months.

The second report, the *2022 Report to Our Community of Feed Nova Scotia* proposes that the government: waive or reduce the deductible after the copay in some pharmacare programs. The *Feed Nova Scotia Policy Advocacy Survey Report* goes on to say: With more than half the respondents sacrificing the purchase of food to pay for prescription medicine, even a \$100 to \$200 waiver on reducing the annual deductible could substantially reduce the out-of-pocket expenditure of about half of the food insecure clients in need of prescription drugs.

This is a singular and important policy initiative that Feed Nova Scotia has brought forward. I must say, too, Mr. Speaker, if I could be permitted a second, short parenthesis,



I don't think that the government's discourse and comments on food banks yesterday and today have provided a great deal of evidence that they understand what is contained in either of these two reports.

A core finding of the *Feed Nova Scotia Policy Advocacy Survey Report* is that government policy itself on income support and affordable housing is, in fact, a main contributor to the escalating need for food charity in our province. Just under half of food bank users report that they derive their income from income assistance, and the overwhelming majority of that group say that their reliance on a food bank is directly related to the inadequacy of their income, yet the provincial government - this provincial government - this year has frozen payments on income assistance.

Similarly, after lack of income, food bank users identify the high cost of housing as a chief factor preventing them from being able to actually buy their food. Nearly half of food bank users in the province report spending more than half of their income on their housing, and yet the government's current housing initiatives contain no place for expanding social public housing. End of second parenthesis.

When the need for government initiatives to mitigate the cost of living is raised here in debate, often the government responds that inflation is not a Nova Scotia problem, that it's a national problem, and it's an international problem, and therefore beyond the scope of the government of Nova Scotia. Of course, this is partly true, but it is also largely false because something's being intimated when that's said which is not the case. The something that's being intimated that's not the case is that there's actually nothing that the government of Nova Scotia can do, which is not true.

There are important things that the provincial government could do, and waiving Seniors' Pharmacare premiums for a year is one of them. Of course, we recognize - everybody recognizes - that governments can't do everything, but they can make an important start. The start that this bill proposes is one that could provide meaningful and practical help to thousands of seniors in Nova Scotia during this time of intense cost of living pressure.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: It's my pleasure to stand up and talk a bit about pharmaceutical services and the bill that's put in front of the House today, just to go back and talk a little bit about my honourable colleagues and some of the things they mentioned. I would like to give an overview, not to explain pharmaceuticals, but to answer some of the questions that were presented in the House.

The budget for prescription drug coverage in 2021-2022 was over \$300 million in our province for benefits under Pharmacare, and the province funded another \$70 million for drugs provided through Nova Scotia Health, such as IV cancer therapies. The

magnitude of that ledger line in terms of what we pay in this province is pretty significant, and we know that comes from a variety of different reasons. Our population is quite senior. We know that our population lives with a lot of comorbid conditions as well. Those things contribute to the amount of pharmacare that is required across our province.

New benefits are added to pharmacare coverage on a monthly basis, and they're informed by a very rigorous program. We make sure that what is being added meets the requirements of CADTH, which is Canada's Drug and Health Technology Agency, and that there is competitive pricing that's negotiated with the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance, or pCPA. These two organizations allow us to ensure that we are adding medications and technology that are really thought out, well-evidenced, and important.

I would mention as an example a drug that both the Opposition and our government are very proud to have worked in concert together was the vision of Trikafta in the early part of our mandate. That is really a life-saving and life-changing medication for people living with cystic fibrosis. These two organizations, with our pharmaceutical services and extended health benefits team, they are looking all the time to understand what are the new and relevant treatments that are going to have a meaningful impact to Nova Scotians, in terms of the treatment. Trikafta would be one that we were very proud to introduce and bring that to the formulary and cover in the province. There is increasing public patient demand I would say as well.

To the opposite member's point, at some point this balloon, if we aren't very intentional about how we continue to look at a variety of different things in health care, that balloon is going to expand, and it is going to burst. Part of my mandate letter was that we needed to look at the formulary, and also look at pharmaceutical, how we deliver that in Nova Scotia because the past is not the future. We cannot continue to keep adding things and not really look at the way we do things.

In addition, we know there are a number of growing demands in terms of the immunization program in this province. We know there are a number of medications. We now see increasingly that there is demand for really innovative and lifesaving technologies. We want to be able to provide the best health care services to Nova Scotians, so we would look at continuous glucose monitoring as one of those cutting-edge and meaningful interventions that could be covered in this province in order to support people living with diabetes. Those things are currently being reviewed.

The formulary mandate, the work is proceeding, so the staff at the Department of Health and Wellness are looking at our formulary, looking at other jurisdictions' formularies, to better understand where we're aligned and where we're not. We are really looking at listing things and finding gaps in coverages, as people have mentioned, but also are there things on there that are no longer best practice? No longer evidence-based, because things change.

Certainly the staff are also looking and working with the Office of Red Tape Reduction. So the opposite member's point about past practices as an example, where there are new and innovative medications for diabetes, for example, where previously it was required that a physician would have to do a trial of insulin in order for people to obtain that second type of medication, that is really now having a significant effect not only for diabetes but also around cardiovascular outcomes as well.

Meeting with physicians and meeting with advocates around how we look at these medications and looking at our processes, so certainly we worked very hard with the Office of Red Tape Reduction to continue to look at the forms, looking at the ways in which we can increase access.

We heard from physicians that there are referrals that come in for medications, there are things they would want to prescribe but unfortunately there are processes in place that make it difficult for them to do that. We have to look at the whole range, not just simply one part of it. We need to look at the whole range of our pharmaceutical work.

The other thing is to really look at what is listed and what we do cover and how we support Nova Scotians in trying to find cost-effective and clinically effective alternatives. I'd like to point out that in February of this year, the biosimilar versions of medications were approved in the province. There was a very rigorous consultation process to make sure that we could safely introduce biosimilars to the province, to people who required them. It was to make sure that there was a very long period of time where people were able to transition from the name brand of their medication to the generic brand.

Also, it was to make sure there was consultation so that in the event that the specialist who was involved in the care of the individual did not feel that it was appropriate that they had time to work with the patients to make sure they did have the right medication, whether that turned out to be a biosimilar or whether they stayed on the medication.

The cost savings from that change were significant and that's important, Mr. Speaker, because what that does is it allows us to reinvest into that program and look at the way we can enhance pharmaceutical coverage across the province. It's very important that we continue to work with people in our province to understand what the needs of Nova Scotians are.

The other thing I'd like to talk a little bit about is I would like to talk about other ways that we have to consider bringing pharmaceutical coverage. We do have a very robust program and process, as I told you, involving CADTH and pCPA. I do want to talk a little bit about a very innovative program that is happening right now which allows us to bring very early bring medications to Nova Scotians free of charge through clinical trials.

In June this year, we announced, in collaboration with our other three Atlantic partners the Atlantic Clinical Trials Network. This is a one-door environment where

clinical trials can happen in this province, as well as across our Atlantic Provinces where we have a high incidence of chronic disease and of Founder's syndrome, where we are considered one of the best places to do clinical trials.

[3:45 p.m.]

What that allows us to do is bring cutting-edge therapy, new medications, and new technology to Nova Scotians who would typically have to wait extended periods of time. When we enter them into this study environment, it allows us to ensure that they do have access to these treatments.

We understand that there are a number of demands. We know that with our comorbid conditions we really need to look in terms of how we support Nova Scotians.

The other thing that happens throughout this province - and I do worry about it - is talking about the polypharmacy that happens. We see it particularly in our seniors group when they live with long-standing chronic diseases. There are some very cutting-edge clinical guidelines that were developed by physicians in this province around looking at how we support Nova Scotians who are on a number of medications to work within their clinical team. It's looking not only at primary care providers, but building robust teams around them. It's making sure they have access to specialists to look at the number of medications that people are taking and working really hard to reduce that number to ensure medications are appropriate and necessary.

It can happen really easily over time that people have 10, 12, or 15 medications. We're working with our primary health care providers - nurse practitioners, physicians, geriatric clinics, long-term care facilities - so that we can look at really supporting people, because polypharmacy can also add to admissions and injuries in seniors.

With regard to that action group, we have had good opportunities to bring cutting-edge therapy here. I want to acknowledge that the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia, as well as our primary care providers, have worked really hard to look at how we can work with them when there are exceptions that are required. Certainly, the folks who work in pharmaceutical services are very committed to improving access across the province to Nova Scotians. This is a huge line item for us.

We know that not only do we have to look at seniors, but we also have to look at access for families. We know that the Family Pharmacare Program, while the premiums and the copay are based on income, we are looking at that program to understand if there are ways that we can make it more affordable.

Again, there is no lack of requests that come to us around funding everything. Unfortunately, we're not able to fund everything all the time. Looking at the program comprehensively, seeing how we can make sure that we have efficiencies and are meeting

the needs of Nova Scotians - that we are forward-facing and not doing what we have always done in the past - is an important part of this.

The work is ongoing in that comprehensive review. We really do need to make sure that we have a full-system approach to this. We know that pharmaceuticals and technology are a key part of making sure that we have a world-class health care system. We are committed to continuing to do that.

I want to assure the members opposite that while this is not something we will be adopting today, there is comprehensive work that's happening in the department. We know - particularly with a line item that's over \$370 million - this is something that warrants a very comprehensive review.

We do want to look to other regions to understand where they have had successes, and where they have been able to implement changes. We want to learn from them and ensure that we are meeting the needs of Nova Scotians moving forward.

I just want to encourage folks that there is work under way and that we will continue to look at this. We are committed to improving not only this part of health care across the province but the entirety of the health care system.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I will just talk quickly about this. The truth is that the reality on this bill is - last Friday I was at my office and a lady walked in and was in tears. She couldn't afford her medicine. She had to choose between her food or her prescriptions. She had to choose her prescriptions.

I don't know about the other MLAs, but what we're seeing in our office - as the MLA and my CA - a lot of times we are helping people by paying out of pocket, because people can't afford life-saving medicine.

While I appreciate this, the truth of the matter is that as the price of everything goes up, people are going to forgo eating. They are going to forgo the basic necessities of life to get their prescriptions or they're going to choose the other way. The minister spoke about being proactive and being innovative and stuff like that, but an innovative health care system doesn't just look at the short-term results. They also look at the long-term results.

When people who are diabetic aren't taking their medicine, that will have a larger impact on our health care system than paying for that medicine up front. When people are not able to afford their prescriptions, they end up in the emergency room. They end up with surgeries. They end up with chronic illness. Those things cost exponentially more to our health care system than helping cover prescriptions. That is a fact.

I wonder what the average prescription cost for a senior in Nova Scotia is - or an individual in Nova Scotia - compared to the cost of multiple trips to the emergency room.

It was absolutely heartbreaking to listen to that woman who worked her whole life and doesn't have the means necessary to cover her prescription. This isn't a one-off. It's not a one-off. I know the minister talked about changes, and things are changing, and medicines are changing. The truth is that in order to get a medicine covered by this program, it can take years and years to do this.

I fought for two years to get a prescription covered for a young kid who had hemophilia. He couldn't come out of his house. He couldn't go to school. We fought for years to get him that - just a young kid, no older than my oldest. He missed the first three years of elementary school because if you bumped up against him or if he fell down, he could potentially die. What kind of life is that for those children?

When they hear that we're working on things and we're getting around to things - and this was a family that was pretty well-to-do . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time for debate on the bill has passed.

Before I recognize the New Democratic Party House Leader, I'd like to introduce three representatives from Victoria County Council who are in the Speaker's Gallery. I'll ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House: Warden Bruce Morrison, Deputy Warden Larry Dauphinee, and Councillor Perla MacLeod. You missed all the fun this afternoon. (Applause)

The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 98.

**Bill No. 98 - Equity and Sustainability in Electrical Utilities Act.**

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'm pleased to rise and speak to this bill, which we tabled in the last session. The title is surprisingly relevant today: Equity and Sustainability in Electrical Utilities Act.

We've been talking a lot about utilities. Recent government actions have shone light on our need to reform our relationship with Nova Scotia Power. I don't think that we would find anyone who would disagree with the idea that we need to reform that relationship.

High power rates, high profits at the company need to be addressed, but they need to be addressed systematically. I think that what we are seeing right now is the opposite of a systemic, thoughtful intervention in what is happening with power rates - and more importantly, what is happening with the bills people pay and the way that our power regulatory system is structured.

What we see on the floor of the Legislature right now is an eleventh-hour intervention that essentially kneecaps an independent regulatory process. What we have been advocating for and what we advocate for in this bill is, in fact, a change in the regulatory process.

NSUARB is an independent regulator, but it is what we call a creature of statute. It is created by this Legislature through legislation, so we can determine how it regulates. But then we need to set it free to do the regulation at arms-length - something this government is clearly not interested in. This is just the latest example.

We have put forward a slew of ideas of how to accomplish this. One of them is a performance-based regulatory system - a system that, in fact, incentivises ecological sustainability and clean energy.

As most members know, right now Nova Scotia Power is incentivised to do one thing: sell power. As we reduce our need for power in certain ways through efficiency, that is at direct cross-purposes with Nova Scotia Power's *raison d'être*. They exist to sell power, and that's fine. They're a private company. That's their business model.

We are a government, and we are responsible to ensure that everyone in this province has access to the power that they sell. This is not a choice in our climate. You can't live without power. Some very hardy souls do live off-grid in this climate. I would suspect that almost all of them have access to some kind of alternative energy source. That's great, but right now, to do that at scale is very difficult.

This bill requires Nova Scotia Power to consider climate change target reductions in its work - something that it is not now required to do. We know that this government talks a lot about the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. That's great. We've got goals, but those goals will only take us so far. We need action. That is one of the things that this bill attempts to do.

We've heard from advocates recently, such as Bill Mahody, who is the Consumer Advocate, about the importance of independence of the NSUARB, and concerns about recent government overreach.

Rate-setting for Nova Scotia Power is very complicated. I don't know how many people have had the privilege of sitting through one of those hearings. I have done part of it. It is incredibly complex regulatory law. One of the things that's important is the

independence of this process. One of the reasons that's important is because otherwise, the company doesn't have access to low-cost financing.

[4:00 p.m.]

I think it's really important to understand that one of the things that the NSUARB cannot do right now is to set up a universal service program. That's really at the heart of what we think would be a systemic intervention in the NSUARB process. Right now, according to legislation, the NSUARB cannot discriminate within a rate class. All consumers need to pay the same amount. There's no choice. The NSUARB would be breaking the law to mandate that consumers pay different amounts.

However, we know that not all consumers are the same. This government is talking at great length about targeted interventions. They know that there are people who cannot afford power, and so a universal service program says that the UARB is enabled, that they may create a different way of charging low-income Nova Scotians, in particular.

Just as we in the NDP caucus, anyway, and the Canada Housing Mortgage Corporation - although maybe not the Nova Scotia Progressive Conservatives - recognize that affordable housing means 30 per cent of your income, it is also widely recognized that affordable power means 6 per cent of your income. That's the test.

What we are suggesting is that for Nova Scotians for whom a power bill is more than 6 per cent of their incomes, it should be accommodated by the UARB such that they can afford power. Put simply, this to me - I mean, we have brought forward two bills today that we actually think are entirely uncontroversial. They're not ideological. They're not meant to pin the government in one way or the other. They're actually just meant to help people.

We have spent all of this session and most of the last session trying to raise the alarms about the impact of the cost of living crisis on Nova Scotians. There are so many in this province who are struggling to afford medication, who are struggling to afford power, who are struggling to afford groceries, who are having a hard time putting gas in the tank, and you know what? We want to be positive too. This government does not have a lease on positivity, and they certainly don't have a lease on compassion. That is what we're doing here.

We're demonstrating our compassion by saying, doesn't everyone deserve the same opportunity right now? We are not all in the same boat. We are in the same storm, but we are not in the same boat, and for some people, paying your power bill is an inconvenience. For some people, picking up your prescription makes you think twice about your bank balance, and for other people, it's impossible. For those people, we are saying please consider this bill. Consider a strategic, smart, useful intervention in the regulatory process.



When the government comes in with a bill like the one on the order paper now, Bill No. 212, and cuts the legs out from under a regulatory process that is just about to wrap up, there are massive repercussions, known and unknown. It gives Nova Scotia Power a certain kind of authority where they can stand up in Law Amendments Committee and say, well then, we're going to break the law. We're not going to meet our 2030 targets; we're going to break the law. Why would we do that? We have Nova Scotia Power and the Consumer Advocate, who by all accounts are on very opposite sides of the table, saying the same thing.

This would not get that kind of reaction. I promise you, Madam Speaker, it wouldn't, because you would have an overwhelming number of people who would say that makes sense. It makes sense that people should afford to be able to turn the lights on. It makes sense that everyone should afford to be able to turn on their stove or turn on the thermostat, just like it makes sense that everybody should deserve a roof over their head.

I've spoken a lot about the universal service program, but as I said, this bill would also create a sustainability advocate. There's a lot that can be done to reform our regulatory environment to make sure that people have access to power, that people have access to the things they need, but it is a complex environment with difficult dynamics. We are in an inflationary environment. Most of our electricity still comes from coal. We desperately need to change that, and we need to build the jobs that come with that transition, but this is too important for a reactionary piece of legislation with a ton of unintended consequences.

Nova Scotia Power's profits are too high. Our bills are too high. Our service is unreliable, and I think it's uncontroversial to say that the model is broken. It's time to take a look at permanent fixes that will make life more affordable for Nova Scotians and protect the environment.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Similarly, in the Fall of 2021, I tabled a bill that would amend the Public Utilities Act that would set out the principles of sustainable development. That's why I rise to support the bill that is being proposed tonight. I do think it's a positive thing to broaden a mandate for the Utility and Review Board that includes sustainability.

I also had in my bill to add an electricity policy that accords with Nova Scotia's environmental sustainable development and sustainable prosperity bills. We could also do that with EGCCRA, with the government's own goals that, by the way, all three parties endorsed in this Legislature becoming laws.

I did this because Nova Scotia Power has been a private utility since 1992 and they've had a number of different mandates, but the main thing and at the centre of it all was to ensure that they delivered for shareholders. That's problematic, and government's

role is to ensure that we look out for what the public interest is. That doesn't always align and actually rarely aligns perfectly with what shareholders are asking for in terms of their return on investment.

Something ought to be done to account for the increasing threat of climate change, I think we can all agree in this House. Something ought to be done from a regulatory perspective on increasing societal goals and imbedding them into regulations.

This bill proposed by the Leader of the NDP attempts to do the same thing: to broaden the mandate that exists today. It's not to interfere with the mandate of the UARB during a hearing and set arbitrary rates that this government hasn't been able to transparently explain to the House or to the public where the rates came from, and the evidence to say it's not going to hinder our climate change goals and not do anything else that would adversely impact rates in the future.

Now the energy grid is very complicated in Nova Scotia, as was noted. We have disadvantages that other provinces don't have. The biggest part of that would be our reliance on fossil fuels, especially coal and less access to affordable natural gas during a transition, less access to hydro, and so on down the line. I think that underscores the importance of actually moving quicker towards modernizing our regulatory system. We've seen this; there actually are examples in our country. The best example would be Quebec. We also have several states that have enacted sustainability mandates within their utilities.

I went over all that at a previous time that a similar bill was put forward - I think the member also brought forward amendments to that. I explained the analysis across all of North America, so this is possible.

By passing a sustainability mandate, Nova Scotia Power would not be able to claim, as they have, that restricting their profits creates an inability to attract capital, that you can't achieve the climate change goals of 2030. In fact, these regulatory changes put into law some rigor that does not exist to meet them today, while still respecting the independence at the same time.

With the recent delay in two coal-fired generation plants that we've seen since this new government has come into office, that causes problems for our predictability of rates into the future and continuing to rely on markets and commodity pricing.

Some of that is due to the delay of the Maritime Link project that was put forward by the prior NDP government. It also has to do with the Progressive Conservative government's inaction to be able to attract federal funds to do the required upgrades to our infrastructure, to start to actually see some movement in the Atlantic Loop - that's the term that's being thrown around a lot. It was in the federal throne speech.

We were all supportive to attract literally billions of dollars to help us upgrade our grids to actually access the necessary affordable power from other provinces, or just other programs that exist today. We know where the upgrades need to take place. We know we need to upgrade the connection line into New Brunswick, and we know there are federal programs to actually make that happen in an affordable way.

The bill will move the needle towards the public interests. It will force more discussion around locally independent-owned renewable energy by putting this in the mandate of the NSUARB.

We were forced when we were in government to put forward the tender - the 10 per cent of our electricity system being a fully competitive tender, not owned by Nova Scotia Power. That wasn't from regulations. That was because our government wanted to see action that wasn't entirely focused on Nova Scotia Power, that had some competition in a tender.

The most affordable type of electricity in the province right now is wind. I did say at the time to those who doubted me that we would see in the order of magnitude of 5 cents a kilowatt coming through that tender, as we saw in other provinces. The government continued with that, I think, because they had to. We were so far along with the process. It was a little bit higher price, five point something cents, because interest rates were rising, but it was the right thing to do.

I wonder if they will continue down that path without a regulatory system that will actually force those types of incentives, if they'll continue to promote independently owned green energy projects across the province with wind and solar. Certainly, it's not within the regulations that are before us today. That's what concerns me.

On the demand side, there are policy levers to achieve better environmental outcomes that will actually lower power bills. There are programs that exist today that are basically out of reach for most Nova Scotians. Those programs need to be enhanced. Again, with a sustainability mandate, that could be driven by the regulations and broaden the mandate of the NSUARB.

The NSUARB currently follows key metrics that are limited. While I agree that increasing the profit margin and equity slice could be within government's mandate, that's why I proposed a bill, as well, that would restrict their ability to increase that. I don't think the government has been able to clearly explain how the two-year proposal of limiting the NSUARB is in the public interest and it could backfire and bring about large costs to consumers.

A sustainability mandate proposed here, and as our caucus proposed in 2021, could be passed. Then the regulations would set out ambitious accountable timelines and track Nova Scotia Power's progress towards renewable targets. It's key in noting here that Nova

Scotia Power has missed those existing targets. There's precedent showing that, even though there are targets going out to 2030, without broadening out the sustainability mandate, there's no guarantee that that will happen, and there are no ramifications for it not happening.

The sustainability lens would bring focus to the urgency of delivering efficiency programming for industries, small businesses, households, farmers, any sector that we all like to support. As some members may not realize, Nova Scotia Power views efficiency gains as competition. Therefore, there's little to no motivation to promote and bring efficiency initiatives to customers absent a mandate such as this that's being proposed.

Nova Scotia Power within the existing regulations today, despite the amendments that the government has made and proposed this session, will mean that they will not be required to act in the public interest. We should not be surprised at the outcome during this mandate of higher power bills and environmental goals that will not be met.

I honestly believe that most of us in the Legislature do want to see these targets met and do want to see power bills kept within control. The sole party that has some control over this, the regulatory framework, is the PC Party. They are the party that will be responsible for letting power bills increase, particularly for low-income Nova Scotians, but also for little to no advancement on climate change goals.

Clearly, a sustainability mandate focused on the principles of affordability, reliability, and sustainability ought to be considered by the government, as it was in Quebec years ago. We can do this now, even though we are in the middle of a rate approval process. That is not ideal in my view, but the government itself has set a precedent for that. Why not do it in a way that has evidence backing it up? Why not do it in a way where there are examples across our country and North America that have made it happen?

**THE SPEAKER:** The honourable member for Hants West.

**MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD:** I'm pleased to rise and speak a little bit to Bill No. 98, the Equity and Sustainability in Electrical Utilities Act. I just want to point out a few things, Madam Speaker.

Nova Scotia has been a national leader in the fight against climate change, and we do have some of the most aggressive climate change goals in the country, to have 80 per cent of our electricity generated with renewables by 2030 and to achieve net zero by 2050.

To achieve these goals, our work to pivot to cleaner sources of energy and technologies that enable them is exhilarating, and it's inspiring. As we move towards our goals, we will protect the ratepayers of Nova Scotia in doing this. They do deserve clean, affordable, and reliable power. We are making these changes to improve the way that electricity is delivered to Nova Scotians. We're looking at how we can move forward with

our relationship with Nova Scotia Power. Madam Speaker, as the minister has pointed out numerous times, we do have the ability to pull different levers at different times. We are going to continue to look at all options.

[4:15 p.m.]

Our priority has always been to protect ratepayers as we move forward toward our greener energy future. We are protecting ratepayers as best we can. For the next two years, we are controlling what we can control. Legislation tabled earlier this session will give ratepayers a cushion against the impact of higher rising fuel costs.

We're preventing the NSUARB from setting power rate increases on non-fuel costs unless they are to improve reliability of power services to Nova Scotians. If the NSUARB sets any increases for that purpose, they can be no more than 1.8 per cent over the next two years.

The NSUARB may decide power rates do need to go up because of the cost of fuel, but if they go up for any other reason, it is to improve the reliability of power service. Tree trimming is a good example of an investment that would improve the reliability of the power service.

Madam Speaker, it's not going into the profits. It's not going into the pockets. It's going into the improved reliability of power services to Nova Scotians. We expect Nova Scotia Power to control what they can control and ensure they deliver clean, reliable, and affordable electricity to Nova Scotians.

Excess profits will continue to be returned to ratepayers in full. The NSUARB cannot increase Nova Scotia Power's rate of return on their equity or their equity ratio any higher than current levels.

We will continue to advocate for ratepayers through the NSUARB's process to consider the general rate application. We will continue to look for solutions on fuel costs and explore further action that may be needed to support ratepayers. With legislation already before this House, we are giving the NSUARB the tools that they need to ensure Nova Scotians pay the lowest cost possible for electricity.

The voice of Nova Scotians is important on delivering electricity across this province. That's why we saw value in allowing the NSUARB process to unfold for the general rate application. Nova Scotians haven't had their say on power rates in 10 years. We let them have their say on this application because it's important for everyone to hear it. The NSUARB, Nova Scotia Power, us as a government - we all needed to hear from stakeholders.

It's also the reason why we're creating the Performance Partnership Advisory Table. In the Spring, we made amendments to the Public Utilities Act so that we could create this table. It will bring Nova Scotian voices together to provide advice on performance standards and penalties.

Affordability and protecting ratepayers will be an important part of discussions. We're requiring the NSUARB to respond to any recommendations from this group within 90 days, Madam Speaker. We're working through regulations right now to put the table in place. We look forward to engaging Nova Scotians in these important conversations.

As we work toward our aggressive climate change goals, we're committed to protecting ratepayers and ensuring that they have access to clean, reliable, affordable electricity.

Nova Scotia is a leader in energy efficiency programming, and each year we invest more than \$30 million in our core efficiency programs. Such programs include the HomeWarming Program, Affordable Multifamily Housing, Home Energy Assessment, GreenHeat, and Small Business Energy Solutions. These programs create jobs, help families save money, and reduce emissions through the energy efficiency. These investments are helping fight against climate change while also reducing personal energy costs.

Our investments have made real impacts. They have helped Nova Scotians save more than \$180 million a year in their energy bills. We've improved 2,500 Mi'kmaw homes and 11,500 public housing units, we've helped to avoid more than 1 million tonnes of carbon emissions every year through these programs, we've helped more than 21,000 low-income Nova Scotians get free home assessments and energy efficiency upgrades since 2007 and continue this good work.

Our programs have reduced electricity demand by 12 per cent in 2008, and account for 1 million tonnes of greenhouse gas reductions annually. We do a great deal of work with the incredible, dedicated partners at Efficiency Nova Scotia, and through legislation this Fall, we're strengthening their ability to help Nova Scotians move off of oil and reduce their energy bills.

In partnership with the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs, we are delivering Mi'kmaw Home Energy Efficiency programs that provide deeper retrofits for all homes across the 13 First Nation communities that we have here in Nova Scotia, while also providing training for community members to complete this work on their own.

HomeWarming and the Affordable Multifamily Housing programs provide financial support for energy retrofits for low-income households and affordable housing units. The Province also provides support for off-oil programming, helping homeowners

reduce their energy consumption and switch from oil heat to cleaner and more efficient alternatives.

Because heating oil accounts for 50 per cent of Nova Scotia space-heating energy, and it is the highest in Canada, we want to change that. The Home Energy Assessment Program provides \$5,000 in incentives for home energy retrofits. All of these programs support a local green workforce, including heat pump installers. I don't know if you've tried to book one. The booking to get a heat pump installed in your home is months out, because people are excited about these programs. They employ green workforce in the lighting specialists, the solar PV installers, and builders alike. They're currently employing more than 25 people in good paying jobs in the green industry, green workforce, in many rural areas of Nova Scotia.

By 2030, we're going to get off coal and have 80 per cent of our electricity generated with renewables. There is no single solution to achieve these goals, and we're exploring all the options to get off coal and move toward green, renewable energy and reliable electricity that Nova Scotians can count on. We will continue to choose right solutions for Nova Scotians to ensure ratepayers are protected.

We want to work toward the development of the Atlantic Loop to bring us important power from Quebec, but it has always been just one of the many options to get there. It's an extremely complex project. There are a number of major challenges to overcome to make it happen, and one of them is global inflation, which is driving up the cost of transmission. However, the Atlantic Loop can't move forward without federal funding. We urge our colleagues across the aisle to join us on this request to put Nova Scotians first.

There are also many other options that are already viable in Nova Scotia. There are solutions we are building on a daily basis, plus exciting new opportunities that are on the horizon. The green hydrogen sector, just to name one as an example. Another, Nova Scotian solution for households and businesses is solar.

Our solar industry, like I indicated, is booming in Nova Scotia. That's no small part thanks to this government's action to ensure solar net metering continues with no extra fees to Nova Scotia Power.

Another much larger option is onshore wind, which is currently the cheapest energy available to Nova Scotia, far cheaper than coal or natural gas. We have five major new wind projects in the works that will add 12 per cent more renewable energy to the grid. That's as much energy as the Nova Scotia Block was to carry over from Newfoundland. Onshore wind is good for the environment, and it's good for the ratepayers of Nova Scotia.

We've also just announced an ambitious target for another Nova Scotian green energy solution, and it is offshore wind. By 2030, we'll offer leases for up to 5,000

megawatts of offshore wind energy. This target tells the world that Nova Scotia is open for business. It's going to attract major investment in both offshore wind development and our budding green hydrogen industry and make it worth their while for companies like these that are going to come and build enough capacity for both export and domestic use.

Offshore wind companies will provide the renewable electricity to produce the green hydrogen, and they will also provide excess clean electricity with a capacity for use in Nova Scotia at an affordable rate. In the same way, green hydrogen companies will produce green hydrogen for export, and will have excess clean fuel that can be stored and used when it is most needed in Nova Scotia. In combination with natural gas, we believe green hydrogen has real potential to help us in our transition to net zero.

There's also exciting work happening in batteries. An area in Nova Scotia works with companies like Tesla and leads the world. Just recently, we heard great news that another Nova Scotian company, NOVONIX, is receiving \$150 million from the U.S. Department of Energy to advance battery technologies for electric vehicles and the electrical grid.

The beauty of all of these solutions is that they are all made-in-Nova Scotia solutions. Instead of importing energy from elsewhere, we'll be generating right here at home. How exciting is that? Instead of the green jobs going elsewhere, these industries will create green jobs here at home for Nova Scotians. Instead of relying on Nova Scotia Power to come up with imported solutions, we have private companies recognizing the potential right here in Nova Scotia and jumping in to make these solutions happen.

We're actively committed to supporting these new green economy firms. We have made the solar industry protected by clearing the way for residential customers to use net metering to lower their energy bills.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: In the last speech, I heard nothing about this bill that we are presenting, Bill No. 98, Equity and Sustainability in Electrical Utilities Act. I didn't hear anything from the member about the bill, and how we are going to work toward lowering power bills for those with low incomes, especially those paying 6 per cent of their income on the power bills.

I find that concerning. I think there have been plenty of times where there have been objections to the fact that others have not talked to the bills. I think if the government is going to be objecting to the fact that when we are not talking to the bills, they might want to start talking about the bills themselves.

Earlier this week in Law Amendments, Brian Gifford of the Affordable Energy Coalition brought forward proposed amendments to create a universal service program in



the Public Utilities Act - an amendment that we supported and raised to the committee that was unfortunately, but not surprisingly, voted down. This is something that we, as well as advocates, have been talking about for quite some time, and in my time in this Legislature, I have heard my colleagues for Dartmouth South and Dartmouth North continuously talking about it, as did the member for Halifax Chebucto.

[4:30 p.m.]

This is something that is very near and dear. These are the issues that we have been constantly bringing forward to the Legislature. But also, with those issues, we in the NDP caucus, when we bring forward issues of concern, also like to bring forward solutions - ways to fix those problematic areas. This bill is one of those. Bill No. 98 is one of the solutions to the fact that people are paying too-high bills for their power, and many have had their power disconnected.

Let's talk about the NSUARB. The NSUARB is a creature of statutes, and all powers in its mandate are legislated by government. Currently, the NSUARB does not have the power, as we have said, to approve different rates for lower-income ratepayers. Clause 3 of our bill would amend Section 67 of the Public Utilities Act to allow the board to set such a program, capping potentially the bills of lower-income customers to 6 per cent of their income.

I think this is a good start to helping people with their power bills, to helping those who are low-wage workers, considering all of the other affordability issues that we have. I think it's a better solution - capping these bills at 6 per cent of the income is a better solution to someone who's having difficulty paying their power bill than saying to somebody: Oh, you can't buy your food? Go to a food bank. Or: Oh, you can't afford your medication? Too bad about you. Here's everything else we're doing besides helping you pay for your medication.

The Affordable Energy Coalition told members at Law Amendments that we are at a unique point in time to implement such a program, that there's no better time that would exist. The time is now. Our province's energy sector is in the middle of a massive shift off fossil fuels to reach the legislated 2030 goals. The future of sustainable energy production will bring cost savings for customers. The Affordable Energy Coalition told us that managing higher customer bills is crucial until we get there. Low-income customers need protections as this sector transitions, and they need to be protected from prohibitive upfront costs.

Let's talk about those upfront costs. Madam Speaker, it is costly. I have a heat pump. It is costly to put in one heat pump. It is costly to put in two heat pumps. Those are upfront costs that you have to bear for a greater return later, but there are so many Nova Scotians - many in Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier - who cannot afford that upfront cost. They can't bear that cost. We need to help them be able to do that.

An additional protection offered by this bill would prevent Nova Scotia Power from disconnecting customers from power due to the inability to pay their bills. Power disconnection is devastating. It is degrading to families. I want to share a quote from the Affordable Energy Coalition given before the Law Amendments Committee earlier this year. "Inadequate income is the primary reason for disconnection of electrical service. Arrears build up. Low income households are forced to use food banks or to stop buying medicine so they can pay electricity bills. Or they lose their electricity which means they can't store or prepare food or lead a normal life. In some cases, they cannot heat their homes."

I live in a riding that some consider high needs. Poverty rates in my riding are between one in two and one in three families living in poverty. The last statistic that we have for senior poverty in Cape Breton was one in five, but that's a really outdated number. About five years have passed, so I would say the number is actually higher now or in the one-in-three or one-in-four category.

A number of people have contacted our office because they're about to be disconnected by Nova Scotia Power because they can't afford their bills. Many play - sometimes it's a shell game: Okay, throughout the Winter, I'm not going to pay my heating bill, but come Spring and Summer, because the temperatures are higher, I'll start paying it off for the next Winter. Then in the next Winter, they stop paying their bills throughout the Winter, and then they start again paying that bill in the Spring and Summer. This is what many in my community have often done.

That may sound shocking. It may sound odd to many. To me, that's a normal reality. I have heard it so many times: I couldn't pay in the Winter, but come Spring and Summer, I start paying my power bill because I can't go without power in the Winter, but I can lower my power throughout the Spring and Summer because I don't need the heat.

Many of these people are people who are working one, two, or three jobs to make ends meet. Sometimes what happens is those jobs end, or they get laid off. They don't have child care anymore, so they can't go to work. Circumstances happen that prevent them after that from paying their power bills. Most of the time, it's circumstances beyond their control. They thought, okay, just get through the Winter, and I'll pay it off in the Spring and Summer.

But between that time, something happens and they can't pay it off, and they're getting more and more in debt to Nova Scotia Power. It is devastating when they call up: It's freezing in my house, I have no power, I have children. How am I going to get them to school? How do I feed them? How do I keep them warm? There is frost on my walls. This is what we hear: I can't lose my power. How do I keep Nova Scotia Power from disconnecting me?

Sometimes we can work things out with Nova Scotia Power. We get a good representative on the line and sure enough, we can work out a deal and help these people get back on track.

Other times it just may not be possible. In our office a lot of times when something happens like that, we're trying to work it out. How harmful, how sad, how scary it must be, and it is for these families. Many of them play this shell game of I won't pay this Winter, but I'll start paying in the Spring and Summer. That's how they do it.

It's a sad state of affairs when this happens, because nobody should be going without power, nobody should have to go without heat, nobody should have to make these decisions. Nobody should have to make the decision between heating the home, keeping the lights on, keeping food on the table, and their medications. Nobody should have to make any of these decisions, and yet they are.

We here have the power before us to make some changes. We can make changes to how the NSUARB - enabling legislation for them to allow them to have this type of program. We can do that.

I hope that the members opposite are taking that into account. I want to say access to heat and electricity is essential to safe and secure housing. So instead of disconnection, this bill allows the establishment of a payment plan to deal with overdue accounts, as I've said, and finally this bill also provides the creation of a sustainability advocate who would appear at hearings before the NSUARB. This advocate would make sure that the sustainability is included in all discussions on behalf of residential customers.

Currently at the NSUARB hearings, there is a Consumer Advocate and a Small Business Advocate. Sustainability is another important factor to be considered, an important voice to be heard and factored into decisions. This advocate would help Nova Scotia Power be accountable to legislative climate targets, especially during the periods of transition.

We believe this advocate is of particular importance given the recent statements made by Nova Scotia Power in response to Bill No. 212. Sustainability advocates before the Law Amendments Committee this week were equally concerned about the state of the province's 2030 climate goals. In light of recent developments, it's more important than ever that Nova Scotia Power is held accountable to their sustainability commitment and that the decisions before the NSUARB are made with a long-term outlook.

We know we need to update regulatory systems to deal with our power monopoly. It must consider equity and sustainability, and this is a straightforward way of doing this. I sincerely hope this government will consider it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

[4:45 p.m.]

KENT SMITH: I am pleased to rise and offer a few minutes of discussion on Bill No. 98, the Equity and Sustainability in Electrical Utilities Act. There is a lot to unpack. A lot has been said already about this bill which, in general, has good sentiments behind it.

Of course, we are a government that has shown a commitment to trying to reduce poverty all across the province and, of course, we want to make sure that our ratepayers are protected, and that all Nova Scotians can afford to live and survive in this province.

I have had a chance to review the bill a little bit. I went over some of the notes in some of the body of the bill. I'll address some of the things in it on a point-by-point basis as I believe that, as I said before in this House, we enjoy a good list over here on this side of the House.

In the notes of this bill, it talks about how Nova Scotia Power is encouraged to take steps to maximize the use of renewable resources. What I can say to that is although we recognize Nova Scotia Power as an important piece of our power grid - they look after most of it for us - we're already taking drastic steps to increase the amount of renewable energy in this province. It's been discussed already in this House that by 2030, 80 per cent of the energy generated in this province is going to be renewable.

We're going to do that in a multitude of ways. It's been touched on briefly earlier today. Some of the highlights of the renewable energy that we are going to be putting into place includes the Atlantic Loop. It's certainly been discussed recently in the news. Nova Scotia Power has said that might be a challenge to complete, but it's something that we're still going to push forward with. That could up the renewable energy in our grid by 25 to 30 per cent.

Another aspect of our future in our energy is solar. We can all do that. On a personal note, there have been rebates in the past for personal solar. I'm proud to say that the house that I just completed, I added solar panels to my house. I'm pleased with the fact that, moving forward, my power bill will be next to nothing.

There's also been a lot of discussion about wind. I know that the member for Richmond is quite pleased with wind and the potential for offshore wind in his neck of the woods. I'd like to throw a plug in for Sheet Harbour as well. There's a great deal of work taking place at the Port of Sheet Harbour to get that facility ready to be a player in the supply chain of offshore wind. I'm very optimistic that the companies that are building these massive monopile wind turbines will take advantage of the fact that Sheet Harbour is a deep port. It can be a key piece in the logistics of bringing offshore wind to market.

Of course, when we talk about offshore wind, the key piece of that would be green hydrogen. We've taken steps already in this legislative session to ensure that the proper

framework is in place for the green hydrogen industry as we move forward. We consider that an important piece of the renewable energy sector moving forward.

To summarize that: Encouraging Nova Scotia Power to take steps to maximize the renewable energy in the grid. We're doing that.

The next piece of the bill talks about the NSUARB being cognizant of and applying the renowned Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. We passed that as one of our first bills in our first session, Bill No. 57 - brought forward by the honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

We know that Bill No. 57 and the key pieces of it are going to help all of our constituents and all of our ratepayers across the province. To apply pressure to the NSUARB to mandate them to include that in their decisions and what they discuss moving forward is not something that we're going to be doing in that regard.

It's interesting to hear the criticism we've recently received for implementing legislation that will limit the rate that the NSUARB can offer to Nova Scotia Power on one side, and then on the other side, talk about legislation that is encouraging us to do exactly that.

Another piece of this Bill No. 98 talks about the affordability service program for low-income customers. I was interested to listen to the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier talk about the fact that we're doing nothing to lower individual power bills. As it relates to this legislation, that might be accurate.

We're not going to advance this piece of legislation in the exact way that the Opposition would prefer, but we have taken a multitude of steps to lower individuals' power bills. We can talk for days about Efficiency Nova Scotia. We can talk about the investments that Efficiency Nova Scotia makes in individuals' homes that ultimately reduce their power bill at their house.

We can talk about the HomeWarming program. We can talk about the Affordable Multifamily Housing pilot, the Home Energy Assessment, Green Heat, the Small Business Energy Solutions program. There is a multitude of things that are in place right now that, if taken advantage of, will lower people's power bills.

There are other investments that we have made that have proven to lower power bills. We have improved 2,500 Mi'kmaw homes and 11,500 public housing units by making them more efficient. That doesn't just improve the efficiency and the affordability of it, it also reduces the greenhouse emissions that are being launched into the environment, which are a key piece of Bill No. 57.

We have helped Nova Scotians save over \$180 million on their power bills. Again, I find it curious to hear the criticism that we haven't done anything to help Nova Scotians lower their power bills when, clearly, the numbers say different.

We have helped more than 21,000 low-income Nova Scotians get free home assessments and energy efficiency updates since 2007. Obviously, since 2007, there have been governments of all stripes that have stood here on the floor of the Legislature. Obviously in 2007, the different government would have been the PC government, but since then, every other stripe has been here. I would like to think that we can all take a little piece of the credit for advancing energy affordability in this province.

If I can talk a little bit more about the climate change goals that we have put in place through Bill No. 57. Not only by 2030 will we have 80 per cent of our energy being brought forward by renewable energy, but we have a supplementary goal to be net zero by 2050. We're going to continue to advance with all the initiatives and the programs that we're putting in place. We're going to look for other unique solutions in order to make sure that not only are we greening the environment and ensuring that we're not polluting, but also reducing the expenses that each Nova Scotian would have.

We can also talk a little bit more about when we take advantage of the green economy, the spinoffs of that are the jobs that are created. Another factor in reducing poverty and reducing energy poverty is new and better-paying jobs. If we think about the offshore wind that's going to take place - I have had discussions with the folks in Sheet Harbour, the port operators, and they're anticipating that they could add 300-plus jobs to Sheet Harbour.

I'm sure you have all toured the Town of Sheet Harbour at some point or another in your lives. Three hundred people being added to that community would be an incredible enhancement to the local economy. Although it is a piece of Halifax Regional Municipality, I would argue it is still rural. The new and better-paying jobs that would be advanced by that would be immeasurable.

Solar is another aspect of this that as we continue to advance in the solar industry - the new and better-paying jobs. I can remember five or six years ago, it would have been a challenge to find a solar company to install. A member earlier stated how challenging it was to find someone to install a heat pump. It took weeks and months for my family to find someone who was free enough, who had the ability and could get the product to install the solar panels on our roof. Their company is thriving. The owner of the company shared how good business is. Those jobs, obviously, did not exist at a point in time. In the last five to seven years, they have been enhanced. That's more Nova Scotians with money in their pockets on account of the green economy.

I'll take a moment to summarize this. Bill No. 98, on its face, is not untoward. I would argue that we have already taken most of the steps within this bill that have proven

to lower power bills for individuals, as well as to enhance the renewable energy options within our province. We're going to keep doing that as we move forward.

THE SPEAKER: The time for consideration has elapsed.

The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I want to express thanks to everyone who joined in our debates today. I will say that that concludes Opposition business for today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Thursday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Government Business will include Committee of the Whole House on Bills Nos. 208, 212, 214, 215, 216, 219, 222, 223, 224, 225, 227, 228, 230 and 205. Time permitting, we'll have second reading of Private and Local Bills, Bill No. 239.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Thursday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 4:57 p.m.]