



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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First Session

TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS:	
Gov't. (N.S.): Pass Non-Disclosure Agreements Act - Request, C. Chender	5188
PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES	
Committee on Law Amendments - Bill Nos. 256, 263, 264, 269, Hon. Brad Johns.....	5188
TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS:	
<i>Combating Sexual Harassment in Canada's Legislative Assemblies</i> , E. Smith-McCrossin.....	5189
International Theatre Day Message, S. Leblanc	5189
GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION:	
Res. 588, HMCS <i>Montreal</i> /MV <i>Asterix</i> : Naval Exercises - Best Wishes, Hon. J. Lohr	5190
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:	
No. 277, An Act to Amend Chapter 70 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Civil Service Act, and Chapter 35 of the Acts of 2010, the Conflict	

of Interest Act, Hon. Z. Churchill	5191
No. 278, An Act Prohibiting Non-disclosure Agreements With Political Parties, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	5191
No. 279, An Act Respecting Certain Financial Measures, Hon. A. MacMaster.....	5191
No. 280, An Act to Amend Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2010, the Finance Act, Respecting Supplemental Appropriations, F. Tilley.....	5191
No. 281, An Act to Amend Chapter 1 (1992 Supplement) of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the House of Assembly Act, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	5191
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:	
Bangladesh Indep.: 52nd Anniv. - Recog., T. Taggart.....	5192
Bangladesh Indep.: 52nd Anniv. - Recog., Hon. Z. Churchill	5192
Can't Buy My Silence Campaign: NDA Efforts - Recog., C. Chender	5193
<i>Bluenose</i> Launch: 102nd Anniv. - Recog., Hon. S. Corkum-Greek	5193
Sexual Harassment Report: Importance - Recog., Hon. K. Regan.....	5193
Epilepsy Awareness Mo.: Support - Recog., L. Lachance.....	5194
Anti-NDA Campaign: Importance - Recog., E. Smith-McCrossin.....	5195
Hyslop, Don: Com. Serv. - Thanks, C. Palmer.....	5195
Advocates: Endometriosis Awareness Efforts - Recog., A. Simmonds.....	5196
Endometriosis Awareness Mo.: Reprod. Care Need - Recog., S. Leblanc	5197
Casey, Keith/Wilson, Ryan: Heroic Rescue - Congrats., Hon. T. Rushton.....	5197
MLA for Preston: Public Service - Recog., Hon. B. Maguire	5198
Anti-NDA Campaign: Importance - Recog., S. Hansen	5198
Sackville-Uniacke Residents: QPJ Medal Recips. - Recog., Hon. B. Johns.....	5199
O'Brien, John: Oak Island Book Discussion - Thanks, Hon. P. Arab	5199
Responsible Gov't in N.S.: 175th Anniv. - Recog., G. Burrill.....	5199

Sexual Harassment Report: Importance - Recog., E. Smith-McCrossin.....	5200
MacPhersons: Bus. Awd. Recip. - Congrats., Hon. K. Masland.....	5201
Annap. Valley Hon. Choir: Carn. Hall Perf. - Best Wishes, Hon. K. Irving.....	5201
BEC Unified Bask. Team: Coal Bowl Perf. - Recog., K. Coombes.....	5201
Bruce, Brian: DLAS Work - Congrats., Hon. J. Lohr	5202
Marshall, Abby: Can. Games Perf. - Congrats., Hon. T. Ince	5202
Cer. Palsy Awar. Day: Accessibility - Recog., L. Lachance.....	5203
Croft, Raymond: Minor Hockey Coaching Work - Congrats., M. Sheehy-Richard	5203
Pharmacy Apprec. Mo.: Hard Work - Recog., R. DiCostanzo.....	5204
Borden, Walter: Merritt Awd. Recip. - Congrats., S. Hansen	5204
Van Hal, Andrea: Twin Oaks ER Work - Thanks, K. Smith.....	5205
Bangladesh Indep.: 52nd Anniv. - Recog., A. Duale	5205
MacDonald, Jennifer: Death of - Tribute, K. Coombes.....	5206
McNaughton, Dan: Com. Serv. - Thanks, Hon. B. Wong	5206
Wife & Sister-in-Law - Birthday Wishes, F. Tilley.....	5206
Chedabucto Curling Club: 60th Anniv. - Congrats., Hon. G. Morrow.....	5207
Comeau, Michel: Alumnus of Yr. Awd. Recip. - Congrats., R. LeBlanc	5207
Theatre Com.: Merritt Awd. Recips. - Congrats., S. Leblanc	5208
Local Fishers: Work in Fishing Industry - Recog., N. Young.....	5209
Kon Dog Restaurant: Food Service - Recog., B. Clark.....	5209
Landry, Brothers: 60 th Anniv. – Recog. T. Boudreau.....	5209
Reid, Brian: QPJ Medal Recip. - Congrats., C. Kerr.....	5210
ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:	
No. 955, Prem.: Partisanship in Investment - Prevent,	

Hon. Z. Churchill	5210
No. 956, Prem.: Non-Disclosure Agreements - Restrict, C. Chender	5212
No. 957, DOJ: Legislation on Non-Disclosure Agreements - Pass, Hon. Z. Churchill	5214
No. 958, DPW: Roadwork Partisanship - Explain, Hon. Z. Churchill	5214
No. 959, FTB: Land Purchase Accountability - Explain, C. Kerr.....	5216
No. 960, OAMH: Universal Mental Health Care - Establish, L. Lachance.....	5217
No. 961, DOJ: NDA Legislation - Pass, Hon. B. Maguire	5218
No. 962, MAH: Conflict of Interest - Clarify, Hon. P. Arab	5219
No. 963, MAH: Future Conflicts of Interest - Inform, Hon. P. Arab	5220
No. 964, MAH: Rent Supplement Pgm. Gutted - Explain, S. Hansen	5221
No. 965, DED: Conflict of Interest - Prevent, B. Clark.....	5222
No. 966, DED: Hiring Process Equity - Commit, R. DiCostanzo.....	5223
No. 967, FTB: AG Advice Dismissed - Explain, Hon. K. Irving.....	5224
No. 968, DHW: Midwifery Services - Support, S. Leblanc	5226
No. 969, SNSIS: Hotel Purchase Details - Release, Hon. B. Maguire	5227
No. 970, DOJ: NDA Legislation - Pass, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	5228
No. 971, DOJ: NDA Legislation - Pass, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	5228
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:	
GOVERNMENT MOTIONS:	
ON MOTION FOR SUPPLY:	
K. Coombes.....	5229
Hon. B. Maguire	5232
L. Lachance.....	5237
HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CW ON SUPPLY AT 3:45 P.M.	5241
HOUSE RECONVENED AT 5:13 P.M.	5242
HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CW ON SUPPLY AT 5:14	5242
HOUSE RECONVENED AT 8:05 P.M.	5242
PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	
No. 273, Road Trails Act, Hon. K. Masland.....	5243

B. Clark.....	5244
K. Coombes.....	5244
Hon. K. Masland.....	5245
Vote - Affirmative.....	5245
No. 262, Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act (amended),	
Hon. C. LeBlanc	5246
B. Clark.....	5247
G. Burrill.....	5250
Hon. C. LeBlanc	5255
Vote - Affirmative.....	5256
ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Wed., Mar. 29 th at 1:00 p.m.....	5257



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2023

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Keith Bain

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Angela Simmonds, Lisa Lachance, Kent Smith, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

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

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, before I introduce this petition, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: In the gallery opposite I'd like to welcome a number of volunteers and associations of the Can't Buy My Silence campaign. Maybe you could rise when I say your name: Kristina Fifield of the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre; Liz LeClair, volunteer with Can't Buy My Silence; Erin Casey, a volunteer with Can't Buy My Silence; and Adrienne Power, a volunteer.

Please give them the warm welcome of the House. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: We welcome all visitors to the Legislature today and every day. The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I beg leave to introduce a petition. The operative clause of which reads as follows:

This is a petition to urge the House of Assembly to pass Bill No. 144, the Non-disclosure Agreements Act, banning the use of NDAs for non-intellectual property purposes.

This bill seeks to end the abuse of NDAs as a tool to silence victims of harassment, assault, discrimination, and other human rights abuses. This tool has been used to silence victims and enables perpetrators of abuse.

The Houston government delayed passing this bill in 2022 due to a jurisdictional review. Now that Prince Edward Island and the British government have passed similar legislation, we are calling on the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia to pass this bill in the Spring sitting of the Legislature 2023.

We the undersigned are concerned citizens who urge the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia to pass Bill No. 144 in the Spring sitting of the Legislature.

There are 400 signatures, and my signature is also included.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: As Chair of the Law Amendments Committee, I am directed to report that the committee has met and considered the following bills:

Bill No. 256 - an Act to Reduce Administrative Barriers to the Provision of Health Care.

Bill No. 263 - an Act to Amend Chapter 380 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Public Utilities Act (amended).

Bill No. 264 - an Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2004, the Electricity Act (amended).

Bill No. 269 - an Act to Amend Chapter 18 of the Acts of 2016, the Construction Projects Labour Relations Act, Respecting Green Hydrogen Production Facilities (amended).

The committee recommends these bills to the favourable consideration of the House, each without amendment.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled. It's ordered that these bills be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

The honourable member from Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, may I table a document that's related to my member statement today?

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, please.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Thank you. I'd like to table the document by Equal Voice...

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Oh, sorry.

MR. SPEAKER: Just one second. If the member could just wait until the next - it's a report, and a regulation tabling reports. Any further reports from committees?

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member from Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I'd like to table the document *Combating Sexual Harassment in Canada's Legislative Assemblies* prepared by Equal Voice.

MR. SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yesterday was World Theatre Day, and so I would like to table for the benefit of my colleagues in the House the International World Theatre Day

message by Egyptian actress Samiha Ayoub. And I will be quoting from it in my member's statement later. Happy World Theatre Day.

THE SPEAKER: The message is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 588

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

Whereas the officer and crew of HMCS *Montréal* and Supply Ship MV *Asterix* left Halifax Sunday for a six-month deployment to the Indo-Pacific region as part of operation Projection; and

Whereas HMCS *Montréal* is the first of three frigates to be deployed to the region over a 12-month period as part of Canada's contribution to the multinational efforts to monitor sanctions imposed on North Korea by the United Nations Security Council; and

Whereas HMCS *Montréal* and its onboard cyclone helicopter detachment will work closely with allies in naval exercises during the deployment;

Therefore, be it resolved that all members of this Legislature wish all those aboard HMCS *Montréal* and MV *Asterix* fair winds and best wishes and let them know we look forward to their safe return to Halifax.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 277 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 70 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Civil Service Act, and Chapter 35 of the Acts of 2010, the Conflict of Interest Act. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

Bill No. 278 - Entitled an Act Prohibiting Non-disclosure Agreements with Political Parties. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 279 - Entitled an Act Respecting Certain Financial Measures. (Hon. Allan MacMaster)

Bill No. 280 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2010, the Finance Act, Respecting Supplemental Appropriations. (Fred Tilley)

Bill No. 281 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 1 (1992 Supplement) of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the House of Assembly Act. (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 Colchester North.

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Speaker, before I read my member statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Speaker, visiting today in your gallery, the Speaker's Gallery, to recognize Bangladeshi Independence Day, are members of the Bangladesh Canada Friendship Society.

As I call your name, I ask that you stand so people can recognize you. The first is my good friend, the president, Ahsan Rizvi Chowdhury. Additionally, the Director of Finance, Dr. Ashraf Zaman, Director of Cultural Affairs, Neelgiri Chatterjee; Director of Student Affairs, Sharmin Sultana; Lily Sitigu; past president Sadiya Nargis; Dr. Mahad Amrahim; Amina Khattar Deliya, Ansar Chowdhury; and Ali Khan. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Indeed, we welcome all visitors to the Legislature. We hope you enjoy today's proceedings. I want to comment that the honourable member for Colchester North did a pretty good job with the names, too.

The honourable member for Colchester North.

[1:15 p.m.]

BANGLADESH INDEP.: 52ND ANNIV. - RECOG.

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Speaker, on March 26th, Bangladeshis around the world and here in Nova Scotia celebrated the 52nd anniversary of Bangladesh's independence. There are more than 100,000 Bangladeshi people living in Canada, and nearly 500 Bangladeshis have immigrated to Nova Scotia since 2017.

Today we recognize the importance of having strong, established communities such as Bangladeshi-Nova Scotians who contribute to our province's social and economic fabric. We thank them for sharing their rich and diverse culture with us.

We are so grateful that Bangladeshis have chosen to live, work and study here in Nova Scotia, helping to make our wonderful province a more vibrant and diverse place.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

BANGLADESH INDEP.: 52ND ANNIV. - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge that this past Sunday, March 26th was the Independence Day of Bangladesh. It is a day to recognize Bangladesh achieving its cherished independence in 1971.

Joining us here today in the gallery are some of the past and present board members of the Bangladeshi Canada Friendship Society. I'm so honoured that they've all joined us here today. I would like to acknowledge the current board, comprised of Ahsan Chowdhury, Mrityika Shamsuddin, Jyoty Dev Nath, Dr. Ashraf Zaman, Neelgiri Chatterjee, Md Shariful Islam Rasel, Sharmin Sultana, Mukti Mutsuddi, and Muhammed Jasim.

They work to provide a positive social space for all Bangladeshis through instilling a sense of community and culture here in the province. They're also instrumental in supporting Bangladeshis who immigrate here - helping them from the moment they depart Bangladesh to the moment they arrive and settle here.

The impact of the Bangladeshi community has been incredible for this province - from medicine to our economy to our finance sector. I know that incredible work is going to continue as we grow and diversify our province.

I'd like to thank this group so much, and wish everyone a happy Independence Day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CAN'T BUY MY SILENCE CAMPAIGN: NDA EFFORTS – RECOG.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise to acknowledge the amazing work of the Can't Buy My Silence campaign. Dr. Julie Macfarlane and Zelda Perkins - with aid from activists across Canada and in the U.S., Ireland and beyond - have built a formidable movement to ensure that the silence of victims cannot be bought via non-disclosure agreements. When they began in the wake of the awful truth of the predatory and criminal actions of Harvey Weinstein, Zelda Perkins risked everything to go public.

Through their hard work and dedication, at least 17 U.S. states, several Canadian provinces, and three countries have passed or are considering legislation to ban the misuse of these agreements. In the wake of the Hockey Canada scandal and other well-known events, we know that this legislation cannot come too soon. Please join me in applauding these brilliant women, all members of the Can't Buy My Silence campaign. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

BLUENOSE LAUNCH: 102ND ANNIV. – RECOG.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, on March 26, 1921, a Canadian icon was launched: the schooner *Bluenose*. Designed by William Roué and skippered by Captain Angus Walters, she became the undefeated Queen of the North Atlantic and the pride of my hometown of Lunenburg and indeed all Nova Scotia. More than 100 years later, the legacy of the beloved *Bluenose* still inspires, while her replica, the *Bluenose II*, is a crowd favourite wherever she docks. It is an honour to be able to acknowledge 102 years since the launch of the original *Bluenose* and I ask members of the Legislature to join me in celebrating her past, present, and bright future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT REPORT: IMPORTANCE – RECOG.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I rise today to address and condemn sexual harassment and its occurrence in any environment, professional or otherwise. As the 2022 Equal Voice report that investigated sexual harassment in Canada's Legislative Assemblies makes clear, sexual harassment affects women and gender-diverse individuals at a disproportionate rate to their male-identifying counterparts. I encourage everyone to read the report, as it outlines the precarious circumstances and facets of workplace culture that can be unique to politics and can heighten the risk for these events to occur.

But the truth is sexual harassment, no matter the person, place, job title or circumstance, continues to happen everywhere and it should not. Nor, Mr. Speaker, should we tolerate the use of non-disclosure agreements, NDAs, to silence its victims in this province. To those who have been affected by sexual harassment, I salute your bravery and

apologize for the system that has failed you. I hope for and will continue to work toward a future that is safe for all.

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

EPILEPSY AWARENESS MO.: SUPPORT – RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, this legislative session began during Epilepsy Awareness Month. Epilepsy is a neurological disorder that affects electrical activity in the brain. In 50 per cent of patients, the cause is unknown. Unusual electrical activity triggers a wide range of seizures, which can have a profound impact on quality of life, lifestyle, and relationships. In 30 per cent of cases, the seizures cannot be controlled by medication. On living and working with epilepsy, my constituency assistant, Marius, says, “The thing about epilepsy is that we’re much more numerous than you think - young and old, lots of us are incredibly independent but still need to manage a disability day to day.”

I ask my colleagues in the House to join me in recognizing Epilepsy Awareness Month and resolve to provide all Nova Scotians living with epilepsy the support they need.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today in the gallery, I would like to introduce Kathryn and Michael Saxton. I’ll ask them to stand. Kathryn and Michael Saxton are the parents of our dear Kait Saxton. Those of you here in the House have heard me speak about Kait. She was a Page here in the Nova Scotia Legislature back in 2011. She went on to work with the Progressive Conservative party as a researcher, and then I had the pleasure of having her work with me as an Independent until she so tragically was taken from us this past June.

Thank you both for coming today. (Standing ovation)

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

It was nice to be able to speak to you earlier on.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ANTI-NDA CAMPAIGN: IMPORTANCE – RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, last evening I had the pleasure of attending the Can't Buy My Silence presentation at the Halifax library. The goal of the campaign is simple - legislative and regulatory changes that will make non-disclosure agreements, or NDAs, unenforceable for anything other than its original purpose of the prevention of sharing confidential business information, intellectual property, and trade secrets.

Sadly, NDAs are now used to silence victims of sexual abuse, and that is wrong. I understand that this is an uncomfortable topic for many, but it is important for us to talk about, especially here in the Legislature, where we have the power to make legislative changes and lead by example.

I will speak about this again in my next member statement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Before my member statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

CHRIS PALMER: I would like to draw all members' attention to our gallery behind us here. I have the honour of recognizing another great volunteer from Kings West. I'd like to recognize Don Hyslop, who's well known in education circles and physician recruitment in our area.

I'd just like to point out - Don, if you could stand up, up there - Don is a well-known Boston Red Sox fan in our community. Hopefully after all this, I can ask the Yankees and Blue Jays fans to still give him a warm welcome.

Thank you, Don, for coming. He informed me beforehand that he is part of a group that brought the World Series trophy to the Legislature on three different occasions previously. Don, thank you for coming.

I'd now like to make my statement, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I will welcome our guest as well.

The honourable member for Kings West.

HYSLOP, DON: COM. SERV. - THANKS

CHRIS PALMER: Don Hyslop is a Kings West resident who has been a dedicated volunteer in our community for many years. In 1997, as a public educator, Don created an

extracurricular Gaelic program at a local school so interested students could learn the Gaelic language and culture.

Don continued this program at a number of schools in Kings County until 2020. In this role, Don took hundreds of students on trips throughout the province to celebrate and promote Gaelic heritage and support their participation in Gaelic immersion programs. I know my children always enjoyed Gaelic club.

In January 2021, the Soldiers Memorial Hospital Foundation formed the Mid Valley Recruitment and Retention Committee for physicians. As a director of the foundation, Don became the community lead for the committee, always giving a warm welcome to doctors and organizing welcome events and activities. Don and the committee's work has been helping to reduce numbers of people needing a family doctor in the Aylesford to Bridgetown area.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in thanking Don Hyslop for his many years as a community volunteer. In the many years I've known him, he has continuously promoted our province's culture and heritage and is dedicated to ensuring that Nova Scotia is an outstanding province to live, learn, work, and play. Tapadh leat. Thank you, Don.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

ADVOCATES: ENDOMETRIOSIS AWARENESS EFFORTS – RECOG.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize that March is Endometriosis Awareness Month. This past year, in late December, I had the opportunity to meet with some amazing, phenomenal women who advocate for this struggle on a regular basis, who are in the gallery. Liz LeClair, Maggie Archibald, and Michaela Kimber are joining us in the gallery today.

Also this month, I had an opportunity to visit with them in our caucus office and share their stories and outline their unique experiences living with endometriosis. They also shared that over one million Canadians are living with this disease and that there is no cause, cure, or universal treatment plan currently available.

They are continuous advocates, and I admire and respect the work that they have been doing. Maggie is a prominent advocate whose journey receiving a diagnosis took over 16 years. Michaela found herself bedridden in 2020 because of her symptoms.

I would like to acknowledge, though, throughout their struggles, I'm very pleased to announce and privileged to say that Michaela will also be accepted into Dalhousie Medical School. This will be an extra step for her and her mark on women's health and beyond.

[1:30 p.m.]

I ask this House to please stand to acknowledge the support and advocacy of these two women. (Standing ovation)

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

ENDOMETRIOSIS AWARENESS MO.: REPROD. CARE NEED - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, as my honourable colleague has just said, March is Endometriosis Awareness Month. I rise today to call on this House to prioritize funding for reproductive health care and endometriosis care in Nova Scotia.

Reproductive health care and health care specific to people with uteruses is often not taken as seriously as it should be. This is especially the case when it comes to menstruation and the pain that comes with it. In Canada, one million people - 1 in 10 women and an unknown number of transgender and gender nonconforming people - live with endometriosis. This is a gynecological condition where tissue grows outside the uterus.

Endometriosis symptoms include severe menstrual pain, chronic pelvic pain, and infertility. Many spend years trying to get an accurate diagnosis so that they can get proper treatment. Sometimes these folks are told that this excruciating pain is normal, but it is anything but. Symptoms are managed using a combination of medical and surgical care.

I call on this government to prioritize the health care for people with uteruses and ensure that we have the specialists and funding necessary to address endometriosis in our province. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

CASEY, KEITH/WILSON, RYAN: HEROIC RESCUE - CONGRATS.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two U15A players, Keith Casey and Ryan Wilson, on their heroic efforts this month.

On the evening of March 16th, I received a call from Stacy, Cumberland County Minor Hockey's President, to advise me that Keith and Ryan were travelling with their referee, Kurtis Langille, who took a medical emergency. Bear in mind that it's the under-15 age group of hockey that they play. Keith and Ryan managed to take control of the vehicle, call 911, and get them safely into the ditch. Their lives were saved that night because of these two young individuals.

I ask you to join me in congratulating and recognizing Keith and Ryan for their heroic act of heroism in ensuring that all three of these lives were saved to ensure that Cumberland County Minor Hockey stays very strong and positive throughout Cumberland County. Ryan and Keith, keep your stick on the ice, guys.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

MLA FOR PRESTON: PUBLIC SERVICE - RECOG.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, April 1st marks a sad day for me both personally and professionally. This Friday will be the member for Preston's last day in the Legislature.

The member for Preston is a powerhouse. I first heard about her through my in-laws as the voice and driving force of the Preston Land Titles Initiative. I've gotten to know the member as not only a colleague but a friend. I will miss sitting next to her, her advice, and her presence.

In her short time as an MLA you, my friend, have made a lifetime of change. I don't know what the world holds for you, but I will watch and admire. Tell Dean and the family I love and miss them and thank you for your public service and friendship.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

ANTI-NDA CAMPAIGN: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, non-disclosure agreements, NDAs, have become commonly used in settlements in cases of harassment and discrimination. NDAs are also often used in employment contracts. Both can and have been used to silence, conceal, intimidate, and exploit. All of this is wrong.

It is critically important that survivors of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse are able to choose the processes and methods of resolution that they want. There are clearly many flaws in this current process for addressing situations of sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse. We are grateful that the Can't Buy My Silence and Avalon and other advocacy groups, organizations, and others have developed solutions that balance the need for choice, privacy, and the protection of the public.

NDAs are wrong and we should stop this practice now. Our party will continue this fight until this practice ends. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

SACKVILLE-UNIACKE RESIDENTS: QPJ MEDAL RECIPS. - RECOG.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to rise to recognize 15 residents of the Sackville-Uniacke community who were recently awarded the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal.

The recipients are, in no particular order: Ally Parkes, Barry Barnett, Blair Eavis, Robert Harvey, David Borden, Gary McPherson, James MacDonald, Laszlo Litcher, Regan Oliver, Mable McCarthy, Michael Perry, Richard McCulloch, Stephen Corkum, Steven Taylor, and Yvette D'Entremont.

The Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal commemorates the 70th anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second's ascension to the throne as Queen of Canada. The medal is distributed to Nova Scotians who have made notable contributions within their communities, and I'd like to congratulate all recipients of this award.

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

O'BRIEN, JOHN: OAK ISLAND BOOK DISCUSSION - THANKS

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: On March 5th, a group of 80 community members of all ages gathered at the Fairview Legion to share a lunch and listen to noted author John O. O'Brien speak about his book, *Oak Island Unearthed!*

John, whose father was a pharmacist here in Fairview, used to listen to stories about the treasure of Oak Island from his dad and other local businessmen, and at 12 years old started visiting the island with them.

After serving in the Canadian Army and spending a total of 36 years underground in the mines, John used his skills to begin investigating Oak Island and start writing his book. His theory on the Oak Island treasure centres on the Aztecs of South America and their involvement with the island. His explanations that day left many in the audience with a new insight into the possibility of what very well could have happened on Oak Island.

I want to thank the Fairview Historical Society for putting on this luncheon and Mr. O'Brien for coming back to Fairview and sharing some of his stories with us.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

RESPONSIBLE GOV'T IN N.S.: 175TH ANNIV. - RECOG.

GARY BURRILL: Twenty-five years ago, at the time of the 150th anniversary of the first responsible government in British North America, in Nova Scotia, author John Ralston Saul wrote that it reflected poorly on the democratic sensibility in Canada and of its government that the occasion was allowed to pass so unheralded at that time.

His words came to mind a few weeks ago on February 2nd, which was the 175th anniversary of the swearing in of that first responsible government. On that date, in 1848, the Reformers, who had won the Nova Scotia election the previous year, on the principle that the Cabinet must be formed from the party which forms the majority in the election, were sworn into office, and the principles for which they'd long fought came into being.

In Nova Scotia, we'd long had elected representatives before that, but only then did representation become effective and thereby truly democratic. The 175th anniversary was marked by the Legislative Library, I'll note, and by a congratulatory message from the King. It is not a surprise, however, that neither the party that placed a fixed election date in the middle of the Summer, nor the party that destroyed elected school boards in Nova Scotia, showed any sign of having registered the importance of this anniversary to the development of effective democracy in this country.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT REPORT: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: In January 2022, a report by Equal Voice, *Combating Sexual Harassment in Canada's Legislative Assemblies*, funded by the federal government, said: "Sexual harassment is a real and persistent problem in Canada's provincial and territorial legislatures . . . there have been media reports of sexual harassment in multiple Legislative Assemblies . . . It is also well-known that sexual harassment regularly goes under-reported" in political spaces and other employment contexts.

Research shows this underreporting is linked to potential complainants' concerns for their mental health, retraumatization, and anxieties about their career prospects. Unfortunately, in some cases, public officials help to hide truths, which only perpetuates the behaviours of sexual harassment, assault, and in some cases violence. These are criminal activities that should be reported to law enforcement, and this hurt must be stopped.

The report goes on to say that most anti-harassment policies do not meaningfully support complainants and can inadvertently cause harm to those who have experienced sexual harassment and also protect harassers. Good policies can prevent this. I believe this Legislature can lead the way by establishing stronger policies for government and including ensuring NDAs are eliminated.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

MACPHERSONS: BUS. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I rise today to congratulate MacPhersons of Liverpool on being named the 2022 Small Business of the Year at the Lunenburg Queens Business Excellence Awards Gala on March 6th.

The MacPherson family began operating their business in the late 1930s, and for three generations, locals have watched it evolve and adapt with the times. Always community-minded, and an employer of many family members and friends, over the decades they have offered a broad range of goods and services, including groceries, gas, pizza, real estate, communication services, fishing supplies, clothing, furniture, and appliances, just to name a few. Their friendly and knowledgeable staff are always eager to serve.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Horace, his family, and his incredible staff on receiving this well-merited award, and in wishing them much success in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

ANNAP. VALLEY HON. CHOIR: CARN. HALL PERF. - BEST WISHES

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, after years of bringing beautiful sounds to the Valley, the Annapolis Valley Honour Choir is getting ready for their debut on April 1st at the famous Carnegie Hall in New York City. The choir is made up of students from Grade 9 to Grade 12 from every corner of the Valley. This performance is a significant milestone for the choir, and they've been working hard to ensure that everything is perfect for the big stage in the Big Apple.

They will be performing alongside five other Canadian choirs, all of whom are practising the same pieces. Among them is the Nova Scotia anthem "We Rise Again." It's a great accomplishment and the choir should be proud of all the effort they have put in to make this happen.

I ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in wishing director Heather Fraser and all the members of the Annapolis Valley Honour Choir an amazing performance at Carnegie Hall. We are all very proud of you.

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

BEC UNIFIED BASK. TEAM: COAL BOWL PERF. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Last week I spoke about the Coal Bowl Classic tournament being more than basketball; it is about community and inclusion. Since 2019, the Coal Bowl has included a Special Olympics unified basketball game. Breton Education Centre's

unified team played another local school team. This year, BEC took on the team from Glace Bay High. Unified teams from across Cape Breton are student-guided initiatives.

Some players have physical or mobility limitations and some are in learning centre programs, Mr. Speaker. It is truly the best game of the week. It is the game you do not want to miss and cannot wait to rewatch.

Next year's Coal Bowl will highlight the importance of unified sports in Cape Breton when a former unified team player, Ian MacIsaac, will serve as the tournament's division chair, marking the first time a unified player will hold that honour. Congratulations, Ian.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

BRUCE, BRIAN: DLAS WORK - CONGRATS.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Brian Bruce of Kentville, founder of the Donna Lemmon Able Society - the DLAS.

Mr. Bruce was inspired to form the DLAS in memory of his friend Donna Lemmon to advocate for greater community accessibility. The society's vision is to create an inclusive organization that will work with towns, villages, communities, and organizations to promote affordable solutions to mobility issues that citizens face. Its purpose is to advocate, educate, and reduce stigma and stereotypes of people who live with mobility challenges.

The DLAS will also advocate for small businesses that may require financial assistance to make significant renovations to promote accessibility to their premises. Please join me today in congratulating Brian Bruce for the excellent work being done in our community by the Donna Lemmon Able Society.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

MARSHALL, ABBY: CAN. GAMES PERF. - CONGRATS.

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to stand here and recognize one of my young community members, who recently competed in the Canada Games in P.E.I., Abby Marshall, a Grade 10 student at Auburn Drive High School. She went to the Canada Games to compete in fencing. Abby discovered fencing when she watched the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Her home club, the Enguardians Fencing Club in Halifax, is the club that she attends, and she has been there for a year. She recently started doing sabre fencing four months ago and that's what she competed in in P.E.I.

Abby has also gone to competitions in New Brunswick and Quebec. Congratulations on your hard work and accomplishments, Abby. Well deserved.

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

CER. PALSY AWAR. DAY: ACCESSIBILITY - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, March 25th was National Cerebral Palsy Awareness Day. Cerebral palsy is a neurological condition that affects muscles, movements, and mobility. It is the most common motor disability of childhood and the most common physical disability amongst Canadians.

The symptoms of cerebral palsy vary from person to person and do not get worse over time, though the exact symptoms can change over a person's lifetime. On living and working with cerebral palsy, my communications assistant Jen shared, "Meeting one person with cerebral palsy means just that: You've met one person with cerebral palsy. This disability is wide-ranging, and our experiences are as individual and unique as we are. Try not to put us in a box; We already spend lots of time thinking outside them. If you want to be an advocate and a friend to the CP community, get loud about places and spaces that are inaccessible. It's 2023 and we are tired."

Let us all recommit to being accessibility advocates.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

CROFT, RAYMOND: MINOR HOCKEY COACHING WORK - CONGRATS.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Mr. Speaker, as hockey season comes to an end, I rise today to recognize Raymond Croft for his 14 years of dedication to the Hants West Minor Hockey Association and more recently, to the Valley Maple Leafs Junior B hockey team. Raymond began coaching in 2009, and it didn't take long for him to become more involved.

In 2016, he joined the board as Director of Hockey and has spent the last five years as president. Having been involved with minor hockey myself, and serving as registrar beside Raymond, I can truly attest to his devotion, hard work, and the numerous volunteer hours he puts in to ensure kids get a chance to play the game they love.

He recently announced that he is taking a step back from minor hockey to focus on his Junior B involvement, but more importantly, so he can spend more time with his family and wife, Jenna, whom he just so happens to share my office with on a part-time basis.

I ask that all members join me in congratulating Raymond, and wish him all the best in his future endeavors with the Valley Maple Leafs Junior B hockey team.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

PHARMACY APPREC. MO.: HARD WORK - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize March as Pharmacy Appreciation Month. This is a national effort to highlight pharmacists who do so much for us.

They no longer just fill prescriptions; they deliver vaccinations, prescribe medicine, counsel patients, and answer all sorts of questions. Each March, we are encouraged to show our appreciation and gratitude for the pharmacists in our community. This year, people are invited to enter their favourite pharmacist in a contest called MyFavePharm. The next time you are in a pharmacy, I encourage you to thank your pharmacy team for their hard work.

Today, I also want to take an opportunity to thank my daughter, who is a pharmacist, for all her hard work. I appreciate all of her consults and advice that she's given us in the last five years as a pharmacist. Thank you, Tara.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

BORDEN, WALTER: MERRITT AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Mr. Walter Borden. Mr. Borden received the 2023 Theatre Nova Scotia Legacy Award at the Robert Merritt Awards last evening.

Mr. Borden recalled some recent memories during his acceptance speech that were an integral part of who I am as an artist. He recalled being the only Black artist at times on the theatre stage. Throughout his life, he has wanted to change that. Mr. Borden recognized using the talent around him and introduced many of our folks in the Black community to theatre.

Bringing to life a theatrical musical play called *God's Trombones*, he opened up the thrill of being in the theatrical world to many. The play *Gospel of Colonus* is where I was introduced to the main stage. I learned so much about the work and ethic it takes to be in a show and to put such a large production together.

This piece of work, unbeknownst to me, was 15 years in the making. This production meant so much to Mr. Borden. It was the first time on the big stage to have a Black musical director and, not one Black artist, but 40 Black artists on stage - me being one of them.

I would like all members to join me in congratulating Mr. Walter Borden on receiving the Theatre Nova Scotia Legacy Award for his trailblazing spirit, and thank him for his hard work and dedication in the theatre world.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

VAN HAL, ANDREA: TWIN OAKS ER WORK - THANKS

KENT SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to Andrea Van Hal, a registered nurse prescriber at Twin Oaks Memorial Hospital in Musquodoboit Harbour.

Andrea, an RN for 20 years, first worked at the inpatient pediatric unit at the IWK, then moved to the IWK's emergency department. She now works at the emergency department at Twin Oaks Memorial Hospital.

Andrea graduated from Dalhousie University in 2022 as part of the first cohort of RN prescribers practicing in Nova Scotia. Additionally, she was the first RN prescriber hired to work in the emergency department specifically in this role. Through this innovative program, registered nurses in Nova Scotia who have completed advanced post-secondary education can now prescribe a limited number of medications and order relevant screening or diagnostic tests within their nursing practice.

Andrea is still able to do all the RN duties with the added scope of being able to see patients and prescribe medication, thus helping to improve flow. Her expanded role allows physicians to better focus on higher-acuity patients while she attends to lower-acuity concerns, thereby helping to reduce long wait times.

I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in thanking Andrea for her dedication to improving access to care in a rural emergency department. Her expertise and compassion are greatly appreciated.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

BANGLADESH INDEP.: 52ND ANNIV. - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize the Bangladesh community who celebrated their Independence Day on March 26th. I would like to ask the House to join me in celebrating with the Bangladesh community here in Nova Scotia.

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

MACDONALD, JENNIFER: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, in August 2022, Jennifer MacDonald passed away following an ATV accident. Jennifer was a resident of Reserve Mines, and was well known for living life with kindness and love. This way, Jennifer inspired a movement.

Since her passing, there have been food drives, baskets for seniors, gift cards, and treat bags for individuals needing a holiday pickup. Family and friends sold #LiveLikeJen shirts to raise money to support the Cape Breton Regional Hospital Foundation and the Breton Ability Centre.

Jennifer was known for her small, significant acts of kindness. Her anonymous actions were unknown until her passing. Her family and friends stated that the #LiveLikeJen movement is about putting more kindness into the world by doing small acts for others. I want to thank Jen's family and friends for sharing her life and philosophy.

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

MCNAUGHTON, DAN: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, please join me in thanking Dan McNaughton for his hard work and service to our constituency of Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank.

Dan has boosted our community with his endless volunteer efforts, as well as his work with the RCMP Veterans Association. From being the local Santa Claus in support of charitable events, to coaching sports and his work with the Lions Club, Dan's efforts are truly appreciated by the community. Dan was awarded the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal in January, and he could not be more deserving of this honour.

Please join me in recognizing and thanking Dan for his dedicated service to the community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

WIFE & SISTER-IN-LAW - BIRTHDAY WISHES

FRED TILLEY: Today I rise to wish a very special happy birthday to my beautiful wife, home in Cape Breton. I hope she has a great day. I wish I was there to be with her, but we had a good celebration on the weekend. A little over 30 years ago, it was love at first sight for me at Smooth Herman's. Over 30 years later, it gets better every year.

I'd be remiss if I didn't wish a happy birthday to her wombmate - her twin sister, Janet Marshall, from Glace Bay. Happy birthday, girls. Have a great day.

THE SPEAKER: Just one comment. I heard just recently that the twin sisters don't even look like twins - hair colour and everything else.

The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

CHEDABUCTO CURLING CLUB: 60TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

HON. GREG MORROW: I rise today to recognize the Chedabucto Curling Club in Boylston. This year marks their 60th year in operation. The club has been a source of recreation for the young and young at heart since its beginnings. Day league and night league play, as well as weekend spiels, are something this community looks forward to every year.

The club has twice been the recipient of the Nova Scotia Curling Association's Organization of the Year award, and has turned out some top competitive players over the years. Their Little Rocks program has been inspiring young curlers to love the game and teaches them the basics of this Winter sport that they can play their entire lives.

From a club that started in 1963 as a natural-ice, one-sheet rink housed under a plastic-covered frame to a now recently renovated building with two sheets and a club house, this organization would not be here today without the volunteers who work hard to keep the club going. From making ice to fundraising, volunteering at spiels or sitting on the club committee, it truly is a community effort.

I ask that the House join me in congratulating the Chedabucto Curling Club on their 60th anniversary, and to all their members and volunteers, continue to hurry hard.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

COMEAU, MICHEL: ALUMNUS OF YR. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Monsieur le président, en octobre dernier, l'Association des alumni de l'Université Sainte-Anne a honoré Michel Comeau comme un de leurs anciens de l'année.

Cet honneur est décerné à un ancien étudiant qui a apporté une contribution importante à sa communauté, à son alma mater, et à sa profession. Avant de prendre sa retraite en 2021, Michel Comeau a passé sa carrière professionnelle dans le système scolaire en tant qu'enseignant, directeur d'école, administrateur scolaire, et pendant les cinq dernières années avant sa retraite, directeur général du Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.

Je demande à tous les membres de se joindre à moi pour féliciter Michel Comeau de l'honneur que lui a fait l'Association des alumni de l'Université Sainte-Anne et pour lui remercier des services qu'il a rendus à sa communauté. Merci.

Mr. Speaker, last October, Université Sainte-Anne's alumni association honoured Michel Comeau as their Alumnus of the Year. This honour is awarded to an alumnus who has made a significant contribution to their community, their alma mater, and their profession.

Before retiring in 2021, Michel Comeau had spent his working career in the school system as a teacher, a principal, a school administrator, and for the last five years, as the general manager of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.

Michel, a proud Acadian and Saint Anne's alumnus, has been an ardent defender of the rights of francophones in education and has contributed greatly to the advancement of French language education throughout the province.

I ask that all members join me in congratulating Michel Comeau for this honour bestowed to him by his alma maters' alumni association, and thanking him for his service to his community. Merci.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

THEATRE COM.: MERRITT AWD. RECIPS. - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, yesterday was World Theatre Day, a day to recognize the contributions that theatre and those who create it make to our world.

In her Theatre Day address, Egyptian actress Samiha Ayoub said to her fellow theatre artists, "I am not exaggerating when I say that what we do on stage is the act of life itself and generating it from nothingness, like a burning ember that sparkles in the darkness, lighting the darkness of the night and warming its coldness. We are the ones who give life its splendor. We are the ones who embody it. We are the ones who make it vibrant and meaningful. And we are the ones who provide the reasons to understand it."

Our local theatre community marked the day last night with the annual Merritt Awards that celebrate the best and the brightest of Nova Scotia theatre. I want to share my thanks and congratulations to all those who created theatre last year. A special shout-out to the artists from Dartmouth North who were nominated for awards, including Mary-Fay Coady, Burgandy Code, and Sebastian Labelle for outstanding performances, and Mary Fay Coady and Katie Dorian for outstanding choreographer.

I ask the House to join me in offering warm congratulations to all.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

LOCAL FISHERS: WORK IN FISHING INDUSTRY - RECOG.

NOLAN YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mike Holmes, Lemuel Locke, Harry Rennehan, and Bill Acker.

Mike, a local lobster fisherman, initiated a Blessing of the Fleet service in Sandy Point last Fall prior to the lobster season with the intention of making it an annual event. At the service were three fishermen - Lemmy Locke, Bill Acker, and Harry Rennehan - who have each spent 70 years supporting their families and our local, provincial, and federal economies as fishermen.

I respectfully ask that all members join me in recognizing these four men for their lifelong work in the fishing industry - the backbone of our Shelburne economy.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

KON DOG RESTAURANT: FOOD SERVICE - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, I had the change to visit one of Bedford South's newest and best restaurants, the Kon Dog Korean Hotdog and Bingsu.

Since opening in December, owner David Kim and his team have been making their mark with delicious gourmet hot dogs and bingsu - a shaved ice Korean dessert often made with sweet toppings like fruit or syrup. I took my 5-year-old son to Kon Dog over the weekend and, believe it or not, he did love it - no surprise there.

I'd ask all members of the House join me in congratulating David Kim and the team at the Kon Dog for their successful early months in business, and wish them nothing but the best in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

LANDRY BROTHERS: 60TH ANNIV. - RECOG.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge a business that recently celebrated their 60th anniversary in Richmond County.

Brothers Narcisse and the late Bennie Landry of Louisdale were working in Ontario when, in 1960, they made the decision to move back home and open their own business. Landry Brothers, incorporated in 1962, began in Narcisse and his wife Eileen's basement with three employees. The first job they had was five houses in Louisdale. They then received a subcontract plumbing job for 500 houses in Greenwood for the Air Force, and 500 houses for the Navy in Dartmouth. From then on, their business flourished.

Today Narcisse and Eileen's son Paul is the owner of the business, which proudly employs 20 people. Narcisse, who is now 94 years young, was presented with an award in December for their 60th anniversary.

[2:00 p.m.]

Please join me in a round of applause for Narcisse, his late brother Bennie, Paul, and the Landry family on this great accomplishment.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

REID, BRIAN: QPJ MEDAL RECIP. - CONGRATS.

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, one of my favourite moments as an MLA has been the honour of presenting constituents with the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Medal. This medal recognizes exceptional Nova Scotians who have made communities even better places to live, work, and play.

One of these constituents, whom I've had the pleasure of working with, is Brian Reid. Brian has contributed tremendously to the betterment of the Village of Lawrencetown over the years, including by serving as chair of the Village Commission and playing key roles in the development of the community internet program and the health centre. He is certainly very deserving of this award.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Brian Reid.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time for Statements by Members has expired. We'll now move on to Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers.

The time is 2:00 p.m. We will go until 2:50 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: PARTISANSHIP IN INVESTMENT - PREVENT

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, since being elected to office, this government has systematically disbanded independent boards and replaced professional hiring contracts with appointments of the Premier's friends and allies. We've seen this happen with the Municipal Finance Corporation, the Gaming Commission, Nova Scotia

Business Inc. and Innovacorp, Perennia, the art gallery, museums, Tourism Nova Scotia, and of course, Mr. Speaker, with the Health Authority.

These independent boards are in place to make sure that operational decisions and policy decisions are being driven not by partisanship motivations but by good policy.

My question to the Premier is: How can he ensure that partisanship is not driving major decisions when it comes to investment in everything from the economy to health care?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Obviously, when we were elected government, we had two goals, really: fix health care and pay for the fixing of health care. I'm proud to say that the work that's happening on those is absolutely incredible. It was necessary, because we all know what happened under the former government. There were lots of opportunities for this province, and we are seizing those opportunities.

Our population is growing. Nova Scotians are happy with where this province is going. There is more optimism around this province right now than I could possibly say in words in 45 seconds.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, in fact we've seen that when the government has taken over these agencies, outcomes get worse for Nova Scotians. We've actually seen this with health care, where we have twice as many people without a family doctor, where we have twice the number of closures in our ERs, where we have twice the number of vacancies in a number of our hospitals, impacting service all over the place. We've seen it with the economic development agencies. We've had growth in this province, in population and our economy, for 10 years. We're now actually starting to see that contract. We don't have professionals in place to oversee and make decisions on government investments. We now have partisans and the Cabinet doing that.

If you look at the outcomes, it's very clear that this government does not know better than the experts. When will they actually start putting experts back in charge of making some of these decisions?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I just disagree with so much of what the member is saying, and obviously I'm not alone. Nova Scotians do as well. The member had eight years to move this province forward. We are moving this province forward in 18 months more than they could even dream in eight years.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we're not seeing the province move forward in very key areas: how many people have a family doctor, the state of our emergency rooms and the closures that we have there. We are not seeing our economy actually grow at the same rate as it has over the last few years. Our population growth has actually started to slow.

We do think, on this side of the House, that part of that has to do with the government not listening to experts. The government has a consistent track record of not taking expert advice, or discrediting it. We've seen that when it comes to treatment and protocols of vulnerable people. I'll table that. We've seen it actively dismiss expert advice regarding the finances of the province. I can table that. It has circumvented expert advice on climate planning. I'll table that. It has ignored expert advice on basic matters of democracy. I'll table that.

When will this Premier assure this House that his partisan agenda is not superceding good policy decision making for this province?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the population of this province has traditionally grown by about 5,000 people a year - roughly 5,000 people a year. In the year that just ended, we grew by 37,000 people.

I will assure the member that we listen to all Nova Scotians. I toured this province extensively. I listened to Nova Scotians in all manners of Legions and streets and on the street, and you know what they're telling me, Mr. Speaker? Thank goodness we saw the last of that Liberal government.

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

PREM.: NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENTS - RESTRICT

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker . . . (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We've only had the first round of questioning, and here I have to call order. Please respect everybody on both sides of the floor.

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians remain concerned about this government's unwillingness to restrict the misuse of non-disclosure agreements to stop them from being used to silence the survivors of abuse. Documents obtained through Freedom of Information show that the development of NDA legislation was labelled a priority for the Justice Department as recently as last Summer. I'll table that. But by the Fall, the Minister of Justice was quoted as telling the media that it was not a priority for government, and I'll table that.

Nova Scotians are wondering why the government has changed their tune and whether that shifting of priorities came from the Premier's Office.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. We of course agree that non-disclosure agreements should not be used as a means to silence victims of sexual

assault. Of course, we agree with that. I think the minister at the time was referring to the slate of legislation that was before the House. I myself know that sometimes you say something a little wrong, but I would assure the member that it is a priority. There is a jurisdictional scan happening. There's research happening. We want to get this right. We know that these should not be used as a means to silence victims of sexual assault.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice did, in fact, say that legislating the misuse of non-disclosure agreements was not a priority for his government - you can go ahead and look at the document I tabled - and also cited the same need for a jurisdictional scan.

The same Freedom of Information request showed that the Department of Justice has been engaging in this scan since February of last year and has been conducting ongoing updates and work throughout the year. I'll table that.

The Law Society of Manitoba, the Government of British Columbia, and the Irish Parliament have all done scans. They are publicly available and free. In the meantime, more provinces are coming forward with their own legislation. Every day that this government fails to act is a day that it fails to protect women and survivors.

My question is simple: When will the Premier act?

THE PREMIER: We will act when we complete our research. There is a jurisdictional scan happening. That's happening at the departmental level. I trust the departmental folks to get that right, and when we get the information, we'll move forward accordingly at that time.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: What makes this government's inaction truly surprising is the broad range of those supporting swift action. It was the Premier's own minister responsible for the Status of Women who brought this forward to the Justice Department. Last month, 94 per cent of Canadian Bar Association members voted in favour of a resolution to prevent non-disclosure misuse. Ireland, the United States, P.E.I., and many other jurisdictions nationally and internationally have acted.

If it's not professional or public support and if it's not jurisdictional scans which are widely available that are preventing this government from taking action, what is it? Why is this government refusing to protect the survivors of abuse?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'll look at member's tablings once we have them. We also support stopping the misuse. I think I said that right off the top, that we agree they should not be used as a means to silence victims of sexual assault. We agree with that.

We are doing the research at the departmental level. We will continue to do that research until we have the fulsome resource, and then when we have all the information that's deemed necessary by the department, we'll act accordingly at that time.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DOJ: LEGISLATION ON NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENTS - PASS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: We certainly want to add our voices to this conversation. This is an important issue for Nova Scotians and for victims. I certainly think the House can agree that reviewing this issue over the two years that this government has been in place is not needed. We know that we don't need a jurisdictional scan to know that NDAs are used to silence victims and they are used to protect the perpetrators.

Will the Premier please do what's right and pass this legislation in this sitting of the Legislature?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, through you to the member, as the Premier said, we'll continue to do our jurisdictional scan. We have widened that since the last time I was before the House to look at North America and a number of other places. We'll continue to review.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Now the government is widening the scope of the scan. Is that just to drag their feet even longer on this issue? Come on.

Other jurisdictions are moving on this. We've had good pieces of legislation come from the NDP and the Independent member on this. They're well-thought-out, and we really think that the government should be moving forward on these with all due haste to make sure no more victims of sexual assault have to deal with this sort of situation.

Will the Premier please confirm to this House today the government will stop dragging their feet and actually get this done immediately?

BRAD JOHNS: Once again, as I said, and as the Premier stated, we'll continue our jurisdictional scan.

DPW: ROADWORK PARTISANSHIP - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Those of us in rural Nova Scotia know how important our roadwork is. I talked in the previous question about how we believe partisanship is directing decision-making in this government. I think we've seen this in the new five-year road plan from this government, where, I'll have to say, almost exclusively, the new work is being done in government-held ridings.

In fact, in many Opposition ridings, roadwork has been actually cut out of the five-year plan. This is not just a matter of convenience for rural travelers in this province, it's also a matter of safety for our roads, and lives are at stake.

I must ask the Premier: Has there been any communication between his office and the officials at the Department of Public Works about specific work being done to the roads, bridges, and other infrastructure projects in his own riding?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: The way our Five Year Highway Plan is developed involves a lot of work from the folks who work at the Department of Public Works in our field: The area managers, the district managers, the district directors. I hope that the member across the aisle is not suggesting that those amazing people who work for the Department of Public Works don't know what they're doing.

ZACH CHURCHILL: You'll see this happen every time the government gets a criticism. They try to deflect and say we're criticizing somewhere else. Guess what? I know about every one of those people. They're hard-working. They're good. They also do what they're told from the department. That's the reality. In fact, if you look at the Gravel Road Program, a very important program that was brought in by a previous government, it's been doubled by this government, the budget for it. Very good.

However . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: However, it's only been doubled in Conservative-held ridings, not ridings of the Opposition. In fact, under this program, the constituency of Pictou East is getting more gravel roads than every single non-government riding combined. I'll table that. You can't tell me something's not up.

THE SPEAKER: Question, please.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Again, politics are driving decisions, not public safety. Will the minister please give us an answer?

KIM MASLAND: I thank the honourable member for pointing out the incredible investment we have made for our roads. Let's talk about it again. The first investment I made as Minister of Public Works was doubling the gravel roads. That's right. It went from 20 to 40. Wait for it, Mr. Speaker: \$55 million. (Cheers) Doubling our RIM went from 11 to 22. Where are we now? Thirty-six. You know what that means in RIM? Another \$1 million in every district in this province. Every one of these MLAs will benefit from that.

Do you want me to continue? We doubled the bridge rehabilitation. I can keep going.

[2:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

FTB: LAND PURCHASE ACCOUNTABILITY - EXPLAIN

CARMAN KERR: We found out in the latest capital budget there's a new Strategic Investment Fund for land purchases. At upwards of \$50 million, it's a massive budget. This fund is not earmarked for any specific investment, and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board was unable to clarify what purpose this fund was for.

To the Minister of Public Works, what accountability mechanisms do Nova Scotians have to ensure that this money is spent fairly and equitably?

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I appreciate the member's question. It is a good one. There is a significant amount being outlaid for the purchase of properties. I can tell the member and the House the primary motivation for this is planning - to look ahead to see where the needs of the Province are.

I'll give an example and it's not a specific example but it's something that could relate - that's in the case of schools in the capital region here. We have schools that are bursting at the seams. You have to plan ahead. If you need to buy a piece of property at the last minute the price goes up.

We're trying to plan ahead. We're trying to be good stewards with the public purse.

CARMAN KERR: We know that when government needs to quickly authorize funding, it can and it has. The unfortunate downside to this new method of funding is that there is no Order in Council when the funding is allocated, so the public receives zero transparency.

Why has the government chosen to create a \$50-million fund with no set criteria for distribution and no public notice for expenditures?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, in terms of transparency, when the government purchases a property, especially if it is a significant one at a significant cost, there is a lot of public scrutiny and it is certainly made public. We would have no reason to conceal that and certainly in the case of a school, if we buy a piece of property that we're going to put a school on, it's pretty hard to hide that.

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

OAMH: UNIVERSAL MENTAL HEALTH CARE - ESTABLISH

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister Responsible for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health. This is a government that ran on a promise of universal mental health care, but Nova Scotians are still waiting. Instead, we are seeing a patchwork of pilot projects and private companies in place of a truly universal system.

The new, single-session program offered through for-profit TELUS Health is no replacement for this and many have expressed concern about the program, especially in lieu of other accessible mental health care.

The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers noted recently that the majority of people who need free mental health care have complex needs that require more than one session. I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, when will Nova Scotians see a truly universal mental health care program, as promised by this government?

HON. BRIAN COMER: I thank the member for the question. We've had historic increases in the budget this year for addictions and mental health care. The Access Wellness service, specifically, is another new, first-of-its-kind service in the province, along with mental health acute day hospitals, and a number of significant pilots in the budget, which I'm sure I will have the opportunity to discuss at Estimates today. I'm looking forward to discussing those.

We continue to make significant investments, Mr. Speaker, and we will keep that promise.

LISA LACHANCE: While extending any kind of mental health support is a welcome task, many have called into question this government's decision to outsource this program to a for-profit company like TELUS Health in a five-year contract totalling \$11.5 million.

The NSGEU, which includes many unionized therapists and councillors, has filed a grievance with the province about this decision, stating that the government is handing their work to a private company rather than growing capacity in the public sector. It's a slippery slope once you start there. I've tabled that.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government insist on funnelling money to private companies over making good on their promise to provide universal mental health care?

BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, speaking from the perspective of a frontline mental health clinician, I certainly value the work they do in the public system. We've been very clear since we formed government, since I was in this position, that we will leverage partnerships with the private sector. These are free services available to all Nova Scotians by Nova Scotian clinicians who do a great job.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable minister for Halifax Atlantic.

DOJ: NDA LEGISLATION - PASS

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the minister's response to NDAs was absolutely shameful. I would like to point out that the loudest this government has been in this legislative session has been on dirt roads. The quietest it has been is when we asked them to support the NDP in the independent legislation on NDAs.

We all on this side of the House agree that it's good legislation. Can the Premier stand up today and tell us why he doesn't think it's good legislation?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, currently in Canada, P.E.I. is the only province that has legislation. We'll continue to watch that and monitor that, as well as other jurisdictions across North America.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Again, we ask the Premier question after question. It's important that he show leadership on this file and instead he just sits there, refuses to stand up and refuses to answer questions in an insult to all Nova Scotians.

My question to the minister, because the Premier is shaking his head and refusing to answer questions . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. When a question is asked, it can be designated to someone else to speak to it at any time.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I was just pointing out that the Premier is refusing to answer questions that were put toward him.

My question to the minister is . . . (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The fact that the Premier passed it on to a minister is providing the answer to the member who asked the question. I'm going to ask that you now ask your question to whomever might stand up to answer it.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to whomever might want to stand up. What in particular is wrong with this piece of legislation? What is it that the minister sees in this legislation that makes him think it's not the right legislation to pass here today with all-party consent in the Nova Scotia Legislature?

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, very respectfully through you to the honourable member, what I will point out is that the Premier did answer the questions when asked by the Leader of the NDP. Unfortunately, a number of members in this House may not like the answer that they received, but it was answered. We'll continue to monitor.

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

MAH: CONFLICT OF INTEREST - CLARIFY

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, we learned only weeks ago that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has a conflict of interest with the Annapolis Group development company. The minister stated that he has had long-time community and family connections with some members of the Annapolis Group. I'll table that.

This is concerning on two fronts. Either the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been actively engaging a group he has multiple conflicts of interest with for over a year and a half without disclosing it, or perhaps even worse, the perception is there that he was not speaking to one of the city's larger housing developers during his tenure as housing minister during a housing crisis.

My question through you to the minister is: Can he please clarify which it is?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Just to clarify for the record, my understanding when I was asked to take over this file for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing - one of my questions was: Were there any previous things that have led to a disclosure? No, there's actually a matter that is coming up this calendar year and looking through it, the minister recognized that it would be a conflict, and as soon as the minister recognized that, he removed himself.

As a Cabinet minister, Mr. Speaker, I was asked to step in and hold this file on behalf of that minister. I'm looking forward to getting briefed later this year on the matters.

PATRICIA ARAB: I thank the minister acting for that question. What I'm looking for is actually a very clear answer - and specifically to timing.

The Annapolis Group is in active litigation with the Halifax Regional Municipality over a potential large development in Blue Mountain-Birch Cove - one of the first national urban park candidate sites in the country. The minister is, by his own admittance, personal friends with many of the key players of this development company.

Could the minister or the acting minister confirm that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing recused himself from the entirety of the Cabinet discussion that resulted in OIC 2023-81 - which I will table - that details the contribution agreement with the federal government related to the park? Can either of them clarify if he was involved in any other Cabinet or intergovernmental discussion related to this piece of land prior to this?

TORY RUSHTON: Without knowing the number offhand, I'm looking at the tabled document. I did ask the question. As soon as the minister became aware that he'd be in a potential conflict with matters that were coming up to Cabinet, he did the right thing. We stand beside our Cabinet colleagues over here. He did the right thing - removed himself - and I'm standing in place.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park on a new question.

MAH: FUTURE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST - INFORM

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, we're not meaning any disrespect. We're looking for clarity and we're looking at a perceived conflict or an intentional conflict on a very important issue. This is the minister's priority, which is an expansion of housing, which is getting immediate housing out there, and looking at all aspects and all avenues to do that - not just those whom somebody may be connected to on the government side.

We're also seeking clarity with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on another potential conflict. This government has designated certain zones of Crown land in the province as priority development and planning areas. While we agree that action needs to be taken to get housing built more quickly, we have since learned that a new, additional priority development zone was added. This zone has the functional effect of allowing a former Progressive Conservative election candidate to skip the line for development permits. Last week, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said he doesn't look at who they were. My question, Mr. Speaker, is will the minister commit to carefully considering project proponents in the future and recuse himself from decisions where there is either a real or perceived conflict of interest? (Applause)

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to answer this question. This relates to a Special Planning Area in the Musquodoboit area. We're very happy to see development in a rural area. The proponent is a not-for-profit who has no connection to us. The person who happened to own the land is the individual you are talking to. We're dealing with the proponent. The proponent wanted that to go forward. We did not see a conflict of interest there. We're very delighted to see that work go forward in that area. (Applause)

PATRICIA ARAB: With full respect to the minister's efforts to accelerate new housing developments, it's also important that we ensure that these new frameworks that

are rapidly being implemented are being done fairly and equitably. My question to the minister is: Will he commit to inviting the Auditor General into his department to review the process of establishing these developmental zones? (Applause)

JOHN LOHR: What I can say is that, as the members will know, the Auditor General chooses where they work, and we're very pleased with the work the Auditor General has done in the department already reviewing certain matters in housing. As far as wherever the Auditor General chooses to work, we always welcome that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MAH: RENT SUPPLEMENT PGM. GUTTED - EXPLAIN

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Sometime in January, the government quietly changed the eligibility for the Canada-Nova Scotia Targeted Housing Benefit on their website. It changed suddenly from people who pay 30 per cent of their income on housing to people who pay 50 per cent of their income on housing. There was radio silence when the minister's office was repeatedly asked about the change. Now there are a lot of extremely frustrated people spending very high costs for housing who have been waiting for months to access this benefit, and it's possible that they won't even qualify. Mr. Speaker, this government is not investing in affordable housing, and has even gutted the rent supplement program. Why?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I don't think this government has anything to be ashamed of in terms of our investment in housing (Laughter). It's been almost \$200 million dollars in the last 18 months (Applause), and we will continue to invest in housing. We are seeing in this budget a \$21 million dollar increase for 1,000 new rents supplements. The member is correct that the eligibility requirements were changed. It wasn't done in darkness or radio silence. We've got it on the website where everyone can see it. We did that because of tremendous pressure and demand on the program. That's the reality. I am pleased to say that since then we've increased the number of eligible people. We've increased the budget for that program. We're continuing to work with that, but it's only one part of the things that we are doing for affordability in this province. (Applause)

SUZY HANSEN: They're more rent supplements for more people who can't qualify for that amount. So it's not affordable. This new calculation of the supplement is so stingy that it will eliminate the working poor and seniors on the Guaranteed Income Supplement from qualifying for the benefit. Not only that, for no apparent reason, for those over 65 this benefit is calculated at 95 per cent of market rates versus 100 per cent for everybody else, a difference that can add up to hundreds of dollars a year for low-income seniors. People would not be wrong if they felt this arbitrary difference amounts to age discrimination. Only the very lowest-income people qualify for the rent supplement, but many more people are struggling. Why does this government refuse to help them? (Applause)

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we have an enormous number of different programs to help seniors. As the member may know, 70 per cent of residents in public housing are seniors, so across the province we're investing more money than ever before to keep seniors in their own homes. We're doing a lot for seniors.

[2:30 p.m.]

As far as the program that the member is asking about, this is the Canada-Nova Scotia Targeted Housing Benefit. We share this with the federal government. Some of what's happening in that is federal government guidelines. To be fair to the federal government, they're looking at their guidelines, we're looking at them. We continue to review the program. We continue to communicate with the federal government on the design of the program. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

DED: CONFLICT OF INTEREST - PREVENT

BRAEDON CLARK: Last week our caucus asked the Minister of Economic Development about the government's bizarre attempt to purchase the Lunenburg Foundry Shipyard.

We just want to ask why, given this government's track record, there are not stronger mechanisms in place to ensure that conflicts of interest, including perceived conflicts of interest, are in place to keep from derailing government projects.

THE SPEAKER: Where is the question directed? Order, please. That's right. I'm asking the member whom he'd like the question directed to. The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: I apologize for that. The question was directed at the Minister of Economic Development.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, sorry for the delay. We have had a shift - questions in around the shipyard should be directed to the minister responsible for Build Nova Scotia.

Nonetheless, I am going to address this in this way: This narrative that everything is being done to help the friends of this government is getting very, very tiresome. We have a province that is growing, that the Public Policy Forum in a report last week concluded against 20 metrics that Nova Scotia is growing, and we need to build the infrastructure and make the investments that the former government would not.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, in my question I didn't say the word "friends"; I didn't say that at all. What I'm interested in, what I think the Opposition is interested in, what Nova Scotians should be interested in, and what the government is evidently not interested in, is perceived or real conflicts of interest.

This is a textbook example of it. Last week the minister said that the government simply did not know about other bids on the property. I will table that. This is an odd statement given that it was publicly known, reported in media, that there were at least two other bidders interested in the property. We will table that.

In the interest of transparency and better process, especially that this is under a new entity of Build Nova Scotia, will the minister commit to inviting the Auditor General into her department to take a look at what happened during this process, and put the questions to bed?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, first of all, every MLA, we receive upon being sworn in, information about conflict of interest, and we have a Conflict of Interest Commissioner who is involved in this process.

You have referenced knowledge about the other bidders. That came out after the fact. But in any case, this interest reflected an asset for a growing sector of our economy. We had a process, and we did the due diligence, and the due diligence revealed that it was something that we felt we could not proceed with. Why would we ask the Auditor General to waste her precious time?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

DED: HIRING PROCESS EQUITY - COMMIT

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, one of the first actions this government took upon entering office was to fire development gurus like Laurel Broten and Jennifer Angel - two very strong women who were making a real difference to Nova Scotia.

These women were replaced with interim CEOs, personal friends of the Premier, and both are men. Civil servants are increasingly moving towards the inclusion of gender-based analysis of government policies. But this needs to be applied in hiring processes, arguably the most impactful decisions a government can make.

My question to the Premier, or whoever can answer: Will this government commit to equity in its hiring process?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad for this question because it gives me the opportunity to say that today we announced the appointment of the new CEO of Invest Nova Scotia, Mr. Peter MacAskill. And yes, I did say "Mr." Peter

MacAskill. While we continue to be very committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion, I would note to the Opposition that I, myself, am a female and I am the first female Economic Development Minister in this province.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, we are firing many, and it is still continuing - many women. Here is another one. Just a few months ago, a very competent and capable CEO, the CEO of the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, was relieved of her duties.

We are in the midst of a significant labour shortage in this province, and one of the most impactful agencies that the government can use to fix this is under the leadership of another male interim CEO. Can the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration tell Nova Scotians why the CEO of the Apprenticeship Agency was let go? What was the reason for letting her go?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, with respect, I consider that true equity and equality comes from women CEOs being treated the same as male CEOs. Sometimes organizations have changing needs, but this empathy for female CEOs is so ironic when it comes to the CEO for Nova Scotia Health. Karen Oldfield is one of the most respected CEOs in this country, is recognized as a change-maker, and yet is constantly under fire.

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next person to ask a question, I want to go back to a decision I made before about who answers questions. They were so involved that time that two of them wanted to answer. There you go.

The honourable member for Kings South.

FTB: AG ADVICE DISMISSED - EXPLAIN

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, we've asked this government before about March Madness spending - for example, additional appropriations making up over 400 per cent of the entire Department of Environment in the December update. This government spent \$222 million in September, \$768 million in December, and over half a billion dollars in the last two weeks of March, for a grand total of over \$1.5 billion in taxpayers' monies being spent without legislative oversight or approval.

Last week, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board dismissed the Auditor General's strong opposition to this practice - a practice that would not be legal in any other jurisdiction - saying that this is a decision for elected members to make. I'll table that.

Why did the minister dismiss this expert advice from our Auditor General, an officer of this Legislature, and insist in budgeting in a way that is incongruent with the rest of the country?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, maybe the member could answer a question for me: Why has it suddenly become such a concern for him? He was part of the government that sat on this side of the House for eight years, and those same rules were just fine for him while he sat on the government side.

I also want to point out that he suggests March Madness and he suggests money spent in the last two weeks. Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we are responding to people all the time. We started spending money three weeks after being sworn in, and we're spending it on priorities.

He calls it madness. We're talking about housing. We're talking about health care. We're talking about Hurricane Fiona, Mr. Speaker, and so on.

KEITH IRVING: Let's do some history. This is different. The number is a huge magnitude different than any previous government of any stripe. Even a few years ago - and we want to talk about history - an additional appropriation of \$13 million was considered "pretty shocking" and an example of "ultimate March Madness" spending. Both terms are direct quotes from the now-Premier.

That was \$13 million the Premier was concerned about. He is now spending \$1.5 billion. Mr. Speaker, did the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board shock the Premier with his \$0.5 billion March Madness spending?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, we have the revenues - there's no question about that - and we're responding. Many of the things we're responding to are the very things the Opposition is suggesting we should be responding to.

I will tell you what's different about this government: When that member was part of his Liberal government in this province, they changed the rules. They changed the rules in this book, which I'll table here. Instead of doing it in the Legislature, they did it at the committee level. They changed the rules of the House at the committee level. That's anti-democratic.

Something else: For an entire year in this province (Interruption) . . .

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

ALLAN MACMASTER: For an entire year in this province, we didn't have responsible government, for the first time in 150 years, because this government chose not to open the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: MIDWIFERY SERVICES - SUPPORT

SUSAN LEBLANC: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Nova Scotians have been asking government for years to invest in more midwifery services across the province. There is still zero service in Cape Breton and the Valley. Midwives in the region have been working on establishing an education program, which is a key piece of the puzzle, and they have asked for a study on how to make it happen.

FOIPOP documents from the minister's department show the process was moving along nicely until it was squashed at the last minute from the very top decision-makers. I can table that. Can the minister explain why her government is so resistant to supporting midwives and new parents that they won't even undertake a simple study asked for by midwives across the region?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Just to let the member know, we're currently focusing on stabilizing our current midwifery services across the province. There are some issues around recruitment and retention. I also want to make note that we do have an unattached baby clinic. Certainly, the midwives in this province have been instrumental in supporting that.

We are using midwives to the best of our scope, but currently, the focus is on stabilizing current midwifery services.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Perhaps we'll have a chance to talk about retention in Estimates, but after this government tabled its budget last week, speaking of Estimates, our caucus heard from midwives and health advocates who were heartbroken that another budget has been tabled with no new investment in midwifery, including no new midwifery services in Cape Breton, where there was the highest rate of C-sections in low-risk pregnancies in the province between 2017 and 2020.

C-sections are the most common kind of surgery, and midwives can help lower these rates and free up hospital resources, but we have to invest in them. If this government will spend whatever it takes to fix health care, why does it continue to refuse to implement the sensible and affordable suggestion to invest in primary care that will benefit pregnant people and free up other primary care providers in this system?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, this has been a historic budget in terms of our investment in health care - More, Faster. We certainly are committed to improving primary care access, and again, we go back to the fact that we need to stabilize our current services before we spread ourselves too thin and make the program not available to anyone.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

SNSIS: HOTEL PURCHASE DETAILS - RELEASE

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The government commissioned a group of experts to give advice on the purchase of a \$34 million unfinished shell of a hotel building for the potential conversion to a health facility. I've actually gone out and visited that facility. The report that was returned recommended against it, and I'll table that. The government acted against the expert's advice.

As a result, Nova Scotians have no idea how much more work needs to be done, how many more millions of dollars it will cost, or how long it is going to take to adequately adapt this building for health care usage. If the government truly believes that this deal was the right decision, will it please release the full details on how much more this will cost and how long it will take to get the work done so that Nova Scotians can judge for themselves?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: As we continue to move forward with this strategic health infrastructure asset that we acquired as a province, we'll certainly make that information available. This is the first of its kind in our province. This is adding more capacity to our health care system.

For far too long - I think it was 2,870-some odd days while the party opposite was in power - they sat on their hands. We're not in the business of sitting on our hands and spinning our tires in mud. We're in the business of moving things forward.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I must say, that minister is becoming very adept at non-answers, because I asked five different questions. Nova Scotians want to know the answers, especially when it comes to finances, and that minister either doesn't know the true answer or is refusing to answer that question.

We now know that not only did independent experts advise against the purchase of this property, the civil service was skeptical about it as well, and pointed out to the government the errors in their evaluation. I can table that. If the government is acting against the recommendations of both independent experts and the civil service, it needs to be straight with Nova Scotians about why.

Will the minister commit to releasing the full details of this acquisition?

COLTON LEBLANC: One difference between our government and the former government is that we're acting for patients - every single day.

Through the process of acquiring that asset, due diligence was followed. Certainly, a project - the first of its kind - is perhaps going to have some questions along the way. We certainly paid within the range of that asset.

Again, to deliver on our More, Faster plan that we delivered on December 15th - and I sure hope to God that the members opposite support - increasing capacity in our health care system that they sat on, and did not want to do in their eight years.

[2:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DOJ: NDA LEGISLATION - PASS

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, the members, organizers, and founders of Can't Buy My Silence are suggesting that the power that has belonged for too long to perpetrators because they have money - that power belongs with the victim. They're saying that no longer should people be able to buy silence. The time is now. It's happening all over the world.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us what it will take to make the changes needed here in Nova Scotia against NDAs in sexual assault cases?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: As I've said before, currently the only jurisdiction in Canada that has actually implemented this is Prince Edward Island. We will continue to monitor.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, this is an opportunity for the government to absolutely do the right thing - whether it's the Canadian Bar Association, the law association, the Canadian military, Hollywood, universities, or governments. People and victims who have signed NDAs are breaking them because they know that they were taken advantage of because their perpetrators simply had money.

We're saying: no more. The power should not belong with the people who are breaking the law and sexually assaulting our children and grandchildren.

Can the Minister of Justice, once again, give us an answer: What will it take for Nova Scotia to pass legislation?

BRAD JOHNS: Again, what it will take is that we continue doing our review.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North on a new question.

DOJ: NDA LEGISLATION - PASS

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I think I can speak for every member of the Legislative Assembly here in that people come to us when they are going through very difficult times.

I don't know if every MLA in this House has had a victim of sexual assault come to them, but I can tell you that I have - and I have had too many. Not just from one perpetrator,

either - from numerous perpetrators. They are out there in our bloody communities continuing to sexually assault and violate our children and our grandchildren.

One of the reasons they are being allowed to do this is because it's legal to silence perpetrators and silence victims because of NDAs.

When will our government do the right thing?

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, as a father of two daughters, I certainly understand, and our government supports, survivors of sexual harassment and discrimination.

However, what I will say is that we want to make sure we have good legislation . . .

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

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, when this government appointed a Minister of Youth, I waited for the mandate outlining its responsibilities. Almost two years later, I am beginning to think that it will become like the Department of Seniors under the Liberals - an assortment of links to other departments. I hope that is not the case.

Cape Breton has some of the country's highest child and family poverty rates, as you know. The previous government neglected children and youth's needs for eight years. It remains the same under this government.

Food bank usage is at an all-time high. The cost of living crisis has diminished the purchasing power of many families, creating financial instabilities for these families. Since

becoming an MLA - and in my previous life as a CBRM councillor - I frequently meet with youth organizations eager for leadership and advocacy.

I was again disappointed that the minister's mandate letter did not mention the specific and complex vulnerabilities that Nova Scotia youth face. The only issue highlighted was the need to attract more youth to work in the province. There was no mention of youth centres, youth organizations, and preventive measures for youth to keep them out of the criminal justice system or breaking the cycle of poverty.

Hope springs eternal. I had hoped to see the more flushing out of the office in last year's budget, but that was not the case. I expected to see more about youth and youth organizations in this year's budget. When I went through the budget, one of the items I was looking for, of course, was the Office for Youth. To my surprise, this government only mentioned youth in the budget in relation to youth in the criminal justice system and youth in the workforce. Don't get me wrong - youth in our criminal justice system is a critical topic, but so is preventing youth from entering the criminal justice system.

It is also vital to support youth entering the workforce. However, the programs and organizations that nurture and foster youth should have been mentioned. After-school programs and organizations play a crucial role in youth development. If we want to support youth in the workforce, we must first help the programs and organizations that foster the skills that youth will need to succeed.

Regarding youth in the criminal justice system, the goal should be, as I said, prevention. We must utilize every tool to prevent as many youths as possible from entering the system. The government spends more money on the criminal justice system than funding after-school programs and youth centres.

Just imagine if we invested more in pro-active cycle-breakers, such as youth after-school programs and centres. The cost to our criminal justice system would decrease. Studies have shown that when government invests in youth programs and centres, it has the potential to transform the lives of youth, reduce crime committed by youth, improve well-being, and significantly reduce costs to the taxpayer. Supporting young people improves their confidence, and physical and mental health.

Young people are struggling with many issues. It's a litany: poverty, isolation, disengagement from school and community, unemployment, family violence, and family and youth substance abuse and addiction. From many studies over the years, it has become well known that youth are more likely to get into trouble, become isolated and disengaged during the after-school hours.

Youth centres run during these after-school hours. They play a vital role in combatting many youth issues, and create positive experiences. These centres provide a safe place for youth. They allow youth to learn things, make friends, improve their

academics, and have fun. Youth centres help youth develop the essential life skills such as teamwork, communication and critical thinking, better grades and test scores. The research has shown that children who participate in the after-school programs have better grades and test scores than those who do not. After-school programs provide a safe and nurturing environment for our children to learn and grow. They give children the opportunity to socialize and make new friends, as I've stated.

Participation in after-school programs has improved academic performance. It has reduced behavioural problems, and it has increased graduation rates. After-school programs also help improve attendance, especially centres that focus on homework help and tutoring. When students have a place to go after school to get help with their homework, they are more likely to attend school and perform well in their classes. Seeing other kids working on school projects, reading and doing fun learning games encourages participation.

A study by the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development found that kids who participate in after-school programs were less likely to be involved in crime or other risky behaviour. Kids get a chance to be part of a community and develop positive relationships with other adults and children.

After-school programs allow kids to explore their interests outside the traditional school day. These programs can provide a safe, supervised environment for students to explore their interests in learning and growing activities from organized sports, fitness, arts, handcrafts, to STEAM - science, technology, engineering, art, and math. Computer coding workshops are also offered.

These programs can provide a much-needed sense of community for kids who may not have that at home or in their neighbourhood. Kids feel connected to something larger than themselves and develop a sense of belonging.

Structured and unstructured programs can also help students develop social and emotional skills. Research has shown that after-school programs can help kids experience positive teamwork and communication problem solving. They can help kids learn how to manage their emotions and time, set goals, and stay on track. These skills are essential at home, at school, and at future workplaces.

Families benefit when there are safe and supervised environments for kids to spend their afternoons, rather than alone at home, waiting for an adult to return from work. Many programs offer nutritious snacks and meals necessary for child and youth development.

With all these benefits connected to programs run by youth centres, this government has failed to provide substantive and core funding to youth centres and programs. Instead, it will be another year of youth centres and programs. Instead, it will be

another year of youth centres fundraising, writing grants, and looking for money elsewhere so they can pay staff and keep the lights on.

[3:00 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, I am often reminded of a quote that is from the BGC Cape Breton, also known as the Whitney Pier Youth Club, affectionately known as The Club, or THE Club to some of the kids.

Kids don't care what you know until they know you care. It is a saying that our late Gordie Gosse, our former Speaker of the House, was always fond of saying at the youth centre. How are the youth of Nova Scotia supposed to know that this government cares about them if this government does not invest in them and the youth centres they attend?

In my riding of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, I have two youth centres - Undercurrent and the BGC Cape Breton. To provide quality youth programs they need to be able to pay competitive salaries to qualified youth workers. It can only happen if government invests more money into youth centres across the province. This is something the minister responsible for youth should be advocating for, as it can help be a cycle breaker and be early intervention.

The upfront cost saves government money in the long run - in the criminal justice system, in community services, and in health care.

I guess I'll be disappointed for another year, as we wait for more funding, more core funding, for our youth centres and our youth programs because this government sees youth in only two categories: (1) in the criminal justice system and (2) only good for the workforce, but nothing in between, to improve their skills, to help them become healthy adults, and be safe during the after-school hours while they wait for their guardians to come home.

Mr. Speaker, that is shameful. I hope the Minister Responsible for Youth will broaden the scope of this office so that it does not become, like under the Liberals, the Seniors Department, which was just a bunch of links. I hope we can have a more robust Office of Youth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Cape Breton for her passionate speech going into Supply.

I want to talk about the government slogan. I think it's "Bigger, Faster, Harder" or something like that. This is their slogan for their budget. Everything they do has a slogan - Time for Tim was one of them. Everybody remembers that one. During the leadership

campaign, there were all kinds of different slogans. This government is really good at creating slogans.

THE SPEAKER: I'd like a clarification on using the first name. I'd prefer it if you'd refrain from first name usage.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. So Bigger, Faster, Harder - I don't know exactly what the slogan is but it's something like that.

Let's talk about income assistance. We have a Minister of Community Services and income assistance who, during Question Period, stood here in this House and abdicated her responsibility when it comes to income assistance. When we asked her about - two years in a row - under this government, people on income assistance, the people in some of the lowest poverty situations in this province, why they haven't gotten any type of raise after getting a historic raise under the last Liberal government, she says: It's the responsibility of all the departments. Health and Labour, Education - and I will table that - all of the departments. This is the first time I've ever heard this. It's everybody's responsibility when it comes to poverty and income assistance. Yet the direct responsibility is the Minister of Community Services, and it's shameful. It's absolutely shameful.

Quite frankly, my perception is that it's an elitist budget. That's my perception, and I think that's the perception of a lot of Nova Scotians. The perception of a lot of Nova Scotians and myself is that this is a budget that doesn't care. A government that doesn't care about the people who are making the lowest amount of money and have the least amount of resources.

We can't get a straight answer in this Legislature from the Minister of Community Services when it comes to the most vulnerable Nova Scotians in this province. And to use their own slogan, their bills are getting bigger, the burden on them is getting bigger, and they're going into poverty faster and life is getting harder.

What does this government do? And I will table it - they stand in the Legislature - there's a picture in the *Chronicle Herald* which I think sums up this government perfectly. It's the Minister of Community Services standing beside the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, standing by the Minister of - or sorry, the Premier, with big smiles on their face and arms wide, stretched, as if to say, what's wrong with this bill? What's wrong with this budget? Vote for it. This is the best thing ever. You've left a large portion of Nova Scotians behind, and you've done it with a smile.

I want to talk about the working class, the middle class of this province who are struggling day to day. We put forward a bill that would help each and every one of them.

And the response from the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is we can spend their money better than they can. We need their money. They don't need it.

The perception is it's a Big Brother thing, right? We're going to spend your money, bigger, badder, faster - or, sorry, bigger, faster, harder than you will. They don't have the right to have their money back. In the most-taxed province, and, Mr. Speaker, I've stood in this Legislature for 10 years now, and I'm certain I've heard the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board stand on his feet in Opposition and talk about lowering taxes. I'm certain of it.

I know a year ago he was on the Todd Veinotte Show - and I will continue to repeat this - where the minister said they were in the process of creating the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee and come the next budget, which is this budget, you will see movement and you wait and see what happens. They called me afterwards - what did I say? It's not going to happen. Nothing's happening. And the minister stood in here, in this Legislature and said it's not a priority. Health care is their priority. I've got lots of documents to table, and I'll table them all.

The perception from Nova Scotians is this is a government that doesn't care. And that's my perception, too. There's nothing in here for the working class; there's nothing in here for the middle class. All you're doing is taking, taking, taking, taking, taking. And it would be okay, I think, a little bit, if there were results.

But everything's gotten worse in health care, their top priority. Again, the Minister of Health and Wellness stands on her feet day after day after day and answers questions and says it's getting better. But when we ask them to prove it and show the numbers, they don't. They can't. They just go, Justin Trudeau, the Liberal government before us, the NDP government, I don't know, maybe, like I said before, John A. Macdonald, Joseph Howe. I don't know, we got - who? Somebody. Let's point to somebody, quick, right?

People deserve a better government. I think maybe in 18 months they've lost a little touch with Nova Scotians, driving their Lexus and their Beemers and their \$100,000 vehicles and there are all these great things that they have now, their Mercedes and all these other things. Maybe they've lost touch a little bit, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you that I can look at those vehicles out there - some of the vehicles in that parking lot cost 10 times more than people on income assistance get.

I see chuckling and all that but it's not funny at all when power rates are going up 14 per cent after you swore up and down that you were going to protect Nova Scotians. Rent is going up 5 per cent. Five per cent may be nothing for people on that side of the aisle who are making \$150,000 a year, but it's certainly not for income assistance when in the last two years their spending has decreased.

If you ask people on income assistance if they'd take a 5 per cent raise today, they would love it. If you asked the working class and middle-class Nova Scotians if they'd take a 5 per cent increase today, they would love it. But the response from the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is, you can get a better job. The economy is booming, get a better job, right? It's that easy, Mr. Speaker. We've seen this time and time again. The perception from the public is that this is a government that doesn't understand what's happening on the ground.

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, respectfully, I appreciate the comments the member is making but he has just suggested that I said something suggesting that people just get a job. I never did say that. I would ask that he actually begin to table some of the things he claims people say in this Chamber because the way he is saying them he is presenting it like they were said and meant in a certain way and he is not tabling the words to go along with it.

I would ask that that be considered going forward, because I don't think those comments are being made in the spirit in which they should be.

THE SPEAKER: I thank the minister for the comments and I will ask the Clerks to ensure that everything the honourable member is discussing and says that he will table is tabled in a timely fashion.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I'll make a deal with that member. I'll table his words and after I table them, he stands up and apologizes for them. I'll make a deal with him.

Here's the thing . . .

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, this is not about deals. The Rules of the Legislature are if a member is trying to say that another member said something, he can't just try to put words in their mouths and suggest that they've said something and not back it up.

THE SPEAKER: This is not the time for debate. I would reiterate that I would love for the member for Halifax Atlantic to timely table documents to ensure that facts are being shared in this Chamber. We will carry on with this debate going into Supply.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: As I said, I will table these words and then I would ask that maybe the member can own up to his words after I table.

[3:15 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, it's sad that we get these types of reactions any time members on this side of the House stand up and speak. We hear the clapping and the laughing and stuff like that but again, we saw in Question Period that when it came to NDAs, silence. If they showed any type of passion for things outside of their own priorities, maybe Nova Scotians would believe that this was a government that had a conscience, because the perception is that they don't. That's the perception and that's what I'm hearing from the public.

I think there's an issue there when the perception out there is that this is a government that is tabling budgets without a conscience. The perception is that this government is tabling budgets that don't look after the most vulnerable. When the perception is that this government is tabling budgets that don't care about low-income, middle-class and working-class individuals. The perception is that this government is making announcements without even telling people. I was at an announcement at Saint Mary's where they said \$40 million or \$50 million or \$100 bajillion dollars and the VP of Saint Mary's came out and said they had no idea it was happening and that they would create something around this announcement.

We hear about this over and over. When we ask them to deal with the highest taxes in all of Canada, they won't. They won't. They want more from Nova Scotians because they are part - maybe not part of the 1 per cent, maybe some people in this Chamber are, but they are definitely part of the 10 per cent in this province when it comes to salary and benefits. They don't feel the pain. They forget what it's like to struggle. You know, they say this budget is all about health care. Really? Really?

Health care professionals and associations are saying it certainly doesn't feel like it, doesn't look like it. When the minister in charge of health infrastructure refuses to give any type of details on one of the biggest and largest purchases in Nova Scotia history. After getting caught with their hands in the cookie jar at the Lunenburg Shipyard. Right? We don't get an explanation on that either. The only reason why that deal was pulled back, Mr. Speaker, the perception is because I actually called for an Auditor General's investigation into it. The Auditor General is ready. She was ready. She's still going to do it. We know that people who were associated with the Premier's campaign stood to profit off it.

That was reported. I see members shaking their head no. If that's not true, then I guess the media is lying. I guess the media lied, because the media reported that, and so what I would say is that this is not a budget that helps Nova Scotians. This is not a budget that helps health care in Nova Scotia. It's not a budget that gives us access to health care. What it does is create bigger deficits. It draws Nova Scotians into poverty faster, and it

makes life harder. So, when they say “bigger, faster, harder,” that’s what they’re talking about. I apologize, I can’t keep up with the slogans.

You know, one of the easiest things they could have done, Mr. Speaker, is to create a lunch program, a universal lunch program. I haven’t heard a single member over there, including former teachers, stand up and advocate for that. Not a single member has stood up and advocated for a lunch program. We know what poverty and hunger does to our students. Not a single member. I haven’t heard a single member stand up and advocate.

For seniors, who got nothing from this budget - nothing. Our moms, our dads, our grandparents, who took care of us. There’s nothing in this budget, but we remember the slogan. It was, like, super seniors. Now I don’t know what it was, but at one point there was a slogan around seniors from the Progressive Conservative government. I saw it on the buses. I saw it when I went to the nursing homes. Oh, it was Dignity for Seniors, Mr. Speaker, that’s what it was. There’s nothing in this budget that gives dignity to seniors. There’s nothing in this budget that helps youth. There’s nothing in this budget - and it’s shameful - that helps people on income assistance. It actually drives them into poverty faster. This is a bigger, faster, harder joke of a budget.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, it’s my pleasure to rise today and speak going into Supply, particularly looking at the realization of children’s rights through this budget that has been tabled. Nelson Mandela said, “There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.” So I think with that inspiration, with that lens, I want to talk about what is happening to young people in Nova Scotia and Canada, what’s happening for young people through this budget, and what could have happened to make lives better.

Before I start, I just want to thank - this work emerges from a global network of child rights advocates, and in particular, my remarks draw from the work of Lisa Wolff at UNICEF, Sara Austin at Children First Canada, and Dr. Andrew Lynk, Dr. Laura Stymiest, and Dr. Sara Kirk at Dalhousie University. I’d like to dedicate it to the memory of the former Senator Landon Pearson, Canada’s first children’s senator, who passed away earlier this year at the age of 93. As well, to honour the power and justice-making of all young people who activate in Canada.

Here’s the deal. I think that in Canada we have this perception that actually our kids are doing well; that we’re doing well for our kids. Unfortunately, by all measures that’s actually not true. UNICEF, for instance, conducts regular reporting around how children are doing by specific standards in different countries. We used to rank 10th among affluent countries. However, we now rank 30 out of 39. And it’s been a sharp downward trend.

We really are reaching a tipping point where young people are really - the future of our country - are in jeopardy. We're going to really start seeing the long-term outcomes that come with ignoring this important section of our community. It's up to us here in the Legislature. There are so many things that impact the lives of young people where government can intervene and improve outcomes.

I just want to paint a picture of the situation of children and youth in Canada at this point. I'm wondering if folks would be able to guess at the most common reason for death for young people under the age of 18 in Canada.

It's actually unintended injuries and violence. It's actually things like driving, emergencies, and unintentional injuries. The second-greatest cause is suicide. What does that say about society, where we're not creating places in our communities where young people are safe? That we're not following practices that keep people safe, and then that in fact, our young people are suffering so much that it's the second-greatest cause of death.

Not only that, it's not just about our experience here, but it's actually - we have one of the highest rates of adolescent suicide as per UNICEF. We rank 35 out of 39 countries. So that means that 35 countries are doing a much better job at keeping their young people alive.

I think it's been particularly important to consider mental health, because the actual onset of most major health issues - mental health issues happen at sort of the transition from under 18 into early adulthood. So 70 per cent of mental health issues are onset during that period. But at the same time, we actually only see that 25 per cent of young people who need mental health care are able to access that.

There are other concerns about how we're also supporting young people who come from diverse backgrounds. Transgender adolescents, for instance, aged 15 to 17, are 7.6 times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to their peers.

Young people in Canada are not living lives free from abuse. Approximately one in three Canadians report experiencing some kind of child abuse by the age of 15. The statistic is higher among certain communities, including Indigenous populations. Approximately one in three children with disabilities also have faced violence in their lives under 18.

Among students in Canada, one in four children surveyed experienced sexual harassment or assault in schools by Grade 7. The prevalence of online sexual abuse has been increasing within the last five years, with higher rates in Canada than most of the other 39 countries that UNICEF tracks. These are affluent, higher-income countries.

Recently, UNICEF released a report on how countries are doing in supporting young people in the face of the threat of climate change and environmental degradation.

Young people, of course, are the least responsible, but are going to be the most impacted by climate change. Canada ranked 28th out of 39 upper-income countries. So we're not even doing well in terms of responding to the greatest threat, perhaps, to the coming generations.

There are some statistics that I think are really important. We have the third-largest freshwater reserve in the world but we rank 24th in the rate of child illness from unsafe water. We're also - and things that really touch on the functions of us here in this House, and what we can do as government - we are actually the highest generator of municipal waste, ranking last among 36 countries that UNICEF was able to gather data from.

Now of course, early in the mandate of this government, those of us who think about children's rights were very excited to see in the Minister of Community Services' mandate letter the directive to work across departments to establish a five-year target for the reduction of childhood poverty in this province. Suffice to say, unfortunately, that hasn't happened. We don't have a plan, and we don't have a target.

However, I can talk about some of the things that we could be doing and should be doing that we missed out on in this budget. It might seem daunting to consider how you reduce childhood poverty, and luckily we have lots of help on how to realize progress for children and their better outcomes.

First, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child presents a framework to guide the way forward. Ratified by Canada in December 1991, the UNCRC contains 54 binding articles that affirm a child's rights, including an adequate standard of health - which is Article 27 - access to education and opportunities for play, leisure, and rest.

We also have information about what's happening in Nova Scotia. The *One Chance to be a Child* report was developed by a broad cross-section of researchers, pediatric specialists, non-profits, and community members, and was published last year. This was a really important step for Nova Scotia, because we actually had no way of understanding, with very limited data, how young people in Nova Scotia were doing, or how young people in Nova Scotia are doing.

My colleague for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier talked about the high rates of child poverty and the high rates of food-insecure houses with children. I think we all can feel that in our soul that one in four families with children are considered to be income-insecure. From 2018 - and I think the stats would be higher, and our partners in food access, like Feed Nova Scotia, could help us define this, but nearly one in five children in Nova Scotia lived in a food-insecure household in 2018.

The thing is, we actually saw that there are some pretty easy ways to address childhood poverty. In 2020, when people were supported by special supports because of

the pandemic, guess what happened to childhood poverty in Nova Scotia? It dropped rapidly. We increased families' incomes and children were better off.

There are other places from which we have tools. There is something called a child-rights impact assessment. Impact assessments are instruments used to avoid unintentional consequences. A CRIA is used to understand how public policy that's being made affects young people. This isn't just theoretical. The Province of New Brunswick is the first jurisdiction in North America to have adopted a mandatory CRIA process for all Cabinet-level policy decisions, having formally implemented this since 2013.

I think sometimes when people think about public policy tools and instruments, maybe that seems like it makes the work more onerous. In my experience and my estimation of fact, it makes the work easier, because then you know - all these Cabinet members would know, and we would know as members - what the impact of the work we're doing is on our most vulnerable citizens. It would be laid out for us in an evidenced way that we could then take into account as we're making decisions. Which is not to say that every policy would actually benefit young people, and I would argue that we are seeing that they don't, but we would understand that. I think that's really important. I don't think any of us want unintended negative consequences on young people, and we certainly want to advance the well-being of young people.

What are we missing in Nova Scotia? What can happen now to make an immediate difference and could be done either through this budget or through the legislative process? The Children and Family Services Act, which was approved in 2017, has many weaknesses. One thing we could do to make things better would be to remove the failure to provide to the child adequate food, clothing, or shelter from the Act, and instead invest in preventing child apprehension by supporting families.

We can make things better for young people by supporting their families. We remove too many children for the concept of neglect when in fact there's actually not a need for care and protection. The parents are not willfully harming their children. The parents are likely working very hard to support their children and they simply can't on the current rates of income assistance and disability support that we currently provide for families. How could you provide for a family adequately on what is provided?

The current budget provides funding to overhaul the foster care system. I think this is an important part of the system, but again I can't help but note that there actually wasn't the same amount allocated to families in need to help prevent the need for young people to go into foster care. We do have an inadequate foster care system. I support it strongly. My partner and I are in the process of being approved as foster parents, so we are part of the system. What I would rather see is that in fact we're supporting families in this province.

We need to increase and index the Employment Support and Income Assistance, disability supports. We need to increase our spending on youth mental health, dental care,

vision care, Pharmacare. Obviously we need to implement our commitments around inclusive education, make post-secondary education more affordable and ensure that essential costs are available and affordable - so food, internet, and safe housing.

[3:30 p.m.]

My colleague spoke about the establishment of a child and youth commission. So the role of child advocates - again this is not theoretical, this is very tangible - they are so critical. We have data over decades from various jurisdictions how actually having an independent voice that monitors how children are doing and the rights of children actually results in increased well-being among young people, because young people are the only part of the folks that we represent who don't get a chance to vote - they are effectively silenced in the process that we're in.

We were all very excited when this government announced its intention to establish a child and youth commission. I will say the PCs proposed a very unusual model that doesn't actually exist anywhere else in the world. However, then the intent was clarified that that model would still continue to have investigative powers, that it would undertake important research. I would say that the community rallied around this. The community was super-excited about what was coming forward. We heard repeated commitments from the Minister of Community Services to this commission. Yet here we are in a budget where there's no line, there's no allocation for a child and youth commission. We haven't seen the legislation. Over the Fall there was a great deal of public engagement and engagement of youth.

Youth engagement is really important - it's not just a nice thing to do, it's a right; Article 12 of the UNCRC guarantees it. It also results in better policy. I can tell you what isn't good. We all know what good youth engagement is, and it isn't this. It isn't going out to engage folks and make promises and then not have a follow-up, not be clear, not tell people what is going on. That is not good youth engagement; in fact, it's more damaging than not engaging young people at all.

There are other things we need to be doing to support young people. I think I'll just try to talk about the investment in places of safety. Places of safety - so it's in the budget as supporting young people with complex needs. Places of safety are actually a rights violation for young people, and we need to get them out of our system.

In 2020, 151 children were in places of safety, which means they were in hotels, they were in apartments, they were in cabins in the woods, with unqualified people. They are not safe, so to call it investments in helping children with complex needs is inappropriate. These are our most vulnerable children without a family advocate, without a provincial advocate, without a right to vote, and we're leaving them alone with unqualified folks.

THE SPEAKER: The motion to resolve the House into a Committee of the Whole House on Supply is carried.

We will now take a brief recess to set up for the committee.

[3:45 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CW on Supply with Deputy Speaker Kent Smith in the Chair.]

[5:13 p.m. The House resumed.]

THE SPEAKER: I call the House to order.

The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

KENT SMITH: I rise to report an incident in the Committee of the Whole House on Supply. The member for Halifax Atlantic persisted in violation of Rule 25 and Rule 28(1). I took steps to ask the member to leave, based on persistent violation of the rules. Pursuant to Rule 40(3), I don't have the authority as Chair to ask him to leave. We had to suspend and report to you and ask you to complete the suspension for the day.

THE SPEAKER: As Deputy Speaker, it is a privilege to hold this position, and I do acknowledge the member. Under the advice of the Clerks, I've been told that when the Chair or Speaker makes a ruling, that ruling stands. Regardless of if I was a witness to it or have heard anything, I'm obliged to go under the advice of the Clerks.

Because of that, I will order that the honourable member for Halifax Atlantic withdraw from the House for the remainder of the day.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the House resume into Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

THE SPEAKER: Order. We'll take a recess until we resume Committee of the Whole on Supply.

[5:14 p.m. The House resumed CW on Supply proceedings.]

[8:05 p.m. CW on Supply rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Angela Simmonds resumed the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole on Supply reports:

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole on Supply has met and has made some progress, and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Would you please call the Order of Business, Public Bills for Second Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 273.

Bill No. 273 - Road Trails Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I move that Bill No. 273 be read a second time.

It is my privilege to rise today to talk about this bill. Mr. Speaker, everyone in this Legislature knows that Nova Scotia is a picturesque province. People want to get outside and enjoy nature, and this is especially true of off-highway vehicle riders. OHVs are gaining popularity in Nova Scotia, and it's our responsibility to make sure this recreation continues in a safe and responsible way.

The Off-highway Vehicles Act has not been significantly updated since 2006. It's time that we had modern legislation that gives riders a permanent way to have fun while safely sharing the roads and trails within our communities.

Over the past five years, the OHV pilot project has been a tremendous success. At seven sites across the province, we saw that riders can use portions of provincial roads responsibly, and to benefit our economy. Trail connections were improved, giving OHV enthusiasts better access to services like gas stations and restaurants, and our road infrastructure was not significantly impacted by this use.

We want to keep this fun rolling, but we know that safety must be our first concern. That's why this legislation will firmly establish the rules of the road and requirements for operators and vehicles. We will continue to use the site criteria from the pilot. Highway speeds must be 80 kilometres an hour or less, roads must have good site lines, and traffic

volumes will be low. This legislation will also give municipalities the ability to permit OHV use in other locations through their bylaws.

Local governments know their roads best, and they should be empowered to decide if and where OHVs can go and cannot go. I want to thank the All Terrain Vehicle Association of Nova Scotia and everyone who took the time to participate in the pilot program, and its evaluation through surveys and interviews. We received tremendous feedback. You can all read the Pilot Project Evaluation Report on our website tonight for bedtime reading, if you wish.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues from across the aisle.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: I do think this is a good, common-sense piece of legislation that, as the minister said, builds on a great pilot project. I do want to give a shout-out to my former boss, Lloyd Hines, who was the minister . . . (Interruption) He could be watching. I doubt it, but possibly. I wouldn't put it past him. He might be.

I was working for Minister Hines at the time when this pilot project went into effect. It was a great project. We heard from lots of members. I remember talking to Gordon Wilson about it many times down in the Weymouth area, and the effect it was having. So I know it's a wonderful project that has worked very well. We know that people love their OHVs all across the province, in rural areas and even in suburban areas as well. In talking to my colleague in Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, there's a lot of interest out there as well.

I think this is a good piece of legislation. We know people are going to get onto OHVs, no matter what legislation may or may not be on the books. So having something on the books that is comprehensive and highlights safety is really important.

I think it was a common-sense and smart move to allow municipalities the authority and the ability to make their own judgments on roads that they own. I think that just removes a step. It makes things easier and less of a burden on municipalities, and allows us to open up more areas of our province. It is really a beautiful place where people love to get out and enjoy it. The more places we can have that, and the easier we can do it, the better.

I think that this is a good piece of legislation. I'm happy to see it on the floor of the Legislature. I want to thank the minister, ATVANS, and everybody else who's done the work to get this project off the ground.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Mx. Speaker, I'm glad to rise and speak to this bill.

There have been many people who have worked a long time on safe off-highway vehicle use. There are important tourism, recreation, and economic opportunities that arise from the safe use of off-highway vehicles and integrated trail systems.

Nova Scotians love to be outdoors and care deeply about our natural spaces. I know that the staff at the Department of Public Works have worked very hard at making the pilot sites as safe as possible and making sure the permanent programs put safety first and foremost.

I also want to say that I think it was an important part of this bill to give bylaw-making authority to municipal units on municipal roads. Those municipally owned roads are in the jurisdiction of municipal units. That ability to create their own bylaws on their own roads is an important aspect. I'm sure that they are going to be grateful and have no qualms with that aspect of the bill.

Again, I want to thank the staff at the Department of Public Works for their hard work. I look forward to hearing from stakeholders at the Law Amendments Committee.

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

The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Thank you to my colleagues across the aisle for their comments on this bill.

Certainly, I'll be the first to say that there were many, many people who worked on this bill long before I became the Minister of Public Works. It is a privilege to be able to be the minister of an absolutely fabulous department that has incredible people working so hard every day for the betterment of Nova Scotians. It's a privilege for me to stand here in front of you tonight to do second reading on this bill.

With those comments, Mx. Speaker, I rise to close debate on Bill No. 273.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 273.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mx. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 262.

Bill No. 262 - Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act (amended).

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

[8:15 p.m.]

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mx. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 262 be read for a second time.

Nova Scotians are experiencing challenges related to the high cost of living and inflation. This is impacting all of us, but not necessarily all the same way. In Nova Scotia, around one-third of our population rent residential properties. That's over 300,000 people.

In October 2021, we extended the previous government's 2 per cent rent cap to continue to protect tenants as our newly formed government got to work to build more affordable housing from one end of the province to the other.

Mx. Speaker, fast forward to March 2023 - to today. Our government is making progress on building our housing supply. We have made many significant investments and are working collectively across government to address our province's housing challenges and to increase supply.

That said, we are not there yet. That's why the investments in Budget 2023-24 are so important.

Those challenges related to the housing stock still remain today. It is necessary for us to extend the temporary rent cap to continue to protect tenants from high rent increases. We have brought forward amendments to extend the rent cap. It will no longer expire on December 31, 2023. Rather, it will expire on December 31, 2025. We're also making amendments to allow the maximum allowable rental increase amount to be set in regulations, and we intend to set the new rent cap amount at 5 per cent per year.

While the rent cap is necessary, we know it may create challenges for some landlords during these times of high inflation, and that's why we have raised the cap to 5 per cent per year. When deciding on a 5 per cent increase per year for the next two years, we took into account the projected rate of inflation over that time. We chose 5 per cent per year to allow landlords to catch up to inflation while avoiding any large rent increases for tenants.

The goal of the Residential Tenancies Program is to balance the rights and the needs of both tenants and landlords. This is not an easy goal to accomplish. Both sides have different interests, and at the end of the day, we need to balance. I hope that all members of this House acknowledge the need for this balance. As I have said many times, and our

government has said many times, permanent rent control is not a long-term solution. Although it may seem like a good option up front, there are many unintended consequences and challenges that it can cause in the long term.

When talking about the Residential Tenancies Program and our tenants and our landlords, it's important to note that this is not a closed book. I've said that many times. Our work is never done. I'm looking forward to the members opposite providing their comments afterwards.

The rental environment is always changing, presenting us with new opportunities and challenges. We will continue our work on this file with our tenant and landlord partners to strengthen and to modernize the program. I'd like to take this time again to thank them. Although they have different interests, the perspectives they share are invaluable to help us and inform our decisions.

There's been lots of talk about fixed-term leases being used for unintended purposes so far this sitting. It is very frustrating to hear some of the situations that tenants have been put in, and how some landlords have used them to get around the rent cap. Raising the rent cap to 5 per cent will help take some of the pressure off landlords to find ways around the 2 per cent rent cap in order to keep up with inflation.

We will continue to watch the situation, and as we always do, we will continue to look at ways to strengthen the Residential Tenancies Program. We will continue to listen, we will continue to collaborate, and we will continue our further work on this file. If we find action is required, we will take it.

With that, Mx. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks and look forward to the comments from members opposite.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: This is obviously a very important bill. I want to begin by saying that I and our caucus are happy to see that the rent cap that was begun under the previous government is staying in place. I think that's a good thing, and I think it protects renters.

As the minister mentioned, a third of Nova Scotians are renters - 300,000 people. That means that all of us in this Chamber, no matter where we represent, have hundreds, if not thousands, in my case, of people in their ridings who are renters and who are dealing with a great deal of anxiety and stress and worry about the rental market.

I had a chance to have a bit of a Q&A drop-in meeting with folks from my riding a couple of weeks ago, two buildings along Larry Uteck Boulevard. We had a great crowd of people there, and their number one issue was rent and housing. They're very, very

concerned about what was going to happen with the cap. Now this was prior introduction of the bill, so I expect they will be happy with that, but there still is great anxiety around what the future will hold. Issues around fixed terms, which I will get to as well, and the feeling that they could be looking at several hundreds dollars more for a new apartment very quickly if they aren't careful about that. That's something that worries people all across this province. So, with this bill, as I said, happy to see that the rent cap will stay in place.

There are three specific issues that I have with the bill as written. The first, and again this is something that we've seen with this government on many, many issues, is a tendency to want to horde power, and to expect that Cabinet can do everything. So, the ability to make regulations to set the rent cap under this legislation is being left with Cabinet. To me, that's a mistake. I would suggest that an entity, an outside entity with some expertise, as in the case in most other provinces that have rent caps, and about half of the provinces in Canada do. For example, in P.E.I. the equivalent of the UARB sets the rent cap there on a yearly basis. There are similar bodies in Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia, that do that work, and that's what I think should've been done here. I think that's the first mistake, to assume that Cabinet has a unique level of expertise, I guess, on the rental market. I don't think any Cabinet of any combination of us in this Chamber would have that expertise. So that is issue number one.

The second issue that I have with this bill is it is completely silent on this issue of fixed term leases which are a really, really serious and a pressing problem for renters in Nova Scotia, across the board, across the province. The minister just now made the case that increasing the cap from 2 to 5 per cent next year should ease the pressure, I guess, on that issue and with respect, I just disagree.

I think, if you take for example, an apartment that is renting for \$1,500 a month, which in a lot of places would be cheap at this point, a 2 per cent cap would be \$30, a 5 per cent cap would be \$75. You're talking about a \$45 difference on a monthly basis for a landlord. To expect that a landlord will look at that \$45 a month and think that's going to be enough to keep them going through high inflation, when, if they can get a tenant out on a fixed term lease, they can take that \$1,500 and maybe charge \$2,000 or \$2,200, and now they're not getting an extra \$45 a month, now they are getting an extra \$500, \$600, \$700 a month.

I just don't think that logic holds, and I think over the next couple of years, until this rent cap expires, we will continue to see major issues with fixed term leases. And there are, again, effective models in other provinces that have seen this issue and have dealt with this issue over the last number of years and decades. British Columbia, Ontario, other provinces, have effective mechanisms in place to ensure fixed term leases. Which as the minister said, and as I agree with, there are circumstances where it makes sense to have a fixed term lease. I'm not suggesting that. What I am suggesting is that in the environment

we have right now, in too many cases, they're being abused, and I think there are relatively easy and obvious fixes to make that problem to go away over the next two and a half years.

Again, I think that's the issue. I think the minister has been clear on this point, that the cap is due to expire in two and a half years. So, with this fixed term lease issue, in the government's point of view, I think it's an easy loophole to close for two and a half years, and if they don't want to deal with it beyond that, then they may not have to, if that's the case.

Centralizing power within Cabinet making regulations on rent cap issue is number one for me. The second issue is a lack of action on fixed term leases, which I think is a pressing issue. The third issue is the deadline. Again, I said this in Question Period the other day - 2025 is going to be magical for all of us, in all these different ways. You know, housing, health care, transportation, surgical wait times - all these things will improve dramatically, imminently, in 2025, which is as we all know an election year. So that will improve dramatically, imminently in 2025, which, as we all know, is an election year. That, for one, feels a bit political, to punt an issue of this magnitude out just a few months beyond the next election and say, you know, the next government will have to deal with it. That's one problem.

The second problem is that the rental market doesn't care about dates. That has nothing to do with the rental market. If in December 2025, the housing market could be essentially what it is now, it could be better in terms of vacancies, it could be worse. Who knows? I'm sure there's prognostications out there, but it's hard to say. Nobody thought four years ago that we would be in this kind of a rental market.

It's very difficult to predict the future on housing, so to me, a much smarter, more sensible, serious approach on an issue like this would have been to say we don't believe in a permanent rent control system - which the government has been very clear on - but rather than just tying it to some arbitrary political deadline post-next election, we will remove the rent cap when the vacancy rate in the province - or the city, however you wanted to measure it - reaches, let's say, 3 per cent, which is what the CMHC generally says is a healthy rental market. At that point, if your lease is up, or your fixed term is up, or you're trying to move, it doesn't take you three months to find an apartment, and you're not scrambling, and you're not living in someone's basement for a week to find a place, and you're not paying \$600 more in rent for a smaller place than you were before.

A lot of those issues, I think, would be resolved if we had a healthy rental market, which, again, is at least 3 per cent vacancy rate, at least. My suggestion would be that rather than have a deadline tied to a date, it should be tied to the health of the rental market, which is, of course, the most important issue when we're talking about the rent cap and these associated issues.

In summary, as I say, we are happy that the rent cap is staying in place. I think to remove it at this time would have been unconscionable and a huge mistake, so I'm glad that the government's not doing that, but I do still think that this bill is short-sighted and incomplete on some very key metrics, and with those words, Mx. Chair, I will take my seat.

[8:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: There are a number of things that call out to be said in response to these amendments to the Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act. I think the first thing that calls out to be said in response to this extension of the rent cap is congratulations. Congratulations, first, to all of those people who have been taking petitions door to door for rent control through the cold of the Winter, and have been doing this since last December. Congratulations to them.

Congratulations to all those people who have enthusiastically signed that rent control petition, sometimes signing it despite a sense of fear of potential repercussion if their landlord might see their name on that petition, sometimes signing the petition despite having spoken about having some nervousness, which is an understandable nervousness, and not rare among newcomers, that their signature might have some potential negative impact on their long-term aspirations about their immigration status, but who signed the petition just the same. Congratulations to them.

Congratulations to all the people who took the petition and had their picture taken while they were signing it, and then shared that with all of their networks, and then who invited their roommates to come to the door and sign it too, and who shared it with their networks, and their families, and asked everyone to sign. Congratulations to them all.

I think we ought to also say, as the rent cap gets extended for two years, congratulations to ACORN. Congratulations to ACORN, because if it were not for ACORN's tenants' rights struggles in 2019 and 2020, I am persuaded there would not be a rent cap today to be extended in the first place. I think we should say congratulations to Dalhousie Mutual Aid, who protested here for permanent rent control a week ago today. Congratulations to Dalhousie Legal Aid and Nova Scotia Legal Aid, who have steadfastly, over the last two and half years of the rent cap and the period that led up to it originally, told the truth in those organizations about residential rents in Nova Scotia. Congratulations, I want to say, too, to all the journalists who have had the professional sound judgment to go to Nova Scotia Legal Aid and Dalhousie Legal Aid and get the truth about the rental situation.

While we are speaking about Dalhousie Legal Aid while we are assembled here debating this evening the amendments to the rent cap, the annual general meeting of Dalhousie Legal Aid is being held. The theme of the annual meeting of Dalhousie Legal

Aid tonight is Eviction Prevention in Halifax. A panel discussion is being held at this moment with Joanne Hussey, Eric Jonsson, Max Chauvin and there are one or two others. I think it would have been instructive for every member of the government to be there.

Congratulations to Dalhousie Legal Aid and congratulations to all the people who wrote to their MLAs about their concern on this subject, who wrote about their personal situations of unconscionable, very difficult rent increases and who wrote, as we have read in so many of those emails, about how I've never written an MLA before, this is not the kind of thing I do, but this has been my experience in my household and this is a very difficult situation and who for the first time in their lives often wrote to their MLAs about the need for rent cap protection.

Congratulations also to all those who followed that up by sending an email to the Premier's Office indicating that neither they nor anyone in their immediate or extended family would ever vote Progressive Conservative again as long as any of them lived if the unregulated market was allowed to set rents in Nova Scotia after December 2023. Congratulations to them.

Congratulations to all of them, because all of these forces together in civil society have done quite a thing: They have pressured a government which declared itself unequivocally opposed to rent control to bring in a rent cap with this Act, to bring in a rent cap that will extend beyond the July 25 conclusion of the mandate of the present government, so congratulations. I think that's the first thing that should be said about this bill.

However, the second thing which should be said is that again, as with the rent cap of 2020 and then in 2021 once more, we're in a position in Nova Scotia where the government's response to the outcry of the people of the province has fallen short of the permanent, effective, comprehensive rent control which is experienced by a majority of people in our country and which is what is required for the people of Nova Scotia.

I want to speak about some of the differences between the Conservatives' rent cap and the rent control which is outlined in our Rental Fairness and Affordability Act, the rent control which is supported and put forward by the NDP. There are many differences between the temporary rent cap and permanent, effective, comprehensive rent control but the one that is most relevant to this discussion and the one that I think is very important is that the Conservatives' rent cap applies only to tenancies.

My colleague spoke about this a few moments ago: the Conservatives' rent cap applies only to tenancies, whereas in a system of permanent rent control, the regulation applies to the actual rental unit rather than to the tenancy, which may come and go. This is a very important difference, whether or not the regulation applies to the tenancy or to the unit, because if the regulation applies to the tenancy and not the unit, which is the case with this rent cap, landlords are, in fact, always incentivized to be finding new tenants, since as

soon as the tenancy changes hands, the cap does not apply. That is the great weakness and the great difficulty of applying the regulation only to the tenancy and not to the unit itself.

With comprehensive, effective, permanent rent control, as we in the NDP are advocating, the regulation applies to the unit, not to the tenancy. The regulated unit rent would be capped, regardless of whether there was a continuous tenant for 25 years or whether there was a whole parade of new tenants.

The result of that cap of regulation applying to the unit rather than to the tenant is that changing tenants would financially, from the landlord's point of view, be neither here nor there, because the rent was going to be capped regardless. This is a very important distinction.

With rent regulation by the tenancy, as we have it with this rent cap, landlords are always incentivized to deal with their own financial pressures - which we will certainly acknowledge are many in the case of the present inflationary environment - with the kind of system that the government is operating with, to find some form, often any kind of form, to get the tenants out the door.

How landlords act on this incentive to renew the tenancy and thereby get around the rent cap can take many different forms. It takes the form, sometimes, of a kind of generalized non-responsiveness to legitimate maintenance concerns. Sometimes it just takes the form of a poor attitude - a kind of uncalled-for, surly, miserable attitude that hasn't any cause for it in anything that the tenants might have done. Sometimes it takes the form of kind of a low-grade chronic harassment of the tenants. Very commonly, the form it takes is the invented requirement for renovations at such a level as would require the tenants to move, and thus the word "renoviction" in the last couple of years has entered into our language.

The most common form that this pressure on the landlords to deal with their financial pressures by renewing the tenancy and thereby getting around the rent cap takes is the landlord's use of fixed-term leases. That is, taking a lease that has a defined end date - usually a year - and at the conclusion of that time, the landlord can choose to renew or not renew for any reason or for no reason, and as a consequence, undermining any vestige of the protection of security of tenure for the tenant. That is the great difficulty of rent control which applies to the tenancy rather than to the unit.

This, therefore, brings me to the third thing that I think should be said about this rent-cap extension bill. No rent cap can work - no rent cap can provide the protections to tenants that the government puts itself forward here as providing - unless it plugs the loophole that landlords in enormous numbers are using today to get around the rent cap in fixed-term leases.

I want to be as clear as possible here. We in the NDP are not calling for the end of fixed-term leases. We understand very clearly, and the point is obvious, the normal role that fixed-term leases have where one person, for a set period, has a place that they want to rent while the place is available and vacant.

What we're calling for, rather, is a system where fixed-term leases cannot simply be used as they are today holus-bolus in Nova Scotia to evict tenants, to jack up rent, and to skirt the protections of the rent cap. It makes every sense that other jurisdictions that have permanent rent control in fact do this. They've plugged this loophole so the rent control will be effective. They do this with automatic default position rollovers of leases. If you don't do this, you end up in exactly the situation that we're in now in Nova Scotia where the only leases that landlords make available to be signed, to a great extent, are fixed-term leases.

I think that the public should be aware of how the minister responsible for the Residential Tenancies Act looks on this crucial problem. The minister was very clear - repeatedly in fact - in his comments to media in introducing the bill that is before us this evening and in his comments later that day to questions concerning fixed-term leases.

When he speaks of the use of fixed-term leases for purposes other than those for which they're intended, he thinks of this as an occasional abuse, something that landlords are doing here and there, a few bad apples that are causing problems. This is an odd circumstance which he speaks about, but it's something as though it were just taking place here and there.

This, Mx. Speaker, is absolutely not the case, and it does not accord with anybody's real experience of the real, current rental market in Nova Scotia. In the real-world rental market today in Nova Scotia, virtually all the leases that landlords are making available are fixed-term leases. I would be willing to bet the minister anything that he would care to bet me that if he asked his staff tomorrow afternoon to go on Kijiji, or go on Facebook Marketplace, and find out the terms on which the first 10 apartments that they look for were being offered, I would be willing to bet he would find that at least eight or nine - and very possibly 10 of those - would be fixed-term leases, and that would be all that would be available to that Kijiji-Facebook Marketplace inquiry.

It is therefore, I think, not a good thing that the minister responsible for residential tenancies is at such an apparent distance from the realities of the rental market to such an extent that he is apparently unaware of the across-the-board ubiquitousness of fixed-term leases today in Halifax and in Nova Scotia.

The minister has also made clear his opinion - I think I'm representing it squarely and honestly - that since, in his view, it is the financial pressures of the 2 per cent rent cap that have led, in his view, to the abuse of fixed-term leases, that therefore, as he reads the situation, a 5 per cent rent cap is going to alleviate these pressures and that's going to lead

to the decline of these fixed-term lease abuses. That is the reasoning the minister has offered - I think that's a clear representation of it - but I think we might well ask what is the evidence for this analysis? What is the evidence on the basis of which the minister is holding this view on behalf of the government?

Maybe we'd better not ask the question, because I don't think there is any evidence for this analysis. I think that this is not, in fact, an analysis at all. This is, rather, a vague la-la hope, an aspiration which is blissfully unaware of the fact that landlords in Nova Scotia today provide every evidence of having received the message from one another very clearly in 2023: Get the tenants into fixed-term leases and you'll be able to get around the rent cap when, at the end of the lease, you don't renew it.

I think a dose of the real is in order. To that purpose, I would like to read an email which I received on March 12th from a constituent in Halifax Chebucto named Robyn McIntosh. Robyn has given me permission to quote her letter in this debate this evening. She writes this:

Dear Mr. Burrill, member of the Assembly, Halifax Chebucto,

I love living in Halifax. As a small-town Islander - P.E.I., not Newfoundland - moving here in 2008 for school was an adventure, and one that I'm happy to say I'm still experiencing since deciding to stay after graduating. Since landing in Halifax, I always wanted to live in a neighbourhood that meant something to me and made me feel like I was home, and I'm happy to say I found that. This neighbourhood is a magical place, from the kids that sell lemonade on Windsor Street in the heat of the Summer, to the cultural excitement that we see at the Lebanese Fest, to the early morning breakfasts at the Ardmore, and the families that come together for evening walks through the tree-lined neighbourhoods we all call home. This community is vibrant, accepting, and made up of people that love living here.

I'm sad to say that I now have to leave this neighbourhood. Not because I want to, but because, like so many others in Halifax, the housing crisis has reached an unprecedented level. I signed a fixed-term lease with a rental company that owns several properties in the city, predominantly in the north and west ends of the city. They have decided to not renew my lease after six years. As I have been an ideal tenant, this came as quite a surprise, until I saw my own unit posted online with a rental increase of \$947 a month. With the current rent cap, my landlord could not raise my rent more than 2 per cent; however, if they refuse to renew my lease, they can increase the rent any price they wish. My unit, which I paid \$1,248 per month for, is now posted online for \$2,195 a month.

This landlord is doing this to entire buildings of people around the city in order to avoid the rent cap, with properties on Windsor, Almon, Jubilee, Oxford, Shirley, Columbus, Tobin. All have seen exponential increases in rent this year, and tenants being forced to leave at the end of their term so the rent cap can be avoided.

Other provinces have legislation in place that does not allow this loophole to exist, notably British Columbia. I don't want to leave this neighbourhood, I don't want to leave the city, but we are being priced out. I have a fantastic job. I survived graduate school. I'd like to begin my Ph.D., but that is seeming more and more impossible if I stay in Halifax. Our hands are tied. We have no rights, no legal recourse. We need to rely on the government to take on these issues, and help the people who make up the very fabric of the communities we live in.

[8:45 p.m.]

Mx. Speaker, I have a file of such correspondence, and so does each of my colleagues. I find it distressing and alarming that the minister responsible on behalf of the people of Nova Scotia for these matters, has not taken in the core truth that is being conveyed here. Namely that a rent cap cannot provide the protections it is presented as providing, unless the fixed-term lease loophole that circumvents it is cut off.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the minister, it is to close second reading of Bill No. 262.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: And I do want to take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Residential Tenancies Program for their tremendous hard work every single day on this file. This is a huge file impacting many Nova Scotians, as it has been pointed out; 300,000 tenants in our province, upwards of 6,000 landlords. So this is a huge and complex file.

And again, I don't want this to fall on deaf ears, but we continuously look at this file through a lens of balance - a balance of the rights and needs of tenants and landlords. Sometimes I feel like it's lost on some members of this Legislature, but it is important, despite the differences, to continuously look at modernizing and strengthening this program, this legislation. Whether it be the Residential Tenancy Act or IRRICA, as we're debating right now, but continuously looking at that balanced approach of the needs and responsibilities and the rights of both tenants and landlords.

I'll just say quickly, though, to simply state that I'm not taking in the core of the truth on this file is completely wrong. Not factual at all. I dismiss it entirely. I think my comments all along regarding this file, and underscoring how complex it is, and how much work goes in every single day by my staff, to try to find that balance, to try to support many

Nova Scotians from Yarmouth all the way to Cape Breton, to imply that myself, and that goes down to my staff, are not taking the truth on this file, is simply wrong. Simply wrong.

So I want to make sure that point is very made clear, very clearly. And I take this responsibility seriously every single day. And to imply otherwise is completely false.

With that, I close second reading of second debate on Bill No. 262.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 262.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Bill No. 262 - An Act to Amend Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2021, the Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes government business for the day.

I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Wednesday, March 29th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

Tomorrow is Opposition Day, so I'll ask the Opposition House Leader to call business, but before that I would like to add that we will also be doing Committee of the Whole House on Supply for Estimates. Over to my honourable colleague.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Thank you, Mx. Speaker. Tomorrow we will be calling Bill Nos. 268, 276, and 278.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn until we meet on Wednesday, March 29th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until 1:00 p.m. on March 29th.

[The House rose at 8:50 p.m.]