



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

## DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

**Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain**

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**First Session**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2023**

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 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 the daily routine.

The honourable member for Pictou West.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: I'm wondering if I can rise on a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Sitting in this Chamber is an absolute honour. It is a privilege for all of us. Our parliamentary privilege is unique to the Legislature.

The purpose of parliamentary privilege is to allow legislators and legislations to carry out the primary functions of deliberating, legislating, and holding the government to account. This privilege should be treated with caution and not used as a shield or an instrument for political gain.

Yesterday that privilege was abused here. It was used as a shield by the member for Cumberland North. The member appears to have intentionally misled the House with misinformation. She tabled an unsigned document that she referred to as an NDA between “Blank” and the PC caucus.

First, I can confirm that neither the PC caucus nor the PC party ever had an individual sign an NDA with respect to this matter, contrary to the assertion of the member for Cumberland North when she stated, and I quote: “My employee was coerced into signing an NDA with the Progressive Conservative caucus.”

Second, I can also confirm that the document tabled in the Legislature by the member is not a document that was prepared for nor was entered into the PC party, the PC caucus, the PC party interim leader, or the current leader. Any statements suggesting otherwise or to malign members of the PC caucus are simply untrue and a clear attempt to mislead this House.

As I said, our privilege is an honour that should not be treated lightly, nor should it be abused. This abuse is evident when a member makes such an inflammatory accusation and then refuses to stand outside the Chamber and repeat those same accusations where she doesn’t enjoy the same privilege as she does in this Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Before the member continues, I’d like to take a brief recess just for a few minutes.

[1:07 p.m. The House recessed.]

[1:13 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I thank everyone for their patience and understanding.

There has been a little bit of debate going on with House Leaders and the person making the point of order. It’s been determined at this point that the point of order is not in order, so we will begin with the daily routine again.

#### **PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

#### **PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

#### **TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

#### **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

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

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, today the Mass Casualty Commission has released its long-awaited final report and recommendations from the public inquiry on the unspeakable, heartbreaking events that shook our province and the country almost three years ago.

[1:15 p.m.]

The events of April 18 and 19, 2020, forever changed us as Nova Scotians. Our thoughts have been with the victims, families, survivors, and communities who have endured an unimaginable pain. They will continue to be close to our hearts.

As a government, we continue to stand with the families. We have said from the beginning that this process is needed to get answers for the families. Now the governments of Nova Scotia and Canada have a responsibility to act and honour the memory of those lost. Together, we must continue to do what we can to help build a safer community and a safer Nova Scotia. The families, survivors, and communities will be foremost in our minds as we continue to do this work.

Speaker, I would ask that after my colleagues finish with their remarks, we have a moment of silence for the lives that were lost on that terrible day. We cannot change what happened, but we know we can do more to help prevent something like this from ever happening again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I want to thank the minister for a copy of his remarks in advance. Today is a difficult day for the province. As the details from the events of April 18 and 19, 2020, are recounted, it can bring back many emotions for Nova Scotians. The report released today symbolizes an important step for our province. To the families, loved ones, and friends, we recognize your grief and continue to stand with you. The strength and resilience you've shown through what you've endured is remarkable.

I also want to recognize the first responders. We thank you for your bravery and service during such a horrific event. Our province lost so much on that day, and we must continue to remember and honour those victims.

We can do so by recognizing that we will all have to play a supporting role in figuring out how we move forward. Here in the Legislature especially, we must make sure that we are working together for the betterment of all Nova Scotians. We are stronger when we stand together. This event shook the province to its core, and we will be forever changed because of it.

Today is not easy. My thoughts are with all Nova Scotians as we grieve, support, and move together.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: Nearly three years ago, Nova Scotians were shocked and shaken by the horrible and heartbreaking mass shooting in Portapique and the surrounding communities. Today, as the Mass Casualty Commission releases its final report on recommendations from the public inquiry, we stand with the families, communities, and all Nova Scotians who have mourned the deaths of the 22 Nova Scotians killed.

From the beginning, it was the extraordinary courage and conviction of the families who fought for and won the public inquiry to find answers and a way forward. Today and always, we hold them in our hearts.

The end of the public inquiry isn't the end of our province reckoning with the events of April 18 and 19, 2020, but it is an important end to this chapter from which we will together move forward. As we saw in the days and weeks immediately following these events, Nova Scotians come together in compassion and solidarity in times of great need and sorrow. Today is no different. Together, we will continue to work every day to build stronger, safer communities for everyone.

THE SPEAKER: Please rise for a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

### **GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, before I read my notice of motion, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

COLTON LEBLANC: I'll do it en français et en anglais.

Monsieur le président, aujourd'hui dans votre tribune, dans la Tribune du Président, j'ai l'honneur de vous présenter et aux membres de l'Assemblée législative des invités spéciaux. In your gallery today, Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce some very special guests: Marie-Claude Rioux, past executive director of the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse, ancienne directrice générale de la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse; accompagnée par sa mère Paulette et son époux Rory - accompanied by her mother Paulette and her husband Rory; Kenneth Deveau, président de la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse - president of the Acadian Federation; Gwen LeBlanc



trésorière - treasurer of the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Giselle Thibault, director of communications - directrice de communication de la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Claude Renaud, président du Regroupement des aînées de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Véronique Legault, executive director - directrice générale du Regroupement des aînées de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Nicole Dupuis, executive director - directrice générale de la Fédération des parents acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse. J'en reconnais d'autres, y inclus Louise Imbeault, ancienne président - former president of la Société Nationale de l'Acadie.

I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. Je les demande de se lever pour recevoir l'accueil chaleureux de l'Assemblée législative. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: I'm not even going to attempt to say it in French, but I will say it in English: Welcome to the Nova Scotia Legislature and enjoy your stay.

The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 590**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Monsieur le président, à une date ultérieure, je demanderai l'adoption de la résolution suivante :

Attendu que la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse est une association à but non lucratif fondée en 1968, qui a pour mission de promouvoir l'épanouissement et le développement de la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse; et

Attendu que M<sup>me</sup> Marie-Claude Rioux était en poste pendant dix ans en tant que directrice générale, travaillant pour faire reconnaître les besoins et les priorités des Acadiens, des Acadiennes, et des francophones dans notre province; et

Attendu que M<sup>me</sup> Rioux part pour poursuivre une occasion de leadership au sein du COPA National;

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que les membres de l'Assemblée législative se joignent à moi pour remercier M<sup>me</sup> Rioux de son engagement et de son dévouement à la vitalité des communautés acadiennes et francophones de la Nouvelle-Écosse et pour lui souhaiter succès dans ses futurs projets.

M. le Président, je demande l'adoption de cette résolution sans préavis et sans débat.

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

Whereas the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse is a non-profit organization founded in 1968 to promote the growth and development of the Acadian and francophone community of Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Ms. Marie-Claude Rioux has served as executive director for the last 10 years, working to ensure the needs and priorities of Acadians and francophones in our province are recognized; and

Whereas Ms. Rioux is pursuing another leadership opportunity with COPA National;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House join me in thanking Ms. Rioux for her commitment and her dedication to the vitality of Nova Scotia's Acadian and francophone community and in wishing her success in her future endeavours.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver. Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Advanced Education.

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, before I read my notice of motion, I also beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

BRIAN WONG: Visiting us today in the Speaker's Gallery, I'm honoured to introduce some very special guests: Judy MacDonald, Director of Social Work at Dalhousie University; and Bria Symonds, also from Dalhousie. Mr. Speaker, these individuals have worked with government to establish an Africentric Bachelor of Social Work pilot cohort program at Dalhousie. I'm pleased that while the original intent was for a class of 25 seats, there was so much interest that we are now looking at 35 students in this cohort. I ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of this House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Once again, we welcome all visitors to the gallery today. Enjoy your visit.

The honourable Minister of Advanced Education.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 591**

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

Whereas March is Social Work Month, and Black and African Nova Scotians are underrepresented in the field of social work; and

Whereas through a new pilot project, 35 aspiring Bachelor of Social Work professionals will learn as part of an Africentric cohort, beginning in September at Dalhousie University; and

Whereas addressing anti-Black racism and educating a robust and diverse social work profession is an important factor in improving health care;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature wish these students well with their studies, and thank those who have come together to make this happen.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver. Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded. Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction before I proceed.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

STEVE CRAIG: The resolution I am about to read was drafted by Emma Hachey, a talented up-and-coming professional who is joining us here in the West Gallery above me.

Emma is a co-op student in the public relations program at Mount Saint Vincent University. She's been on a work term at Fisheries and Aquaculture since January of this year. Emma has done tremendous work in a short period of time. She's drafting news releases, remarks and resolutions, and managing a lot of our social media. She's also supporting the Department of Agriculture, and I know my colleague the minister and member for Guysborough-Tracadie appreciates her work too.

It takes a sharp mind to quickly learn new subject matter and in a new workplace. Emma has done this with grace and a can-do attitude. I wish her well as she completes her studies, and I sincerely hope she considers a career in the Public Service.

I'd like to ask all members to give her a warm House welcome. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: And welcome to you as well, Emma.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 592**

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

Whereas fishermen and scientists came together 30 years to form the Fishermen and Scientists Research Society to promote the long-term sustainability of the marine fishing industry; and

Whereas using their valuable insight and expertise, the data and information collected creates the knowledge to help the fisheries sector make informed decisions so that future generations of fish harvesters have the resources they need; and

Whereas the society breaks down barriers between fishermen and scientists, helps keeps our oceans clean, and supports a sustainable fishery that helps keep seafood as Nova Scotia's number one export;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House congratulate the Fishermen and Scientists Research Society on their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and their commitment to a sustainable marine fishing industry for Nova Scotia.

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. 287 - Entitled an Act to Provide for Affordable Hearing Aids for Seniors. (Gary Burrill)**

**Bill No. 288 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 197 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Health Services and Insurance Act, to Provide Fairness in Long-term Care Fees. (Gary Burrill)**

**Bill No. 289 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 203 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Homes for Special Care Act, respecting National Standards (Gary Burrill)**

**Bill. No. 290 - Entitled an Act to Protect Whistle-blowing by Health-care Workers. (Elizabeth Smith McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 291 - Entitled an Act to amend Chapter 203 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Homes for Special Care Act. (Elizabeth Smith McCrossin)**

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

[1:30 p.m.]

## **GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

## **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable for Eastern Passage.

### **MLA FOR PICTOU WEST: PUBLIC SERVICE - THANKS**

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: I rise today to recognize the outstanding contributions of the longest-serving female PC MLA in Nova Scotia history. The honourable member was first elected to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly as MLA for Pictou West in 2013, and was re-elected in 2017 and in 2021. She has served as our interim party leader and caucus chair for the PC party. For four years, she served as the only female in the PC party. During that time, she rose to become one of this Legislature's strongest advocates for women's rights. I was pleased to join her in 2017 along with a member from Queens.

She has fought tirelessly for victims of sexual abuse and human trafficking. Mr. Speaker, she was the first female House Leader in Nova Scotia history. For six years, I have had the privilege of working alongside the Minister of Community Services. I have seen her pour her heart and soul into doing the very best job she can for her constituents, and in her ministerial portfolio. The member for Pictou West has the greatest integrity, the biggest heart, and the strongest of convictions. She always stands up for what she believes in. She is an inspiration to everyone who knows her,

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in thanking this outstanding member for her dedicated and long service to the Province of Nova Scotia as the MLA for Pictou West.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if this is the appropriate time to correct a few facts, but I do believe that the longest-serving female member of the PC caucus was, in fact, Karen Casey, although the entire time was not spent as a PC member and that she was also an interim . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. You are correct, it is not the appropriate time.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

### **SISTER, ROSALEEN BRIDGET - BIRTHDAY WISHES**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'd like to take a moment to wish my sister Rosaleen Bridget a happy birthday. I have a lot of siblings, but she is the one I am absolutely the closest to. When we were separated from our parents all those years ago, my siblings and I were all separated and put into different foster homes. As the story goes, Rosaleen and I cried every night until we were finally put in the same foster home together. After that we were in every foster home together; they refused to separate us or think of separating us. She will always have a special place in my heart.

Happy birthday, Rose. I love you.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction relative to my member statement.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Joining us today in the gallery are members of my family. I am proud to introduce Dr. Catherine Cervin, who is my mother-in-law and will be celebrated in my member statement. I'd like them to stand as I do the introductions - my son Jason Atsiaq, who is in Halifax in between programs in Ottawa and British Columbia, and my niece Jemma Brown, who is in Grade 5 at Crichton Park Elementary. She is the fiercest basketball player and an award-winning highland dancer.

THE SPEAKER: Once again, welcome to the gallery.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

### **CERVIN, DR. CATHY: MEDICAL CAREER - CONGRATS.**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I am happy today to rise to mark the retirement of a Halifax Citadel-Sable Island constituent and my mother-in-law, Dr. Catherine Cervin. Dr. Cathy Cervin grew up in the tiny town of Harrow in southern Ontario, went to medical

school at the University of Toronto, and finished her medical residency at Dalhousie. Dr. Cervin then practiced full-scope family medicine in northern Ontario, working in one of Ontario's first family health teams and helping to establish a women's health group that stretched across northern Ontario.

Dr. Cervin returned to Halifax to start her academic career in the Department of Family Medicine at Dalhousie. She became Hospital Chief of the Department of Family Medicine at the Grace Maternity Hospital, was the Residency Program Director for Family Medicine for 10 years, and was the Interim Department Head at Dalhousie Family Medicine.

Dr. Cervin was also the physician leader in a global health office. During that time, she also completed a Master of Arts in Medical Education. The call of the north beckoned to Dr. Cervin once again in 2011, when she joined the Northern Ontario School of Medicine as Associate Dean of Post-Grad Education, Vice Dean Academic and is now Professor Emeritus. She was the president of the College of Family Physicians in 2021.

I ask all members to congratulate Dr. Cervin on her successful career and wish her well in her retirement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

### **DELOREY, ALBERT JOSEPH: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, early in the morning on March 25<sup>th</sup>, Albert Joseph Delorey left us to be with the love of his life, Mary Delorey, who was waiting for him since she passed away in February 2015. Albert was fortunate to have some of his closest family members around him in the hospital during his final moments. They wanted to ensure that he was not alone when he left us. They did that because of what Albert meant to them.

Albert was always there for someone needing help. He loved his years working at Halifax Public Works and taking care of the Public Gardens. He could take a plant that was dying and bring it back to life - a skill I've never been able to do. Of course, I must mention that he loved his Montreal Canadiens and it was always interesting watching him watch a tight game with his socks rolled up and rolled down. And, of course there was no talking when the game was on, unless it was a commercial.

I know that Mary has a cup of tea and some biscuits, along with a deck of cards, ready for him when they are finally back together. I wish all of the members to give condolences to Albert's family and friends. He will be missed by everyone.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: I'm extremely excited to be able to acknowledge Ms. Wyndolyn Brown, who is in the gallery. She's a strong advocate and leader in the community. As a woman who leans on God, it is really because of her many conversations and her advocacy toward survivors of sexual assault that I'm pleased to say that tomorrow I'll put forward a resolution based on our conversations to hopefully address some of the gaps and inequities within Victim Services. I'll ask the House to please rise and celebrate Wyndolyn being here. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Once again, we welcome everyone to the gallery today.

The honourable member for Preston.

**BROWN, WYNDOLYN: EMPOWERMENT FOR HOPE - RECOG.**

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge Ms. Wyndolyn Brown, the founder and CEO of Empowerment for Hope. She is the mother of five beautiful children and four precious grandchildren.

She runs this non-profit organization that strives to help families by breaking cycles of violence, abuse, and trauma, giving children and families the resources they need for a better future through awareness and empowerment. The main focus for Empowerment for Hope is to help and support young girls, women, and gender-diverse persons from other marginalized communities involved in sex trafficking or at-risk youth being involved. She helps folks and supports them in their next journey toward self-resilience.

I ask this House to celebrate this long-standing leader and all of the work for Empowerment for Hope, and hopefully working toward a better future for them all.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**STEED-ROSS, BRENDA: QPJ MEDAL RECIP. - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize Ms. Brenda Steed-Ross, the recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal, which was presented in December 2022 in Halifax Needham.

The purpose of the medal program is to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to the province and the community. Ms. Brenda Steed-Ross exemplifies just that.



She was recognized for her continued passion and work to keep the spirit of Africville alive through education, and speaking to our community at large and around the world about the atrocities of the displacement of the Africville people. As well, year after year, she helps to organize the Africville Reunion, which this year will be celebrating their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

I would also like to say that I'm super-proud of Ms. Brenda Steed-Ross for her continuing, long-lived life to profess the fact that Africville still lives on in each and every one of us. I would like all members to join me in celebrating her receiving of the medal this year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**MASS CAS. COMM.: REPORT RELEASE - RECOG.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my comments on the findings of the Mass Casualty Commission that were released today. It's a very sobering and sad day for the families who lost their loved ones. The communities in Cumberland and in Colchester are really feeling the pain very deeply today.

I know that the pain is being felt all over the province and really throughout our entire country. I was pleased to see that some of the findings are focused on root causes of violence. There is too much family violence. I know in Cumberland North, I meet with victims on a regular basis. I look forward to these findings being implemented, and all of us working together, united to end family violence here in the province of Nova Scotia.

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

**BAY TREASURE CHEST: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I rise today to recognize Bay Treasure Chest. This association offers an opportunity for the community and players to win through a weekly 50/50 lottery and a monthly online 50/50 lottery. The association provides many benefits, including support to volunteer organizations and retail partners.

Through community support and local volunteer services, they have been able to grow a fundraising partnership operated by local not-for-profit groups, including the Community Centre Hub, the Bay Youth Hub, and Lions & Food Bank Community Hub.

I am pleased to learn that they established the Bay Treasure Chest Scholarship Fund and a \$500 honorarium to not-for-profit organizations that offer a service to the community.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in recognizing the excellent work being done in our community by the Bay Treasure Chest.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**SUNSHINE TOURS: SIGHTSEEING SERV. - RECOG.**

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge Sunshine Tours.

They are an Armdale-based sightseeing company that specializes in showing Chinese tourists around the Atlantic Canada region. They show the beauty of our province from the Highlands of Cape Breton to the beaches of the South Shore.

I appreciate that Sunshine Tours has chosen Armdale as their home away from home and wish them all the best with their growing business.

THE SPEAKER: Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

**ORGANIZERS: WHITNEY PIER RINK FUNDRAISER - CONGRATS.**

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, a community-based effort to save the Whitney Pier rink has eclipsed its initial goal to give the rink a more stable footing entering the off-season.

From March 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup>, a hockey tournament, a dance, and an auction were held by community organizers to raise \$30,000. That was their hope. When the tournament ended, they ended up raising \$41,491.25 through team entry fees, even splits, dance proceeds, and other sales.

Kyle Mollons, one of the organizers for the Pier Community Hockey Fundraiser - sponsored by the Sydney Credit Union - says they are planning events for the Summer. I can't wait.

Congratulations to organizers Kyle Mollons, Rory Allan MacDonald, Sharon Turner, Maria Rizzetto, and Deboria Dee.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

**QUICK AS A WINK THEATRE: 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - RECOG.**

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: As someone who loves live theatre, I am delighted to rise today and acknowledge the amazing work that Quick as a Wink Theatre Society does for the arts community of Hants West and the Annapolis Valley.

They are a non-profit, charitable community theatre society which was founded by Michelle Herx in January of 2003. The Society recently celebrated 20 magical years of making us laugh, cry, sing, and dance. In those 20 years, Quick as a Wink Theatre has produced 64 stage presentations along with numerous galas, theatre camps, and so much more.

For a community theatre group to be successful, it requires a lot of volunteer work, donations, community involvement, and, most of all, hard work. Hats off to all involved for their amazing accomplishments.

Mr. Speaker, if you ever have the opportunity to see a show, you can rest assured that you will not be disappointed.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**FLOORBALL TEAM: CH'SHIP PERF. - CONGRATS.**

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, floorball is a new sport in Nova Scotia, but it is popular around the world, particularly in Europe, where league games can draw thousands.

One of my constituents, Steve Broome, has been instrumental in bringing floorball to Nova Scotia. The U19 women's national team competed last Fall at the U19 Women's World Floorball Championships, which took place in Katowice, Poland.

Our Canadian national team consisted of Reanne Curry, Ida Hudson, Sophie Pomeroy, Hana Hutchinson, Jeryn Isenor, Scotia Broome, Caelyn Parker, and Lily Bergevin, who are all from Nova Scotia; along with Macy and Elly Peters from Ontario; Filippa Dorais from Sweden; and Elise Van Thielen from Belgium. These young women all self-funded their trip to Poland for the championship games, where they brilliantly represented Canada.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in congratulating these outstanding young women athletes on a valiant effort against the well-established floorball nations. The future of Canadian floorball is bright.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**CHILD WELFARE ADV. COALITION: BENEFIT ADVOCACY - RECOG.**

GARY BURRILL: Five years ago, a group of social workers and community members came together to form the Child Welfare Advocacy Group out of a shared concern over how a number of practices of Nova Scotia's Child Welfare Services were having a negative impact on their clients.

At the top of that list was the practice by which when a child or children is or are placed under the care of the minister, the family's Canada Child Benefit and Nova Scotia Child Benefit were directed to the Province of Nova Scotia. This practice was very negative because at the very time when parents were attempting to improve their situations, this major component of the family's income was being taken away, intensifying pressure on the family.

It was therefore very welcome when, on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the deputy minister announced that the department is implementing financial stability payments to replace the Canada Child Benefit and Nova Scotia Child Benefit for all families whose children are in temporary care and custody.

The Child Welfare Advocacy Group is to be commended for the years of advocacy that have led to the ending of this injustice. Child welfare advocates now are watching closely to ensure that the financial stability payments will match, dollar for dollar, the Canada Child Benefit and Nova Scotia Child Benefit payments.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

**MUNROE, VINCENT: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.**

KENT SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to rise today to acknowledge a long-time friend and former co-worker, Vincent Munroe of Sheet Harbour. Recently, after more than 35 years, Vincent retired from his position as a driver and sanitation relocation engineer at Eastern Shore Cartage, a garbage removal company based in Watt Section.

My late father Brian and I both had the pleasure of working with Vincent for decades. He was an exceptionally loyal employee and a dedicated member of the team. He was actually the first person on the Eastern Shore to operate a one-person garbage truck - a huge innovation at the time.

Vincent is beloved in the community of Sheet Harbour and surrounding communities. He is well-known and respected for his positive attitude and for going above and beyond his responsibilities. It was common knowledge that Vincent went outside of his curbside garbage removal scope and would personally remove garbage from the porches and decks of the elderly, frail, and ill.

I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating Vincent on his retirement and to thank him for his constant displays of kindness and exceptional work ethic for more than 30 years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

**JENNIFER: CONSTITUENCY WORK - RECOG.**

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, I stand to recognize and acknowledge my office manager/assistant, Jennifer. Jennifer has worked with me for a year now, and I can tell you that she is a great addition to my office. She continues to oversee and look after the constituents. She will go out of her way to take care of any of the constituents.

As we say in our constituency, it doesn't matter what political stripe you are, you can come into my office, and you will be taken care of.

Thank you, Jennifer, for all your work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**ROBART, BISHOP JOYCE: QPJ MEDAL RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Bishop Joyce Robart, who is a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal, which was presented in December 2022 in Halifax Needham.

As we know, the purpose of the medal program is to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to the province and community. Bishop Joyce Robart did just that through religion and her community work.

Bishop Joyce has been a foundation in our community. When it comes to counsel and understanding, her strength and faith have always been available in a time of need to many in our community. Bishop Joyce has volunteered countless hours to families in need during times of despair, as well as being there for celebrations of life and marriage to family.

I was honoured and privileged to present this medal to Bishop Joyce. She'll know what I mean when I say Aunt Lena is so proud of her.

I ask all members of this House to join me in celebrating and recognizing a wonderful recipient, Joyce Robart.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

**RHYNOLD, ADAM: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the life of Adam Rhynold of Little Dover.

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, Adam passed away at the age of 50. Adam was a participant of GOALS - that's Guysborough Options for Adaptive Living - in Guysborough for over 20 years. He loved listening to country music, watching wrestling, and laughing at his favourite sit-coms, *Three's Company* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.

Adam was a cheerful ray of sunshine within the GOALS family and loved by all. He will especially be missed by his caregiver and family friend Paula Keefe, whom he referred to as his "hunny."

I ask that members of the House join me in remembering Adam Rhynold, and sending our prayers to his family, extended family, and friends during their time of mourning.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**DALEY, DENISE: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the dedication and hard work of Denise Daley and the Parker Street Food and Furniture Bank. Denise has been the executive director of Parker Street since April 2022. They recently won the Not-For-Profit Business of the Year at the 2023 Halifax Business Awards.

Parker Street has been a registered charity since 1990. Their programs help provide the necessities of life, from food, clothing, a place to sleep, heat and, most importantly, care. Denise, who is originally from Jamaica, is a brilliant biochemist, pharmacologist, and herbal and nutritional consultant. She has done groundbreaking work in advancing diabetic medicine and hypertension. She is the innovator and CEO of Natural Soothing Remedies Limited and she has won countless awards and achievements in the field of health and wellness.

I am so pleased that she calls Clayton Park West home and we're lucky to have an amazing woman like her.

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

**GLOBAL EQUITY CAUCUS: PROM. OF LGBT+ EQUALITY - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, the Global Equality Caucus is an international network of parliamentarians and elected officials dedicated to tackling discrimination

against LGBT+ people. Membership is open to legislators around the world, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. It is the only international network of elected representatives focused exclusively on achieving LGBT+ equality. They work with NGOs, businesses, and governments to promote and drive through measures on anti-discrimination and legal equality.

Parliamentarians are in the unique position to advocate directly for political and legislative action. We pass laws, vote funds, and influence leaders. The Global Equality Caucus believes that politics has the power to change people's lives and is united in a belief of equality for all.

In recognition of International Transgender Day of Visibility tomorrow, I call upon all MLAs in Nova Scotia to consider joining the Global Equality Caucus and the global fight for LGBT+ equality.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

**MARTIN, MEGHAN: ACADEMIC SUCCESS - CONGRATS.**

NOLAN YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Meghan Martin, a 2012 graduate of Shelburne Regional High School. Meghan is currently a biomedical engineering Ph.D. student at Dalhousie University, a Techsploration alumna, and a teaching assistant.

In high school, Meghan was encouraged to pursue her interest in the sciences, competing as the only girl on the robotics team, which gave her the confidence to continue in that path. During her first research project, on tandem mechanics, she realized her love for research and her true passion of biomechanics and structural formation during fetal development. Meghan is a recipient of the prestigious Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship and a BrightRed Student Research Award for her work on the biomechanics of fetal heart development.

I respectfully ask all members to join me in congratulating Meghan on her successful and important career.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**MORGAN, JOANNE: CONSTITUENCY WORK - THANKS**

FRED TILLEY: Today I would like to rise and thank my constituency office and in particular my CA, Joanne Morgan, for the incredible amount of work she does in our community, helping people every single day, Mr. Speaker. Our office is so busy that it is very hard for Joanne to manage everything she's doing but she does a tremendous job. Everybody loves her.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome a co-op student, a work term that we have right now, Fallon Laffin. Fallon has been working with us for a little over a week or two. She is doing a great job and has been a great addition to our team.

Thank you, Joanne. Thank you, Fallon. Thank you, Sammy, our student. I couldn't do this without you guys, so thank you so much.

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

**FORT PETRIE: MIL. ARTIFACT ACQUIS. - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I have something that might pique the interest of the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. When Rob Grezel and the Sydney Harbour Fortification Society heard from the director of Maritime Equipment Programme Management that they had a military 40-millimetre gun from the HMCS *Glace Bay* in its possession, Rob quickly sprang into action to secure it.

The concept of the Maritime Equipment Programme Management is to donate military equipment to military museums, memorial parks or naval reserve units, to be installed as monuments. Rob and the Sydney Harbour Fortification Society knew this military artifact would be an incredible addition to Fort Petrie. The fort already had decommissioned military equipment on display and having a piece of the HMCS *Glace Bay* would be a welcome addition.

I am happy to inform you that soon visitors to the Fort Petrie Military Museum will enjoy having this military history placed in New Victoria, where Fort Petrie is located. As you know, it is often difficult for small museums to obtain artifacts. For the Sydney Harbour Fortification Society to have this opportunity is significant.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

**CONSTITUENTS: QPJ MEDAL RECIPS. - RECOG.**

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, I had the honour of presenting Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medals to 15 very deserving constituents of Richmond County. Without their dedication our communities would not flourish like they do. I would like to acknowledge the medal recipients again today: Anita Basque, Louise Campbell, Terry Clements, Anne Digout, Robert Goyetche, Evelyn Landry, Richard Landry, Dr. Laurie MacNeil, Louise Marchand, Allison Martell, Shirley McNamara . . .

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



The time is now 2:00 p.m., and we'll open it up to Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. We'll go until 2:50 p.m.

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

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

[2:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

### **DOJ: MCC RECOMMENDATIONS - COMMIT**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Today is a difficult day for Nova Scotians, especially the families of those who were lost on that terrible day in April of 2020. Many loved ones were lost and now many Nova Scotians continue to grieve these senseless losses every single day. We hope that the release of today's report will mark the start of the next part of the long journey that we have to travel together. This is an opportunity for us all to work together on an issue of great importance, and I want to pledge to the government that our caucus is united in doing whatever it takes to make this work. I'd like to ask the Premier: Will he commit to working through this together with all 55 members in this Chamber?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, through you to the honourable member on behalf of the Premier, what I would say is we have not had a chance to review the recommendations yet, but it's a very significant event. It's a very significant report and we would hope that we would actually have the collaboration from those across the aisle to help us, so we can all work for the best of all Nova Scotians.

KELLY REGAN: We will all need time to carefully digest and fully comprehend the detailed recommendations that the commission has brought forward. The executive summary alone runs to over 300 pages. The families have lost so much; they are owed nothing less than our full efforts. So again, will the Premier commit today that once there has been appropriate time to digest the recommendations, that there will be continued updates to the public so Nova Scotians can be informed of the progress on the recommendations?

BRAD JOHNS: I think the Premier as well as all members of the PC caucus would agree that we owe it to Nova Scotians that Nova Scotians are updated and kept updated. We've waited a long time for this - the families, the survivors. And ideally I would also say that we're hoping that although the report does have recommendations, we're going to work towards those and not try to point fingers at anybody else, but to work for the best for Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**EECD: CHILD CARE SPACES - INCREASE**

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Last year the estimated amount of federal funding this department received was over \$100 million. This is a huge amount, but the results don't add up. In the Central Zone, for example, there were 122 fewer regulated child care spaces in December 2022 than there were when this government was elected - and I'll table that. My question is: Not only aren't things improving, they're getting worse - what is going on in this department?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: We are undertaking transformational change in child care. I vividly remember 12 years ago waiting in anticipation, putting my name on child care waiting lists, because I had two children under the age of two and we needed spaces. The reality is this is a sector that has been neglected for decades, and we are doing the work, putting in the time, putting in the effort and doing the work to transform this sector and deliver child care for Nova Scotians that's affordable, that's accessible, that's inclusive, and this is quality child care.

The question from the member opposite was, where is the money going and what work is being done? Well, I can tell you right now, one of the significant things we did last year was increase wages for our early childhood educators. (Applause) We added 14 to 49 per cent on most of our ECE wages. And that was in addition to the millions of dollars . . .

SUZY HANSEN: Yesterday in this House we asked the Premier about this government's failure to deliver child care spaces as promised. He replied that affordable child care was the focus and goal. But the current situation is becoming less affordable for many families who are left with no option but to pay \$1,400 deposits just to get their name on a wait-list, including \$200 in a non-refundable deposit. These types of fees have been banned in other parts of Canada, but this government is allowing the shortage to continue and forcing families to pay. Will the minister commit to outlawing non-refundable deposits for child care spots, as they have done in other parts of this country?

BECKY DRUHAN: I'm really disappointed that I hadn't heard from the member opposite about this particular issue prior to Question Period. I look forward to getting details on that and looking into it. I can assure the member opposite and Nova Scotians that we are, in fact, working to make child care more affordable. Indeed, last year, we reduced fees by half. Nova Scotians are now paying 50 per cent less from what they did two years ago. What does that mean? That means hundreds of dollars in the pockets every single month of Nova Scotia families who have children in child care. We are doing the work to make child care more affordable.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**FTB: MOST PGM. CUT-OFF - EXPLAIN**

HON. KELLY REGAN: In June of last year, this government announced its More Opportunity for Skilled Trades program, which it billed as a measure that was “aimed at attracting and retaining young people in key sectors and shaping the workforce of tomorrow.” I’ll table that. The tax benefit is for apprentices and tradespeople who are under the age of 30. The MOST program will return their provincial income tax paid on the first \$50,000 of income earned. Could the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration please explain how the cut-off age of 30 was arrived at?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: The program actually came out of the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. I will say that there was an interest with that program to focus on young people in the province and young people who would consider coming to our province.

KELLY REGAN: I thank the Finance and Treasury Board Minister for his valiant effort; however, he didn’t answer the question.

The average age for an apprentice is 28. For tradespeople, it’s older, and for women, apprentices or tradespeople, it’s older still. It often takes women longer to decide to go into the trades, and then it can take them longer to actually complete their hours for a variety of reasons, including child-bearing. I’ll table that.

As the average age of an apprentice is 28, there is a very real possibility that women tradespersons and apprentices will miss out on the full benefit of this program. Can the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board indicate whether they will extend the age cut-off for women apprentices and tradespersons so they too can reap the benefits of this program?

ALLAN MACMASTER: There’s no question that the More Opportunity for Skilled Trades is a novel idea. It’s a program that we have not seen before in this province. It’s a new program. Our government will always assess efforts we make to help stimulate the economy and to help grow the number of people working in skilled trades, as the member has said. Certainly, this is something that we will continue to review. We’ve just had the program around for a year now. We’ll be looking at all of these things.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

#### **DHW: HOSP. CHAPEL CLOSED - INTERVENE**

HON. KEITH IRVING: The Valley Regional Hospital recently had its chapel doors locked on March 17<sup>th</sup>, to the surprise and shock of the community. We are being told that this has been closed so that they can use the space to accommodate a large piece of training equipment. This has disappointed many in the community. Those in the faith community are strongly voicing their disappointment. The administration is saying and telling the community that they are looking for a new location in the hospital, but removing

the hospital from a central location where families and patients and staff can access it seems cruel.

THE SPEAKER: Question, please.

KEITH IRVING: This chapel has served thousands of people in my community. Will the minister intervene in this terrible decision?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I want to thank the member for the question. I know it's very important to the folks in the area. There was a space evaluation undertaken by the facility, and the current space was deemed to be necessary for training, for simulation. They are working now on developing a new space, a multi-denominational interfaith space. Chaplaincy services do continue, and I know that they are working with the community through the chaplaincy program in order to support the community.

KEITH IRVING: I think what really troubles us is the way that this was dealt with.

Clearly the department and the hospital have known for months about a large piece of equipment coming. You say they did studies. There was no communication or discussion with the community. No communication with the faith community. I'm told that the hospital chaplain got word of this through a letter.

This chapel has deep and significant history. I will table a document that talks about how this was created by the community. They raised a million dollars in the community for the perpetual funding of this Chapel. To lock the doors to the spiritual home of our community with no warning is insulting.

I ask again: Will the minister reverse this decision?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, to the member, I was made aware just recently about this. I know that through the work in the facility they did look for, and are continuing to look for, an appropriate space for interfaith prayer. Their Chaplaincy services do continue. I know that they're working on a solution in the facility as we speak.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

### **DOJ: VICTIM SERVS. PROGRAM - EXPAND**

ANGELA SIMMONDS: The provincial Victim Services Program provides a variety of services for victims of crime as they navigate the legal system, including counselling.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this program is not available for everyone. Survivors of sexual violence are only eligible for counselling in cases where charges are laid. We

know that not only is there already a system issue with prosecuting cases of sexual assault, but survivors also need access to these services before a decision to prosecute is ever made in almost every case.

My question is for the Minister of Justice: Will this government right this wrong and commit to expanding the Victim Services Program to cover all survivors of sexualized violence?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: I will certainly take it back and have staff review it with me.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: I certainly hope that they will commit to the necessary action. There is another portion of that, however, and it's not just the eligibility: It's also the cap of \$2,000 of counselling. There's actually nothing more than that.

Mr. Speaker, survivors of sexual violence need to know that the proper supports for them are there immediately and are not just a subject of arbitrary limit. They deserve full support of this. My question is: Will this government commit to removing the cap on counselling services for survivors of sexualized violence?

BRAD JOHNS: Although at this time I can't commit to that, I will certainly commit to having staff review that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

### **SNSIS: FIXED-TERM LEASES ABUSE - STOP**

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister Responsible for Residential Tenancies. I will table the document that I want to quote from. It's an internal departmental memo which we've obtained through freedom of information where officials in the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services informed the minister last year of this:

“Fixed-term leases are being used by some landlords as a ‘probationary’ period to see if tenants work out. . . . If not, the tenancy either went to another fixed-term lease or ended the lease. This has led to housing insecurity for tenants in fixed-term lease agreements.”

Will the minister acknowledge, as his own department acknowledges, that fixed-term leases are a real cause of housing insecurity in Nova Scotia?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: As I indicated before and I've acknowledged on the floor of this Legislature, on occasion - the member knows that I've used “on occasion” because he's quoted me - there are some landlords who use fixed-term leases for their unintended purpose, Mr. Speaker. That's something that we do not support.

Again, we also acknowledge that there are some tenants and landlords who do not follow the rules. That's what's the driving force behind my department doing a full public awareness and education campaign to inform and ensure that Nova Scotia tenants and landlords understand their rights and responsibilities.

[2:15 p.m.]

When it comes to fixed-term leases, we will continue to engage with both tenant and landlord organizations. We will look at this file and act when we need to.

GARY BURRILL: Yet, Mr. Speaker, the minister's words "on occasion" are not the words that are reflected in the department's memo. It says there further:

"Tenants can be put into a precarious situation when fixed term leases are the only option presented; they are unsure if at the end of the fixed-term lease they will have a place to live."

The minister's own officials say that fixed-term leases are putting people in a precarious situation and leaving them unsure whether or not they have a place to live. Other parts of Canada that have rent caps don't allow this.

Why won't the minister put a stop to it here in our province?

COLTON LEBLANC: Again, I and our government support the intended use of fixed-term leases. They play an important role in giving tenants an option if they need a short-term rental.

We will continue to look at ways of modernizing and strengthening the Residential Tenancies Program, again looking through the lens of balance, of engaging with both our tenant and landlord organizations. Fixed-term leases are one of the topics that has been discussed and continues to be discussed with our stakeholders, Mr. Speaker.

We will continue to engage with them, and as required, will bring legislation to modernize and strengthen the Act at a later date.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

### **DHW: MENINGITIS B VACCINE STRATEGY - UPDATE**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, at Health Committee in January, our caucus asked Dr. Strang about coverage for meningitis B vaccines. Kai Matthews, a young Nova Scotian from a community I represent, lost his life to meningitis B in July 2021. His family has been advocating on behalf of him ever since to increase access to meningitis B vaccine.

This past year, unfortunately, we lost two more Nova Scotians at universities. At the committee, Dr. Strang talked about working with Atlantic counterparts on a meningitis B strategy to vaccinate students living in residence.

Is this strategy coming to fruition? Can the minister please update the House?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I want to thank the member sincerely for bringing this to the floor. I know that losing someone to meningitis B is devastating for families and communities - young people at the prime of their lives.

We are working with Public Health through the Atlantic university presidents specifically around looking at how to support an educational campaign. We have also written to NACI, asking them to review the recommendations around meningitis B. They haven't been reviewed for a period of time. I did have the opportunity to meet with some advocates recently about it. There is work happening in the department.

IAIN RANKIN: I appreciate the answer from the minister. Dr. Strang did say that work has begun with post-secondary institutions to prevent future outbreaks in universities. The budget that is before the House will need to have some funding put forward to Public Health, Mr. Speaker. I want to ask the minister: Will this government commit to providing the funding needed for Public Health to administer a meningitis B vaccine at universities, especially in our residences?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Typically, we do not provide vaccinations that are not recommended in certain circumstances by NACI, which is why we have reached out to them to ask them to review. I know that Public Health is also in contact with NACI around their guidelines. There is active work happening in the department now on this file, and we will continue to work with the university presidents through Public Health, as well as potentially education to reach our Grade 12 students. There is work under way in terms of how best to support students who will be attending university - post-secondary - in the Fall.

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

#### **DHW: FAMILY PRACTICE REPLACEMENT - UPDATE**

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, late last year, the Hammonds Plains Family Practice experienced a retirement. Dr. Swinamer has moved into retirement. We wish her well. She had been in discussion with recruitment about a replacement since March of last year. They have been working hard to fill the space, so much so that local resident Jean Lumsden started a campaign to try to assist the effort. Ms. Lumsden received a response from the department indicating, "I finally got an email back in late December from them, saying that a family doctor was going to be in place soon." Can the minister please update the clinic and the community on when they should see a replacement doc?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I don't know exactly when the physician will arrive. If they do have someone, it's due to recruitment efforts. I would have to double-check and get back.

BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, thank you, through you, to the minister for that response. I'd also like to note that the same clinic has been making an effort to find a permanent home for a nursing student who has been doing her practicum at that location. She is a local resident and having a place to work in her home community would be a win for the clinic, for the community and for this nurse. We know we want to try to support anybody working in the health care system to have this type of best-case scenario so they can hit the ground running and get to work. I am wondering why the department won't enable this type of a hire when these requests come from local clinics like the one in Hammonds Plains.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, we are looking at how to best support practices throughout the province, and collaborative practices are important. I'm not sure if it's a nurse or a nurse practitioner that the member is speaking about. Generally, when nurse practitioners are involved in practises, we do our best to match, but we do have some contractual agreements because of collective agreements that have to be abided by. Again, it would be helpful to know a little bit more about it in order to answer the member's question more thoroughly.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

#### **EECD: NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL - UPDATE**

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, the middle school in Sydney Mines is at the end of its useful life; it has been around for a long time. As a former board member, we did some work to extend it, along with other board members. There is a new middle school slated for the area and I was just wondering if I could ask the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development if we could get an update on site selection and the progress.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: We know that when a community gets a new school there is a lot of excitement, a lot of anticipation around that. We share that excitement and that anticipation. I can share with the member opposite that site selection work is under way and when news arises and when there are more developments the region will be in communication with families.

FRED TILLEY: I, too, share the excitement of the potential site but it has been under review now for quite some time. I'm wondering if the minister could actually give us a timeline as to when we can expect ground to be broken on this new school.



BECKY DRUHAN: I don't have a timeline to share right now but I can assure the member opposite that when there are any updates, the region will be communicating with the community and the families.

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

### **DCS: CHILD AND YOUTH COMMISSION - FUND**

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Community Services. Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians were happy to hear this government's commitment last year to the creation of a Child and Youth Commission as a positive step in the right direction. It has now been a full year since that announcement and the public consultation was completed over four months ago. This seemed to be progressing until the release of the government's budget last week, which showed that zero dollars were designated for the creation of this commission. If the minister is committed to creating a Child and Youth Commission, why didn't she provide funding for it in the budget?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Thank you so much for that important question. I remain very committed to definitely forming a Child and Youth Commission. We heard from over 1,000 people by email and we've had over 180 consultations. When we thought we were ready to release a What We Heard report, we had a number of individuals who were stakeholders who took part in consultations who wanted to add more. I certainly did not want to go out and then have them say, well, we missed this part, so we are going to continue having those ongoing conversations with them and make sure we get it right. This is too important for us to get it wrong.

KENDRA COOMBES: I agree, it is too important, and we need to get it right, but that doesn't mean we can't fund it.

The minister's mandate letter required the development of a five-year target for the reduction of childhood poverty within the first 90 days of the mandate, as well as a timeline and regular reporting requirements. On this work, last year the minister told Nova Scotians to stay tuned. However, another budget has arrived with little to address our province's alarming number of childhood poverty.

We are now 588 days into this ministerial mandate, and there is no sign of a target or a strategy. There has been no timeline set or quarterly updates made. Why are the children and families being made to wait?

KARLA MACFARLANE: What I can say is that we have done a lot of work at our department, and I feel very strong and very proud of the work that we have done, and have arrived at what was in my mandate letter, to come up with a five-year target to reduce child poverty.

We are going to get it right. There are a lot of moving pieces. I meet with a lot of other ministers because we know that solving this issue is not going to be from just the Department of Community Services, and it's not just going to be from the Province of Nova Scotia. It's all levels of government, all departments. We're getting there. It never will be as fast as any of us want . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

### **MAH: MIDDLETON RESERVOIR - FUND**

CARMAN KERR: The Town of Middleton is looking to fund their new reservoir for \$5.6 million. The town has applied to the current government for funding through the ICIP program and was denied, as they were told all funding has been committed.

This is an emergency situation. The current reservoir has been patched for years. It's deteriorating rapidly and it's operating at less than half of its capacity. If this reservoir fails, the impact will be severe. The hospital, schools, NSCC, businesses, and long-term care facilities may be forced to close, as well as residents will be without water.

Given the largest budget we've seen in the province, is the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and EMO willing to fund this emergency project right away and help the Town of Middleton and its residents?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I can confirm we did receive an application from Middleton for an ICIP Invest Canada fund for the reservoir, but it was not clear in that application the urgency. This month, we received an email indicating the extreme urgency, which we were unaware of. We sent staff to look into that. We are looking at what funding options we have. We realize the seriousness of the situation now, which we were unaware of, which was not communicated to us that clearly.

Now we know, and we're looking into it, looking at what funding options we have for them.

CARMAN KERR: I appreciate the acknowledgement that there is an emergency and they're aware of it. This is not a nice-to-have project; this is a must-have project. People need water to survive. It's an emergency waiting to happen. This kind of situation is under the minister's purview, as both in charge of EMO and Municipal Affairs and Housing. The town is scrambling to access any possible funding they can find, and they still don't have a clear path forward.

I'm thankful to the minister's senior staff for talking to me about this. I'm certainly appreciative of the minister's staff for visiting the site and that they've acknowledged this is a potential emergency. If the minister isn't prepared to help fund the project long-term,

will he commit to supporting the town and its residents in the short-term by strengthening the infrastructure as they build a new reservoir?

JOHN LOHR: What I can say is that we will certainly follow the advice of our experts in this. I can't commit to one course of action or another without having more advice.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

### **DCS: HOTEL HOUSING COST - PROVIDE**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: We know that the number of homeless or unhoused people in HRM is growing steadily. I have recently found out that there are many people living in a hotel in my riding, the Holiday Inn Express. My question to the Minister of Community Services is: How many people is this government housing in hotels in HRM, and what is the monthly cost of this?

[2:30 p.m.]

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: We know that when someone finds themselves homeless, there are very complex issues surrounding that individual. Their intention is to live a dignified life. We are there to help them.

I will say that I know for certain right now the number of individuals who are homeless in the HRM area, by the daily by-name list, is over 800. Out of those, there wouldn't be many in hotels, but I would have to get the exact number for you. I will tell you that most of them are in shelters or emergency shelters and other temporary places.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: If I could have that number of how many and the costs that were paid, because my second question is kind of related to that.

Mr. Speaker, with the rising cost of living and the rent as well, our office helped so many people with rent supplements and, unfortunately, we checked last week and actually the website said that the threshold has gone up from 30 per cent of your income to 50 per cent. I don't remember that there was an announcement on that.

Now my question to the minister is: With this change, there will be many more people who will be unhoused, so what is the reason for raising it to 50 per cent? Do they want more people unhoused?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I believe I did answer it. It was not intended to be hidden. It was changed on the website. The reason the change took place was the enormous demand on the program. We wanted to prioritize those most in need, so we changed it from 30 per cent of income to 50 per cent of income. This was earlier this year.

However, I am very pleased to say that we continue to increase the funding on the rent supplements. There is enormous demand, but we will have 1,000 new rent supplements and have added \$21 million to the program, so we continue to fund the program and work hard to make it accessible.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

### **DHW: MASSAGE THERAPY RECIPS. - PROTECT**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: The term “massage therapy” is protected under the Massage Therapist Titles Protection Act. However, using the term “massage” is not protected and anyone can put out a shingle and offer massage. If someone who is doing this is alleged to have committed a sexual assault, there is no licensing body to remove their licence and to protect the public. Can someone from the government address this problem and let us know here in the House if anything is being done to address this?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: There is work happening now, work around a common Act for registered licensed professionals. Certainly there have been some discussions with the Massage Therapists’ Association of Nova Scotia. They have title protection but, to the member’s point, they are currently not a self-regulated profession, so there are conversations happening within the department now in regard to massage therapy.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I am going to make a request that when that work is being done, they also take into consideration even using the term “massage,” so not just protecting massage therapy but protecting massage.

We have victims in our area who have come forward and reported to police. It has been months and people are still offering this service, and the public is unaware. Mr. Speaker, I feel this needs to be brought forward because there is no one protecting the public right now. I’m wondering if the minister could commit to taking this on and doing something expediently so that the public is protected.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: There is work under way in the department around looking at the regulations with massage therapists and certainly that will be part of the work. Definitions will be very necessary in order to look at how we support that profession and protecting the public.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **ECC: CLIMATE PROJECTS - FUND**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Last December, his department released 68 goals in their

long-awaited climate plan. Unfortunately, we're not seeing investment that matches the level of urgency and the work that needs to be done. Most of the climate funding in this recent budget has already been earmarked for existing projects under the Green Fund, leaving little left for work on climate goals. How does the minister expect us to meet our climate targets if he won't fund the work that we need to do to address the climate crisis?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Indeed, we did release our climate plan in December of last year, with 68 goals to guide us for the next five years. In point of fact, since forming government 18 months ago, this government's invested \$300 million in climate adaptation: \$44 million from the Green Fund, \$57 million from general revenue that went into heat pumps, and immediately following the release of our climate plan, we released our plan for heat pumps, \$140 million. (Applause)

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, to illustrate this government's priorities, this House has been sitting for six days so far and already the government members have kicked and screamed about carbon pricing 34 times. We counted. Meanwhile action and dollars to address climate change are coming up short.

Just three days before the tabling of this budget, the International Panel on Climate Change released a damning report that showed time is running out to prevent catastrophe. Governments have 10 fewer years to address climate change than previously thought, and I will table that.

Does this minister believe we can afford to wait another year to get serious about addressing climate change?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, we're not waiting. We're not marking time; we're making a difference. We're taking action. Included in the \$300 million we've invested since forming government, in December we invested \$20 million for nature conservation.

These are significant investments. These are investments that benefit Nova Scotians and will help Nova Scotians adapt to climate change. We have a strong climate plan. We have the strongest piece of climate legislation in the country. (Applause)

I am very optimistic about the future. We may hear a lot of doom and gloom from the other side about this (Interruption) but we're moving forward together.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

### **DFA: METEGHAN BREAKWATER - FUND**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, recently I had the opportunity to meet with the Meteghan Harbour Authority as they look for government support. As weather events

become increasingly extreme, the structural integrity of the breakwater at the Meteghan wharf is becoming compromised. And the consequences of losing access to the wharf would be absolutely devastating to the community.

I know that the Fisheries Minister attended over the past winter the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers. Did the Minister of Fisheries have the opportunity to bring this critical issue forward to his federal counterparts in discussions regarding small craft harbour funding?

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Commercial fishing wharves and related infrastructure are critical to the seafood industry and the importance to communities throughout Nova Scotia.

The Meteghan wharf and breakwater are the responsibility of the federal government. And I have had the opportunity to speak with Minister Murray a number of times about the need to both maintain and upgrade our small craft harbours to make them more resilient to increasing threats posed by climate change. In fact, they have spent more money.

I say we need more money than what they've spent. And I certainly support the member from Clare in his efforts to bring that to fruition, as I also do to all members of this House in rural and coastal communities that have small craft harbours.

RONNIE LEBLANC: On March 15<sup>th</sup>, I wrote a letter to the federal Minister of Finance in support of the Meteghan Harbour Authority's request for increased funding for major improvements to their infrastructure, specifically the breakwater. We need to access all available funding avenues to make sure this piece of critical infrastructure in our community is protected.

Will the minister consider writing a letter of support to the federal government to ensure that we get the funding necessary to support that wharf?

STEVE CRAIG: Certainly, I will write that letter. I would also like to recognize the importance of the fisheries and seafood sectors to Nova Scotia. We have been proactively taking on the climate change front, looking at a number of vulnerability assessments. We're doing one for our lobster industry. We are looking at our critical coastal infrastructure that supports the seafood industry. Recently, under the Climate Change Plan, our province is investing \$8.9 million in this particular area to take a look at what we can do to help the seafood sector and support the industry's adaptation efforts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

**DPW: HWY. NO. 113 CONSTRUCTION - UPDATE**

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Public Works for a quick update on Highway No. 113. As the minister is aware, this is a proposed highway that the department has had on its books for quite some time. It's an issue that's of real interest to my constituents, the constituents in Hammonds Plains, in Timberlea, and Clayton Park West - quite a few of us here. I'm just wondering if the minister could update the House on when or if that highway will be built by Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That's right. Public Works has had - I think the initial designation for proposed Highway No. 113 went in in 2009, so it has been there for quite some time. As part of the JRTA's work, which is doing absolutely incredible work, they will continue to assess that as part of the Regional Transportation Plan. I expect that plan to be finished in 2024.

BRAEDON CLARK: Also, as the minister knows, the proposed highway route passes through some of the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area, which is a proposed national urban park. I know the Minister of Environment and Climate Change has been working on that file as well. I'm just wondering if the minister could update the House on if that proposed national urban park has any bearing on whether or not that highway is built at some point.

KIM MASLAND: As the member would know, the extension for an EA is going forward. I know that the CEO of the JRTA recently had an opportunity to meet with the member and a couple of the other members across the aisle to talk about the EA going forward. We know that there is ongoing work and discussions for the proposed urban park. We also know there's ongoing work to develop the Regional Transportation Plan. I look forward to that plan coming forward, but please know - and I know the member probably has read that five-year highway plan now seven times - that it's not in the five-year highway plan.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

#### **DPW: WILLIAMS LAKE DAM ISSUE - UPDATE**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Active Transit or the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables: Could the minister give me an update on the Williams Lake Dam and the land ownership issue?

HON. KIM MASLAND: We know that we have had multiple conversations. - member and I and the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables - about the condition of Williams Lake Dam. We know it's in poor condition. The ownership has not been - determined - that's the word I'm looking for. What I do want the member to know is that I understand the concerns of his community. I don't take those lightly. We have secured funding and are working collaboratively with HRM to make sure that dam is fixed.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: That's some good news. Speaking of land ownership, can the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables give the community of Sambro an update on the land transfer issue on the old fire hall in Sambro? I know the community group had submitted an application, and they're looking to take ownership of the land to build a long-overdue community centre. I would like to get an update on that, and if they could give us some timelines around the process.

[2:45 p.m.]

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Yes, there is an application that came in this calendar year from that association that's interested. I do know the application is currently being reviewed by the department staff. There hasn't been anything that has arrived on my desk to make the final decision as yet, but as soon as we get that on my desk and make a decision, the community will certainly know.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **ECC: COASTAL CONSTRUCTION LEGISLATION - ENACT**

SUSAN LEBLANC: My question is, again, for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. We're approaching another construction season without any ability to regulate how people build on our coasts. This week, we learned that the minister has thrown out any timeline for making this happen, saying his department is engaging in yet another round of consultations. These have been going on since 2018. Meanwhile, development is accelerating in coastal areas as people seek to be ushered in under the old rules. Can the minister see that every day that goes by without regulations is a day that puts the coastline at greater climate risk?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: In 2019, this caucus voted in favour of the Coastal Protection Act because we recognized how critical that is. Nova Scotians are a coastal people. We're going to continue to live by the coast. However, we need to recognize the hazards that can be associated with that. These regulations are critical that we get correct. A lot of work has gone into them, and more work will continue to go into them. There's a lot of support for the Coastal Protection Act, but there's also a lot of folks that don't even know the Act exists, and a lot of folks that don't even know what the entailing regulations could imply. We recognize that more work needs to be done on these . . .

SUSAN LEBLANC: The minister said it himself in 2019. The time for consultation is over. If people don't know about this Act, then the government needs to educate them about it. One of the recent examples of coastal construction is a large infill wall on the beautiful and popular Crescent Beach in Lunenburg County. It happens to have been built by the owner of Cresco - just saying - the same developer that has benefited from the government's dubious hotel purchase in Bedford. As one resident who grew up near the beach said, "There has been a big outcry on how this is being done. Why are there no



protections in place?” The government’s delays are only benefiting people who are dead set on building under the old rules. When will the government actually protect people on our coastline and release the coastal protection regulations?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Getting buy-in, getting understanding is key, especially on something as critical as this, and acknowledging there’s still a lot of awareness. I want to thank the honourable member for saying how important education is. That’s why I’m happy to inform the House that I’ve directed my department to begin targeted consultation with property owners to raise awareness, to raise education. To say that there’s not any other protections in place, that’s not the case. Residents of this province can reach out to their municipalities and talk to their zoning and by-laws. They can reach out to CLIMAtlantic. That has information. They can reach out to Natural Resources Canada. They can reach out to Municipal Affairs and Housing, who’s partnering with the federal government for flood plain mapping and lidar.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

#### **EECD: NEW BLT SCHOOL - UPDATE**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: The collection of Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea is some of the fastest-growing communities in the province. Right now, our population is booming. We have developments under way, and we need a new school. One of the developments that has approval for over 3,000 units, with just a couple hundred of them built right now, is Brunello Estates. They have land designated for the purpose of a school, and I’m wondering if the minister can share how negotiations are going with her department to ensure that we can build a new school in Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: We are well aware of the need to proactively plan for and build for the expansion and growth in our communities, and that relates to all areas of infrastructure in addition to schools. One thing that I’m very proud of and very excited about is the work that we’ve done to make sure that we have capital planning and growth planning that reflects exactly that.

A couple of things that I can speak to now in terms of what we’re doing around that to make sure that we have the flexibility and agility to meet growth needs: One of the exciting things that we’ve announced is a plan to include, going forward, the acquisition and use of modulars. We know that we need to be flexible and responsive. Capital builds take months, take years to plan, and years to build.

IAIN RANKIN: We do have those modular facilities at the school, and they’re full, and we have more developments on the way. Her own operations team provided the enrolment projection data to the minister with the recommendation to secure this land for a new school.

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

The honourable member for Dartmouth North on an introduction.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I would just like to draw the members' attention to the gallery opposite where my awesome nephew Malachi Leblanc is here visiting. He has a PD day today. There are long discussions in our house about who his favourite MLA is, Mr. Speaker. It is between the member for Halifax Atlantic; the member for Timberlea-Prospect, who is his own MLA; you, Mr. Speaker; and then me, who is his aunt. All I am saying is I don't think either of those members gave him a Christmas present last year. (Interruption) Yes, the member for Timberlea-Prospect gave him a pin. I just want to ask the House to join me in welcoming Malachi. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: It's going to be interesting to hear the final vote.

### **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**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, this gives me a good opportunity today to speak a little bit about the budget this year and a few things that I think some of my colleagues on different sides of the House have said but that can be reiterated and hopefully some new thoughts as well.

Since the election on August 17, 2021, I have been watching the government very closely, analyzing its moves, seeing what's going on, as we all do on the Opposition side. I must say I'm having a really hard time figuring out exactly what this government stands for. What is its philosophy? What is its vision for the province?

I am sure that members on the government side would say, it's obvious, we said it from the beginning, that we were going to fix health care. Okay, we'll grant it that they have said that. But when you really think about that, Mr. Speaker, that means almost nothing. What does that mean, fix health care? Does that mean we have less people looking

for a family doctor? Does that mean we have surgical wait times that meet the national standard? Does that mean we have less ambulances idling outside of ERs? All of those things? Does it mean any of those?

If you say something that is so vague and so general that it can mean anything to anybody, then it becomes impossible to disprove. That's smart politics - I will grant that - but it's probably not good policy. I think that in this budget, we can see the impact of that lack of direction and lack of focus.

Okay, fix health care. What else are we talking about?

Before I was elected, Mr. Speaker, I worked in public relations, and I worked as a journalist. Communications has kind of been my professional life in a lot of ways. I see echoes of my past life in PR when I look at a lot of documents that come out from this government with catchy slogans that, again, actually mean nothing when you look at them word by word. They come by, somebody says them, and they go in one ear and out the other. When you actually sit down and look at these things, it becomes almost nonsensical.

"More health care faster": three words - what does that mean, more health care faster? I think I'm reasonably intelligent, but I look at that, and it means nothing. It means nothing, and it means everything. We hear more and faster in the capital plan and more health care faster in the budget. This is a government that wants to govern by slogan, govern by sound bite, govern by catchy phrase and assume and hope - I think hope - that Nova Scotians aren't paying enough attention to realize what's actually going on.

Our job is opposition, and what I want to talk about today are the reasons why that is not the case, and these promises are not being fulfilled. I read the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board's Budget Speech this morning. I read it all. It was wonderful, but I will say that the first line was another example of something that sounds decent, but when you look at it, what does it mean? The very first line in the speech is "This budget is about empowering people." Okay, with what and in what ways? I don't know. I read through the rest of it, and I couldn't tell.

What I have determined when I look at the budget is that I wanted to focus on the thing that was easiest to measure. Budgets are about measurement. They're about spending, saving, cost, taxes, all these things. They're about measurement. So that actually gives us an insight into where government priorities really lie. It's a good opportunity for us in the Opposition - and for government members and for the public - to kind of lift up the curtain a little bit and see what's really going on.

I look at the government's messaging on this - More Healthcare, Faster. Okay, let's talk about more. That's an easy word to understand - more. What do we have more of? On March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, as compared to August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021 - when the election happened. That's about 18 months. We're talking about a year and a half. Here's what we have more of: We

have more people without a family doctor - tens of thousands more. About 60,000 more people across the province, but as I've said, particularly in the Central Zone. So we have more of that.

We have more ER closures across the province. It doubled in 2021-22 from the previous year - thousands of hours of ER closures. So we have more of that. We have more people walking out of ERs - thousands of people. About 8,000, I believe, walked out of ERs last year, deciding it wasn't worth their time to stay there. Can you imagine?

We have more people waiting in line at walk-in clinics at 7:00 in the morning, 7:30 in the morning, in the cold, in the heat, in the rain, in the snow, in the sleet. They're waiting hours. They're getting in if they're lucky. They might get through the door to actually have somewhere warm and somewhere to sit down, but they might not see a doctor that day. Then what do they do? Well, then they go to the emergency room, and they add to the more people who are in those rooms.

We have more delays until we reach surgical benchmark times. In the Minister of Health and Wellness's mandate letter, the Premier asked to meet national standards for surgical benchmarks within 18 months. That was not done. We still have thousands of Nova Scotians on the wait-list for surgeries of all types - from very minor to the most serious and severe cases of surgery. So we have more of that.

We also have something that, again, sounds good on the surface - and the government has talked about this a lot since the budget - more rent supplements. Okay, that sounds good - a thousand more rent supplements. We've got 8,000 rent supplements now. So being a fair person, I said, okay, that sounds good, let's dig a little deeper. You don't have to dig very deep to realize that is a bit like fool's gold.

As the member for Clayton Park West says - as the member for Needham asked about last week - the threshold for rent supplements has gone from 30 per cent of your income to 50 per cent. So imagine - people in Nova Scotia who are paying 49.9 per cent of their income on housing are not eligible for rent supplements in this province anymore. If we have a thousand more rent supplements, but those who need it can't access them anymore, how is that a good thing? How is that something to be proud of - to crow about - to say how great it is?

We have two issues with that: We have a threshold that is prohibitive for many, many people, and we don't have enough apartments to rent. So even if you are eligible for rent supplements, good luck finding something - and then good luck finding something that you can afford within your budget. So that's something there was more of in this budget, and it sounds good - but it's actually not what it sounds like at first glance.

Again, on the housing side, we have more repairs for public housing. That's a good thing. I believe we have an extra \$15 million for repairs for public housing units, and that's

a good thing. I wouldn't suggest it's not. But we also have closing in on 7,000 people in Nova Scotia who are on the wait-list for public housing. The majority of those folks are seniors, people with young kids, and single people who have nowhere to go. This government has not shown interest in building new public housing units, which is the only way that wait-list is going to be reduced in a significant way.

[3:00 p.m.]

So we have more repairs for housing. But again, it's not addressing the core issue at hand, which is that 7,000 people - the size of a good-sized town here in Nova Scotia - are waiting for public housing, and still waiting.

Here's another thing we have more of, Mr. Speaker: We have more people who have nowhere to live - many more, hundreds more. I believe the number is close to 900 people in HRM who are living outside, sleeping on park benches, outside of buildings, in parks. I saw a picture a few months ago of a tent in Point Pleasant Park, I believe, with a wheelchair outside of it - just to give you a sense of what's really going on for people in this province.

Again, it's not just in HRM. It's all across the province. If we have 900 people who are homeless in HRM, it's reasonable to assume we would have a similar number outside. Let's say 1,500 to 1,600 people in this province who have nowhere to live. That number has gone way, way up since August 17, 2021, when this government was elected. So we have more of that.

We have more people who are stressed about the fact that their income assistance payments are not going nearly as far as they once did. Over the last two years, inflation was somewhere in the range of 15 per cent over two years. If you're on income assistance - which as we know, is a paltry amount to begin with - your purchasing power has gone down 15 per cent in two years. We have seen zero dollars from this government in its first two budgets to help those who need our help the most.

All Nova Scotians are affected by inflation. We know that. But the burden and the brunt of that is shouldered disproportionately by those in the lower income threshold - and particularly by those who are on income assistance, and who have seen very little support from this government. We have more people waking up every day worried, stressed, anxious, worn out - who have the burden of waking up every day and figuring out: How am I going to feed myself?

Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker? We have thousands of people in this province who wake up asking themselves that every day - how am I going to feed myself? How am I going to get my kids through the day? How am I going to afford my medications? Those are decisions and choices that people are having to make that I don't think they should have

to make. I think this government has neglected them to their detriment - of both the government and the folks who are in that situation as well.

We also see more reckless spending. I won't go too deep into this issue because the members for Northside-Westmount, Kings South, and others have said this as well. We see more and more and more spending, going out three or four years down the line, adding billions of dollars of debt to our province's books. This year, we're going to spend over \$700 million on interest payments alone. I think it's the fourth or fifth largest line item in the budget. More than the vast majority of the departments is just interest on our debt. That's an issue that's going to ripple down for decades to come. When my kids are 20 or 30 years older now, they'll be the ones who are having to shoulder that burden when they become taxpayers and they start working in the system.

I think what we also see is more excuses and finger-pointing at everyone else, whether that's international events, or the bogeyman in Ottawa, the federal Liberals, who are punishing us with the Liberal carbon tax - I guess, 35 times now, I just said it. I understand that the Province of Nova Scotia is a small place by global standards, with a small economy. But to suggest, as this government often does, that there's nothing they can do about these issues is simply an abdication of their responsibility. I think we have seen more excuses than answers so far.

I think it can be very easy when we are in these seats - and we live and breathe politics and we think about it every day - to get lost in the minutiae of what's really going on. People outside of this Chamber, as we all know, don't think about that. They don't think about the work we do here at nearly the same level of detail. I think they should ask themselves a very simple question. That is, when they wake up in the morning, are they better off now than they were on August 17, 2021? I hope they ask themselves that question again in July 2025, when we have the next provincial election.

I think for many, many Nova Scotians, the answer to that question of whether or not they're better off now than they were when this government was elected is going to be no. That is a very simple way to frame the issue of politics, but I think it's an accurate way and I think it's a way that people who are not invested in the system, as we are, think.

Whether you are a person who is struggling to get by on a day-to-day basis; whether you are a business owner; whether you are a senior who is waiting for surgery; whether you are a parent of young children who is desperate to get your kid into daycare and there are no spaces for them, and you've been waiting months and months, and you are out \$1,500 just waiting for that space that is not guaranteed. If you are a student who continues to be crushed by high tuition costs; if you are a person who has lost their family doctor, either from retirement or the doctor has moved or in many cases, unfortunately, burnout, and a lack of support from this government. If you are any of those people here in Nova Scotia, you are, unfortunately, worse off than you were on August 17, 2021 when this government was elected.

This budget does not do enough for those who need it the most. I think this government is very good at talking the talk, and making things sound good, but actual results are not there. I don't expect they will be there throughout this budget and that's why we're opposed to it.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak into Supply on the subject of an autism strategy for Nova Scotia. We are far past time in the need for an autism strategy in this province, but at the same time there is a lot of federal momentum that we can grab on to now if we act.

This past week, the House of Commons unanimously passed Bill S-203, the Federal Framework on Autism Spectrum Disorder. This will help prioritize and accelerate a national autism strategy coming this year. Autistic Nova Scotians, their families, and their caregivers want, and have long wanted, to work alongside the provincial government to make sure our province is ready to meet the recommendations that come from this national strategy.

Nova Scotia has the highest autism prevalence rates among five-year-olds in the country, while support programs and services to support autistic people in Nova Scotia remain fragmented. We are the only Atlantic Province without a formal autism strategy. The lack of this framework places us at a significant disadvantage to negotiate with the federal government when discussions between first ministers begin.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how information is processed in the brain. People on the autism spectrum are diverse and may have high or low support needs - however, the condition is present for life. For this reason, individuals need access to services across their life span based on their level of support needs.

Autism prevalence has increased significantly over the past two decades - from one in 2,500 in 2000 to one in 34 in 2022 - for children aged five in Nova Scotia. With increased prevalence comes increased pressure to access critical supports and services across the life span. If we know more, we need to act - and we need to act better.

Autistic children and adolescents rely on the school setting for the provision of the majority of supports and services until graduation. As such, if services are limited or unavailable in these settings, autistic children and adolescents may not receive necessary supports and services. How regional centres for education use funds to support autistic students' needs can vary considerably. Few provinces or territories offer specific guidelines to school boards on how funding should be spent, how to conduct needs assessments, or how to outline supportive programs, practicums or curricula for autistic students.

I will say that having supported my son Jason - who was in the Chamber earlier today - through his school career, there was actually just never a good fit, so we were never captured under a specific learning plan. It was very hard to get an individual program plan in place because the needs were quite specific. We heard rumours of autism specialists, but I have to say I never met one. Frankly, the lack of those services really impacted his ability to obtain an education and at times threatened his very right to education in this province.

Mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, attentional difficulties, and behaviours that challenge are common amongst autistic students, and yet services can be scarce. I've spoken to folks who have come to this House to talk about the need to support educational support workers fairly and equally, about the important work that they do, but they are not well enough supported or resourced. There is a need for specific services and supports for autistic people during times of school transition because of the greater uncertainty that comes with changes in roles or responsibilities, routines, and support structures.

When supports and services are delayed, unavailable, or ineffectual, service providers in the educational context may struggle to meet the needs of autistic children and adolescents despite legislative mandates. In these instances, autistic students may experience school exclusion such as disruptions or transitions out of mainstream or special education classrooms. Speaking to my own experience, Jason was excluded from public school in this province for Grade 3, Grade 4, and Grade 5, and we had to fight if we wanted to get a half-hour of classroom time in each day.

Due to ongoing system issues, some Canadians also voluntarily remove their autistic children from school, temporarily or permanently, to home-school them because of concerns regarding the child's development, academic success, or safety. Reasons that are reported for short-term or permanent exclusions can range from difficulties dealing with the complex demands of a school day, sensory responses, or bullying. And certainly we saw that in our case as well, where Jason experienced extensive bullying during his elementary school years that was never properly addressed by the school system, and that continues to this day to really impact how he views group experiences and prepares for them.

Other challenges faced by autistic students include a lack of autism education for those training to be teachers or educational assistants, few opportunities for professional development regarding evidence-informed educational supports and teaching methods, limited access to the necessary tools and resources to effectively support students, inadequate individual needs-based support, as I mentioned, reductions in the educational funding, policy framed around the medical model of disability, and restricted parent participation. I think what I would say, too, is that a lot of the evidence-based programs that were being introduced into the public school system when Jason was there actually were counter-indicative for folks with autism. In fact, because of the lack of emphasis, the lack



of knowledge, the lack of support - actually, inappropriate behavioural supports were being recommended, and probably made the situation worse.

[3:15 p.m.]

I think this government has invested into early childhood identification and intervention, which is certainly very important, but there's actually a whole other stream of autism diagnoses. For folks with different types of support needs, perhaps folks who appear more independent and able to participate more broadly and easily without support - in fact, there's another bump where people receive autism diagnosis around the age of 12, so as folks enter adolescence. Then there's another bump around early adulthood. These are those transitional periods where folks really have a hard time understanding what's being asked from them in subtle social ways, and making that transition successfully. The result is that we actually are losing folks who could be much more successful in higher education and in our workforce because we're not supporting them through these transitions.

Publicly funded and locally available supports and services, specifically for autistic adults, are essentially non-existent across Canada when unsupported transitions are vulnerable times for autistic people and can lead to family and individual crises, and overutilization of urgent or emergency care, poor quality of life, and financial instability.

There is very little information about parenting by autistic individuals in the research literature. Very little is also known about how to support older autistic people and seniors, yet it is important to plan for future needs. Offsetting common out-of-pocket costs associated with autism, such as home modifications, transportation, therapeutic products, and day supports can promote family and individual well-being and financial stability across the life span.

Labour market participation of parents of autistic individuals can benefit the entire family and can be supported through workplace policies and provisions offered, for example, through unions, employee assistance plans, and support of human resources development.

Access to trusted non-partisan financial planning and financial literacy supports and services can better equip autistic people and their families to understand and make informed decisions that promote long-term financial stability and well-being. A pathway for autistic individuals to financial stability can be achieved by disability benefits that are flexible, needs-based, accessible, and take into consideration the extra costs associated with this condition.

A provincial autism strategy would maximize current government investments and specifically identify remaining gaps and investments required for costing a relocation of resources. It would also enhance cross-departmental collaboration and partnerships,

properly leverage current policy networks and communities in the province, and enhance the well-being and health of autistic Nova Scotians and their families. If we continue to operate without a provincial autism strategy, policies for accessing many government services remain outdated and inaccessible. Services will remain fragmented, and we will lose folks along the way.

On our journey as parents, we have been aware of the stories of many young people who have received insufficient support in elementary school, who have struggled to make the transition to middle school or junior high because of the increased social pressures, the increased necessity to manage complex schedules and interpret social cues, the effects of bullying and peer pressure, and young people who have really struggled to make that successful transition to junior high and then to high school, and in fact who end up not finishing high school. That's not what we want in this province.

As well, for those who have finished high school, many of the support programs that exist to help people transition into the workforce or transition into training again don't take into consideration the particular needs of folks with autism. In many cases the adjustments would be slight. They'd be slight tweaks that would actually support the positive and successful participation of many folks.

Simply put, continuing with the status quo will leave us further and further behind other Atlantic provinces and the rest of the country on addressing this policy issue, despite our high rate of prevalence that we know is at the younger age group. It is also, of course, coming forward as these young people become adolescents, as they become adults.

We need to recognize that time is of the essence, and we risk underestimating the federal support required and which could be taken advantage of when negotiating around the national autism strategy. The implementation of a provincial strategy would build an integrated and sustainable service system across a life span, and position the province favourably for negotiations with the federal government.

Last, but certainly not least, it would let us join other Atlantic provinces in having a strategy or framework to address this complex policy issue and make life better for folks with autism and their families in our province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to talk about a time in the year that I really enjoy and look forward to and it's called African Heritage Month. African Heritage Month is a time of celebration and reflection, a time when African Nova Scotians can come together across the province to remember the achievements of notable Nova Scotians, recognizing leaders in our community, all the while enjoying each other's company, most times with music and food, truly celebrating each other while educating folks in Nova Scotia about our African Nova Scotian contributions to the province as a whole.

It's been said, and I know this is true, that we've been here for over 400 years, and we have paved the way and built the foundation on which Nova Scotia stands today, which is why African Heritage Month celebrations and the theme of the month are so important to the fabric of Nova Scotia. I just want to make note, and I'm pretty sure you folks can look this up, but I just want to have you envision some of these African Heritage Month themes and they all are attached with a poster or a visual that you can look at later.

In 2018, it was about Educate, Unite, Celebrate Community, embrace our education and encourage all Nova Scotians with a desire to educate oneself about African Nova Scotian history. It was meant to unite and ignite the culture and heritage we share as a community observing the International Decade for People of African Descent.

In 2020, it said The Ties that Bind, and the visual was about a rope and some families and hands binding people together, the community, the close-knitness, recognizing the unique bond that people of African descent share through faith, family, and community, celebrating the long-standing legacy of faith and spirituality, acknowledging strong family ties, and honouring the togetherness of the African Nova Scotian community, facilitating a greater bond and understanding of all cultures in Nova Scotia, which also means not easily broken.

In 2021, which some of us will remember, it was a Black Lives Matter movement. That particular theme was that Black History Matters and it meant listening, learn, share and act, recognizing the legacy and long-standing history in the development of Canada, bringing the focus and increased awareness of racialized issues of a community that has overcome great adversity for inclusion in all aspects of society.

As we hear even just about those three past years, it's about celebrating, uniting, and really bringing people together and discussing some of the major milestones of African Nova Scotian people in this province.

In 2022, it was Through Our Eyes, and it was a beautiful visual depiction of eyes in itself, but within that what it meant was it was recognizing the long-standing history of people of African descent in the development of Canada. Through Our Eyes promotes all the ways and all the voices of African Nova Scotians who blazed a trail for change despite anti-Black racism, also following the International Decade for People of African Descent. So these all follow that piece.

This year was 2023, and it was Seas of Struggle - African Peoples from Shore to Shore. The themes previous to that were very positive, empowering, recognizing the development and the role that African Nova Scotians played in this province, and how they helped build this country, and really had a number of contributions to that. This particular one was Seas of Struggle - African Peoples from Shore to Shore, outlining the struggles people of African descent faced from the shores of Africa to the shores of Nova Scotia, recognizing that the one thing that remained constant in our history is the Atlantic Ocean.

The long-standing history of the people of African descent in the development of Canada, which was also said in the other previous statements, but then the sea has played a vital role.

This theme explores the struggle and adversity that was overcome and examines the effects of slavery and seafaring of African Nova Scotians and, as well, recognizes the International Decade for People of African Descent and some of their pillars there, which brings me to the point I am going to raise today. A number of folks in this government received an email in February discussing the profound psychological and emotional trauma that the 2023 provincial African Heritage Month theme and poster has inflicted upon African Nova Scotians in this province.

African Heritage Month has historically been a time to recognize, celebrate, and honour the history, contributions, and lived experiences of people of African ancestry in Nova Scotia, and to educate all Nova Scotians on the same. To the contrary, the 2023 theme Seas of Struggle - African Peoples from Shore to Shore stagnates these efforts through its adverse, injurious, and dehumanizing impact on African Nova Scotians.

Ironically, this year's African Heritage Month theme perpetuates the brutal, white supremacist narratives of slavery that human rights-focused societies across Canada and the world, and communities of African descent specifically, have worked arduously for centuries to overturn. Rather than supporting the fight to end anti-Black racism, this year's African Heritage Month provincial theme and poster negatively impacted the cultural fabric of all people living in this province through its complicity in an anti-Black racist message that reduces all people of African descent to this traumatic period of our shared history.

As a government of Nova Scotia, we are responsible for the provincial African Heritage Month theme and poster and we have a responsibility to end this trauma by making sure that we have themes that are respectful, anti-racist, anti-colonialist, and culturally responsible, a theme that does not inflict further harm on our people.

In a day and age where we are experiencing an upsurge of overtly bold and unchallenged acts of anti-Black racism, Nova Scotians must be able to confidently trust in and rely upon our government officials to vehemently oppose all representations of this societal vice. Hence, it is important that this government is acutely aware of how certain language, imagery, narratives, and representations can pass themselves off as being positive Black representations while contributing to vile perpetuations of white supremacy.

It is imperative that this government exercise the capacity to critically analyze all communication to guard against human rights violations, oppressions, discrimination, and psychological and emotional harm to all of our constituents, our province's citizens.

Unfortunately, the damage has been done, and people of African descent in this province are haemorrhaging. We are haemorrhaging during a month traditionally anticipated as a time of joy, celebration of ancestral and cultural pride, and positive reflections on our multiplicity of contributions, and healing. We were called on as a provincial government to right this wrong. To shed some light on the insulting imagery and language of the 2023 African Heritage Month theme and poster, I ask you to reflect on the fact that in order for anti-Black racism to be successful, it requires the objectification of people of African descent. Anti-Black racism works to strip Black people of our very humanity, oftentimes in stealthy, inconspicuous ways.

The theme itself in the context provided to explain the theme limit the connections of people of African descent to the sea - the Atlantic Ocean, an inanimate body of water reminiscent of the middle passage, that sorrowful grave for millions of unnamed enslaved African people, our foremothers and forefathers who never found a respectful resting place. Instead, the remains lie restlessly strewn across the expanse of this ocean due to the horrific exploits of the Maafa, the great tragedy of African peoples. This sea reflects sorrow, not celebration, an imposed struggle rather than the victorious self-determination of our people. It cannot accurately represent us; it would be inhumane to insist that it represents us.

In a rather erroneous, callous, and insulting way, this year's African Heritage Month theme insists that the sea is the only thing that connects African people from shore to shore - from the shores of the continent of Africa to the shores of Nova Scotia. In so doing, it discounts the ancestry, heritage, history, cultural languages, and lived experiences that truly do connect us, relegating all of who we are to depictions of struggle. This theme dishonours the glorious legacies of our ancestors and our ancestral homeland of Africa as the forebears of civilization, the cradle of knowledge and culture, innovation and science, technology, medicine, architecture, literature, religion, models of government, and the arts, to name a few aspects of our history worthy of recognition.

This theme ignores the many contributions of African Nova Scotians through our more than 400-year history as one of our province's founding peoples. The theme objectifies and reduces people of African descent to voiceless powerless objects forced to struggle, rather than validating us as agents of change, resisting injustices, and insisting on defining ourselves and being the authors of our own stories.

Further, this theme seems to displace the responsibility for the enslavement of African people on to the sea, an inanimate body of water, rather than demanding truth-telling and reparations of people and nations of European descent who orchestrated and have benefited from the institution of slavery. Therefore, this theme is unjust, insensitive, and inhumane. Despite its intent, its impact is shame and trauma to African peoples.

[3:30 p.m.]

As a Black mother of seven African Nova Scotian children in our Nova Scotia public school system, I dread the detrimental impact this African Heritage Month theme and posters, already in circulation and posted in schools throughout this province, have on African Nova Scotian learners. Our schools are already struggling to provide anti-racist, inclusive, respectful, and equitable learning spaces where African Nova Scotian students can bring their full selves and be seen as knowledgeable students capable of excellence.

I reflect on my children's and their friends' recent stories of students using the N-word at their school and on social media and subsequent meetings with all the Black students about how they should react when - not if - such situations happen again. Unfortunately, as an MLA, I'm keenly aware that such stories, and many worse than these involving adults in authority, are the rule rather than the exception in public schools and in our neighbourhoods and in government offices.

In a province where the majority of our schoolteachers and administrators and school counsellors are white and void of the lived experiences of what it means to be Black or racialized in this province, I'm confident that most of them are ill-equipped to respond to this theme, Seas of Struggle, in a way that does not belittle, limit, and traumatize the Black students in our classrooms, hallways, and schools. The mental health of African Nova Scotian students is at stake, and we as government leaders should have acted expeditiously to this action to ward against acts of anti-Black racism that this month's theme and poster incite by their very presence in Nova Scotia schools and communities.

I could go on and on and on, but I will say that the constituent wrote this letter, and they received a response back from the Premier that said: Thank you very much for your email. To clarify, the government does not determine the theme or the poster for African Heritage Month. It is determined by the African Heritage Month Information Network - which we know - a collaborative of African-Nova Scotian associations. As such, we'll be informing them of your concerns. Instead of writing a full page about care and cause and thought, and so sorry that this has happened, and we need to do better as a government - it should be three or four pages, but it was five lines - four and a half lines - from the Premier.

I have a lot to say, but this person did write back and say: Thank you for your response. I am disappointed by your attempt to absolve the Nova Scotia provincial government of its responsibility. I am aware that regardless of who chose the theme, the provincial government sanctions it, hence the involvement of the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs, and at length Communications Nova Scotia, and the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. They're very, very well versed in the system of how things are processed.

As we know, such is the crux of the disappointment. Either the usual rigorous vetting of the African Heritage Month network's theme suggestion did not take place, or no

one in the Nova Scotian provincial government had the wherewithal, knowledge, cultural understanding, care, or concern to decipher harmful reductive anti-Black racist messaging from education celebrating African Heritage Month.

In my last minute, I do have a number of things that I want to say, but I will say that this is a prime example of how we can be doing better, how we could be doing better, to get things right. We talk about how we need to take our time - and I have heard this a number of times while we have been sitting in here - and really dig deep into what this really means. There have been many opportunities, and this year in particular, there was no care or thought or even a proper response to someone who is feeling like these harms are affecting them and their community, and the African-Nova Scotian folks in this province.

I will continue to stand up and speak for those who don't always have a voice here in the Legislature. I'm very disappointed. I was very disappointed, and my reaction to this was just this: I will be speaking these things in the House so folks will understand that these harms are happening across the province. We should never turn a blind eye to folks and their adversity and the things that are happening to them all because we choose to not act when we have the information to do so.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The motion is carried.

We'll take a brief recess for the members of the Committee of the Whole on Supply to get set up.

[3:34 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CW on Supply with Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance in the Chair.]

[7:56 p.m. CW on Supply rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance 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 progress, and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: 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. 279.

**Bill No. 279 - Financial Measures (2023) Act.**

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I move that Bill No. 279, the Financial Measures (2023) Act, be now read a second time.

The Financial Measures Act introduces a range of amendments that better reflect today's practices and remove unnecessary burdens on our citizens, businesses, and our economy. This bill amends four pieces of legislation and repeals one.

I will take a moment to outline those changes for all members. The authority to charge tax on bets made on harness races will be transferred from the Theatres and Amusements Act to the Revenue Act, through which the authority for other taxes exists. This aligns with our work to consolidate gaming activities within the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. This change is to the authority only and does not alter the practice of collecting and keeping the tax.

The Corporations Registration Act will be amended to eliminate penalty fees on the reinstatement of revoked companies with the Registry of Joint Stock Companies. The current fee is double the annual renewal fee and represents a barrier for businesses to re-register. Most provinces have no penalty fees for late filings, so this change will bring Nova Scotia in line with other jurisdictions and save businesses \$350,000 each year. Over 80 per cent of companies currently renew on time, but we've heard this fee is a barrier to small companies re-registering and we hope that it will allow more companies to keep their registration up to date.

The Credit Union Act will be amended to transfer regulatory oversight of Atlantic Central from the province to the Credit Union Deposit Insurance Corporation. This change in oversight is necessary because the Office of Superintendent of Financial Institutions is no longer choosing to monitor credit unions at the federal level.

The Nova Scotia Credit Union Deposit Insurance Corporation guarantees deposits in credit unions and administers a supervisory framework to protect member deposits and maintain the safety and soundness of Nova Scotia's credit union system. We've determined that the Credit Union Deposit Insurance Corporation is best positioned to efficiently and effectively regulate Atlantic Central. The parties involved have been consulted and this amendment will extend Credit Union Deposit Insurance Corporation's mandate to take on this strength and supervisory role.



[8:00 p.m.]

The Non-Resident Deed Transfer Property Taxes Act will be amended to formally remove the non-resident property tax from legislation. We are also making administrative changes to ensure that only those who do not intend to live in Nova Scotia pay the deed transfer tax. Previously, the deed transfer tax was in place if more than 50 per cent of the property is owned by a non-resident. As of July 1<sup>st</sup>, the tax will be prorated for the percentage of non-resident ownership.

The Revenue Act will be amended to enable harmonization of excise tax on vaping products. Provinces and territories have asked to harmonize with the federal government's tax on vaping, similar to what is done for cannabis. It's a simpler, more efficient way to collect taxes and if an agreement is reached, Nova Scotia will be able to implement a harmonized vaping tax through this legislation.

Lastly, the Financial Measures (2023) Act will eventually repeal outdated legislation after formalizing the transfer of ownership of Schooner Bluenose Foundation assets to the Lunenburg Marine Museum Society. This society has operated the ship since 2005 and they will take ownership of the former foundation's assets, which include the *Bluenose II* headquarters in Lunenburg and a small remaining account balance.

I am pleased to bring forward a bill to reduce fees for businesses, remove unnecessary and outdated paperwork, and modernize legislation. These are largely administrative changes, but these measures can have financial implications for our province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: I'm pleased to get up and give a few remarks about the FMA bill that's on the floor this evening.

A couple of things that I would like to point out with regard to this budget that comes through the FMA: As we're all aware, government has talked about empowering people. They've talked about this being a health care budget - \$6 billion-plus in health care funds. Again, we're not seeing the metrics to improve those health care numbers. We're looking to see the correlation between the spend and the metrics.

What I'd like to talk about is what the FMA does not do. The minister indicates that by cutting the penalty fees for businesses to register in the Joint Stock, it's going to save about \$350,000 per year for businesses. He indicates that what it will do is bring Nova Scotia in line with other jurisdictions across Canada. That's a very important line that the minister said: to bring Nova Scotia in line with other jurisdictions across Canada.

What this FMA did not do was bring Nova Scotia in line with other jurisdictions in

Canada with regard to income tax bracket creep. Every jurisdiction in Canada besides ourselves and P.E.I. indexes their income tax brackets to inflation. We know that we're currently the highest-taxed citizens in all of Atlantic Canada. According to the Fraser Institute report, we're number two in all of North America. This was a real opportunity to bring us in line with other jurisdictions in Canada.

Another lost opportunity to bring Nova Scotia in line with other jurisdictions in Canada was an opportunity to cut the motive fuel tax. Many jurisdictions in Canada have done this in times of need. Again, we hear that this minister said that, the federal said this, blah blah blah, but we know that it can be done. It's a provincial tax. We know that this could have been used to give Nova Scotians a break financially.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could stand here this evening and say that the FMA has saved X number of dollars for Nova Scotia families? We can't do that this evening.

What we can say that this FMA has done for Nova Scotia families is place the burden - a burden of debt upon them for generations to come. A growth of \$5.6 billion over the remaining term of this government. An increase of debt servicing costs approaching \$1 billion per year by the end of the mandate. These are things that this FMA is doing for our families and our citizens and taxpayers of Nova Scotia.

I would have loved to have seen some additional relief, some broader-based relief such as reducing the Motive Fuel Tax. Some broader-based relief for Nova Scotia families and young families.

We heard the Finance and Treasury Board Minister say that tying the income tax brackets to inflation only helps the wealthy - something along those terms. We'll go back and Google it. We'll Google Hansard and see what it was. It helps the rich, I think is what - or the highest taxpayers. (Interruption) You said something to that effect that we will - I will get it and table it. (Interruption) Mx. Speaker, I will get it and table it. I don't think I'm wrong (Interruption) I don't think I'm wrong, but if I am, I'll come back and say so.

Mx. Speaker, the disrespect coming from some members of the other side is absolutely juvenile and ridiculous. (Interruption) I heard the term - I heard what was said and I'm going to leave it at that because it's fine.

Indexing income tax brackets does not help the rich and wealthy. In Nova Scotia, the first bracket is at \$29,000. It's the lowest in Atlantic Canada. It's the lowest in - probably Canada. I'd have to double-check that. So indexing those income tax brackets would certainly help all Nova Scotians.

I've said enough for tonight, because right now I'm a little bit wound up. I've said enough for tonight, but I will look forward to coming back to speak to FMA in third reading.

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mx. Speaker, I'll rise tonight to say a few words on the Financial Measures (2023) Act. As we all know, this is the Act that enables the budget. I haven't had the opportunity to comment on the budget yet and so I will say a few words tonight on how we feel about the budget.

Well, the budget is more, faster, except for when it's less, slower. There's a lot of funding for a number of health care initiatives, but I have yet to hear an articulated plan for what comes on the other side of those, other than fixed. And that is really concerning because we've eliminated all of our oversight mechanisms. We don't have a board for the Nova Scotia Health Authority. A great deal of decision-making is done in secret. We certainly don't have order-making powers for the Information and Privacy Commissioner - that was a platform promise from the Progressive Conservatives - and we don't have any oversight of the money that flows through the Legislature, as has been pointed out by the Auditor General.

Some day, I suspect, the government will stand up and say, "We fixed it." And we'll all have to argue over whether or not that's true. And that's a shame. We measure this budget by its impact on people's lives. By that measure, I don't know what is going to happen faster.

People won't get access to primary care faster. In fact, we are looking at something like 10,000 more residents of HRM who will be without a family physician in the coming weeks and months. People won't - immediately anyway - get their surgeries faster. What is the sought-after result? We're told that you will have access to some kind of care. So if you have strep throat, you'll get antibiotics from a pharmacy. If you live near one of those clinics, that's good. If you have a minor ailment and you can have access to a computer and the time to wait, maybe the money to pay if you don't have the time to wait, you'll get access to virtual care. Maybe they'll help you.

But you won't get access to collaborative care. You won't actually get access to health care you can count on. You won't, if you're sick or if your kids are sick, or if you're really concerned, have an office you can call up, and they know your name, and they have your file, and they can give you an appointment, and they can follow your care. If you're diagnosed with cancer, you won't have, in this budget, necessarily, a physician or a physician's office that will follow you, that will order your tests, that will make sure to follow your condition. And that, from our perspective, is truly a missed opportunity.

We were talking about the budget, and we were talking about the additional \$1 billion-plus in revenue that this government is the beneficiary of, and we were reminded of the Barenaked Ladies song "If I had a Million Dollars," only this is if I had \$1 billion. We started playing the if I had \$1 billion game - what would you do if you had \$1 billion extra in revenue as a provincial government?

[8:15 p.m.]

That brings me to the parts of the budget that are slower, because there are so many things that this government is not acting on, is waiting to act on - there are so many ways that \$1 billion could make a difference in people's lives. If I had control over a government that had an unexpected \$1 billion in revenue in a province with skyrocketing home prices and less than 1 per cent rental vacancy, I would spend a lot of it on affordable housing. I would build housing. I would leverage the money for truly affordable housing - almost none of which we have seen from this government.

I will say on the record that 80 per cent of market rates just isn't affordable. It's affordable for some people, but if we're going to define the term "affordable," that has to be geared to income. Incomes have not risen at anywhere near the pace of the cost of housing, so 80 per cent of market rate which is what - when the government talks about affordable housing they have created is affordable, it doesn't count in our estimation.

I would set up an enforcement branch for Residential Tenancies. That's going to be complicated; that takes time; and that takes staff. You have \$1 billion, let's get to it. There's something that I would do. I would establish a reliable system of rent control so that we can actually make sure that people have a place to live. We have been told - we haven't had the opportunity to ask the minister about this yet - that the Department of Community Services has leased a 204-room hotel in my constituency. We're assuming that will be a shelter. That's not what I would spend the money on. I would spend the money on affordable housing. I would actually start a housing-first approach and make sure that people have a permanent place to live, something on the other side of a shelter.

I would freeze Pharmacare fees. I would make sure that people don't have to choose between medicine and food. When this government announced their budget, they went out of their way to say they were not raising Pharmacare fees. I almost couldn't believe it. Like that is supposed to be something that anyone could be proud of. Why would you even say that? I don't understand, Mx. Speaker.

At least this government should be putting a temporary pause on Family and Seniors' Pharmacare. Feed Nova Scotia tells us - and I've tabled this document before, I can do it in the future - that people are choosing between food and medicine every day in this province. The government has a very simple tool that they could enact to stop so many people from having to make that choice, but they are going slower on that one.

I would enact the Coastal Protection Act. The IPCC has told us that we have no time to wait. All we hear is empty talking points about the Liberal carbon tax from this government. I don't even know what to say about it.

Yes, there have been some good things. The move towards efficiency has been good. The investment in heat pumps has been good. We applaud that work, make no

mistake, but we have no time to waste. I have three children and the world that they become adults in will look fundamentally different than the world we live in today and that is terrifying to me, and it should be terrifying to all of us. It should be so terrifying that this government should stop their stupid conversations about Liberal carbon taxes and start talking about how they are going to be constructive on the environmental file. I'm sorry I used the word "stupid," Mx. Speaker. I meant empty.

In light of what we heard today but also, as we have been advocating for for years, we would use \$1 billion to substantially increase funding to organizations working on the front lines of gender-based violence, including safety. We would strengthen and transform our approach to community safety. It's an idea whose time has come. We all know it. It's heavy lifting. It's a lot of work. It takes money and this government has an extra \$1 billion.

These areas - housing, income assistance, cost of living, action on climate change, transforming our approach to safety and to gender-based violence, are all areas where this government is going very slowly.

I will close by pointing out that these are all health care. Housing is health care. (Interruption) But since the member mentioned it, the ESIA rates are frozen in this budget. A freeze of ESIA rates in the context of CPI is a cut. It is a cut to the income of the most vulnerable people in this province.

Housing is health care, food security is health care, stable income is health care. Safety, the ability to live and not be in fear, protecting our province from the ravages of climate change is health care. I look forward to the government investing in it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I just thought I would rise to make one observation and one comment that I think is noteworthy with respect to the budget that this government has brought in. I think our colleague from Dartmouth North has made some very important points about - Dartmouth South, my apologies, the Leader of the NDP - has made some compelling arguments about the gaps in funding and the choices that she would make, contrary to what the government would make.

I think it's fair to say, without repeating many or all of the points she has raised, that we're in agreement here and I think we are, from the Liberal caucus, so shocked and disappointed by the ignoring of income assistance. I think that is the real travesty in this budget.

I'm not going to dwell too much on the long list of things that have been ignored but I think there's an important point of the choices that this government made. I think if you had a million dollars - \$1.4 million of unexpected income - you would think that you could balance the budget . . . (Interruption) Billion, thank you. You would think that you

could balance the budgets. There are Progressive Conservatives in this province who are concerned about fiscal management. There are bond rating agencies that are watching the provincial budgets.

I have reviewed the budgets of all of the provinces. About half of them are balanced, many of them receiving the same unexpected revenue from the bounce-back in the Canadian economy. About half of them have balanced their budgets. The other half have all shown their citizens a path back to balance. Where Nova Scotia stands alone is they seem committed to deficits. They want to grow deficits. This was a purposeful, very conscientious deficit that this government wanted to run. The March Madness spending of the last two weeks, if you really wanted to spend that money, some of that money could have gone out on April 1<sup>st</sup>. Instead, the money and contribution agreements, as I learned last night, are being written right now to get that money out the door so that this government could proudly say, we ran a deficit. We are such strong fiscal managers that when we get a surprise of \$1.5 billion, we're going to celebrate that we can run a deficit. Wow, that's strong fiscal management.

I think what Nova Scotians should be concerned about is how we stand as the one province that has no concept of fiscal discipline. Let's be very clear: It was a choice of this government to go into deficit. Unfortunately, the government feels that they can do that because they ran on spending whatever it takes to fix health care. But they didn't need to run a deficit to do exactly what they want to do.

Nova Scotians, particularly conservative, fiscal-minded Nova Scotians, really have to question the choices that this government is making around fiscal management.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Mx. Speaker, I would like to add to the thoughtful and thorough analyses of the budget that have been offered this evening by our leader, and days ago by our party's Finance Critic. I would like to just add to those a few additional comments about this budget in the context of this second reading of the Financial Measures (2023) Act.

The budget that's before us is defined not by its health care program, as had been anticipated and expected of the government would be the case. It was defined, rather, by its shocking refusal, in the midst of 40-year-high price inflation, to provide one cent's worth of improvement to income assistance levels in the province, either in the form of absolute dollars or in the form of indexing to inflation. This is both bankrupt at the level of policy and, in this present moment in Canada, anachronistic when we look and see the bold and interesting initiatives in the improvement of income assistance programming that are taking place today across our country, many of them in Progressive Conservative-led provinces, like Manitoba and Ontario, and here in the Maritimes in New Brunswick.

Since last Thursday, with the presentation of the budget, under attack about this terrible absence, under attack from a host of angles since last Thursday, across the province, the government has, in the last week, taken to offering a defence of their position on this. It's that defence that I would like to say a few words about. It's a defence that does not inspire, if I may say so, very much confidence in their understanding of these issues.

The government's defence of their failure to improve income assistance in this budget, which we have heard repeatedly, is that they are, rather, taking what they call a targeted approach. Mr. Speaker, this is a distortion of the meaning of the word "targeted." The plain meaning of the word "targeted" in public policy is that which is not universal.

For example, a couple of years ago, the federal government, I think we can recall, changed the way the Canada Child Benefit works. They changed it from a universal program to a targeted program. The argument was made that wealthy people didn't need to receive the Canada Child Benefit, so the resources of the program would be targeted more at those whose need was greater. There are lots of arguments to be made about this - targeted versus universal programs - lots of positions that can be put forward in the debate. In that debate, on the whole, we in the NDP, for lots of reasons that we don't need to go into now, tend to favour the universal over the targeted approach. My point at this moment is that the Canada Child Benefit case is an example of what targeting actually is in social policy, which is not what the government is doing by choosing to not improve income assistance one cent in the current budget.

I want to say this with maximum clarity: Income assistance is a targeted program. In fact, in many ways, income assistance is the ultimate targeted program. It is targeted, at the core of its definition, at the those whose need is greatest, those who otherwise are going to be left without the means of living. To say that one is not improving income assistance because one is targeting is nonsensical.

Are there rich people in Nova Scotia receiving income assistance today? Of course not, because the income assistance program is already a program that is entirely targeted to start with. When the government says they are not improving income assistance because they are, rather, taking a targeted approach, this is a confusion. This is not a sign of deep understanding. This is an obfuscation - targeting, baloney. What they are simply doing is deciding to spend the money on something else, which is not targeting but, rather, making a choice - in this case a mean and hard choice that is going to cause a lot of hardship to a lot of people.

Furthermore, when the government speaks about their so-called targeting relative to the budget's changes to the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, which they have done on numerous occasions, I want to point out that the effect of this is less to target and rather to exclude the 70 per cent of people receiving income assistance who are single and who have no dependents and who are therefore going to be untouched by changes in the Nova Scotia Child Benefit. This was so very clearly argued and pointed out in Matt Stickland's

instructive article in *The Coast* a few days ago under the title The Premier “and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Budget,” which I will table.

[8:30 p.m.]

“Targeted” is a word that is, in these moments, causing some reflection. I received an email a couple of days ago from a constituent; his name is Brian Dauphinee. He’s given me permission to quote him this evening, and I am going to table the text of what he wrote. Mr. Dauphinee is going through the process of being renovicted at this moment and facing having to leave his apartment building, along with all the other tenants, by the end of August. He wrote about the details of his income and his expenses and how hard this all is, and then he wrote something that jumped off the screen at me. He said that he’d heard the word “targeting” a lot to do with the current budget, and he wrote: “‘Targeted’ is the right word, the government has targeted me and other senior citizens with modest incomes for cruel and unusual punishment.”

Mx. Speaker, I was myself surprised by the current budget. I thought the government would be aware of the best thinking on this subject and would move to improve income assistance, or at least to index it to inflation. It is hurtful and shocking that they did not.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the minister, it is to close second reading.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: The way I’m feeling this evening, I think I will move now to close debate on Bill No. 279.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 279.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mx. Speaker, would you please call Private and Local Bills for Second Reading.

#### **PRIVATE AND LOCAL BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mx. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 274.



**Bill No. 274 - Catholic Cemetery Company Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Addictions and Mental Health.

HON. BRIAN COMER: I rise to move Bill No. 274 a second time.

Bill No. 274 will modernize the rules which the Resurrection Cemetery in beautiful Sydney Forks must follow. No major changes have occurred to the legislation governing the cemetery since its incorporation in 1964. These amendments to this Act will allow the Catholic Cemetery Company to have a higher quality board and enhance the privacy of its members.

Examples of how these changes strengthen the board include allowing newly elected board members to attend training as set out in their bylaws, increase term limits for five of the elected directors to more than one year of service, and separate the role of treasurer-secretary into two new positions. The Act enhances the language protection, the privacy, and the individuals owning lots in the cemetery.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the minister again, it is to close second reading on Bill No. 274.

HON. BRIAN COMER: I rise to close second reading on Bill No. 274.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 274.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

THE SPEAKER: We will take a brief recess. Thank you.

[8:34 p.m. The House resolved into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance in the Chair.]

[9:56 p.m. The Committee of the Whole House on Bills rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Danielle Barkhouse in the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Committee of the Whole House on Bills reports:

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole House on Bills has met and considered the following bills:

**Bill No. 256 – Patient Access to Care Act.**

**Bill No. 263 – Public Utilities Act (amended).**

**Bill No. 264 – Electricity Act (amended).**

**Bill No. 269 – Construction Projects Labour Relations Act (amended).**

without amendments, and the Chair has been instructed to recommend these bills to the favourable consideration of the House.

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

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 Friday, March 31<sup>st</sup> between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Government business will include third reading of Bill Nos. 269, 264, 263, 256, and Committee of the Whole House on Supply to deal with Estimates.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on March 31<sup>st</sup> between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until 9:00 a.m. on March 31<sup>st</sup>.

[The House rose at 9:57 p.m.]