



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

## DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

**Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain**

Published by Order of the Legislature by Hansard Reporting Services and printed by the King's Printer.

Available on INTERNET at <http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/proceedings/hansard/>

**First Session**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2023**

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2023**

**Sixty-fourth General Assembly**

**First Session**

**9:00 A.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Keith Bain

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

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

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

**PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

**PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, before I table the accessibility directive, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

BRAD JOHNS: In the Gallery today, we have Laura Beth MacPherson, who is a senior policy analyst with the Accessibility Directorate. I'd ask her if she could stand. I would ask the members of the House if they would please give her a warm welcome this morning.

THE SPEAKER: We welcome all visitors to the Legislature today and every day.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, in my capacity as the Attorney General of Nova Scotia, I hereby beg leave to table the Minister's Annual Report on Accessibility 2021-2022.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, once again, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of people with us today in the gallery. I'd ask if they could stand when I call them out. From the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, we have: Joseph Fraser, who is the director and CEO of the Human Rights Commission; Greg Gillis, registrar; Angela McCullen and Nicole MacKenzie, human rights officers and Steven Roy, project coordinator. I would ask the members of the House if they would please give them a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Again, welcome to everyone.

The honourable Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, in my capacity as the Attorney General of Nova Scotia, I hereby beg leave to table the 2021-2022 Annual Report of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a document, a link to the proceedings of the Board of Police Commissioners, which do not keep a written record, but from which I wish to quote in a member statement in a moment.

THE SPEAKER: The paper is tabled.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

**GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

**RESOLUTION NO. 593**

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Whereas sport fishing is an accessible sport with many physical and mental health benefits that is enjoyed by increasingly more Nova Scotians and people from around the world who are discovering the unique connections sport fishing provides us to our beautiful and natural landscapes; and

Whereas the sport fishing sector growth is important to our rural communities and tourism industries, contributing significantly to the Nova Scotia economy, ranging from \$65 million to \$85 million annually; and

Whereas the Sportfish Habitat Fund has surpassed \$5 million with thanks to anglers who are committed to funding important work like the restoration of fish habitat and fish passage, and mitigating the impacts of climate change and acidification through the Adopt A Stream program;

Therefore be it resolved that as we look forward to warmer weather and days spent by the water casting a line into one of the many pristine lakes and rivers throughout the province, members of the Legislative Assembly encourage Nova Scotians to head to one of the province's many waterways to enjoy the 2023 sport fishing season, which opens in most areas tomorrow, April 1<sup>st</sup>.

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 Community Services.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. May I make a few introductions before my notice of motion?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Visiting us today in the Speaker's Gallery, I am very honoured to introduce four special guests from Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, an organization that represents and advocates on behalf of the educational interests of the Mi'kmaw community, each one a valuable contributor to the revitalization of the Mi'kmaw language.

As I call your name, would you please stand. I would like to introduce Kji-keptin Antle Denny. He is the son of Alex Denny, the late Grand Captain of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council. Like his father, he stresses the importance of keeping the language alive. He is the MK Language Advisory committee chair.

I would ask then to have Blaire Gould, executive director of MK and co-chair of the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Language Advisory committee. Blaire was absolutely instrumental in the development of the Mi'kmaw Language Act, which recognizes Mi'kmaq as the original language of Nova Scotia. Blaire singlehandedly translated the Act from English to Mi'kmaq.

Then I would ask for Michelle Marshall-Johnson, director of Mi'kmaw Language and Culture as well as MK Language Advisory committee member. Michelle is the daughter of Albert Marshall and the late Mrs. Marshall, where she inherited her commitment to the preservation, promotion, and revitalization of Mi'kmaw language and traditional knowledge.

Is Shara Johnson there as well? I couldn't see her. There she is. The communications coordinator for MK, Shara is a teacher by training and has been providing communications support to MK for eight years.

Pjila'si. I would ask everyone in the House here to give them a very warm welcome. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: We welcome everyone to the Legislature today. We hope you enjoy the proceedings.

The honourable Minister of L'nu Affairs.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 594**

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

Whereas today, March 31<sup>st</sup>, is National Indigenous Languages Day in Canada and an opportunity to recognize that language is an important part of culture, identity, and resilience; and



Whereas Mi'kmaq is the original language of Nova Scotia, and the Mi'kmaw Language Act was passed by the Legislature in April 2022, proclaimed by the Province and affirmed by the Mi'kmaq in July, and took effect on October 1<sup>st</sup>, Treaty Day; and

[9:15 a.m.]

Whereas this legislation stands as a powerful example of the relationship and partnership with L'nu and is a critical step to advance reconciliation in Nova Scotia;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in celebrating National Indigenous Languages Day and renewing our commitment to support efforts to protect and revitalize the Mi'kmaw language now and for future generations.

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. (Applause)

The honourable Minister of Advanced Education.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 595**

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

Whereas the Nova Scotia Community College and the Digby Pines Golf Resort and Spa have partnered to deliver business, hospitality, and culinary management programs; and

Whereas students will have the opportunity to work, live, and learn at the Digby Pines, representing a first of its kind, innovative partnership; and

Whereas this opportunity embodies the spirit of doing education differently and finding innovative local solutions for our economy, for our students, and for our communities;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature congratulate the Nova Scotia Community College and Digby Pines on this partnership and wish all the students enrolling in these programs well with their studies.

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. 292 - An Act to Amend Chapter 141 of the Acts of 1970, an Act to Incorporate the Mount Saint Vincent University Student Union. (Hon. Patricia Arab)**

#### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 596**

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

Whereas the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act commits to 80 per cent of the province's electricity being generated from renewable energy by 2030; and the Government of Canada's Sustainable Development Goal 7 targets 90 per cent of Canada's electricity being generated from renewable and non-emitting resources by 2030; and

Whereas marine renewable energy is positioned to become a significant contributor to clean energy supplies to help Canada and Nova Scotia meet our green energy targets and reduce reliance on imported energy, with over 300 companies already finding work in Atlantic Canada's emerging marine renewable energy sector, with tidal investments approaching \$200 million; and

Whereas tidal energy proponent Sustainable Marine has given notice that they will be withdrawing their application under the Fisheries Act, citing that Fisheries and Oceans Canada is unable to assess their application effectively nor competently despite five years of engagement with the department; and

Whereas if Fisheries and Oceans Canada will play a crucial role in approving potential offshore wind energy projects, these investments are threatened by the department's inability to provide a clear, consistent federal regulatory path to proponents under the Fisheries Act and jeopardize Nova Scotia's green future . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. That appears to be more of a Ministerial Statement.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: It was actually a request. We did check yesterday to see where it should lie.

THE SPEAKER: With the unanimous consent of the House, could we move back to Government Notices of Motion so that can be covered?

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded. Thank you.

The motion is carried.

#### **[GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION]**

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

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 596**

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

Whereas the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act commits to 80 per cent of the province's electricity generated from renewable energy by 2030, and the government of Canada's Sustainable Development Goal 7 targets 90 per cent of Canada's electricity being generated from renewable and non-emitting resources by 2030; and

Whereas marine renewable energy is positioned to become a significant contributor to clean energy supplies to help Canada and Nova Scotia meet our green energy targets and reduce reliance on imported energy, with over 300 companies already finding work in

Atlantic Canada's emerging marine renewable energy sector with a total investment approaching \$200 million; and

Whereas the tidal energy proponent, Sustainable Marine, has given notice that they will be withdrawing their application under the Fisheries Act, citing that Fisheries and Oceans Canada is unable to assess their application effectively or competently despite five years of engagement with this department; and

Whereas Fisheries and Oceans Canada will play a crucial role in approving potential offshore wind energy projects, these investments are threatened by the department's inability to provide a clear and consistent federal regulatory path to proponents under the Fisheries Act and jeopardize Nova Scotia's green future;

Therefore be it resolved all members of the Legislature call upon the Government of Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Minister Murray, and her Parliamentary Secretary and Nova Scotia MP Mike Kelloway to immediately offer solutions for facilitating the responsible development of tidal energy in Nova Scotia by releasing the rationale for failing to provide an approval of Sustainable Marine Energy's multi-unit deployment plan and providing a pathway to approve other tidal and offshore wind energy developments.

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.

Before we move on to Statements by Members, I recognize the honourable member for Preston.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: I beg leave for an introduction. I want to ask the House to acknowledge and rise. I have my husband here, Mr. Antonio Dean Simmonds; my beautiful daughter Angelina; my eldest son, who has blessed me with two beautiful grandchildren, AJ Simmonds and my baby A'dre. I'm so shocked you're here - thank you - between football and workouts and overnights.

I just want to ask this House to acknowledge today is an important day for me. So blessed that they could all be here. You have several statements already about you in the

House, but I do want to say thank you very much, and this journey wouldn't be worthwhile without you all here. I ask the House to rise and acknowledge them. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Again, welcome to all visitors to the House today.

### **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

#### **MLA FOR PRESTON: IMPACT ON PROVINCE - RECOG.**

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): I rise today to extend my best wishes to the member for Preston as she leaves Province House to take on new challenges.

Although she was an MLA for a relatively short time - I'm sure it felt like a long time, but a short time - she made a big and lasting impact on this building and on our province. The member for Preston was the first African Nova Scotian woman to serve as Deputy Speaker in the Nova Scotia Legislature, and her work on land claims will ensure her rightful place in history.

On a personal note, I want to thank the member for Preston for her dedicated and sincere work on the groundbreaking Dismantling Racism and Hate Act. Thank you so much for that. I want to thank her for setting aside politics, engaging in frank discussion, and working to draft a very strong bill that I believe will move this province one step closer to a Nova Scotia that is free from hate and discrimination.

Today I'm happy to thank the member for Preston for her distinguished public service, and I wish her success and happiness in her new job and in the future. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

#### **MLA FOR PRESTON: CONTRIBS. IN LEG. - RECOG.**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the member for Preston and her contributions as a member in this Chamber.

The member continues to build the legacy that is founded on compassion, elevating underrepresented voices, and putting people first. During her time with our caucus, the member has made consequential impacts on this House, to her community, and the province at large, which was most demonstrated with her critical work in developing Bill No. 96, the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act.

Mr. Speaker, the member for Preston made history in Province House as the first African Nova Scotian deputy speaker, as the first African Nova Scotian woman to be elected to the Liberal Party as the MLA for Preston, and the first African Nova Scotian to run for the leadership of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party. The member always advocates for the voices of those who need it and provides that voice. I know she will be sorely missed in this House. I know that she will continue to do that in her new role as senior advisor on diversity, equity, and inclusion for McInnes Cooper and with her private consulting business as well.

I want to wish the member, on behalf of the caucus, all the luck as she moves on to this next chapter of her life and career. I ask the House to join me in celebrating the many accomplishments of the member for Preston and thank her for the impact that she has had on all of us. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**MLA FOR PRESTON: ADV. FOR COM. - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a friend and a colleague whom we have all had the honour and privilege to work with and alongside, the member for Preston, Angela Simmonds.

The member for Preston has been a fierce advocate for community during her time as an MLA and her work previously on the land titles initiative as well as a lawyer and with all of the many other accomplishments that were named here today.

The member for Preston is a voice for change. Her voice is in legislation, it is on panel discussions that I know that we have had jointly in community and in the public forums, continuing our talks on being Black in politics and specifically, a Black woman in politics.

Being a legislator can be challenging. Being a woman, and being a Black woman, is even more challenging, as we know that typically these spaces are not designed for folks who look like us.

Our NDP caucus would like to wish the MLA for Preston well on her future endeavours. I would like to thank the member for her time here with us. I want you to know that your presence here in this space has started a ripple effect and will continue on for years to come. I want to wish you well on your journey, and I hope that you enjoy the next chapter of your life. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Gosh, this could continue all day. (Laughter)

The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I feel bad for taking the heat off her now.

[9:30 a.m.]

Before I make my member's statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

JOHN WHITE: Visiting us today in the Speaker's Gallery, to recognize Transgender Day of Visibility, is Veronica Merryfield. Veronica is a founder of Cape Breton Transgender Network. She is active in her community and sits on several boards, including Transition House, the Every Woman Centre, Cape Breton Centre for Sexual Health, and Marion Bridge Community Hall. She also sits on two CBRM committees: the Diversity and Inclusion Committee and the Access to Disability Committee.

Veronica has set up support groups and delivered training to a number of organizations both locally and further abroad, including Samaritans Suicide Hotline U.K., staff at Transition House, Cape Breton Partnership, GSA conferences with schools and youth projects, GSA in Michigan, CBU nurses program, the Elizabeth Fry Society, Marine Atlantic and more. "And more" are key words, there, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) We're not even finished.

She campaigned for a change in the Nova Scotia Children and Family Services Act, which took effect October 27, 2020, to better support 2SLGBTQ+ children in difficult situations and environments. Most recently, Veronica became the first transgender woman appointed to the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status on Women.

Mr. Speaker, I've got to say, when I first met Veronica, it was about a year ago here in this Chamber in a very impactful Health Committee meeting. At that time, she described a time in her life that she was confused, lost, and lacking a passion for life. As I just read, she's no longer lost and confused, and she's certainly not lacking in passion for life.

Would you please give us a round of applause for Veronica, because I'm happy to have her here. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Again, welcome to the Legislature today. If the clock had been running, you would have been long out of time just on the accomplishments alone.

The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion.

### **INT'L TRANS. DAY OF VIS: RAISING AWAAR. - RECOG.**

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge International Transgender Day of Visibility, a day dedicated to recognizing our

transgender residents and raising awareness of the discrimination they face. Today we not only acknowledge the need to challenge the discrimination facing our transgender residents, but to also celebrate the many contributions they have made to our communities here in Nova Scotia.

We are committed to supporting and promoting the rights of our transgender residents. Last Summer our government removed barriers and cut wait times for residents seeking gender-affirming surgery, a decision that was celebrated by our transgender community.

I ask that all members of this House join me in celebrating International Transgender Day of Visibility in our province. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**MLA FOR PRESTON: WORK FOR PROVINCE - RECOG.**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I want to join my colleagues in recognizing the member for Preston. We first met at Dalhousie's IB&M Initiative, just across the hall in the Red Room, many years ago. We then reconnected when I was seeking advice on how to get through the claims of the Land Titles Initiative at the Department of Lands and Forestry. Because of her advice, we were able to make structural change in that department.

That's what started our friendship and journey together to tackle systemic racism within the government of Nova Scotia like never before. The member was appointed executive director of the Land Titles Initiative. The Land Titles Initiative Acceleration Act passed, more resources were put into it, and commissioners were appointed to settle claims.

We had more plans, plans to be on that side of the House. However, being in Opposition did not let that be a barrier for the member. She was a force, and it was because of her that our platform commitment of defining hate and eliminating racism passed in law in this Legislature. (Applause)

She is the first African Nova Scotian Deputy Speaker. I am reminded of a saying from the community that I hear often that says we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors. I want to say to the member, I think it's a fair statement to say that there will be many more in the future, both outside and within this Legislature, who will stand on her shoulders.

It is a bittersweet day for me. Her new employer is very lucky to have her. I will always admire and appreciate her tenacity to always work and pressure to do things that are what's right for Nova Scotia, what's right for inclusion and diversity, and what's right for our province and the future prosperity of this province. (Applause)



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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make some introductions with regard to my member statement.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, in the gallery I would like to welcome, and would invite them to stand as I introduce them: Samantha Taylor, Diane Taylor, Sophie Pomeroy, James and Heather Pomeroy, Maggie Duck, and Louisa Duck. Can we all give them a warm welcome? (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: A very warm welcome to all. Thank you.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

**HFX. WESTERN CAPITALS: CAN. WINTER GAMES - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, Maggie rang us in. I'm so honoured to recognize some of Nova Scotia's best young athletes in the House today: Maggie Duck, Sophie Pomeroy, and Samantha Taylor.

Maggie learned to skate at 19 months of age and began playing hockey at five. She is a student at Halifax West High School, and will continue playing hockey next year in the competitive U22 junior women's league in Ontario.

Sophie is a forward and started playing at age four. She is at Armbrae Academy, and will be going to the University of Guelph to study sciences and play varsity field hockey.

Samantha started playing hockey at the age of five. She is currently in Grade 12 at Citadel High School and will be playing varsity hockey next year with Mount Allison University.

Together, Samantha, Sophie, and Maggie all currently play on the Halifax Western Capitals, which is a U18 AAA female hockey team. The Halifax Western Capitals finished third of nine teams in the regular season and won the silver provincial title.

Recently, all three players were selected to represent Nova Scotia at the 2023 Canada Winter Games in P.E.I., where they took home a historic silver medal. I know we are all so proud and so excited.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to recognize the athletic excellence of these young Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**NORTH AMER. INDIG. GAMES: 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - RECOG.**

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, 2023 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the North American Indigenous Games, known as NAIG, and the first time they will be hosted in Atlantic Canada. These games will be the largest sporting event ever held in Atlantic Canada. The Games will host 16 sports, including three traditional sports: lacrosse, canoe/kayak, and 3D archery. Over 5,200 athletes and over 756 Indigenous nations from across North America will be in Nova Scotia for this event.

The games will take place across the HRM and Millbrook First Nation in over 20 sport venues from July 15<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>. NAIG is held every four years and is an exciting opportunity for athletes to compete in their chosen sport.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, actually, I believe the member for Dartmouth East would like to make an introduction before I do my member's statement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: I certainly appreciate that gesture from my honourable colleague. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, we have two incredible Atlantic Canadians with us here today who for many of us here don't need an introduction. Jim and Judie Edgar, I'd ask you to please stand and receive the warm acknowledgement of the House. (Standing ovation)

In 2018, my daughters Sophie and Ella and I had an incredible moment to meet Judie and Jim Edgar. At that period of time, we were on a path of healing - a path of grieving. Judie and Jim came into our lives. They offered us an opportunity to journey with them on the path of healing - working with them, and many others, to establish the Daffodil Garden for Cancer Survivors, the first in Atlantic Canada.

I think this Legislature has a real debt of gratitude to Jim and Judie Edgar for the work that they've done. Jim and Judie, you know the love my family has for you. You know the love I have for you personally. On behalf of all Nova Scotians, thank you for all that you've done.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**EDGAR, JUDIE & JIM: CANCER SURVIVORS GARDEN - RECOG.**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to read a statement on behalf of my colleague, the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand and recognize Judie and Jim Edgar of Cole Harbour, both cancer survivors. The Edgars had a dream of creating a daffodil garden in honour of those who survive cancer. Their vision came to fruition on September 25, 2020, when the first such garden in Atlantic Canada was completed, with support from public and private funds, including HRM Parks and Recreation.

The Daffodil Garden for Cancer Survivors is located on the Dartmouth waterfront. It is a beautiful gathering space that inspires and gives hope and courage to those impacted by a cancer diagnosis. We look forward once again to experiencing the sea of yellow daffodils for all to enjoy and celebrate in the Spring of 2023.

I ask that members of the Assembly join me in recognizing Judie and Jim Edgar for this achievement. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**EDGAR, JUDIE & JIM: CANCER SURVIVORS GARDEN - RECOG.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, as the MLA for Dartmouth South - which is proud to host the Daffodil Garden for Cancer Survivors - I also rise to recognize Jim and Judie Edgar today, the creators behind Dartmouth's most recent and iconic installation.

The Daffodil Garden for Cancer Survivors is in Ferry Terminal Park in Dartmouth. If anyone wants to come visit, you're all very welcome. It officially opened in September 2020. To date, over 30,000 daffodil bulbs have been planted by Jim and Judie's loyal volunteer team, which includes the community, myself, my staff, my family, and many other MLAs and their families, as you've heard.

Overlooking Halifax Harbour, the garden is a place for contemplation, remembrance, and healing for anyone affected by cancer. A wash of thousands of bright yellow daffodils pop up each Spring and it is a sight to behold. It brings joy to our hearts, and I really encourage you all, once we rise, to go visit.

Jim and Judie's steady dedication to this project brought it to life and now we all get to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Thank you so much to both of you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

**AUCHNIE, PATRICIA: COUNSELLING WORK - RECOG.**

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to all social workers across the province of Nova Scotia for Social Workers Recognition Month in March, but also to make special mention of social worker Patricia Auchnie.

Patricia is the owner of Nova Salutem, a private and corporate counselling service that she offers from the Eastern Shore. She has been offering her social work counselling services in Eastern Passage for a mental wellness series focusing on the needs of community members.

This service is provided thanks to funds raised by the Music 4 Mental Health Committee, of which Patricia is also a volunteer. She has offered courses on what is mental wellness in creating a better you. There are two future sessions left this quarter - Supporting Children and Teenagers, and Seniors and Caregiver Supports - with more to come in the Fall.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in recognizing social worker Patricia Auchnie for all of her hard work and dedication in my community - as well as all Nova Scotia social workers.

THE SPEAKER: I recognize the lady of the hour, the honourable member for Preston. (Laughter)

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: I just want to acknowledge Ms. Bernadette Hamilton-Reid, who sits up there, my constituency assistant. She is one of the recipients of the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal, and has done so much in our community. I just want to thank you for showing up. You've sent me messages all week about you praying for me for today, and here you are. Thank you so much, and I appreciate you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

**CLERKS AND SPEAKER: HELP IN LEG. - THANKS**

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and thank two people who have done over 110 per cent when I've asked, and even times when I haven't. Mr. James Charlton and David Hastings, thank you so much for your leadership, your kindness, your steadfast service, and most of all, for your patience. I want to thank you for the sticky notes when I'm saying, wait one second, I need to get a pen, I need to write this

down. Even before I showed up, you would have the written information in front of me. Thank you so much. I appreciate the courage.

Finally, I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your friendship, your courage, your leadership, and your guidance. When you left the Chamber to make me have to ask my colleague and friend to leave, you've challenged me - in the best of times to challenge myself with decisions. I thank you for that. I look forward to the next piece of French toast that we share in conversations.

[9:45 a.m.]

Thank you, everyone. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, may I make a rather long introduction before I begin my member statement?

THE SPEAKER: Sure, why not? Everybody else is doing it. (Laughter)

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm really excited today, Mr. Speaker, to welcome to the House a number of folks from Dartmouth North. They are students at John Martin Junior High School and a couple of teachers, as well as Rebecca Rose, who is the constituency coordinator in my office in Dartmouth North.

I will say your name and if you wouldn't mind standing to receive the warm welcome of the House, that would be great. Welcome to Janet Jasmine, Katrina Kerr, Zama Uramen, Leah Zuraviv, Isaac Handley, Jaden Stevenson, Shrihari Menan, Keyonne Kennedy, Charine Goran-Williams, Jasmine Time, Daniella Duka, as well as teachers Ian Stewart, Brooke Vantassel, and Wanda Baker-Hayward. Thank you all for being here. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: A very warm welcome to everyone attending today.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**STUDENTS & TEACHERS: THE NORTH GROVE EFFORTS - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, John Martin Junior High School is just over a block from the North Grove, Dartmouth North's community food and family hub. Both the school and North Grove are integral and vibrant parts of our community.

This past Fall and Winter, Grade 7 students at John Martin Junior High School brought their considerable energy and enthusiasm to the North Grove to help in the community farm and prepare meal kits for the weekly market. For the chili meal kit, for example, the students work together to assemble canned tomatoes, beans, onions, peppers, garlic, spices, oil, and detailed instructions. Last month, the students learned to make their own fajitas, including homemade guacamole, in the North Grove's kitchen.

Ms. Vantassel, who coordinated the partnership, said that the overwhelming feeling the students had after volunteering at the North Grove was pride - and they should be proud. The Grade 7s' efforts even won them the attention of the CBC.

I would like to ask the House to join me in thanking the Grade 7 students and teachers at John Martin Junior High for doing their part to make sure everyone in Dartmouth North has access to healthy, delicious food.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

**MACMASTER, NATALIE: ORDER OF N.S. INDUCTION - RECOG.**

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Let us acknowledge Natalie MacMaster, inducted into the Order of Nova Scotia in 2020, who received her honour this week. Natalie has been an ambassador for our province since she first took her music on the road as a teenager. When others her age were enjoying the pursuits of youth, she was making sacrifices and dedicating her time to honing her craft. This has led to a successful career in music, where she continues to sell out venues across North America each year she tours.

What sets Natalie apart is her sincerity. She always takes time for everyone she meets and makes them feel special. Her ability to play the violin brings them in the door, and her sincerity keeps them coming back for more.

Although she is a resident of Ontario with her husband Donnell and their troupe of seven professional musicians - Mary Frances, Michael, Clare, Julia, Alec, Sadie, and Maria - we are not letting go of Natalie. Her roots are showing, and we shall continue to lay claim to her and her family here in our province. Congratulations, Natalie, you have been awarded our province's highest honour.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

**BAILEY, LINDA: QPJ MEDAL RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, recently, I had the pleasure of awarding the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal to Linda Bailey. Linda has been a registered nurse for many years and now helps recruit health professionals to our community.

She is also a long-time community volunteer, including with the Fundy YMCA, the Atalanta Hospice Society and Fundy Hospice, and the Annapolis West Health Foundation. She is certainly a very deserving recipient of this award.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Linda Bailey on receiving the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

### **POLICE IN GROCERY STORES: IMPACT - RECOG.**

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, the constituency office for Halifax Chebucto is across the street from the Quinpool Road Superstore, which has much diminished the neighbourhood by the use of uniformed armed HRP officers patrolling the store since last July. I was interested to note that at the January 16<sup>th</sup> hearings of the Police Commission - preparatory to the HRM 2023-24 budget - five out of 30 public presenters made reference to this subject.

They spoke about, I quote, police lurking around grocery stores and moonlighting in grocery stores. They referred to allegedly overworked HRP officers picking up extra shifts as armed guards protecting loaves of bread, and to police picking up off-duty shifts at the Superstore - criminalizing people for accessing food.

What is the real difference, asked one presenter: stealing food or arresting people who are stealing food because they're hungry? I would suggest that the real crime is grocery chains profiteering during a period of rampant food price inflation and increasing hunger. It is unfortunate that the HRP continues to lend its symbolic authority to Loblaws Superstore in this respect.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

### **DAFFODIL MONTH: FIGHTING CANCER - RECOG.**

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, tomorrow marks the beginning of Daffodil Month. Many Nova Scotians have been impacted by cancer. I know all of us in this Chamber today are honoured to wear the daffodil pin.

As the first flower to emerge after the Winter months, the daffodil is resilient, just like the estimated 641 Canadians and their families who are diagnosed with cancer every day. To us, the daffodil represents courage, strength, and most importantly, hope.

For 65 years, the Canadian Cancer Society's Daffodil Campaign has raised funds for the vital work that they do, including funding research, educating people, and providing support services to enhance the quality of life of those impacted by cancer.

There are a number of ways that the members of this Legislature can let Nova Scotians living with cancer know that their battle does not need to be fought alone. Whether it is wearing a daffodil pin, sharing inspiring stories on social media, or engaging with community partners, I know we can all contribute.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join me in supporting Daffodil Month and consider the ways that we can inspire hope and fight the good fight.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**INT'L TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIB.: SUPP. OF COM. - RECOG.**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, today is International Transgender Day of Visibility. Today and every day, we celebrate transgender and non-binary people for their contributions to our province. We must strive to continue building a more diverse, welcoming, and equitable future for Nova Scotia.

I would just like to say how grateful I am to be part of a Legislature that supports that community on all sides of this House. When I look south of the border and I see what's happening, it breaks my heart for people who are transgender and non-binary there. It breaks my heart, and I am so thankful to be part of a Legislature that will not be part of that.

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

**MERRYFIELD, VERONICA: SUPPORT WORK - THANKS**

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise today on this very important day - I'm trying not to cry here. A very dear friend of mine, Veronica Merryfield, is here. It is fitting that she is here in this House today on the International Transgender Day of Visibility. Veronica is - not only is she a strong advocate, but she has saved so many lives - people whom we both care about. She has been such a steadfast community member in Cape Breton.

Veronica is also a poet - a very beautiful poet who lends her art to save those who are suicidal, Mr. Speaker. She talks about those who have been lost. The International Transgender Day of Visibility is a very important day. It is apt that she is here, and I thank her so much for all of her work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

**NORTH RIVER & DIST. FIRE BRIGADE: 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - RECOG.**

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the North River & District Fire Brigade, who are celebrating 50 years of serving the community of North River.



As a result of a farm being destroyed by fire, they held their first meeting on March 8, 1972, in the old schoolhouse. They canvassed their community to raise money for the fire hall. Foster MacKenzie provided the land, someone in the community donated the logs, and a community sawmill milled the lumber. Their first fire truck was, I think - I'm not sure of the model, but it was at least a half-ton - two-wheel-drive, half-ton. That's where they started out.

Ed Franklin was the first fire chief of the North River & District Fire Brigade. Fifty years later, during their celebration, his son, Chris Franklin, is the chief of the day. Staying with family traditions is very common in rural communities.

The North River & District Fire Brigade continues to provide our citizens with exemplary service. I would like to congratulate the members and I wish them all the very best in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, before I do my member's statement, I beg leave to do an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: In the West Gallery, I'd like to introduce Heather Mulligan, manager of advocacy for the Canadian Cancer Society of Atlantic Canada. Heather is a passionate, strong, intelligent, hard-working individual who is a strong voice for all who are impacted by cancer. I want to thank her for being here today. I hope the House will give her a nice round of applause. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

#### **DAFFODIL MONTH: CANCER AWARENESS - RECOG.**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Today we are wearing daffodils to raise awareness and funds to help those impacted by cancer. We all know someone who has battled cancer, and we all know the struggle and bravery it takes. For me, it was both my biological mother and my foster mother.

The daffodil is the first flower to bloom in Spring. For those living with cancer it represents strength, resilience, courage, and hope. My heart goes out to everyone who has lost and everyone who battles. You're heroes to all of us.

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

#### **INT'L TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIB.: AWAR. OF DISCR. - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, on International Transgender Day of Visibility, we recognize and celebrate the transgender, non-binary, and two-spirit people in our families, communities, and workplaces. As we focus on making visible the lives and contributions of trans people, we also need to continue to raise awareness of the discrimination and violence faced by many trans people every day.

Here and around the world, it is often not safe to be openly transgender, and many trans folks are unfairly subjected to violence if they try to live as themselves. Lots of progress has been made, but it is being actively attacked and eroded. It's not just a problem elsewhere; it's a problem here.

Transphobic discrimination, especially violence, does not occur in a vacuum. It starts with attempts to erase the existence of trans people and to block their participation in society. It is linked both to other forms of hate and to profit. There's a lot of action in the word visibility. Now is the time to get loud. Support the visibility and rights of trans, non-binary, two-spirit, and gender-diverse Nova Scotians.

I ask all members, don't stand on the sidelines as our access to public space, our safety, and our human rights are eroded.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

**MOSSMAN, MARION: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I rise today to recognize Marion Mossman of Chelsea for her devotion to community and for always lending a helping hand.

Marion has been a dedicated volunteer of the Saint John the Apostle Parish for over 40 years and has contributed in so many ways, including being a member of the finance council, doing pastoral care, and being a coordinator, reader and altar server at Mass. She also organizes functions such as funeral receptions and farewell parties, ensuring that everything runs as smoothly as possible.

Marion is an inspiration. Despite going through her own personal battle with cancer and feeling unwell some days, she just keeps on going. She takes care of others. She visits those who are sick at home, in hospital, as well as in nursing homes, always offering a smile and a listening ear.

I call on all those in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in thanking Marion for her kindness and caring, and for going above and beyond to help make our community a brighter and happier place.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**MLA FOR PRESTON: COURAGE - RECOG.**

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge today my privilege to know my colleague from Preston and family.

[10:00 a.m.]

I came across this family in my early stages with the fire service. I met first time, Dean, who has become a very close friend of mine. And after that also I had the opportunity to meet AJ through my son, through basketball competition. Then they became teammates for a Nova Scotia basketball team.

And that did not end, when I met the best and last, the member, my colleague. I'm grateful knowing this family and each one of them has their quality. And each of them the space they were, they were the champion. I am sure Nova Scotia will miss this member. I am sure this House will miss this member. And I'm sure the caucus of the Liberal party will miss her courage, her belief, and her stance, what she believes.

I wish the best wherever she goes and I have full confidence, no matter where she goes, she will make it a better place to be.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**BEALS, FRANK: QPJ MEDAL RECIP. - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize a recipient of Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal, which was presented in December of 2022 in Halifax Needham. Mr. Beals has dedicated himself to our community and province in all that he does.

Frank Beals began volunteering as a volunteer medical first responder with St. John Ambulance NS/PEI Council 20 years ago, and he has assisted in the leading of the Halifax division as a member of their . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time for Statements by Members has expired. We went beyond on most of them today, but I think it was for a very good reason.

Before we move to Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers, I want to bring the members' attention to the Speaker's Gallery this morning and a familiar face up there that many of you know used to be our Chief Clerk here in this Legislature. I'd like to introduce Neil Ferguson. I'm glad to see him. (Applause) Good to see you, Neil.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on an introduction.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined by Sarah Douglas, counsel with McInnes Cooper, who will be a colleague of the member for Preston in her new role. I want to thank Sarah for coming in and also thank her for her work as vice chair of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party.

[10:00 a.m.]

While I have a moment, Mr. Speaker, I also want to quickly wish a happy birthday to my youngest daughter, Eva Irene Churchill, who is turning four today.

Eva and Cecelia, I love you both. I am sorry I am not home with you right now, but I will hopefully see you tonight before you go to bed.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. The time is now 10:02. We will stop at 10:52.

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM.: FAMILY PHYSICIAN RETENTION - SUPPORT**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, this Premier was elected on a promise to fix health care. In fact, when he was in Opposition and the number of people who needed a family doctor was just over 40,000, he said we had a health care crisis. Now that number, under his leadership, is closer to 140,000 people without a family doctor in this province, the majority of which is caused by doctors actually shutting down their practice.

We also know that in the Central Zone we have a major spike, with over 61,000 Nova Scotians without a family doctor on a wait-list, yet this government has not brought any financial supports to incentivize or retain doctors in this budget. In fact, the Premier has told our health care workers to "go like hell." They have been going like hell. They are going through hell, and now many of them are actually leaving their practice.

Why was there nothing in this budget to actually support retention and recruitment of family physicians into the Province of Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: I thank the member for this important issue. Obviously, the state of health care is a concern to myself, the government, and all Nova Scotians. We are committed to fixing health care. We are going fast, Mr. Speaker. We are making significant

investments in health care. In fact, in this year's budget, \$6.5 billion is invested in health care.

We're concerned about access to care. Nova Scotians are concerned about access to care. That's why we put a number of initiatives in place to make sure that people have different options for care. As the world changes, the health care system has to change.

But I have to say, I was so proud to do the retention incentive last week for nurses and other allied health care professionals. We continue to work with doctors. We have great respect for our health care professionals, and we're there to support them as well as we can every day.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, things are moving fast in this province. We've never seen an explosion in the number of people without a family doctor happen this quickly, as we have had under this government, and yet there is still nothing to recruit or retain family physicians.

Without patients being attached to family physicians, that is going to put more burdens on our emergency rooms - which, by the way, are closing at twice the rate as they did previously. It is putting more pressure on people's personal health because they are not paying attention to the health impacts that are happening in their own body.

This government actually had a chance to retain six family practices here in Halifax, but instead what they did was shut down the family doctor financial incentive and not even support those doctors trying to remain in practice.

My question is: Why is this government ignoring the important role that family doctors play in our health care system?

THE PREMIER: What I want Nova Scotians to know, particularly those who are on the Need a Family Practice Registry, is that we've established a number of ways to access care - through virtual care, through mobile clinics, through pharmacy clinics. We are working with health care professionals to make sure there are options for those Nova Scotians who are seeking care. We'll continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

The old days where you had a doctor when you were born and that was the doctor through your life who delivered your own children are over. We need to move forward and accept that the world is changing. That's why we're opening so many different pathways to care and health homes. We're working hard, and Nova Scotians can see that effort. That's something they didn't see for the eight years before that.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I think Nova Scotians are paying attention to the words that the Premier said while in Opposition - fighting to get more patients family doctors - and what he's saying now in this House, where he's admitting he has essentially

given up on getting Nova Scotians a family doctor. That's why there's no incentive in the budget. That's why they cut the family practice incentive here in Halifax. That's why the Premier talks about everything else, from virtual care to pharmacists, without actually talking about family doctors.

Guess what? Virtual care is good when you want to get a prescription renewal, if you need a mental health consultation. That's why our party brought virtual care into the province. What it doesn't do is provide a physical assessment. What it doesn't do is help people catch illnesses that are in their bodies. Doctors need to put their hands on patients. They need to do physical assessments. The more patients without a family doctor, the more people are going to get sick, and this health care system will not be fixed.

When is the approach going to change?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, let me just say two things: The first thing is that there is a role for virtual care. The member still may not believe that. Virtual care is not for everything, but it is just what the doctor ordered for a number of things. We will continue to expand access to virtual care.

I will tell the member one other thing. He may know what giving up means, but I have no idea. We're going to go like hell every day.

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

### **PREM.: WOMEN'S ORG. FUNDING - INCREASE**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Mass Casualty Commission released its final report. Included within the 3,000 pages are many carefully crafted and considered and potentially transformative recommendations. This one stands out today:

“Community-based services, and in particular services provided by the gender-based violence advocacy and support sector, need to be viewed in tandem with police agencies as equal partners in preventing violence . . . Adequate and stable core funding is essential for efficient and effective operation of all organizations forming part of the public safety net in Canada.”

Mr. Speaker, we need this government to take a transformative approach to safety, and to take women's safety seriously. Will the Premier act to dramatically increase funding for women's organizations and to make them equal partners in public safety?

THE PREMIER: Of course, with the release of the report yesterday - it's a very fulsome report - it certainly brought a lot of emotions forward for all Nova Scotians, and Canadians as well. We have always put the family members, the victims, and the survivors

at the centre of everything we have done. We'll continue to do that. There are a lot of incredible recommendations in that report, and we're going to work with the federal government. We're going to do what we can to make sure we make our communities safer. Certainly, the focus on gender-based violence is front and centre for us as well.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: This week, we have had the opportunity to ask both the Premier and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development about the massive shortage of daycare spots in the province. Both were dismissive of our concerns, and somehow suggested that the situation is improving. But Mr. Speaker, when only 14 infant and toddler spaces have been delivered out of a promised 4,000, it is categorically not improving.

We are hearing story after story of parents - largely mothers - who cannot return to the workplace because they do not have a child care spot, which was promised by this province, and this province's government . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The leader has changed the topic.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: No, my topic is: Is this government taking women seriously? Women need child care. Women need gender-based. . .

THE SPEAKER: You had made reference to a previous question put to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and you made reference to it in this. Your preamble has not been about how you started talking about the Mass Casualty Commission. (Interruptions)

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party - I'll give you a chance to ask your question and how it's going to relate to the Mass Casualty Commission.

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: As with the request for funding for gender-based violence, we also have requested of this government to fund child care. These are both things that women need to stay safe, and to be able to be productive in our society.

Therefore, I want to point out the situation of an Enfield mother who can't find even a wait-list to put her child on to return to work. She asked: What do you do if you don't find someone? I have to return to work, so what are my options? I'll ask the Premier: What are her options?

THE PREMIER: I want to assure that Nova Scotian, and all Nova Scotians, that we're not dismissive of any single concern of Nova Scotians. I take my obligation to Nova Scotians very seriously. I would never be dismissive of an issue that a Nova Scotian brings to me - certainly not an important issue around child care.

What I would correct for the member is with the agreement with the federal government as we move forward to make sure that people have access to child care, which is incredibly important, as the member has pointed out, we've opened close to 1,100 new spots - before-school, after-school, and all kinds of spots. Is there more work to be done? There's a lot more work to be done. We'll continue to do that work as best we can.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Continuing with the topic of investment in women, we have now had a week to digest this budget and the priorities it represents.

Apparently, the priorities are not investments in access to universal birth control; not expansion of midwifery services; not increased core, stable, predictable funding for women's organizations; not making good on child care commitments - either with spaces or affordability; and not a school food program.

In this budget, and throughout the past week, this government has made their priorities well known, and those priorities do not appear to be the health care nor other investments that women need in this province.

Why does it seem like women are not a priority for this government?

THE PREMIER: I just want to say that certainly in the budget there is a significant investment in health care, in all Nova Scotians, and certainly in women's care, for sure. The member may know that just prior to the release of the budget, sometimes there's a lot of discussion in this Chamber as to whether or not we should make investments prior to the budget. But just prior to the budget, we announced \$8 million in funding to help women's centres and transition houses across the province. We will be there to support women's centres and transition houses, women, and all Nova Scotians across this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **DHW: FAM. PRAC. INCENTIVES - IMPLEMENT**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, we really believe that the situation with people who need a family doctor is going to get worse. We have hundreds of doctors who are nearing the age of retirement, and yet there is nothing in this budget to recruit or retain doctors.

We also know that many doctors who have retired or are nearing retirement are actually interested in continuing on with part-time practice - although there is no billing option that can allow them to do that. Doctors like George Burden in Elmsdale have been advocating to incentivize retired or older doctors to transition from practise gradually to ensure more Nova Scotians aren't left without a family doctor.



Why isn't this government considering any incentives to ensure that retired doctors can enter into part-time practice or transition more slowly out of their practice so that more Nova Scotians can have access to the primary care that they need?

[10:15 a.m.]

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I think what the member is actually describing is the former government's approach to retiring physicians, because certainly, it was always one-in, one-out in the years that I recall.

We are looking at a transition into practice and a transition out of practice. We are looking at a variety of different options. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are more options than ever before for retiring physicians to work in mentorship roles, mobile clinics, virtual care, to do hospitalist work, and to support new physicians coming into practice.

We continue to work with physicians. We're working with Doctors Nova Scotia. The college has given us some feedback about retiring physicians. We want to keep that senior wisdom in our system. We'll continue to work with senior physicians to mentor our novice physicians as we transform health care.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the minister stood up and talked about all these new positions that are actually pulling family doctors out of family practice at a time when Nova Scotians need family doctors the most.

Why is it that this government can only brag about how much money they are spending, or blame other governments for the problem that is getting worse under their leadership? Why is that the case? Because they can't point to outcomes that are getting better for patients here in Nova Scotia. They can't point to a fact that more Nova Scotians have a family doctor, because they don't. Exponentially more Nova Scotians do not have a family doctor.

When will this government actually take primary care seriously when it comes to family practice and ensure that there are incentives in place to attract patients to family doctors?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I told the member previously, there is \$6.5 billion in this budget to make sure that we transform health care. In the House this week, I read a litany of eight years of reductions in budgets over the entire course of that government's tenure in office, and yet we are training more. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness has the floor.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Thank you for the moment of Zen, Mr. Speaker. I don't remember where I was.

I don't remember where I was. I just want to assure everyone there are \$6.5 billion commitments to health care in this province. We are working tirelessly to transform health care. We have invested in a number of things that nobody invested in before. We are here for a reason, Mr. Speaker, but we are the first government in over a dozen years that has actually decided that they are going to fix health care. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

### **DHW: HEALTH GAG ORDER - REMOVE**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'd like to thank the members opposite for the round of applause.

During the campaign, the Premier committed that he'll be removing the gag order on health care workers who want to improve the system. However, Nova Scotians learned about a letter sent from the Vice President of the Nova Scotia Health Authority to doctors across the province. In the opening sentence, this senior executive makes it crystal clear that the health authority is very concerned about the ongoing negative media coverage in the province on the ever-growing list of doctors leaving their practice under this government.

My question to the Premier is: Did he think this letter was appropriate to send to doctors who take care of people across the province?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I am grateful that the member brought this up. To the point of retired doctors, certainly at the last summit, we heard directly from physicians about how difficult it is for them to transition out of practice. Sometimes they don't have a replacement - and the shame they feel and the guilt they feel. We were asked by the College of Physicians and Surgeons to be mindful of how it feels for those physicians.

As an attempt to work with physicians, we want to let them know that we are here for them. We didn't ask them to change the narrative. We want to change it with them. We want to have a support line with them so we can help them transition out of practice, we can help them stay in the system - that they don't need to carry a burden of guilt about finally retiring after a life of dedicated service to Nova Scotians.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I would like to remind the Minister of Health and Wellness that the letter said, and I quote: "We want to change this narrative immediately."

In Nova Scotia, we have a government asking the doctors to share their concerns internally via hotline, but not to go to the media. If this letter was about supporting doctors, it would not be focused on the media narrative. That was drawn out in that letter.

Does the Premier or the Minister of Health and Wellness believe that changing the media narrative is more important than taking care of the doctors?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the work that Dr. Nicole Boutilier does in this province every day with primary care physicians. Dr. Nicole Boutilier regularly corresponds with physicians throughout the province with that newsletter. She puts supports in place for physicians. She has worked diligently. In fact, we have had a number of physicians who have reached out through that email and hotline to thank Nicole Boutilier for her work and support. They were very anxious to be able to speak to her about their feelings about retirement, and they want to work with government in order to help transition out of practice in a way that is meaningful for them as they continue to contribute to the system. In no way do we want to silence physicians.

We travelled around this province and talked to over 2,000 health care workers in order to ensure that we heard directly from them. We heard their voice, and Action for Health is built on the foundation of health care workers in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

#### **DHW: COLLAB. CARE CTRS. - OPEN**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I'm asking this question today because of the troubling answer given at Estimates. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. Under this government in the last - over a year, there has not been one collaborative care centre opened in this province. What happened to all parties agreeing that collaborative care was the future of primary care?

New and existing doctors who work in this environment need this so we can take more Nova Scotians off the list. We know of many doctors who have been asking for nurse practitioners, family practice nurses, and other allied health care professionals to join a team-based approach, and yet not one collaborative care centre has opened.

Will the minister admit that the number of people without primary care has spiralled out of control because of the government's failure to open one collaborative care centre?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: What's really important about opening new collaborative care centres is actually the recruitment aspect, which we need to stabilize. We've had a net gain of 261 registered nurses in this province in the past year, a net gain of

264 licensed practical nurses in this province in the past year, a net gain of 47 nurse practitioners in this province in the last year.

We've had 31 primary care physicians net gain in this province. This is what it takes to turn the tide. We have a province that is working with clinicians. We are increasing our immigration and we are increasing our seats. People know that Nova Scotia is open for business. We are moving at breakneck speed to ensure that people know that Nova Scotia is on the move, and this is the place where they should come to work.

IAIN RANKIN: This government brags about population growth that was set in motion back in 2014, but even then we were able, with that growth, to move people off the list. The list was actually going down until the pandemic hit.

There are many clinics asking for nurses. All the minister has to do is get one nurse approved. She mentioned a bunch of nurses. Approve one for South End, Spryfield, Tantallon, Hammonds Plains. I could go on and on. Can the minister confidently say that the new collaborative care centres she's saying will open this year, which is 14, will actually happen, and does she regret that she didn't open one until she got to this point?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: What I regret is that I didn't run sooner and help him form government. That's what I regret. As I said before, I worked under that former government for the past eight years, and they can pound their chest all they want. The reason I'm here today . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Everybody take a deep breath. Please.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

#### **DHW: ANTI-TRANSGENDER HATE - CONDEMN**

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Premier. I'm proud to stand on Transgender Day of Visibility and take this moment to recognize and celebrate the transgender, non-binary, gender-diverse, and two-spirit people in our families, communities, and workplace. This day is important here in Nova Scotia because we still have so much to do.

Hate is present in our province. Just recently, a local business that hosts a drag storytime received hate and backlash online, and trans folks are incessantly attacked online and in the streets. Progress has been made, but that progress is quickly being attacked and eroded.

Will the Premier stand today on Transgender Day of Visibility and condemn transphobia and hate?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, I want to stand and speak about some of the work that's happened around the health equity framework, which we're very proud of in the Department of Health and Wellness. I also wanted to thank the folks who are advocating and supporting the Department of Health and Wellness in running a new gender-affirming care policy to support people in accessing care.

I do want to acknowledge as well that we have a lot of work to do. We're very grateful for these evolving and growing relationships and looking very much forward to improving the access to care for transgender people in our community.

LISA LACHANCE: I thank the minister for her words. I think in a government where we're moving faster for better or quicker access to health care that trans folks and non-binary folks in this province have not seen faster, better, or more health care.

We need to act. We need to act on gender-affirming care. We need to create more 2SLGBTQ+ community spaces. It's difficult to take commitment seriously without action, without a strategy, or without a minister dedicated to work on this front.

I'll ask the Premier: Will the Minister of Health and Wellness, the minister responsible for 2SLGBTQ+ affairs, and the Premier make that appointment official?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: To your point, I know that there is more to do. I know that there is more work that has to happen in terms of making our spaces safe and inclusive. We are committed to doing that work, Mr. Speaker.

Admittedly, we have come a long way, but we do know that there are more things to do. We are committed to that work. We want to do it intentionally and mindfully. We appreciate the relationships that we're building within communities, particularly around health care, to make sure that we have safe, inclusive environments and access to the care that individuals require.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

### **DHW: RETENTION OF PARAMEDICS - ACT**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, we continue to hear stories about the issues that paramedics are facing across the province. Paramedics continue to leave in record numbers. I will table that.

Off-load times remain a critical issue for paramedics and we continue to hear about that in our communities. We are happy to hear that there is such high uptake of new paramedic students in the Yarmouth expansion, but we need to work on both recruitment and retention of new paramedics.

What is this government going to do, aside from the tuition rebate, to retain paramedics in rural Nova Scotia?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: There are a number of things that have happened in terms of our paramedic workforce.

I'm very, very proud of the workforce committee that's working with the Department of Health and Wellness, Nova Scotia Health, EMCI, the paramedics' union, and the regulator with the college to make sure that we are hearing directly about the concerns of paramedics. We've invested in equipment for them to reduce their injuries. We have revamped ambulances based on the feedback from paramedics. We have provided a rebate for new paramedics entering the workforce.

Recently we covered short-term illness for paramedics. We understood that this was a financial strain. As a result of those conversations, we were able to support them. There are a number of things. We certainly hear from them regularly and we want to make sure that they are valued. We have asked to go back to the table to support that workforce.

RONNIE LEBLANC: While we are happy to see the tuition rebate come in, we need to do more. We need immediate solutions to address the distressing situation that paramedics are facing and the impact that it is having on our patients.

We learned in Estimates that the average off-load time in the Western Zone is 73 minutes. Mr. Speaker, when will patients and paramedics feel some relief and see improvements in those off-load times?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: The introduction of the medical transport drivers - the patient transfer unit drivers - with 180 new folks to drive ambulances and separate our transfer system from our EHS response has had a significant impact on our ability to support emergency calls in this province.

We are also looking at those folks who are furthest away from a tertiary hospital, Mr. Speaker, and investing in a fixed-wing transfer unit that will put five ambulances per day back on the road to support emergency calls. We are working with end-of-shift overruns with solutions that have come directly from the front line. We are in constant communication with our paramedics and continue to work on solutions to support their practice environment and the care that Nova Scotians deserve and want.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

### **DHW: INCENTIVES FOR DOCTORS - CREATE**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It is without a doubt that all across this province, Nova Scotians need access to primary care, as there are over 137,000 people now on the

doctor wait-list. This is an increasing trend of doctors leaving all across the province, with over half of the Nova Scotians on the doctor wait-list due to doctors leaving or retiring.

We are disappointed that this budget did not recognize the needs of those in the Central Zone on the doctor wait-list. We've continued to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness why.

Quite frankly, we're not seeing any real reason why this government would not reinstate the important incentive when the Central Zone has over 60,000 Nova Scotians on the doctor wait-list. I will say that in my community alone, it went from 700 to about 6,000. Mr. Speaker, we know that at least 8,000 more are going to be joining in the coming months.

My question is: Why did this budget not include incentives for doctors coming to the Central Zone?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, we are open to looking at our strategies across this province to see how we recruit doctors. The Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment has a budget, and from that budget they look at recruitment, they look at retention issues, and we've been working across this province with physicians. We will continue to assess. We're looking at immigration strategies as well.

No one thing is going to address this entire problem. We need to look across all sectors, all specialties, including family practice, in order to recruit physicians, and we'll continue to do that. Our relationships are strong in this province, and we will continue to hear from doctors directly through the negotiations at the table with Doctors Nova Scotia.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Over 60,000 people are without a family doctor in the Central Zone, and I'm unsure why this minister won't listen to the needs of the over 60,000 people who are needing a family doctor. We know there's a correlation between the incentive and the doctor wait-list. We know that; it's factual. And I see the Premier shaking his head no, but this is a fact.

When there were 69,000 Nova Scotians on the doctor wait-list, this now Premier called it bad leadership. Now there are over 60,000 Nova Scotians on the wait-list in one zone alone, and this government will not incentivize new doctors to come to the Central Zone.

Mr. Speaker, does over 60,000 people in one zone not qualify as a need for incentivizing more family doctors?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I want to assure the member that when we came into office there was 60 per cent of the incentives sitting squarely in the Central Zone. And so for the past two years we have focused on equitable distribution. We have had good

recruitment efforts in this Central Zone, and it has also supported the recruitment efforts across this province. We do want equitable recruitment.

[10:30 a.m.]

We'll continue to look at our incentive programs. We're very open to suggestions. We work with physicians on a regular basis, making sure that they're a good match not only with the practice, but with the community where they live, and that work is ongoing. We also want people to be attached. We recruited 47 nurse practitioners, a net gain as well, Mr. Speaker.

So outside of physicians, we also need to look at our family practice teams in order to improve access.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

#### **DHW: CONT. GLUCOSE MONITORING - FUND**

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, for the last couple of years I've had constituents come to my office and sing the praises of continuous glucose monitoring.

A woman with a husband with dementia - it's been lifesaving, really, for him, not knowing when to test or if he tested - and mothers with children. Yet we have done nothing with this technology that saves money and creates much better health. Our Maritime counterparts have moved on this; they have covered or increased supports.

When will this government commit to providing funding for this lifesaving technology?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: There is an active review happening in the Department of Health and Wellness now around continuous glucose monitoring. We are looking at what our colleagues across the country have done.

We certainly know, and have heard from advocates, that it is an important piece of technology. That work continues in the department, and we will be looking into the future about how we can best support people living with diabetes in the province.

KEITH IRVING: We continue to hear from government that they are "reviewing" very important initiatives the government should be taking. There are many waiting for this, and we have no timeline, we just have another comment about review.

Nova Scotians are wondering what "more, faster health care" means. I think they can now understand that more means more review. Will the minister at least give an estimated timeline when we will hear the results of that review?



MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, we certainly are working through the processes of understanding how and if we are able to bring this new technology into our provincial system. We are working through the CADTH program. We're trying to understand how best to implement, and if we're able to do that. I do believe that there will be more to say about this, but again I'll wait for a fulsome review by the department.

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

### **OAMH: ACUTE CRISIS SUFFERERS - SUPPORT**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health. We have seen too many tragic consequences from the lack of supports available for people in an acute mental health crisis. Yuliya Andriychuk tragically died last year after failing to get adequate mental health care. In the weeks before her death her parents say she went to a hospital for help because she was struggling and waited three days to see a specialist. She died after showing up for an appointment that she was told was cancelled. I tabled that document previously.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister see that so much more needs to be done to support people in acute mental health crisis?

HON. BRIAN COMER: Certainly, I am deeply sorry to hear that story. I don't know the specifics that led up to that case. I do know there is a review going on right now at Nova Scotia Health and there is an expectation that answers will be provided to the family.

In regard to crisis services specifically, this budget does have an expansion of day hospitals to Cape Breton, to Western Zone, to Northern Zone. There will be an expansion of integrating services across the province over the next four years. I know that is something the member opposite is very passionate about as well. This will help our children across the province.

There is a variety of items to point to in this budget that are ongoing that will help our youth and I am certainly focused on implementing these across the province.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, if the budget does have some money for an emergency mental health crisis response pilot, something our caucus has been pushing for, and for an additional acute mental health hospital, but it doesn't have enough invested in emergency mental health care. We need investments rapidly in acute mental health supports across the province before another tragedy occurs.

I was glad to learn about the acute day hospital projects, but what does the minister have to say to someone who is struggling in Liverpool or Kentville and can't access the same kind of care?

BRIAN COMER: I have spent most of my professional life in this position, working in acute mental health in-patient settings. I certainly know the demand when someone is in a crisis. I do think the expansion of day hospitals across the province will have a significant impact on helping the pressures within the system.

Certainly, the Integrated Youth Services has been a file that has been sitting on a desk, I think, for 10 to 12 years. The IWK and Eskasoni have been doing some great work in this regard as well. We're really trying to get resources not only just within the hospital system but also within communities to help people before they get to the point of crisis.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

### **OAMH: MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION - COMMIT**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, the current availability of mental health services being offered in this province has unacceptable wait times for intervention. People with mental health issues get worse as time passes and sometimes the wait is four to six months.

The Nova Scotia chapter of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association has written to the government on several occasions offering to be part of the solution to the universal access to mental health care that this government has promised. I will table that.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions is: Will he commit to meeting with the association and discussing the options of including their service under MSI?

HON. BRIAN COMER: There has been significant consultation with a variety of allied health care professionals, so I can certainly get the specific list of stakeholders. I know there is a significant list. The work is well under way. I'd certainly be happy to follow up with the member about that specific association.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I thank the minister. I see that we have solutions in front of us from our association to directly help the mental health of thousands of Nova Scotians. This government stood and gave campaign promises to Nova Scotians for universal mental health care and have yet to deliver. When will the minister be able to fulfill that promise?

BRIAN COMER: We're certainly committed to committing to that promise, Mr. Speaker. There's a \$38 million increase in this year's budget and there's a variety of innovative pilots seen within the budget, ranging from mobile crisis supports to new graduate programs for nurses to integrated youth services. We are deeply committed with this and the work is ongoing.

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

### **DHW: MORE OB/GYNs - HIRE**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: People who need obstetric/gynecology care face extreme wait times, as there is a significant lack of access for OB/GYN services, which makes health for women and gender-diverse Nova Scotians significantly worse. Those with chronic disease like endometriosis are often left untreated, or they spend years on a wait-list to get specialist appointments.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: What is the specific plan to reduce wait times for gynecology care? Are we hiring more OB/GYNs in the public system this year?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: There is a significant investment this year: \$2.4 million in terms of women's and the pelvic pain clinic at IWK, which will support faster access. It will increase the number of staffing. I believe I mentioned last night in Estimates that it will be an increase of two positions, a number of nurses working in the clinic as well as nurse practitioners and other allied health care professionals. This money will be used to bolster urgent care services that will include implementation of changes for urgent gynecology patients, an expansion of the endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain clinic. Certainly we have heard from people across the province that this is a necessary service, and we have invested.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, in the last House session, this government tabled legislation enshrining a new fertility and surrogacy tax credit. However, those who have received fertility treatments have been waiting for this government to clear up all the confusion around this tax credit. They are waiting to hear about how they can claim this tax credit, and I will table that. The government stated that a plan and an announcement would be released soon. My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: When will they be able to access this tax credit?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question; it's a chance to provide some clarity on this situation. One of the options we had when we looked at this was to go through Canada Revenue Agency as a tax credit. We could have done that, but we discovered that in other provinces - one province in particular - it didn't work quite so well. We chose to manage it ourselves, so it's actually a rebate. What people do when they file their income tax for the year 2022 and get back their notice of assessment from Canada Revenue Agency, they will now use that to apply for the rebate. Most people would only be starting to get their notice of assessment if they filed their taxes early . . .

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

**DCS: SUPPORT FOR HOMELESS - ACT**

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Community Services. This Winter, many people without housing in Cape Breton had to turn to the hard work and generosity of local pizza restaurants that organized tent and supply donations. This initiative was created by a local volunteer who noticed a lack of support for people experiencing homelessness in the region. I am so proud of our community for stepping up to support some of our most vulnerable, but it breaks my heart that local volunteers and donations have had to fill in for the inaction of this minister and her department. Why is the minister allowing Nova Scotians to rely on pizza shops rather than providing them with a permanent place to live?

[10:45 a.m.]

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: There's no doubt that many Nova Scotians are facing a lot of challenges right now, with the increase of inflation and the housing crisis. We as a department have been doing our very best to move away from a crisis situation to more of a preventive and responsive one. We're making as much investments into our food banks and into our shelters. We have put millions of dollars into our supportive housing. We know that a lot of people are struggling to find permanent housing. We certainly will continue to work with our stakeholders and community organizations to do the best we can for those who are most vulnerable.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, make no mistake, we are in a crisis. Neither of the solutions that the minister put forward are preventive solutions. They're reactive. Like the rest of the province, Cape Bretoners are facing increasing food insecurity, and food banks are reporting their struggle to keep up. The student union president at CBU told the media lately that the campus food bank can no longer keep up with the demand from students who are struggling to make ends meet.

The minister has indicated in this House that food banks are the answer to food insecurity, but even the organizations themselves are telling us that that's not true. The minister and I may not agree on this, but food banks should not exist. When will we see something other than band-aid fixes from this government?

KARLA MACFARLANE: I'm not completely aware of all the details around CBU and their food insecurity. I have not heard from them directly and I'll certainly take that up with the Minister of Advanced Education. What I do know is that any organization that reaches out to us, we certainly do everything we can to help them. I'd be happy to reach out to CBU, because they haven't reached out to us. I'm just being made aware, but I'll certainly reach out to them and work with my colleague to see what we can do to help.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**DHW: PPE DISTRIBUTION END - EXPLAIN**

HON. KELLY REGAN: The safety of our health care professionals should be top of mind for this government. We've heard from doctors that this government will no longer be providing family doctors with personal protective equipment. PPE is provided to all doctors and nursing staff who work in hospitals and should be provided to our family doctors across the province who continue to serve patients. This is another way this government continues to fail to support family practice clinics across the province. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Why is the government stopping the distribution of PPE to our family clinics across the province?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Over the last number of months we have seen a reduction in the amount of PPE use related to the change in the prevalence of infectious diseases, particularly COVID-19, in our province. We are seeing as well that there has been a change in the transfer of funds related to COVID-19. We know these are private businesses, and in the past they have been responsible for their PPE and we are using the supply that we have and moving back to that model.

KELLY REGAN: Not that we would know how much COVID-19 is actually circulating, because if you are under the age of 50, good luck getting a COVID-19 test that's not a rapid test.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just COVID-19 that has caused impacts on our health care system in the last year. We saw spikes in the respiratory syncytial virus and influenza. Family doctors have to pay the overhead costs of their practices, and creating a safe environment for patients, staff, and doctors should be a priority of this government.

Time and time again, this government has said that money is not an issue with fixing health care and it shouldn't be when supporting family practice clinics.

Mr. Speaker, can the government commit today to continuing to supply PPE to family practices across this province to keep our health care workers and patients safe?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: We continue to transition through this pandemic. We are returning to pre-pandemic levels of circulating illness throughout the province. We know that overhead is included in the pay that is provided to physicians. We'll continue. If there's a physician's office that has a particular need in relation to PPE and finding it expensive, we certainly are open to that conversation.

For right now, Mr. Speaker, we are changing the way in which we support those clinics and we will continue to work with them if there is a particular requirement.

THE SPEAKER: Just a reminder that Question Period goes to 10:52 a.m.

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

### **SNSIS: HOTEL PURCHASE - EXPLAIN**

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, this government purchased the most expensive hotel in the history of the province, at 34 million taxpayer dollars. Experts have indicated that the facility's design and function are not currently appropriate for a transition care centre and to achieve it will cost a hell of a lot more.

We know this government continues to say that money is not an object to fix health care. My question to the minister responsible for health care infrastructure is: Did this government feel that facility design, layout, function, and expert opinions are not factors?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Back in December we introduced our government's More, Faster: The Action for Health Build plan. The pillar of that was to build more, faster. More beds, more capacity in our health care system, something that the previous government failed to do, and I'm sure they're very proud of.

We engaged with a professional adviser to help inform us of the valuation opinion that guided us in formulating a pathway, a road map of actually maximizing the full utilization of that building to develop a transition to community facilities - something that we're very happy to implement, not one, but two in this province - a first of its kind in Nova Scotia.

FRED TILLEY: As we know, the only thing that we're seeing right now is more spending, faster. We're seeing more debt, quicker. And according to a CBC report, the company contracted to provide a high-level opinion on the potential adaptation of the unfinished hotel into the transitional care unit said what is needed to make it appropriate will be difficult to pull off with this property, requiring much time and much investment.

My question to the minister: When will this unfinished hotel be an appropriate transitional care unit, and does he really feel that this is an appropriate use of taxpayer money at this time?

COLTON LEBLANC: Nova Scotians have given us a very clear mandate and that is to fix health care, and we stand firm by that every single day. We know that modern, high-quality health care infrastructure is very important to Nova Scotians. It's a very important part of the web that's fundamental to securing the foundation of our health care system in Nova Scotia.

We know that we have to build more capacity in our health care system to improve the flow of patients. Transition to community facilities is one element of that, as is adding a new emergency department to the Halifax Infirmity site, as is adding more than 400 beds to the plan that we announced . . .

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

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

### GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

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 Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: I am glad to rise today to speak going into Supply on my annual rainbow budget. What could we be doing to support the 2SLGBTQ+ community?

And I'm going off script because I can tell you that one thing that we didn't do today is we didn't have anybody from government, the Premier or the ministers, stand up and condemn transphobia and hate in our province. (Applause) You know, that was the easiest thing that people could have done, and nobody chose to do it.

Do not tell me you celebrate International Transgender Day of Visibility if you're not willing to stand up. We have had acts of homophobic violence and transphobic violence across this province. In Liverpool the town tourism office was targeted repeatedly by homophobic and transphobic graffiti, and it has not been addressed.

In Lunenburg, businesses that are 2SLGBTQ+-owned are targeted online with hateful comments, people making false accusations - and last year when Lunenburg businesses would not even put the Pride flag in their window. This year is the first Lunenburg Pride parade, and I certainly hope that the MLA knows about it and will be out there in strong force.

In Lawrencetown, the Bee's Knees General Store & Bakery has had their Pride flag ripped down and defaced repeatedly. The person who's been down there and served the grandest announcement of providing a replacement Pride flag has been our U.S. Consul General. I haven't seen anybody from this House go down there.

In Halifax, a business recently hosted a drag storytime and they were targeted online by hate. I know of stories of students in our schools who are not safe - trans folks in our schools who are not safe to use the bathroom for the gender with which they identify;

they cannot do it. There are seniors in long-term care; I have actually witnessed verbal harassment of queer seniors in our long-term care facilities.

This is all happening. And hate crimes are underreported. They're not reported for a lot of reasons. One is shame. So if I'm standing in the provincial Legislature, where no member of the sitting government stood up and said, actually you're right, I condemn transphobic hate, then how are you going to build up and recover from the constant onslaught of hatred and discrimination?

People are fearful of making a big deal. I bet you someone over there wanted to stand up and say something, and I bet you you're fearful of the implications on your political career. Frankly, we're tired. We're tired because we've been doing this fight for a very long time, and we've been trying to keep people alive. To the point that my colleague for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier made earlier, the wait times are still too long for people to be able to live the lives they want to live. Do not tell me that you're celebrating International Transgender Day of Visibility until I see some action on that side of the House.

Statistics Canada released the latest police report data - and let me be clear that queer folks don't easily go to see the cops to complain about hate because we have to explain it, we have to prove it, and there's a long history of discrimination. They showed a 64 per cent increase in hate-motivated crime on sexual orientation last year alone. Our communities are under attack. I don't think it's simply a matter of opinion about whether you stand up to homophobia or transphobia. It is time now, and it's only getting worse.

A little history lesson, as folks on the other side often like to provide. I was President of Egale Canada in 2002-03, and I was one half of one of the first queer couples in Canada to get married. As you can imagine, I received hate mail. I received it weekly, but they arrived in snail mail, so it arrived slowly, and people actually really had to make an effort to make those threats. On the doorstep during the campaign, I really faced only a handful of uncomfortable situations, but when someone asked me about my record on addressing gender-based violence - which I'm extremely proud of; I have worked against gender-based violence my entire life - only to start yelling to me about how I endangered children, how I was going to do damage, and harassed the young volunteer with me.

But in the past year, the volume of hate online has grown exponentially. The tweets and re-tweets mentioning the LGBTQ+ community, alongside grooming slurs, jumped 119 per cent since October 27, 2022, when the major change happened on the Twitter platform. Often targeting educators, Pride events, or drag story hour events, the grooming narrative demonizes the LGBTQ+ community with hateful tropes, using slurs like "groomer" and "pedophile."

The Center for Countering Digital Hate has identified over 1.7 million tweets and retweets since the start of 2022 that mention the LGBTQ+ community via key words. The



hateful grooming narrative is not happening in a vacuum; it is connected to other forms of intolerance and hate. It is connected to those who also want to be anti-Semitic. It is connected to those who are also pushing Islamophobia. New estimates from the Center for Countering Digital Hate show that five accounts are set to generate up to \$6.4 million per year for Twitter in ad revenues. This is the sort of thing we're facing.

Earlier this month, my colleague, my friend, Fae Johnstone, was profiled in an International Women's Day campaign on behalf of Hershey's Canada, along with four other amazing young women activists, and received so much hate that Hershey had to get involved at a global level, that we had to increase security for Fae to be safe in her home, and to date, there's been something like over four billion impressions of hate around that campaign globally.

On this Transgender Day of Visibility, I simply can't stand here and read to you the nice words that I wrote about "let's all work together," and "there could be so much more," and "we've flourished anyway" - not thanks to anybody's help. But I think I'll just continue to repeat, again, that this government's platform when they ran and won the election did not have a single mention of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and received an F from the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project in their review of party platforms. There was no mention of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the Speech from the Throne. There is no minister, unless today was that historic moment when the Minister of Health and Wellness was also appointed as the minister responsible for 2SLGBTQ+ communities. That would be fantastic to have a minister responsible.

So no ministers' mandate letters, no minister, no policy, and in Budget 2023, there are two small mentions, two trickling amounts of funding that are directed toward gender-affirming care and prideHealth, and their deliberate absence about actual policy commitment to equity and 2SLGBTQ+ health.

When I worked in the Nova Scotia civil service and when I left the civil service, I think there were three specific positions focused on analyzing and representing the issues facing the 2SLGBTQ+ community. At that time, gender identity and gender expression were being added to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act, and government recognized the need to build and have capacity. There were managers in that role at the Department of Health and Wellness, CCTH, and the Public Service Commission. I will say that my colleagues on this side of the House, the Liberals, decimated those three positions, and we saw an erosion of the policy capacity over the eight years that they were in power.

It is important to have that capacity because it is the difference between formal equality, which is set out in laws, and substantive equality, which is actually the ability to enjoy those rights and to benefit from those in our society.

As I mentioned, this is a government committed to health care, and we hear it all the time in many ways - better, faster, more, all the health care. Health care, health care, health

care, lots of spending, spending, spending - it's fast. I know you're moving so fast. Except that you're moving at a glacial pace for trans and non-binary folks. You have told us, you have committed to us, that there are these reviews going on. At one point, I understood that there was a review of prideHealth, that this was going to take time, so we understand what the resources truly are.

[11:00 a.m.]

This year in Estimates - just to be clear, we thought prideHealth was going to be expanded last budget - there's a small amount of money allocated, apparently not based on a review, apparently based on a business case by the Nova Scotia Health Authority. So in fact, whatever was happening that took all that time, I'm not sure what's really happening. I would invite the government to table whatever analysis it has done that warranted a full year of waiting for the expansion of prideHealth services.

On gender-affirming care - again, it's not that we actually have to reinvent the wheel. There's actually an international body - WPATH, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health - that has done this work, has worked with specialists and community members around the world for many, many years to develop standards of care. Standards of Care Version 8 came out last August, and the minister, in Estimates, made some reference that it took time to absorb it. There were tweaks in that policy in fact, so the bulk of the work was there the moment they were elected and has not been put into play.

The message that we're receiving is that gender-affirming care isn't health care, or at least it's not health care to this government, or it's not important health care, or that gender-affirming care and the well-being of trans and non-binary folks is simply not a priority. I would say that today's exchange only emphasizes that when no one - no one - on that side of the house stood to condemn transphobic hate.

What could be a better public health measure - what could be better for the mental health of people in this community - than to have the leaders in the province stand up and say: We condemn hatred? We condemn transphobia. We condemn violence. We will not stand by while our trans community faces more and more violence. That's what you could have done. That's not what's happening. We don't see it in the budget.

We were told in Estimates that the Department of Health and Wellness is on a journey - again, there are fast journeys, and there are medium-speed journeys, and then there are slow journeys. Then there are journeys that never end, but also don't even need to get started because the work has been done. The standards of care exist. We really thought we were going to have announcements quickly.

From the moment I stood in this chair, I felt that I was giving this government lots of clues, and opportunities, and easy things to grab out of the air and indicate the support

for the 2SLGBTQ+ community in this province. I can't believe that we are still here at the beginning of the 2023-24 fiscal year, and nobody on the other side of this Chamber has figured out how to support the community that I come from.

Let me be clear: Not extending gender-affirming care in Nova Scotia to the best of available medical evidence is discrimination and exclusion. There's no other way to describe the lack of action on gender-affirming care. At this point, government silence is akin to actual violence in our community. What people hear, if they don't hear it from you, is that what they're going to see, if they care to watch the tapes that play, I am sure it will make some of the online hate purveyors - the Premier of Nova Scotia was asked to condemn transphobic hate and didn't. The Minister of Health and Wellness of Nova Scotia had an opportunity to condemn transphobic hate and didn't. That is the message you are sending. It is actually that, like, maybe you'll show up for Pride and I appreciate.

I held a party here at Province House last July, folks came, we had a lovely time. But don't come to the party, don't come to the parade, don't do vacant, empty member's statements if you're not actually going to do the action that makes a difference in our lives. We don't want performative appearances by politicians without real action.

I think, as well, I had done a lot of notes considering how else we can think about 2SLGBTQ+ folks in our community. We can think about it in Economic Development, we can think about it in CCTH. I was thrilled to see the reference to African Nova Scotian and Indigenous tourism supports, but you know who else could? We have an amazing rainbow trail in this province. We have an amazing series of summer Prides that take place next to the ocean and they take place in beautiful communities like Annapolis Royal and in Cape Breton.

What an amazing thing it would be to actually have the province say, hey folks - oh, by the way, we have a minister for the 2SLGBTQ+ community and we have a strategy and we've condemned transphobia, so we're working hard to make this a safe space, and here's our rainbow trail, come join us for the Summer and see all the amazing parts of our community. That, my friends, is action.

I've also given lots of other information to folks. First, the provincial employment equity should be expanded to include 2SLGBTQ+ communities. I was contacted earlier this year by Simply Good Form Inc., an amazing Bedford-based business that is doing amazing work, has received accolades for the work they are doing in capacity-building and organizations and businesses around 2SLGBTQ+ issues. They went to use the Graduate to Opportunity program and they were, like, great, we are a queer old business, we have a queer employee, we have the perfect set-up. In fact, what they found was that they couldn't access the special diversity bonus. Again that one-off was approved but it should be in there. So again, get loud, get actually visible on Transgender Day of Visibility.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak for a short period of time on Supply. First, I will acknowledge the multitude and billions of dollars that was spent. The money is focused and spent in an area which is much needed.

We have a host of problems in this province, of which my community of Cole Harbour actually is affected by those problems. I'll start with talking about tourism and the museum system. We have a community that has a great view of this province, that has a history in this province of agriculture. It is now a community that is more, I would suggest to you - a mix of urban and rural, so it makes it really challenging when it comes to our challenges from municipal and provincial.

We have a place in my community called Cole Harbour Heritage Farm. Now, I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, how many people have had the opportunity to get to this farm in an urban setting, a farm that teaches young people in my community about the agricultural past of Cole Harbour. It's a working farm. It has a blacksmith. It has it all - it has a tea room - and it's operational.

The challenge, though, is that my Cole Harbour Heritage Farm Museum has been struggling for generations - struggling to maintain its operations, like many places are. However, it is a vital piece of history within my community. When I was Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage, I supported them as much as I could. We all know that when you're trying to support community organizations, the budget is finite when we're sharing right across the province.

We have so many community museums right across this province that need the help. We have community museums that tell the histories of those particular communities. I have to say that I was educated and informed when I was the minister, because I got to go right across this province and see those community museums and hear about the impact and the importance of those museums in each of those communities. Yes, I will say that under my watch we were working on a review to help give those museums more funds.

I digress. We're in government. A lot of things move slowly. Not fast, slowly. That being said, I've received several letters from my community museum stating how challenging it has been, and even more so over the last number of years.

I'm not seeing a huge increase for those museums in this budget. I'm not sure what's going on behind the scenes and what's happening, but I'm looking forward to finding that out in Estimates. Then I can go back to my community and hopefully explain to the community museum what's really going on.

When I talk about that part of my community, I also wear two hats. I'm African Nova Scotian, so I have to bring that into the picture. As an African Nova Scotian, the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs is another office and another place where there has been a lack of resources and funding put into it. I was hoping that this particular office

would have grown and really addressed its role in government to the community, right across the province.

[11:15 a.m.]

I can tell you - and I'm not sure if the minister is aware of what's happening there either - but I can tell you that many community members, and many people across the province, African Nova Scotians, there was a movement. There were things happening that tried to bring awareness, recognition, and an historical perspective of African Nova Scotians in this province. I'm not hearing much about that.

Again, I'll talk to the minister during Estimates, and hopefully he can explain to me. But when you look at the budget - no extra money going in. As a matter of fact, it's dropped in that particular office.

Again, for my community, very little has been mentioned, discussed, or said in this budget that shows that there's real interest in trying to move the bar ahead for my community.

Just for interest, Mr. Speaker, we are in the last year of the International Decade for People of African Descent, from 2014 to 2024. In the last two years, I've heard very little about that. I've heard very little about what this government will do to help uplift, to help educate, to help improve the well-being, the life, the status of African Nova Scotians.

I can go through each line - CCTH, Community Services, Economic Development, Education, Justice, and Seniors: All those affect my community, not one mention about our community.

I've sat on the other side. I know how challenging it is. I know that when decisions are made - and let's be real, decisions are made by, let's pick here, we'll go here, we're going to decide here, take from here, and move over to here - and that's what's being done. I'm not here to try to tell the government how they should be doing their thing right now, but I am here to criticize how they're doing some of those things.

I don't hear many people talking about any of the diverse communities in this province - not just the African Nova Scotian. We had my colleague stand up and talk about the 2SLGBTQ+ community. There are Muslims, there are Afghans, we've got so many people in this province now - Filipinos, and Hindus, and Tamils, I can go on - but that's not being discussed but that's not being discussed here. Nothing is being discussed here to talk about what we can do better.

Yes, you were doing some great things. Yes, you have dropped the ball on a lot of things. What frustrates me, Mr. Speaker, is this narrative that we don't want to work with

you, which is furthest from the truth, where I stand, because it's not about us, it's about the communities we represent.

With that, I'd like to say moving forward, I wish the government would be more cognizant about the many ethnic groups that are around them and end their discussions sitting at the Cabinet table and wherever else, they ought to have - no, they must have - those conversations included in whatever else you are looking to do to govern and moving us forward.

Let's not forget that diversity impacts your economic pocket. So I ask - moving forward as a member of this House with all of you as colleagues - that you remember those other communities that need to be considered when you're making your policy decisions. That's all I have to say right now.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, I just want to take the opportunity for a few minutes to say a few words. With all due respect to my colleague the member for Cole Harbour, I'm not sure if I agree with everything he's saying. I hope to be able to explain why in the next few minutes, to some of his references - perhaps not all.

The Count Us In action plan continues to support the framework to address systemic racism that has occurred forever in this province and beyond. There are many initiatives that are going forth, as we speak, to address this.

When I think of ANSA, certainly to my mind, there's a great transformation happening in that area - to that office and so on. They have been very engaged in the communities across this province. We have been in many, many communities. I've personally heard that they have said a number of times, we finally have someone who is engaging with us, we finally have someone who is listening to us, we finally have someone who is visiting us and bringing our concerns back to the Legislature. Those types of things are happening from one end of the province to the other.

I have attended several galas across the province - in Sydney, in Digby, in East Preston. I've gone to several proclamation events across the province, and I'm listening to what they're saying. It's certainly not what I just heard a few minutes ago.

The member for Cole Harbour also mentioned about no funding in museums. I suggest that all members take note and go to the book. This is the first time in 15 years that we've invested in arts and culture and museums. If anyone was listening to the Budget Address, there's a common denominator. It was our government that gave the last operating increases in this Legislature - 15 years ago.

A lot of years have passed between then and now. Yes, I can agree with him that a lot of these museums and so on were hurting - retaining their workers, getting new workers, and so on.

I've certainly heard loud and clear from those sectors across the province. I've had many meetings with them. Certainly, we're doing everything to address those concerns, and we've made a significant step forward. Again, that's not to say we have many projects over and above that increase that are still in place for these museums, and arts and culture organizations to take advantage of.

Mr. Speaker, we hosted the Emancipation Day provincial ceremony on August 1, 2022. The province is investing \$4.1 million to the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute. If you look at the Budget Estimates for 2023-24, the ANSA regional offices' budget is \$633,000. That's up from \$317,000. We are committed to action and supporting African Nova Scotian communities.

We opened up three new offices in 2022 across the province - in the Preston area, southwest Annapolis Valley, and the northeastern areas - to ensure we are serving African Nova Scotian communities from one end of the province to the other. The offices were created, along with the other ones that we have, to address the unique concerns in rural African Nova Scotian communities, which is a step further in addressing anti-Black racism. The Preston area regional office was opened and serves North Preston, East Preston, Cherry Brook, and Lake Loon. The southwestern Annapolis office opened and serves the Digby-Annapolis-Kings region. The northeastern region office opened, which supports the surrounding regions of Pictou, Antigonish, and Guysborough Counties.

ANSA has three other offices across the province, along with the main Halifax office. Our team in Yarmouth serves southwest Nova Scotia. Truro serves the Colchester and Cumberland region. Sydney serves Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

On January 28, 2023, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing - in collaboration with African Nova Scotian Affairs - signed a new memorandum of understanding with the Preston Area Housing Fund to address housing inequities in African Nova Scotian communities. There is a substantial amount of investment there. I believe, if my memory is right, it's about \$3.5 million to look after the maintenance and upkeep of approximately 50 dwellings in that area.

African Nova Scotian Affairs has grant funding available for community groups and organizations with initiatives, events, and programs that support, preserve, promote, and protect all aspects of African Nova Scotian culture, heritage, social, or economic development. We have been investing in African Nova Scotian communities and will continue to. We'll continue to listen to them and engage with them.

There's certainly a lot of other things I could continue to say here, but I think I have made my point. I'll take my place.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

We'll take a short recess while we get set up for Committee of the Whole on Supply.

[11:28 a.m. The House resolved into CW on Supply.]

[3:53 p.m. The House reconvened.]

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 made progress and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Madam Speaker, before I call government bills, pursuant to Rule No. 5C(1), I move that the House will sit on Monday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to set hours for the House to sit on Monday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Madam Speaker, would you please call Government Bills for Third Reading.

### **PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 269.

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



THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

HON. JILL BALSER: I move that Bill No. 269, An Act to Amend Chapter 18 of the Acts of 2016, the Construction Projects Labour Relations Act, Respecting Green Hydrogen Production Facilities, now be read a third time and do pass.

I am pleased to rise today before this House to read for a third time Bill No. 269. As I've shared before, Madam Speaker, as a government we are committed to helping private companies and investors reach the completion of projects on schedule. We know this keeps Nova Scotia's economy growing. It helps important infrastructure projects reach completion and it provides hard-working Nova Scotians with steady, reliable employment.

This government sees the potential for hydrogen production facilities. We are positioning Nova Scotia as a leader in green hydrogen production. We are exploring all scenarios where hydrogen can advance development of our renewable resources, all scenarios where we can safely supply the demand for cleaner energy and where we can build Nova Scotia's green economy.

An important way to keep that green economy growing is by making sure these types of mega-projects can move forward uninterrupted and to completion.

The purpose of the Construction Projects Labour Relations Act is to allow parties involved in a specific construction project to enter into a collective agreement for the life of the project. Amendments to the Construction Projects Labour Relations Act will broaden the legislation to include larger-scale green hydrogen production facilities as Nova Scotia transitions to green renewable energy.

Under the Construction Projects Labour Relations Act, unionized contractors and unions enter into a collective agreement for the construction project, safeguarding it from work stoppages during the life of the project.

In developing the proposed amendments, we have consulted with community partners, unions, open shops and construction associations and we heard from three of our partners - EverWind Fuels, the Nova Scotia Construction Labour Relations Association, and the Cape Breton Island Building and Construction Trades Council - at Law Amendments Committee, all speaking in support of Bill No. 269 as drafted. Large scale projects, like green hydrogen production facilities, provide significant investment, economic activity, and jobs for our province. These amendments will support a timely completion of large-scale green hydrogen projects in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: This is an amendment to a bill that I brought in back when I was Labour Minister and we would be supporting it. I would note that it does have the

potential for considerable economic activity, jobs, et cetera. I will note that it does not move us towards our green - it's not helping us along our path to reducing emissions.

I will note again, for the government's information just in case folks didn't catch it the first time I said it, when I was the Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act, I did have a conversation with the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association about work camps. These often accompany these large projects and they can have considerable effect on local Indigenous populations, particularly women and young people. There's a potential here for human trafficking so while we do believe there are measures the government can take to ensure that women and children are protected, we are raising the issue now so they can think about. Should this project actually materialize, we want to ensure that the government is prepared to take steps to ensure that they are protected.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

HON. JILL BALSER: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for sharing those important comments. I've already taken that under advisement with the department and we'll make sure that we speak with community partners to ensure that anything around work camps does not happen.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to close third reading on Bill No. 269.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 269, Construction Projects Labour Relations Act (amended).

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill do pass. Ordered that the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 264.

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

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Madam Speaker, I move that Bill No. 264, an Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2004, the Electricity Act, be now read a third time and do pass.

[4:00 p.m.]

As I have said in the Chamber before, Nova Scotians deserve clean, affordable, and reliable electricity. This bill takes another step in that direction. Amendments to the Electricity Act will fast-track energy storage solutions. This includes things like large-scale batteries. These amendments allow government to procure energy storage options through an RFP process. Right now, only Nova Scotia Power can do that. The amendments will also give us flexibility to move faster on storage. They let us open up the game to the private sector and fast-track well-developed projects outside the RFP process.

I want to clarify something that was brought up during second reading, Madam Speaker: Just because we fast-track some projects does not mean we're bypassing important approval processes. We'll have stringent criteria for choosing these innovative projects, and projects that will normally trigger an environmental assessment would still trigger an environmental assessment. We're not fast-tracking at the expense of our environmental safety, and we're not excluding Nova Scotia Power through this process either. We encourage them to pursue storage processes as well.

Our aim is to get more storage on the system faster. As I said before, this is not a power grab to the Cabinet or government. This is a power grab for Nova Scotians. It will help us reach our clean energy future quicker.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Madam Speaker, I just have a few comments on this bill. While overall, our caucus does support initiatives to build up our province's infrastructure for renewable energy, we have some concerns remaining about the government's overall strategy as it relates to Nova Scotia Power as well as the increase in ministerial discretion afforded by this bill.

As Nova Scotia Power told its shareholders earlier this year, future compliance with provincial and federal GHG emission caps, coal phase-out requirements and targets, and renewable standards have been challenged as a result of the constraints imposed by the enactment of Bill No. 212. As part of its response to Bill No. 212, Nova Scotia Power revised their capital expense plan and put a pause on key projects that would have worked towards the transition to renewables. One of these projects was a large battery storage project. This project would have benefited from federal funding and would have made significant progress towards renewable electricity for Nova Scotians.

I think this government was surprised by the immediate and serious impact of their Fall legislation and are now scrambling to find a band-aid fix. Unsurprisingly, this government has again turned to the market via private corporations to achieve its goals. Pausing these projects risks serious long-term economic consequences for Nova Scotians, not to mention the climate consequences, which are health consequences, economic

consequences, mental health consequences, et cetera.

Our caucus supports these kinds of investments in renewables. We recognize the need for this, in fact, but we continue to be confused by this government's reactive and short-term approach to our utility regulation. Again, our caucus believes there is a better way to do all of this. We again urge this government to take a serious look into performance-based regulation to hold Nova Scotia Power to account and to ensure a future of affordable, renewable electricity for Nova Scotians. At this point, Madam Speaker, I do not know why we are not implementing these changes. It doesn't make any sense. We're doing everything but performance-based regulations, it seems.

Finally, we continue to have concerns with the expedition and ministerial discretion afforded to the RFP process by this bill, bypassing accountability and transparency in the decision-making. The minister made mention that he had heard concerns about the bill and environmental assessments. That's not actually - that is a concern of ours, but the minister has assured us that it needn't be.

What we are really concerned about is the ongoing trend - and the overall trend that we've seen from this government - of taking power from independent boards and bodies and placing it in the hands of Cabinet.

With those few words, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: We are optimistic to learn the government is putting legislation forward - yet cautious. We're hopeful that this will encourage and streamline more renewable energy projects. We need to continue to encourage companies to invest in renewable energy and to help us get off coal and meet those 2030 targets.

There are two main changes that I mentioned in second reading to these amendments - allowing the procurement of energy storage mainly through battery storage. I'm told by the department that this process will be similar to what government developed, I believe, last year for 373 megawatts of wind power, and similar to that procurement in that contract process. I'm also told by the department that there'll be an independent third party that will be retained and provide advice to government to implement the process and deliver on policy objectives and goals.

The second amendment is more concerning. These amendments enable the minister to issue contracts and power purchase agreements outside of the RFP process without competition and without much oversight. We hope government will use these self-appointed powers with the public interest in mind, and choose projects that are innovative, provide max value to the electrical system, and therefore to Nova Scotia ratepayers.

I mentioned my concerns around this process. It was good to hear a commitment from the minister at second reading around environmental planning will be included, stakeholder engagement, and other concerns I had that are bound by the legislation.

Beyond government, I'd like to see Nova Scotia Power partnering with the private sector to ensure these renewable energy projects come to life. I hope that both government and Nova Scotia Power partner with our industrial partners, our residential customers, and Nova Scotians across the board.

With that, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Mx. Speaker, might I say a short word of introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Absolutely.

GARY BURRILL: I just wanted to say a welcome to the House this afternoon to Carol Johnstone, a long-time member of the NDP in Halifax Chebucto. She has joined us for the debates this afternoon. We're very pleased in the House to have Carol here with us. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for coming to the Legislature. We're glad to have you on a Friday afternoon. It's sunny out.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

HON. TONY RUSHTON: Bill No. 264 is exactly what we said we'd do with Bill No. 212 - and that was to protect the ratepayers of Nova Scotia and improve our grid. It wasn't just us who believed that we would stand with the ratepayers. The UARB believed that we stood with the ratepayers, and they found that in their findings in February.

It was also Nova Scotia Power that finally gave in this week, and admitted with a paper sheet that went around to every elected official in Nova Scotia, that said that Bill No. 212 did what it was supposed to do. We're going to stay focused on protecting the ratepayers. We're going to stay focused on greening our grid. We're going to stay focused on making sure that Nova Scotia ratepayers are receiving the power and quality that they deserve and are paying to Nova Scotia Power with their hard-earned money.

We're pleased to be doing this. I'll highlight the fact that this government is not the first government to be doing innovative projects as a test result or a pilot project, if you will. I won't go too far back in history, but we won't talk about the boondoggle that COMFIT ended up being at the first.

Madam Speaker, I move that we do close third reading of Bill No. 264.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No.264.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that the bill do pass. Ordered that the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 263.

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I move that Bill No. 263, the Public Utilities Act, an Act to Amend, now be read a third time and do pass.

Nova Scotians have been forced to dig deep into their pockets lately. The cost of living, heating, groceries, fuel, and housing - it's all going up. Now the cost of electricity is up with the UARB decision to increase the rates. But even though ratepayers are paying more and more for electricity, the quality of service they're getting is less and less.

That's not right, Madam Speaker. If people are going to pay more, we should at least get reliable service. For years now, Nova Scotia Power has failed to meet its performance standards, and they haven't been fined sufficiently, either. So we're increasing the performance penalties for these things like outages and reliability. The maximum penalty is going from \$1 million to \$25 million per year.

I want to repeat a few details from second reading, because it seems unlikely that they were fully understood. We are setting up performance standards where these fines will apply. My staff have already begun writing some of these regulations for proposals. We're planning to set minimum fines for some of these standards. We're planning to make fines a requirement for some of these standards.

I want to be clear: Government won't be imposing these fines. This is the job of the UARB. We're giving the board the tools that it needs and requires to hold Nova Scotia Power to account.

I truly hope the UARB never has to use this. I hope that ratepayers receive the

service that they pay for and so deserve. But if penalties are in order, they won't come directly from the utility's profits. The cost will be passed on to the shareholders.

I'm confident these changes are a motivation for Nova Scotia Power to step up to the plate and provide the service that Nova Scotians do deserve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: This is one clause, increasing the maximum annual penalties, as the minister just mentioned, for non-compliance with performance standards from \$1 million to \$25 million. This increase in penalties derives from a past session in government where the government introduced a number of changes expanding performance measures. Now Nova Scotia Power can be penalized a wider scope for a number of more things, including weather, reliability, customer service.

Administrative penalties are intended to encourage better performance each year. We're glad to see a mechanism improvement that may lead to more reliable service in Nova Scotia.

The reason I mention "may" is, as was raised in our bill briefing, past penalties issued to Nova Scotia Power ranged, I think, in the \$200,000 to \$300,000 range. They were never close to that \$1 million cap, which raises the question of why the need for a 25-fold increase. I can only speculate if government expects the UARB to issue more fines or believes that this larger penalty amount has greater impact for encouraging better performance.

It was nice to hear just now from the minister that the penalties can't be used as part of the rate-making process. They're not permitted to increase rates to Nova Scotians to compensate for this potential deficit.

With that, I look forward to hearing more from my colleague.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Again, we in the NDP support what we think the government is trying to do with this bill. We think that holding Nova Scotia Power accountable to Nova Scotians is somewhere all parties can meet, absolutely. This is why I'm particularly disappointed that we were unable to work together to strengthen the bill and its impact with the proposed amendments that we brought forward last night.

Our concerns are that this bill lacks the teeth necessary to promote real accountability and compliance with objectives that Nova Scotians are looking for - things like reliability, decarbonization, and affordability. While we're very happy to see the maximum fine amount increased, we know that fine amounts in recent years have come

nowhere near the previous cap of just \$1 million. These fines were so nominal - especially to an entity the size of Nova Scotia Power - that they really did not succeed in promoting compliance.

What we proposed would have set a minimum for these individual fines to make sure that they have the necessary impacts. We also proposed that these fines would be mandatory for infractions. As it stands now, the board has the choice of whether or not to levy these fines, and there's no guarantee that infractions will even lead to a fine. I think I heard the minister say that regulations are currently being written to this effect, which would be great.

But, I will say again, why leave these kinds of things to regulation? Regulations can change in the blink of an eye. It's very easy to change the regulations. Why not bake this stuff into legislation?

Finally, we propose that the minister be required to exercise the power under this Act to set new performance standards in regulation. The Act gives the minister permissive power to regulate on things like affordability and sustainability, but this has not been acted upon.

The existing performance standard framework could be better utilized to achieve these goals that Nova Scotians desperately need. I want to centre this all in our caucus's previous call for a true performance-based regulation framework - tying the utility's allowable returns to their performance on various criteria.

Strengthening this existing performance standard framework is certainly a move towards this - and one that we support - but we maintain that a real overhaul in how we regulate the power utility is necessary. Administrative penalties clearly aren't sufficient to achieve the goals we need.

This past year, we've seen massive profits earned by Nova Scotia Power, and yet they have recently gone back on plans to develop renewable infrastructure, and remain uncommitted to undertaking the transformative change the sector needs. For a company so focused on their bottom line, restricting their potential profits is the clear method of incentive that we need.

We are prepared to support this bill and agree with its purported intentions, but we remain skeptical at how transformative it will be in practice. It remains to be seen.

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

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Thank you for the comments from the opposite side. I'm



looking forward to getting to work with my department to get the regulations done, and ensure that Nova Scotians get the electricity and reliable quality power that they so deserve, and get to work on this bill. This is an exciting one for our government and I look forward to that.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to close third reading on Bill No. 263.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 263.

There has been a request for a recorded vote.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[4:17 p.m.]

[The division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Clerk will now conduct a recorded vote.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[5:18 p.m.]

**YEAS**

**NAYS**

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

Chris Palmer  
John A. MacDonald  
Melissa Sheehy-Richard  
John White  
Danielle Barkhouse  
Tom Taggart  
Nolan Young  
Kent Smith  
Hon. Brendan Maguire  
Hon. Kelly Regan  
Susan Leblanc  
Suzy Hansen  
Gary Burrill  
Lisa Lachance  
Rafah DiCostanzo  
Hon. Ben Jessome  
Carman Kerr

THE CLERK: For, 36. Against, 0.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

Ordered that the bill do pass. Ordered that the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 256.

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I move Bill No. 256 now be read a third time and do pass.

I don't believe anyone in this Chamber would disagree with the purpose of this bill - to improve access to health care for Nova Scotians. We all share this goal. We all want to ensure our health care providers are spending more time caring for Nova Scotians in their health care journey, not filling out paperwork.

We want to ensure that health care providers are working to their full scope of practice, so they are using all of their competencies. We want to ensure that health care workers who live in other parts of Canada, or even other parts of the world, do not have

their ability to work delayed because of unnecessary red tape. What this bill does is give us the ability to move quickly when things change, to be nimble, agile. But quickly does not mean unsafe.

At the Law Amendments Committee, we heard 17 presentations from people who also agree with the principle of this bill. During these presentations, representatives from the regulatory bodies for health care workers and members of the public expressed some concerns about the bill and proposed amendments that they said would make it better. They expressed concerns about unintended consequences.

I would like to take a moment to address these concerns, but first I would like to acknowledge and thank each and every one who took time to appear at Law Amendments. We are lucky in Nova Scotia to have such committed and knowledgeable people who have worked and are working to ensure the safety of Nova Scotians. We recognize and value your role and expertise and look forward to working with you as we develop regulations for this bill and beyond. We do want to work with you.

As I said during my remarks during the second reading of this bill, we are stronger together, and Nova Scotia is better for it. Contained in this bill is the duty to consult. We take that duty very seriously not just because it's in the bill, but because we genuinely want to know what the colleges think. We also need to be able to move faster, because health care is moving faster than ever before.

One of our presenters at Law Amendments Committee on Tuesday illustrated perfectly why it's so important to improve the way we update a professional scope of practice. Julie Avery is the Executive Director of the Nova Scotia College of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy Professionals and represents medical radiation technologists and diagnostic medical sonographers in Nova Scotia. She told the committee that the work that these vital health care professionals perform is dependent on technology. As you can imagine, technology changes extraordinarily quickly these days.

Under this bill, our government will be able to move quickly to update a medical radiation technologist's scope when new technology becomes available and those technologists gain the competencies they require to use it. I think we would all agree this is better than the current system, where a technologist waited a decade to be able to perform CT scans in Nova Scotia. Changes to legislation can take a long time and, in this case, serve no one.

Another health care profession that has seen an expansion of scope is pharmacists. They have been trained in pharmacy school for decades in assessing minor ailments but were only granted the authority to prescribe for these ailments a little more than a decade ago. It's hard to believe, considering the integral and growing role pharmacists play in our health care system. Where would we have been during the COVID-19 pandemic if changes to the scope of practice for pharmacists had not been made years ago?

As I said, moving quickly does not mean that it is not safe. Madam Speaker, the mandate of our regulatory bodies is public safety. This is the government's mandate as well. But more importantly, our health care professionals take the safety of their patients very seriously. It is the heart of who they are. In fact, they take oaths that say that they will care for others. They have a code of ethics. They have the responsibility to their patients to only offer care that they are competent to provide, and each health care professional must know their limits. They have a responsibility to continue their professional development for every year after they graduate.

This is not unique to Nova Scotians or even Canada. The vast majority of health care professionals who are licensed and are coming from other jurisdictions have these same individual responsibilities ingrained in them through their training. Holding a licence, in almost every jurisdiction, means that you have the training, experience, and commitment to provide appropriate patient care that is within your scope of practice, and that you are still competent to provide. Licensed health care professionals take the public good seriously. It is because of this seriousness that each of our health care providers takes the health and safety of their patients to heart.

When we visit a doctor, nurse, pharmacist, dietitian, or dentist, we trust them with our safety because we know we are in good hands. If they can't help us, we trust them to tell us that. This is the foundation of practice in our health care system.

This government made the commitment to fix health care in Nova Scotia. We said that we will deliver better health care, which all Nova Scotians deserve, no matter what part of the province they call home. Madam Speaker, we said that we will do whatever it takes. That means we cannot continue to do things the same way we always did. Change can be uncomfortable, but it is necessary. It doesn't mean that we are going to permit health care providers to provide care without liability insurance. It does not mean that we are going to let health care providers who are convicted criminals practise in Nova Scotia - or those who have difficulty with language requirements, or those who have significant disciplinary actions against them. It does not mean that we are going to permit paramedics to perform heart surgery or dentists to assess and prescribe for diabetes, nor would these health care providers ever be willing to do so.

It means that we are going to work with the experts in their fields to develop the regulations that will support the health and safety of Nova Scotians while at the same time improving access to care, reducing unnecessarily barriers for health care providers who want to work here, and free up doctors' time for the important things, which is not paperwork.

Madam Speaker, the Patient Access to Care Act is about allowing our health care workers to use all the skills they have, making it easier for health care workers to come here, and being able to move quickly to make changes if we need to. Our top priority is fixing health care. We promised that we would deliver better health care that Nova

Scotians deserve. The Patient Access to Care Act is one of the many ways in which we will make this happen.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

[5:30 p.m.]

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Here we are. We probably should be on our way out, but some trickery, some tomfoolery, in the House, we're here today. What I will say is, Madam Speaker, on your last day in your last act in this House, it's a bit of an embarrassment that this is only one of seven pieces - including the Financial Measures (2023) Act - of legislation that this government is going to put forward. All the health care issues we have in this province, all the housing issues, community services issues, transportation, seniors, and there are seven pieces of legislation from this government. This is the lightest session in the history of the Nova Scotia Legislature - the lightest. In the middle of a housing crisis, a health care crisis, an inflation crisis . . . (Interruption)

If the minister has something to say, stand up. Don't hide behind your privilege.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'll ask the member for Halifax Atlantic to continue.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I would appreciate, you know - members over there, this is what tends to happen. When we stand up, they chirp us. But we don't get answers in Question Period. We don't get them on their feet to defend the lack of bills and the lack of support and the lack of help. They just sit there, smiling and smirking and laughing and high-fiving while Nova Scotians go without health care.

This is a government that - the minister just said a few things that I quickly jotted down. They said they'll do whatever it takes. They'll do whatever it takes to fix health care, except . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'd just like to remind the member for Halifax Atlantic just to speak to the bill that's on the table.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The Minister of Health and Wellness said that they will do whatever it takes to fix health care, and this is part of their solution. They'll do whatever it takes except what we heard in Law Amendments on this bill, which is listen to the 21 professional bodies who said they were not consulted, they were not spoken to, they were not asked, and they had no input into this bill.

And yet here we are today. There were some really good amendments that came forward on this bill by the health care professionals who perform the duties in the health

care system. Individuals who are a thousand times more qualified than anyone on that side of the House to speak on health care - anyone. Yes, absolutely.

If the member thinks they're more - it's more appropriate for her to speak on anaesthesiology than anaesthesiologists, maybe the member should get up and speak on it.

That's the problem we have here. We have another bill where that government thinks they have all the answers, and the arrogance to not listen to anyone. They know everything about everything, and they don't need to listen to the 21 professional bodies that told them, you've got it wrong - there are some things you could fix to make our lives, and the patients we deal with, their lives, better, and their access to care better.

And what did they do? They put their fingers in their ears - la la la la la. Nobody wants to hear it. Nobody wants to hear it.

Some more comments that were made: Change is uncomfortable. The minister said she knows that when it comes to this bill and when it comes to health care, change is uncomfortable.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'm just going to remind the member to refer to members across the floor as "minister."

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Madam Speaker, when the member stood up and spoke on this bill, the Minister of Health and Wellness said that change is uncomfortable. We know that change is uncomfortable.

You know what's uncomfortable? Not having access to a family doctor. Do you know what else is uncomfortable? Going to a walk-in clinic here in Nova Scotia and it not being open. Take the elevator down to the bottom of Scotia Square. Walk down the hallway. Tell me the last time that walk-in clinic was open. That is uncomfortable.

We have a Premier of Nova Scotia who continues to say, when it comes to the Medical Act, when it comes to midwifery, when it comes to nursing, when it comes to optometry, when it comes to getting a chiropractor, when it comes to any of these professions on here that you have access - they say, go to a walk-in clinic. Call virtual care.

This is not access. People are dying in this province. People are getting sick. People are leaving this province. This government is spending money hand over fist. They said, money is no issue. It's no issue - except for the doctor incentive in HRM. We're not going to give you that.

This is called barriers to the provision of health care. I'm going to give you some

barriers. Not having a family doctor in HRM. Anyone on that side of the House who is from HRM and hasn't spoken up in this Chamber about the explosion of the lack of doctors in this province - in this province's capital - because of the missing incentive, shame on them. I have the numbers.

Some of those members across there, the people they're supposed to represent, their access to a family has decreased by 400 and 500 and 600 per cent. We have members on that side who stood up every single day in the Legislature and said, "Where's my family doctor? Where's my family doctor?" and are dead silent now, and they don't have a family doctor.

What has changed? Paycheques. "Honourable" in front of their name. Power. These are things that change people. The same people who stood on this side and complained and fought and were amazing advocates for the people in their community are silent today, and they've been silent for 18 months. When they've been asked about the barriers to the provision of health care, they said, everything's great. Everything's fantastic.

Try to get a dietitian here in Nova Scotia. Try to get one. This government continues to bash the federal government and point their fingers at the federal government to fix every problem, and say, it's not us; it's the feds.

I didn't hear any of you celebrate when we heard there was money coming for low-income people when it came to access to dental work. Not a single one of you stood up and said, hey, that's going to do great things in my community.

There's a member over on that side, Madam Speaker, who continues to make comments. If that member wants to stand up, show the fortitude and stand up.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask that both sides of the Legislature refrain from making any comments when a member has the floor. If the member would like to leave, please do so, but right now the member for Halifax Atlantic has the floor.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I go through the list of the Acts. One of them is the Paramedics Act. Shame, shame, shame that during this session the only thing this government is going to do to help improve or even mention the paramedics is this bill, which does nothing to help paramedics in this province. Nothing. They are crying out for help. They're crying out for better pay. They're crying out for the resources they need.

This government has shown the ability to just sign a cheque - they've done it over and over and over - and say, you get more money because you deserve it. You over there, you're worth \$10,000, you're worth \$500, you're worth \$1.50, you're worth \$200. But not

a single cent - not a single thing in this session for the paramedics.

The only mention of paramedics from that side of the aisle in the last 18 months has been right here in this bill. Section 3(q). You ready? Is everybody ready for it? Because it's deep.

Here's what they say: "the Paramedics Act." Eighteen months and that's what the paramedics get. The Paramedics Act.

Listen, we don't expect this government to wave their magic wand and everything be fixed, right? No government could do that. So the previous government had some successes and some failures, just like this government in 18 months has had successes and failures, just like the NDP government had failures and successes.

Wouldn't it be nice if, for once in the bloody history of this province, if a government - it doesn't matter what stripe you are - admitted that you made mistakes, admitted that you had failures and said we're going to do this and we're going to correct the course, we're going to fix this, instead of saying, that was broken because of them. All parties have done it and people are sick and tired of it. It would be historic if a Premier stood up and said, do you know what, we made a mistake on this, we're going to correct it, we're going to fix it, instead of saying that I think the other party did that, not us.

It's not on this side of the House. It's not just about throwing mud and saying what's wrong. There are solutions, we've come forward with solutions. I've said it before and I'll say it again: A good idea is a good idea, no matter who it comes from, and that's a good idea.

Individuals who came to the Law Amendments Committee did not wear a Liberal hat. Some of them might have worn an NDP hat, I don't know. But in all seriousness, they did not wear a Liberal hat, did not wear an NDP hat, they did not wear a Progressive Conservative hat.

I've been in this House long enough to know that you can see a partisan from across the street. You see them coming, you are, like, that's a Progressive Conservative witness, that's an NDP witness, that's a Liberal witness. You can see them coming a mile away because it's usually the same people.

The individuals who spoke and took the time to speak on this bill were not partisans. They were there because they have a deep care for the health care system and they have a deep care for the individuals it impacts. They were not there for their own selfish beliefs, they were not there for their own self interests, they were not there to get more money, to get more power, to get a new name. They were there to fight for the people they were sworn to protect, help and heal. That's what they were there for and it fell on deaf ears.



I think that just a day or two beforehand the Premier said, if you bring forward good ideas in Law Amendments Committee on this bill, we'll listen. Well they didn't. So again, what is the purpose of Law Amendments Committee if you are not going to listen? I think all governments have done it, right? The bill goes in, yes, rubber-stamped and you move on.

This bill is supposed to reduce the barriers to the provision of health care. One of the barriers of health care is that, as we heard in Estimates, our emergency rooms are constantly closed. We have communities that go days, weeks, months without access to emergency care.

When you have paramedics saying to you it's never been worse, it just proves to me that it's not money that solves problems, it's leaders and good ideas, because this government is spending more money to fix the barriers to health care than anyone before them - and they won't admit that everything has gotten worse. Everything has gotten worse. Maybe some things have gotten better. I remember the Minister of Health and Wellness had said - please forgive me for not remembering, but some of the lists have gotten better. I think optometry, maybe, was one of them. I can't remember . . . (Interruption) Eyes - access to eye surgeries was one of them. This is great stuff.

Believe it or not, no matter what they think of me - quite frankly, I don't care. The only thing I care about is what my wife and children think of me. No matter what they think of me, I want them to be successful. You don't want a government to be a failure. They have four years to fix the issues, and part of it is health care. I would love to see that Minister of Health and Wellness be the most successful and transformative Minister of Health and Wellness in my lifetime. I would love to see that.

Members are talking. Stand up.

We're not seeing results right now. One of the questions that I have for that side of the House - and I think all Nova Scotians should have - this government has said that when it comes to access to health care, when it comes to the barriers of health care, there is no cost. Right now, we're spending 45 cents of every tax dollar on health care. Is it going to be 50 cents? Is it going to be 60 cents? Is it going to be 70 cents? Is it going to be 80 cents? Where's it coming from?

We know there was no increase to income assistance, so it's clearly coming from there. We know that some of these departments have gotten cut, so we know it's coming from there. We know there's no Coastal Protection Act, which is going to cost money to implement, so it's coming from there. We know there's no new housing build, so it's coming from there. Health involves all of that.

There's no lunch program. For the love of God, Madam Speaker, there's no lunch program for our children. We implemented a breakfast program - and thank them for

continuing. If kids are hungry, they're going to access the health care system more because they're going to have more and more problems.

These are barriers to health care. These are entrances to health care. It's being proactive - and it's not a top priority. The social determinants of health care are not a priority for this government.

[5:45 p.m.]

What is a priority is this bill, which controls and takes away power from the experts. It says, I'm from Ingonish, I know more. I'm from Pictou County, I know more. I'm from Eastern Passage, I know more - from Hants. But they don't know more.

I think it's important that in Opposition, the same members stood there and said "transparency" and "listen to the experts." How dare you? The Premier in Opposition filibustered the Law Amendments Committee - the first in its history - because we would not listen. That's what he said - and he filibustered. Yet, for somebody who is so concerned with transparency, someone who is so concerned with listening to the experts, somebody who is so concerned with health care - there are 21 groups on here that were not listened to.

They took the time out of their day, they came to the Law Amendments Committee, and they were told, we don't want to hear it. We'd rather listen to the member for Halifax Atlantic in the Legislature. We don't want to hear it.

We're here today because the government didn't listen. They didn't listen to the experts. They certainly didn't listen to this side of the House - not only on the bills but the way the House is moving. We shouldn't be here today. We shouldn't be here right now. There's a gotcha moment. That's something they practice. They practiced it with this bill. They practiced in the House just over an hour ago, and they practiced it with this bill when members from the professions were not given the proper consultation or even told about this.

I'd like to also speak about how this is a pattern. I've been at many announcements over the last little bit around health care and all kinds of other stuff. The common theme is the individuals - except for the one when we were in the Mulrooney Building. The individuals had no idea money was coming their way. They had no idea about announcements. There was a big announcement about a hotel when it came to homelessness. When you speak to the individuals who are in that field, they had no idea the announcement was coming. They had no idea this was happening. Nobody talked to them about it.

Why would they? They have all the power, and they're going to ram this bill through come hell or high water. They're going to do it. There's no stopping it. The only thing we can do is annoy them a little bit - make them actually work an eight-hour shift.

Imagine that. Imagine working eight hours on a Friday to debate this bill. I could tell you, when people stood up and it prolonged this bill debate, there were groans from that side of the House. They're like, oh God - I've got to work more than three hours on a Friday.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask the member for Halifax Atlantic to stick to the bill.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I can tell you, it's going to be more than eight hours on this bill. We have a long road to haul on this bill. We have a long road to haul on the other three bills that are left on the docket - a long road. We're going to give lots of input. I plan on it. I hope all of you do - from these 21 associations. Some of them belonged. Imagine belonging and being a member of one of these associations, and then deciding, thank you for paying my bills all these years. Thank you for giving me a profession. Thank you for being my brothers and sisters. Then you put on your fancy clothes, come down to the Legislature, and you become this fancy-pants MLA who drives \$80,000 vehicles, and you say I'm no longer listening to these 21 professions.

Some of you were a part of this - part of these professions. That's like me not listening to the union. (Interruption) I love my union brothers and sisters. Someday they will be back - some of them, but not all of them. The truth of the matter is politics is pretty simple stuff. We know that not every single person on that side is going to be here in two years. Some of you will retire, some of you will lose the election. There will be new faces. People come and go.

I've spoken to former members who have only done one term or half a term or this or that. Some of the really good ones leave early. Some of them have said that they wish they had a stronger voice and that they wish they had stood tall. They wish they would have fought for what they believe in.

I think it's difficult when it comes to this bill to go back to the professions that you are intimately involved in. They'll ask you, why didn't you listen to our voice on Bill No. 256? (Interruption)

I know the bill. Again, the same member. Stand up.

Madam Speaker, I would just ask that the member you have already spoken to would stop mocking me and interrupting. I have three minutes. We go to 6:00 p.m., right?

THE SPEAKER: I'll ask that the people in the Legislature remain quiet while the member has the floor.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I've got 32 minutes left and I plan to use every minute of it because health care is important.

We cannot afford to lose a speech language pathologist. My children have access to a speech language pathologist in their school. I probably need one too. Do you know how difficult it is to get a speech language pathologist in this province? We're talking about once every two weeks, if you're lucky.

When they came and asked us to just hear them out, nobody heard them out. Does that encourage you, as a speech language pathologist? I don't think they got the \$10,000, either, to stay in this province. Does that encourage you to continue to work?

What about therapists? I spoke to a guy the other day at a coffee shop, and we were talking about therapists. I myself have seen a therapist in the past. I think it's a healthy thing. I think everybody should. I plan on going back to see one after this session. (Laughter)

I was talking to this gentleman in the coffee shop, and he said that he was looking for a therapist. He said that he was trying forever to find one. It's a very intimate relationship. It's not just about finding a therapist and going to that therapist. He couldn't find one. He said that he would take anyone. I sat down and had a coffee with him, and we talked for a while.

Midwifery. How important that is. The most amazing thing that you can do as a human being is give birth and create life. Once again, we're in a position where women's health is either underfunded or not listened to. There's been nothing in this session on midwifery.

I've heard the member for Timberlea-Prospect stand up several times asking about that. I heard it in Estimates. I heard it in Question Period. I heard the member for Dartmouth North ask about it. Everybody's asking about it. I know that the member for Dartmouth North is passionate about this. Nothing.

Madam Chair, with 29 minutes left, I would just like to say that the decorum in this House was going well. We were doing fine. We were moving along. We were cruising along. Everything was good. For some reason, somebody decided to put a wrench in it and it wasn't this side of the House.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The House now stands adjourned until 4:00 p.m. on Monday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>.

[The House rose at 6:00 p.m.]

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**NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)****RESOLUTION NO. 597**

By: Angela Simmonds (Preston)

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

Whereas the Provincial Victim Services Program provides a variety of services for victims of crime as they navigate the legal system, including support in accessing the Criminal Injuries Counselling Program; and

Whereas the program is currently only available to survivors of sexualized violence after they choose to report the crime to the police and proceed with a prosecution and survivors of sexualized violence need services and support in the critical period before they make the decision whether or not to proceed with a prosecution; and

Whereas survivors of sexualized violence deserve services and support regardless of whether they pursue criminal charges, and the current Provincial Victim Services Program offers counselling with a cap of \$2,000;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly call on the Nova Scotia government to extend the Provincial Victim Services Program to all victims of sexualized violence and remove the cap on counselling sessions for victims of sexualized violence.