



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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First Session

TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2023

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2023

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Keith Bain

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Kent Smith, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

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

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Before I read my petition, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

CHRIS PALMER: I would like to draw the attention of all the members to the West Gallery. Up here, I have residents from Kings West who made the trip in to visit with us today. I'd like to introduce all of you to young Sophie Jones and her mom and dad, Nick and Kaylee.

Sophie was born with a rare chromosome abnormality deletion called Malan syndrome. It causes epilepsy, ataxia, migraines, autism, and a variety of other maladies. She has made many trips to the hospital in ambulances throughout her life so far. Traditional treatments, medications, haven't been doing well for her, so her neurologist suggested they try CBD oil.

Mr. Speaker, she has been having great results with CBD oil. I wanted to give that context. I'd like everybody in the House to please give my guests a warm welcome. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: We welcome all visitors to the gallery here today and every day. We hope you enjoy your stay with us.

The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: In that context, I would like to read my petition:

Whereas treatment-resistant epilepsy leads to an increase in expensive prescribed medications and frequent trips to already overburdened emergency rooms, while being transported by emergency health services, also an overburdened component of our health care system; and

Whereas Veterans Affairs Canada established a reimbursement policy for medicinal cannabis, in accordance with Section IV of the Veterans Health Care Regulations that do not require a drug identification number, the Province of Nova Scotia could do something similar for children with life-threatening illnesses such as epilepsy;

Therefore we, the undersigned, residents of Nova Scotia, call upon the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly to cover the cost of cannabidiol, a base medicine for children who have life-threatening diseases, and specifically, to remove the financial barrier to assessing CBD-based medicines for children with epilepsy by adding it as an exception-status drug to the Pharmacare Program.”

Mr. Speaker, there are 1,379 signatures in this petition and, as per the Rules of the House, I have affixed my signature.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a petition with the operative clause:

“We, the undersigned residents of Canaan Cross Road and area, are petitioning our government to pave it or, at the very least, chip seal the Canaan Cross Road.”

There are 29 signatures and I have affixed my signature, as per the Rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I would like to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Downstairs, Mr. Speaker, watching on the television because the gallery is full, there are a number of very committed and hard-working folks who work in housing support in HRM and around the province. They have been working very hard bringing to light the very serious issue of the lack of appropriate housing and affordable housing, especially in terms of homelessness. We know the housing crisis is at a record high in the province, and these days the housing crisis has become a humanitarian disaster.

I'd like to introduce to the House - even though my honourable colleagues can't see them physically, they will be able to hear the applause - Ainslee Umlah, Ashley Hinchey, Kay Spurr, Masuma Khan, Erin Austin, Sam Krawec, and Hallie Burt.

They are representing a number of different organizations that made this petition happen, including ACORN Canada, ACORN Nova Scotia, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia, Dalhousie University Social Work Clinic, the Ecology Action Centre - oh, here they are - the Halifax Refugee Clinic; the North End Community Health Centre; the North Grove Family and Community Food Centre; No One is Illegal - Halifax/Kjipuktuk; P.A.D.S. Community Advocacy Network, permanent accessible dignified safe housing for all; the Spring Socialist Network; and Welcome Housing & Support Services.

We have Ainslee and Masuma in the House now. Everyone please give them a warm welcome to thank them for their work. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: As mentioned before, we certainly welcome all visitors to the Chamber, and regardless of where you sit within this House, you're more than welcome to be here.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition with the operative clause reading:

“We, the undersigned residents of the Province of Nova Scotia call upon” the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing “to:

1. Permanently Legislate rent control at 3% every 12 months;
2. End fixed-term leases, to ensure that landlords cannot continue to abuse them as a loophole to avoid the rent cap; and
3. Invest meaningfully in non-market social housing, committing to building 30,000 more units over the next five years.”

There are 501 signatures on this petition, and I have affixed mine, in accordance with the Rules.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

This gives me an opportunity to remind people in the gallery, regardless of how excited and pleased you are with anything that’s being presented here on the floor, please control your emotions. I can’t blame you.

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition. The operative clause is as follows:

“Whereas significant coastal development has taken place and is underway at Little Crescent Beach, Georges Island, Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia. This activity includes encroachment of a coastal wetland, coastal shoreline armoring on mean high tide mark, among other impacts within an ecologically sensitive coastal wetland and shoreland environment. Many of these activities would likely contravene the Coastal Protection Act, if only it was enacted, complete with regulations, and yet it languishes.

Therefore we, the undersigned residents of Nova Scotia, call upon the Government of Nova Scotia to . . .

Immediately pause these specific development activities at Little Crescent Beach, Georges Island N.S. until the Coastal Protection Act be enacted fully and completely, as soon as possible.”

The petition has 380 signatures, and I have affixed my signature to the petition in accordance with the Rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

[1:15 p.m.]

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, may I say a word of introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

GARY BURRILL: In the West Gallery today, we're joined by Aidin Mousavian and Megan Runge. If you would, please stand, Aidin and Megan.

Aidin was the recent candidate in the Prince Edward Island election for the NDP in the district of Charlottetown-Belvedere. Welcome to the House this afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: Again, we welcome visitors to the gallery and to the Legislature today.

The honourable Minister of Justice on an introduction.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make a quick introduction. In the gallery today we have with us a well-known local activist and advocate as well as a friend of mine from high school, Chris Backer. I'd like to say hi to Chris. He's here today showing support for Kaylee, Nick, and Sophie. I'd like all members to give him a warm welcome to the House today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: You are indeed welcome to the Legislature here today as well.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: As Chair of the Committee of Private and Local Bills I'm directed to report that the committee has met and considered the following bill:

Bill No. 292 - An Act to Incorporate Mount Saint Vincent University Student Union (amended).

and the committee recommends this bill to the favourable consideration of the House, without amendment.

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

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

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Monsieur le président, je désire déposer des rapports d'étape en français et en anglais, rapport d'étape *Plan de services en français 2021-22* sur les services en français offerts par le gouvernement de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table progress reports in French and in English on French-language services provided by the Government of Nova Scotia, *French-language Services Plan 2021-2022*. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce reports for a Notice of Motion that I will introduce. These include “Nova Scotia has the highest gender diversity among people aged 15 to 34 among the provinces” from Statistics Canada, 2021; “Health and Well-Being amongst Trans and Non-Binary Canadians” from Trans PULSE Canada, 2020; and “Finding a Primary Care Provider in Nova Scotia - February 2023.”

THE SPEAKER: The reports are tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Whereas lupus is a serious and incurable autoimmune disease that can cause life-threatening damage to any organ in the body and affects more than one in every 1,000 Canadians; and

Whereas people with lupus face a lifetime of living with the unpredictable health effects of this disease and there is a deep need to educate and support individuals and families affected by lupus; and

Whereas World Lupus Day is a day to increase awareness of this disease and its effects, highlight medical research on lupus, and educate health professionals, patients, and the public on this disease;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize World Lupus Day and commit to help increase awareness of this disease.

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.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KELLY REGAN: I would direct the members' attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined today by some members of the Ehlers-Danlos syndrome community and the hypermobility spectrum disorder community. I'd like them to stand as I mention their names. First of all, my daughter Nicole Regan, who joined us today; her girlfriend Victoria Brushett; and her roommate Kimberly Stalker, as well as some of Kim's family: Janet Stalker, Susan Conner, and - I think Dennis just stepped out - Dennis Conner. I would ask the members to give them the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Once again, we extend a warm welcome to all our guests.

Bill No. 311 - An Act to Establish Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and Hypermobility Spectrum Disorder Awareness Month. (Hon. Kelly Regan)

Bill No. 312 - An Act to Encourage Net Zero Buildings. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 313 - An Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 1996, the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act. (Gary Burrill)

Bill No. 314 - An Act to Support the Atlantic Open Educational Resources Program. (Hon. Ben Jessome)

Bill No. 315 - An Act to Amend Chapter 34 of the Acts of 2010, the Clothesline Act. (Susan Leblanc)

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: Before we move into Statements by Members, I want to recognize the honourable member for Cumberland South on an introduction.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I beg leave to make an introduction. Sitting in your gallery today, I'd like to recognize three individuals. First is Kurtis Langille, whom I would say is an outstanding official within the Cumberland County Minor Hockey Association. Some of the players might disagree, but he is off on a good step. I've tried to train him with everything I know, but I don't actually think I trained Kurtis. Kurtis is a referee here whose life was saved over March break by these two young individuals - Keith Casey and Ryan Wilson. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, just before I turn it over to the Premier for the Member's Statement, I'd just like to recognize that Keith's and Ryan's parents are also joining here today and while we were discussing things at lunch we also all wanted to recognize the fact that Cumberland Minor Hockey and baseball and sports in general - Cumberland has a big hole in their heart this past weekend with the loss of Chuck Linney, and we just want to make our thoughts be known here today.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you to the member and to our guests. I had the pleasure of taking them around the Legislature today and taking them in the Chamber here and everything else. I just want to recognize you and I'm going to recognize the honourable Premier.

The honourable member for Pictou East.

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

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring special recognition to two young hockey players, who are heroes both on and off the ice. Last month, Keith Casey and Ryan Wilson were travelling to a game with their referee, Kurtis Langille, when Kurtis had a medical emergency while driving. Rather than panic, Keith and Ryan reacted calmly and swiftly. They were able to take control of the vehicle and call 911 for emergency assistance. Thanks to the decisive actions by Ryan and Keith, Kurtis is alive, and a potential major accident was avoided.

I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating these two outstanding young men on this amazing act of bravery and skill and wish them the very best in the future. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Before we continue with Statements by Members, with the unanimous consent of the House, we will go back to Notices of Motion.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[NOTICES OF MOTION]

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

RESOLUTION NO. 662

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

Whereas Nova Scotia has the highest proportion of trans and nonbinary individuals between the ages of 15 and 34 in Canada; and

Whereas 45 per cent of trans folks across Canada report an unmet health need compared to 4 per cent in the general population and the Nova Scotia Need a Family Practice Registry does not publicly report data disaggregated by gender, identity, or expression; and

Whereas rising transphobic hate and intolerance is happening across Canada impacting the mental and physical health of trans, nonbinary, gender diverse, and two-spirit Nova Scotians;

Therefore be it resolved that the issue of access to health care of trans, nonbinary, gender diverse, and two-spirit individuals be referred to the Standing Committee on Health.

I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Kings West on an introduction.

CHRIS PALMER: Mr. Speaker, it's a bit of an odd introduction but I would like to draw attention to my daughter, who is in the Valley Regional Hospital right now, and I would like to introduce my newest grandson. (Applause)

I was at the hospital until 11:00, but I had to come to work. I couldn't wait any longer. Asher Philip Wade was born at 11:10 a.m. - 8 pounds, 10 ounces, and Mom, Dad, and baby are all doing well. So I'm introducing my grandson.

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Congratulations to Mom and Dad and the grandparents.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to stand on a point of privilege and ask that you would consider this. It is regarding an incident that some time has passed.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm going to ask the member if she would mind bringing her point of privilege forward after Statements by Members and Question Period.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to beg leave to make an introduction first, before my member's statement, please.

THE SPEAKER: I think we've covered everybody in the gallery today. By all means.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I would like the House to join me toward the West Gallery to welcome Mrs. Raj Verma, who is chairperson of the Vedanta Ashram Society, who is joined here by many board members as well. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House. (Standing ovation)

[STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS]

THE SPEAKER: Indeed, a warm welcome to all of you as well.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

VEDANTA ASHRAM SOCIETY: 50TH ANNIV. - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the House to recognize the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Vedanta Ashram Society, the registered charity that has been managing the Halifax Hindu temple. As you all may know, the history of the Hindu community in this province goes back several decades. Their contribution to the overall economic, cultural, and medical enrichment of Nova Scotia is admirable. Since its establishment, the Vedanta Ashram Society has been

supporting the spiritual and cultural needs of the Hindu community here in the city, as well as in the rest of the province.

I'm happy that we are joined by some of their board members today, including Mrs. Raj Verma, the chairperson. They work together to hold regular Sunday services, organize important Hindu festivals, provide Hindi and Sanskrit classes, support international students, organize Hindu cultural events, and the list goes on. I'll add that all these folks do that on a voluntary basis. They're busy people anyway, who are doctors in our communities, academics, business people, and they still put the time in to make sure their community is well-supported.

I invite the House to join me in celebrating the chairperson, Raj Verma, along with the other board members with us today and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Vedanta Ashram Society. They have made our province a more rich, better place to live. We want to thank them for their contributions to the city and communities across the province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

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

THE SPEAKER: By all means.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I would like to draw the members' attention to the gallery opposite, where Mike and Faye Paris have travelled to be here today from Windsor. They are the siblings of John Paris, Jr., and the honourable Percy Paris, former member for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank, former Minister of Economic and Rural Development; Tourism, Culture and Heritage; and African Nova Scotian Affairs. I'll read a statement about them shortly. In the meantime, I ask all members to extend to the Paris siblings the warmest and sincerest of greetings. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to you as well.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

PARIS, PERCY & JOHN JR.: HOCKEY TRAILBLAZERS - RECOG.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize brothers Percy Paris and John Paris, Jr., two legendary Nova Scotia hockey players.

Percy Paris played for the Saint Mary's Huskies and was part of the first all-Black line in Canadian university and collegiate hockey. John Paris, Jr. was the first African Canadian coach and general manager in professional hockey and the first Black scout in the NHL.

This past February, during Black Heritage Month, the brothers were honorary coaches in a game commemorating the 128th anniversary of the Colored Hockey League of the Maritimes, the first all-Black league founded in Nova Scotia. The Halifax Eureka and the Dartmouth Jubilees, named for the first teams formed in the CHL, faced off in an exciting commemorative game of hockey in Dartmouth. Hockey is and always has been for everyone.

Please join me in recognizing these two trailblazers.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Permission to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: In the West Gallery, we have a highly regarded and respected member of the Halifax Fire Service. We have with us Captain Mike Sears. Mike, I'd ask you to stand and please receive the warm welcome of the House of Assembly. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

SEARS, CAPT. MIKE: ADVOCACY FOR MENTAL HEALTH - RECOG.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to recognize an incredible individual. I want to thank the member for Halifax Armdale for extending a warm invitation to Captain Mike Sears. I've had the honour of knowing Captain Sears for nearly 20 years. He and I would have gotten to know each other at Woodlawn High School many, many years ago when we were both coaching football. Mike was such an incredible role model to young people.

Not long after that, Mike became a firefighter and he has served Halifax for many years, earning the respect of his peers, earning the respect of his colleagues. Mr. Speaker, when I think of integrity, when I think of strength of character, when I think of leadership, Mike Sears always comes to mind. I want to sincerely thank Mike for the strength of character he has shown over the past year.

Mike, please know we stand with you in the advocacy that you are doing for mental health supports for our first responders. I want to thank Mike for his friendship over the years. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

BADAWI, DR. JAMAL: MUSLIM SCHOLAR - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize Dr. Jamal Badawi. Dr. Badawi is a remarkable Islamic scholar, author, and speaker who has devoted his life to spreading knowledge and awareness about Islam and its teachings. His contributions to promote peace, understanding, and social justice have had a profound impact on the Muslim community in Halifax and around the world.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the members of this House to join me and to welcome Dr. Jamal Badawi. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Might I say a word of introduction first, Mr. Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: Might as well.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Is there anybody we didn't get yet? (Laughter)

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: We are fortunate to be joined this afternoon by three members of the organization Advocates for the Care of the Elderly, often called the ACE team, who are visiting the House this afternoon. We welcome ACE team chairperson Gary MacLeod, and members Ian Johnson and Olga Milosevich.

We welcome them and appreciate their work keeping seniors' issues front and centre in Nova Scotia. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

ACE TEAM: SENIORS CARE ADVOCACY - RECOG.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, on this day when it appears that we will conclude Budget Estimates in the subcommittee with the Estimates for the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, I want to say a word of appreciative recognition for the organization Advocates for the Care of the Elderly.

For 15 years, the ACE team has been drawing public attention to the care circumstances and living circumstances of the thousands of people in Nova Scotia who live in long-term care. The organization has been a consistent voice for adequate staffing with

adequate pay in the nursing homes of our province, for adequate government funding and against cutbacks, and for the adoption of progressive models of care throughout the sector.

The work of long-term care advocacy has never been more important than it has become over the last three years of the COVID-19 era, as the world of nursing homes has come to a new place of prominence and priority in the public discourse. Advocates for the Care of the Elderly continue powerfully to contribute to this work, and they are deserving of the regard of every member of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, before I read my member's statement, I beg leave to make an introduction. You missed some.

THE SPEAKER: It must be one of the Commissionaires.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, visiting us today in your gallery, the Speaker's Gallery, are members of Team Canada and their coaches who recently competed at the Abilympics in France: Liam Crane, Andrew Thorne, Hadia Bedoui, Alishia MacRae, Jennifer Richardson. The team was coached by Caitlin Kettley, Amanda Payne, Sheila Day, Steve Stewart and Matt Madden.

I ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome from the House. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Once again, we welcome all visitors to the gallery here today.

The honourable member for Hants East.

N.S. MEMBERS: INT'L ABILYMPICS PERF. - CONGRATS.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the incredible performance of the Nova Scotia team of Team Canada at the International Abilympics in Metz, France. The International Abilympics is a series of vocational skill competitions specifically designed to allow people with disabilities to demonstrate their unique talents.

This year, 1,000 participants from 24 countries took part in the Abilympics from March 23 to 26. Our Nova Scotia team consisted of five participants: Jennifer Richardson of Team Photography, Liam Crane and Andrew Thorne, who won bronze medal in Team Cooking, Hadia Bedoui, who took home a bronze in Electrical Installations, and Alishia MacRae, who earned a bronze in Welding.

Their achievements in this competition are a testament to their unwavering commitment to excellence and their ability to overcome challenges and obstacles with

grace and determination. Their talents and skills have not only brought pride to Canada and Nova Scotia but have inspired and motivated people around the world.

Prior to their competition, each team member was paired with a professional who shared their expertise during months of coaching. Congratulations to coaches Caitlin Kettley and Amanda Payne of Team Cooking, Sheila Day of Team Electrical Installations, Steve Stewart of Team Welding, and Matt Madden of Team Photography.

I would ask all members to congratulate these Abilympic participants on their amazing performance.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make two introductions, please.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ZACH CHURCHILL: We are joined here by Councillor Claude Poirier of District 1 of Inverness County, a friend of mine, who has represented that area and worked in that area for over 30 please. Claude, please rise and be recognized by the House. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make another introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Go ahead.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I would like the House to join me in welcoming Ranjeev Chopra, who is here today, whom I will be giving this member's statement on behalf of. Please accept the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

CHOPRA, RANJEEV: CONTRIB. TO HINDU COM. - THANKS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an outstanding community member - for his own community, the Hindu community, and also the broader community in our province. Today joining us is Ranjeev Chopra. Ranjeev immigrated to Canada from Kanpur, India in April of 1988. Since arriving, Ranjeev has made a positive impact on the volunteer, social, and cultural communities here in Nova Scotia. He also played a central role in the growth of his favourite sport, cricket, here in the province and into the broader Maritime provinces as well.

Ranjeev routinely helps international students settle down comfortably here in Halifax. He goes so far as to pick up newcomers from the airport and provide an orientation

tour of the city. He demonstrates the compassion and East Coast hospitality many of us aim to emulate.

I invite this House to join me in thanking Ranjeev for his remarkable contributions to the Hindu community and our broader province. We thank him for being a role model as he continues to make Nova Scotia a better place.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: I would like to welcome Allison Davis, the executive director of Spencer House. I ask her to rise, and I ask my colleagues to give her a warm welcome. (Applause)

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

DAVIS, ALLISON: SPENCER HOUSE EXEC. DIR. - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I couldn't speak enough times about all that Spencer House does for my constituents and other seniors living in the Halifax area. I'd like to take a moment to recognize Allison Davis or, as everyone at Spencer House knows her, Alli. Alli is their hard-working and compassionate Executive Director. Alli coordinates everything that goes on in the centre and everyone who volunteers, with leadership that many could only dream of. She meets people where they are at and is constantly developing innovative programs to respond to evolving needs.

Recently, there was a flood at Spencer House severe enough to halt operations for about a month while damage was assessed and repairs undertaken. Alli assured everyone that despite this, members remain connected during this tough time. Spencer House is slowly reopening and showing its resilience in being one of the safest and most welcoming places for seniors in all of Halifax.

I ask my colleagues in the House to join me in recognizing Alli's leadership in getting Spencer House reopened and her critical role serving seniors in Halifax.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

HON. JILL BALSER: Mr. Speaker, before I read my member's statement, I beg leave to make an introduction as well.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

[1:45 p.m.]

JILL BALSER: He's already been recognized by the member for Halifax Armdale, but I also just wanted to make sure that the House gives a nice warm welcome to Dr. Jamal Badawi, who is sitting in your gallery, the Speaker's Gallery, here today. Please rise and get the warm recognition of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

BADAWI, DR. JAMAL: DIST. SERV. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. JILL BALSER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Dr. Jamal Badawi for receiving the Ummah Society Distinguished Service Award last month.

The award is presented to a person who has distinguished themselves through their community and public service. Recipients are leaders in encouraging intercultural understanding and community well-being, as well as in developing a more inclusive society.

Dr. Badawi is a Professor Emeritus at St. Mary's University, where he taught Management and Islamic studies from 1970 until 2005. In 2008, he received an Honorary Doctorate in Civil Law from St. Mary's which was awarded for his work in advancing knowledge about Islam in Nova Scotia, including at the Human Rights Commission.

Dr. Badawi is one of the original founders of the Ummah Masjid, and has been an Imam for more than 50 years. He has also written several books and has a successful TV series that has been aired around the world.

I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in congratulating Dr. Badawi for receiving the much-deserved Ummah Society Distinguished Service Award. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KEITH IRVING: We're joined today in the West Gallery by Emily Hancock. Emily is the partner of my son Simon.

I have shared with you some of the exploits of my son's big hikes that he has done. He has found a partner who exceeds his accomplishments. Emily has done the Appalachian Trail - 3,598 kilometres; the PCT, at 4,270 kilometres; and with my son completed the

T.A., which is tip to tip in New Zealand, another 3,000 kilometres. She's got about 10,808 kilometres under her belt. She was able to get from the other end of Hollis Street here without a backpack.

I'd like Emily to rise in the House and receive the warm welcome of the House.
(Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I would like to not make an introduction before I make my member's statement.

THE SPEAKER: I would appreciate that.

HOLLINGSWORTH, PAUL: FAMILY AWARD CREATION - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, the Hollingsworth Family Award is a \$1,000 scholarship to be given to a first-year student at St. Mary's University who is grieving the loss of a parent or sibling.

The scholarship was established by Dartmouth North resident and CTV Atlantic personality Paul Hollingsworth, who lost his brother Bryce to mental illness while Paul was studying at St. Mary's in the early 1990s. Paul has said in an interview with CTV that his brother's death "blew him into a million pieces." Three years his senior, Bryce and Paul shared the same bedroom for 13 years and hung out in the same circles. Paul now honours Bryce by living his own life to the fullest.

Unfortunately, this past Summer, Paul and his family also lost his older sister, Lauren. That loss propelled him to create the Hollingsworth Family Award. Paul will donate \$12,500 to kick-start the award, and St. Mary's is accepting donations on its website to bolster the fund.

I ask the House to join me in thanking Paul for channelling his grief into such a beautiful gift for many St. Mary's students to come.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

SCHOOL WORKERS: COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS - THANKS

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to thank those who work tirelessly every day in schools in Cumberland North and across the province.

This past Sunday, I held a town hall meeting in my riding on the topic of education. Those in attendance, including teachers and others, talked about the many issues schools must address on a daily basis. From class sizes, student behaviour, lack of participation from parents, to the need to raise wages for educational assistance, those working in schools face monumental challenges.

These dedicated individuals truly have the future of our province in their hands. As our young people continue to rebound from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic - and as schools deal with ongoing policy changes, including student assessments and inclusion - school staff are charged with guiding students through the peaks and valleys of learning.

I would ask my colleagues to join me in thanking each and every person working in Nova Scotia's education system for their commitment to their students: teachers, administrators, educational assistants, clerical staff, playground supervisors, cafeteria staff, and so many more. We appreciate you and everything you do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

LANTZ, CHIEF BLAIR: 50 YRS. OF FIREFIGHTING SERV. - THANKS

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the 50 exemplary years of service and continued dedication of the Chief of the New Germany Volunteer Fire Department.

Blair Lantz joined the department in February 1973 and quickly moved up the ranks as engineer, lieutenant, and captain, and in 1981, the office of deputy chief. A decade later, he became fire chief, a role he still holds 32 years later.

Chief Lantz has witnessed many changes in the fire service, from the building of a new hall to 10 new fire trucks, implementation of the Medical First Responder program, and new equipment and firefighting strategies. Over the years, he's responded to more than 3,000 calls.

It is his many hours of quiet work, in planning and paperwork, and checks on equipment and his people, that makes Blair Lantz such a treasure to his community. Please join me in thanking Chief Lantz for his service.

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

SCHOOL SUPP. WORKERS: NEED FOR GOOD PAY - RECOG.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Today I'd like to recognize EPAs - the team that makes up the complement of school support workers, from the Millwood, C.P. Allen and Bayview family of schools - that covers all the schools in my community.

They do tremendous work that often goes undervalued. I just want to send a message to them to let them know that we appreciate them. I know that collective bargaining can be challenging, without a doubt. But I think that this time we really need to pay close attention to how we say “Thank you” in the form of compensation that reflects exactly the value that they put in, time in and time out, in our schools for students who truly need the most help. If they weren’t there, they would fall behind. With them there, the sky’s the limit.

I encourage the government to work hard to get an agreement that says “Thank you.”

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SCHOOL SUPP. WORKERS: NEED FOR FAIR COMPENSATION - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize our school support services and education workers. They are the backbone of public education. These workers drive kids to school, work with them one-on-one, and keep our classrooms clean and healthy.

School support staff are leaving their jobs in the sector in droves because they cannot afford to stay. Our kids deserve their school supports. This government has an obligation to make sure that our kids’ education and experience are paramount.

Education workers are valued by the kids they work with, valued by the teaching and administration staff at their school, and valued by the families that they support. School supports need fair compensation for their critical work. They need wages to lift them out of poverty, because their working conditions are our children’s learning conditions.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

DELOREY, SAM: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember the life of Sam Delorey of Canso, who passed away in October at the age of 75.

Sam worked as a lineman with the former Town of Canso Electric Light Utility for 37 years, and was an active member of the Canso/Hazel Hill Volunteer Fire Department. He also volunteered with the Canso Regatta and various other organizations over the years.

Playing baseball and hockey were passions for Sam. In his later years, he continued his love of sport as a member of the Canso Curling Club, where he enjoyed the game and socializing with friends.

Sam and his loving wife Janet raised a family of volunteers. His legacy of giving back to his community and supporting the community lives on in his children and will, I am certain, continue to grow with his grandchildren.

I ask that members of the House join me in commemorating the life of Sam Delorey and in expressing our sincere condolences to his family, friends, and community.

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

SCHOOL SUPP. STAFF: NEED FOR FAIR COMPENSATION - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise for the third time this session in solidarity with school support staff. Education support staff need to be valued more and be compensated fairly. Instead, many are working poverty wages at \$17,000 a year. They deserve a living wage and meaningful increases. Without a living wage, education staff will continue to leave the sector.

The services and supports students rely on are already depleted and that will continue if support staff do not receive a wage that will bring them out of poverty. Without these hard-working and caring individuals, schools would not run. Mr. Speaker, I stand in solidarity with 5,400 members of CUPE's educational support staff, their families, and their students.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

HAY, TIMMY: FOOD BANK WORK - THANKS

HON. STEVE CRAIG: I rise today to thank Timmy Hay of Lower Sackville. Timmy, a Dalhousie University student, spends his evenings and weekends working at the Beacon House food bank. If you have ever visited Beacon House, you most likely had the pleasure of meeting Timmy.

At any point during Timmy's shift, you will hear him singing, laughing with customers, and moving around the retail store and food bank to help out in whatever way he can, with always a smile on his face. Timmy is reliable, hardworking, dedicated, and goes the extra mile to assist customers, volunteers, and staff.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in thanking Timmy for his compassion and positive energy that he so willingly shares with those in his presence.

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

BRILLIANT JEWELLERY & REPAIR: CLASSES - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand and recognize Brilliant Jewellery & Repair, a locally owned business located at 650 Portland Street in Dartmouth. Owner Martha Wilkinson opened her store in 2018 after attending George Brown College in Toronto, where she studied goldsmithing. They are the only school in Canada that lends you gold and silver with which to practise your craft.

She apprenticed with her grandfather, Ernest Pridham, who was a gem cutter in Lunenburg. After finishing school and working at a local jewellery she was inspired to go out on her own. Brilliant Jewellery sells vintage estate jewellery, but on-site jewellery repairs are an important part of their business.

Soon to move in a larger space in the same property, Martha plans to install 15 goldsmithing benches in the workshop, where she will hold classes that will help to pass on this rare trade. As Martha knows all too well, it's a dying trade. I ask the members of the House of Assembly to join me in recognizing Brilliant Jewellery & Repair.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

CHEBUCTO LINKS: PGMS. FOR SENIORS - RECOG.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize the contributions of the Chebucto Links Senior Support Association to the lives of Halifax seniors. Chebucto Links exists to foster healthy, active living and connection for seniors through a wide range of recreational and educational programs through Zoom and in the public spaces of the West End of the city.

Programs include fitness and bridge at Bayers Road Baptist Church; pickleball, exercise, and cards at St. Agnes Church on Mumford Road; and a book club at the Anglican Church of the Apostles at Connaught Avenue and Bayers Road. Just recently, Chebucto Links has convened gatherings where seniors can receive help applying for financial supports, especially those that can only be accessed online.

Over the course of the last year, the organization has delivered 250 subsidized fruit and vegetable bundles in the community it serves. Through COVID-19, the importance of connection has come to be understood in a new and heightened way and executive director Rachel Shepherd, program coordinator Samantha Morrison, board chair Anne Corbin, and all the directors of Chebucto Links are to be commended for the network of friendship and activity they provided among the seniors of the city.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

MOON PROJECT: UNVEILING - RECOG.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the students and faculty of Eastern Passage Education Centre, including fine arts specialist Melanie Kennedy, for their hard work and dedication towards the Moon Project.

[2:00 p.m.]

As a reflection of the book, *Mi'kmaw Moons: The Seasons in Mi'kma'ki*, written by Cathy LeBlanc and David Chapman, the students worked hard creating clay tiles representing the Moon's cycles. The project will be exhibited as a Mi'kmaw calendar in the foyer of the school. The unveiling of the Moon Project will take place tomorrow, April 12th, 2023, with students, faculty, and invited guests in presence.

I ask all members to congratulate this group on this important project.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY**ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

NRR: ATLANTIC LOOP DEAL - NEGOTIATE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has said that due to the passage of time, he is reconsidering participating in the Atlantic Loop. I'll table that.

Nova Scotia has the most to gain and the most to lose from the construction of the Atlantic Loop. This Premier shouldn't simply be allowing time to pass without active involvement in saving this project. Other Atlantic provinces are still optimistic about the Loop, and the federal government as well. I'll table that.

Why, as the leader of the most crucial provincial partner, is the Premier waiting for everyone else to do his job instead of actually getting to work and negotiating a better deal in the Atlantic Loop for Nova Scotians?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I just want to reiterate the points that we've spoken about. We're still at regular meetings with our federal counterparts and with other Atlantic jurisdictions and also the utilities - regular meetings, Mr. Speaker.

It's been very clear ever since last Fall out of these conversations that we cannot do this alone. We do have an expectation of the federal government to not just talk about the support. We need to see the number on the table that the federal government is willing to stand up. And yes, as of right now, we do have other options on the table, but when it pertains specifically to the Atlantic Loop, the federal government needs to put their money where their mouth is.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and this government actually need to step up, stop blaming others, and get to work to make sure that the Atlantic Loop is not lost, and that Nova Scotians have a better deal that they can negotiate.

We've seen this trend happen. We've seen this government back down when it comes to power rates, and now power's going to be going up 14 per cent. We've seen this government back down on Nova Scotia's made-in-Nova Scotia carbon pricing plan that was an alternative to the carbon tax, and now we're going to have a carbon tax coming to Nova Scotia. And now we're seeing this government back down on the Atlantic Loop project, which means ratepayers in Nova Scotia are going to pay more for their power in the long term, and we're going to be burning more coal than provinces 10 times our size.

When will the Premier stop the blame game and actually get back to work and bring the solutions to Nova Scotians that he promised he would?

THE PREMIER: The ones who are backing down in this Chamber are the Opposition members when it comes to the Liberal carbon tax. They had an opportunity to speak up on behalf of Nova Scotians. They didn't bother. That Liberal carbon tax will be devastating to Nova Scotians, and they've said nothing about it.

In terms of the Atlantic Loop, I will tell you what I will not back down on: I will never back down on standing up for the ratepayers of this province. I will not stick them with a bill. The federal government has an opportunity to support Nova Scotians, and I suggest that the Opposition get on board with supporting Nova Scotians on that bill.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Let's compare the provincial parties. What this side of the House actually did was negotiate an alternative pricing plan that kept that price off the pumps. What this government does is simply play the blame game and engage in bluster.

We've seen this with every single issue. There is a deeply disturbing trend with this Premier. In 2021, he said that health care was his priority; now the doctor wait-list has doubled, and so has ER closures. He said that power rates were going to be his priority; now they're going up even more than the original Nova Scotia Power proposal. He said housing was going to be his priority; now we have more homelessness in Nova Scotia than at any other time in our history. He said the Atlantic Loop was going to be our priority, and now that project is on the rocks.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier please tell this House what his next priority is going to be so that we can prepare to see that thing go off the rails too?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, what I would say to the member, and certainly what I would say to all Nova Scotians, is that every time that member opens his mouth, wrong, wrong, wrong.

We will stand up for Nova Scotians. Nova Scotians have had their say on the record of eight years of that government. They weren't too pleased, and neither are we.

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

PREM: INCOME ASSISTANCE - INCREASE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, Dan Freeman lives in Dartmouth and relies on government disability payments. He says, "My grocery budget for one month is \$100.00. If I spend more the rent bounces or the power bill does not get paid. I rely heavily on food banks to survive, and by survive, I mean exist on a Nova Scotia standard which accepts that the poor should be malnourished anyway. I am unable to move to cheaper or more affordable housing, as there isn't any! . . . Milk in my coffee? Butter on the bread? Those 'luxuries' are now taken from me." I'll table that letter.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain how he decided that his budget, including \$1.5 billion in unexpected revenue would not offer any real help to people like Dan?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I don't accept that our budget or the spending that has happened doesn't benefit Nova Scotians. I just don't accept that. We tabled a budget before this House - \$14 billion of spending. I will assure you, every single one of those \$14 billion goes to the benefit of Nova Scotians. There is more to do in this province, for sure, but to say that we're not supporting Nova Scotians - I just don't accept that.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: This is what we're trying to say, Mr. Speaker. They're supporting some Nova Scotians but not all Nova Scotians. Dan is not alone. Food bank use across this province has skyrocketed. Groceries are up 11 per cent year-over-year. HRM Regional Council is looking for more land for tents. There is no - zero - affordable housing to be found. We know that service clubs, non-profits, community groups, and neighbours are stepping up to help each other as they are struggling, but in so many ways, this government is failing.

Why does the government think that this is an appropriate time to cut income assistance rates in real dollars?

THE PREMIER: What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is we know there's more work to be done. We also applaud those community groups that stand up. Just in this budget alone,

the targeted spending, we do believe that targeted spending is important - \$45 million in housing initiatives, including rent supplements, homeowner repair programs, and investments in public housing - support for homeless and supportive housing. The member mentioned that \$8 million redesigning the foster care program - early intervention. These are important investments in Nova Scotians. They're investments in this budget, and the member will have a chance to support those investments in those Nova Scotians coming up.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Income assistance is the key program we have in this government that is targeted towards the poor, and this government cut it in real dollars. Leo Rafuse is a senior from Berwick. He says, "My wife retired during the pandemic and I have been retired since 2018. We both have health issues and along with groceries we have not had money to get basic dental work we both need." Alan Smith is a senior from Amherst who wrote to us recently when he had to cut back on essentials and on medication. While seniors across this province continue to struggle to afford medication, the government will collect over \$64 million in Pharmacare fees from seniors this year.

Will the Premier agree to waive those Pharmacare fees now, while people are so seriously squeezed by the cost of basics, like food and medicine?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, there has been no increase in Pharmacare fees. There are a number of programs where the government subsidizes Pharmacare fees for seniors in particular but for others as well. Just to remind members of this House, we stepped up for seniors with the seniors Supportive Care Program, the \$1,000. That's the first time ever this happened in this province. We will invest in Nova Scotians as we can. I know it's easy to paint a doom-and-gloom picture of this province, but good things are happening in this province. There is more work to be done, but to say that government is not supporting Nova Scotians is just not true. I don't accept that, not for one second.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

NRR: MUSKRAT FALLS POWER - UPDATE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, since this government came into power, we have seen a slowdown in the planned clean transition, with one of the Lingan coal plants scheduled to close in January 2022, and Trenton is also facing delays. At Estimates, the minister gave the figure of the cost of coal in this province at now about 15 cents a kilowatt hour, and also wind is down to 5 cents a kilowatt hour, and so are other renewables.

I would like to ask the minister: What is the latest update on power needed coming from Muskrat Falls? Does he have a new expected date when a coal plant will finally close so that ratepayers don't see another 14 per cent increase under their watch?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, we put some very ambitious targets in the management plan for our government. We are going to get off coal. We're going to get off coal with various different measures. It will be wind. It will be solar. It will be tidal. Muskrat Falls is a part of that equation as well. Over the last several months under this government, it's started to produce a lot more, and we look forward to even more coming on the grid in the coming months.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, as we sit here today, more and more capital is going into maintaining these coal plants. Tens of millions of dollars, if not over a hundred million - we couldn't get the figure during Estimates - and yet the Premier has said he's not optimistic that any of the Atlantic Loop project will come to fruition. That is a sweeping statement given that there are four separate key projects to that loop, and no matter the scenario to get off coal, we need to upgrade the line that connects Onslow, Nova Scotia, to Salisbury, New Brunswick, also known as the Intertide.

I want to ask the minister: Has any application or any letter been sent to the federal government to reduce the impact of this specific upgrade and what it will have on rates? What is taking so long for this crucial project to begin so we can unlock . . .

TORY RUSHTON: There's consultation going on with that link between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker. I will say this: In 2011, 2012, and 2013, when I was a practising electrician, we waited for that link, as an electrician, to bring quality power into Nova Scotia. It wasn't this government that worked on it, but those consultations are taking place right now under this government, because we want clean, reliable power for all ratepayers in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect on a new question.

ECC: PERFORMANCE CENTRE COSTS - EXPLAIN

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, after roughly 18 months of government, they just start consultation in such a critical project and no application or letter of interest to get support from the federal government. On top of the 14 per cent power rate increase to cover increasingly expensive fossil fuels, we're seeing nothing but delays and federal dollars left on the table. With power coming from Muskrat Falls being delayed, the government gave hundreds of millions of dollars to Nova Scotia Power. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change admitted in Estimates that his new, output-based performance centres will also add to power bills in 2024. How much more will output-based performance centres cost with the failure to meet renewable energy targets in the last two years? How much more will it be than our cap and trade system?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: The work is ongoing, as the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables indicated, as we work together to achieve our 2030 targets for

clean and renewable energy. The Premier has been very clear that this province will be positioned by 2030 to be a clean, renewable global and national superpower, focusing on onshore wind, offshore wind, tidal, green hydrogen. Despite the doom and gloom from the other side, Mr. Speaker, we're optimistic over here.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, we'd get a lot more optimistic if we hear more than just "ongoing conversations" and "consultation started." Not only did this government throw away all the work that previous governments did - even of their own stripe - in this area, we are hearing that \$60 million is still being left on the table from the low-carbon economy front, and all that the federal government is getting is incomplete applications.

I'll table that Newfoundland and Labrador has actually made an announcement a month ago with their program that will come out from the program that was announced last September. When will the minister get this proposal completed and realize that the delay in making the transition and missing renewable energy targets will cost ratepayers even more in the long run? (Applause)

TIMOTHY HALMAN: When we say the work is ongoing, we are making tangible results. We met all our 2022 climate goals under EGCRA. We have 68 goals to guide us over the next five years in our climate plan. Since forming government 19 months ago, we've invested \$300 million in climate adaptation and mitigation. A long list of defending ratepayers in this province, Mr. Speaker, because if that federal OBPS had been opposed, it would have been a 7 per cent increase. That might be acceptable to them on that side of the House, not to us on this side.

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

ECC: 2030 EMISSION TARGET GAP - TABLE

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, there is broad consensus that, although there are economic benefits, green hydrogen will not get us to our climate goals - and I'll table that - especially not when we are generating it by burning coal, like this government. The proponent of our largest tidal energy project has pulled out, and I'll table that as well. Wind power is a great alternative, but it's going to be another 18 months before the federal impact assessment is even done.

To the minister I ask: This government's climate plan from December 2022 shows our emission reductions happening slowly and slowly in power generation. Can this government table the exact gap we have in our 2030 emission target should the Atlantic Loop not progress?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of moving parts in us achieving our climate goals for 2030, but as the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables has indicated, we are on path. I can certainly get my department to table our

greenhouse gas reduction targets from 2018 to 2021 and how we are on the path, and even have a look at the climate plan. We have some charts indicating that we are well on the way to achieve those reductions, along with the developments of our onshore winds, the offshore wind as well, green hydrogen - all of these things are going to help us achieve our targets. That is why I say I am optimistic. We have a lot of different things happening in this province.

[2:15 p.m.]

LORELEI NICOLL: Well, he has a climate goal and has a path that the minister actually knows and speaks well of it . We are also concerned about the fact that - and I also hear from constituents all the time that they want to see the clear path and they want to do their part, myself included, and make the transition to an electric vehicle. But not only do we have an insufficient EV-charging network in this province, we also have a huge supply issue. Manufacturers are prioritizing other jurisdictions in Canada to deliver EVs to them, and Nova Scotians are at the back of the line for access.

Mr. Speaker, how does this government plan on intervening to ensure that Nova Scotians are getting their fair share of EV supply?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Quite frankly, we are at the federal levels talking with all jurisdictions. We aren't at the back of the line. We are all in an equal line straight across the board across the federal negotiations. We may not agree with the federal government on everything, but electric vehicles is one of the conversations we speak about regularly.

This past year, I believe it was \$1.5 million that we invested to ensure that the charging systems reach and span out across all of Nova Scotia. In this budget, there are more incentives for those electric vehicle chargers to be spread out even further into the rural areas of Nova Scotia. We want the tourists to go around all of Nova Scotia, everywhere through Nova Scotia, with the electric vehicles. That is how we are getting on a clean path on the highway, Mr. Speaker.

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

DAE: STUDENT HOUSING AFFORDABILITY - ENSURE

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Advanced Education. We know how desperately students need access to affordable housing. This department released massive amounts of unbudgeted funding last year for student housing projects across the province, but we were concerned to discover that the units being built at NSCC campuses will be rented at something the government calls "fair market averages." I will table that.

Students are already facing extraordinary financial pressures from cost of living increases to the highest tuition in the country. Can the minister explain how fair market average will be affordable for students?

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, students are absolutely at the centre of everything we do, and it is affordability for students and overall for students that's important. We can't just look at housing as in student affordability. We look at it as an umbrella. We are looking at tuition. We are looking at transportation. We are looking at housing.

We did announce three NSCC student housing projects before we even started our first-ever student housing strategy. I truly wish that I had inherited a student housing strategy, because it takes time to build housing.

LISA LACHANCE: I want to clarify that market average is not affordable for students, at least not by the widely accepted definition from the CMHC, which states that housing is considered affordable if it costs less than 30 per cent of a household's before-tax income. I will table that.

The minister has indicated that the student housing strategy will be released later this year, but will not include a definition of affordable housing. Instead, the department will continue to allow individual organizations and housing providers to set their own rents.

Will the minister commit that the student housing strategy will present a path to truly affordable housing for students and young people in Nova Scotia?

BRIAN WONG: To speak about the student housing strategy, Mr. Speaker, we are looking at solutions that are short-term, mid-term, and long-term solutions. Those short-term solutions are needed now. We know we can make decisions based on things that are not going to take three years to build, or five years to build. We know that we can have an immediate impact, and that's what's important.

We're looking at our private sector, we're looking at our public sector, we're looking at our university system, we're looking at our colleges - everybody - and working with students in order to find the solutions for them.

We know that the demographic has changed, where it's not just 18-year-olds who are coming into the market for housing, but we're looking at families coming from international markets coming in. We're doing everything we can.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

DHW: URGENT CARE FACILITY - OPEN

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, last Fall the CEO of the Nova Scotia Health Authority told an audience at a health forum that she felt that 24-hour urgent care was a great idea for the new outpatient clinic in Bayers Lake. When she was asked how that could happen, she told many residents that she needed to hear from them, that they needed to advocate for this 24-hour care.

Our office began an online petition which has reached 2,000 signatures. My question to the minister is: Can the Minister of Health and Wellness let those residents know today when they might see 24-hour urgent care open at the Bayers Lake outpatient clinic?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, we have had some communication, of course, with folks in the Bayers Lake area. Right now, that project is moving forward as it was intended. We are going to open that facility to the scope in which it was intended initially, and then we will have future conversations to see if there is any opportunity in order to look at the services provided there.

What is important is that we open it, we make sure that it is fully staffed and it is up to capacity, providing the services that it was intended to. After we reach that goal, we will then reconsider and see if there are other options for that space.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I know that the petition cannot be tabled under the Rules because it is electronic. However, we will be mailing a copy of the petition with 2,000 signatures to the minister's office. Can the minister clarify for us exactly how many more residents need to sign so they can have a reason to staff it? They have six months to work on this. The people have spoken so I hope they have the time to work on this.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I said to the member opposite before, the priority right now, given the staffing requirements, is we want to make sure that we staff that facility to the scope in which it was intended. We certainly are open to future discussions, but right now the priority will be to open and staff to the scope, then we will consider what other options are available.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DHW: PET SCANNER FOR C.B. - OBTAIN

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I asked this question in the last three sessions. I'm going to ask it again for folks in Cape Breton. The minister knows it's coming. We've talked about it already. It's about the cancer centre at home - the new cancer centre that is being built.

I was happy to see the government celebrate it when they came to town. One of the final pieces is the CT scan for the new cancer centre. As we know, hundreds of Cape Bretoners are travelling to Halifax to get the tests, or from eastern Nova Scotia. This technology, to me, is really one of the final pieces for the hospital redevelopment in the CBRM and for Cape Breton.

My question to the minister is: Have any decisions been made today to honour the commitment that the previous government made to a PET scanner for the Cape Breton Cancer Centre?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly we did commit to doing a feasibility study of a PET scanner in Cape Breton under the redevelopment. That has been completed. There is some complexity around the PET scanner that requires further understanding, things like the construction, the maintenance, staffing and then reagent production as well. There are ongoing discussions about the PET scanner in terms of where and how and if it can fit within the redevelopment project. Again, there will be more to say moving forward.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate the answer from the minister, and I appreciate the conversations that we've had. I know the department is looking at it. As I said, I know that the government came to Sydney, and they talked about the cancer centre and some of the amazing work that the folks on the ground are really doing down there with the health care redevelopment team.

As I said, we know that it's going to support hundreds of Cape Bretoners and Nova Scotians. It will give them a second option to get that important test. But we also know as well that there is a significant amount of money that is ready to go into that project from donors around the community. An answer on a timeline sooner than later would be great, so that those donors can come forward with the money.

I'm going to ask the minister: Can she commit to a timeline for the health care redevelopment team, and for the folks on the ground, who are fighting so hard for this PET scan?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I said, we are certainly committed to investing in Cape Breton. We've shown that through the medical school, and through the addition of the cath lab - which is also a very exciting development for the redevelopment project. Really, these are complexities, particularly around the reagent production, as well as the staffing. So there will be more to say. I don't have a timeline, but certainly, those discussions are ongoing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

DFA: MACKEREL MORATORIUM - LIFT

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Our fishermen and -women work rain or shine in dangerous conditions. Last year, DFO imposed a moratorium on mackerel fishing, even though American fishermen continue to fish mackerel. It seems a little unfair - to me, anyway. This takes money directly out of the pockets of our fishermen and -women. Will the moratorium continue in 2023? Has the minister stood up for our fishers? Can he promise the moratorium will be lifted in 2023, to at least even the playing field with the fishermen and -women in the United States?

HON. STEVE CRAIG: The mackerel fishery is very important to Nova Scotians and those in the Northumberland Strait. Yes, I have had conversations with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. There was a time when there would be none - zero mackerel being caught for the tuna fishing industry. We were able to get that done. So through our intervention, we did have the moratorium lifted, if you will, on that particular case, so that now tuna fisherman can go out and use the live bait to catch tuna.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: My question to the minister is that all fishermen and -women in the United States are exempt from this: How is it that we still have a moratorium, or we have criteria on the local fishers here in Nova Scotia? The cost of fuel is choking our fishermen. The cost is driving up their expenses. In some cases, they are making the difficult choice to dock their boats because they are losing money.

We on this side of the House are against the federal carbon tax - and we are on the record saying that - but we are also against the inactions of this government. What will the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture say to those hard-working fishermen and -women who, while we sat at home during COVID, got up and fed Nova Scotians? What will he say to them as they watch their profits dwindle away due to inflation and the cost of fuel?

STEVE CRAIG: Certainly, fishermen in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada are hard-working people, and we would never suggest otherwise. What we do have, though, are different jurisdictions. In Canada, we have Fisheries and Oceans Canada, which is responsible for both conservation and commercialization. The member would know that.

We are doing everything we can - whether it's redfish, whether it's herring, whether it's mackerel - to assist our fishermen and -women here in Nova Scotia when it comes to advocating for them with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

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

EECD: EDUC. SUPP. STAFF - SUPPORT

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. Education support workers are getting a frigid response from government in their

fight for fair wages that bring their members out of poverty. Their union president, Chris Melanson, says that it is difficult for educational support staff to continue to do what they do with the bare minimum, and then go home and make decisions about which bills or utilities to pay this month, because they don't make enough to cover the necessities of living in today's age.

[2:30 p.m.]

Is the minister's position that educational support workers should live in poverty?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Our educational support staff are incredibly valuable and important members of our school teams. We value and respect the work that they do. CUPE, like NSGEU, represents a variety of roles across the province. They include bus drivers, ECEs, custodians, EAs, tradespeople, food services staff, and more.

Also, as with the NSGEU, these groups have never seen parity. They've never seen equivalent wages across the province before. We are committed to making that happen. We as a government are committed to making that happen, and we saw that work with our NSGEU teams. We want to see EAs who work in Digby, Shelburne, Truro, Antigonish, and Glace Bay receive compensation for the work that they do. We are committed to the bargaining process and are hopeful that the parties can reach an agreement.

KENDRA COOMBES: If I remember correctly, NSGEU had to go out on strike. My question is for the Minister of Labour Relations. Mr. Speaker, Chris Melanson explains how the government's position is impacting workers and students alike. Without a living wage, and progressive and meaningful increases, educational support staff will continue to leave the sector in droves to find work in other sectors or even other provinces. I'll table that. Educational support staff are underpaid, undervalued, and understaffed. Now it appears that the HRCE is preparing for scab hiring. Is this the minister's idea of good labour relations?

BECKY DRUHAN: As was our government's position with NSGEU, we support collective bargaining. Collective bargaining is an important process, and it leads to a negotiated agreement. We saw that happen with NSGEU . . . (Interruption)

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

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

BECKY DRUHAN: We also believe that it is vitally important that employees see and understand the latest offer that's on the table before a strike vote is taken. We are very hopeful that they'll have the opportunity to do that to understand the compensation package that's being offered, and then will be able to have the opportunity to come to a

negotiated agreement. We are optimistic that can happen if the parties are at the table and if all information is shared.

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

DHW: NURSE PRACTITIONERS - FUND

HON. BEN JESSOME: The Tantallon Family Practice is requesting the support of government to fund a nurse practitioner at one of our local clinics. They have expressed a desperate need for this nurse practitioner so that they help take the pressure off our emergency rooms by providing services for locals in our local community. I want to ask: Is the minister familiar with the request from the Tantallon Family Practice, and what is she prepared to do to accommodate their request?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: There are a variety of practices - in both HRM as well as across the province - that have expressed interest in expanding their practice. This is very much aligned with the team-based care that we would like to provide across this province. There has been a hotline set up for physicians to call if they want additional supports. There is also the practice optimization team. They can come in and support the clinics that are looking for additional resources as well.

There are a number of avenues. I would encourage the physicians in the clinic that the member talked about to give that hotline a call and speak with Medical Affairs - as well as the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment - to understand how best we can support them.

BEN JESSOME: I've been working with this clinic and other clinics in the community that have shared similar requests. Nurse practitioners who are looking to set up at local clinics are being told, in some cases, to look at existing opportunities that are already being offered in other communities.

This doesn't strike me as a more, faster approach to helping our local clinics. We've seen a great deal of funding go out the door since February. I'd like the minister to say what she is going to do to ensure that these requests are being accommodated so that local clinics are able to be a part of the solution to fix health care?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: There is an investment of \$32 million in primary care across this province in order to support access and attachment. That will require that we work with family practices. When we add additional resources, if they are not replacement resources, there is an expectation that practices will increase access and attachment as a result of those additional resources.

The clinic of which the member speaks is welcome to phone that hotline so we can better understand how the practice is currently being run, where the opportunities are, if the

optimization team can help them, and what additional resources would support access for their current patient care assignment - as well as potentially more attachment in the area.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FTB: CBDC MINERS - MEET

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, coal miners have long been the backbone of Nova Scotia - and in particular in Cape Breton. I would just like to read an excerpt from a letter written by the candidate for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party and now-Premier of our province. It talks about “the issue around benefit payments for those who worked at the Cape Breton Development Corporation, that was recently brought to my attention. The decision to stop the health benefits for this small, impacted group at the age of 65 strikes me as inherently unfair.”

Now, since becoming Premier, the Premier will not meet with this organization. They have been ghosted. My question is: Will the Premier commit to a meeting with the members of the Cape Breton Development Corporation miners?

THE SPEAKER: I ask the member to table that statement, please.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to have a look at that myself.

This group of workers was employed by the federal government through a federal Crown corporation. We know there have been issues with concerns they've had about their pensions. The fact is that their employer was the federal government. The federal government is responsible for that. I'd be happy to entertain another question, but I think the member would be better off posing the question to the federal Liberals in Ottawa.

FRED TILLEY: I figured that was going to be the answer, but my question was around the idea of, will the Premier meet with the group? I am going to quote another letter here, from Duncan Retson, Regional Director General: “As discussed, the Government of Canada pays benefits based on provincially-determined entitlements: if Nova Scotia's workers' compensation legislation was amended to extend wage loss benefits to workers beyond age sixty-five,” the federal government would pay. I am going to table this document.

I am going to go back and ask the question: Will the Premier meet with these members just to discuss their situation?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I will say the federal government has never indicated that to the provincial government. I would also say that member - he was not part of, but his party was in office for about eight years. They had eight years. (Interruption)

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

ALLAN MACMASTER: If they were sincere, they would have fixed it when they had the power to do so. I will also say that the other Opposition party here today had a term of office themselves not so long ago. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I would ask the member for Northside-Westmount to come back to order, for the third time.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the federal government is the employer. They are responsible for all benefits, period. It is disappointing that people play politics. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I am going to ask that the member for Northside-Westmount remove himself from the Chamber until the end of Question Period.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, this accomplishes nothing. It's just playing politics with people who are affected. They need to go to the federal government, which is their employer, period.

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

SNSIS: HARP APPLIC. BACKLOG - UPDATE

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: My question is for the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services. We know that Nova Scotians are facing a financial crunch, especially over the past year, and no group more so than our seniors.

I've heard from a number of seniors within my constituency who have applied for the HARP and are waiting for their money to come in. As of April 4th, the department had said they were still processing applications received from the week of February 13th.

My question to the minister is: Does he have an update on how the backlog is going with the processing of applications?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this important question. Understanding that Nova Scotians are facing tough financial times, that is why our government announced back in December a significant announcement to top up the Heating Assistance Rebate Program, \$100 million to support Nova Scotians. More than 125,000 households have been approved so far and I want to reassure all Nova Scotians and all members of this House that we are working within the two- to eight-week time frame, the turnaround time for processing. Those Nova Scotians who haven't heard yet between the two- and eight-week time frame, they will certainly hear back.

PATRICIA ARAB: I guess what the concern is for constituents who are coming and calling into my office is that if the backlog was this great as of February, March was probably the time when most of those applications were going to come in. I am curious if the department had any fail-safes or any processing plans for either more staff or more bodies to process those applications, where the bulk of them would have come in in March.

COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I really want to extend my appreciation to the staff for working diligently to process all those applications. Since we put the expanded program live at the end of January, just itself there were 111,000 applications received since then, a significant bulk of applications then. We have also seen a significant increase in the calls through the call centre: not just a double in call volumes pertaining to HARP - actually, in fact, I think it was in February, a triple in calls, up to 18,000 calls per month, regarding this program. Knowing that there is lots of interest in the program, but we want to reassure Nova Scotians that their applications are being processed.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: CHILD CARE SPACES - INCREASE

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. For the past two weeks, we have been relaying stories of parents, mostly mothers, who can't find child care spaces and have been assured by this government that things are improving. Fourteen spaces - that's how many new infant daycare spaces have been created under this government. When presented with this number, the Premier stated that this government was doing what they could. Should Nova Scotians accept that 14 new spaces is the best that this government can do?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that 14 new infant spaces are by no means what Nova Scotia should expect and that is not what we are delivering. We have been working diligently to expand access to child care in Nova Scotia. We have opened not 14 but 1,100 new spaces. That includes spaces for infants. That includes spaces for toddlers. That includes before and after spaces, because child care is not just needed before school starts. Parents need child care when they work, where they live, and our department and our government are doing the work to deliver on that.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I appreciated that applause for 700 spaces, but 14 infant spaces was probably not something you wanted to clap on. These parents who can't find daycare and can't return to work are the health care and skilled workers that this government is scratching their heads to try to find.

One mother - a nurse - told a reporter last week: I work two days a week in cancer care. Why, you ask? I have small children and one of them is not yet school-aged and needs daycare. However, daycare availability is limited in my area. My daughter gets part-days

of care and we are on a wait-list for full days. My other two children finish school at 2:30 p.m.

[2:45 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, can the minister see that health care workers, 84 per cent of whom are women, can't work because they don't have child care?

BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, I vividly recall 12 years ago having my name on multiple wait-lists. My friends and family did. Colleagues across the way did. The reality is that child care has needed transformation for decades. The work that we are doing right now is not causing problems, it's the solution to the problems in child care.

We are building spaces for health care workers, for shift workers, for people in rural areas who have been underserved, but in addition to doing that - because you can't just do that - to transform child care we not only need to build spaces, we need to reduce the costs. We have done that as well. You need to support our ECEs and we've done that as well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

DHW: FREE TUITION FOR PHARM. TECHS. - CONSIDER

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, we're hearing from pharmacists throughout the province they're having difficulty hiring enough pharmacy technicians or assistants. They believe that some of the issue has been caused by the implementation of free CCA training - people who might otherwise have trained in the pharmacy sector have gone the CCA route. Will the Minister of Labour consider offering free tuition for pharmacy techs and assistants?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly through the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia, as well as the College of Pharmacists, we have had some discussions about workforce.

There were recently regulations that were passed that had languished for a while, and that will allow pharmacy assistants to PLAR - use prior learning in order to transition to a pharmacy technician, but also leaves a gap as well for pharmacy assistants. So we are working with the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia, as well as the college, to look at the workforce to better understand how we can support and expand the opportunities in that program.

KELLY REGAN: This was an issue that was actually raised with me at a number of different pharmacies. This often happens when you try to solve a problem in the health care sector - surprise, surprise, it has an impact somewhere else in the sector. We're asking a lot

of our pharmacies these days. They've stepped up during COVID-19, did all of those vaccinations. They've expanded their scope of practice. They've opened community health clinics. Surely we can ensure that they have the people they need to carry out their duties. I urge the minister to please look at the effects on other professions as the free CCA program impacts other programs as well.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I agree, we have to really look at our workforce. We know that the labour market right now - there are so many vacancies, and certainly health care is one of those.

In our community conversations across this province, we had the opportunity to talk in community and tell them that particularly young people, or people who are mid-life looking for a change in their career - there's so much opportunity in health care across all different sectors. We are continuing to look at what opportunities are available, not only through growing our own workforce, but also through immigration.

The conversations are ongoing, and we will continue to look at options, both in classroom and also other alternative learning opportunities for people to support the pharmacy sector.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

SNSIS: VITAL STATS. PHONE CALLS - STOP

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I first met Krysta and Jackie when they contacted my office late last Summer. It was then that I learned that government was not allowing two female parents who were trying to have parental recognition on their child's birth certificate. They were not allowed to have their two names on the birth certificate. To my shock, I found out that the government actually spends time and resources calling the parents to find out how they conceived their child. Will the Minister of Vital Statistics tell this House when government will stop calling citizens to ask them how they conceived their child when they are two female parents?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I appreciate the important question from the member opposite. What I can share with the House is that there is a package of proposed amendments regarding modernizing the birth registration process in Nova Scotia. It's a comprehensive review, and actually engagement with a number of different community organizations, including actually members of the Opposition, to share their feedback.

We're certainly taking all that information into consideration, and the experiences that Nova Scotians are living first-hand, into consideration of how we modernize this Act, and modernize the needs of Nova Scotians in our growing diverse population.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: If you know the donor, the parent's name is removed from the birth certificate, leaving one parent's space blank on the birth certificate. Then they are asked to actually adopt their own child. Can you imagine that - you are the mother who delivered the baby, and you are asked to adopt your own child. Will the minister tell the House and all those affected when will they see a change?

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, before I give the point of privilege, I do want to ask if the Speaker would give consideration to hearing this point of privilege, considering the time that has lapsed. I did just find out on Thursday, at the end of the session, that this would qualify as a point of privilege, and I was not aware of that before end of session on Thursday, at which time I had had a meeting with the Clerks.

My point of privilege is referring to an email that I received on January 6th, where I received a threat of litigation from an employee of the Department of Justice regarding helping a constituent with their wife who had died tragically at our hospital. The email was sent Friday, January 6th, at 11:40 p.m. I did seek legal counsel . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I have just been informed that - I just want to read this for everybody's information. The matter of privilege to be raised in the House must have recently occurred and must call for the immediate action of the House. Therefore, the member must satisfy the Speaker that he or she is bringing the matter to the attention of the House as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the situation. As the member has not fulfilled this important requirement, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is not a prima facie question of privilege.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We would like to know what recourse this member has. Each time she has tried to represent her constituents or an individual that she knows or the parents of a victim, she is threatened with legal action or censorship from this government. For all of us to feel comfortable here, that we can say what we want to say, represent our constituents, and do our job in here, we need to know we can do that without legal threat or threat of censure in this House. I would ask you to consider that and please offer us what measures can be brought in place to ensure that members' rights are protected in this House, if you're not able to listen to her point of privilege today.

THE SPEAKER: I am going to rule the point of order out of order because, as mentioned in the rules, the notice of motion for a point of privilege has to be given as soon as possible to the date that it took place.

As far as what recourse could the member for Cumberland North, or any member in this Chamber want to do, the recommendation from me is that they try to follow that timeline, but at the same time to approach the Clerks for advice or Legislative Counsel. That's why we have Legislative Counsel.

I would recommend that the member do that and again, that the other members in the House here consider that if the time ever comes that they may be faced with the same situation. With that, we'll move on.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, taking into consideration your recent comments and advice, I am standing today, speaking into Supply, about the pattern of intimidation, the culture of silencing, and culture of bullying that not only I have experienced, but others in this Chamber, present and past.

Upon the advice of legal counsel, I have been advised to stand today and lay out the pattern of intimidation so that it is documented. As I mentioned when I stood on the point of privilege, I was unaware that an email from a department - from the Department of Justice - could be used as a point of privilege because I had thought that only acts or events that happened in the Chamber could be used as a point of privilege.

I have learned and will take that into consideration in the future, and in future sessions. It was news to me - when I met with the Clerks - we met to discuss what are the tools in the tool chest for us, as MLAs, when we feel threatened that we are not permitted to do the job we were elected to do, that is to represent the people of our area.

I was told about the workplace harassment policy, but there are limitations with that in that you have to bring those forward within six months. If an event had happened before that, the workplace harassment policy is not usable, and that a point of privilege, you have to bring it forth as soon at your first opportunity. This email I received was January 6th, so I completely understand and respect your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

[3:00 p.m.]

However, at the advice of legal counsel, today I would like to lay out a pattern that I've experienced, and I know of others who have had similar experiences as well. Of course, we all know the most recent example was just a week ago - last Monday - when a notice of motion was tabled here in the Chamber to have me removed from the Legislature. It was quite a shock to experience that type of reprimand from the government. Not only was I shocked, but I received communications from all over the entire country because it is such a rare thing to see happen in democracy that we are supposed to be ruled under here in Canada.

I consider the notice of motion that was tabled last week to be another form of intimidation for me to do my job here in this workplace. It is unfair to the people I represent from Cumberland North. I have had my eyes opened wide since I was elected in 2017. I had no idea the culture of politics. I had no idea that I would be expected to toe the line and be basically a puppet to a leader, whoever that leader may be. I don't believe that is fair to the people I represent, nor is it fair to anyone in a democracy. People elect all of us to represent them, to be their voice here in this Legislature, to bring forth the best legislation possible.

It's ironic that when I go to our Nova Scotia government website about bullying that one of the comments on this says, "If you are being bullied, remember that you don't have to put up with it. You can seek help." Mr. Speaker, today I am seeking help from you and from everyone in this Chamber because I would like the bullying to stop so that I can focus on doing the job that I was elected to do, and that is represent the people of Cumberland North. Not only does it affect my well-being and my health and my ability to do my job in this workplace, this is actually undemocratic. It's unconstitutional, what was brought forth to me.

There was a lot of research done by people who were helping me. It's very rare, when you look at the history, to take such an unconstitutional step. Here in Nova Scotia, there are very rare cases. People were removed for things such as criminal misconduct. In B.C., no one has ever been removed from the Legislature. In Alberta, no one has ever been removed. In Saskatchewan, someone was removed for murder - Colin Thatcher in 1984. In 1980, Robert Wilson was removed from Manitoba for trafficking. In 1940, someone was removed from Manitoba because they were a communist. His last name was Litterick. In New Brunswick, Fred Harvey, however, was removed from his seat by a judge. No one has ever been removed from P.E.I. or Newfoundland. In the Northwest Territories, someone was removed for breaking COVID-19 rules. It is very rare. We go all the way back to 1874, when Louis Riel was removed for murder.

It has been an interesting history lesson going through all of the people that I potentially will be lined up with if this notice of motion passes. The fact that the notice of motion was not removed when the Leader of the Official Opposition requested the

government do so shows that it's being left on the order paper as another form of intimidation, so that every day when I come into this Chamber, I am going to wonder, is today the day that I'm going to be removed undemocratically from my seat in this Legislature?

On January 6th, I was intimidated as well after trying to assist a constituent. We all know the story of Allison Holthoff. It was a very tragic situation in our community. A few days after Gunter had come to me, I received this email on a Friday night at 11:40 p.m. from someone who works in the Department of Justice. I did not sleep, and about 24 hours later, I sought legal counsel from three separate lawyers. Each of the three lawyers told me that it was an act of intimidation, a clear threat to me and my ability to do my job. I did not know I could bring it forth as a point of privilege, and that is why I did not do that until today.

At the end of my speech, I'll table all of the documents that I have.

I would also like to reference a point of privilege that was tabled here, and I won't read through all the documents, but I did want to mention it in this speech because it is another example of intimidation here in this Chamber. On Thursday, October 21, 2022, Mr. Speaker, you gave your ruling on that point of privilege that the member for Bedford Basin and myself had stood on. I would like to reference it because it's interesting. In the ruling, I want to read two things, if there's a ruling on whether something is intimidation.

First, was it an intimidating action, and second, does the intimidating action directly impair a specific parliamentary duty or legislative function? Mr. Speaker, you found that, in fact, there was an intimidating action, but because I came back into the Chamber, did my job, and did not show any physical or emotional or mental signs of distress, the ruling was that there was no intimidation. I can say I chose not to make a comment after that ruling, but in my opinion, if someone is trying to intimidate and has intimidating behaviour for someone, just because I'm a strong woman and will stand in the face of that and not show emotion and not leave my job should not mean that it was not intimidating.

Now I'm going to bring up another topic that does open old wounds, but I want to bring it up because it also shows the pattern of being silenced and being shamed. From March 22, 2020, until June 24, 2021, I shared the concerns of the people I represent in our border community every single week with my caucus. The unbelievable stress that the pandemic placed on our people who live in harmony every day with the people of Westmorland County, New Brunswick, for medical care, business, family, and more, was unbearable. It went on for 64 weeks.

On June 22nd, when the former Premier, our member for Timberlea-Prospect - and I will say, we have made amends, he's been a real gentleman - when he backtracked on the opening of our border, everything fell apart in our community, people lost it. People were

messaging me and calling me, and they were going to block the highway, and I begged them not to. They asked me to join them in the protest, and I told them I would not go to the New Brunswick-Nova Scotia border, and I did not.

Many people, thousands probably, went to Exit 7, which was 45 minutes from the border. I made that famous video because I was angry on behalf of my people, and I went and joined a protest that was there. Mr. Speaker, many members in this House join protests in support of their constituents, and in fact the member for Cumberland South tried to join the protest but was stuck in traffic, yet he still sits in his seat. That night, at 8:30 p.m., with the assistance of former . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I just want to ask the member to tread carefully here, because she is starting to point out individuals, and the repercussions could be (Inaudible).

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: At 8:30 p.m., as things were getting dark, with the assistance of former MP Scott Armstrong, I gave a speech and asked people to go home. I told people I would come here to the city on their behalf, and I did that. I was asked by the Premier not to speak to media, and I complied. Everyone at home knew I was here in the city while people blocked the New Brunswick-Nova Scotia border, and I was never there.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing called me that afternoon to congratulate me for standing up for my people. The Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage called me and congratulated me for standing up for my people, and at 5:00 p.m. I held a caucus meeting where they asked me to publicly state that I was not an anti-vaxxer and that I did not support the border blockade, and I agreed. Then I went to the caucus office and was given a document, which I will table, which I was told to sign, or do a video. If I had done that, it was legally implicating me in the Nova Scotia border blockade, which I was never at.

After hours of trying to negotiate with the current premier, I was not willing to sign something that was not truthful. I will not do that. That is the foundation of who we are. If we lose the ability to stand in our truth, we have lost everything, and I am not willing to do that. I was not willing to do that then, and I'm not willing to do that now. I hope to God I will never be in that situation where I will give that up.

I'm outlining these four very direct, very specific acts where I have been attempted to be silenced. I believe it's been a form of intimidation and bullying, and I've had enough. I've been elected by the people of Cumberland North to come to this Legislature and represent them, and I believe I should be free to do so. I believe what we're seeing in this Legislature last week and the fact that this Notice of Motion to remove me sits on the order table to intimidate me each and every day that I come in this House, likely until the next election, weakens democracy here in Nova Scotia.

People are watching across this entire country. I will stand firm on my foundation of truth. The acts of intimidation actually strengthen my resolve to help stand in and stand for democracy. They strengthen my resolve. Former MLA Alana Paon and former constituency assistant Martha MacQuarrie - both strong women who tried to stand - were expelled and treated like pariahs as well.

It's not just me. There has been a pattern of intimidation and a culture of silence, and I am asking for the government to stop. Allow me to do my job in representing the people of Cumberland North. I believe we will all be better off for it.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

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

[3:11 p.m. The House resolved itself into CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker Kent Smith in the Chair.]

[7:48 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Kent Smith resumed the Chair.]

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

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole on Supply has met and has come to agreement on 43 Estimate Resolutions. The Chair has been instructed to recommend these Estimates to the favourable consideration of the House, each without amendment.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House concurs with the report of the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

[GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:]

[INTRODUCTION OF BILLS]

Bill No. 316 - Entitled an Act to Provide for Defraying Certain Charges and

Expenses of the Public Service of the Province. (Hon. Allan MacMaster)

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 316 be now read a second time.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 316.

There has been a request for a recorded vote.

The bells will ring until the Whips are satisfied.

[7:51 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 316.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[8:09 p.m.]

YEAS

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
Dave Ritcey
Hon. Brian Wong
Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek
Hon. Brian Comer

NAYS

Hon. Patricia Arab
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Iain Rankin
Susan Leblanc
Claudia Chender
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Lisa Lachance
Rafah DiCostanzo
Hon. Tony Ince
Lorelei Nicoll
Hon. Ben Jessome
Braedon Clark

Hon. Colton LeBlanc	Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin
Hon. Jill Balsler	Ronnie LeBlanc
Trevor Boudreau	Fred Tilley
Hon. Greg Morrow	
Hon. Becky Druhan	
Larry Harrison	
Chris Palmer	
John A. MacDonald	
Melissa Sheehy-Richard	
John White	
Danielle Barkhouse	
Tom Taggart	
Nolan Young	

THE CLERK: For, 28. Against, 18.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING]

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 316 be now read a third time and do pass.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 316.

There has been a request for a recorded vote.

The bells shall ring until the Whips are satisfied.

[8:12 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. There has been a request for a recorded vote.

I recognize The Clerk.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[9:12 p.m.]

YEAS

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
Dave Ritcey
Hon. Brian Wong
Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek
Hon. Brian Comer
Hon. Colton LeBlanc
Hon. Jill Balsler
Hon. Greg Morrow
Hon. Becky Druhan
Larry Harrison
Chris Palmer
John A. MacDonald
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
John White
Danielle Barkhouse
Tom Taggart
Nolan Young

NAYS

Hon. Patricia Arab
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Iain Rankin
Susan Leblanc
Claudia Chender
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Lisa Lachance
Hon. Tony Ince
Lorelei Nicoll
Hon. Ben Jessome
Braedon Clark
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin
Ronnie LeBlanc
Fred Tilley

THE CLERK: For, 28. Against, 17.

THE SPEAKER: 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: Mr. Speaker, I move pursuant to Rule 5C that the hour of adjournment for tomorrow, April 12th, be not 5:30 p.m. but 11:59 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the hour of adjournment for tomorrow, April 12th, be not 5:30 p.m. but 11:59 p.m.

[9:15 p.m.]

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to move Private and Local Bill 292, An Act to Incorporate Mount Saint Vincent University Student Union, to pass Committee of the Whole House on Bills directly to third reading.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Private and Local Bills for Third Reading.

PRIVATE AND LOCAL BILLS FOR THIRD READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 292.

Bill No. 292 - An Act to Incorporate Mount Saint Vincent University Student Union (amended).

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill No. 292, An Act to Incorporate Mount Saint Vincent University Student Union (amended). Very briefly, as I said in second reading, I really appreciate the passage of this particular bill. The Mount means a lot to me, and even though this is a housekeeping bill, to be able to stand here and represent such an esteemed university is a real honour. I hope that the moving of this bill will help the student union move forward and be more reflective of the student body that they represent. I hope they know that they always have a friend in me at the Mount.

With that, I move third reading of Bill No. 292.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park, it will be to close debate.

The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

PATRICIA ARAB: I move third reading of Bill No. 292.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 292.

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: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Bills for Third Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

Bill No. 273 - Road Trails Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 273, the Road Trails Act, be read a third time and do pass.

I want to thank the members opposite for their positive comments during second reading. It gives me great pleasure to know that communities and people across the province are looking forward to the OHV pilot project finally becoming permanent.

I grew up riding ATVs with my family. My father still has one, and he absolutely loves going out on the trails. I know first-hand when OHVs are used safely and responsibly, they are a great activity for people to enjoy with their friends and their loved ones.

I had the pleasure of discussing this act with a lovely couple from North Queens, a place where I grew up, recently. They're both retired now, and they bought a side-by-side so they could actually go out on the weekends and ride together. They told me how much they enjoy the drives, getting outdoors, seeing our beautiful province, stopping at local

restaurants, meeting people - and they love how this activity helps them connect with their community and each other.

While I am very glad that the OHV enthusiasts are excited about this bill, what makes me truly proud is the emphasis that it does place on safety. There have been some misconceptions that this bill gives OHV riders free rein on provincial roads, and that is simply not the case. A great deal of work and effort went into crafting the rules of this pilot, taking safety standards and public feedback into careful consideration. The bill will use the same rules developed for the pilot, which clearly defines the designated routes that allow riders to travel from trailhead to trailhead or from trailhead to services like fuel and food.

Additionally, I am also very pleased that municipalities are empowered by this legislation. It helps them shape how OHVs will function in their communities, and it brings economic benefits.

To close, I would like to thank the members of ATVANS for championing this bill and for being such a collaborative partner throughout this process. I'd also like to thank my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables and his staff for all their support and for allowing access to the beautiful trails that they are responsible for.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to send a huge thank you to all the hard-working and dedicated staff at the Department of Public Works - staff members who put such energy and expertise into this work and to the work they do every day.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and look forward to hearing from my colleagues from across the aisle.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: I will be brief as well here on third reading.

I am happy to see this move forward. I think the pilot project worked really well. Obviously in the seven sites across the province, it was very useful and safe. We understand there were no major incidents or accidents which is, of course, paramount.

I think this is a good example for us, not just at Public Works but at all departments, to see the value of pilot projects and how they can really work to prove a concept that we believe to be true but the pilot project gives us the real-world evidence for that.

As we've mentioned in the past and as the minister mentioned as well, communication will be a huge issue on this, just to avoid misconceptions like the fact that it's just open season for OHVs, which obviously it is not. Communication, whether that's in the form of public education or signage on the roadside - all those things will be critically important, I think particularly in areas where people might not be used to OHV or

ATV use - kind of in the suburban areas, kind of in between the urban core and more rural areas where this is more common.

I do think this will unlock some opportunities for tourism and for year-round recreation - not just for Nova Scotians but for people who are visiting our province as well. I think there is real opportunity there. We look forward to that.

Again, to echo the minister's comments, I just want to thank the staff at Public Works for putting together this pilot project some five or six years ago now. It is great to see that we have gotten to this point where we can now expand this across the province, and also, I think, rightly give municipalities some discretion as to whether or not they want to do this in their particular spheres of jurisdiction.

With those comments, I will take my seat.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, and I thank my colleagues. I have a 20-page paper on this that I'd like to deliver. I'm really kidding, Mr. Speaker. I saw some fear there, and I am quite capable of doing a 20-pager.

I rise in support of this bill. First off, I want to thank the staff at Public Works and the minister and the previous minister for all their hard work on this and with regard to the pilot project. It is good to see this bill move forward.

I do appreciate the ability for municipal units to have that enabling power. I think that is a significant part of this bill that is going to be truly important for all units.

The other thing is that I want to reiterate what my colleague in the Liberal caucus had to say, and that is the need for sufficient and proper signage as well as a lot of education. I hope the minister and the Public Works Department are prepared to knock out some signs.

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You were delayed there a little bit.

I just want to bring a few words of support for this bill. As the Minister of Public Works said, our two departments have been working very hard, since we've sat in this, and even before we sat in the chairs. This was one of our joint projects that we wanted to see through. Finally, Mr. Speaker. Finally. I know there's a lot of people very happy that this moment is taking place, all through the whole province, as ATVs are becoming even more popular.

Just locally, I'd like to throw in a couple of mentions about how important this is to rural economies. When I think about Sarah and Mike Berry in Advocate, their local store down there - when you drive by on the weekend, whether it's ATV season or snowmobile season, that's what makes the rural economy in Advocate on the weekend, is when you see 60 to 70 machines parked in their back area.

Or I think locally, in my own hometown, of the Parkview Motel, where there might not be anybody parked out front utilizing the hotel, but when you look out back in the parking lot, it's full with ATVs right off the trail. This will allow the Municipality of Oxford - which is one of the very first municipalities to step up and show interest that they wanted to utilize this program - I know they're working actively right now to see what this will shape and look like.

I think about Springhill as well, at Sociables restaurant, when you look across the parking lot from Sociables. It's a huge driver of economy. This is going to allow the rural network to even be more connected and allow more tourists and even Nova Scotians to come in.

A little bit of a highlight that there's been a few questions pop up. What role do our conservation officers take? There's still an enforcement process for this, similar to municipal and RCMP police officers as well. We've been getting a lot of positive feedback and look forward to seeing this bill finalized and more trails becoming a reality in the next year to come.

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

The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Again, thank you to my colleagues in the House for their comments about this great bill. I can assure the members across the aisle that certainly there will be a significant public awareness campaign and adequate signage. We'll make sure that that's taken care of.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I rise to close third reading on Bill No. 273.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 273. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered 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: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 262.

[9:30 p.m.]

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

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

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I move that Bill No. 262, an Act to Amend Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2021, the Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act, be now read for a third time and do pass.

I would like to start by thanking the members for the debate on this bill, a bill that will impact more than 300,000 Nova Scotians. I appreciated hearing their perspectives and listening to the issues that they brought forward.

I'd also like to thank those who appeared before Law Amendments Committee last week to share their experiences as well as their suggestions about Bill No. 262. I took the time to listen to each presenter, and I appreciated and I recognize the impact that this bill is having on so many Nova Scotians, both those who rent and those who have invested in residential properties.

What we have heard will continue to factor into our decision-making, into balancing the needs and rights of both tenants and landlords. We have said all along that our priority with any change we make to the Residential Tenancies Act and to the Residential Tenancies Program is to balance the rights and the needs of both tenants and landlords. I say this often, but I'm now starting to hear it from others as well.

The presenters at Law Amendments Committee helped to illustrate how challenging that can be. Tenants bring one perspective to the table and landlords bring another. Our job, with the decisions we make, is to get the right balance.

Landlords spoke at Law Amendments Committee about how difficult it has been since the rent cap was first introduced. The cap has limited the rent they can collect while costs associated with utilities, for example, and ongoing maintenance have increased. The cap limits how much they can make and how much they can reinvest in their properties. It's a challenge.

On the other hand, we hear from renters, some of our most vulnerable citizens who can't afford high increases in rent. There are two distinct arguments for and against extending the rent cap and for changing the rate percentage. We debated it on the floor of the Legislature. We heard in great detail the challenges associated with it during Law Amendments Committee.

Our job is to find that right balance, and it's not easy. We're not going to please everyone, and our job is to try to get the right balance again, to meet with both landlord and tenant groups and organizations to hear their ideas and learn about their challenges. Then we make an informed decision.

With the current rental market and high inflation, we've seen challenges for both groups, and that's why we have taken the approach we have. I'm confident that this is the right decision. Extending the rent cap until December 31, 2025 is necessary to protect renters from high rent increases. With the high cost of living, we know many can't afford increases like this, especially when we are in the midst of working to increase housing availability. While recognizing the rent cap is challenging for landlords, we increased it to align it more with the cost of inflation.

Fixed-term leases were also a topic that was raised during Law Amendments Committee on a couple of occasions by both tenants and landlords. Again, we heard varying views. I've said it all along, that fixed-term leases have a role. They work in situations where a tenant needs a short-term lease, and in some instances, landlords are using them for what they are not intended for. We'll be watching to see if the increased cap helps address the misuse of the fixed-term leases, and if they continue to be an issue, we will work with both tenant and landlord organizations to see what can be done.

As I conclude my remarks, I also want to express my appreciation and my gratitude to my team at Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services and those within the Residential Tenancies Program and their hard work and dedication on this very complex file every single day. With that I look forward to comments from the members opposite.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: It's a good opportunity to speak again at third reading on this bill. There are a few issues that I see, and the minister has talked a lot on this issue with balance, and the need for balance. I think that the balance is not there on this bill in particular. There are a few issues.

One, as I've discussed, to leave the calculation of the rental cap in the hands of Cabinet through regulation, I think, is an oversight. All other provinces that have any type of rent control system in place, which is about half the country, tend to give that power to an independent body, whether it's a UARB equivalent, or some third party that has expertise on housing. I think that's a smarter option, but again, I think this reinforces what we've seen from this government in particular, which is to consolidate power and think that Cabinet knows best, which I think is a mistake on this.

The date is another issue that is a problem for me: December 31, 2025, as the minister mentioned. As I've said before, it's an election year, as we all know. It has no connection at all to the housing market. It's just a date. Who's to say that the housing

market, the rental market will be any better at the end of December 2025? It could be worse. I think that is a bit of a punt, to be honest, to do that. I would argue that a much better option would be to tie any removal of the rent cap to indicators of health or a lack of health in the rental market. The vacancy rate, for example.

We all know that 3 per cent or so is considered a healthy vacancy rate, and we are far from that in most of the province. Around 1 per cent in some areas. Here in the city, under 1 per cent. We all hope that that will be closer to 3 per cent by the end of 2025, but it might not be. I think to set that date to coincide with a few months after an election, and some government to deal with at that time, I think, is an abdication on this important issue. That's certainly not something that we support.

The other point is what the minister talked about on fixed-term leases. I was at the Law Amendments Committee for a good chunk of the debate on this bill. Many presenters came forward with issues around fixed-term leases, and unfortunately, the abuse of fixed-term leases.

If I could summarize the minister's argument on this point, it seems to be that there are some bad apples in the landlord community who are abusing fixed-term leases, and that might be true. The minister says that the vast majority of landlords are following the rules and doing the right things. I can accept that argument, but the logic doesn't hold. We all know that the vast majority of drivers on our roads are good drivers, but we still have speed limits. We still make people wear seatbelts. We still do all these things.

All of us in this Chamber, and the vast majority of Nova Scotians, are law-abiding citizens, but we still have laws. We still have a Criminal Code. We still recognize that just because the vast majority of actors are doing the right thing, we can't just throw up our hands and say, well, there's nothing we can do about the few who are breaking the rules. That doesn't make any sense.

The minister's argument on this has been, well, if we go from 2 per cent - which is what the cap is this year - and we go to 5 per cent next year, that will disincentivize landlords. They won't abuse the fixed-term leases if they can get an extra \$45 or \$50 a month in rent.

We've seen situations over and over again where the increases in rent at the end of a fixed-term lease are in the hundreds of dollars - \$500, \$600, \$700, \$800, \$900 in some cases, we heard at the Law Amendments Committee. To suggest that a landlord is going to not touch a fixed-term lease or not do anything wrong or unethical on a fixed-term lease because they can get an extra \$45 a month under the 5 per cent cap, as opposed to \$700 from getting a new tenant, I think it just doesn't hold.

We know that the housing situation in this province is desperate. It doesn't appear to be improving significantly. The number of people experiencing homelessness in this

province is going up, close to 1,000 people across the province at least - although we don't have great numbers on that. We know that the rental market is as tight as it has ever been. The vacancy rate is stubbornly low. There are people all across the income spectrum - and all across this city, and all across this province - who are desperate for housing.

I think this bill, while it does extend the rent cap, is a halfway measure. It doesn't do enough to deal with a pressing issue for the 300,000 people in Nova Scotia who are renters. It passes the buck down the road. It doesn't close an obvious opportunity for abuse that is leaving some people either homeless, insecurely housed or looking for a place that they can't afford but that they are forced to afford - and they are forced to make some really difficult decisions that people in this province shouldn't have to make.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: I would first like to say that we in the NDP are in favour of this bill, the Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act. We are very pleased that the rent cap is going to be extended through 2024 and into 2025. I want to commend the government for understanding the level of intensified hardship and chaos that would have ensued if the unregulated housing market had been allowed to determine rents beyond this December.

I also want to appreciatively acknowledge that the government has done this in the face of an intensely powerful, well-funded, and often vitriolic landlord lobby, who are strongly in favour of the path of deregulation, which would have led directly to the hardship and chaos that I speak of. I want to say that first.

However, I want to say secondly - as I've said before and as others have said as well - this temporary rent cap for 2024 and 2025 is not the needed answer. What is really needed is a comprehensive, effective, permanent system of rent control, which is better than the present cap - not just because it's long-term or because it would be predictable - but also because in its form in our party's Rental Fairness and Accessibility bill, it applies the regulation to the rental unit rather than to the tenancy. Because it applies the regulation to the unit rather than the tenancy, it removes any vestige of a financial incentive to any landlord to remove and replace their tenants.

I don't think that everyone here would be aware that this actually was the form in which the current rent cap came to the province - that is to say, rent control by unit rather than by tenancy.

In November 2020, when the then-Liberal government introduced the first rent cap, that rent cap was a cap on units, not on tenancies. It has caused no end of problems since that time. About a week after the rent-control-by-unit rent cap was introduced by the Liberals in November 2020, the Liberal Cabinet, by Order in Council, reversed that

decision and established the current rent control - not by unit but by tenancy system. That would never have become known by the public at all except for the work of an enterprising, digging journalist, who found that that decision was taken by the Cabinet some very short few days after the implementation of the rent cap in November 2020.

That change - a few days after the first establishment of the rent cap in November 2020 - set the stage for so much of the hardship that is being experienced today by the thing that happens when you have rent cap by the tenancy, rather than by the unit: the undercutting of the rent cap by the proliferation of fixed-term leases.

I do want to say a few more words on this subject of fixed terms as they relate to the efficacy and usefulness of the rent cap. I want to say it this way: No rent cap - not this rent cap nor any other rent cap - that is based on the regulation of tenancies rather than the regulation of units can achieve the protections for tenants that it is intended to achieve, that it is designed for, unless limitations are brought in and placed on landlords' ability to undercut and skirt the protections the rent cap provides by the use of fixed-term leases.

A constituent of Halifax Chebucto - his name is Jonathan Hird - has written to me recently of his experience with a fixed-term lease as it relates to the rent cap. He's given me permission to quote from what he had written to me. I think that what he says deserves to be heard. He writes:

"I feel the rug has been pulled out from under me by my current landlord. I foolishly signed a fixed term lease last August not realizing that renewal may be denied by the landlord to skirt around the current 2 per cent rent cap. I am well aware that the rental company is simply swapping me out for another tenant so they may raise rent by hundreds of dollars rather than the legal 2 per cent increase if I stay.

[. . .] I feel I've been taken advantage of, and I'm staring down the barrel of a \$400+ increase in my rent when I move that I will simply be unable to pay. Fixed-term leases existing feel as if they completely nullify the rent cap, and also apply the pressure on tenants to move every single year into perpetually increasing rent prices.

My current options now feel as if I have to move out of Nova Scotia or simply live in my car and it's incredibly scary that this has all been done legally with the current system."

Throughout the debate that we've been having over these last couple of weeks about this piece of legislation, the minister has been called on many times to respond to the point that Mr. Hird is making in this email. When he does that, the minister almost always begins with an acknowledgement that that kind of misuse of fixed-term leases that this tenant is describing - that this does happen. Sometimes the words the minister uses - these

were the words that were used in the paper the weekend before last: to say that this happens “on occasion.” I think this is not an accurate characterization of the situation we find ourselves in.

[9:45 p.m.]

Another Halifax resident named Jameson Gillis has recently written to the minister a most thoughtful letter, I think, countering this opinion of the minister’s. He has also given me permission to quote his correspondence. Mr. Gillis writes to tell the minister this:

“Many friends who have signed leases in the last few years have had to sign fixed-term leases. I have recently been looking for new housing and all the apartments I have viewed or inquired about are 12-month, fixed-term leases. Major Halifax landlords who used to sign regular periodic leases are now only offering fixed-term leases.”

Joanne Hussey from Dalhousie Legal Aid was asked in the media lately what percentage of the leases that come before them there now are fixed-term leases. She said simply: almost all. No wonder the minister doesn’t even acknowledge the reality of the proliferation of fixed-term leases. If he did, he would have to explain where this proliferation of fixed-term leases came from - what has brought it about. Thus, he would have to recognize that it hasn’t come about because of Santa Claus. It has intensified through these last 30 months of the rent cap period because landlords have discovered in the fixed-term lease - in terminating tenancies and beginning new, uncapped tenancies - a dodge, a shift, a bypass, a loophole, and a circumvention around the protections which this bill, this Act, this law, is designed to provide for tenants.

I would also like to comment briefly, as my Liberal colleague just has, on another central part of the minister’s response to the arguments that have been increasingly brought forward for permanent rent control, namely that unlike some others - as the minister sometimes alleges - he is one who bases his thinking about this subject on the principle of balance. If I may say so, I find it inadequately humble of the minister to suggest that his understanding of this important principle is superior to that of those he disagrees with. I want to suggest that there’s room for improvement in how the minister thinks balance works in the residential tenancies world.

Somebody famously said once that the law in its majesty forbids the rich and the poor equally from sleeping under bridges. In other words, in order for the principle of balance to be properly honoured, a person must take into account the totally unequal situations of the parties whose interests are being balanced. If an elephant and a mouse were going to have a wrestling match, we would not want to hear the referee say that the referee’s priority was going to be to arbitrate this match with balance.

The government, in residential tenancies, is the referee. It has the responsibility to

fairly arbitrate the competing interests of the elephants and the mice: landlords - much of whose experience turns on an axis of return on investment, of which they often have plenty - and tenants, many whose household lives will be crushed if the cruel market logic of supply and demand is allowed to determine what they have to pay for rent.

I support this bill, as does our party, but it would be better in my view, if the bill were put forward with fewer platitudes and more protections for the mice.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to speak briefly tonight on this bill. This is a very important issue, obviously. Rent, in HRM in particular, is out of control. A lot of people are paying 50 per cent of their total income, if not more. This is all a connection.

This budget, this bill, people's lives, it's all connected. We have a government that is about to spend \$14 billion and there is nothing in there to protect renters. There is nothing in there to protect the most vulnerable people in our society, and I agree with the member from Halifax Chebucto about this unbalanced approach.

I have heard the minister say: Well, if they have an issue, they can go to the Residential Tenancy Program. You speak to anyone who is in that precarious position, where they are going to lose their home, where they have to figure out where their kids go next. Their kids are going to be torn out of their schools and they've got to go to a tenancy board and face off against somebody who has exponentially more experience than them and sometimes has a lawyer. I would agree and disagree with the member for Halifax Chebucto because it is not an elephant versus a mouse, it's more like an elephant versus an ant, because there is no avenue.

The minister continues to fall back on the same talking points: We're listening. This is what this government says: We're listening. Balanced approach. We care. Well, if they cared, they wouldn't have made the change to the rent subsidies. They now say 50 per cent of what you take home has to go to your rent - 50 per cent instead of 30 per cent. So that 20 per cent that you know went to things that aren't important, like feeding yourself or paying your power bill - which is going up 14 per cent, after they said they would protect.

The cost of inflation last year was 8 per cent. The cost of food inflation is even higher. This, I would argue, is not a 5 per cent increase. This is a minimum of a 15 per cent increase. This is another 5-5-5 and you can guarantee it's coming down the pipeline, yet there was a zero per cent increase to income assistance. There was a zero per cent increase for our seniors. There was a zero per cent increase for our most vulnerable. There was a 20 per cent raise in minimum wage. There was a zero per cent reduction in taxes, even though we on this side of the House, both parties, have put forward alternatives and bills that will help everybody. It won't just help the people who are represented by the NDP or the people

who are represented by the Liberals. It's going to help everybody, because you know what? When you are in poverty, when you can't pay your rent, you don't care about political parties.

I would say something, Mr. Speaker. I have heard this over and over from ministers over there about how poverty is complicated. No, it's not. Poverty is literally defined as not being able to pay your bills. There is nothing complicated about that. That is what poverty is, and I dare say that if people had more experience, more life experiences, they wouldn't so easily dismiss the people who come to Law Amendments, the people who were standing outside, and not a single member of the government went over and visited them or talked to them.

If they were so concerned about the loophole and the rent increases, they would have stood on that street and spoken to those people. When those people came into the Legislature, not in a confrontational way, not in a provoking way, they came in here to watch, to listen, and, hopefully, talk to the minister. They didn't even get a smile. They didn't get a second of the time just to say: Listen, this is what we're going through. This is how desperate our situation is. To say that only a few landlords are using fixed-term leases shows the lack of depth of understanding of this situation.

The number one issue in the community I represent right now is housing - the number one issue. Do you want to hear another number? Zero dollars from this government for public housing. Zero dollars for new builds.

The people who need it the most, the people who need help the most are being forgotten, all in the name of balance, and all in the name of "We understand, and we care, but we can't do too much because if we help you too much, you might get ahead."

The number of people who are going to be driven into poverty - which I will explain again is not complicated. Webster's defines it as the inability to pay your bills. It literally says things like housing, food, utilities. The number of people who are going to be driven into poverty because of the lack of action of this government in the name of balance and bills like this.

We have been in here for three weeks, Mr. Speaker. We are about a day away from being out of here, and there has not been a substantial bill to help low-income, working-class, and middle-class folks in this province. We have individuals who are about to go on strike, some of the lowest-paid and most important people in the province that this bill impacts. Is this government going to give them 5 per cent increases, or just the landlords?

I'm sure there will be all kinds of reasoning and excuses, and we see it time and time again from that side where their lack of ideas, the negative and the destructive - I would argue - legislation and policies that are put forward are followed by a cringeworthy

“We care.”

[10:00 p.m.]

This is very simple. We heard from not just - the minister was a bit dismissive of it. He said a few people talked about this loophole - just a few people - as if to say one or two people are being impacted by this loophole. That's simply not true.

Again, I would say it takes courage to stand up and listen to people who have a difference of opinion, people who will fight you on your legislation. They'll contradict what you believe, but that's how you learn and you grow.

There was a great opportunity for this government, that minister, and those members, to learn and grow and that was outside, across the street, that was up in the gallery, and they didn't take a single second. Today we watched and counted as that government introduced probably 30 people and gave them all a standing ovation, but nobody from that side of the government spoke to the people who were impacted. I would argue that that shows their real priorities.

I think this is less about helping and about who votes for them. I think they've made a calculated decision and they are calculating people's worth based on votes, not on what truly needs to be done - the dismissive attitude towards people who need it the most, to stand in this Legislature and pull things out of the sky and say that we are helping them, this bill is helping them.

Every bill they have put forward they have said will help, will make things better: Just wait and see. Every bill they reject: Well, we have to take a balanced approach.

Well, clearly their balanced approach doesn't include balancing your bills, balancing taking time off to go to the food bank, because this is what this government says: If you can't afford food, go to the food bank. It doesn't include single parents balancing their time, trying to find a new place, and those kids being ripped out of their schools.

And people who work, 40, 50, 60, 70 hours a week being told: You're on a fixed-term lease. Beat it, buddy. Go find a new place to live.

The only balance we have on that side is self-preservation. The lack of understanding of what this does to people, what their policies and lack of ideas are doing to people, is stunning. And I will finish it with: The facts are the facts are the facts.

Every single person in this room is going to get a 14 per cent increase in their power rate. If you're renting, you're going to get a 15 per cent minimum, because we know that some landlords are slipping things through, but you're going to get a 15 per cent increase in your rent. There's 14 per cent on your power, 15 per cent on that. We've now heard that

Halifax Water is applying for a raise on their water rates. There goes another one. Who needs water, power, and a place to live?

The cost of food is going up 7 per cent, 8 per cent, 9 per cent, 10 per cent. The cost of gas - we stood here in this Legislature and begged you to do something about it. It's now at almost \$1.70 a litre. And the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board once said: People will just drive less. Well, the price keeps going up and up and up. And this government keeps spending more and more and more. And people are being driven further and further and further into poverty.

And I will repeat for the last time, poverty is not complicated. It's the inability to pay your mortgage, your rent, your food and your utilities. So stop using that as an excuse.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm just going to stand here and I'm going to talk about why it's important to have housing, and why housing is very important. I mean, this bill - we are in favour of the rent cap, absolutely, and we're pleased to see that it will be extended - I just need to paint you a picture of the importance of housing.

Too many people are struggling to find and keep and secure an affordable place to live in Nova Scotia. We hear this all too often. Families who rent across the province are facing an extreme shortage of housing, and rents are climbing. The number of people unhoused and forced to sleep outside has exploded. As my colleague said, all because of poverty, or all because they can't afford, all because of the cost of living.

As housing prices and mortgage rates rise, home ownership is further and further out of reach for a growing number of Nova Scotians, but housing is more than just the roof over your head. It's health care, it's community, it's economic security. It's your home.

Housing is health care and mental health care. We know when someone is unhoused or worried about losing their home, they deal with additional stress and don't necessarily have time to take care of their physical or mental health. It can be hard for some folks to grasp, and in turn, it takes a toll on their health.

Housing is economic development. In communities and towns across our province, people are stuck with nowhere to live, leaving businesses without workers for the tourism season and beyond. We see now even a struggle to recruit folks to work in different parts of the province because housing is non-existent in areas in need of our workers.

Housing is community. In communities like CBRM, folks can't afford to pay the taxes on their homes, and young people can't afford to buy their first home. When people can't afford to live in communities that they've grown up in, or established their lives in, we lose important social connections and opportunities.

Every day we all speak to folks about how heartbreaking it is to leave their community from where they know, and they have no other option but to move elsewhere, because they're being priced out of housing.

Housing is education. We talked about this earlier today. In university towns and communities across the province, even here in Halifax, students are struggling to find housing, to find a place to rent that they can afford to live in. That leads to stress, and in some cases, people aren't able to finish their degrees because of the cost to live here in Nova Scotia.

Housing is climate action, and we know, as we talk about here all the time, that we need to do more to address the climate emergency. We know we need to build greener, more efficient housing that helps people be able to afford their homes and power bills. We say it all the time here on this side: Housing is a human right. For far too many of us, our friends and neighbours, it's no longer that guarantee. More and more we hear from our seniors, parents, students, and everyone in between that they aren't able to find a place to live or afford the home that they have. This is impacting people in communities across the province, rural and urban alike.

This government - and we have said it - is leaving way too many people to figure this out on their own. We know that Nova Scotians need to see real action on affordable housing and the skyrocketing cost of living. That means building new housing and protecting those who already have a home from losing it, especially when it's almost 20 per cent of Nova Scotian households that have to spend 50 per cent or more of their monthly income on rent or their mortgage.

For now, we know that there's a two per cent cap, which means people have had the predictability that comes with rent control. Just a few years ago, people were getting rent increases of \$200 or \$300 a month, which they couldn't afford and would force them to move. While we are pleased that the rent cap is extended, we need permanent rent control.

This government is standing by while landlords use loopholes and other tactics to evict people, threaten their tenants, or get around the rent cap. We hear this every single day in our offices. Our CAs hear it. We get it in emails. This is a problem, and the balance is definitely not struck by this piece of legislation. People are getting evicted with nowhere to go. While rents for existing tenants are capped, huge increases to rent continue for new tenants. With a vacancy rate of 1 per cent in Halifax and lower, or even worse rates in the rest of the province, if someone has to move for work or because of a fire or because their lease is up, there are very few affordable options for people to move to.

People are struggling to pay their mortgage, or they can't even find an affordable home to buy. Fixed-term leases, as we have heard all aspects of over here, are being used to restrict people from staying in their homes. There are loopholes in this legislation, which we have talked about many times, that make it possible for fixed-term leases to be used this

way. We know that other provinces don't use them that way. Why are we still doing that? Why are we harming folks by allowing this loophole to continue?

We need to close this loophole. We have brought forward legislation to address that issue. There have been amendments across the floor to talk about how we can make this piece of legislation better. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Our suggestions, our feedback, Law Amendments Committee feedback, folks who are actually experiencing these issues, and folks who are servicing people who are experiencing these issues have told us time and time again that there is an issue. There is an actual imbalance to this whole system. I have been here since 2021, and this problem is still happening.

In my first sitting, in 2021, we talked about something that had to do with opening up the Residential Tenancies Act. We said, how about we open it up and take a look at it in its entirety and go piece by piece to figure out what actually works for people, which means getting feedback from folks, having consultation, and having communities' input? I know that we are all saying these things, but - and I don't mean to say this in a disrespectful way - it seems like it's very one-sided.

I say that because someone who is trying to mitigate and navigate the system for folks who are experiencing eviction and the abuse of fixed-term leases - there doesn't seem to be very much protection for those folks who are actually going to be evicted next week, next month, or in 14 days. It's very troubling to see that we have a piece of legislation here that is put forward, and there were amendments, there were actually suggestions that were easy suggestions that could have easily been put forward in this legislation, and yet this government continues to ignore, that this is not a fix. This is a band-aid fix.

I want to say once again, the legislation put forward by this government is really just a band-aid. Leaving the per cent rate to the regulator is not a good idea. We as a government want to be able to believe in a lot of things that are being put forward.

It's hard to listen to the "We have a plan, we have a strategy, we're consulting, we're talking to people." But then you are not talking to the people you should be talking to who are part of the government. I just don't understand the whole concept of "We're working together, this is great, we're collaborating" yet none of us know what's going on on this side. Maybe we're missing something, maybe something is awry, but it's really challenging when we hear some amazing ideas, some great feedback from folks who are experiencing things and yet this government looks at them, smiles in their face - "Good, thank you so much for that." Then what do they do? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

It's very disheartening when I hear that there's a piece of legislation put forward that says we will do a rent cap - amazing because it's something people can depend on. It's predictable.

Then the piece of legislation doesn't have the percentage in it. Not like the last

piece of legislation that had the 2 per cent in it, that was in the words, completely in the Act. This government chooses not to put the percentage in, so it's hard for us over on this side to believe that that is your intention if it is not in the legislation.

I've been told from the time I got elected, that if it is not in legislation, it is not accountable. We can't debate it, it doesn't come to the floor, we don't get to discuss it. Even though this government has a majority, we still don't get to see the information that is going to be put forward. It's kind of challenging to really believe and wholeheartedly go with this process when we don't actually have anything physical or anything with any bills, any pieces of legislation with any plans or strategy.

I say that because we've seen on many occasions that there have been back-door decisions happening and we have no option to debate the change. If this government really wants to strike a balance, they should just legislate the percentage. It's an easy thing - it's only changing a few words. They should just legislate the per cent so that there is no question, none whatsoever, about what the government intends to do.

The minister is very aware of this, and closing the loophole is the answer and permanent rent control is the answer. If we keep skirting around it, it's only going to get worse. We've seen that the first time around, the second time around. How about it if we get it right the third time and do it the right way?

The extension is nice but, as we all know, this is an imbalance, with a date that coincidentally coincides with an election, which for me, once again, is mind-blowing. As my colleague has said here and spoke so eloquently about the balance, let's balance the bill and legislate at least the percentage so that folks can actually have predictability and have an understanding and the peace of mind of knowing that this government actually cares about folks in Nova Scotia, that this government wants to do the right thing. We hear it all the time. This government doesn't want to do the doom and gloom. That's what this is going to be, a doom and gloom situation. I say this, not lightly, because it will happen if we continue to put band-aids on gushing, open wounds that are literally infected. We need to actually start doing the right thing and fix the problem.

I say this because you know we need to invest in people, not in the businesses and the other people who are coming at them, lobbying for things. Right now, people should be coming first.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I am just going to add a couple of comments. I feel like tonight's discussion around this bill has been, frankly, some of the best debates that I have witnessed in this House. There have been some excellent offerings, I think, about this piece of legislation and I want to add just a couple of things. I want to say "Yes, and" to most of the things I've heard tonight, in particular this idea of balance. We've heard

the minister talk about the balance between the landlords and the tenants. I've heard this idea of striking a balance from many ministers, by the way, not just this current minister but many ministers, in two different governments. This is a rhetoric that is used and we've heard tonight some of the reasons why it doesn't hold water. That is because there is an inherent imbalance between renters and landlords. It's simple.

[10:15 p.m.]

I want to say not all landlords are bad landlords. We know that. Everyone knows that. There are great landlords in Dartmouth North, but there are also some not-so-great landlords in Dartmouth North. I'm sure that's the same in every district in every riding in this province. It is our duty as lawmakers and legislators to make sure that laws actually protect the people that they are being written to protect.

The Act is called the Residential Tenancies Act, which suggests that we're talking about residential tenants, so we need to make sure that the Act supports tenants in a real way. This issue of fixed-term leases is really at the heart of what's wrong with this bill in terms of it not being addressed.

I want to say one thing that we haven't really heard in the House tonight on this bill. That is, over the last couple of weeks when we have been in for this session, we have talked a lot about housing, but we know that housing is a massive ecosystem, in a way. Sometimes when we talk about housing, we're talking about the homeless issue, and we're talking to the Minister of Community Services and we're saying, why are you closing the shelters? Why are you taking over a hotel? Where are you putting the people who are homeless? Why don't we invest in housing for those folks so that they don't need to live in hotels? That's one conversation.

Then there's a conversation around public housing, and we talk to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and how come you're not investing - these are real questions. I'm not making fun of these conversations - how come we don't see any investment in public housing where the rent is geared to income at 30 per cent? How come the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is allowing a change in the rent supplement program, which is actually protecting many renters but also is incongruent with the way that public housing is run, which is 30 per cent rent geared to income? So there's that conversation.

Then there's this third conversation with the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services, who is in charge of the residential tenancies, which is this rent control, rent cap, fixed-term lease issue. The thing that I don't think is coming clear to the government is that if we don't fix that situation, and we don't fix the situation with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, then we get to the Minister of Community Services. It goes all the way down the line.

If you want to take that even further, then we get to the Minister of Health and Wellness, because people who are unhoused or in housing insecurity or housing precarity are going to be less healthy. It's as simple as that, because housing is health. If this government is so set - which, listen, I have no problem with this - on fixing the health care problems in this province, then they absolutely need to address the housing problems. If they're going to fix the housing problems, then they have to make sure that this bill does what it needs to do, and that is protect people from becoming homeless because their rents get too high. Until we have Labour, Skills and Immigration making sure that everyone has really great jobs and until we have the Minister of Economic Development making sure that there's all kinds of opportunities for people to make their way in the world, these are the things we need to concentrate on. This is not happening with this bill.

The other thing I want to say is that we keep talking about a rent cap. In the legislation and the work that we have done on this issue for many years, our bill contemplates rent control, not a rent cap. If you think about a rent cap - and I've been trying to go with a bit of an analogy here. When I think of a rent cap, I think of something under pressure and capping it, right, and just stopping the pressure. Perhaps it's a bottle of fizzy water or a bottle of pop that you put the cap on, and you shake it and it's all fssshhhhhh. Everything comes out like that, but you take the cap off and it explodes. That is what would happen if we didn't continue - if this bill weren't happening right now. Take that cap off and everything goes crazy.

Now, the analogy doesn't go very far, actually. This analogy is not that good, but if you had a controlled opening of the pop - this is where it all falls apart - but anyway, what I'm trying to say is this: A controlled managing of the residential tenancies is a much more appropriate way to handle it and the reason is because it contemplates help for the landlords, whereas a rent cap does nothing for the landlords and thus makes them resort to fixed-term leases and renovations.

If we had rent control, there would be an ability for a landlord to go to the Residential Tenancies Program and apply for a higher rent increase: I have to fix the roof on my building. I need a 6 per cent increase this time only. Okay, that makes sense. These are the bills, and I can show you my contractor is saying what it's going to cost. A flood - because the Coastal Protection Act wasn't proclaimed - a flood happened and my building got wiped out. It was totally flooded, or I built on land that was close to the water because the Coastal Protection Act wasn't proclaimed and so I have a flood in my building. I need to raise the rent by more than 3 per cent or more than 5 per cent. Can I please do that? Oh yes, well, we are reasonable people. We can see that that is necessary and that will happen for you this time.

None of that can happen with a rent cap, or at least not in this bill. Maybe it's just semantics, but in what we are talking about with the rent cap, none of that helps the landlords, and believe me, there have been landlords who have come to me over the last several years, especially when we were talking about rent control before COVID-19,

before any of this happened, and I would say: Yes, I hear you, but the legislation that we want to see in Nova Scotia contemplates your side of the story. Most of the time, the landlords whom I spoke to, who are reasonable people, were very happy to hear that.

In this bill it doesn't happen. So, even if it is 5 per cent - if it's 3 per cent, it's 3 per cent; if it's 5 per cent, it's 5 per cent. It doesn't matter. The fact is that if anything is fixed like that with a hard fix, it is good for the tenants - and this is why we will support this bill, because the fact is it will mean the difference between housing and homelessness for many, many people across the province - but the landlords will continue to resort to fixed-term leases if that loophole is not corrected.

I just wanted to add those contributions to the conversation but also, before I sit down, I want to read - and I will table this, Mr. Speaker - I want to read a little bit of the open letter to the Government of Nova Scotia on behalf of the following associations: ACORN Canada; ACORN Nova Scotia; the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia; Dalhousie School of Social Work Community Clinic; the Ecology Action Centre; Halifax Refugee Clinic; the North End Community Health Centre - ding, ding, Health - also refugees; also social workers; the North Grove in Dartmouth North; No One is Illegal - Kjiipuktuk; P.A.D.S. Community Advocacy Network, which is Permanent, Accessible, Dignified, Safe Housing for All; the Spring Socialist Network; and Welcome Housing & Support Services, who, by the way, do excellent work in my constituency and probably all over. This is what they say in an open letter:

“Nova Scotia Needs Decent Housing for All. To the Government of Nova Scotia, The housing crisis is at a record high in the province. Due to the extremely high cost of rent and a shortage of housing, a growing number of Nova Scotians are now facing homelessness for the very first time.”

I just want to point out that some of that homelessness is happening in Dartmouth East and I think that the member for Dartmouth East ought to be paying attention to this letter.

Pardon me? I'm not allowed to hold my pen? Excuse me. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'll drop my pen . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. It's not a question of holding your pen. It's the manner in which you're holding your pen.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm a theatrical person, Mr. Speaker.

According to the point-in-time (PIT) count, in Halifax Regional Municipality between 2018 and 2022, there has been a 500 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping outside. Homelessness overall has more than doubled and in the rare instance that

a bed is available, many people feel unsafe in shelters. Not since the Halifax Explosion has such a high number of people been in dire need of housing or sleeping outside. Today the housing crisis has become a humanitarian disaster.

“Rather than address this disaster, the government’s response to the housing crisis has been to exploit it,” - I’m just reading a letter here; I’m putting it in the record - “empowering landlords and enriching property investors at everyone else’s expense. The government continues to deregulate private development and make it easier for landlords to evict tenants, all while forcing people to over-rely on emergency services like shelter beds, hotel stays, and eventually health care and law enforcement.” Mr. Speaker, those are some pretty serious words right there. I’m going to table that. I want to add that into the conversation.

Just to summarize my points, I want to remind folks that there is an inherent imbalance between tenants and landlords. I want to remind folks that rent caps are not rent control and that we need a permanent form of rent control for all of the reasons that my honourable colleague for Halifax Chebucto laid out but also for the reason that a rent control, or at least a good rent control, would actually address some of the concerns of landlords, which means they would not have to resort to fixed-term leases.

I also want to say that the connection between this government’s decisions and homelessness - the connection between the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Minister of Community Services, and the Minister of Health and Wellness - there is a definite connection between those four ministers.

I would say that the other real issue with this bill is the transparency factor, which we talk about a lot in this House. It is amazing to me that this Cabinet, who are all honourable people and have excellent reasons for being here - not the least of which is that their communities asked them to come here and put them in these seats - that they could regulate health care or residential rent cap rates. They have a lot of responsibilities and they don’t have to actually answer to anyone about them. That is a real issue.

I really hope that the minister will take a look at this bill, add the 5 per cent into the wording of the bill, and take the next two years and work toward a permanent form of rent control so that when this cap comes off in 2025, the bottle of pop does not explode all over the place.

[10:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise to offer a few remarks on this bill. Before I do, I want to address a couple of things.

First, this bill actually doesn't say anything. It says that they're going to do a thing and they'll tell us what it is later. I think that's important to acknowledge. The way that this bill is promoted is as putting forward a 5 per cent rent cap, but that is not in fact what the legislation says. The legislation says that they're going to do a thing and they'll tell us what it is later.

I want to address another elephant in the room. It's 10:30 at night. Every bill this session has been passed in the dark, literally. We spend some time voting on the budget. It could have been 8:45 p.m., in the dark. The people affected by these bills are putting their kids to bed, are watching TV, are doing the things that they want to do at the end of the night, which is 100 per cent not watching what is happening in this chamber and that's okay.

I mean, there are a couple of people. Sorry - those of you watching Legislative TV, thank you.

I will say that it's worth noticing this, that we pass our bills in the dark, and a reminder that the rules, which have been brought up a few times - if you were to look at the text of the rules, they will say that this House sits during daylight. Yet we do not.

So here we are 10:31 p.m., about to pass a bill over the objections of the Opposition, that will have a material impact on the lives of 300,000 Nova Scotians. What I want to say about this is that I agree with my colleague from Dartmouth North. I think this has been excellent debate. I think we've heard very cogent arguments about the lack of sufficient action on this file and the deficiencies of this bill in particular. Those have rightly focused on the most vulnerable people impacted by this legislation. But we have 300,000 renters in this province, and so I think the point that I've heard, but I haven't heard articulated explicitly, which I want to say, is that it is making people vulnerable.

When we started to talk about this work, we had a press conference with Elizabeth O'Hanley. Elizabeth O'Hanley makes a good living. She said: I expected to be in a position to own a house, and I can barely stay in this province because I can't find a place to rent. In fact, she had decided before she found an apartment at the last minute, after being evicted at the expiry of her fixed-term lease, from an apartment that she lived in for a very long time, she was going to move to rural P.E.I. because she had a friend with a farmhouse, and she worked remotely. She said: I didn't want to go there, but that was my only option.

Her rent when she was evicted was \$950, maybe it was a bit higher, but any rate, the differential between her rent when she left her apartment and the rent advertised a few days later was in the order of \$700 or \$800, as I recall. And this happens every day. This doesn't happen occasionally.

I appreciate the member for Bedford South talking about the ways in which we regulate things. Even if most people are law-abiding citizens, or most people will follow a

rule, this is a very selective situation in this Chamber, so we often hear the government stand up and say: We don't think that fixed-term leases should be abused. Then the quiet part is: But we're not going to do anything about it. Or: We don't think NDAs should be misused - but we're not going to do anything about it. Or: We think our coastline should be protected - but we're not going to proclaim the bill.

I think it's imperative to point out that if the government thinks something, they do have the power to do something about it. This is the latest example where the government has chosen not to.

To come back to Elizabeth O'Hanley, people like Elizabeth O'Hanley are the people whom this government has explicitly said they want to attract. We apparently want to grow the population of this province to two million people - so what's the profile of those folks? Probably a little bit younger, probably folks who are eager for work, wanting to contribute. We can't even keep them here. Then when they come, they can't find a doctor, and their kids go to school in modulars, and they don't have the infrastructure and the support they need to make a life here.

This is the latest example of a bill that is showing the disconnect between what the government says its goals are, and the way it's working toward those goals. People who move to this province, unless they have a lot of money, cannot find a place to live.

We've said this 100 times, and it feels like we have to say it 100 times more. We have a rent cap of 2 per cent and we have the highest rising rates of rent increase in the country. I'm going to say that again. Our rent increase is capped at 2 per cent and our rents are rising by 9 per cent. That is not a few bad apples. That's a system that doesn't work.

As my colleagues have said, and as we have put forward in legislation, and as we have talked about, somewhat ad nauseum, the answer - and this is the answer put forward by people as diverse, really, although they might think that I am mischaracterizing them, from all sides.

We've heard lots of landlord groups say, well, they should just raise the rent cap a little bit every year. That's the off-ramp. That's the pressure release that my colleague was pointing to. Well, that's rent control. Raising it a little bit each year, that's rent control. That gives people clarity. That gives landlords and tenants clarity about what's coming. As was pointed out, that allows for a landlord to cover an extraordinary expense.

We're not here to cast aspersions on individuals. I had a conversation with someone I know who is a landlord, who owns several properties, who called me very upset and said, you can't outlaw fixed-term leases. I said, well, why? They said, because it's the only insurance we have. If we have a bad tenant, if we have an unexpected cost, the only insurance we have that we are not going to be underwater is a fixed-term lease.

I can see that perspective, but what I said to them is, if we had a system of rent control, if we had an enforcement branch of Residential Tenancies - talk about balance. Every single party involved in this conversation wants an enforcement branch at Residential Tenancies.

This government had an extra billion dollars. They could have set up an enforcement branch, but they didn't, so I question the commitment to balance.

To get back to it, my conversation was, if we had an enforcement branch, if we had allowable rent increases every year, if you could apply to the Residential Tenancies Board to cover your extraordinary costs - and they said, oh, yes, but that will never happen.

That's where we are. We're in a cynical space where we know that the system is broken. We know that it needs to be fixed. Everybody knows it needs to be fixed. Tenants know it needs to be fixed, and more than anyone, landlords understand that it needs to be fixed - yet this government refuses to fix it. We see this bill, and this bill is a band-aid - it's not really working.

I want to talk again about balance, which a few of my colleagues have brought up. Balance in the way that we have talked about it - again, not just in this legislation, but in the Coastal Protection Act, where we need to balance the future of our province and our coastlines against the interests of some property owners along those coastlines; the NDA bill that we brought forward where we need to balance I don't know what with the rights of victims of abuse and harassment not to be silenced. That's not balance. That's steamrolling.

The Premier has said many times that nothing good happens here. He has made his disdain for this House and this Chamber very clear. When he passed the health bill - I think it was the health bill - I may be misquoting, but the Premier has said, well, we're going to put this in regulations, because otherwise we'd have to come back to the Legislature every time we want to make a statement.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Please table the documents that you are referring to and the citations you are making. The member just used the words "I may be misquoting." I'd like to ask the member to table whatever the member is referring to at this time.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I am characterizing his comments. I am not quoting him. I am saying that the Premier has oftentimes expressed a disdain for the work that happens in this House. I can try to find a tabling document. I don't think anyone would disagree with me.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Thank you. I disagree - of course I disagree - because I am in the Opposition, and I get approximately 26 days a year to represent the people who put me in this House.

This government was in the same place not so long ago and was making all these same arguments. The change I have seen is nothing - no change. It's deeply disappointing.

I don't know about the people in this House, but I have been unable to turn away from what's been happening in Tennessee the last few days. In Tennessee, a newly famous legislator, Justin Jones, who was ejected from that Chamber, made an incredibly moving speech.

In that speech he said, this is the place where we wrestle with ideas. This isn't the place - he was referring to a comment someone had made about the legislative chamber being sacred and being offended by something that the opposition had brought up. He said, quite the contrary - we can offend each other. This is a place where we wrestle with ideas.

But what we have seen in the last year and a half, in this session, in this bill, is that this government doesn't want to wrestle with ideas. They want to dictate their agenda. Or failing that, they want to avoid fixes, which as my colleague the member for Halifax Atlantic pointed out - or maybe Bedford South, I can't remember - means pushing this bill to 2025, the magical date at which it may or may not be their problem anymore.

In closing, I want to say that I see this Chamber as a place of opportunity. Every bill that comes forward, we have the opportunity to make people's lives better. We have the opportunity to ensure that everyone in this province has the ability to thrive. We have the opportunity to bring people's voices into this Chamber.

This is a government that talks a lot about listening to the people on the front lines, having listening tours. But the way that that works is sort of invitation-only. We have town halls where you only know about it if you get a robo-call. We have conversations with front-line workers, but most people never hear that they're happening.

As was pointed out, when we have things like Law Amendments Committee, where you have people who have put a great deal of thought in a very short period of time into legislation that will impact their lives - that will impact the lives of their members - we see no engagement. It's incredibly disappointing.

We are supporting this bill. We are voting for this bill in all of its inadequacy - in all of its inability to address the core issue - because to not vote for this bill would be literally to make hundreds of people homeless, and to drive hundreds more out of this province.

I implore this government to do better, and to take this opportunity, what you've heard tonight, what you heard from Law Amendments, and fix this. Implement rent control. Implement an enforcement branch of Residential Tenancies. Close the fixed-term lease hole. Build public housing and make sure that everyone has a home they can afford.

[10:45 p.m.]

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

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping to have a few more minutes than 16 minutes on the clock, but no. I digress.

I certainly appreciate the comments from the members opposite. There's a lot to digest and absorb, of course, with the varying opinions and perspectives that have been shared - not only through third reading, but all along since the introduction of this bill.

One thing that I want to be on the record stating very clearly, is that this side of the House, our government, cares for Nova Scotians. Any argument otherwise is the furthest thing from the truth. I think that's what motivates each and every one of us as elected officials, as MLAs, regardless of our political party - the betterment of our province and the betterment of our respective constituencies. I'm not shying away from addressing that argument that we're a party that does not care for Nova Scotians. Quite the contrary - we stand alongside Nova Scotians, and support Nova Scotians from one end of the province to the other.

I would go even a little bit further in countering the argument that has been made many times before - all along through Budget Estimates and again this evening - about not investing in Nova Scotians. The budget that my honourable colleague, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, tabled a couple of weeks ago that we have debated - that members of the Opposition have had the opportunity to question our respective ministers regarding - is not our budget. It's Nova Scotians' budget. It's investing in Nova Scotians' needs.

The No. 1 priority is, of course, health. That is a clear indication of our commitment to Nova Scotians and fulfilling our mandate. We still have more time on the horizon. I'm very confident that we'll have much more time beyond the end of our mandate - 2025 has been listed a number of times, but that's not going to be the end of a PC government of Nova Scotia. We have many more years on the horizon.

With respect to consultations, I hear on one side that there are not enough consultations or too many consultations. Which one is it? It sort of brings to mind a comment that the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board made in Question Period with respect to questioning government spending. We have been hearing members of the Opposition saying that we need to invest in Nova Scotians. We need to invest in education.

We need to invest in health care. We need to invest in HARP. We need to invest in the Seniors Care Grant. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The end is nigh. Let's play nice.

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

COLTON LEBLANC: These are all very important sectors in our province. These are priorities for Nova Scotians. These are priorities for our government. To imply that we're not investing in Nova Scotians or that we're not consulting with Nova Scotians - on one hand, we're consulting too much, or we're taking our time. Again, that goes to a difference of opinion. It's subjective.

I guess I dovetail that into the definition of balance. I have spoken at length regarding the balance. I have heard it being used a number of times. I have lost count of the number of times. I will continue to use the word "balance." I will continue to look through the lens of balance when it comes to this file. My predecessors have used it. I'm sure that if one day an NDP government was in power, they too would be saying they would be - I hope - looking through the lens of balance.

I do not have the luxury of picking one side. There's a difference of opinion on whether it's balance or not. I think that comes down to perspective. It comes down to opinion. It comes down to experience. Clearly, it comes down to political views.

As I have said a number of times, this is not a closed book. The first piece of legislation that I brought forward as Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services was in respect to the Residential Tenancies Act. Here we are again talking about more matters having to do with that Act.

As I've indicated previously in this House, we worked with a consultant to help inform our government, help inform my department, on what a compliance and enforcement branch can look like in Nova Scotia. That is a big lift to the Residential Tenancies Program - one that cannot happen overnight.

We want to make sure that we're getting it right because this impacts, as has been noted, more than 300,000 Nova Scotians who are tenants, and more than 6,000 landlords - who are also Nova Scotians. We want to make sure that we're getting it right. We don't want to rush into this. Once we're done in the Legislature, I look forward to having a more fulsome discussion with my staff to learn what we have been presented, and what can be done to better support, modernize, and transform the Residential Tenancies Program in Nova Scotia.

I think most people, at least on this side, who know me know that I'm not too much of a negative person. I try to be optimistic most times, but what has been troublesome is

sometimes the negativity in this Legislature. As has been pointed out by the Leader of the NDP, this should be an area where we can wrestle the ideas. I'll wrestle ideas any day. This is a place of democracy. We have differing opinions. I will wrestle ideas any day.

When we start moving beyond breaking down policy and start criticizing policy, and we're starting to break down individuals and start to smear people's character and smear people's integrity, that's not talking about the heart of this legislation. This is not talking about what matters most to Nova Scotians. This is not a fundamental part of our democracy.

Furthermore, on the negativity, there are difficult tenants in this province and there are difficult landlords in this province, but to hear a narrative that, whether it's from members of the Opposition or if it's from community groups or whoever, that one party is all bad or the other party is all bad, that's not true. These are Nova Scotians. These are our friends. These are our families. These are our neighbours. These are our constituents. I just want to try to ground people and bring people back to the fact that these are Nova Scotians. That's what's the driving force, at least for me, when I'm looking through this lens of balance and continuing to do so every single day.

This is an evolving file. As I've said many times, the book's not closed. I'm sure after this session's done, it's still going to remain open on my desk. We'll continue to talk about this frequently, engage with our partners, engage with our stakeholders - both tenant and landlord organizations - to see what we have to do to do things right, to make things right, to move the needle, to address the needs of both tenants and landlords.

This is an office I have a high respect for as both an MLA and minister. I take this job very seriously. Every single day, I know that the decisions that we're making as a government are not always easy ones. They're tough ones. But at the end of the day, we aspire that we're making a true difference for the betterment of our fellow Nova Scotians, and I'm confident that we are, as we move forward in our mandate.

Thank you very much. I move to close third reading of Bill No. 262.

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

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: Mr. Speaker, that concludes government business for the day. Tomorrow is Opposition Day, so I will turn it over to my honourable colleague, but before I do that, I would advise that government business will also include third reading of Bill No. 279.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, for Opposition business tomorrow, we'll be calling three pieces: Bill No. 284, the School Lunch Program Act; Bill No. 306, the Serious Illness Leave Act; and Res. 622, MLA Expulsion Resolution: Need to Repeal - Recog.

THE SPEAKER: All those in favour of adjournment? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 10:54 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 663**

By: Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

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

Whereas Karla Nicholson has served as Executive Director of the Quinpool Road Mainstreet District Association for 15 years; and

Whereas Karla brings to the table a great deal of experience and expertise in business development, communications, strategic planning, event management, and valuable insight into the needs and priorities of our local business community; and

Whereas the 120-plus businesses of the Quinpool area have greatly benefited from Karla's energy, passion, professionalism, and dedicated leadership over the years;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Karla Nicholson on the occasion of her 15th anniversary as Executive Director of the Quinpool Road Mainstreet District Association, and wish her every continuing success.

RESOLUTION NO. 664

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Abir Hussein received the Mentor Champion award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Abir Hussein on this honour and thank him for his mentorship of new doctors and providing excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 665

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Ashley McCormick received the Healthcare Hero Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Ashley McCormick on this honour and thank her for being dedicated to her patients and providing excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 666

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Brian Moses received the Life-Long Learner Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Brian Moses on this honour and thank him for the incredible dedication he has to provide excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 667

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Elissa Cohen received the Specialist of the Year Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Elissa Cohen on this honour and thank her for providing excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 668

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Emma Crawley received the Outstanding Resident Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Emma Crawley on this honour and thank her for providing excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 669

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Erica Lasher-Coates received the Rising Star award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Erica Lasher-Coates on this honour and thank her for providing excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 670

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Joe Gillis received the Healthy Communities Leader Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Joe Gillis on this honour and thank him for being dedicated to community health and providing excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 671

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Julie Chandler received the Dedicated Mental Health & Continuing Care Physician Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Julie Chandler on this honour and thank her for providing excellent mental health care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 672

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Michelle Cain received the Family Medicine Physician of the Year;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Michelle Cain on this prestigious honour and thank her for many years of providing excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 673

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Michelle Dow received the Distinguished Recruitment Partner Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Michelle Dow on this honour and thank them for their recruitment efforts and providing excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 674

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Tessa Boudreau received the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advocate Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Tessa Boudreau on this honour and thank her for always being an advocate for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 675

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas a Physician Appreciation Night was recently held in Yarmouth with awards nominated by colleagues and the community; and

Whereas this event was sponsored by the Yarmouth Regional Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership and the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment; and

Whereas Dr. Tyler Green received the Making a Daily Difference Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Tyler Green on this honour and thank him for providing excellent care for the health and wellness of our community.