



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

## DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

**Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain**

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

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

### First Session

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 2023

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 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. Before we begin with the daily routine, the late debate tonight is submitted by the member for Halifax Needham. It reads:

“Whereas barriers persist to create uneven access to education, housing, health care, employment, wealth, and justice for African Nova Scotians, Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas for the second year in a row the government has not brought forward any regulations or provided funding for the development of a strategy under the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act; and

Whereas the government has not brought forward a long-asked-for African Nova Scotia Policing strategy, despite inequities in the justice system;

Therefore be it resolved that this government has not done enough to address systemic racism in Nova Scotia.”

That will occur at the moment of interruption this evening.

We'll begin the daily routine.

### **PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents, including Dyson and Darwin, two young boys who went door to door, I beg leave to introduce a petition with the operative clause "Following the patch work recently completed by the Department of Public Works, which has in fact made driving conditions worse than before the patch work, we the undersigned request the Department of Public Works, Government of Nova Scotia, to immediately place the section of Highway No. 1 between the Kentville town boundary and Lovett Road (2.1 kilometres) on the 2023 paving program."

There are 108 signatures, and I have affixed my signature, as per the Rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

### **PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: I would like to table a document from the Office of the Seniors' Advocate from Newfoundland and Labrador. Yesterday in Budget Estimates, the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care contended that there was only one seniors' advocate in Canada, in B.C. This document will correct this.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a November 22<sup>nd</sup> press release from Fernwood Publishing in connection with a member's statement to follow.

THE SPEAKER: The paper is tabled.

### **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

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



THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

**RESOLUTION NO. 676**

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I hereby request that the following motion be adopted without notice, pursuant to Rule 32(5) of the *Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly*:

Be it resolved that all the congratulatory motions deposited with the Clerk pursuant to Rule No. 32(3) of the *Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly* from March 21, 2023, to the rising of the House today that have not been otherwise considered by the House of Assembly be approved.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**RESOLUTION NO. 677**

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

Whereas emergencies can occur at any time of the day or night that require police, fire, or emergency medical services to respond promptly to protect life or preserve property; and

Whereas 911 call takers work behind the scenes in conjunction with emergency dispatch partners to provide a critical link between Nova Scotians experiencing an emergency and the first responders who are there to offer assistance; and

Whereas these committed Nova Scotians answer and provide assistance to more than 300,000 emergency calls annually and are an integral part of our 911 system;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Legislature thank Nova Scotia's 911 call takers and recognize April 9 to 15, 2023, as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week, which provides an opportunity to celebrate these unsung heroes who provide a lifeline to Nova Scotians when they need help, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River.

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make an introduction. Here in the West Gallery I have my CA, Jill Guinan, here with me today. What she does in our community, and such a caring heart, and all the work that she does - each and every one of us in this Legislature knows that our constituency assistants are our arm in our communities. I can't thank her enough for being here today and for being with me for the last couple of weeks. (Applause)

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. I'll ask members to direct their attention to the West Gallery. I know that all of us have athletes who competed in the 2023 Canada Games who are in our constituencies. There are many more from Hammonds Plains-Lucasville who are not with us here today.

I do want to first acknowledge the hard work and dedication that everybody put in from the athletes to the coaches to the supporters. These are some of Nova Scotia's top contenders and they should be recognized.

With that being said, I would ask the following people to stand when I read their name. We have figure skater Mylah Simpkin, who skated in pairs and who is here today with her mother, Tina. (Applause) We have Jackson Wilson, joined by his mother Nicole. (Applause)

Also with us today, we have two gold medalists from the women's curling team, Team Blades, which is coached by a familiar face to this House, Andrew Atherton. We're joined today by skip Sophie Blades (Applause) and lead Alexis Cluney, who is joined by Erin. (Applause)

I would be remiss if I did not mention Kate Weissent and Stephanie Atherton, who unfortunately could not be with their teammates today. Congratulations to the athletes who have joined us and the others from Hammonds Plains-Lucasville and those who represented our province at the Canada Games this year. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Indeed, we welcome all visitors to the Legislature today. We hope you enjoy your stay.

The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

HON. JILL BALSER: Mr. Speaker, before I read my Notice of Motion, I beg leave to make an introduction. Visiting us today in your gallery, the Speaker's Gallery, are members of the Maritime Sikh Society: Mr. and Mrs. Satnam Singh Randhawa, Mr. Pavneet Singh and Mrs. Pahul Kaur Kohli, Mr. Jagdeep Singh Hiundal, and Mr. Kulvinder Singh Dhillon. I ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. In the gallery behind me, I would like to take an opportunity to introduce a gentleman I'm sure some people already know: my constituency assistant Regan Oliver, who came in today. Regan's been helping me hold down the fort out in Middle and Upper Sackville, Mount Uniacke, and Beaver Bank for the last six years. He decided he wanted to come in here today and watch in person instead of watching on TV.

I love to tell everyone this: He's not only my constituency assistant. We've actually been friends since Primary. My mother has this little picture of Regan on one side of the classroom at about the age of five and me on the other side of the classroom at about the same age. I'd like members of the House to please give him a warm welcome today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. In the West Gallery, I'll ask my CA to stand. This is Jenny Comeau. I didn't get the memo with all the other MLAs. I didn't know Jenny was going to be here today. Jenny loves to be the centre of attention, so I thought I'd get her to stand up and say hi. In all fairness, Jenny and I started on this journey over a year ago now, and I will tell you, there's no better person that I can think of to be there with me working on behalf of the constituents in Richmond. We complement each other extremely well. We have our skill sets that certainly, I think, do wonders to make sure that the constituents of Richmond are well taken care of.

On behalf of myself and all my colleagues, welcome, Jenny, to the House, and I hope you enjoy your time here.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave for another introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

[1:15 p.m.]

GREG MORROW: Joining us in the gallery is my constituency assistant, Charla Cosgrove. Charla joined me - I guess my very first move after the election on August 21<sup>st</sup> was hiring Charla, and it was my first decision and my smartest decision. There have been some not-so-smart ones, but she's my smartest for sure. I am absolutely so proud of the work that she does for the good people of Guysborough-Tracadie on a daily basis. Please join me in welcoming Charla to the gallery. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

KENT SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KENT SMITH: I draw the House's attention to the West Gallery for my constituency associate extraordinaire Kelly Corkery, who's here with the group of CAs today. Has she stood and is she waving? (Interruption) Excellent.

Kelly is an extremely organized person and runs our office perfectly. She is dedicated, she is caring, she is empathetic, she is everything I am not. I am very lucky to have her as a CA. I will say that, most importantly, she's become one of my best friends. The Eastern Shore and I are lucky to have her, and I ask the House to join me in welcoming Kelly and her friends to the Legislature. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. In the West Gallery, I'd like to introduce the constituency assistant in my office, Wendy Juurlink. Wendy and I have been together since the campaign started. She was Tando MacIsaac's constituency assistant back in the day. She's very experienced. She shoulders many things with me and for me, and she's the perfect balance of toughness and kindness. You don't want her crossed. I am very appreciative to have her here with me today. Wendy, thank you for everything that you do. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave for an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: In the West Gallery, I'd like to introduce my constituency assistant, aka my boss, Jena Fraser. When I got elected, I had to find out who. I sent her a text, and I'll be honest: I just asked, how's job hunting? If I actually gave you her response, you'd ask me to leave. She didn't think she could do the job. However, the residents of Hants East have been lucky to have her, because she tells me every week: Here's what you're doing, John. I just get told. That's why I say that's my boss. I'd just like to thank her for the 18 months, and of course the next 18 years. I haven't told her yet. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Not to be outdone, I'm so pleased to have my constituency assistant Amanda with us here today. I have to tell you, people stop me all the time and say, thanks for doing this. I've got to be honest, that was Amanda. I don't get to say on the other side when they say, why didn't you? I never say it was Amanda's fault. We're blessed to have such strong support in our constituency offices.

I've been here for 10 years, and I've been extremely fortunate with the two CAs I've had. Amanda, thank you for everything you do.

THE SPEAKER: Again, thank you all very much for coming today. We'll be checking payroll to make sure that you're not being paid today.

### **GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

HON. JILL BALSER: Before I read my Notice of Motion I beg leave to make one more introduction for today.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

JILL BALSER: Joining us in the West Gallery we have Samantha Dixon Slawter, founder of the Black Beauty Culture Association. I ask that Samantha rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 678**

HON. JILL BALSER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas the province recognizes the importance of Nova Scotians having access to inclusive hair care training and services, and ensuring Nova Scotians can connect to practise natural hair care services without unnecessary regulatory burden or infringement on cultural practices; and

Whereas the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency has worked with natural hair care providers, community members, and partners in response to an application to designate Black Beauty Culture Hair Innovator as an official voluntary trade in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Samantha Dixon Slawter is one of the founders of the Black Beauty Culture Association, which strives to promote, preserve, and protect Black beauty culture in Nova Scotia and has been a strong advocate for creating a course for people interested in careers in natural hair care;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize Samantha Dixon Slawter for her work through the Black Beauty Culture Association and celebrate the approval and the successful certification of the first three journeypersons of the Black Beauty Culture Hair Innovator program, an official voluntary trade under the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Act.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 679**

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

Whereas the seafood processing industry is an important economic driver for Nova Scotia and adopting new technologies will modernize the sector and help the province to meet its ambitious climate change goals; and

Whereas Glen MacDougall, an onsite manager from EfficiencyOne, has worked in the industry since April 2021 and made 320 visits to processing plants to complete technical audits, identify and recommend updates, and oversee the improvements; and

Whereas technology and efficiency upgrades have helped companies reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 3,300 metric tons over the last two years. That's the equivalent of taking 7,000 cars off the road and saving about \$465,000 in energy costs;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in recognizing seafood processors for their leadership in addressing climate change, and EfficiencyOne for its hard work as the industry program expands to support more businesses in fisheries and aquaculture.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

### **RESOLUTION NO. 680**

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

Whereas mid-April marks the beginning of the month of Vaisakhi in the Sikh calendar; and

Whereas Vaisakhi is the birth of Sikhism and Khalsa Panth is the most auspicious and holy day for Sikhs around the world, as it celebrates when the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, gave the new order, Khalsa Panth. The Khalsa were created to fight oppression, uphold freedom, and to support basic needs such as food, clothing, health, and education for all people; and

Whereas the Sikh community in Nova Scotia is very active and works with the IWK Health Centre, Feed Nova Scotia, and various other charitable and community organizations to support people throughout the province;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me in recognizing Vaisakhi and the importance of this time of year for many Nova Scotians and in wishing all of those who celebrate it a Happy Vaisakhi.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 681**

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

Whereas April 16<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> is Education Week, which is a time to acknowledge the work of teachers, public school administrators, early childhood educators, and student support staff, who help ensure the achievement and well-being of students across the province; and

Whereas this year's theme, Active Learning = Engagement, recognizes how school communities promote active living in many ways, from outdoor and land-based learning to experiential hands-on classroom opportunities, and find ways to address the needs of learners they support, which results in authentic learning, movement, and improved well-being outcomes; and

Whereas we wish to continue to show our appreciation to all teachers, educators, early childhood educators, support staff, and administrators, who have done exceptional work in making students feel welcome, challenged, and encouraged within the school environment;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me in acknowledging Education Week and thanking all educators, administrators, and staff who guide students in developing their skills and help build their futures every day.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.



The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

**RESOLUTION NO. 682**

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

Whereas the Department of Agriculture is working with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Nova Scotia Health to get more locally grown and produced food in institutions such as schools, hospitals, and long-term care and correctional facilities; and

Whereas fresh food carts with fruits and vegetables are now available as a pilot project in five schools in the Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education, giving students greater access to locally grown produce and greater understanding of where food comes from; and

Whereas these fresh food carts help our youth make healthy food choices, they support buying local, and they give our farmers an expanded market for their produce;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize that the fresh food cart pilot is one of the many things we're doing to help reach our goal of getting more healthy local food onto Nova Scotians' plates.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We'll take a very brief recess for just a moment, please.

[1:28 p.m. The House recessed.]

[1:31 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order please. Because of the many introductions and everything that took place today, there has been a request to extend the discussion for an extra 15

minutes on Statements by Members, and that will, in turn, extend the total time for the day by 15 minutes as well.

In order for that to happen we require unanimous consent of the House. Is everyone in agreement that this take place? Did I hear a No? We're going to check it again.

All those in favour of extending the hours, please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

It's agreed that the hours will be extended for that time.

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 317 - Entitled an Act to Implement the Support Our Troops License Plate Program. (Hon. Ben Jessome)**

**Bill No. 318 - Entitled an Act to Establish Lakes Appreciation Month. (Hon. Ben Jessome)**

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

### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

### **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make a quick introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined by Michelle and Cleve Brewer with Breathe Clean. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

### **BREWER, MICHELLE & CLEVE: HEAT PUMP CLEANING - THANKS**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to give well-deserved recognition to an outstanding business founded right here in Nova Scotia. In 2016, Michelle and Cleve Brewer noticed that their heat pump was in desperate need of cleaning. After some discussions with local businesses and experts, they realized that heat pump cleanings were overlooked and rarely ever implemented, contributing to mould growth and unhealthy air circulation.

Together they saw this need and took it upon themselves to provide a solution. They created Breathe Clean, North America's first company dedicated to heat pump cleaning. Since opening, they have cleaned over 16,000 heat pumps and accumulated over 5,000 happy customers. They have helped businesses, non-profits, and residents breathe cleaner air and have educated the public on the importance of heat pump maintenance.

Many of us encounter problems waiting to be solved every day, but it is truly inspiring to see stories where people take on problems to improve the lives of others and actually create commercial opportunities for themselves while doing so.

I'd like to invite the House to join me in thanking Cleve and Michelle for keeping our air clean and contributing to the lung health of Nova Scotians. Your work is well celebrated and also to all those listening at home, get your heat pumps cleaned.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member of Dartmouth North.

#### **HANSARD STAFF: DILIGENT WORK - THANKS**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker as we wind up this Spring sitting, I'd like to recognize some people who, though often hidden from view, are an essential part of the workings of the Nova Scotia Legislature. Of course, I'm talking about the fine people at Hansard, the folks who prepare complete and accurate transcripts of the debates and proceedings of the House of Assembly and its committees. They do hard and detailed work.

There are many permanent staff: Pamela Cameron, Eleanor Royle, Julia Kinsman, Ellen Brooks, Ysabet MacFarlane, and Cat McCluskey. Casual staff who work during House hours: Colleen Denomme - who retired after 37 years, but is back in a part-time capacity - Margo Grant, Sally Lloyd, Jocelyn Pletz, Carolyn Casey, Laura Hastings, Tracey McGee, Kathie Sears, Sheryl True, and Cheryl Coolen. Jeff White and Adena Clark recently retired but have worked here for many years.

All of these folks are headed up by the Editor of Hansard, Mike Chandler. Mr. Speaker, I ask the whole House to join me in thanking the folks at Hansard for their diligent work in putting our words, debates, and let's face it, shenanigans into the public record. (Applause)

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

#### **METRO WEST FORCE WARRIORS: CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.**

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the incredible achievement of the Metro West Force Warriors, who won the Atlantic Championships for the U13 AAA female hockey - and what a victory it was. The Warriors had an impressive 5-0 record against teams from Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and Prince

Edward Island, overcoming the Quad County Whitecaps in a 3-2 nail-biter final game to become the first-ever Atlantic champions.

This tournament capped an impressive season that saw the Warriors win the Sobeys Cup, their league and playoff titles, and the provincial championships. The Warriors made history, winning the first Atlantic Championship through hard work, perseverance, and true team spirit. Congratulations also to the coaches, parents, and fans who have been there every step of the way supporting the team and helping them to reach their goals. Their dedication and commitment played a big role in this incredible achievement. I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in congratulating the Metro West Force Warriors on an amazing victory.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I beg leave for an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

PATRICIA ARAB: In the West Gallery today, we are joined by Dr. Keltie Jones. She is the Associate Vice-President for Student Experience at Mount Saint Vincent University. It's no secret anymore after the last few days how much I love Mount Saint Vincent University. It's a pleasure to have her here in the gallery to be present for my member's statement. I ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Once again, we welcome all visitors to the gallery today, and every day.

The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

#### **MT. ST. VINCENT UNIV.: 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - RECOG.**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken many times in this House about what a wonderful institution Mount Saint Vincent University is. On January 24<sup>th</sup>, during a gathering of over a hundred students, staff, and supporters, we got to celebrate another exciting milestone for the Mount: its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The Mount was founded in 1873 by the Sisters of Charity - Halifax, and was one of only a handful of institutions of higher education for women and girls in Canada at a time when women didn't even have a right to vote.

For 150 years now, the Mount has been challenging the status quo and making higher education accessible, starting with providing opportunities for women and girls when few others saw the importance. I was proud to bring greetings from the province and

share my Mount story with those gathered at the McCain Centre and did so also in honour of my late mother, who was also a Mount alumnus just like me.

I know I may be biased, but I also know we have a very special institution here in Fairview-Clayton Park that continues to be a leader in higher education and a champion for women, proudly boasting the honour of having 14 women presidents in their 150-year history. I wish them a very happy 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I look forward to a continued partnership as the years go on.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make a quick introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

FRED TILLEY: In the West Gallery I'd like to introduce Mr. Bobby Gillis. Yesterday we had some questions around coal mining, and Bobby is a representative of the coal miners for Cape Breton, who are looking for a meeting with the Premier. I was just hoping since he's here in the city that maybe the Premier and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board would be able to have a meeting with him today.

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

**GILLIS, BOBBY: COAL MINERS ADVOCATE - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to thank my friend the member for Northside-Westmount for that introduction because it follows with my member's statement.

Mr. Speaker, Bobby Gillis has been an advocate for federal government underground coal miners who have been severely injured while on the job. These coal miners are a unique group, and are the last surviving federal Crown corporation coal miners. All their WCB benefits stopped at age 65, and they are left injured and in poverty. The issue they have is that the federal government paid 100 per cent of their benefits, and the Province of Nova Scotia got an 18 per cent administration fee for disbursing the benefits. This is a no-cost to the province or employer, as the rest of the board's formula works. The federal government is on board to look after the last surviving federal miners.

Where is the province? I do hope that the Deputy Premier will meet with Bobby at some point in time, probably today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

**INT'L DAY OF PINK: SUPPORT FOR LGBTQ+ COM. - RECOG.**

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the International Day of Pink. This day is a powerful reminder that we must continue to stand up against discrimination, bullying, and harassment in all forms.

Today we raise our voices to support LGBTQ+ individuals who have faced discrimination and violence. We stand in solidarity with those who have been marginalized, ostracized or made to feel like they do not belong.

We affirm our commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment where everyone can live authentically and without fear of discrimination. Nova Scotia has a history of being welcoming and inclusive. We embrace diversity and celebrate our differences, knowing that they make our community stronger.

In 2004, our province became only the ninth jurisdiction in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. Prior to that, in 2001, same-sex couples were granted the right to jointly adopt children. A year ago, our government removed barriers and reduced wait times for residents requiring gender-affirming surgery.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to continue and join in supporting LGBTQ+ Nova Scotians, and send a clear message that discrimination has no place in our society.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**FAM. SERV. OF EASTERN N.S.: BELIEVER'S AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

HON. KELLY REGAN: I'd like to congratulate Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia. The long-serving organization was recently awarded the prestigious Believer's Award from 211 Nova Scotia. The Believer's Award is presented to an individual or organization that champions 211 Nova Scotia's mission and aims to positively impact the lives of Nova Scotians.

Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia was recognized for establishing a helpline for men in September 2020. They stepped up after we noticed an increase in the number of men seeking help as they struggled with the pressures and fallout from the pandemic.

Executive Director Nancy MacDonald says the men were looking for help but had few resources to deal with isolation and job loss. The idea behind the helpline was to give men a place where they could reach out, ultimately reducing family violence. As DCS minister at the time, I greatly appreciated their positive approach towards solving the problems of intimate partner violence.

The overwhelming success of the men's helpline led to the establishment of two more helplines in the first half of 2021. I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia.

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

**SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN N.S.: 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an important national and personal anniversary. Twenty years ago, Canada was embroiled in a national debate about whether to extend the right to marry and bring about equal marriage that included all Canadians. My partner Heather Gass and I - and many others - were watching as province after province considered the issue. We thought it might be a bit of a longer wait than we wanted, so in September 2002 - with our youthful impatience and lots of love - Heather and I gathered with all our families and friends at Oceanstone in St. Margaret's Bay to engage in a beautiful act of civil disobedience. We had our own commitment ceremony.

To our surprise, in June 2003, the Ontario Court of Appeal lifted the ban. Heather and I rushed to Ottawa City Hall to get legally hitched on our lunch hours. So it's a big year with two 20<sup>th</sup> anniversaries. I ask all members to join us in marking these two milestones. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

**SOUTH SHORE BLUEGRASS ASSOC.: 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I rise today to recognize the South Shore Bluegrass Music Association, of New Canada's Double S Bluegrass Park, which will celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this Summer. "There are no strangers in bluegrass, only friends we have yet to meet" is the motto of this passionate association that supports and promotes bluegrass, country, and old-time country music. The association's camping park is a hub of activity most weekends from May to October, where members, guests, and the public come together to share stories, play cards, camp, and enjoy traditional music, food, and friends.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to please join me in extending our gratitude to the South Shore Bluegrass Music Association and its volunteers for the gift of music that they have given to many generations in our community, and offer our congratulations to them on reaching this major milestone.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**GARDINER, RUTH: NORTHSIDE POOL SERV. - RECOG.**

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, Ruth Gardiner is the secretary-treasurer of the Northside Community Pool. For 45 years, she has been a volunteer. When she was 36, she went to the pool to learn how to swim. She never thought she would reach the bottom of the pool, but she had a great instructor named Jim Duncan. Afterwards, Ruth went on to take courses in Antigonish to get a coaching level. In 1981, she started the swim team. She has seen a lot of changes over the years, but one thing remains the same: Children start with a learn-to-swim program, and then they return to be lifeguards and instructors.

[1:45 p.m.]

Ruth has made a lot of friends over the 45 years that she has been at the pool. Some of them have passed on, but she's so grateful for the time that she has shared. The Northside pool is truly a beloved community institution, and so is Ruth.

I would ask the House to please join me in congratulating her on 45 years of service.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**ROOTED DOCUMENTARY: DEBUT ON CBC - RECOG.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a group of filmmakers - Jeff Miller, Charlie Benoit, Dylan Jewers, and Joel Waddell - whose documentary *Rooted* debuted on CBC Gem last week. This one-hour special showcases the breadth of traditional folk music in our beautiful province and in Dartmouth South. Following the tradition of Helen Creighton - who recorded and preserved stories and traditional music from around Nova Scotia and the Maritimes in the 1900s - host Dylan Jewers and the team set out to do the same. From Mi'kmaw drummers, singers, and fiddlers to African Nova Scotian gospel, roots, and reggae, to historical and modern Acadian and Gaelic music, *Rooted* captures the modern evolution of traditional music, and preserves these art forms and this history for generations to come.

I invite all members of this House to watch the film and to congratulate the team on the debut of this wonderful documentary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River.

**MEDICINE SHOPPE: CLINIC PGM. PARTIC. - RECOG.**

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize The Medicine Shoppe in Truro for being one of the 12 locations across the province to pilot the Community Pharmacy Primary Care Clinic Program. This program allows pharmacists to dedicate time



to see patients with common illnesses, and provide care for certain ailments. Their central downtown location provides improved accessibility to the community while helping to free up emergency rooms for emergencies.

I want to thank The Medicine Shoppe owners, Tera and Lennie Walser, and their dedicated team - along with the other 11 participating pharmacies - for providing this important service that so greatly benefits all our communities in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

### **DEVEAU, JUNE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, on December 3, 2023, the province's artistic community, and all of l'Acadie, lost one of Clare's best-loved artists, June Deveau.

Inspired by her surroundings and her childhood, June used her canvas to tell the story of Acadian life. She developed her craft while raising her family and working as a hairdresser. This transformed into a passion, and in 2003, June opened her workshop and gallery next to her home in the village of St. Alphonse. In 2008, she was awarded the prestigious Prix de Grand Pré award, which recognizes artists whose work reflects Acadian culture while demonstrating excellence and originality. June was also revered in her community for her generosity and patience as an instructor and mentor to budding artists through her art classes and retreats. She leaves behind a catalogue of nostalgic moments that speak to our Acadian heritage.

I ask that all members join me in expressing our condolences to June's husband Jimmy and their children.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

### **MURRAY, MADISON: QPJ MEDAL RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Madison Murray, who was a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal, which was presented to him in December 2022 in Halifax Needham. Madison Murray received the medal for his contributions to community through his public service.

Madison is a community leader who has always looked out for the youth in our community. Working at the community centre, mentoring youth, and planning events to socialize, Madison has volunteered countless hours to make sure that youth and families have a place to share and be present.

I would like all members to join me in congratulating Madison Murray for his contributions to community. I believe that he is a true representation of community helping community.

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

**ORGANIZERS: TALBOT FLOOR HOCKEY TOURN. - CONGRATS.**

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, from a young age, Reggie and Henry Talbot loved playing floor hockey with the Passchendaele Police Boys and Girls Club. Unfortunately, on June 27, 2020, Reggie lost his life in an ATV accident while working in British Columbia.

Henry and friends Michael McInnis and Allan Gillis decided the best way to keep Reggie's memory alive would be through a floor hockey tournament. Thanks to their hard work and dedication, the second annual Reggie Talbot Memorial Floor Hockey Tournament will take place in Glace Bay this weekend at Morrison Gym.

Henry says the tournament is about the friendships that are made through playing the game, but providing community support is also a major part of this tournament. During the weekend, they will be collecting bottles and non-perishable food for the Glace Bay Food Bank and for mental health for children.

My heart goes out to the Talbot family, but I want to congratulate them for turning their unimaginable loss into a positive event for the community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

**WOOD, MURIEL: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, we have incredible volunteers in Annapolis, and Muriel Wood is certainly one of those exceptional people. She has teamed up with our office, NSCC, and our local libraries to process hundreds, maybe thousands, of tax returns for lower-income adults.

I want to thank Muriel for all this work. I want to invite all members to join me in thanking her for countless hours, energy, and dedication to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**JONES, EL: *ABOLITIONIST INTIMACIES* PUBLIC. - RECOG.**

GARY BURRILL: I would like to draw the attention of the House to the recent release of El Jones's important new book *Abolitionist Intimacies*.

In *Abolitionist Intimacies*, El Jones draws on her work as a poet, journalist, prison justice advocate, and scholar to examine the movement to abolish prisons from the world view of the Black feminist principles of collectivity and care. Understanding the history of prisons in Canada, and its relationship to settler colonialism and anti-Black racism, the book examines the policing of intimacy in a carceral context in such forms as prison visits, strip searches, and the management of community contact with incarcerated people.

Robin Maynard, Toronto author of *Policing Black Lives*, describes *Abolitionist Intimacies* as an “urgently needed text” which “draws attention to the banal violence of carcerality in Canada.”

*Abolitionist Intimacies* is an important contribution to the movement for prison abolition in this country.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

**SAULNIER, SHARON & ROY: FOSTER PARENTING - RECOG.**

HON. KIM MASLAND: I rise today to recognize Sharon and Roy Saulnier of Liverpool.

Sixty years ago, Roy and Sharon dreamed of having a big family. After having two children of their own, circumstances required them to embark on a new journey, and for an incredible 50 years, they have been foster parents.

They opened their hearts and their home to provide a safe and stable environment for children who desperately need just that. They believe in keeping families together, so siblings are always welcome, and their beautiful family continues to grow. Every child - whether formally adopted or not - knows that their home will always be the Saulnier home.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the Saulniers for the incredible impact they have made, and continue to make, through their selfless generosity and pure love of family.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**STEELE WHEELS MOTOR MUSEUM: HOSTING EVENTS - RECOG.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize a new and exciting venue in Clayton Park West, the Steele Wheels Motor Museum. I recently had the pleasure of viewing their UNZIPPED exhibit. It was truly fascinating. It is a unique, modern, and exciting new space.

They had the world's largest Rolling Stones exhibit. The display shows more than 300 original objects from the Stones' personal collection, such as iconic costumes, instruments, diaries, paintings, posters, and of course, audio and video footage.

The museum also has rental space for various types of events, conferences, and weddings - and includes an industrial kitchen.

This May, Steele Wheels will have its grand opening, and will showcase a new and spectacular classic - an exotic car museum. I am thrilled to have this new and unique venue in Clayton Park West.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**NATURAL BUTTER BAR: AWDS. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Dartmouth North business Natural Butter Bar on their success in building a thriving business based on excellent hair and body products. Owner Tiffani Young has been rewarded for her dedication and hard work. This past December, she won the Black Business Initiative's 2022 Entrepreneur of the Year award, a prestigious and well-deserved honour.

In September 2022, Natural Butter Bar won the first Blk Women in Excellence Pitch Competition, which came with a \$5,000 award. The pitch competition aimed to break down barriers and provide financial and in-kind support to marginalized entrepreneurs. At this time last year, Tiffani also brought home the Halifax Chamber of Commerce New Business of the Year Award from the Halifax Business Awards.

Natural Butter Bar offers great products with excellent service. Tiffani Young and her team deserve all the accolades they have received, and I ask the House to join me in congratulating them and wish them all the best for continued success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

**MACINNIS, SARA: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

KENT SMITH: I rise today to bring recognition to Sara MacInnis, a dedicated community volunteer and employment advocate on the Eastern Shore. Sara's focus has always been on community growth and supporting those in need.

Sara has over 23 years' experience in coordinating employment opportunities through the YMCA Nova Scotia Works Employment Services Centre. She also sits as a board member for the Porters Lake Business Association and was formerly chair of the Eastern Shore Family Resource Association.

Not only is Sara a certified case manager and career development practitioner, she's also a mental health champion and deserves special recognition for her continuous peer support. Her positivity and selflessness in helping her community extend beyond her job. You can find her cooking for fundraising dinners, coordinating clothing drives, and making connections in whatever she does.

I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating Sara for going above and beyond and providing personal and professional support to anyone in need.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

**WIGGINTON, LINDELL: BASKETBALL ACHIEVEMENTS - CONGRATS.**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I rise today to recognize Lindell Wigginton. Lindell is a professional basketball player who has brought pride and inspiration to our province through achievements in the sport of basketball.

From Dartmouth, Lindell is making international headlines through his exceptional talent and hard work on the court. In university, he played for Iowa State and quickly gained attention in his freshman year and became the player to watch. His momentum throughout his college career did not slow down as he worked his way to the NBA.

Just last week, playing for the Milwaukee Bucks, Lindell scored 25 points and had 11 assists in his first career start in the NBA, a feat that hasn't happened since Isaiah Thomas back in 1981. (Applause)

Lindell's impact goes beyond the court. He's been a role model and inspiration to countless youth in our province's communities, showing them that with dedication and perseverance they too could achieve their dreams.

Lindell is only at the beginning now of his career. I want to thank him for representing Nova Scotia. Lindell, we're so proud of you. We appreciate you and we can't wait to see what you're going to achieve in the NBA.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**SMITH, LINDELL: QPJ MEDAL RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize Mr. Lindell Smith, the councillor for District 8. Lindell Smith is a lifelong resident of the north end of Halifax and a proud father. He has a proven commitment to working within his community and has dedicated himself to serving it.

I had the honour and privilege to present Mr. Lindell Smith with the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal for his work in politics and his leadership in community.

I would like all members of this House to join me in congratulating Councillor Smith for his continued contribution to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

**BOUCHARD, CLARE: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.**

TREVOR BOUDREAU: I rise today to congratulate Clare Bouchard of St. Peter's for her long career and recent retirement.

Clare is the mother of four children and grandmother of six. In 1971, when she was first asked to deliver the mail through River Bourgeois, she never thought it would be the start of a 51-year career. This past October, she began her much-deserved retirement.

Clare is well-known in her community and liked by all who know her. She reports that some of her most interesting deliveries over the years include baby chicks, queen bees, human ashes, and dentures. Some of her favourite deliveries over the years were the stacks of Christmas cards and copies of the Eaton's and Simpson's mail order catalogues.

Please join me in congratulating Clare on a successful career and wishing her a happy and healthy retirement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**MACDONALD, VALERIE: 70<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I rise in my place because somebody special to me growing up as a kid is turning 70 today. That's Valerie MacDonald from the shipyard.

I've been blessed to have Valerie's sons in my life: Parker, Brad, and Mark, who have been friends with me since I was a kid. I watched Valerie raise those boys. I know that the family is home today celebrating with her.

As I said, Valerie was one of the moms in the neighbourhood. She was good to all of us growing up, and she's one of the reasons why I'm here today. I rise in my place to wish Valerie a very happy 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. I look forward to seeing her when I get home.

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

**PRIDE PLACE SOCIETY: EMPOWERING 2SLGBTQIA+ FOLKS - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Pride Place Society and its team. The mission of the society is to empower adult 2SLGBTQIA+ members and their allies. It works closely with health care professionals, including counsellors, to provide queer folk with tools and support to help mitigate trauma.

[2:00 p.m.]

Pride Place also looks to help people looking for answers and guidance to questions such as: How can I start a family? and speaking to people with real-life experience. Pride Place is also actively involved in the community, from a neighbourhood cleanup and feeding the community after Hurricane Fiona to organizing a family Easter egg hunt.

I thank the Pride Place Society team for their work, their volunteerism, and their community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**LINNEY, CHUCK: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize Mr. Chuck Linney. Chuck died last week after a short illness. He was a man in our community who touched thousands of people. He had an incredible heart.

I first met Chuck as a nurse. He was my patient, and we came to become very good friends. Today I want to stand in honour of Mr. Chuck Linney. I know that our community is mourning. He worked at IMP Group, but he did so much more. He volunteered doing photography for just about every sports team there was in Cumberland County. He knew all the players, all the athletes, and they loved him.

I want to thank all the medical professionals in Cumberland, as well as here and Amherst, and I want to send my sympathies to the family and friends and our entire community on the loss of Chuck Linney.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

**EBBETT'S MEADOW BROOK FARM: NEW LOC. OPENING - CONGRATS.**

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to a growing business in Colchester North: Ebbett's Meadow Brook Farm. Twenty-four years ago, Lorenda Ebbett attended a local farmers' market with extra beans from her garden, and today they have up to 15 people working on their farm.

Lorenda and Joe Ebbett realized that consumers want to have a relationship with their food producers, so over the years they went from a booth at a farmers' market to opening a butcher shop and abattoir to their own retail farm market. That farm market is so successful that they have now opened a new farm market and country kitchen in the former bowling arcade in Tatamagouche.

This new location is just walking distance from the Tatamagouche Regional Academy, where just today Minister Druhan announced the fresh food cart pilot program. Hopefully Ebbett's will play a role in providing fresh produce to this project.

The Ebbetts also still have a working farm where they raise beef cattle and free-range chickens and turkeys, all sold at the local market.

I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in congratulating Ebbett's Meadow Brook Farm on the opening of their new location and recognize all the farmers and farmers' markets across Colchester North.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

**SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF: NEED FOR FAIR COMP. - RECOG.**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, again I stand to speak about the vital support staff in our education system and our schools. These individuals - the support staff - make our schools hum. They take care of our children, provide after-school care, maintain our schools, drive our buses, work in our libraries, and do so much more.

They are invaluable, yet they are on the verge of striking, and what has this government offered them? Twenty-six cents an hour. For a government that brags about the money they spend, a government that says money is no object, all of a sudden it is.

When it comes to our education staff and our children, 26 cents an hour is an insult. Do better for these valuable staff and our children.

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

**BEE'S KNEES GENERAL STORE & BAKERY: OPENING - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: I rise today to recognize a new business in Lawrencetown, the Bee's Knees General Store and Bakery. Sue Littleton and Candice Zaina bought the building in Lawrencetown, the former Beals grocery store, and opened the Bee's Knees General Store and Bakery in late 2022, where they sell, as they say, a little bit of this and a little bit of that. There is also an amazing bakery serving daily treats to go along with great coffee.



While the business has been the target of repeated acts of vandalism aimed at their Pride and Mi'kmaw flags, Littleton and Zaina say the positive community response has been far more powerful than the negativity.

Bee's Knees is about more than just a place to stock up on essentials. There is a community table that offers a chance for long-time residents to meet with new folks who've arrived to make this beautiful community their home. They've also started a family story time every Sunday.

Mr. Speaker, can I ask all members to welcome Bee's Knees? I recommend stopping by for a brownie, coffee, and great conversation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

**DONNIE'S TAXI: 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I rise today to congratulate Tracey and Richard Davis, the owners and operators of Donnie's Taxi in Windsor, who recently celebrated 25 years of business success.

Tracey and Richard purchased Donnie's Taxi in February of 1998 from Donnie Clarke. It is a service that the community has relied on for many years. Tracey has shown that she is a strong leader and a dependable businesswoman by working steadily throughout the pandemic, ensuring citizens got where they needed to go.

More recently, during an extreme cold event, Tracey declared free rides by Donnie's Taxi for anyone who needed to get to an emergency shelter centre. Tracey and her staff have proven time and again that they are flexible and always willing to accommodate the ever-changing needs of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in congratulating Tracey and Richard and their entire staff on celebrating 25 years and help me wish them many more of continued success, one drive at a time.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**DYMENT, J./BLACK, E.: CYBERSTEAM CHALLENGE WIN - CONGRATS.**

HON. KEITH IRVING: I rise today to congratulate the impressive achievements of two Grade 7 students from Wolfville. John Dymont and Esme Black recently won big with their UFO project during the Canada CyberSTEAM Challenge.

Competing against 50 teams from across Canada, they secured 1st place in their age category, and an overall 6th place out of 125 registered students. Their project featured

a UFO-style rocket ship that levitated using a magnet, and travelled around a rollercoaster, earning them high scores and recognition.

The Canada CyberSTEAM Challenge, hosted by TeamUP Science, is a prestigious virtual competition that combines science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math for youth. Dymont and Black's dedication, problem-solving skills and persistence were evident throughout the competition, and they were praised for their enthusiastic and hilarious presentation.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in congratulating John Dymont and Esmé Black for their outstanding success in the Canada CyberSTEAM Challenge and wishing them all the best as they explore the new frontiers of life.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

**HART, SHIRLY/DELOREY, SHIRLEY: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

HON. GREG MORROW: I rise today to recognize Shirley Hart and Shirley Delorey of Boylston.

Many residents of the Guysborough-Boylston area and those who pass along Highway 16 will often see these two ladies walking with their garbage bags and their sticks, gathering litter along the side of the road. Their volunteering has not gone unnoticed, and they were both given volunteer awards from the Municipality of the District of Guysborough in 2019. They've also helped in community cleanups in other areas of Guysborough over the years.

Both Shirleys have been friends since childhood and raised their families just up the road from one another. They continue their friendship now in their retirement years by giving back to their community, going above and beyond to keep their neighbourhood litter-free. Not ones to seek the limelight, they go about their daily walks, not looking for praise but just enjoying their daily routine year-round.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the House to join me in a round of applause for Shirley Hart and Shirley Delorey on their years of volunteering their time for the betterment of their community. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

**HRCE STAFF: OPENING OF NEW SCHOOLS - RECOG.**

BRAEDON CLARK: Before this House sits again, two new schools will open in my constituency. I'd like to recognize that today. The Broad Street schools are a pre-

Primary to Grade 8 school and a Grade 9 to 12 school that will open in September, under the leadership of principals Sean MacDonald and Susan Casey.

All of the schools in Bedford, Hammonds Plains, and Clayton Park are bursting at the seams, so I look forward to these schools easing some of the pressure on the system, Fairview as well. The high school will also offer self-directed learning as an option for its students, the first program of its kind in Nova Scotia. I look forward to seeing how that works out as well.

I'd like to thank staff at HRCE for their consistent and ongoing communication during the construction and boundary review process. Finally, of course, congratulations to staff, teachers, parents, and students as they get ready to open the doors of these new schools in September. I have no doubt they will be fixtures of the community for decades to come.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

**MACLELLAN, AUSTIN: ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENTS - CONGRATS.**

NOLAN YOUNG: I rise today to recognize 21-year-old Austin MacLellan, the grandson of Barry and Marilyn MacLellan of Shelburne. At 12, Austin was diagnosed with a neurological disease that prevented him from being able to stand. Yet his tenacity and love for sports prevailed, and Austin began playing wheelchair basketball and he played the past seven years with Team New Brunswick.

Austin has competed in many championship tournaments nationally and internationally, including in Thailand and Mexico, most recently placing first in Division 2 national championships. Austin recently began the privilege of being the flag-bearer at the Canada Winter Games. His next challenge is wheelchair rugby, and he will be competing in the Rugby Nationals in Moncton in May.

I respectfully ask all members to join me in congratulating Austin on his fantastic athletic achievements.

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

**KUHN, GEORGE & DONNA: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

LORELEI NICOLL: Today it is truly my honour to acknowledge the volunteer efforts of two outstanding residents of Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, George and Donna Kuhn. Now in their 80s, they continue to volunteer their time. George never missed his weekly volunteering at the St. James United Church Food Bank, arriving early each Monday and Tuesday, receiving and packing grocery items, assisting, receiving and delivering to clients. Just last week, he missed his first day in over 30 years.

Both George and Donna volunteer for the Feeding Others of Dartmouth program, Margaret's House, by purchasing and delivering weekly groceries, and serving meals. They coordinated Coats for the Cold, collecting and delivering coats to Margaret's House to donate to those in need.

Donna spent over seven years volunteering at Saint Andrew's United Church in Halifax for Sunday suppers, and sometimes took transit from Cole Harbour to support the program. She visited Ocean View and Oakwood nursing homes as a dependable volunteer for over 20 years.

As a couple, they volunteered for many St. James fundraising programs: the annual lobster suppers, the UCW and the annual Christmas Tea and Sale. Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing George and Donna Kuhn as truly community-minded people.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**LACHANCE, SYLVAIN & CHERYL: BUS. AWD. RECIPS. - CONGRATS.**

HON. STEVE CRAIG: I rise today to congratulate Sylvain and Cheryl Lachance of Lower Sackville. Sylvain and Cheryl, owners and operators of Lachance Signs in Lower Sackville, started their business in 1993. This year, they will be celebrating 30 years of providing service to our community.

Sylvain and Cheryl work very hard to make their local small business a success. As a matter of fact, if you were to drive down Sackville Drive, you would certainly notice many of their signs - proof of their success. Lachance Signs was recently awarded this year's Industry Supporter of the Year by the Canadian Housing Business Association's Kohltech Peak Awards for outstanding service to their customers.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Sylvain and Cheryl for receiving such a prestigious award.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**LANDRY, JANICE: *EYE OF THE OCEAN* COMPLETION - CONGRATS.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to congratulate Janice Landry on the completion of her new book *Eye of the Ocean*. I had the pleasure of meeting with Janice during my coffee and conversation to discuss her new book. Janice is an award-winning author, and this is her sixth work of non-fiction.

*Eye of the Ocean* showcases stories of love, hope and empathy from 21 Canadians. The book features Canadians who inspire all to help and lift up others. Janice has been a storyteller for as long as she can remember. Her late father, Captain Basil Landry of the

Halifax Fire Department, was the first person she can remember who sparked her love for literature. Janice later became a reporter, producer and an anchor with CTV Atlantic.

[2:15 p.m.]

Landry pays homage to both her late parents in her books and to mental health advocacy work. All proceeds of Janice's new book go to supporting the refugee non-profit HEART Society of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

### **CITIZENS GROUP: HELP FOR SENIORS - THANKS**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I rise to draw attention to the plight of many seniors across Cumberland County and all of Nova Scotia who are struggling, quite literally, to keep the lights on as prices continue to skyrocket. The prices for heating oil, food, power - everything really - are continuing to rise. Especially for those on fixed income, each day presents a new challenge. Far too many seniors are having to make decisions on whether to buy food, pay for their prescriptions or pay for the heating of their homes. Seniors want to stay in their homes, but it is becoming much more difficult for them to do so.

Mr. Speaker, I was recently made aware of a group of . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. There's a lot of chatter going back and forth.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I was recently made aware of a group of citizens in Cumberland County who are literally going door-to-door and giving food to seniors who have no food in their cupboard. Today, I want to bring honour to them and thank everyone.

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

The time is now 2:15 p.m. We'll begin with Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers, and it will expire at 3:05 p.m.

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**PREM.: INCOME ASSISTANCE - INCREASE**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has told this House that this budget is going to fix health care. We know that is not true, because this budget is not addressing people's root causes of health.

Don't take my word for it - this is what experts are saying as well. Social workers have said there is nothing in this budget that would speak to the social determinants of health. Human rights experts said this budget will increase food insecurity, particularly with the most financially insecure Nova Scotians. Those working directly with those most in need in Nova Scotia said that this budget is doing nothing to address the basic needs of Nova Scotians.

Does the Premier not understand that people who can't meet their basic needs are going to be sicker? If so, why has he frozen income supports for the second year in a row?

THE PREMIER: I am very proud of the budget that we put before this House. It is a budget that supports Nova Scotians.

As I've said many times, we always want to do more. That's just part of our DNA in this Chamber. We want to do more for Nova Scotians. But with a budget before this House of \$14 billion - 14 billion investments in Nova Scotians - it's hard to imagine that anyone would say there is nothing there for any group of Nova Scotians.

We are investing in affordable housing. We are investing in targeted supports to help Nova Scotians where we can. We want to do more, and that is why we are growing the economy of this province. That is why we are growing the population - so that we can continue to do more and more for Nova Scotians.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, this budget is going to make Nova Scotians poorer and more food-insecure, and is not addressing the basic needs of housing, either. There is nothing in this budget to address non-market housing or to create more units. During a cost of living crisis, the government has raised the qualifications for rent supplements from 30 per cent of one's income to 50 per cent of one's income to actually even become eligible for rent supplements. A key social determinant of health is housing, and the health of the population is directly linked to the availability of housing. I will table that.

If this Premier actually cares about health care and people's health, why did he increase the qualifications for rental supplements, meaning there are going to be thousands of Nova Scotians who are no longer eligible for that program?

THE PREMIER: There will be at least a thousand more Nova Scotians who are eligible because we increased the rent supplements in this province. More people will be

eligible for rent supplements in this province. Since we have come to office, we have continued to increase the number of rent supplements that are available to Nova Scotians.

Yes, the policy should follow the need, Mr. Speaker, so we prioritized. The most people with the most need will get it, but not only people of the most need. We will continue to invest in rent supplements. They are a good thing that supports many Nova Scotians. That is why I am so proud of the minister for increasing the number of rent supplements. There are far more rent supplements available in this province right now than there were under the prior government under eight years. We will continue to add more rent supplements.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The Premier brags about rental supplements when we have a vacancy rate of less than 1 per cent in Nova Scotia, where people can't even find a place to live, and where people who are spending 49.9 per cent of their income on their rent will not be eligible for these rental supplements.

We know, based on what experts and data are telling us, that people who are dealing with housing insecurity and financial insecurity are also going to be dealing with food insecurity. People who are not food secure don't take their prescription drugs. People who are not food-secure have larger health care issues, particularly around diabetes, and stomach and bowel issues, among many others. If we don't deal with these basic needs of Nova Scotians and we allow people to get sicker, we are never going to catch up with the pressures on our health care system. Does the Premier not understand that?

THE PREMIER: I will assure the member that I certainly understand. We are trying to catch up with the pressures on the health care system, because those pressures were allowed to build and build and build for eight years while budgets were decreased.

We are investing in the health care of Nova Scotians, and to all those (Interruption)

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

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I just want to assure all Nova Scotians that we will continue to invest in rent supplements. We will invest in Nova Scotians.

For anyone who says that the budget does nothing, I will just remind them: \$45 million in targeted housing initiatives; \$23 million in disability support programs; \$13 million for youth with complex needs; \$8 million to support homelessness; the Nova Scotia Child Benefit increase; prevention in early learning investments . . .

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

**PREM.: MASS CAS. COM. RECOMMS. - IMPLEMENT**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, the final report of the Mass Casualty Commission was released last month. It details how our communities, our province, and many vulnerable women were failed by systems that should have protected them.

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre brought forward the fact that the perpetrator was well known to have taken advantage of vulnerable and marginalized women who came to him for denture services - many of them in Dartmouth South. This was enabled through referrals from the Department of Community Services. These women did not report because they did not feel safe.

Will the Premier commit to implementing the Recommendation No. 13 of the report to adequately fund organizations combating gender-based violence at “epidemic levels” and to ensure that victims feel safe coming forward?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the commissioners for their work. Of course, we know the tragedy of that period of time in this province and across the country. Our thoughts have always been with the families, with the survivors. It’s just a terrible thing that happened.

The commission made a number of recommendations. What I would tell the member is that we can’t change what happened in the past, but we can certainly do everything possible to prevent it from happening again. We’re going to work with those commission recommendations. We’ll work with the federal government to make sure the very first step is the recommendation to put the panel together to make sure that governments, federally and provincially, follow through on the recommendations. We’re committed to doing what we possibly can to prevent this from happening again.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: This and many other recommendations are squarely within the purview of the provincial government, and are designed to make sure it never happens again. We all know we can’t change the past.

Survivors, families, and community members have expressed that they continue to struggle and do not have adequate resources to heal in the aftermath of the tragedy. In light of this, Recommendation No. 30 of the report reads: “By May 1, 2023, the Government of Canada and Nova Scotia should jointly fund a program to address the public health emergency that exists in Colchester, Cumberland, and Hants Counties as a result of an unmet need for mental health, grief, and bereavement supports arising from the April 2020 mass casualty.” I’ll table that.

Will the Premier commit to implementing this recommendation by May 1<sup>st</sup>?



THE PREMIER: What I want to say to the member is I've already met with groups from the area. I know the MLA for the area has been a strong voice for the community, for the families, for the survivors. I want to assure the member we're taking the recommendations very seriously. I don't want to leave any room for doubt on that. Nobody wants this to happen again. As a province, as a country, we will absolutely do whatever we can to make sure we take the steps to prevent a tragedy like this from happening again.

There are a number of recommendations. Every single one of them is on the table. We'll do what we can.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The one I just mentioned has a deadline in three weeks. The Mass Casualty Commission recommended no less than a transformation of our entire approach to community safety. In Recommendation No. 116, the commission wrote: "The Province of Nova Scotia should within six months of the publication of this Report establish a multisectoral council comprising representatives of municipal police agencies and RCMP, community safety experts, and diverse community representatives to engage with community members and experts and review the structure of policing in Nova Scotia." I'll table that.

The Premier has said again and again that he'll do what he can. Can the Premier commit to implementing this recommendation by the stated deadline?

THE PREMIER: The effort that went into the Mass Casualty Commission and - the report is 3,000 pages. A number of recommendations. The member has identified three recommendations. She could put them all in front of me and go through them one by one, and my answer would be the same. Nobody wants to see something like this happen ever again in this province or in this country. We will absolutely take the recommendations of the commission to heart. We will work to do what we can to prevent something like this in this province. We will always keep the families and the survivors at the centre of everything we do, Mr. Speaker. I will assure the House and every single Nova Scotian of that. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **DHW: FAMILY PHYSICIANS - PROVIDE**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, another area where this budget misses the mark when it comes to people's health is actually attaching patients to family physicians.

We know that when patients don't have family physicians, they get sicker. They show up in our emergency rooms either for urgent or non-urgent issues. They are the ones who are lining up at the walk-in clinics in Halifax around city blocks just to see a doctor.

Yet there's nothing in this budget that is going to increase recruitment or retention of family practitioners or to incentivize family practice, particularly here in the Halifax region.

Even Doctors Nova Scotia has said our province needs to stabilize family medicine and establish health homes to aid with team-based care. Despite that, this government hasn't even created one new collaborative care clinic in this province. My question is: Why?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We've been trying to fill the hole that was left behind for the last 18 months. We've been trying to stabilize our workforce. Now, Mr. Speaker, we have \$32 million towards investing in primary care for new community clinics and for collaborative centres. We're investing in nurses. We just passed a terrific bill, the Patient Access to Care Act, which is going to help us . . . (Interruption, applause)

I'm very pleased with the budget that is likely going to go through today. I feel confident in our ability to deliver primary health care in this province. (Applause)

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the government can only brag about how much money they're spending. They can't brag about incomes getting better for Nova Scotians here when it comes to health care in this province and when it comes to people's health. I wonder when the government's going to realize that spending more doesn't mean that they're spending smart.

You want to talk about the hole that's being dug with this government. We've had the number of people without a family doctor nearly double in this province under this government. That's a hole that someone else is going to have to dig ourselves out of. We have ER closures that have doubled in the last two years under this government.

We have more and more Nova Scotians getting sicker. With this budget freezing income assistance and freezing rental supplements for those who aren't paying more than 50 per cent on their rent, we are going to have people who are more food-insecure and sick.

Does the minister understand that this is not going to help our health care system?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I'll stand every day and talk about our investments in health care when I look at about eight years of them taking money out, because that surely didn't work. Here we are, Mr. Speaker, investing \$6.5 billion. As I've said before . . . (Interruption)

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

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: What I would like to say is that I'll stand on this side of the House any day and tell health care workers and Nova Scotians in this province that we are totally focussed on their health care.

We are investing the money that was never invested for the last number of years. We will continually see results and improvements in our health care system in this province under this government. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

### **DFA: LOBSTER LICENCE POLICY - CHANGE**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, lobster fishing is a difficult and dangerous occupation, even more so when licence holders are in their 70s, 80s, and 90s. This is the reality for approximately 50 Class B licence holders in Nova Scotia. Due to a policy implemented by the DFO in 1976, they are limited to a 30 per cent trap limit and their licences cannot be sold or transferred. In fact, the licence expires upon the death of the licence holder.

While this is a federal issue, these Class B licence holders are looking to the provincial government for support. Is the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture prepared to publicly support the campaign by the Class B licence holders and their families to have this policy changed?

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Since taking this office, I've become aware of the Class B licences. There are about 3,000 total commercial licences, which includes the Class B ones.

There was a letter-writing campaign back in 2021. I know that the members for Kings North and Chester-St. Margaret's contacted me on that. I also talk with Minister Murray every time I can to explain to her as well as the parliamentary secretary Mike Kelloway the issue, and they are fully aware of that.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, this DFO policy punishes the wives and families of the licence holders, as they are left with nothing once the licence holder passes. These elderly licence holders have to keep fishing or lose their licence. They are being denied the opportunity to pass it to their family members or sell it to their local community at a time when the lobster fishery is healthy.

Over 1,000 people have written to DFO Minister Joyce Murray calling for a policy change. This policy has been reviewed for 47 years to determine if it is still required. A recent federal court of Canada decision called on the minister to review the policy, which she has not done.

Will the minister request an all-party meeting with the Minister of DFO to call on her to change the policy preventing Class B licences from being sold or transferred?

[2:30 p.m.]

STEVE CRAIG: Certainly, my understanding is that in 1976, it was a measure of conservation, and the people with the Class B licences were those who did not have fishing as their primary livelihood. They could have been mechanics. They could have been teachers. They could have been anything. This was almost 50 years ago.

I understand that as fishers get older, those with Class B licences are concerned as to what happens next. I would commit, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, that I will bring the topic up again with Minister Murray.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

### **DOJ: MARRIAGE CEREMONIES OFFICIATING - CLARIFY**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Both the member for Annapolis and I have attempted to assist constituents who would like to become Justices of the Peace so that they can perform marriages. We have been told that Nova Scotia has too many JPs, and indeed, the Justice website indicates term appointments for Justices of the Peace are no longer being processed. Can the Minister of Justice please clarify for the House: Who is allowed to perform marriages in Nova Scotia, and what are their qualifications?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Thank you to the honourable member for the question. She is correct. Under the previous government, there was actually a hold put on granting full-time Justices of the Peace. Individuals can still come forward and be granted to do individual ceremonies if they want to make application for that.

We decided when I came on in the department to start doing a review. Unfortunately, a number of people weren't able to do ceremonies over COVID, so when we did the review, the numbers were skewed. We're reviewing them again. Unless somebody meets a cultural or some type of a special need, we're not granting them until we have an opportunity to do that review.

KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, it's public knowledge that the Premier officiated at a wedding at the Pictou Lodge. Our question is for the Premier: Was he duly authorized to officiate at a wedding ceremony? Were there any issues with the paperwork? Was there any communication between the Premier's Office and any government departments on whether or not the Premier was authorized to officiate at a wedding ceremony? If he was duly authorized, did he file all the appropriate paperwork once he performed the marriage?

BRAD JOHNS: There were a lot of questions there. I'll answer on behalf of the Premier that yes, there was a ceremony that did take place. The Premier did oversee that ceremony.

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

### **MAH: HOUSING CRISIS - ACT**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The housing crisis in this province continues to worsen, and it's affecting the efforts to build new housing. According to Out of the Cold, and I'll table that, "Folks working in the construction trades here in Halifax are building condos while unhoused. We have construction workers coming to our sites looking for showers, food or a bed because they are unhoused."

This government has presided over skyrocketing rents and ballooning populations of people experiencing homelessness, and won't build any new public housing this year. Where are these folks supposed to live?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Obviously, the Province of Nova Scotia is growing. It is the first time in living memory, and we're very appreciative of all people who want to live here. We understand why they want to come. We're doing multiple things on multiple fronts to address the housing crisis. One of them is More Opportunities for Skilled Trades for young tradespeople, but we're investing also in modular housing and in community housing.

We're working hard on our public housing to get our turnaround times lower so that we can get more people in public housing and deal with overhousing. We're working on multiple fronts to address this crisis. We recognize it, and we made a massive investment in modular housing, and with our partners the Nova Scotia Housing Trust, we hope we'll see new modular housing on the ground as early as this Summer.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, we tried to get information on these modular units. It's not clear how they will be divided amongst sectors. We have heard them referred to for health care workers and others. We don't know how many people they're going to help, where they're going to be, and how long they will be in place.

Adsum for Women and Children is another is another housing support organization that is attempting to navigate the abysmal housing landscape. They have seen the same issues. There are housing support workers in Halifax hired to help community members find and maintain housing who are themselves couch-surfing or staying in unsafe situations.

We hear from provincial government employees calling to ask for help. It's awful. I'll table that. It's unlikely that these folks will be eligible for a rent supplement. If they are eligible for public housing, they will have to wait years for a unit.

How is the government going to help them find housing and stay housed?

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to say is that of all the things we have done and the thing I am most proud of is our immense investment in community housing. We have done numerous projects. For example, the North End Community Health Centre - we have done five different projects with them. We have done a project with Dartmouth Housing. We're working across the non-profit community housing and co-op housing sector. We have made millions of dollars of investments in that, which was never done before - never has been done before. We knew, going into this, when we first got this mandate, that Nova Scotia was weak in community housing, weak in non-for-profit housing. We have made an immense investment in that.

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

#### **SNSIS: RENT CAP INCREASE - EXPLAIN**

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, we're seeing record levels of homelessness in this province. I can table that. We have some of the highest rental and home price increases in the country year-over-year, and I can table that.

This session, our caucus brought forward multiple bills to help support new housing construction and help improve the functioning of the rental market. This government decided to raise the rent cap to 5 per cent - not in legislation but in regulation - and extend it by two years without justification for that timeline.

My question to the Premier is: What expert advice was given to this government that would demonstrate that 5 per cent is the ideal, correct number? What expert advice was given to this government that said housing market pressures would be alleviated in two years?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I guess we're returning to debate on the bill that we passed with all-party support last night.

What I say is that my department takes engagement and consultation with both our tenant and landlord organizations. We meet regularly with them. I meet with them annually as minister to understand different feedback and perspectives on the Residential Tenancies Program, including the rent cap.

Again, we have heard throughout debate, and we have heard throughout Law Amendments Committee, differing opinions - but also recognizing that inflation is

certainly a cause of pressure and can cause pressure for both tenants and landlords. The bill that we passed last night is a reflection of that.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, when commenting to media on one of our proposals, the Premier stated that our bill, as it is written, would bring permanent rent control. We would sunset rent control when the housing market reached the CMHC-defined industry standard for a healthy rental market.

My question to the Premier is: Is there an actual plan to restore a healthy housing market in Nova Scotia? Maybe it's on a website somewhere we could find it.

COLTON LEBLANC: If the member has an idea for a website rather than just alluding to it, I'm sure I could hear a little bit more about that after the fact.

Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure all members of the House and remind them that the position of this government is not long-term, permanent rent control. Based on the feedback from the member for Bedford South, as well as the member currently posing the question, it sounds like they are entertaining the idea of permanent, long-term rent control.

Again, we don't believe in that. We are in a position of supporting Nova Scotians, supporting tenants, while we continue to build on the availability of housing, which is going to improve the availability and affordability of it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

### **AGRIC.: FOOD INSECURITY - ADDRESS**

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, the price of food and household goods has continued to hit new highs. Nova Scotians can be expected to spend a full \$1,000 more on groceries this year as compared to last year. I can table that. Food affordability, food insecurity, and food production are all closely linked. Our caucus has been pushing the government to take action. We have put forward multiple bills this session alone that would help tackle food pricing, food affordability, and support local agriculture.

This government has put forward zero, not one bill. To the Premier: Where is the systematic approach to food insecurity that our province desperately needs to see from this government?

HON. GREG MORROW: We are all feeling the impacts of rising costs and that includes food - not just food, but fuel, housing, and other necessary costs. For some, it is a tough time to afford food right now - there is no question - let alone local, healthy food. We have created a program to offset production costs for farmers, but we don't influence the retail price of food.

What we can do is support our farmers and we have done that through the budget, through in a year spending \$9.9 million, including more money to put food into local institutions. This includes a program we just launched yesterday: a new local food pilot in our schools in Springhill, Tatamagouche, Elmsdale, Stellarton, Winding River in Stewiacke. We are putting more food in our local institutions to help feed students in those places, as well as our correctional facilities, our health care facilities, and long-term care facilities. Mr. Speaker, we will keep working.

KEITH IRVING: At one point, food banks were supposed to be one-time measures, and now we have record numbers of food banks. I can table that. The number of people accessing food banks today is up 23 per cent over this time last year, which I will table - and it is not like last year's food prices were particularly affordable. Over the course of this session, we've learned that half of the students who visit the CBU food bank don't even get served because they run out of food. I will table that.

Mr. Speaker, access to food is a basic human right, and this province is failing to fulfill that right to its people. To the Premier: When can we expect to live in a Nova Scotia where people don't go hungry?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Along with my colleague, I echo all his comments, but we have helped CBU with regard to food. Anyone who reaches out to us, we try to find means to assist and ensure that they have food in stock to help those who are finding these challenging times to feed themselves.

We've made significant investments with Feed Nova Scotia, along with close to over 200 other community organizations within this province that offer services to help those who may need, during this difficult time, to access food, healthy food.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

### **FTB: TAX BRACKETS - INDEX**

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, this session we have put forward multiple bills that would give the middle class a break, to put more money back in the pockets of Nova Scotians. The middle class is being squeezed out. Giving the average Nova Scotian some tax relief would help them with groceries, food, gas, and rent.

We're one of the highest tax jurisdictions in the country, and I can table that. The average household income in Nova Scotia is less than 78 per cent of the national average. I will table that. Why hasn't the Premier given the average Nova Scotian a break in the gas tax to put more money back in their pockets?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: For a simple reason, Mr. Speaker: The gas tax funds the fixing of roads. I know every member in this House has constituents who feel



that fixing roads is very important. That's why we increased the amount that was in the budget to fix roads, significant increases. That's the straight answer. Beyond that, we've focused on targeted supports, because we agree that there are people out there who are struggling, and we want to support those who are most in need.

[2:45 p.m.]

FRED TILLEY: This is a government that promised Nova Scotians a Better Pay Cheque Guarantee on Day 1 of their mandate, which I will table. Since then, not only has the income growth lagged behind other provinces, but the overall tax burden of Nova Scotians has actually increased under this government. This government is taking in record amounts of revenue from income taxes as a result of this increased tax burden.

The average Nova Scotian who isn't eligible for government support is just not able to get ahead. Why won't the Premier help them by indexing tax brackets?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, no question that indexing tax brackets would be a nice thing to do. But right now we're focused on fixing health care, and we're introducing deficit budgets to do so.

One thing the member didn't mention was the burden of the carbon tax, which we know is hitting in July. I also know that those members were suggesting we remove the provincial excise fuel tax - if only to make way for a federal carbon tax. What sense would that make? We remove the tax that's used to fix Nova Scotians' roads so the federal Liberals can increase taxes on all those things out there, including things like transportation for food, fertilizer for food, at a time when food . . .

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

### **DCS: FOOD INSECURITY - ADDRESS**

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Community Services. We know that food insecurity is a rising problem in our province. Food banks are reporting record demand, and there are challenges to meet this.

I asked the minister yesterday about what kind of strategy or plan the department has to address food insecurity at its core. The minister pointed to local food and beverage strategy over at the Department of Agriculture and stated, "It's not like we're responsible for food insecurity."

Food banks themselves have called for bold policy intervention to tackle food insecurity. When will we see that come from this department?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: First of all, as mentioned in Estimates yesterday, we outlined many of the organizations in this province that we work with. I'm not sure if we got to the point where I was able let the member know that we have also invested in a collaborative food network pilot with Eskasoni and East Preston. We continue to work very closely with the Department of Agriculture in our food and beverage strategy.

I think it speaks volumes of the investments that we've made into ensuring that we meet food security in this province. We'll continue doing what we have to do.

KENDRA COOMBES: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I'm still not hearing a strategy. I also asked the minister yesterday what the department's plan was to address the continually rising rates of homelessness this province is seeing. In Halifax alone, the number of actively homeless persons has risen from 345 to 899 since this government was elected. I'll table that.

The minister actually asserted that homelessness has not just been around since this government was formed - I've tabled that - and again, wasn't able to point to a clear strategy being used. It's concerning that the minister's first instinct when asked these questions is to downplay the department's responsibility.

Why hasn't this department developed a strategy to address the growing crisis?

KARLA MACFARLANE: This is the very first government - and actually the very first government in Canada - that has put forth a supportive housing strategy. I would think that the Opposition would be happy that we have \$26 million that we invested to go towards supportive housing. We've done more than any other government when it comes to homelessness. Just in this budget alone, we've increased it by \$8.2 million.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

### **DOJ: FOIPOP SYSTEM - REFORM**

BRAEDON CLARK: We are coming to the end of another legislative session here in the House, and the government has failed to fulfill another key campaign promise around a review and overhaul of the FOIPOP system.

The issues with the system have not gotten any better. FOIPOPs routinely cost hundreds, if not thousands of dollars to process. If they do come out at all, they are blacked out 91 per cent of the time, as we know. If there is an issue with the process, you can appeal - and the appeal backlog is only four years.

This government committed to a FOIPOP overhaul in their election campaign. The Premier reaffirmed this commitment after they took office. I will table that. I'll ask the

Minister of Justice: Given only six pieces of government legislation came forward this session, why was FOIPOP reform not one of them?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: As I've said in the past, I will say again that FOIPOP was in my mandate letter to review. We are continuing to move forward with that. As I've said in the past, it affects over 400 different agencies across the province. We want to make sure that we do it right.

I would say to the member that I'm optimistic we'll be back here in the Fall with something to report at that time when asked. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Bedford South has the floor, and it's his own party that's interfering with him. (Laughter)

The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: It's hard to control them, Mr. Speaker.

The government's position on this issue reminds me of a wonderful saying about politics, which is "Where you stand depends on where you sit."

Let's not forget that when the Premier was sitting on this side of the House as Leader of the Official Opposition, he made his name and his reputation on access to information. He went so far as to march down to Lower Water Street and file a suit against the government to get access to information. We all remember that. There are lots of photos.

Now I would ask the Premier and the minister: What has changed?

BRAD JOHNS: We're continuing to work on this.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

### **DOJ: NDAs - BAN**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, in this session we have learned an important and confusing lesson from this government. On some issues, we have to go as fast as possible. The Premier said that we have to "go like hell," actually - no plan, no budget. On other issues, they preach potential disaster should the government move too quickly.

Perhaps nowhere is this issue more stark than on NDAs. We have seen the Premier use every excuse to avoid fulfilling his commitments on transparency and accountability,

but his refusal to ban NDAs really stands out. There is an active harm every day through the government failing to act.

To the Premier: Why are we continuing to harm victims of sexual assaults and sexual abuse, and when will he “run like hell” on this issue as well?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: I’d like to point out, although I’ve said this in the past, although the Premier runs like hell, I’m pretty slow. It took me five years to get through high school and five years to get through university. I was over on council for 16 years before I got elected MLA. I go slow. I go steady. I go thorough. (Laughter)

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Thorough, they have been. This government performed a jurisdictional scan in advance of introducing Bill No. 203 in November 2022. I can table that. This government also performed a jurisdictional scan in advance of introducing Bill No. 204 in the same session. This government performed a third jurisdictional scan prior to enacting Bill No. 155 in April 2022. I can table all three in a minute.

I would suggest that many jurisdictional scans, where performed with best legislative practices - a jurisdictional scan does not take 18 months. What is the real reason that the Premier will not act?

BRAD JOHNS: I will apologize that I don’t know off by heart all the bill numbers and what each one is. I don’t have time to look, but I will look. I’m assuming that most of those come to me and are probably related to NDAs. What I will reiterate is that I don’t run. When I run, I trip. I like to walk nice and slow.

THE SPEAKER: Well, only 10 more minutes to go, folks.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

#### **DHW: PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT CO. - HIRE**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I find it really interesting how this government can take such an important issue like an NDA and turn it into humour. I don’t get it. There’s been all kinds of these distraction tactics about this issue, but that is not my question. I just want to put that on the record. There are victims being harmed daily because their perpetrators are being - they are allowing to be - to silence them because they can sign an NDA.

Anyway, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness: All the money that’s being spent by this government, why is the government not choosing to hire a recruitment company to actually recruit more physicians to this province?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We actually just had a meeting before I got here today. We have a very strong and capable recruitment team who are working across this province, in community, in Nova Scotia Health, and in the Department of Health and Wellness. A strategy that has not existed before. They are an incredible group of individuals. They are working very closely with Labour, Skills and Immigration and doing a fantastic job. I would prefer to have somebody in Nova Scotia recruit for Nova Scotia as opposed to exporting our money and our expertise outside of this province.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, the minister may not be aware there are actually physician recruitment companies right here in Nova Scotia that would love to be hired for this. I think that Nova Scotians want results.

Minister, the Nova Scotians that I've talked to in Cumberland North, Pugwash, Amherst, and around, they want a family doctor. Then the other doctors that we already have, specialists as well, they want more doctors to support them. Because retention is a huge issue when doctors are overworked and the working conditions are poor, we just continue to lose more and more. So we need an effective recruitment strategy, and one of the best well-known ways is to hire a firm that actually does that for a business. I still don't have a good reason why we're not doing that. We need results.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, I have total confidence - we have hired physicians in this province to be local recruiters and contact physicians. We do have municipalities who have hired navigators throughout this province. We have community-based committees. There are some in the member's riding who are actually working with us to support community. I believe the communities understand what they need. I believe they are in the best position to recruit and retain physicians and other health care providers. We'll continue to support communities in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

### **EECD: PRE-PRIMARY WORKERS' WAGES - INCREASE**

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Last night, the HRCE sent an email advising parents that negotiations had broken down with school support workers, and that a strike could begin as early as next week. Parents are alarmed to read that this potential strike will close down pre-Primary programs. As the minister stated yesterday, child care is not just needed before school starts - parents need child care when they work. I'm going table that.

Why would this minister rather let thousands of children and families go without these programs than pay these workers a fair wage?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite and I would be in complete agreement that the optimal and best answer to this issue is a negotiated

agreement that ensures that our valuable and important CUPE workers in the education system, our bus drivers, our ECEs, our support workers have the collective agreement and are at work. That is what we're optimistic about and that's what we want to see happen.

I'd like to say again, as I mentioned yesterday, we really value the collective bargaining process. We value these workers, and we firmly believe that they should have the opportunity to know what is in the offer before voting and making a decision on a strike. We continue to be optimistic that the negotiated answer will keep these valuable employees at work.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the minister got the memo, but the negotiations have broken down, and there's going to be 20-plus classrooms with no classes. With no kids in the classes, parents without child care. If this strike happens, it will be because this government is continuing to deny these workers a living wage. These wages have not kept up with inflation. Support workers' pay is now worth nearly 10 per cent less than it was a decade ago.

These workers play a crucial role in our province's schools, and yet this government refuses to treat this group with dignity and respect. To add further insult to injury, this government is already actively engaging in scab hiring. This is now the third potential strike under this minister in the past six months.

THE SPEAKER: Question, please.

SUZY HANSEN: Why won't this minister pay education workers fair wages?

BECKY DRUHAN: I will say it would be completely irresponsible and inappropriate for regions not to make contingency planning. We see that happening. We see the regions doing the right thing and proactively communicating with families and making contingency plans, because that's the right thing to do. However, we still remain optimistic. We still remain committed to the bargaining process.

With respect to the question of current wages, I would note that the current wages that exist, the inequities that exist across the province, the fact that we have people who work in pre-Primary in Digby and Shelburne and Antigonish and Cape Breton all making different things didn't happen under our watch. We are committed . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West. Order, please. I'm going to ask the member for Halifax Atlantic not to even be interfering with his own members when they get up to ask questions.

The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**DCS: WOMEN'S CENTRES FUNDING - COMMIT**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Could I start from the beginning? As we have discussed in this House, the Mass Casualty Commission report being released has been an impactful report, especially to the victims' families. There are many important recommendations from this recent report, but one key take-away from this report is on gender-based violence and the collective and systemic failure to protect women.

[3:00 p.m.]

Community organizations that work with women and gender-diverse people need sustainable operational support for women's centres across the province, not just a one-time top-up. My question to the Minister of Justice: Will this government commit to this recommendation to implement sustainable operational funding for women's centres across the province?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: As the member would know, as discussed in Estimates yesterday, we provide core funding to our transition homes, to our women's centres. We just recently made an \$8 million top-up investment. When they reach out to us and they need extra help, we're always there to help them.

As the member would know as well, in early Fall in Pictou County, with the federal minister, we also signed the National Action Plan, and we're very proud of that. We're in negotiations right now, and under this Liberal government, Standing Together was started, and we continue to make those investments in Standing Together.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, when we talk to women's organizations across the province, one important issue we hear is that the centres are not on par with equitable service funding, and that organizations and programs that service men receive higher hourly rates. They have even stated that because of this, organizations focused on serving women are contributing to the gender wage gap.

Due to the vital importance of supporting women's organizations across the province, will the Minister of the Status of Women commit to focusing on pay equity for the incredible staff of women's organizations across the province?

KARLA MACFARLANE: We have a very strong partnership with all of our women's centres, our transition homes. We are meeting them on a regular basis. In fact, many of them have said that we meet them more regularly than anyone else has ever met them. We're listening. We're identifying what their needs are. We're able to make investments when they need extra help. We have put gender-based violence on our agenda. It's on our radar. We're working towards making sure that we get it right.

I'm happy to have a really good relationship with the federal government on this, because this government realizes how important the investments are, which this government didn't at the time.

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: Yesterday in Estimates, the Minister of Community Services couldn't speak to one goal set around reducing poverty. I would ask the minister  
...

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

I'm first going to recognize the honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park on an introduction.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I need to keep the Mount Saint Vincent love going today. In the gallery, we have Katerina Allan, who is the student union president. It was Katerina who brought forward the need for changes in the piece of legislation that we all passed here last night. I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, in the gallery behind me, I would like the House to recognize some of the student youth council for Cumberland County who are here today: Brenton Thorley, Olivia Sanderson, and Rachel MacDermott. They're here with Councillor Jen Houghtaling. I would like to welcome them to the House.

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

#### **OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

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

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

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

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

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No.  
306.



**Bill No. 306 - Serious Illness Leave Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I move second reading of An Act to Amend Chapter 246 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Labour Standards Code, Respecting Serious Illness Leaves of Absence. This was a bill that we brought in last week. I think the Premier suggested that it was late in the session, and they couldn't do anything about it, but I would suggest otherwise. The government could pass this bill today if they wanted to.

It's interesting because the bill that this amends, I was the minister for back in 2015 when we made some amendments, when we brought in the bill, but there were still some gaps. We actually have caregiver leave that protects jobs, and we don't have that, Mr. Speaker, for employment. The problem is, right now, your job is protected for three days if you are employed in a provincially regulated sector. What has changed since then is that the federal government has brought in employment insurance changes, and workers would be able to access employment insurance now if they go out on job protected leave.

We had Kathy MacNaughton here in the House. I know that she's known to some of the members on the opposite side of the House. When her partner, David Fraser, was diagnosed with cancer back in 2014, all he could think about was how was his family going to be provided for? He was extremely worried about this. Kathy would like to say he was kind of old-fashioned - he wanted to provide for his family. But it's not old-fashioned for any of us to want to provide for our family when we're sick. He worried about what was going to happen to them. She promised him that she would work to ensure that no one had to have this worry again. She worked with Sean Fraser, her local MP and the minister for Nova Scotia. They were able to get this brought in federally. Right now, across the country, only Quebec has this provision. I believe they had it even before the EI changes. Nova Scotia could be a leader in this.

The Canadian Cancer Society consulted widely on this particular issue. I know that consultation is important to government, and sometimes governments use it as an excuse not to do something. I don't believe that would be the case here. I believe the government recognizes that this is a good bill, and it's a good thing to do for Nova Scotians. I believe that the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration can, in fact, run or walk when it comes to consultation. I do believe that - she indicated that this was a good possibility for future legislation.

I have also said that you don't have to pass my bill. I don't care who gets the credit; I'm happy to have this bill passed by whomever. It's an important piece of legislation that Nova Scotia should be advancing. It's important that when people get sick, they can focus on looking after their health. For some they are focusing on their recovery. For others they are focused on the opposite. For some it's the fight of their life and they are not going to make it out. They should not be worrying in those final days, final weeks on Earth, about

what is going to happen to their family. That's why we brought this bill forward. That's why we agree with Kathy that it's an important thing for us to do.

There are many organizations that are supportive of this kind of legislation. They were very clear with us. Because the House hours shifted suddenly that day, they weren't able to join us because we were sitting in the morning, which we don't normally do on a Thursday. There are many organizations representing people who suffer from MS, for example, who felt strongly that this is an idea whose time has come.

On November 25<sup>th</sup> of last year, the federal government announced the official extension of the EI sickness benefit from 15 weeks to 26 weeks. That's the first time since the 1970s that amendments were made to the legislation. The extension to the federal benefit began on December 18, 2022, and will impact an estimated 169,000 Canadians, according to the Department of Finance Canada.

In jurisdictions where job protected leave is less than the federal sickness benefit period, eligible Canadians entitled to access the benefit do so at the risk of losing employment unless provinces and territories like ours create complementary legislation to protect their employment.

I think we all know of somebody who gets sick with a serious illness and their family is wiped out. I remember growing up when one of my mom's best friends had been married to an accountant and life was good. Then he got cancer and she ended up living on income assistance. They were wiped out. That's what we don't want for Nova Scotians. We want to make sure that if a Nova Scotian gets sick, they have the financial wherewithal to ensure their family is taken care of while they have the fight of their lives.

As Canadians and Nova Scotians live longer, with longer careers, more people are likely to develop an illness while they are in the workplace, so we want to make sure that they have that financial support while they are going along - when they face cancer, when they face MS, when they face any other major illness their struggle is not just medical but it's also financial. They worry about their family. How are they going to pay their bills?

A cancer diagnosis or an MS diagnosis comes with a rise in expenses, such as medication which may not be fully covered by government or private plans. We all heard the petition yesterday about parents who are trying to cover that cost of a certain medication for their children. This is one place where we can do something, Madam Speaker. It's one place where we can ensure that Nova Scotians are not - I mean they are going to be impacted by a diagnosis, there's no doubt about it, but to know that there will be money coming in to cover the bills is huge. It makes battling their disease, whatever that disease is, so much easier when they don't have to worry about the financial impact.

I think we can all agree in this House that three days of job-protected leave just isn't adequate at all. Don't even get me started on what our constituency assistants think

of 18 sick days a year. That's it. You get cancer, you have to go out for more than that. You're out of luck. At least knowing their jobs are safe while they access EI could make a huge difference to Nova Scotians of all stripes, of all sorts, in all kinds of different jobs that are under provincial jurisdiction.

[3:15 p.m.]

According to a national study from June of 2021, 41 per cent of surveyed cancer patients and their families suffered a reduction in income or a rise in expenses as a direct result of cancer care. And that's just one illness. And in 2022, the Canadian Cancer Society estimated that 6,800 Nova Scotians would be diagnosed with cancer that year.

So my point is, the person suffering from cancer, the person suffering from MS, or other critical, serious illnesses - those are our neighbours. They're our dads and our moms; they're our kids. If indeed this government is laser-focused on health, then this is a perfect bill to pass. Because although it is a labour bill, it is a labour bill that is concerned with health. It can help Nova Scotians who are facing the fight of their lives have one less thing to worry about.

And let's be clear, EI is not a princely sum, but it is a help. And if you're concerned about doing things that make it easier for Nova Scotians to return to good health, if that is their path, then this is the kind of thing we should be doing. This is the kind of bill we should be passing.

While some Canadian workers have adequate private disability insurance, a lot of Nova Scotians are not adequately covered. They have to rely on a host of different public programs in some cases that may not have adequate support for them. But the EI sickness benefit is an important safety net for workers who don't have LTD, or who have a short LTD. That's why it's important to meet the needs of patients and extend job-protected leave to 26 weeks.

When we brought in the need for caregivers back in 2015, it was significant change. It acknowledged the full-court press that many families experience when one of their members is suffering from a serious illness. And it was the first in the country to go in that direction. It was an important piece of legislation.

I do believe that Nova Scotia could be a leader in this particular issue across the country - again, only Quebec has done it so far among the provinces and territories - and it could make such a difference for Nova Scotians. Statistically, a number of us in this room will suffer a serious illness. Some of us are probably battling it right now. Our situation is not the typical situation, just because of elections and things like that. But in this room, we have loved ones who are suffering from cancer, or from MS, or any number of serious illnesses.

I believe this is something we can all take to heart in here. I believe this is an idea whose time has come. I believe that this is a piece of legislation that all parties would support.

If the government is concerned about consultation, I would suggest they get in touch with the Canadian Cancer Society, which consulted on this particular issue back in 2019 and had a diverse group that they consulted with. They had employers, employees, labour unions, civil society of all natures, et cetera, employees, you name it. They were all unanimous that this was a good bill, that this was a good thing to do. I urge the government to pass it or one in similar form.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Madam Speaker, I'm glad that we have this opportunity to speak about the need for better job protection and the Liberals' bill that would provide 26-week unpaid serious illness leave of absence for a medically certified chronic illness. People should not have to worry about losing their jobs when they are trying to get well - full stop, end of story.

It's a change that makes sense and costs this government nothing. I will say this: It will cost this government something to not pass this. It will cost them money in income assistance. It will cost them money when people delay getting health care because they cannot take the time off, first, to find out what's wrong with them, second, go for the treatments, and third, try to recover. To not pass job protection for chronic illnesses actually costs government a lot.

Meanwhile, to pass the bill costs the government zip, nada, zero, nothing. The Canadian Cancer Society has asked for this change.

I want to acknowledge that I am glad to see my Liberal colleagues have seen the light and have come around to the idea of enhancing worker protection in law. I have to say this one criticism of this bill - because no bill is perfect - and that is if this bill is to be better, then we need to open the Labour Standards Code to protect workers when they are ill at any point. During the recent eight years of the past government, that did not happen. I say that because in order for this bill to be perfect, it needs paid sick days attached to it because workers may not access this bill - if it were to come to pass - if the financial loss is there.

What I'm saying is that we need to update our legislation on job protection to match the changes made to the federal EI protections. It fails to address the more common issues of paid sick days which we know all workers require for general illness and family obligations. For someone dealing with chronic or serious illness like cancer, we agree that they shouldn't have to worry about losing their job during their treatment - absolutely.

If someone is facing life-altering surgeries or enduring chemotherapy or other treatments to survive cancer or other illnesses, they should have the comfort of knowing that their job will be there when they return. Right now, workers in Nova Scotia only have protection of three unpaid sick days. After that, if they miss work, whether it's due to a common virus like a flu or a treatment for something more serious, their employment could be terminated.

This bill to create the serious illness leave that my colleagues have introduced is important and should be considered by this government and by the minister. I know the minister very well by now. I know that the minister is always listening and always looking for really good ideas to improve our Labour Standards Code. I mean that with all sincerity. I think that this bill is one of those bills.

I'm also going to take this time, because I know that the minister is always listening, to talk about the fact that we also need to consider general paid sick days for all employees in the province. When you are dealing with a cancer diagnosis, you may not know at first if you need weeks, if not months, to deal with treatment. You don't know at the beginning stages.

Sometimes you don't even know what's wrong with you and why you have to take time off, because you're not feeling well until a diagnosis. We know sometimes diagnoses can be delayed, or misdiagnosed on some occasions because their symptoms match other illnesses, or medications are not working and there have to be switches. We know all this. It takes time.

In the beginning, you're going for your blood tests, scans, appointments with your doctors or your specialists to review results and to come up with a treatment plan, a next course of action. During this period, a person may not want to disclose the potential illness to their employer, but they would likely need to miss work to get the soonest-available scans or appointment with the surgeon.

We know that Nova Scotia is in a health care crisis. If you can get a CAT scan in Bridgewater and you live in Halifax, or anywhere else sooner than closer to home, you know you're going to take that opportunity. I know that in Cape Breton, we have the same issue. The member for Sydney-Membertou has talked many times about a PET scan for Cape Breton being a game-changer. It would stop many Cape Bretoners from having to travel and take not just hours but a travel day, an appointment day, and another travel day from work.

Yet this is our reality. You're going to take the closest place available so that you can get your results sooner. If Nova Scotians had 10 paid sick days, they could get the tests and the consults that they need without fear of losing their job on top of their fight for their life.

We have seen some improvements of our Labour Standards Code over the years. The leave for pregnancy loss was recently added - although again, I say, unpaid when it should be paid - as well as paid days for those dealing with intimate partner violence. That was a good bill. That bill attached paid sick days to it. It made it accessible for people to actually access that and use their right in that legislation to get out of violent situations and abuse.

[3:30 p.m.]

I want to take that time to say that we also know that nobody takes advantage of paid sick days because nobody wants to be chronically ill. Nobody wants to be sick at home. Nobody takes advantage of these days. They hold them dear. They hold them precious. When you have paid sick days, you hold them very close, to the point where sometimes you have to use them or lose them at the very end. March has passed, and many people had to use them or lose them because they don't carry over.

The Liberals had eight years to change the standard, to make changes like this in the Labour Standards Code, and they did not. They had the opportunity, and they didn't. That is no reason for us to say no to this type of bill. With its imperfection, in my opinion, of no paid days attached to any section of it, even if just a little tiny bit, it's still a good bill. It's still a good start.

Our Labor Standards Code is one of the weakest in the country. It needs to be updated for better protected leaves. I am going to say this - better, paid, protected leaves. It needs employer sick days. It needs better protection for workers from time and wage theft. It needs a path to a living wage. It needs this change. We need to see serious illness in the Labour Standards Code.

I commend my colleague for bringing this forward, and I hope to see it come before our Legislature for a vote. You can call it the Turtle Act. I'm with the member for Bedford Basin: I don't care who takes the credit for bills that are important to this Legislature, for bills that are important to Nova Scotians. I don't care who takes the credit as long as the work gets done.

With that, I take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

HON. JILL BALSER: I am pleased to rise today to be able to speak briefly on Bill No. 306, the Serious Illness Leave Act. I just want to start by saying thank you to the members for their very kind comments.

We know that in this House and by example that when we share personal stories, real change can happen. I know the session before - and the member mentioned the end of

pregnancy leave - when we heard a personal story from the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, real change happened. We took that story. and we took it back to the department. We made sure that we listened, and we made sure that change happened. That amendment to the Labour Standards Code to support Nova Scotians with job protection if they experience an end of pregnancy leave, that happened here in the House when we shared personal stories. I know that was a memorable day for all of us in this House because it was quite emotional.

I guess where I'm going with that, Madam Speaker, is that maybe this is my opportunity to share my personal story. Last year, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. This bill is real for me. Going through my treatments and the unknowing experience - as the member had mentioned - we didn't know if it was going to be months, if it was going to be weeks, even if I needed time off. I made the choice, because I was able to, to keep on working through that period of time. I remember that it was this time last year that I was waiting for when my radiation treatments were going to start.

Madam Speaker, I take this bill very seriously because I know that cancer is an illness that also impacts the lives of so many Nova Scotians, myself included of course. We have a family member, ourselves, or a loved one who is impacted by a sickness, maybe cancer. As the member for Bedford Basin mentioned, we need to think about other illnesses as well, long-term, that are serious, MS being another one.

I also had the opportunity to meet with the Canadian Cancer Society, and I am so pleased that the member brought this bill forward, because it is an important topic. Again, it is an opportunity to listen to Nova Scotians, listen to stories, consult, and make sure that we're hearing from as many people as we possibly can. If we go forward and make changes, we want to make sure that it is done right and take a thoughtful approach. As the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier mentioned, when someone experiences a serious illness, they should not have to worry about taking time away from work. They should not have to worry about whether their job will be there for them when they return.

That's why, through my own experience, we went back to the department and said, "We have an opportunity to do something." I really want to do something, knowing, again, that I am a Nova Scotian - all of us in the House are Nova Scotians who do have job protection. Thinking of those who are in that experience to have to make those difficult choices, we want to make it easier for them.

We are reviewing this issue, we are monitoring it, and we are looking at what other jurisdictions are doing. Madam Speaker, it is quite timely, because I will be participating in a federal/provincial/territorial meeting on labour where I know that this will be discussed and other ways that we can make sure that our Labour Standards Code is modernized. I know from speaking to the member that there is passion there. There's a lot of work that's there and what we heard from Nova Scotians, too, is if we do go in that direction, it's going to take a lot of time. We need to make sure that we do get it right.

We are aware, of course, of the recent announcements of the federal job protection and the Employment Insurance sickness benefits changes and, as mentioned, I had the chance to meet with the Canadian Cancer Society. I also actually participated in my first Run for the Cure last October, where I also had a chance to speak to members of the Canadian Cancer Society and, of course, shared my personal story with them about my passion about being able to do something right for Nova Scotians.

Again, the comments around how the bill may not be perfect or there are opportunities to add change and look at it in its entirety, that's what we are going to do, Madam Speaker, making sure, again, that if a change comes forward that we hear from as many Nova Scotians and their personal stories and how we can make it better for them is the goal of what we would want to bring forward to the House.

Of course, the Canadian Cancer Society has advocated for job protection that aligns with the federal government's Employment Insurance sickness benefits, which increased in December 2022 from 15 weeks to 26 weeks. As always, Madam Speaker, I appreciate hearing from individuals and groups to hear their concerns and possible solutions, which is why a bill like this that has been introduced is an important one to take into consideration. As mentioned, everyone in the House will recall that when we passed legislation regarding the end of pregnancy leave, that again came from a personal story.

Issues, when they are raised in this House - we know that there is an opportunity for change. We took time to review the issue to understand what other jurisdictions were doing, to consult on the topic, and brought forward a strong, inclusive piece of legislation. Madam Speaker, I appreciate that this is our style. As a government we want to make sure that's exactly what we are doing, taking the time to bring strong pieces of legislation forward that are going to support all Nova Scotians, especially in a difficult time.

Madam Speaker, serious illnesses such as cancer affect the lives, as it's been said, of many Nova Scotians, their families, and, as I already mentioned, myself. We are going to make sure that we take time to listen and look into this issue even further because we want to hear from Nova Scotians, both employers and employee groups, to better understand this important issue before considering any changes to the Labour Standards Code.

I do want to thank the member for bringing the bill forward, hearing from my colleagues, making sure that we are doing the work, taking the time to consult, taking the time to listen, and making those important changes when the opportunity presents itself. I want to just say that I appreciate being able to speak on this important bill and sharing my own personal experience because I know, Madam Speaker, that what we want to be able to do is also, again, take the time to listen to stories.

To the member's comments about the Labour Standards Code, we have also heard from the Federation of Labour and, knowing that the Labour Standards Code hasn't been



reviewed in its entirety for a very long time, that is going to be another additional piece of work. If we do go in that direction, we want to make sure we take the time to listen to Nova Scotians, to listen to employers, making sure that we do get that work right. It is going to take further conversations with members across the floor. We have proven that we can do that. When we listen to each other, we can get good and important work done to support Nova Scotians. I will close with those remarks and thank you. (Applause)

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

LORELEI NICOLL: I want to thank the minister for bringing the heart of the matter because, sadly, we don't often hear the heart in this room. It is timely and it would be nice if it were an easy thing to amend a bill as quickly as doing it in the month of April when we all recognize April as Cancer Awareness Month. We're all wearing the daffodils, we're all reminded - and sadly, today I said goodbye to my good friend Cindy, who lost her battle to cancer. The heart of the matter is really important here because there are so many people impacted by cancer, and we think when you announce your diagnosis, it's like, but she's so healthy, she's so young. It touches so many people.

I don't like to hear about, it wasn't done in the past, or it wasn't done properly. Let's just do it. I want to thank Kathy MacNaughton from Westville, who brought this forward and has been advocating on this important issue on behalf of her beloved partner, David, as my colleague from Bedford Basin stated. I acknowledge the minister's recognition, saying that she sees a parallel with this issue with Ruby's Law. It's when you make policy changes like this that you really, truly lead by example. People are watching. Nova Scotians are watching, and I heard from them, and they said: Well, if they can do that, acknowledging what happens to people with a cancer diagnosis, maybe we can change the Labour Standards Code to do that like we did for infant loss and bereavement leave.

I'm very proud to stand up in this House and actually see further changes being done to the Labour Standards Code. A friend of mine once said - and he's also Mayor Mike Savage - he has often said: Don't let perfect be the enemy of good. So let's do some good policy-changing. At this time, like the minister mentioned, Quebec is the only province to have followed the federal government's lead, and I would like to see Nova Scotia be next because unbeknownst to me, my daughter forwarded me a social media post from an MLA in Manitoba. He's tabling a bill to recognize bereavement leave for pregnancy loss. Nova Scotia led and made change. We can continue to do that. Instead of being recognized as a province that may be late to the game, let's be there early.

I can't imagine, from your personal experience or anyone who gets that diagnosis, the fear of losing their job or coming back to a job that wasn't what it was before. As people, the work that we do is a big part of who we are, so if that is removed from them, it's like a double diagnosis. I know I ended, when I spoke of Ruby's Law, that is a little thing, but it means so much. That's true again, and yes, from the experience of Ruby's Law, there are many out there who feel the Labour Standards Code needs a total revamp.

There are many policies that need a total revamp, but I'm encouraged and very grateful for the minister's comments in saying that she wholeheartedly wants to do that.

[3:45 p.m.]

On that note, I will continue to be fortunate to work with the minister, and on this bill, I look forward to the Fall.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

TOM TAGGART: I'm here to speak on this bill this afternoon, and I have made some notes and had comments to make, but I'm not sure how I can honestly do any better than what our minister just did here.

And I think that - I honestly think that our minister has shown herself, not even withstanding the challenges that she faced over this last Spring or whatever, that she gets this stuff, okay? And I think the work that she did, and others, with respect to the end of pregnancy leave, what was that, a year ago? I think it speaks for itself.

And so I just - instead of me going on - I have absolute confidence, and I believe that the House here has absolute confidence that our minister will do what needs to be done here. That she will make sure that she fully understands, and I am absolutely confident that this will be dealt with.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I would agree with my colleague that the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration makes a hard act to follow, as referenced by another member, that she gets to the heart of these matters.

And I do hope that the comments that I am about to make will also be seen for the heart within them. Because none of us would wish a loved one, a friend or a neighbour facing a serious health challenge to have to worry about keeping their job. On that we are all agreed.

But this is as much true for employers as it is for any of the rest of us. And I have had the personal experience of working in a very small organization, where very suddenly a member of our team became ill. And literally overnight, she left. We said: See you tomorrow, and this very serious situation befell her.

And again, as a very small team we relied closely on each other, we were friends, that unique category of work friends. You don't necessarily hang out outside the office, but you know the darnedest details of their life. And we wanted to support her. And

working at that time for a charity, there were limits to what we could do financially, although we did as well as we could in that regard.

But then there was, in a small team, with no extra resources of any kind, it was sharing her duties amongst ourselves, so that we could keep things rolling to keep that position for her. And we were able to do that, but I remember it as a very stressful time. And I say that, as stressful as it was for myself and my other colleagues, that did not compare to the fear and stress and anxiety that she was feeling.

However, it is a fact that no matter how much a business owner wishes to support an employee dealing with a serious illness, their absence will very much impact that business. And that is especially true in small organizations, small businesses, and is especially challenging in our current labour market. That is why at the heart of this, I think, this House - it seems there is agreement on the will to move forward but it is absolutely essential that the business community be not just consulted but embraced as part of the development of any such change.

Madam Speaker, they will want to help; I know that. It is a matter of activating our collective innovation and creativity to ensure that we can do that. So while I do personally subscribe to the perfect is the enemy of the practical and good, this is a time that a bit more time to do this right - as the minister has said, there has not been a deep dive into much of our labour legislation for a very long time. We can either go at these things piecemeal - and there may be situations where we can agree that it is proper that we must deal with some small aspect - or we can take a bit more time and try to create the best possible outcome, the support of the person who is facing the illness but equally, to find a way to proceed that supports our businesses.

During Budget Estimates I was asked a series of questions in relation to supports for small businesses. Again, there was complete agreement and acknowledgement that businesses are facing a collection of pressures right now, an extraordinary collection of pressures from that tight labour market, to inflation, to carrying far more debt than they have historically, coming out of the pandemic, to supply chain issues.

I was asked as part of that Estimates process: What is your government doing for those small businesses as they are carrying that debt and so forth? I said during my response during Estimates, in terms of what we can do, some of the best things we can do is support those businesses to look at ways that they can increase their productivity and their efficiency, to look at ways through immigration and skills training, that we can create the workforce that they need.

There is reference as well to a report from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Basically, it referenced - I get many pieces of correspondence from the CFIB and the particular piece of correspondence that I was asked about, actually when we got back to the office, I had not received it. I later did receive it with an apology as it had only

been sent to the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, as it was targeted towards the budget. The message inherent in that piece of correspondence was - and I'll use Lunenburg language - steady as she goes.

Please, government, do not, of your own will, throw any more curve balls in our direction. I fully believe that the intent here is not a curve ball, that it is aimed at a support for valued employees within a good-hearted and supportive business community. The reality is that unless we have those conversations and allow the perspective to be shared of how this might impact employers or what additional pressure points would be created and, importantly, then how we can mitigate adding any extra pressures and undue challenges for our business community.

At the end of the day, I think that what we are capable of is to bring something that will meet the spirit of what's been asked for here today - to meet the spirit of what the Canadian Cancer Society has advocated for in terms of job protection, which aligns with the federal government's Employment Insurance sick leave benefit.

We know that cancer is just one of many illnesses and situations that can see someone needing to take time away from their work. Again, we want to be as holistic in approach as is possible.

I certainly appreciate the efforts of the Canadian Cancer Society and other organizations for meeting with our minister and her department to discuss this important issue. We appreciate hearing from individuals and groups, and we solicit wherever possible as well. Certainly, in my department, we solicit the input of the business community to help us in making the best possible policies.

As a government, we want to hear from Nova Scotians to better understand the issues that are important to them. That's exactly the strategy or approach that we have taken across all our departments - certainly in health care and getting out the door early with our health care tours, and a year later, again going out to meet with the frontline workers, and then the second time around more with the communities.

I do feel that is the signature of our government. It is not at odds with "more, faster," but it is absolutely tied to an approach that sees us get the best possible results for the legislation that we sponsor.

Again, I have only been inspired by the work of our minister. I don't want to turn her all shades of pink, but she and others on this side of the House - I suspect that it's the same on the other side of the House - it would just be information that may not have come to us. We will endure our own personal trials and tribulations, whether they relate to our personal health, or whether they relate to the health and welfare of our families. We will try to tuck those concerns away in a side pocket as much as is possible, while we deal with the responsibilities of these very privileged offices that we hold.

In the case of the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration, I remember getting a message, and it was that she had felt she had to share something with her constituents, so having done that - by the way, you guys should know. That was literally the tone. Almost like saying, please don't make a big thing about this.

[4:00 p.m.]

I do believe that for many people - and a good friend of mine who's going through an illness right now - work can be, if they're physically able to be there - and we know that there are treatments that can be involved where you are not up to doing something. Sometimes you can do something the day after, but two days later, you sure can't.

Yet being able to participate in some form of routine, being able to retain some form of normality to recognize that you are still that person - not simply defined as a sick person - is very important. So for reasons having to do with income and economics and household - there is what work brings to many people in terms of their sense of lighting their personal fire. Their sense of self being tied to the work that they do.

So it becomes a very important - maybe a more important than ever before - outlet for them to be able, when able, to go into a workplace. This is why I understand not simply the 26 weeks, but the ability for those 26 weeks to be broken down into parcels so that the individual can take treatment, take time for recovery, and still stay involved - and still stay current with their files, with their colleagues. To stay up on all that crazy information that we do share as close work colleagues sometimes. I can't go into some of the blue details of the stuff we'll find out, but you all know it's true.

Anyway, suffice to say that I am completely convinced that employers will meet us and will go shoulder-to-shoulder. Consulting them can only improve the bill we bring.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on an introduction.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined by a constituent and friend of mine, Yvon Robichaud. He is the deputy superintendent of the provincial jail in Yarmouth - a jail that I hope the Minister of Justice will open up soon.

Yvon has lived a life of service in our community. He followed in the footsteps of his father, Dr. Ben Robichaud, who served in this house as a member between 1967 and 1970, and served the community as an optometrist for more years than anybody can count.

I just want the House to please join me in welcoming Yvon to today's proceedings.  
(Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome, and we hope you enjoy your time here at Province House.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Madam Speaker, we're moving on with Opposition Business.

THE SPEAKER: Order. We haven't closed debate on Bill No. 306. Sorry, we haven't adjourned it. But we still have a few minutes left and the honourable member for Eastern Passage would like to speak.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: How much time is left?

THE SPEAKER: You have a minute and 10 seconds.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Madam Speaker, I'm adjourning debate on Bill No. 306, the Serious Illness Leave Act - so motion to adjourn on that.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 306.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Madam Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Motions Other Than Government Motions.

### **MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: We're in this together, Madam Speaker. For the next piece of Opposition business, I am going to call Resolution No. 622.

**Res. 622, MLA Expulsion Resolution: Need to Repeal - Recog. - notice given April 6, 2023. (Hon. Zach Churchill)**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: This was a resolution that our leader put forward in the face of a resolution that had come forward from the government side.

I don't know if everyone has a copy of the resolution, so I'll just run through it very quickly. Is that appropriate, Mr. Clerk? I can just speak to it.

Basically, what the resolution calls for is that Resolution No. 598 be struck from the orders of the day. That resolution, in fact, was a resolution to expel one of the members of this House, Madam Speaker.

To be clear, members have been expelled from this House before. I was here when Trevor Zinck was going to be expelled, but he resigned. I think there was a case where Billy Joe MacLean - I'm not sure if he resigned first or was expelled. It has happened, but it's for criminal activity. It's not for disagreeing with somebody. That's the big difference.

What Resolution No. 598 was, was a threat. It's a threat to the member for Cumberland North: Stay in line, or we're going to kick you out. The member doesn't know when it's going to be employed or how it's going to be employed. The government said, oh, we're not going to do it. But it's still on the order paper, let me be clear, and it can be called at any time.

I would be the first to admit that sometimes the member for Cumberland North can be a pain in the derriere for ministers. I have been one of those ministers, and at times she was a pain in my derriere - I am here to tell you. But she was a pain in my derriere because she cares about the people of her area, and she wants to make sure their voices are heard.

I would submit that Resolution No. 598 is a sledgehammer that did not need to be employed.

I am happy to table the article about Billy Joe MacLean and Trevor Zinck.

I think the Minister of Community Services was deeply hurt by the suggestion that the document the member tabled was an NDA. I don't blame her for being deeply hurt, but do not ascribe to malice what you can ascribe to grief. I believe deeply that the member in question was grieving the loss - and is still grieving the loss - of a young woman who worked for her who, after three years in the wilderness, came to work for the member, and we saw a difference in the member immediately. She was well supported by that young woman.

Madam Speaker, we are not Tennessee. I don't know if folks are following this, but in Tennessee some lawmakers there agreed with protesters who wanted gun control. So the House then began proceedings to kick three members of that House out. They didn't like what they said, and I will table that, Madam Speaker. Actually, I am going to hold on for a second. I'll hold on to that.

To make matters worse, in Tennessee the lawmakers there decided to expel two of the three lawmakers. The two they decided to expel were Black men, and the white female lawmaker they decided to let stand. We are not Tennessee. We don't need to resort to these kinds of things. The resolution No. 598 should be struck from the Orders of the Day. Although the Nashville council reinstated the Black Tennessee lawmakers, that's just until an election is called. Literally, if this resolution stays on the order paper, we are no better than Tennessee. We are going to use a sledgehammer to kick out - potentially, because the Premier says, oh, we're not going to use it, but it's still there. It should be gone because the member never knows - is this the day I am going to say something somebody else doesn't like and they are going to kick me out? To be clear, I have been in this House when my colleagues and I were called child rapists, murderers, all kinds of things. We didn't kick people out.

The now-Premier was judged to have misled the House. We didn't kick him out. If we are going to start kicking people out because we don't like things they say or because we feel they misled the House, well, then that's an interesting bar that we are going to have to meet because I will tell you - and I don't believe that it was in any way intentional, but the Minister of Health and Wellness stood up the other day and had a member's statement about Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia and she read what had been written for her. The one problem was when it came to the programs that she was talking about Family Service being rewarded for. In fact, the dates she gave made it look like this government had started the programs. Guess what? They didn't, and how do I know? Because I was the minister responsible.

The first program, the men's helpline, happened in 2020 in the middle of COVID-19. If we are going to start this, where does it end? I don't believe for a minute that the Minister of Health and Wellness meant to mislead. Somebody wrote something and they changed the dates. If this is the kind of thing we are going to do, where does it stop? I will table the resolution and somewhere in my pile here I have the media notices that went out about Family Service actually getting the award and it shows what the right dates are, Madam Speaker. It is very clear: Someone changed those dates and the minister unwittingly read that member's statement. I don't believe she meant to do it on purpose. I went over and explained it to her.

I just want to be clear, Madam Speaker, that this is a slippery slope. I have to say that when the now-Minister of Community Services, who tabled Resolution No. 598 - when she tabled that particular resolution, I believe that she was told to do so by the centre of government; they said, do those things. What she didn't realize is that it opens up all the questions all over again about that particular incident. We would never have been debating what happened three years ago if she hadn't tabled that resolution. They put their minister at risk when the Premier's office said, table this resolution.

So all those questions come out. What was that? What was the thing that the member tabled? The minister asserted that neither she nor the PC caucus signed an NDA



with the young woman. Was that an actual NDA? We don't know who wrote it. All of those questions came out all over again because of this resolution that was not a good idea.

[4:15 p.m.]

Clearly, the young woman had signed something with somebody, she left her employment, and we never saw her again for three years until she went to work for this member. She signed it with somebody, we don't know who, in part because none of this stuff was ever explained at the time. We don't know why the PC caucus didn't choose to follow the harassment policy of this particular Legislature. Maybe they had a good reason. We don't know.

I have been contacted by people who have used the process, as it's called, to find out - guess what? You have to sign an NDA or a confidentiality agreement before you can even go through the process. So here we are again, knocking up against something that keeps victims quiet.

I look to the member whom they're trying to eject, whom they're trying to have hanging over their shoulders, have this Resolution hanging over her head, day after day. Do you know she has tabled more bills in this House than the entire government caucus this session? Think about the resources that are at the fingertips - (Interruption) Would the Minister for Community Services like to speak? Okay. I thought I heard "shame," but I think I heard "James." That's probably what it was.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Rather than have the banter back and forth, I recognize the honourable member for Bedford Basin.

KELLY REGAN: Think about it. The government, with all its vast array of resources, with departments and staffers and political staffers and everything, this lone member has managed to table more bills than the government this session, twice as many. Let's be clear: By not withdrawing this resolution, it's a shot across the bow to every member in this place. It's a warning to all of us here: Say something we don't like, and we'll kick you out or we'll try to. It's a pattern of behaviour they have engaged in with this particular member, and, again, I will be clear. She was a pain in my butt when I was a minister, but it's a pattern of behaviour we've seen over and over again. It's remarks - "Go block a highway." It's "coven meeting." Just let the member do her darn job.

You know, a wise person once said to me, "When you seek to dig a grave, dig two, because you bury yourself when you go after people." Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the pattern of behaviour we've seen from this government with regard to this particular member has been continuous. I've heard from members who do not feel safe in this Chamber anymore because of the level of vitriol, the games-playing, the overreach when something happens you don't like. Sometimes when you are in government, stuff happens that you don't like. You have to suck it up.

We are not Tennessee, Mr. Speaker. Resolution No. 598 was overreach by this government and I implore you to withdraw it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise to address the motion put forward by the member for Yarmouth, Resolution 622, and therefore also the motion put forward by the member for Pictou West, which it attempts to rescind. At the heart of the motion put forward by the Progressive Conservative caucus, with which this motion deals, is parliamentary privilege, specifically whether MLAs should be restricted in their speech on the floor of this House.

I think it's clear to all members that, in fact, our speech is protected in this space, as has been confirmed by many rulings of Speakers past and by the Supreme Court of Canada. We are free to argue in favour of or against any government bill or expenditure or other issue that may land here, with as much vigour as we are able and which we think the matter deserves. Not only are we free to do this but I would argue that we are required to.

Sometimes a member will take issue with what is said and with what is tabled. Sometimes they will take issue with the truth of an argument, but in the end, these debates come to a vote, as this motion that still sits on the order paper could at any time. When they come to a vote, in a majority government, that vote will always pass.

This government has a majority, and they have the power to win any vote that requires a simple majority, as this motion would. What the House is being asked to consider is whether a member should be removed from her ability to represent her constituents in this Chamber based on what is said on the floor of this House.

As has been mentioned, since these resolutions were both tabled, two members of the Assembly in Tennessee were, in fact, kicked out of the House for protesting gun violence, in the context of a majority government that believes firmly in gun rights. They were kicked out of the House, they were unable to represent their constituents, for protest. In many of the speeches they made at the time and subsequently, they pointed out that there were times when the two men who were ejected, who were African American, when the debates would have been about whether they were allowed to be in that House. It's not a perfect analogy, but I think it's important to point out that many of the rules of this Chamber were not made for women, they were not made for non-binary folks, they were not made for BIPOC folks. They were made for men - men who are white and men who have privilege.

I think Parliamentary privilege is, in fact, one of the only rules that does protect us all equally. I think of an example - and I don't stand here to challenge a Speaker's ruling but I will just raise the example of the point of privilege that was brought earlier. There was a point of privilege and it was ruled out of order, as points of privilege often are,

because it was not brought at the earliest practicable moment, or whatever Bosc & Gagnon's wording is.

We've talked about this notion of the earliest practicable moment for a woman to disclose that she has been mistreated many times in many contexts, particularly in justice. It is now widely accepted that one person's ability to come forward and report a wrongdoing is not, in fact, equal to another person's ability to come forward and do that, particularly where there may be some perception of intimidation. This is an example of a rule that may, in fact, not apply equally to all members of this House, particularly in the case of the member's point where she was alleging a pattern. Did the pattern start at the first instance, or was the pattern discovered last week? That's for the Speaker to decide.

I only raise this to illustrate that it's not a level playing field in here. This rule of privilege is one of the only things that does, in fact, level that playing field and allow us to speak without fear.

I want to say that I do not think the floor of this Legislature is the place to debate the story of a young woman who was treated terribly, suffered greatly, and ultimately died.

But I also want to say that all of this arose in the context of a bill put forward by our party last year, a bill to prevent the misuse of non-disclosure agreements. Our bill - like legislation passed in P.E.I., 17 states and federally in the United States, and in Ireland - would render this conversation moot.

We wouldn't be talking about whether an NDA was signed, and with whom, against the backdrop of the real human suffering of a young woman, and the devastation of her family. We wouldn't be talking about it because such an instrument would be illegal.

It is our position that, while not retroactive, the single most useful thing this government could do, right now, would be to pass this legislation today, with all-party consent and ensure that no one else has to endure this and that this never comes up again in this House. I am confident in saying that this government would have the full support of the Opposition in this matter, and something good could come from this awful situation. Conversely, I do not think that ejecting the member from Cumberland North and preventing her from taking her seat is the right thing to do.

The power this government holds to censure must be used very selectively - ideally, as has been mentioned, in the case in criminal wrongdoing of a member, or other serious illegal infraction. As members, we all, from time to time, feel mischaracterized, hurt, and unfairly implicated, by the words of others in this Chamber. I would go so far as to say every day.

Nonetheless, we persist. We persist in doing the work Nova Scotians elected us to do, the work of representing our constituents, advocating for their hopes, addressing their

needs, and trying to remedy their challenges. It is our position that to prevent another member from doing this is the most serious tool at the government's disposal, and we do not believe it should be used in this case. We stand in support of this motion to rescind the notice that was originally brought.

[4:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Being an elected member of this House of Assembly is a privilege, and it is an honour. It is a privilege that I take very, very seriously. I ask members to remember that moment in time, that very first time, you took the oath to take your seat in this Chamber. Think about that moment when you took that oath. I remember coming in here my first time feeling very humbled, overwhelmed: Oh my gosh, I'm nothing compared to these people surrounding me. How could I do this job? How could I be worthy of being in here?

It was with support from colleagues on all sides that I built a confidence over time. Even today, a decade later, I look around, and I look at the brilliance in some of our newest members, how they speak, and how passionate they are. I think, oh my gosh, they're so much better than me. They are so strong and independent.

I do want to offer a few comments regarding abuse of power - specifically, the abuse of power that comes with being an elected member who can hide behind parliamentary privilege in this Chamber. Does that privilege include the freedom to make unsubstantiated, egregious allegations free from accountability? Talk about setting a dangerous, a very dangerous precedent in this Chamber.

The member for Cumberland North stood in this Chamber, with all the privileges and protection it offers and stated that an individual was coerced into signing an NDA with the PC caucus. The document she tabled to substantiate her claim was nothing more than an unsigned, undated piece of paper that could have come from anywhere.

The truth is optional, isn't it, Mr. Speaker? Which I believe was their approach that was used for the member's benefit in an attempt to garner support for her own private member's bill - to draw attention. We never saw it ever before or discussed before. Conversations about NDAs with me started years ago. I still have conversations with people. I'm still listening to survivors and victims and trying to figure out what is right.

There is, in fact, no NDA between the named individual and the PC caucus, nor the PC party, the current Leader or myself as the previous Interim Leader. Further, given that no NDA exists between these parties, there certainly was no coercion. The question is then, who did create the NDA? The member for Cumberland North was quoted in the media, "It is unsigned. I don't have an answer for that . . ."

Certainly made you guys believe that someone coerced someone. That person who's not here with us, who doesn't have a voice. When the member finally spoke to media, she did not make the same allegations outside this Chamber that she made while enjoying her parliamentary privilege. The member's comments in the Legislature here were - and I'll table it, "Mx. Speaker, this bill is personal. My employee was coerced into signing an NDA with the Progressive Conservative caucus."

The intent of the notice of motion that was put forward by myself, supported by my team, was to have the member for Cumberland North simply retract the portion of her comments that were inaccurate and speculative. She could simply repeat the comments she made to media within these walls. But she chose not to.

Let's clarify. I heard a few members mention Tennessee, and they were kicked out. They were kicked out, but Mr. Speaker, they weren't kicked out for lying. That's apples and oranges. They weren't kicked out for lying, were they? The strong language used . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm going to ask the member to retract the word "lying" and substitute with another. (Interruption)

It's just that the word - no, I know you're not accusing anybody.

I apologize. There's a difference between the word "lying" and "liar."

Okay, I apologize.

KARLA MACFARLANE: The strong language used in Resolution No. 598 was used purposely to demonstrate the gravity of the member's allegations. The purpose was never to silence her. In fact, it was to encourage the member to speak the truth.

The truth should be valued. My mother always said, you're only as good as your word. False allegations do not just do harm to the people they are about, they harm every one of us. The privilege we hold by being present in this Chamber - my hope is that the member for Cumberland North clarifies for the members what the document was that she tabled as she so clarified it for the media outside this chamber of privilege.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: There's a lot I could say but I am going to choose to say little. There has already been a lot said before today. I shared a lot yesterday about the pattern of intimidation, the patterns of threats, the bullying, and I shared four cases, but they started long before that, but I don't think that's helpful.

What we are debating today is democracy and the ability to have privilege to stand in this House. I was careful with everything I said outside this Chamber because I know

from experience of being threatened with legal action in January, after just helping a man who had just lost his wife who died, and I was threatened with legal action then.

I'm no fool, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely know that if I stand outside this Chamber and say anything that would give them the ability to sue me, it will happen. I know everyone else in this Chamber knows the same thing will happen to them. The media know that; they have received several cease and desist letters since this government - even before they came into their position of power. It is a very real, legitimate threat.

The issue around the person - and I do regret ever bringing my former employee into that debate, because it's unfair to her family. However, I will say that they were here in the Chamber the day before. They wanted to be here when I tabled that bill. They want the truth to be told and they want their daughter to be honoured. By continuing debate that involves her, I do not believe it will bring her honour, and I think that's important. Enough has been said about that. Her parents have made a statement and we need to leave them in their peace, out of respect.

I want to echo the Leader of the NDP and say that the issue that caused all this commotion, and again in Question Period today, is around non-disclosure agreements in sexual assaults. I thought that by tabling a bill that was similar to the Leader of the NDP's but focusing in on political parties and using the white paper from Equal Voice, which focuses on sexual harassment and intimidation in political parties and in legislatures across this country, would be a good document to share, to show that not only should non-disclosure agreements not be used in general in sexual assault, but it's an actual issue that we should be addressing right here, in our own Legislative Assembly and every one across this country.

We should be doing everything we can to protect our Pages, to be protecting our political staff, and all staff who work for our parties and everyone who is within our parties. That was the intent of the bill.

Sometimes - definitely the bills that I table are a reflection of the issues that people bring to me. Bills tabling legislation are a tool that we have to try to create changes that are needed, to protect against future harms. I believe that non-disclosure agreements should not be allowed to be used in cases of sexual harassment and assault from incidents that happened within political parties. I believe they should not be used at all in this province of Nova Scotia, and I believe the bill that the NDP have tabled here in this Legislature should be passed. This is a very passionate, important topic to me, long before this recent issue involving someone very dear to me who was wronged - by everyone. I'm not going to go there.

Long before I became elected, I met victims of sexual assault. In almost every case, the perpetrator hired these victims, or preyed upon these victims who had low self-esteem, were meek in personality, had zero or very low confidence - and they preyed upon them.

They continued to do so simply because they had a lawyer who was able to convince the victim that if they brought this forward, they would be shamed, they would go through public persecution, and that no one would believe them. They convinced the victim to sign an NDA, silence them - and the perpetrator continues on.

It's so wrong. We have the ability in this Chamber, every one of us, to pass legislation that could prevent that. I don't understand the logic behind the people who have the majority in this place. I don't understand the logic of not passing legislation that will protect not only the victims that we have now but future victims. I don't understand that logic. That is the heart of the issue. All of these other things to distract and take away from that, I think we need to keep coming back about the issue - and that is non-disclosure agreements should not be allowed to be used in sexual assault and harassment cases.

Obviously, the notice of motion to try to remove me from my chair is very scary. It's very intimidating. If the member and the government want to know if it worked, I can tell you, it did. My question now is: What are they going to do next, Mr. Speaker?

Who's it going to be next? Is it going to be one of my family members? Is it going to be one of my children? Who else is the government going to target, because they keep targeting me? I grew up to be a strong woman. I'm not going to back down in the face of adversity - certainly not to bullies.

I've received several messages since my speech yesterday, that this is an example to other women and to other people, to not back down under threats of adversity, by people who simply have more power, or are in a position of power to do so - and to stand on truth. That foundation, Mr. Speaker - I know there are some people on the other side who know what I'm talking about. When truth is your foundation, no one can shake that - whether you're in this Legislature or in any position that you may hold.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to thank the member for Cumberland North for her comments, and the comments of the Leader of the New Democratic Party, as well as our deputy leader, my colleague.

This is a pretty serious issue. I do believe that censorship of a member in the House cannot be taken lightly. It is an extreme overreach of a majority government to do that - on the basis of disagreement of fact. Mr. Speaker, I'll remind you, how many points of privilege or points of order have you ruled out of order because you've called them disagreement of fact? That happens weekly in this Chamber, and nobody's threatened with expulsion or censorship, and the inability to represent their constituents in this House because of that. That does happen here, and it happens on the government side.

We've had to sit on this side this week and hear the Minister of Health and Wellness say that under a previous government the health care budget was cut every single year. In fact, if you go look at the budget documents, you'll see the budget was increased every year.

[4:45 p.m.]

I had to sit on that side in government - I'll remind the members - and face false allegations toward myself after the birth of my second child, by the way. Not fun. I had to do that for three weeks in this Chamber. Not at one point in time was there a motion that came from the majority government of the day to censor or expel the members who were doing it. Not once. These seats are sacred to our society. They're sacred to our democracy. Each one of us here has the right to represent our constituents in this House.

There is precedent for expulsion and censorship. Here in Nova Scotia, those revolve around criminal activity and criminal charges, which we can agree are very different circumstances than a disagreement of the presentation of facts.

I do worry that this is a pattern of behaviour with the member for Cumberland North in particular. We have seen that member kicked out of the Progressive Conservative caucus. That member was threatened with legal action from the Department of Justice. I have never - in my close to 13 years in this Chamber and 8 years in government - heard of the Department of Justice issuing a cease-and-desist letter to an MLA for representing their constituents. It is unbelievable that happened.

That pattern of behaviour continues in this Chamber with signed consent from the member for Cumberland North representing her constituents - who by the way, only brought up information that was in the obituary of the deceased person. No private information was shared, and the Department of Justice threatens her with legal action at 12 o'clock on a Friday night. I've never seen a public servant do that, particularly without direction that comes from the centre of government.

We saw it on the record in this House. I asked a question related to NDAs, and this issue that the member for Cumberland North brought up, which is actually relevant to the debate in this Chamber around the restriction of use of non-disclosure agreements. What was the Premier's answer? I dare you to go say that in front of the cameras. It's on the public record in this House. Why would I be dared to go say that in front of the cameras? By the way, I did, because the Premier knows there's threat of litigation outside of this Chamber, where our privileges cease to protect us.

We are seeing this pattern of behaviour. We know the media have gotten letters from the government or their lawyer. I know radio stations in the last campaign had cease-and-desist letters because they didn't like the ads that were being run against them. This is a pattern of behaviour. It is one that involves bullying and intimidation. The irony is that



this is exactly what non-disclosure agreements are used for: to silence people, to scare them, to have threat of legal action hanging over their heads. If the government caucus does not understand the irony of their actions related to this, I think they have some reflecting to do.

The member for Cumberland North, as well as members of this caucus, have asked questions pertinent to that conversation about legislation seeking to restrict the use of non-disclosure agreements. Is there a conflict of interest here? We don't know. There was an incident in 2018. The facts of that are not fully known because the party of the day did not follow the code of conduct rules and harassment rules of the House, of the Speaker. They followed their own in their party, which was different, and they were secretive about it.

Years later, you have a member in the Chamber who's defending this individual who is unfortunately deceased, very tragic. A lot of us knew her. There are friends across party lines with that individual. You've even got the parents coming out now and talking about this. They said their daughter was coerced into signing an NDA. That is a fact, but what was worse was the total abandonment she endured from the caucus office. I will table that.

You can shake your heads all you want on this. This is what the parents of that individual are saying. There are obviously questions about this, because it is a serious issue. It's an issue that was kept secret from the public, where allegedly there was use of non-disclosure agreements to keep everybody quiet, where the alleged victim was then fired or ceased to work in the caucus office. It's normal that in a conversation around restriction of use of NDAs that these topics are going to come up. They are going to come up because the answers were not provided at the time when this happened.

The governing caucus - the PC caucus - chose secrecy, protecting themselves, and perhaps the individuals, instead of opening up their doors and letting some light in on this situation. Five years later, to come in and threaten a member with censorship and expulsion from this Chamber - because she is talking about something that is pertinent to pieces of legislation that are brought before this House - is absolutely unacceptable.

It sets a very dangerous precedent where if there is a disagreement of fact, any party that has a majority government can censor and expel a member. What happens if the majority is only one seat and then you pass a confidence motion, and there is a disagreement of fact? Does the governing party then have the opportunity to expel a sitting member who has a right to be here - a right that comes from their constituents, that doesn't come from this Chamber? Think about that. Think about the precedent that this sends. That threat is still looming over the head of the member for Cumberland North.

This resolution, Resolution No. 622, would give the government an opportunity to remove that threat so that the member for Cumberland North, and all members, can feel that they are able to represent their constituents, have uncomfortable conversations in here

that our constituents and the public demand of us to have - without threat of losing our seat. There are individuals in Tennessee who just went through this very thing. They were expelled from their seats.

The Minister for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women has accused a member now in this Chamber of lying at least twice during this debate. I think if that was brought to a point of order, Mr. Speaker, you would say that is a disagreement of fact. The fact is that I don't know if that's the case or not. I believe there is truth to the story. I believe that because of what the parents said. I believe that because of some of the rumours that were going around at the time. Guess what? Just because someone says something you don't like or does mislead the House, you don't have a right to expel them because you have a majority. Again, there are cases of this happening every single week.

We have a government that takes credit for the actions of the previous government. Is that not misleading the House? We had a Minister of Health and Wellness who again today said that under a previous government, the health care budget was cut every single year, despite the fact that the budgetary documents would indicate the opposite. Is there a threat of expulsion for that member? Is there? There hasn't been, because guess what? We can do that in here. We can disagree. We can argue. We can debate, but we can only do that if we are able to hold our seats - and that is fundamental to how this House works.

We have this expulsion that happened in Tennessee. There has been outcry across the United States over this: "Expulsion of Tennessee Lawmakers Jeopardizes Democracy." I will table that. That's one headline. "Tennessee becomes new front in battle for American democracy" - and I will table that. "Ousted Tennessee lawmakers say move is 'attempt to crucify democracy.'" I will table that. "Tennessee House Republicans expel Democrats who participated in gun protest." This is an affront to democracy, Mr. Speaker. I will table that.

It is well-accepted in the British parliamentary system that members have privilege and a right to represent their constituents in this House. It is an accepted fact in the U.S. that members have a right in the congressional system to sit in these Chambers and represent their constituents. All members, even those representing their constituency independently and Opposition members, even when faced with a majority government, have a right to debate, to argue on behalf of our constituents, and to push hard questions towards the government without threat of reprisal.

That's our job, and that is why this government needs to pass this resolution so we can take this threat of censorship and expulsion off the head of the member for Cumberland North and, in so doing, off the heads of every single member who is not sitting on the government side in this House.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore - I'm sorry, Eastern Passage. It's getting late.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: It is God's country. You must come out and visit it some day.

What we are debating, or should be debating here today, are the merits of Resolution No. 598. Let me be clear: Resolution No. 598 is about formally correcting the record and clarifying assertions that are not accurate.

Providing accurate information is part of our privilege here as elected representatives. The classic definition of parliamentary privilege is found in Erskine May's *Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, and I'll table all these documents at the end. "Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively . . . and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals."

All too often, debate here descends into scoring political points and getting under another member's skin. That is not what Resolution No. 598 is about. I ask all members to remember the first time they took the oath to take their seats in this Chamber. I remember the thrill of being one of a very small number of people to have ever been given this incredible honour. I, too, remember the anxiety of wanting to get everything right, to do my best to represent my constituents effectively with accuracy and with integrity.

I have misspoken in this House. I knew that I enjoyed the parliamentary privilege of freedom of speech, but I corrected the record, and I apologized. That's because I understand that my privilege of freedom of speech should not prevent me from doing the right thing. It is well established by Speakers in the House of Commons that members have far-reaching and powerful privilege of freedom of speech.

That is why it is incumbent upon all of us to exercise that privilege and responsibility with extreme care. Speaker Fraser reflected on this responsibility in 1987, and he said, and I quote, "Such a privilege confers grave responsibilities on those who are protected by it. By that I mean specifically the Hon. Members of this place. The consequences of its abuse can be terrible." I'm going to read that again. "The consequences of" the abuse of privilege "can be terrible. Innocent people could be slandered with no redress available to them. Reputations could be destroyed on the basis of false rumour. All Hon. Members are conscious of the care they must exercise in availing themselves of their absolute privilege of freedom of speech."

Likewise, Speaker Parent also emphasized the need for members to use extreme caution when exercising their right to speak freely in the House when he said "paramount to our political and parliamentary systems is the principle of freedom of speech, a member's right to stand in this House unhindered to speak his or her mind. However when debate in the House centres on sensitive issues, as it often does, I would expect that

members would always bear in mind the possible effects of their statements and hence be prudent in their tone and choice of words.”

[5:00 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, the motion that the Leader of the Opposition seeks to strike from the record can be boiled down to a choice of words. On March 29, 2023, during debate on Bill No. 278, a member tabled a document and characterized it as, and I quote, and I’ll table the document, a member characterized the document as an NDA between an individual and the PC caucus.

They chose those exact words, even though the document was unsigned. They chose those words even though the document was undated. They chose those words even though the document gave no indication about who the party or parties were with whom they may have entered into that agreement.

I want to say that again. They chose the words: this is an NDA between an individual and the PC caucus, even though the truth was that this was a document that was unsigned, undated and gave no indication about who the party or parties were who may have entered into that agreement. Let that sink in for a minute.

We take tabling of documents very seriously in this Legislature. This member made a statement about a document that they were tabling, that this document that they were tabling was an NDA between an individual and the PC caucus. Mr. Speaker, I want to be very, very clear. The document tabled by that member was not a document that was prepared for, was not a document entered into, was not a document used by the PC party, was not a document used by the PC caucus, and was not a document used by the PC Interim Leader or our current Leader.

So, just in case anyone is still unclear, further, on March 29, 2023, during debate on Bill No. 278, the member went on to state that an employee was coerced, and I’m quoting, and we’ll table it, the member stated, “My employee was coerced into signing an NDA with the Progressive Conservative caucus.”

That is a devastating accusation. More so because it is simply untrue. Here are the facts - and I would hope in this House that people care about the actual facts: Neither the PC caucus nor the PC party ever had an individual sign an NDA respecting this matter.

I did not hear that come from others who spoke about this, other than the member for Pictou West. The member stated that an employee was coerced into signing an NDA and that was simply untrue. Does that not matter? Of course it does. It should matter. It certainly matters to me, Mr. Speaker.

I want to contrast those accusations made in this Chamber with what the member said outside of this Chamber. That's what this is about, and about the documents she tabled when talking to reporters on April 4<sup>th</sup>. The member did not tell reporters that the document she tabled was an agreement between an individual and the PC caucus. What they said, and I am directly quoting: I think the question is, who did create that NDA? It is unsigned. I don't have the answer to that.

For those who weren't aware that that statement was made, I am going to read it again. What the reporters were told outside of this Legislature by the member: I think the question is, who did create that NDA? Let that sit for a second. That is not what was said inside this Chamber.

The member went on to say, who did create that NDA? That should matter. What the member tabled was not an NDA. Who did create the NDA? That's a good question. The member went on to say that it is unsigned. I don't have the answer to that.

The truth matters, Mr. Speaker. The member could have said the same words in that exact sentence inside this Chamber and that would put this whole thing to rest. That's all it would take, and it would have fulfilled the objective of Resolution No. 598, which is about the truth, it is about setting the record straight and providing accurate information. I would hope that would matter to all members of this Legislature.

Resolution No. 598 has been described by quite a few colourful adjectives in the last week. That is politics, I understand that, but this is not simply a disagreement of facts amongst members. What that resolution is about is the responsibility that goes along with our far-reaching privileges, about the integrity of the work that we are so privileged to do in this Chamber. What this resolution is about is the responsibility that every one of us should be feeling in their heart that it is about the integrity of the work that we do, that we are privileged to do, for however long God graces our time to be in this Chamber. What the resolution is truly about is setting the record straight when there is an inaccuracy on the record.

This is about accuracy and honesty and members taking responsibility when they have said something that is not accurate. I know it is not always easy to admit a mistake. Certainly in this Chamber where it is on camera, it is even harder. But when we took the oath to serve our constituents and all Nova Scotians, we pledged that we would do so with honesty and with integrity. Having worked with the members in this Chamber, I know that it is not always easy to admit a mistake, to stand up and say, I said something; it wasn't accurate; I didn't mean it; I might have hurt someone's feelings; and I want to retract it.

That is what this resolution is about, Mr. Speaker. It might not always be easy to admit a mistake, but it will always be the right thing to do.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: It's a difficult subject for me to address personally, but I do want to add something to the debate that I feel has been missing, and maybe because of my experience, I can address that.

As many members know, we went through, as a family, a very traumatic event in 2014 where we lost our son Caleb, which made, at a certain point, national news and actually provincial news extensively. It was a difficult time for us. I don't know if we have clearly articulated on this side of the House our own grief, which I have seen across our staff and across our caucus, at the loss that the family has endured here, and how public this has all been.

I don't know if they're listening today or not, but it is my desire to convey that to them. I have experienced that similar loss of a young person, an untimely death. I have talked about it previously in the Legislature. I know the new members wouldn't be aware of this, but there's a few things I know. I know that there's nothing that we can ever say that's going to make it better, and there's no way it'll ever stop hurting.

But I know their pain. I know part of their pain. I know my colleagues deeply loved this young lady and cared for her. The staff who worked directly with her deeply cared for her. They were there for her. They went to the funeral. They cared for her very deeply. So in that sense, this debate has been traumatic for us. It's been traumatic as a caucus to be talking about this again, this untimely loss of this young lady.

Another part of the trauma for us actually is - and I just want to tell a story. When I was first in the Legislature, and I think it was in my first session, I was asking a question in Question Period. I just read the question, and the question named an individual who was an employee of the government.

Afterward, the Premier, Stephen McNeil, came over and said, John, someone wrote that question for you, didn't they? And I said, Yes, they did. And he said, We try not to name individuals in here, so that their part in this political arena is not forever and ever and ever - and he didn't say all that, but he just said, we try not to name individuals.

I understood exactly what he was saying, and since then, very rarely - I mean, we name individuals all the time for good things, and then tell them afterwards, like they won a tournament or did something really good. I mean, we do that all the time. But when there's things that are complicated and difficult in the individual's lives, we try not to name them.

Unfortunately, that has not happened here, and this has all been - again, forever - a young person's worst moment in their life will be forever enshrined in Hansard, unfortunately, in some way or another, in a searchable database.

So from that point of view, that's been traumatic for us too. Very hard for us to see this happen.

[5:15 p.m.]

To the family, I just want to say, on behalf of the Premier and my colleagues, especially the ones who were there and lived through some of that, this was a traumatic experience for us at the time as a caucus, and we want to extend our absolute sympathy and condolences to the family and let them know that we share their grief. We share their grief at the loss of a beautiful young woman who was so capable and talented, who loved this House and the Rules of this House and who served as Page in this House. We share that grief and that loss.

It's a complicated situation. We can't bring it back. We can't change it, but we've lived through it ourselves. I've lived through similar, very public circumstances and that's not easy. It's not easy to go to the grocery store. It's not easy just to go shopping. It's not easy to be out and about in town when your family name is in the media like that, in a complicated circumstance which we went through. It had mental health complications.

On behalf of our caucus and to all members of the House, I want you to know that this has been difficult for us and painful. We want the family to know that, as a caucus, we share their grief.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: At this point I'm going to adjourn debate on Resolution No. 622. I so move.

THE SPEAKER: Debate on the resolution is a motion to adjourn.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm now going to call Bill No. 284 - School Lunch Program Act.

**Bill No. 284 - School Lunch Program Act**

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: It's a pleasure to stand to speak for a few minutes on Bill No. 284, which is the introduction of a universal school lunch program for all students in the province from Primary to Grade 9.

We've talked a lot about the importance of food security and the financial crunch that families are finding themselves in at this time. We try to find resolutions to these sorts of situations. As government, we don't have the answer for everything. As legislators, we don't have the answers to everything, but we try to bounce ideas off of each other.

The Opposition holds the government to account. The government comes in, they have policies, they've made campaign promises. We also find ourselves in times where all of the best-laid plans kind of go out the window. We're left to scramble and try to figure out what's going to be the best answer. What can we do for the betterment of the people in our province?

I paid close attention during the election campaign of 2021. It's very obvious. It's been on the record numerous times. This is a government that wants to focus on health care and health care is a priority. We see it in their budget. We see it in their messaging. Health care is their priority.

There are some things that are left that are maybe not the obvious connections to health care because they're not the system, or they're not addressing the needs of the health care system. Looking at it from a preventive and proactive approach, when we talk about access to healthy food, food security, and raising healthy, food-literate children, the long-term effects on the health care system will come. This will be something. This is an investment in health care, when you invest in a healthy lifestyle with children.

We've talked about the physicalities. I have a document in my hand that I will table at the end, which is information from Feed Nova Scotia that I'm going to refer to a couple of times. It was a study that was done in 2021 on food insecurity in the province. Right off the bat, the first line in this report is "More than 1 in 6 households in Nova Scotia were food insecure in 2021. That amounts to 168,000 Nova Scotians." Think about that. Some quick math. That's 10 per cent of our population? Oh, it's 15 per cent.

That's a startling number. That is quite shocking. This was in 2021. I don't have statistics, but we've seen patterns that would indicate that that number has only grown. I see in my own constituency the use of food banks has doubled and tripled in some instances.

People are struggling to find affordable housing. People are struggling to make ends meet. We've talked about this in the Chamber. Parents are making decisions over buying groceries or buying prescription medication or paying their electric bill or paying their



heating bill. This is something that I know all of us as members have come across our desk. We've had these conversations. We work with community organizations, we work with churches in our ridings, we've worked with individuals to try to help families that are in need.

The physical ramifications on having access to healthy food for our youngest Nova Scotians - Grade Primary to Grade 9 - are well-documented but today actually is Yellow Day, and Yellow Day is a recognition of the counsellors and psychotherapists in the province of Nova Scotia. I actually want to talk about the mental health impacts on students when it comes to healthy eating and food insecurity. I was a high school teacher and then a guidance counsellor. I had never worked in an elementary school. Didn't know anything about what little kids know or what they deal with. Give me teenagers, give me adolescents all day long. I can handle whatever they throw at me no matter how crazy it is.

My first counselling position was on the South Shore and I was piloting a preventive mental health program through three elementary schools - one in Newcombville, one in Pentz, and one in Petite Rivière, Nova Scotia, and let me tell you, the amount of problems that little kids have, the amount of emotional issues - and we are talking 15 years ago now. This is before the pandemic. This is before the information overload that has happened with social media. These were normal kids growing up in rural Nova Scotia who had crises in their lives and had problems.

Don't underestimate how a healthy breakfast or a healthy lunch or access to food could impact the mental health of these students. If you are coming to school and you are hungry and you are 5 or 6 years old or you are trying to do a six- or seven-hour day in the classroom and you have no stability - whatever is happening in your life, whatever it is, whether it's developmental challenges or whether it's divorcing parents or whether it's bullying or triangling - which is that fun thing that girls do, where there are three girlfriends and two pit each other against the one. That happens quite a bit. If you are a mom or a dad to a little girl, that has probably happened at some point. Whatever the issue is, being hungry only exacerbates those issues. Being hungry makes it harder to learn. It makes it harder to sit still and pay attention, and then you get behind.

I hope that the minister will have a chance to get up and speak to this. I know that there is talk and that we have pilot programs, and what this piece of legislation is, as I've mentioned before, is just to secure this. It's just to put it in place. We want the federal government to give us money. We want the feds to buy into this and to support this but we also want to have it not take too long. We want to be able to implement it right away. We want that commitment from this government. This isn't something that would start a rollout in September of 2023. This would be September 2024, so there would be time, and it would give all of our kids access to this, not just in certain areas.

I apologize because I don't have the information of where the pilot programs that are taking place are happening, but in response to a question today in Question Period, I

believe the Minister of Agriculture had mentioned a number of areas and they were in - not to take away from any of these areas because, again, I think this should be taking place in the entire province - but none of them were in the Halifax area. None of them were in our capital and when I tell you what we see as an urban/suburban MLA, it's overwhelming. It's overwhelming the need that is here in this province. It's overwhelming how expensive it continuously gets for people to live.

That isn't to take away from the struggles that are happening outside of HRM, but I stand here to represent my constituents, and it is in a suburban area. They are being pressured out. There is nowhere to move, there's nowhere to live, they can't afford where they live, they get pushed out to the outskirts, and out and out and out.

There are decisions that are made every day about, like I said, making choices that shouldn't be choices for anyone. It shouldn't be a matter of, okay, this is my paycheque, or this is the money that's coming in this month. I've got to put this much towards rent, I've got to put this much towards - maybe we won't. Maybe we'll skip the oil bill, or we'll pay the electric bill this month in the hopes of paying the oil bill next month - or better yet, which happens quite a bit - I have three credit cards. I'm going to pay the minimum payment on this credit card, and then put everything down on that credit card, and if I can just keep on playing this shell game of paying minimum payments, then maybe I can get to a point where I can get through the next three months or the next six months.

This is a very real reality. This is something that brings on even more stress. It brings on even more issues.

The introduction of this, the ability to complement the breakfast program that already exists - the breakfast program that can be shored up - is to have a partnership where you know that your kids are covered. It's one less thing that you have to worry about.

It's one less thing that teachers have to worry about. What happens in schools is teachers don't let the kids go hungry, and student support workers don't let the kids go hungry, and the lunch monitors and support staff in the school don't let the kids go hungry. They go to Costco, and they'll buy a bunch of granola bars and a bunch of fruit snacks, and they'll put them in the classroom. If you need something, you come.

Again, these are all just little band-aids to a bigger solution, and it's a stress that already our education system feels the burden. Go back to the mental health issues. Our education system feels the burdens of the mental health trauma that is occurring. The effects of the pandemic, if nothing else, have left us with a generation of kids who are afraid to socialize normally - who feel more comfortable in front of a screen than face to face.

It normalized things that - God, I feel like an old person. Back when I was a kid, you went outside, and you played. You were able to engage. I watch my friends, and I

watch them struggle with their children, of putting that back together. I watch my friends' kids struggle with going to school, kids who would normally not - it would never be an issue. I'd never in a million years think that they would be a personality or have a struggle - to be afraid to go to school, and again, for no other reason than that socialization aspect of it.

[5:30 p.m.]

There are so many levels that parents are dealing with, that teachers are dealing with, that kids are dealing with. When you have a solution in front of you that has the ability to take away one of those stressors and help alleviate some of the other stressors, it feels like it should be a no-brainer. It feels like this is something that could be an easy win for government. This could be a signalling of how important health care is to them - another signalling, because I know they've made signals. They constantly make signals as to health care being important, and the health of our population being important.

This is another way. This would be a way to show that it's preventive, that it's outside of the box, that we're thinking about not right now in this emergent situation that we're in - that we're thinking about how we avoid this in the long term. Mental health benefits, physical benefits, socioeconomic benefits - this is something that is important to everybody. I think it would marry really well with the mandate and the direction of this government. I think it fits in nicely.

I hope that the members opposite will take this bill into consideration. If it's not this bill exactly, then perhaps something else that is fine-tailored for them. But the ultimate goal would be the same - that we would make sure that the kids of this province have a healthy lunch - or have the option of a healthy lunch - every single day and have a little bit of an easier time than they have.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I want to bring a light to a number of things, just in general. I'm very passionate about a number of things, and children and education are a passion for me. To stand here today and speak to this is really exciting. It's something that we as a government should be doing whatever we can to make sure that this is something kids benefit from.

I want to say this topic is something that we as a caucus are fiercely passionate about - myself in particular. Implementing a school food program is something that we have advocated for for years. It was a prominent part of our 2021 platform, and we were the only party to include this.

Our 2021 platform assessed the cost of this policy, and while the number would likely be higher in today's dollars, we know that it would cost a fraction of this current

budget spending. In a year with unprecedented surplus revenues, it is a lack of government will, and not resources, behind this government's failure to move forward on this.

While I am so happy to hear this proposal come from our Liberal colleagues, we are left wondering why they didn't implement this themselves. I know that the government across will say the exact same thing, but I think we all have a like mind when it comes to education, and our children, and their future.

This is not a new idea. Under the Liberal government, we saw funding for school breakfasts. These programs relied heavily on volunteers and donations. As the member across said, we see teachers daily going on a snack run or going out to get kids' lunches because they know that they don't have that there at the school with them - because of a number of reasons. This is an opportunity for us to provide lunch and food throughout the day for our children who are in need of more than just food that is just breakfast.

Nova Scotia has one of the worst rates of child poverty in the country. In 2019, Halifax had the highest rate of food insecurity of any Canadian city.

The facts that I'm putting forward are actually a realization of what we need to do to do better. Although a school food program does not address the issue of income directly, it has the potential to increase the economic security of families by reducing one of their expenses. It is a tool and a help for sure, but it does not replace the need for government to ensure that all Nova Scotians have sufficient income.

I just want to say this because we sit long hours, and we're in here. Many of us are up and out to grab something to eat. We know that our body needs that in order for us to function, for us to have clarity, for us not to be hangry - for us to be able to speak in a way that will be sufficient for the work that we do here in this House.

As adults, we understand that it is very important for us to feed our bodies in order for our minds to do the right thing. Children are no different. If nothing else, children need it more than we do. I think if we looked at a universal school food program, this would change the dynamic, and change the things that we see when it comes to our education system right now.

We know there are further-reaching benefits of school food programs beyond even income support. School food programs have been linked with positive impacts on children's mental health, as my colleague has said, as well as their learning outcomes, as I mentioned. It fiscally makes sense too. Work by the U.N. World Food Programme estimates that school food programs have a return of investment of \$3 to \$10 for every \$1 invested.

Just this past year, the Auditor General released a report that warned that if health food recommendations were not addressed, the ultimate health care costs would be in the

billions. A major component of this report was a call for a comprehensive school lunch program, as the report found that there was no consistent approach across the province's RCEs to provide lunch to students who couldn't afford paid lunches. There's a huge demand for this. Approximately 43,000 students across the province access school breakfasts every single day. The Auditor General's Report found that without these breakfasts or donated meals from teachers or communities, some children would otherwise not eat for an entire day. We see this in our communities every single day.

Despite the urgency, recommendations from the Auditor General, calls from Opposition parties, advocates from this government, and advocates who have spoken to this government, we see that the government is dragging its feet. They recently confirmed that they will not be implementing a school food program until the federal government directs and funds it otherwise.

I am only going to say this because I like speaking truth to power. When it comes to children, I'm like a mama bear to every child I interact with - and they will tell you that. I made this comment last night that the Progressive Conservative government is quick to applaud themselves with the many investments that they put forward. They remind us often of that.

Any time we speak in Estimates, in Question Period, there's a lot of reminders of the amount of money, and the investments that they put forward as a government. I have yet to hear them talk about our children, and the impact that not having a school food program in the schools would be for them. I've heard it, but I don't think it's actually what we see is being worked on. We see every day our children are living in poverty. Our families are living in poverty. Here is an opportunity to meet them where they are. To help them grow. To foster their learning. To really give them a good step up. All children and being inclusive, and accessible for everyone.

I have yet to hear any applause for universal school programs. Actually, I hear crickets instead - which is really disturbing because our children are our future. If we want them to be in these seats and actually have a say over the lives of folks - and even just make an impact in this world - we need to be able to invest in them. That is what we need to see.

The pilot announced yesterday by this government - because I know that is what will be mentioned very shortly - fails shockingly short of what is needed. It will only provide lunches in just five schools in just one school board, Chignecto-Central RCE. For me, I'm protective of my community because I live in Halifax Needham. I have yet to see an investment in education, and in food, and in anything in Halifax Needham. If I'm wrong, please, I will take feedback. I will take it because I have yet to hear anything happen in my riding that this government is ready to profess that's going to be an investment in our children, and in their education. Children in every other corner of this province will just have to wait.

I know, a member had talked about how our parents have said certain things, and sometimes we've got to take it as it is because parents are very wise. I know my mom would say - we've all heard this - if we do it for one, we do it for all. If we're going to do it for one, we've got to do it for all.

If there's a pilot program that is ready to be rolled out - which there was already information to be done - it was ready to go. I say this as a past school board member who has a lot of knowledge on how schools have been run and how systems work. I know that this is not something new that just needed to be consulted on. There have been many consultations, many reports on why this is important, and why we need to do it.

Dragging our feet is not helping anybody. We know that this is needed. The model is there. The province-wide breakfast program and the need is there. The stats prove that. I always go back to: How is this accessible, and how is this inclusive for everyone? Because if we do a pilot program for five schools that are in need, we know that all of our schools - if you look at the stats and if you look at the information in the education department - every school is in need. Every school needs something - and healthy food, is just what the Auditor General said is what they need.

I'll end with a quote from the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development from yesterday's press release. "We know that good nutrition is fundamental to learning and helping students be the best they can be. Equitable access . . ." - which means everyone, and I'm just saying that to myself. I will get back to the quote in a second, but equitable access - I stress this because I'll be talking about equity later, "Equitable access to healthy, whole foods, like fresh fruits and vegetables, is an important part of students' achievement and well-being." Why don't we help these students achieve - achieve to the utmost for their well-being by implementing this particular program. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Opposition for the opportunity to speak about the importance of school food and the work that's under way in relation to school food.

I have to say that I'm disappointed that it appears I'm only going to have about four minutes to talk about this. I really wish that questions would have been raised on this in Estimates, when we could have really spent some time digging into the issue and talking about what was happening on food in schools.

That didn't happen, so I'll take the time that I have left to really talk about the issue. I think the one thing for sure that we all agree on in this House - and this is the thing that I

love about the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the work that we all do is - that we all agree on some really fundamental things.

We all completely agree that what we want for our kids is for them to achieve the best they can and for them to be whole and well and taken care of. That's something that we all agree on. We want Nova Scotia's children to reach their full potential. We absolutely understand that access to healthy food, and the tools and knowledge to lead a healthy lifestyle, play a really important role in that development.

I want to talk really briefly about why it is that food in school is important. I want to talk about what exists in the program now, what our actions are, and what the future opportunities are. We know that it's important for well-being. We know that it's important for learning. We know that kids need a full belly with nutritious food so that they can pay attention in class and be present. We also know that it has impacts for their broader well-being and their physical health.

In addition to that, exposure to food in schools, conversations about food in schools, and curriculum also develop longer-term healthy lifestyles which leave dividends. I think the member opposite mentioned how important it is and the dividends that are paid when you invest in food early.

There's also a connection to trades. There's also a connection to lifestyle. When we incorporate food and growing food into schools, we learn about agriculture. We learn about food production. We learn about cooking. All of those things are important, not just for the students in the moment to enhance their well-being, but also for their futures.

That's why we know it's important. What exists already? Food has been in schools. We've had a breakfast program in schools since 2005. It was expanded in 2018. We have funding in schools through School Healthy Eating Programs. We have student support grants.

One thing that is important to understand about food in schools across our province is that it looks different from place to place. There is strength in that. Yes, we have a breakfast program across the province. All students have access to a breakfast program, but that looks entirely different from school to school because the community needs are different from school to school.

That is a similar situation with lunch programs. In some schools, we have cafeteria programs that are funded and supported with school staff. In other places, we have contract workers who do that work. In other places still, we have older schools, lovely community schools. They weren't necessarily built with cafeterias, but they still make it work.

One example that I can think of is a small school near to me that I had the opportunity to tour recently. They identified a need within their school for a lunch program.

They actually used a storage room and converted it to a kitchen. They serve a healthy homemade lunch every single day to their students. That's one example.

[5:45 p.m.]

I've also toured schools and high schools. One example in Dartmouth is Woodlawn High School. They have a pantry. There's a pantry that students can access to obtain food that they need. There are other schools that have refrigerators throughout the school. Some schools have gardens and the students are involved in growing their food and then cooking their food. Other schools have salad bars, as we've heard. Other schools still have fruit bowls.

One of the things that we've done in the course of our work, the Minister of Agriculture and his department and I, is to look at and understand what's already there and start to expand it so that we are in a position to grow and to provide healthy food in schools to all students who need it.

The reality is that that will never look the same across the province, nor should it.

THE CHAIR: Order. Order, please. We have reached the moment of interruption. The topic for late debate was submitted by the honourable member for Halifax Needham:

"Therefore be it resolved this government has not done enough to address systemic racism in Nova Scotia."

## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: This kind of falls in line - equitable and access and actually recognizing certain things that we need to change. We have a long way to go to ending systemic racism in Nova Scotia. There's so much to say about it and I have limited time.

African Nova Scotians are overrepresented in the justice system: 2021 data from the Department of Justice shows that African Nova Scotians make up about 2 per cent of the Nova Scotia population but represent 10 per cent and 11 per cent of admissions to remand and sentenced custody.

African Nova Scotians were overrepresented both in admissions to remand and admissions to sentenced custody in 2019/20. Street checks data show that Black people in Halifax were six times more like to be street-checked by police than white people.



Rates of child poverty are higher in Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities. The child poverty rate in North Preston was 35 per cent in 2020. The postal code that contains Whitney Pier has a child poverty rate of 33 per cent. The postal code that includes Halifax's North End has a 29 per cent child poverty rate. This means that a third of children in these communities are living in poverty, which is what I was speaking to just before that.

Twenty-eight per cent of Black children in Nova Scotia live in poverty, compared to 16 per cent of children who are not a visible minority. This is shameful, absolutely shameful. The government has a responsibility to address it with the full force of all of its focus.

Both the Conservative and Liberal governments have failed to make significant progress on addressing systemic racism and uneven achievement in the education system, the statistics show. In 2021 and 2022, 57 per cent of African Nova Scotian students in Grade 3 met standards, 12 percentage points below the provincial average score. Shame. Writing remains a serious problem, with fewer than half of the students meeting expectations.

Studies have shown that African Nova Scotians experience higher rates of chronic disease than white populations. Black people are dramatically underrepresented among those who seek out mental health services. But we shouldn't need these statistics to prove or convince people that this is a problem. We have been talking about it forever.

Our communities have been making amazing things happen and pushing forward against all odds, with no end of suggestions for how to do this. Health care: Let's take that for an example. When I asked the Minister of Health and Wellness about the idea of an all-Black primary care clinic, it became clear that there aren't plans to make this happen.

We need to invest in resources that reflect the Black community. We need increased funding for research, with the focus on the health of people of African descent. We need recruitment and support for Black health professionals to stay in Nova Scotia if they want to. We need funding of Black health care professionals degrees or doing a couple of cohorts other than social work. We have some funds for social work, but we need funds for nursing, medicine, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, recreational therapy - the list goes on and on.

The Fair Care Project doing race-based data collection has started but needs more support. For example, we have volunteers who are there - and I've said this before: When we go into community and we consult and consult and we show no action from the words that we hear, folks don't want to volunteer. Folks don't want to give their information. So we should be paying volunteers to sit on those committees to give their valuable information.

I was very disappointed to see another budget from this government that included no new funding for the strategy to address racism and hate. When I asked the minister about this in Estimates, he said the department continues to consult with communities about the strategy. Wow. How many more consultations are we going to do with the communities that we have reports of reports of reports on? Sitting on bookshelves collecting dust. (Applause)

It's important that we move forward together with our communities, but I would respectfully suggest that the time for consultation is over. People have spoken many times in this House. At Law Amendments they have shown up in full force to let the folks who are sitting in these seats know that they don't agree with certain things. African Nova Scotian communities know what investments are needed. We do not need to reinvent the wheel or study the issue further.

There are massive shifts in our justice system that need to take place. I applaud the ongoing funding of the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute and their incredible work, but we know that more needs to be done. Community has been clear about this. We need a commitment to develop an African Nova Scotian policing strategy. Apparently this is on the way, but no minister can give us any details or timelines, despite there having been a community-developed draft for years now.

A legislative ban on street checks by police: This exists in a ministerial order, we know, but we need it baked into legislation and this is what communities said they wanted. They want it in legislation so that it is protected and permanent, not changeable depending on who is in power.

Unfortunately for members of the African Nova Scotian community, there is no way to erase the emotional and economic harms associated with racist policing policies and practices. This is why we need a new approach to ensure systems are in place to address past, present, and future relations between police and the justice system and the African Nova Scotian community.

Robert Wright, activist and fighter for Black communities in Nova Scotia, said that:

“When I look forward 10, 20 years, it would be great to be looking back and saying, you know, we have finally figured out that the foundations of this carceral system, this criminal justice system, was really erroneous. It was rotten right to its core. It was developed during a time when there was an us-them mentality in our society. And so these systems supported a small sliver of the population and policed the other sliver, where Black people were dramatically overrepresented. And as a community, as a society, we have evolved to the place where we are less dependent on the criminal justice system for us to have safe and vibrant and well-

connected communities. That, I think, that would be a thing I would be wanting to look back on and see.”

We know we also need a commitment to implement and regularly report on the progress towards the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the calls for justice from the inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This government has not committed to doing this. A commitment to begin conversations about reparations together with Black Nova Scotians - this government has not committed to doing this.

Remove all remaining hurdles to land claim processes and African Nova Scotian communities. We have a long way to go on this and still people are waiting. Not to mention the need for community-owned housing in our own communities.

Ensure support and representation in the public sphere, including justice personnel, elected officials at all levels, high-level civil service, social service providers, health care personnel, and on the Nova Scotia Health Authority board. Instead, the government fired diverse representation on the NSHA board. Protection from harassment and discrimination needs to be enshrined in our occupational health and safety laws.

We put forward these and other things as part of the committee we were invited to join but the government refused to put them into legislation. Now almost two years later, there isn't even funding for a strategy to address these items.

Luckily, we're going to keep fighting for these things and remain proud of our anti-racist agenda. We will continue to press this government to address environmental racism, uneven access to housing, uneven access to justice, education, health care, and employment opportunities. I know we have a bright future despite the barriers placed in our way, which is why I'm standing here, and which is why our caucus will continue to fight this fight.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: It's a pleasure to join the debate this evening in support of the motion for late debate. I just want to preface my comments that I want to recognize my own privilege, not the privilege of being an elected member, but the privilege of being a white person, someone who speaks about this issue without lived experience. My life, and the lives of other Caucasian members in this House, particularly men, have benefited from the structural racism that we have in this province today.

I think part of when we debate these very complex issues but very important issues is acknowledging the systemic racism that we have that permeates throughout our institutions at all levels of government.

I wanted to support the resolution that the current government has not done enough to address this systemic racism and structural racism and our duty as Opposition continues to push for more help because I do think that the prior government had made a number of steps to set up this structural change required, especially with the new Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives. That is the nucleus, or the hub, of leadership that was set up within government which is supposed to drive change throughout all departments. The resolution talks about education, housing, health care, employment, wealth, and justice, where we see the overrepresentation of people of colour, African Nova Scotians, Indigenous, and other minority communities.

That's why, after the office was created, we launched primary working groups with representation from all these communities, because we need the data. This is what groups have been calling for from community for a long time. That announcement back in April 2021 was a long time coming. I'm proud to have been able to put these groups together. Unfortunately, the only communication that we have heard about this has come from Question Period and was limited to one department, which was the Department of Health and Wellness. I believe there's a new name for that. I had to Google it. Some of the community members I connect with were telling me that there is a new community organization - or title at least - when it comes to the desegregated data in health.

What emanated from the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives was the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute and was the eventual passing of the Act that the government passed which was first proposed by Opposition, the anti-racism Act. That was important to put in law, because if we all accept that systemic racism is the problem, then anti-racism is the cure. I was happy to see all parties in this province support that movement moving forward, and the government bill that eventually was worked on by members from all sides of the House.

These are steps forward, but in that Act, there are specific clauses that were worked on by members of our caucus, specifically Sections 12 and 13, where the minister shall report annually to the House on progress made and table an annual report by July 2023. This is the last session we have until that month, that requirement, to table some of the progress made. I don't believe we have seen that report tabled, unless that is expected to be tabled while we're not in session. This is, I think, foundational to the work ahead to ensure that we see the progress.

We see other examples of this in other parts of the country, namely Ontario. The policing strategy that my colleague referenced has been worked on for a significant amount of time that goes back to - my recollection is either 2019 or 2020, especially from the Decade for People of African Descent putting forward a proposal. I don't see any reason why that strategy hasn't come forward, at least for consultation with community.

We also asked about land titles in Estimates and couldn't get an update from the Minister of Justice on where that initiative is, despite the fact that we passed the Land Titles

Initiative Acceleration Act, put significant resources in, and hired commissioners to help with claims that may have overlapping claims put forward. I think that there is tremendous work to do in this area.

[6:00 p.m.]

There's always more work to do after hundreds of years, decades of years, of oppression. It will take time, but it will take leadership and concerted action, I think, from all parts of the House.

The judiciary was one important advancement, nominating more people from African Nova Scotian communities and Indigenous communities to serve as a judge in provincial court, family courts as well. That progress seems to be stalled, even despite the minister committing in this House in Question Period that he would be nominating an African Nova Scotian judge. I asked that in Estimates as well. We have yet to see that nomination come forward, despite the fact that the minister seemed to think the benefits of his new process to nominate judges had resulted in more candidates from diverse backgrounds. That's an odd argument to make, given that he has more opportunities to nominate someone from the African Nova Scotian community, but he has yet to actually put one in place.

A purposeful policy change that we made that came from a Justice working group that I advocated for with the Minister of Justice years ago was changing the eligible requirement down from 15 years to 10 years. One of the reasons why was because of the limited time after the Marshall inquiry, in 1989, to ensure that we had more applicants and a wider field of applicants from diverse communities that we could choose from. That resulted in, thankfully, the government - the Premier at the time - seeing the value in nominating more diverse people from especially the African Nova Scotian communities to the bench so that people could see themselves reflected in the judiciary.

Now we have to see more progress in other areas of justice, especially the prosecution office that hasn't seen a member from the African Nova Scotian community since its inception in over three decades, and that's problematic given the level of discretion that prosecutors have in trying to determine what is fair for people who are being prosecuted and the justice that they deserve. This is the province of the BLAC Report. The member referenced education and the issues of overrepresented people who drop out early.

IPP stats are problematic within this. This is something we put in mandate letters to tackle when we were in government. Haven't seen any communication or progress since. This is the province that has a very high number of African Nova Scotian communities relative to other provinces. Some would argue that the Black capital of our country up until the 1960s - half of African Canadians actually lived in Nova Scotia. It is a big part of our history. It is a big part of what I think we can continue to work on as we move forward in Opposition with this government in place. One of the things I think members who have

been here before the last election have noticed is that these issues are talked about a heck of a lot more and I think it is because of better representation in this House.

One of the positive things that came out of the last election, whether it's the member from Needham who spoke or the member from Armdale who had a big part of the legislation that was made and brought the Muslim community forward that we consulted with and, of course, members who were here before that, such as the member for Cole Harbour and the member for Preston. I think that is important and I certainly want to recognize my colleague from Halifax Chebucto, then Leader of the NDP, who saw that as important when he, like me, was recruiting candidates to bring forward.

So despite the outcome of the election, at least we had better opportunity, better chances of ensuring that more diverse voices are heard in this House and that lived experiences can be actually brought to the floor of the Legislature, which is really important when we are looking at policy development, legislation, ensuring that we continue to press forward.

The main thing I want to see is the total fruition of that Office of Equity and Anti-Racism, the impetus of why it was created, and ensuring that it works across all departments. When we see the disparity of people living homeless, not having enough to eat, incarcerated, and that continues on and the government owes it to these communities to show some leadership and work with their colleagues across departments and ensure that we are able to make some progress during their tenure, because thus far we have seen none.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

HON. PAT DUNN: I want to thank the members for Halifax Needham and Timberlea-Prospect for their comments.

I am pleased to rise in my place to speak about addressing systemic racism in Nova Scotia. It is a critical topic, a very important topic, and there is certainly more work that we can do and we must do together to dismantle the barriers that affect Black, Indigenous, and racialized people in this province. This government is committed to addressing anti-Black racism and supporting African Nova Scotians to grow and thrive.

There are more than 100 cultures represented in Nova Scotia, including Mi'kmaw communities, historic African Nova Scotia communities, and people from all over the world who have chosen to make this beautiful province their home. We want this to be a province where everyone has access to opportunities and resources and where all communities can thrive socially and economically. To reach that goal we know we must continue to address systemic barriers that have disadvantaged many communities. I am pleased to say there is lots of work under way, Mr. Speaker. I want to ensure the members

of this House that work continues on the strategy required under the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act.

The members opposite have asked why this strategy is not a line item in the budget, but I can say the staff at the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives are investing considerable time and resources in developing the strategy. It is one of the major initiatives that the office has been focused on over the past year.

Members may recall that OEA staff held more than 100 hours of community engagement sessions, reaching out to more than 1,200 Nova Scotians and 70 organizations in developing the legislation. We listened to communities across this province, and what we heard in those conversations will be reflected in the strategy. We look forward to introducing that strategy by the end of July. Once it's in place, that will be the time to look at what targeted investments may be needed to support the work.

The office continues to develop the other pieces required in the Act, including an equity and race-based data standard, a community network, and support for public bodies such as municipalities and universities as they develop their required anti-racism strategies as well.

We are certainly investing in supporting African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities. This government opened three new regional African Nova Scotian Affairs offices, doubling ANSA's regional presence from three offices to six, to make sure that communities across the province have access to resources to address their unique needs.

We have made strategic investments in several important community organizations over the past year, including the Black Cultural Centre, the Africville Heritage Trust, the Lucasville Greenway Society, and the African Nova Scotian Road to Economic Prosperity committee, just to name a few, in order to help them take the next steps in planning for a sustainable future.

The Province also contributed \$1.4 million toward a new first-of-its-kind resilience centre in Millbrook First Nation to be run by the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association.

There's lots of work under way to make our health care system more diverse and inclusive as well. The Department of Health and Wellness is developing a health equity framework to be completed by July, and in the Fall of last year, the Province launched a Fair Care Project to collect race-based data in health care. This is something that communities, especially African Nova Scotian community health leaders, have been seeking and asking for a long time.

Budget 2023-24 includes \$1.9 million for initiatives to improve equity and health care, including expanding Pride Health across the province, launching an Indigenous

patient navigation program, and starting a Summer internship program for high school students to get more diverse young people considering careers in health care.

As a Province, we are working to remove barriers to career pathways for racialized and historically underrepresented communities. Advanced Education has worked with partners on fronts including an Africentric Bachelor of Social Work pilot program at Dalhousie University; a new Mi'kmaw practical nursing cohort at the Nova Scotia Community College Pictou Campus, starting this academic year; and an Africentric Early Childhood Education program at the Nova Scotia Community College Akerley Campus.

We are committed to addressing equity in all walks of life. Nova Scotia has been a national leader in addressing anti-racism in sport and recreation. In November, we held our first Anti-Racism in Sport and Recreation Week with partners throughout the sport system. Access to physical activity is a critical part of social, physical, and emotional well-being, and we want to make sure that sport and recreation in Nova Scotia is welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to everyone.

I'd be remiss if I didn't remind this House one more time that this year's budget includes an increase of \$5.1 million for arts and culture organizations and community museums, the first funding increase since 2006. That funding directly supports organizations like the Millbrook Cultural and Heritage Centre, but it'll also have a broader impact on African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaw, and other racialized artists, creators, and community groups that contribute to Nova Scotia's culture landscape.

I want to be clear here, Mr. Speaker, that today I'm giving just a high-level snapshot of some of the work under way to make this province more equitable. I could talk at greater length about the many initiatives in my own portfolio, and I'm sure my colleagues could do the same.

If I had more time, I would speak in depth on the Land Titles Initiative, where we have now helped residents in five historic African Nova Scotian communities gain clear title to 338 parcels of land. At some future time, I'd love to speak more about our plans to develop an African Nova Scotian cultural tourism strategy to help ensure that African Nova Scotian organizations, businesses, and tourism operators can showcase their unique offerings to the many visitors we have in Nova Scotia.

I am going to close by mentioning the work under way through ANSA, and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to support community-based housing opportunities in historic African Nova Scotian communities. We have been working with the Preston Area Housing Fund on a plan to transfer up to 50 provincially owed housing units in Cherry Brook, Lake Loon, North Preston, and East Preston to the non-profit organization. We are providing \$3.5 million towards repair, maintenance, and sustainable operation of these units.



I was there at the North Preston Community Centre on the day we signed a memorandum of understanding. I remember what Mr. Bruce Johnson, a board member of the housing fund, said that day: This government, you have shown now that you are willing to listen. That's a refrain I've heard from Sydney to Digby as I have attended community events, spoken at African Heritage Month galas or visited our new ANSA regional offices. I've had multiple community members tell me it's good to see the minister here, it's good to see that you are listening.

My colleagues and I are well aware that there is still more to do to build relationships and trust in communities that haven't always been treated fairly by government. We know we have to keep working hard to knock down those barriers, and work with communities to find new, creative solutions to address historic problems.

When people tell me that they know we are listening, it makes me think that we are moving in the right direction. We are not going to stop at listening. We are going to keep acting to make this province a place where everyone feels like they belong, and everyone believes that they and their children can succeed.

With the time remaining, I just want to mention a few things about some of our investments over the past year. In the Black Cultural Centre, in 2022-23, there is an investment of \$226,000, and going ahead into this year another \$225,000. The Africville Heritage Trust, another \$100,000. The Black Loyalist Heritage Society, \$375,000. An association in Glace Bay that needed basement renovations, another \$39,000. The Halifax Black Film Festival, \$30,000; DPAD Coalition and other projects, \$200,000. The Halifax Pride Committee, an annual commitment of \$50,000. The list just goes on and on. The African Nova Scotian Music Association, \$95,000. The list is too long, Mr. Speaker, maybe another time.

THE SPEAKER: Order. That concludes late debate for tonight. I'd like to thank everyone who participated.

## **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Public 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. 279.

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

[6:15 p.m.]

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 279, the Financial Measures (2023) Act, be now read a third time and do pass.

This bill amends four pieces of legislation and repeals one. I'll quickly go through the details because I know I've gone through this already, so I don't want to spend too much time with that. I know members have heard this before. It will repeal outdated legislation after formalizing the transfer of ownership of the Schooner *Bluenose II* Foundation's assets to the Lunenburg Marine Museum Society.

This society has operated our iconic ship the *Bluenose II* for more than 15 years and they will take ownership of the former foundation's assets, which includes the *Bluenose II* headquarters in Lunenburg and a small remaining account balance.

This Act also reduces fees for businesses and removes unnecessary and outdated paperwork. The Corporations Registration Act will be amended to eliminate penalty fees for the reinstatement of revoked companies with the Registry of Joint Stock Companies. Currently, Nova Scotia charges double the annual renewal fee as a penalty for companies wishing to renew. Most provinces across the country have no fee, and we feel it represents a burden to these businesses. We want to encourage them to re-register.

Small businesses have told us the fee is a barrier to re-register. We hope that removing the fee will help, and will allow more companies to keep up to date on their registration. There is a cost of \$350,000 per year to the government, but we feel more businesses registering has value, and can also bring value in terms of consumer protection.

We are also amending the Revenue Act through this bill. It's part of our work to consolidate gaming activities under the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. We're transferring the authority to charge tax on bets made on harness races from the Theatres and Amusements Act to the Revenue Act. This change is to the authority only and does not alter the practice of collecting and keeping the tax.

Another issue is vaping. We are enabling harmonization of excise tax on vaping products with the amendment that we're making here. The federal government has been asked by provinces and territories to consider harmonizing taxes on vaping, similar to what is done for cannabis. This makes it easier and less expensive to put in place, and it achieves the same goal. If an agreement is reached, Nova Scotia will be able to implement a harmonized vaping tax through this legislation.

The Financial Measures (2023) Act: With this bill here, we are also amending the Non-resident Deed Transfer and Property Taxes Act to formally remove the non-resident property tax from legislation. We are making changes to ensure only those who do not intend to live in Nova Scotia pay the deed transfer tax. Previously, the deed transfer tax was in place if more than 50 per cent of the property was owned by a non-resident. As of July 1<sup>st</sup>, the tax will be prorated for the percentage of non-resident ownership.

Finally, we're amending the Credit Union Act to transfer regulatory oversight of Atlantic Central from the Province to the Credit Union Deposit Insurance Corporation. That organization guarantees deposits in Credit Unions and administers a supervisory framework to protect member deposits, and maintain the safety and soundness of our province's credit union system. We are strengthening oversight of the credit union system and bringing Nova Scotia in line with other provinces. We've consulted with the parties involved in advance of extending this mandate to the Credit Union Deposit Insurance Corporation to ensure that there is buy-in from parties involved to strengthen that supervisory role.

This bill before us reduces fees for businesses, removes outdated and unnecessary paperwork, and modernizes legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: May I make an introduction before I give my comments?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery. We're joined here again by James Stewart Young, a bright man who cares more about politics than most other humans I've met in my life. He's spent numerous late hours here watching debates in the House. James, on behalf of all of us down here, thanks again for joining us, and appreciate your interest in the proceedings.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House. I hope you enjoy your stay.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to stand and speak in relation to the FMA and the provincial budget, which will be passed. This is not a budget that our caucus supports, and I think there's good rationale for that. We've been told that this provincial budget is going to bring more health care faster. I don't think that's true. I don't think it's true from an operational standpoint in terms of what the health care system is in most desperate need of. I also don't think it's true when it comes to dealing with the actual pressures on our health care system, which is sickness, and illness, and people who are going to our emergency rooms with complex problems.

I really worry that this budget is going to lead to people in Nova Scotia becoming sicker, which is going to put more burden on our primary care system. It's going to put more burden on our emergency rooms. It's really going to affect the lives of Nova Scotians in very adverse ways.

As we know, the vast majority of cases in our hospitals are actually people who come from financially vulnerable situations, who are low-income, or who are financially stressed. If you talk to any doctor in our health care system, they're going to tell you that. Low-income Nova Scotians are overrepresented in our health care system, and there are factors that contribute to that - which I'll be getting into.

There are very damaging measures in this budget that are going to particularly impact people who have low incomes, who are under financial duress, and who are having a hard time finding housing or even accessing appropriate food. I think the most damaging part of this budget is the freezing of social assistance for the second year in a row. This is, I think, potentially very catastrophic to a lot of Nova Scotians and our society overall.

These are the most vulnerable Nova Scotians, who require government assistance to make ends meet, living in a situation where we have the highest level of inflation that we've had since the 1980s, who are having a hard time putting food on the table, who have a hard time paying for their power bills - which, by the way, are also going to be going up 14 per cent over the next two years - and this government has not indexed their income supports to inflation.

Those folks are going to have less disposable income - if any - over the next two years. That's going to impact their health care in potentially very serious ways - and that's going to impact our health care system in very serious ways.

We've heard from the Minister of Community Services that, and I quote, "when we have good health care in Nova Scotia, everyone benefits, even our most vulnerable." I'll table that. In fact, the opposite is true. Research shows that the social determinants of health can be more important than actual health care itself, or even lifestyle choices that influence health.

Numerous studies suggest that social determinants of health account for between 30 per cent and 55 per cent of health care outcomes. Estimates show that the contribution of sectors outside of health that are involved with population health outcomes exceeds the contribution from the actual health care sector itself. I'll table this. When you think about that, there's proof of it in our health care system.

Look at where the money's spent. I believe 90 per cent of our resources, financial and human, are on the most drastic acute side of care in the last three months of somebody's life. That's where the majority of resources go in our health care system. This is an absolute failure. We have to learn that if we don't address some of the root causes of health issues

in this province - the root causes of the high rates of certain illnesses that we have - we are not going to catch up with the pressures that are debilitating our health care system.

There are very well-documented relationships between poverty and health in Canada. I will speak from a document and table it. According to the World Health Organization, poverty in childhood is associated with a number of health care conditions in adulthood. More than one in seven Canadian children live in poverty. This places our country 15<sup>th</sup> out of 17 similar developed countries.

Children who live in poverty are more likely to have low birth weights, asthma, type 2 diabetes, poor oral health, and suffer from malnutrition. Children who grow up in poverty as adults are more likely to experience addictions, mental health difficulties, physical disabilities, and premature death. Children who experience poverty are less likely to graduate from high school, and more likely to live in poverty as adults - and the cycle continues.

People living in poverty face more barriers to accessing care. The World Health Organization has determined that there is a profound two-way relationship between poverty and health. People with limited access to income are often more socially isolated, experience more stress, have poor mental health and physical health, and few opportunities for early childhood development, along with other things. People living in poverty experience poor health, and health challenges, and poor health outcomes appear a lot more with individuals who are struggling financially. I'll table that.

Freezing social assistance for two years in a row is going to add to these problems. People are going to get sicker. They're going to have a harder time accessing the supports that they need. They're going to have a hard time putting food on the table. They're also not going to pay for their prescriptions, Mr. Speaker.

We have food inflation shooting up 9.7 per cent. One in six Nova Scotians face food insecurity. This is a major problem. We know that, according to a recent survey by the Agri-food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie, more than 50 per cent of Nova Scotians believe that grocers are gouging them.

We also know, based on studies, that 50 per cent of people who aren't taking their prescriptions are food-insecure. They don't have access to healthy food. They're making the decision to put food on the table for their families instead of paying the little extra that they need to for prescription medicine. What does that mean? That means more people are going to show up at our emergency rooms with more acute illnesses. More people's health conditions are not going to be as well-managed, and they're going to get sicker.

We know that the impact of food insecurity on health is really prolific. It impacts people in a variety of different ways. It impacts a number of chronic conditions, Mr. Speaker. People who are food-insecure tend to have larger issues with stomach and

intestinal ulcers. They have more mood and anxiety disorders. They experience more migraines, hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, bowel disorders, back problems, arthritis, and asthma. These are all conditions that are impacting people's lives but also put pressures on our health care system. I'll table that. Nothing in this budget is helping address the high rates of food insecurity that we have in the province - a major failure of this budget.

We know the impacts that housing has on health. We have heard the government pat themselves on the back for putting more money into the rental supplement program. Rental supplement programs work when you have a healthy vacancy rate, first of all, which is between 3 and 5 per cent. Our vacancy rate in Nova Scotia is less than 1 per cent. People can't find places to rent. How beneficial is the rental supplement program going to be for those individuals?

Furthermore, the government has changed the policy around who is eligible. It used to be that if you spent 30 per cent of your income on your rent, you were eligible for the Rent Supplement Program - 30 per cent, that's reasonable. This government has increased the criteria to 50 per cent of someone's income that they have to be spending on their rent to be eligible for the government support.

At a time when rent is shooting through the roof for those who aren't under the rent cap - and a lot of those in the rental market are not being covered by the rent cap. They have fixed-term leases, and their rents are going up every year outside of the cap, or new entries into the rental market are paying inflated rental prices, in part because of the rent cap that's in place.

Now if you pay 49.9 per cent of your income on rent, you're no longer eligible for the rent supplement program. That's thousands of Nova Scotians who aren't going to be eligible for this support at a time when they need it probably more than any other time in recent memory.

We know that this is a problem for health, which makes it a problem for our health care system. Studies show that the health of a population is directly linked to the availability of adequate affordable housing. When people have access to housing that meets their needs, they are better able to afford other basic needs like food and are more likely to find a sense of belonging in their community. Health impacts when you don't have access to affordable housing are mental health issues; substance use disorders; chronic disease, like hypertension and diabetes; and injury as well.

By having thousands of Nova Scotians not eligible for the rental supplement, by having a vacancy rate that's less than 1 per cent, by having no real plan to have non-market housing that is affordable, this government is really creating a lot of negative health conditions for people. I'll table this document.

We know that housing is a major social determinant of health and well-being. I'll table this, which is provided by BMC Public Health, where they have found causal pathways connecting less tangible aspects of housing to health and well-being. It's a very detailed document here listing all the negative impacts on people's health that this situation has.

[6:30 p.m.]

This government has created a situation where thousands of more Nova Scotians who are experiencing a cost of living crisis in their own lives are now no longer eligible for the support. Fifty per cent of their income has to be spent on rent. I don't think that's reasonable. When you have a budget that says it's going to fix health care, and health care faster, but that is actually creating conditions that are going to make at least a segment of our population sicker, by the way a growing segment of our population, potentially sicker, you are not improving health care in this province. Again, that is evidence in who is showing up in our emergency rooms. That is evidence on who's taken up our hospital beds.

There is a direct link to income levels and health outcomes, between food security and health outcomes. In very real tangible ways, and housing and health outcomes, and the government has washed its hands of these things. I think it's absolutely incomprehensible that social assistance has been frozen for two years in a row, with inflation shooting through the roof at close to 10 per cent. This is going to create a problem in our health care system that's going to worsen, and it's going to create more importantly major problems in people's lives.

Well let's look at the actual outcomes here, from just an operational perspective. We stand in this House, and day after day, the government stands up and literally pats itself on the back and counts every single dollar that they spend on health care. That's what they point to. Look at how much money we're spending. Finally, a government who cares. I'm sorry, just because you spend more, doesn't mean you're spending smart.

What the government can't do is actually point to outcomes that are improving in our health care system. Outcomes that really matter to people. Like whether they have a family doctor or not. I remember not that long ago when the now-Premier was Leader of the Opposition, there was a crisis in health care when 40,000 Nova Scotians were without a family doctor. According to him, there was a crisis. That number now nears 140,000, and the Premier's response: We're in a different world now. You know, the old days of having a family doctor, that's not the reality anymore.

He believes that, because it shows up in where the money is going in the budget. This government cut the family practice incentive in Halifax - by the way, our fastest-growing community in the province. Our capital region is driving immigration growth. We have people moving in domestically from other provinces as well as internationally. You know what? We're going to cut the family doctor incentive for Halifax. In the Central

Zone, what's happened? Well, the overall numbers of people who need a family doctor have nearly doubled under this government. They may be doubled now because the government hasn't released the new Need A Family Practice numbers. For some reason, that is always the way - even though the information is there, you just have to press send, and it goes on a website. That's been delayed every single time.

The number in some estimates has shot up about 600 per cent in Halifax. That started after the family doctor incentive was cut. Nothing in this budget to incentivize family practice at a time when practitioners are leaving their family practice, and either working other parts of our health care system, where certainly they're needed, or getting into private practice or moving out of the province to practice elsewhere. At a time when we're seeing an explosion of people who need a family doctor that we've never seen.

Again, under a government that brags about how terrible things were before they were elected and how great things are now, nothing in this budget to incentivize family practice. In two years, there hasn't been one collaborative care clinic that's been established in Nova Scotia for primary care. Not one in two years. Compare that to, I think, between 30 and 40 that were established previously.

People without a family doctor are also more prone to be sicker and not do as well at managing either their chronic illnesses or their overall health. They have a harder time getting their prescriptions renewed. Someone is not keeping up with physical assessments, whether that's bloodwork or feeling for bumps on their body, examining moles that could become cancerous. All these things really matter. What happens? People go without primary care from a primary care provider for a certain amount of time until they realize that they're sick and they start having more serious symptoms. Then they show up in our emergency rooms.

Now the government says, we're fixing that with virtual care. Virtual care is not an alternative system to having a family doctor and being able to get physical exams from a family physician in person. It can help in certain circumstances, maybe with prescription renewals if a physical assessment isn't needed. It's more useful on the mental health care side to do counselling and therapy. It does not replace family practice medicine.

Furthermore, we're seeing that virtual care is actually hitting a roadblock, because so many people are trying to access it. This is a CBC article: "Billed as a Remedy for the Doctor Shortage, Virtual Medicine in NS Hits Bottleneck." It's not an answer.

What's happening in our emergency rooms is a result of lack of access to primary care. We know a third of the visits in our ERs, by the way, which are closing double-time under this government, twice as many ER closures under the PCs than in any previous government in recent memory, and what's happening? They're closing more. Nova Scotia emergency rooms, they've closed more, and the staffing shortages are happening twice as often as the previous year before this government was in power. I'll table that.



The government has said, we are bringing in mobile clinics to deal with this. Not a bad idea to help people who need a family doctor. It's not a bad idea, but here's a problem that we're hearing the mobile clinics have created: GPs can make more money with less overhead by working in a mobile clinic than they can in their own family practice. The irony of this program is you've got an incentive in place that's actually pulling general practitioners out of family medicine to work in a mobile clinic that's supposed to support patients who don't have a family doctor. Let's think about that. That's a problem, and that's an example of spending more but not spending wisely. Plus, demand has hit an all-time high for mobile health care clinics. People are lining up to get in. They're not accessing those easily.

This is also showing up in our walk-in clinics. More patients are being turned away as walk-in clinics see a surge in demand because of lack of access to family doctors.

You go around Halifax - I used to walk by in Scotia Square on my way to this House, a walk-in clinic. Usually, one or two people in there, just a few short years ago. Now they are lined up all the way down to the food court in Scotia Square. You see that in other walk-in clinics around Halifax, lined up outside in the Wintertime around buildings.

Health care is not getting better. It's getting worse, and it's getting worse at a rate that we haven't seen before. That is why when you see the government pat themselves on the back, it's about how much is being spent and not actually what that money is achieving.

What's missing from this budget? This PC Party promised Nova Scotians a universal mental health care program. We know that demand for mental health and addictions support is rising. Nothing in this budget for a universal mental health care program. This is their more health care, faster budget. They promised a pension for family doctors - doesn't show up. Now there aren't even any incentives to keep people in the family practice. Not even trying to tackle some of the issues that are driving GPs out of family practice, which they've been very vocal about: billing and overhead in particular.

We've got a bunch of retired doctors who are willing to support patients, but there are no billing codes that allow them to practice part-time, so they can't get back into the system in family practice. We brought a bill to the floor of the Legislature to change that - not voted for by the government, not supported. Nothing shows up in the budget to do anything about this issue.

We've got a whole bunch of doctors that are going to be retiring soon. There's going to be a surge of more people who will be without a family doctor. Nothing to help those physicians retire later on, or at least stay in practice part-time. This is a big problem.

I think we do have to say the biggest new item of spending in health care, which I think is over \$300 million at least, is on a two-year retention bonus. Listen, our nurses deserve that money, our paramedics deserve it, everybody in our health care system

deserves to have those dollars. I hope that it's successful in stemming the bleeding of our human resources in our health care system, because we have a vacancy problem that is just shooting through the roof right now.

That's not just because of this government, I'll say that. COVID-19 was a very challenging time for our health care professionals and people are getting burnt-out. They are in a situation now that because of the vacancy rate they can't take vacation. They can't get a break from the stressful work environments, and it's driving them out of practice.

We hope that the biggest new expense, which is a two-year retention bonus, helps stem that bleeding, but that is not going to help recruit new people to our health care system. Furthermore, we are hearing from a whole bunch of health care providers and workers who are frontline, patient-facing, who are not eligible for this. We are hearing from paramedics who are upset that they don't have the same amount of bonus as a nurse. They get one-quarter of what the nurses are getting.

This is an unfortunate outcome of how the government has handled that. You can have a group of people who are going to get this, who are going to be happy with it and hopefully they will stay. Will they stay after two years? I don't know. Usually what we see happen with doctors and employees is they will stay for the duration that the bonus is available and then they will leave after. We don't know if that is going to happen or not. There certainly is some evidence to suggest that it may and that can become a problem.

You also have thousands of employees who are disgruntled because they didn't get that money, they weren't eligible for it or they didn't get the same amount as their colleague who works next to them at work - lab techs, people doing the blood work. We've heard from nurses who were out on maternity leave or out for cancer treatment who are either being pro-rated or are not eligible for this.

That is not a long-term, visionary solution to our health care challenges. What it does is get this government to the election in two years. That's what it does. It tries to stem the bleeding, get through these next two years so that we can hopefully at least show some improvement in the health care system, but we are not seeing that show up.

This budget - as labelled "more health care, faster" - I do not believe is accurate. I do not think this budget is going to improve health care outcomes and that will be evident over the next two years. We will be able to see what happens. If I'm wrong, I might just get up and say it in the House, but I don't think I am going to be, because there's nothing in here to get more family doctors, incentivize them to practise. I think we're going to see more people who don't have a family doctor. I think we're going to see more people who are putting pressure on our walk-in clinics, our mobile clinics, our virtual care, and our emergency rooms. I also do believe that this government's approach to the most financially vulnerable is going to result in more people getting sick in Nova Scotia. It's going to result in more death.

By the way, death in our hospitals has gone up this year as well. About 500 more people have died in hospital this year. If we don't deal with the basic needs of our fellow human beings, our community members, those who need our help, we are not going to catch up with this problem. It's just not going to happen.

[6:45 p.m.]

I will say this: If you do want to see a government that has brought in a budget that actually factors in these things, you can look to the Liberal government in Newfoundland and Labrador - Your Health. Our Priority. This is a government that is supporting those on financial assistance with more money. It is tackling the root social determinant causes of health care, along with putting more operational dollars in the system.

I urge the government to look at this. This is a highlight in their budget document: "Helping with the High Cost of Living." That is in their health care budget, "Your Health. Our Priority." Your health, not just your health care system. That's where this government really misses the mark.

No new taxes, elimination of retail sales tax on home insurance, there is a reduction in the price of gasoline - something we've called for here - doubling the physical activity grant, the income supplement going up 5 per cent, seniors benefit going up - all kinds of things here to support people with the cost of living, because in Newfoundland and Labrador, with the Liberal government there, they know that these factors oftentimes matter more when it comes to health outcomes and health care outcomes than all the money you put on the operational side of things.

Long term, this budget creates issues. This government has been very clear that they don't think money matters. They don't think spending matters. They are not responsible with the public purse and taxpayers' money - 30 per cent of our overall debt that we have in Nova Scotia is going to be accumulated under this government over the next two years. So in four years, we're accruing close to 30 per cent of our provincial debt in these four years. I think that's insane.

The deficit for this year is shooting up from \$279 million to close to half a billion dollars by the end of this government's term. The net debt is going to rise from \$19.5 billion this year - by the end of their term, it's going to rise to over \$23 billion. The net debt-to-GDP ratio is going up by several percentage points as well.

The reason why this matters is because there's a cost to this debt. We all know that interest rates have been going up. We have to pay interest on our debt in this province, which is why this matters. The debt-servicing cost is going up to \$766 million this year and will be rising to almost \$1 billion to service our interest payments by the end of this government's term. We're going to be spending more servicing our debt than we are on

the Department of Community Services, and almost as much as we are on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

That has implications for government services. You've got to spend a billion dollars to cover your interest payments? That means taxpayers' money isn't going into government services. It's going to the banks. That has been a long-standing problem in this province. That's why you kind of understand Liberal politics in Nova Scotia. It seems the Tories get in and they're not fiscally responsible, ever. My generation and I are paying for the debt that was accumulated in the 1980s; now my kids are going to inherit the debt that was accumulated during this government's term in office; and when my kids and grandkids grow up, there's going to be more money that's going to pay the debt, maybe, than to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, right? It matters. It's not responsible to govern this way.

Now this would be forgivable if there were actually a return on this investment. If we start seeing outcomes improve in health care, hey, good job. You spent the money in the right areas. We'll take it on the chin with our interest payments. We know that things are getting better. But every single metric that matters to people, it's getting worse. People care about whether they have a family doctor or not. That matters to our health care system - 140,000 people now without a family doctor, ER closures doubling, off-load times doubling in our emergency rooms. I don't know one statistic that has gotten better in these last two years despite the fact that all these dollars are being spent, and if you look again at the biggest expense, it's just to stem the bleeding on vacancy for the next two years.

That is not going to help our health care system long-term, right? Let's stop the bleeding. Let's plug the hole, right? I think there are going to be unintended consequences as a result of that, too. You've got people who are frustrated, and they may leave because of that. There's not a return on this.

Furthermore, I do think people are going to be less well off and under more financial pressure. There's going to be more food insecurity that develops in this province. I believe people may get sicker over the next two years, and that is going to matter when it comes to health care outcomes and outcomes for people.

Where is the return on investment here? It is one thing to pay a billion dollars in interest, to borrow that money if you are going to get a return for Nova Scotians but we are not seeing that return on investment and that is why I am concerned about these figures.

Now the government is saying we can accumulate all this debt because we have a growing economy and population and for the first time in forever all this stuff is growing. The population has been growing here since 2015 because of smart policy to double the number of provincial nominees who could come here, because of factors obviously during the pandemic that we didn't expect, a lot of domestic immigration to Nova Scotia, not just

in Halifax but in rural areas as well. But in the budget documents that this government has tabled, it is very clear that population growth is actually slowing now.

We heard the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board say that the economy is going to keep growing - look how booming our economy is. Guess what? It's projected in this budget that economic growth is going to be slowing and we are actually seeing some red flags in the economy. Business confidence is down. That doesn't sound like we have small businesses that think the economy is going to be in good shape. Consumer spending is down. We have had 20 restaurants close in Halifax in the last year. That is another sign that consumer spending is down.

We can't take this economic growth for granted. The government doesn't even have a plan for the economy in this budget. We have sectors that are in trouble. The wine sector - they need emergency support but are not getting it from this government. That is hundreds if not thousands of people who are employed in the western part of the province. We have threat to our natural resource sectors from climate change to dropping in exports. We can't take the economic growth we've had for granted. It has also been an anomaly in the last 20 years to see this kind of growth.

This government, I do believe, is being irresponsible. They are spending a lot of money and we are not seeing a return. They have a budget that they say is going to deliver more health care faster for people when, in fact, we are not seeing that show up in the data, in the outcomes, in the evidence. We have a budget that I really believe is going to contribute to worsening problems when it comes to acute illness, chronic illness, food insecurity, and a number of other things that are going to show up in our health care system. They are going to be chasing this thing until the cows come home and we are never going to catch up. For those reasons we will not be supporting the Financial Measures (2023) Act. We will not be supporting this budget.

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the Financial Measures (2023) Act. As we all know, this is the Act that enables the budget. So how do we feel about this budget? Well, it's more, faster except for when it is less, slower. It contains a great deal of funding for a number of health care initiatives but no clear plan for what comes on the other side of these investments and third, money is no object except for when it is.

Let's begin with more, faster and less, slower. We measure budgets by the impact they have on people's lives and by that measure I am not sure what exactly will happen faster. People won't get a family doctor faster. In fact, we are looking at something like 10,000 residents of HRM who are newly on the list. It also appears in the health care area that faster is for this government a synonym for private. Pharmacy clinics, virtual care, mobile clinics, travel nursing, these are the big ticket items and these are all partnerships

with private companies. Millions - tens of millions of dollars out the door through contracts with minimal capacity and minimal oversight, a great deal of which can and should be delivered publicly.

It the wallet is open, let's spend some money to improve our public health care system. Is the plan to re-sign multi-million dollar contracts with Maple for the foreseeable future? Are we to believe that a Zoom appointment is a stand-in for a family clinic? What about private nursing companies. Will we rely on travel nurses forever, as they continue to poach, understandably, nurses from the public system, which we are leaving to rot.

It doesn't appear that faster means evidence-based, since the evidence overwhelmingly points to the need for attachment to a family health team that can follow you. People, parents, seniors across this province want to be able to call their doctor's office when they have a health issue.

The Premier has said that health care is going to look different - and we agree, health care should look different. I think the experts agree that health care should look different. It should look like collaborative health care teams, family health homes - an idea which, in fact, the NDP brought to this House and to the province over a decade ago, and which the Liberal government discontinued under their reign.

We know that better health outcomes come from community-based integrated care. We have a fantastic example right here in HRM in the North End Community Health Clinic, which for decades has been delivering this kind of care.

THE SPEAKER: Order. There's a bit of chatter in here.

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Thank you. We see no indication in this budget that people will have a doctor's office to call when their children are sick, when they are sick. That is an unbelievably missed opportunity.

There is no expansion of midwifery services, despite the savings it would provide to overstretched hospitals and clinics - despite the talk of increasing the scope of professionals. The Midwifery Association themselves came out today - and I'll table this when I get a copy of it - and said that they were deeply disappointed by the lack of inclusion in this budget.

Many members of this house, I know, have used midwives. This is a simple thing that could take pressure off of specialists, off of family doctors, off of our health care system. It could provide appropriate caring health care for pregnant people across this province.

We saw no commitment to the provision of free birth control, despite again, the savings that this would result in for the system as a whole. We know that this was recently included in the British Columbia budget - as was a significant financial commitment to change the structure of pay for family physicians so that they could offer consistent primary care to people in that province. We know what a difference that would make in the lives of women. Yet we saw nothing.

[7:00 p.m.]

We saw no coverage for the Shingrix vaccine, despite the high out-of-pocket cost that people have to pay if they want it. I think it's about a hundred dollars the last time I checked, for at-risk seniors, whom we know currently are suffering the most of any demographic in our health care system.

We saw no new funding for health care in the province's prisons, despite the tragic outcomes of insufficient access and the recent deaths that have been reported. It's unclear if and when new collaborative health care clinics will open, but we haven't been given any details on this. Then again, this government has shown that the budget is a document of convenience. It doesn't necessarily tell us what's going to happen.

There's no money for a universal school food program, despite being the only G7 country that doesn't feed kids to ensure that they can learn and that they stay healthy. There's no money for mental health crisis response teams across the province that advocates, and now in so many ways, the Mass Casualty Commission, have asked for. We need to transform our approach to policing. We have seen no commitment to that in this Chamber - despite repeated questions, not just in this session, but for years.

We have not seen meaningful progress towards the promise of universal mental health care. Not for the first responders who report terrible experiences trying to get the help they need to stay healthy and get back to work - including paramedics, professional firefighters, and others - and not for the communities affected by the mass casualty, whom the Mass Casualty Commission recommended have extraordinary supports in place by May 1<sup>st</sup>.

We have a more, faster health care budget that misses the boat on the better and sooner care that people truly need, and that would lower the costs and stressors on the system in the long run. Despite repeated promises and being elected to fix health care, there is no definition of what that means. There is no clear plan.

Every person who wants health care fixed wants something different. We all agree that we want health care fixed, but for some, that means that they just want to be able to call the doctor. They just want to be able to know that they can take their kid somewhere when they're sick and they won't have to take two days off of work, driving from walk-in

clinic to walk-in clinic, or trying to find mobile care that's open, or book an appointment with Maple.

Some want reduced surgery times. I can think of so many people over the last few years who are waiting for joint replacements, hip replacements, and knee replacements. That's what it means to them. For some, it's access to emergency mental health supports when they need them. Some just want a diagnosis. They don't want to wait a year and a half to see a specialist. Some just want to be able to afford their medications.

What's the priority? If there is one, we haven't heard it. If it means addressing any of the things that I just listed, we haven't seen it. It seems to mean that if you're lucky, you'll be able to get antibiotics for an ear infection from your pharmacist or a virtual appointment for something minor. With respect, I don't think that's what people are looking for when they're told that health care is going to be fixed.

This government needs to stop telling us that things are getting better when, objectively, they are not, and start telling us when they're going to get better and what that's going to look like.

Last, money is no object, except for when it is. On health care, we actually saw minimal investment in this budget in what I believe people want the most: health care that they can count on. Family health teams are something that would be truly transformative and is absolutely needed. I'm reminded of the Barenaked Ladies song If I Had a Million Dollars - only in this case, it's over a billion dollars.

Just a fraction of the overall budget, but a billion dollars in unexpected revenue landed in this government's lap. We've been asking ourselves, our constituents, the experts, and the people that we talk to - what would you do if you had an extra billion dollars to spend?

We hear all the time from governments that their hands are tied. The spending is allocated. They don't really have any room to manoeuvre. But this government, in this budget, in this year had room to manoeuvre.

If I had control of a government that had an unexpected extra billion dollars in revenue in a province with skyrocketing home prices and less than 1 per cent vacancy rates, I would spend a lot of it on creating affordable housing. I'd build housing. I would leverage the money for truly affordable, rent-geared-to-income, affordable housing. I would set up a branch of enforcement for residential tenancies - something both landlords and tenants have repeatedly asked for. I would establish a reliable system of rent control.

This government plans to build zero new public housing units even though there are thousands and thousands of people on the wait-list. Even those who are deemed a priority - special priority, by the way, is given to victims of family violence, those whose



homes have been condemned, or those who need to live near a hospital for health reasons. For those priority folks on the list, the wait is a little over a year, if you're lucky - but it's closer to two years in some parts of the province.

As was discussed - and as our office has discovered and brought to the floor of this House - we also have the cut to eligibility for rent supplements. The rent supplement program is now so stringent that it only applies to people who are literally desperately poor, who I don't actually understand because I don't have the lived experience of how they can make it from one day to the next. In extreme housing insecurity, it excludes the working poor, and it excludes seniors on the GIS. So we see those folks sleeping in shelters and going to work.

You won't qualify for the supplement if, for example, you live in Dartmouth, rent a one-bedroom apartment and make more than \$19,377 a year - \$19,000 a year. This government refuses to close the fixed-term lease loophole - a key tool that landlords are using to get around the rent cap that has the effect of massively increasing housing insecurity in our province.

I know, and we have heard, that people talk about the legitimate uses for fixed-term leases. In a normal rental market, we might be able to talk about that, but in this rental market at this time, we simply cannot, because with a 2 per cent rent cap, we saw a 9 per cent increase in rents. That is because you now almost can only get a fixed-term lease. Until the government acts, the housing system will not change.

There are thousands of people living with the anxiety right now of what they are going to do when their 12-month lease is up. Despite the government's insistence on building supply, that the answer to the housing crisis is to build housing - I believe I am paraphrasing - none of the cranes in the sky that any of us see on our walk to work, or in our drive around the province, are going to result in housing that anyone would call affordable.

Of course, there are a few pockets, the federal funding for the Rapid Housing Initiative has resulted in some units. There have been some partnerships - and I heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing reference this earlier - with non-profit housing providers, but it's not nearly enough.

If I had \$1 billion, I would build public housing. I would add to the buildings that exist, build new ones, support non-market and non-profits to build more. There is an RFP that was put out in downtown Dartmouth well over a year ago that I know, because even though it hasn't been announced, there were two qualified bidders. I know that both of those bidders intended to create hundreds of truly affordable housing units, but I can't get answers on whether there has been any progress on that, what's happening on that. There is simply not enough being done to make sure that people have a home they can afford.

If I had \$1 billion, I would raise the ESIA rates immediately, and then I would index them. Anything else is a cut - a cut to people living miles below the poverty level. In this job, we are required to have empathy. So everyone imagine for a moment that a single person in Halifax living on income assistance this year will be living \$18,000 a year below the poverty line. Poverty is not enough - people need to be in double poverty.

A single parent with a two-year old child will be \$17,000 a year below the poverty line. A couple with two children, ages 10 and 15 - maybe some people in this Chamber have been in that situation - will be \$21,000 a year below the poverty line. They will not be able to afford to feed those children properly. They will not be able to afford their medications, if they have them. They will not be able to afford transportation. This government has the power to do something about that.

As Vince Calderhead explains, this year's provincial budget represents a clear step backwards in the province's compliance with its human rights obligation to provide an adequate income. The province's decision to effectively lower the standard of living for those in receipt of assistance violates their basic human rights. That's from Hansard, but I can table that after I finish.

If I had \$1 billion I would freeze families' and seniors' Pharmacare fees. That's only something like \$64 million. That's only a little teeny part of \$1 billion. This government has the gall to make a big deal about how they haven't raised Pharmacare fees, but as we've been saying for almost a year now, they should freeze them entirely.

This budget projects revenue of more than \$64 million in seniors' Pharmacare fees, during a cost of living crisis where people regularly have to choose between food and medication.

We've heard a lot about the social determinants of health. We've been speaking in this Chamber on this topic for years. That's way upstream. Further downstream than that is just being able to take your meds, if they are prescribed to you. Many people, including the people in our provincial Pharmacare programs, can't do that, and this government could change that today. They could freeze those fees and make sure that people can take their medication, keep them out of emergency rooms, keep them healthy.

On the heels of a truly terrifying IPCC report - and for those of you who don't spend a lot of time thinking about climate, I would really recommend looking it up - standing on the coast of a peninsula that is basically and might soon actually be an island, with thousands of miles of unprotected coastline, which is on the front lines of climate change - if I had \$1 billion and a majority government, I would immediately enact the Coastal Protection Act and ensure that we are doing everything we can to protect our province and all that it contains: people, flora, and fauna.

Studies show that every \$1 spent on adaptation now will save \$15 on future costs. That's money that will come from this government. That adaptation is a cost that we will have to bear. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and we refuse to prevent the catastrophe coming our way.

Our government would massively invest in deep retrofits. We've gone some way there but we have much further to go. Are the new developments being greenlit behind closed doors net zero? No, they aren't, and they aren't affordable either. If this government is in the business of doing favours and expediting projects, the least they could do is ask for something in return. Imagine if we were building new net-zero public housing. We could kill two birds with one stone.

This budget includes no strong financial commitment to the Atlantic Loop or a Plan B to get off coal. The Premier is suddenly cold on the idea of the Atlantic Loop. When asked what is Plan B, he just says wind, solar, tidal, tidal, solar, wind, in different successions, and we are supposed to believe that's a plan. That is not a plan. Those are words. We need to understand how we are going to move this province off coal and into a cleaner future, if not for us, then for our children.

There are no accelerated investments in active transit or in public transit. As the Ecology Action Centre points out - and I will table this - of the \$41.4 million in direct funding for the climate plan, the vast majority - \$34 million - was already earmarked for environmental initiatives through the Green Fund. We've talked about this a little bit tonight, what the government is actually doing versus what was already in the works. The government says the climate change plan will be further resourced, but we need so much more and we need to move so much more quickly.

The Nova Scotia Government showed today - they said that a robust response to the crisis is possible. That was a reference to the spending on health care. However, this budget fails to recognize concurrent emergencies beyond health care that demand our attention. Certainly, whether we like it or not, the environment is one.

In light of what we have read in the report of the Mass Casualty Commission and also what we have been advocating for years, if we had an extra billion dollars, we would substantially increase funding to organizations working to combat gender-based violence. We would recognize the call for a transformation of our approach to community safety, something we have also been calling for for years. We have been amplifying, in fact, the calls of people on the front lines who tell us over and over again that our current carceral approach to policing simply doesn't work.

We would ensure that there are more infant and toddler child care spots in the province and not pretend that a few hours of unlicensed before- and after-school care - which is needed - fulfills that commitment. It does not. I meet people every day who aren't going back to work, who are leaving the province, and who are not sleeping at night

because they cannot find child care. I have been in the position of trying to find child care. Many of us have been in that position. It is something that we were promised would be fixed, and it has not been fixed.

[7:15 p.m.]

We would ensure that education workers are paid a living wage and not wait for the second group of them in a year to go on strike, as CUPE members are preparing to do in the breakdown of conciliation and absence of further meaningful negotiations with this government. This from a government with little respect for collective bargaining unless it serves them to say so as a delay tactic.

We would immediately ensure that victims of assault, abuse, and bullying are not subject to the misuse of non-disclosure agreements by relying on existing legislative precedents and jurisdictional scans to inform a bill that would have passed this session. This is something on which we agreed with the current government when they were in Opposition but which has changed significantly since then.

These areas - family health teams; cost of living, including housing; child care and income; action on climate change; transforming our approach to gender-based violence; and community safety - are all areas where this government is moving so slowly. These are all part of health care.

If we had an extra billion dollars with a growing and increasingly younger population, we would make sure that the policies, budgets, and choices of our government lifted everyone up. We would ensure that all Nova Scotians could share in the prosperity that we have and that we could all have a chance to thrive - that paramedics and education workers and Uber drivers and students and seniors and families all have the opportunity to thrive.

We would acknowledge again and again the truth of our small province: that we are connected, and we are and should be interested not just in each other's business and who your father is - because we know that we are interested in those things but also how you are doing and if you need a hand. They say we are separated by six degrees, but I think we can all agree that here in Nova Scotia, it's more like two. With that connection comes a responsibility to care for each other, to celebrate our successes and to work to fix our failures, to ask for help when we need it and to offer it when we have it. Government can reflect these values or ignore them. Sadly, I think that in so many areas of this budget, they are ignored.

In the Barenaked Ladies song, which maybe some of you will be humming tonight as you fall asleep - I would sing it but I'm not allowed - the chorus says. "If I had a million dollars, I'd buy your love." Mr. Speaker, if we in the NDP had an extra billion dollars, we would show Nova Scotians - all Nova Scotians, the ones who need help the most - that we

love them and that we love them enough to believe that they should have health care that they can count on, a home that they can afford, meaningful action on climate, and a focus on equity. Unfortunately, this budget falls short of that, and so we will not be supporting it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: I'm happy to rise today - well, I'm not really happy because I think this isn't a great budget and a great FMA, but I'm pleased to give my position on why I believe it's not a good budget for Nova Scotia.

The leader of the NDP just talked about if she had an extra billion dollars. Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no chance of having that extra billion dollars because by the end of this mandate, we'll be paying a billion dollars to service the debt. If you let that sink in for a moment, it means we're going to grow the province's debt by one-third over the course of this term, \$5.6 billion. A total debt of \$22 billion.

We're not only setting up our children, our children's children, but we're setting up our children's children's children with a debt that they will probably never pay down. When we look at spending, we hear the minister say, well, what does the Opposition want? Do they want us to spend? Do they not want us to spend? One minute they say they want us to spend, the next minute they say they don't want us to spend.

Well, the answer to that question is we want to spend with a plan. We want to spend in a way that's going to bring Nova Scotia forward. Ringing up a deficit is not necessarily a bad thing if it's bringing the outcomes that Nova Scotians are looking for. And what we've seen from this government - we're not seeing those outcomes based on all the spending.

Now we're into Year 2, we're into the second budget, and we'll hear the government say, there are fourteen-point-odd-billion reasons why this is a good budget. When I hear those types of analogies and those types of statements, it makes me really question and wonder how much thought, or how much effort, is actually going into some of these programs.

We saw in the end of this fiscal year, half-a-billion - that's a big number - half-a-billion dollars spent in the month of March - outside of the budget. Over the course of this budget year, we saw \$1.6 billion spent outside of the budget. So we're here voting on a budget that for all intents and purposes, over 10 per cent of it is arbitrary. Because just on the willy-nilly - I don't know if that's a parliamentary term, but willy-nilly decision, we can spend money on whatever we feel is necessary at that time, without oversight from this Legislature.

I think that's a problem. We'll hear them say, well, the rules were made by the NDP, they were followed by the Liberals. Not to the extent that we're seeing today. Not to the extent - now we just saw the Appropriations come through this week, and I think we saw a number in there of \$1.7 billion that could be spent outside of the Appropriations. That is just an amazing, amazing figure for me.

There are 55 people in this Legislature whose job it is to ensure that the government is spending its money in the best interests of Nova Scotians and in the best interests of moving this province forward. By spending all this money outside of the budget, it takes away that power of oversight by the MLAs in this province. And I think that should really be changed.

What we didn't see - this budget is branded as - I'm going to get it right this time - *More Healthcare, Faster*. In my opinion, what the government is doing is putting all of their eggs in one basket. We're putting almost half of this budget into health care. Nobody's disputing that health care needs a healthy budget, as long as the outcomes are tied to it.

What we are missing in this budget is help for Nova Scotians. We're missing the help for average everyday Nova Scotians who are paying their taxes on time, filing their taxes on time, working hard, and not getting ahead. As a matter of fact, they're falling further behind.

This caucus, in this session and in previous sessions, tabled numerous bills that were targeted at helping everyday Nova Scotians. One of those bills was to cut the motive fuel tax. Again, we'll hear "federal carbon tax," et cetera, et cetera - all smoke and mirrors, all sound bites from this government.

There was a legitimate way to help Nova Scotians at the pumps, help them at the grocery stores, help them with transportation, help them get from Point A to Point B and to their jobs, help small businesses, help taxis, and help deliveries. It was a measure that would help everybody, but because it's not the idea, or because it was somebody else's idea, we can't look at that in the budget, and that is a real shame. It's a real shame for Nova Scotians.

Another measure that was tabled by this caucus that would have helped all Nova Scotians was the idea of indexing the tax brackets to inflation. I stood in this Legislature - I think it was second reading or the Committee of the Whole House on Bills, one of the two - and I talked about income tax brackets and how indexing those tax brackets to inflation would be a good thing for Nova Scotians.

During that conversation, I mentioned that the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board had said that income tax bracket indexing only helps the wealthy. Then I corrected myself and said: Well, higher income earners. The Finance and Treasury Board Minister said, I didn't say that.

I want to table the document that the Finance and Treasury Board Minister said on March 23, 2023: “I will say that in terms of indexing tax brackets, the benefit actually accrues to higher-income earners.”

[7:30 p.m.]

Those are the words of the Finance and Treasury Board Minister. Indeed, he did indicate that income tax bracket indexing will only help higher earners. Let me put that into perspective. The lowest tax bracket for Nova Scotia is \$29,000. Indexing that up does not help high-income earners. It helps all Nova Scotians. As all Nova Scotians begin to get a cost of living raise, it gets eaten away because they move into a higher-income tax bracket. All of that benefit they think that they’re getting - it’s a hidden tax. They think they’re getting this tax, but it’s going back into the coffers of government.

Nova Scotia has the worst tax brackets in all of Atlantic Canada. Nova Scotians pay the most provincial taxes in all of Atlantic Canada and are Number 2 in all of North America. Documents were previously tabled that indicated that, Mr. Speaker. We could easily lessen the burden of income taxes on our Nova Scotian families and Nova Scotian individuals.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to again bring up the topic of equalization. We saw in this budget that there will be an increase of \$2.8 billion in equalization funding from the federal government to the provincial government. Just a reminder that equalization was put in place to ensure that provinces were receiving like benefits or services for like taxes.

We know in Nova Scotia we are not seeing that. We know that we are not seeing like services for the amount of taxes we pay. I want to reiterate that during the election the Premier campaigned on the idea that there was an issue with the way municipalities are funded in this province, doubling the allotment to municipalities from the equalization fund with the promise to go back and renegotiate the way that municipalities are funded. That has not happened, and municipalities are struggling.

I know from the news reports we’ve seen that the Cape Breton Regional Municipality is struggling to balance a budget. They are looking at cutting services and there’s no help for them. It was promised; it has not been delivered - a sound bite to get elected, followed up by no delivery. That seems to be the modus operandi of this province.

I have an idea that can help all municipalities in this province immediately: simply cut the municipal education tax. The tax that municipalities pay to the province for a provincial service, if we were to cut that, that would be a great first start. [Interruptions] We’ll start with education and then we can move on to housing. These are areas that could easily be transferred back to the province, allowing municipalities a little bit of breathing room until the funding agreement is restructured. This restructuring, this agreement - it’s

over 20 years since this was even looked at. It's time to review the way municipalities are funded in this province.

I have a letter here that was sent to the Premier by the Halifax Regional Municipality and it talks very much about the impact that education taxes are having on municipalities and their ability to balance budgets and I will table that.

Mr. Speaker, time flies when you're having fun here in the Legislature. Because I've spoken on this a couple of times, I don't want to belabour my points. The last thing I want to talk about is housing and the fact that we've done nothing in this budget to increase housing within the province of Nova Scotia.

We're in a crisis; we need more housing. The rent supplements are not going to cut it. The rent supplements being raised to 50 per cent, it's just not going to cut it. It's not going to help the folks who are needing those rent supplements in order to survive. To top it all off, there are no apartments to rent, so a rent supplement is no good if you can't find an apartment.

To summarize, I guess what I've spoken about this evening is that all of our eggs are in one basket. I really hope, honestly for Nova Scotians, that this works out. I really hope that we see those massive improvements in health care, because as some of my colleagues have said, this is a defining budget for this government. If things don't work out from this budget, it's going to be interesting how things look going forward.

All the eggs are in one basket. We know eggs are fragile. Let's hope that we're able to pull this off. With that, I'm going to take my place and pass it on to the next speaker.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the chance to rise and reflect on the budget process for 2023-24 one more time. To probably repeat some of the things I've had to say about this and hopefully cover some new territory as well.

So, as we've seen, in fact, there's very little substance in the FMA as presented. A weak and wee FMA raises many questions. I think that we are all left to wonder, and Nova Scotians are left to wonder what this PC government will do next.

We saw over the past 19 months the consolidation of over a dozen bodies, from independent governance structures to under the purview of ministers - direct purview and control of ministers. We saw a Fall FMA, which is unusual in and of itself, that purported to really be about harmonizing with the federal definition, but actually then buried a major tax credit program in the back of it.



We've all talked about our concerns about the major amounts of additional appropriations. I understand that this is provided for in the current 2010 Finance Act, but as I've said before, I think we would be remiss if we were not looking at how we manage in the policies and Acts that we used to manage, especially around accountability and transparency, looking at them, wondering are we doing the best, and what can we do going forward.

Evidently, we've had the report from the Auditor General indicating that in fact we can be doing better and that other jurisdictions are doing better. I think what is also concerning, and I think my colleague from Dartmouth South also alluded to this, is that then we hear all these big announcements, through additional appropriations in particular. Just because it's been allocated doesn't actually mean it's been planned. There are no clear plans in place on so many critical files that demonstrate an understanding of good project management and budgeting.

So, for example, a lot of the \$1.6 billion from fiscal year 2022-23, has been sent out to - has been promised to external partners. But these external institutions will not be spending all this - they certainly didn't spend it in the fiscal year in which it was allocated, which was last year. They're not even going to be spending it this year. So, in fact, we are now sending, for some reason - why we're not spending it on real needs such as income assistance, disability supports, housing, I could go on, but we're sending massive amounts of public funding to external organizations to sit there for a while.

I know that eventually those external organizations are going to do some great things with it, but we actually have essentially forfeited some of our future to being there. Then when we ask ministers questions about how that money is being managed, well in fact, contracts haven't been signed. It's still being worked out. What's going to happen with the interest? I think we really have a right to be concerned about what this does to the budget of Nova Scotia.

There are other questions, so in particular I had a chance to speak with the Minister of Advanced Education in Estimates - and this is true, there's over \$100 million going out the door that actually is not planned really. This is very concerning. In the Department of Agriculture, a very important and critical support was signalled to farms for recovery from the February deep freeze. However, it was allocated months in advance of when we'll know what the actual need is.

So again, it seems like we're in such a rush to get money out the door from the past fiscal year without legislative oversight and is it really serving the aims that we want it to and is it going to reach the outcomes that we need? We believe that Nova Scotia should come into line with other Canadian jurisdictions, and I tabled a private member's bill in this session that would require a new look at how we do our appropriations process.

I think I also want to make it clear - we have heard time and time and time again in this session, the Opposition says spend, then they say don't spend. I do think we have consistently said we need to be accountable and transparent. I also think we have been quite consistent - there has also been thrown at us that the government needs to be able to act in emergencies, and to emergent issues, and didn't you want us to spend money on Hurricane Fiona? The answer is absolutely, but most provinces and the federal government have lots of different ways that they can respond to emergencies that still meet real tests of accountability and transparency.

It is a wonder about why this government is so resistant to dealing with the issue of unbudgeted, unplanned spending. I think it raises all kinds of questions. Is planning just not happening, or is it happening too slowly? I know there's an amazing civil service that supports all of these ministers. Is it at the decision-making point where things are not being decided upon to be implemented?

Is there a perceived expediency by ministers that if we do the additional appropriations, then we don't have to talk about it? It can be a big splash, a big buzzword, but we're not accountable for it. Is it a lack of respect for the democratic process? I don't want to contemplate that as the reason, but there are so many things that have happened over the past 19 months that would indicate this government is not taking seriously the role of this entire Legislature in policy and budgeting for the province.

I don't think that this budget, through the FMA, reinforces sound fiscal management. I also don't think that this budget, and the FMA, provide adequate consideration of our economic policy needs. More importantly, I really wonder and hope that all of the members, including those folks on the other side, have actually taken in the risks that this budget is built on. We have been through a period of economic volatility. That's what we always talk about. There was a pandemic, there was a war, and there were supply issues. We know all that. That's often being used, frankly, to make excuses about how decisions are being made. Really, this government has actually benefited from the volatility of increased tax revenue. Things are still volatile. Things are still tenuous.

In this government's own budget - I encourage every member to go read the risks section, go read the GDP growth section. It's predicting real GDP growth of 0.6 per cent in 2023, and 1.1 per cent in 2024. My friends, this is not very much wiggle room. That's not very much growth, and it's pretty easy to knock a 0.6 per cent growth rate to a negative growth rate.

I think we're not anticipating entering into a recession in this province. That is good news, but we're not exactly on the far side of an economic boom. I think we really need to understand the choices we're making with the money in this budget, and that we made with all of the additional appropriations from last year's budget. As my colleague, the member for Northside-Westmount, said, they had better be getting the impact we need because we're just not going to have all of this extra cash floating around in the next few years.

The budget also lays out some really big challenges, and I have yet to hear the government's ideas about how to address them. Over the medium term, the economic outlook assumes that productivity growth will be driven by rising population and labour supply. Yet we know that in every sector in this province, in every region of this province, we have a labour issue. We don't have folks to fill the positions that are available. If they do fill the positions that are available, they don't have enough to live on. We really have an issue.

[7:45 p.m.]

Our labour force participation rate has fallen from 2021 to 2022, and there was lower participation against the broad age cohort of 30-year-olds to 55-year-olds. I ask questions like, what is our economic development plan? Why do we have the MOST program, which is for folks under 30, if it's actually our more middle-aged folks - I'll throw myself in there - who are where we need to concentrate, where we need to assess how to encourage better labour force participation amongst 30- to 55-year-olds?

Again, we've also asked this government many times about a gender-based analysis of this. I believe it was the member for Bedford South who talked about the average age that women enter the trades. I would also say that from over the years from working with young people with mental health issues, often their launch into work and education can sometimes be delayed or perhaps slower than the set-out path.

I also think about folks who are 2SLGBTQ+ who also - since a lot of them are waiting a long time for gender-affirming care - don't follow the same traditional track record of timing of college, timing of entering into the workforce. I feel it will be really interesting to see the results of the MOST program in the coming months, and who is able to access it.

Again, I've been asking questions about economic development, our labour shortage, and the connection to immigration. We have a goal in immigration. I don't see what the plan is. If the plan is that we're going to welcome people to this wonderful province, that's great. First of all, we're actually not doing the best in Canada. I will table that document in a minute, from Stats Canada. We're not the only growing jurisdiction in Canada, we're not the fastest. P.E.I. is growing at 4.25 per cent, Alberta at 3.68 per cent last year. We were at 3.53 per cent, and New Brunswick was at 3.28 per cent.

I think what's important to say is, folks, we're in competition. It's not like everybody wants to move to Nova Scotia. Actually, lots of people are moving to other places. If we don't create the conditions for success for people who are coming here, we are not going to keep them. Traditionally in Nova Scotia we have had - and this I can table - an immigrant retention problem. We're getting better. The Atlantic Immigration Program has been absolutely essential for moving Nova Scotia out of the bottom floor in Canada. We're now in competition. We're even keel with our Atlantic neighbours. So we're doing

better at keeping the people who come, but we're not keeping all of them. First of all, we're keeping between 60 or 65 per cent over a five-year period, and we're not show-offs in the Atlantic Provinces. Everyone else is doing about the same.

We need to really question, welcome everybody in, it's going to be great. We really need to think about that because I see too many conversations and hear from too many folks who are like, "I can't find a place to live here." I'm part of a number of Francophone discussion groups, that sort of thing, and people are like, "Hooray, I'm moving to Nova Scotia, where should I send my kids to school?" Everyone is like, "Don't worry about that, what you have to worry about is finding a place to live," or people saying, "I'm coming in a month, where am I going to live?" The community conversation is that there is no place to live here.

In terms of actually welcoming newcomers, I would say that we have an amazing Immigrant Settlement Association in ISANS. We have amazing community partners around the province, and we have Nova Scotians who have stepped up. But I would say that what I have seen is that New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador have outpaced our governmental efforts in Afghan and Ukrainian settlement. I'll tell you how they are doing it. First of all, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador went to Poland to attract Ukrainians wanting to come to Canada, and made sure that housing was in place. When you were a Ukrainian immigrant who landed in Newfoundland and Labrador, you immediately had access to a social worker.

I had family who housed a Ukrainian family for several months. It was an amazing experience. You can imagine that family hit the ground and basically Day 1, mom was working, kids were in school, and they wanted to have their own place. It took them six months to be able to find a place in a small Nova Scotia town. They can't really afford it, so I think they are hoping for some kind of luck to make it balance over the long term.

My point is that in Newfoundland and Labrador, there was really a great deal of support to help people find housing - to provide the types of supports that people need to be successful.

Another part of our growth strategy - so far immigration strategy is actually our labour strategy, and our labour strategy is our economic development strategy. That's all pretty important to get this right. Well, there's another part of that, and that is making this a province where newcomers - whether they are coming from another part of Canada or another part of the world - want to stay. As I said earlier in this budget debate, I think this budget is a dismal commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in this province.

What does it say about the fact that there was all this hoopla around the anti-racism bill? There is no money allocated to the strategy - and I understand there is work going on - but honestly, you can't be working across communities, be engaged in communities, and

be doing good programs without a budget. That just doesn't make sense. We don't have a child youth commission. Again, despite the fact that there was a commitment to it - a very public commitment to it - we don't see it.

I would invite the minister to show me where the money is, where the legislation is. People were engaged. People across the country were happy that Nova Scotia was finally catching up - and yet we see nothing. We have no public responsiveness about what is actually happening. I have not heard anyone on that side of the floor talk about a commitment to how we are making the 2030 accessibility commitments we have in this province. Really, this should be a financial pressure on this province, and if we are not funding it, it's not going to happen. Again, it can't be done on good wishes and best will. That's not the way things work.

We had in this session a Premier who refused to stand and condemn transphobic hate - which I will tell you, was really meant to be a softball kind of Question Period question. We have the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act, we have all these commitments to gender-affirming care. I invited the Premier to condemn transphobic hate because it is illegal. It's against the Human Rights Act. It should be a pretty easy thing for someone to stand up and do. Yet he didn't do it. The minister didn't do it - and I haven't heard it from any other person on that side of the room.

I worry that we are not advancing. I was concerned to hear a minister during Estimates say that some cultures have higher rates of interpersonal violence, which actually does not bear out in statistics. It is not a systemic look at how violence happens in our society. Frankly, it's shameful and it's racist. What are people hearing when they are looking at this province?

I think as well, once a bureaucrat, always a bureaucrat. This is the second time that I have approached Estimates debate with quite a great deal of enthusiasm because I love to talk about things like plans and evaluation. I love to hear about how you've done an evaluation and that it informs what you do next - because what you did first was maybe not the right thing, but that's okay because you are learning from it, and you are publicly sharing that type of learning.

Anyway, as you can imagine, this is not what happened in my second experience. Maybe next year, I don't know. I know where I'm used to being. I am actually highly optimistic over here. I just want everybody to know this. Everyone is, like, you always see the glass. It doesn't even have to be half-full, Lisa, you see the glass. I am still looking for the glass, folks. But what I hear from this government is goals without plans, targets without measures, commitments without contracts, a lack of use of evidence - except to stonewall - precious little program evaluation, and no sense that it is being integrated.

I've talked about this across economic development, immigration, agriculture, housing, mental health, advanced education. Frankly, last night I was disappointed and

very concerned listening to the Estimates debate with the Minister of Community Services. In the minister's mandate letter, there is an extremely clear goal, which is to set a target to reduce child poverty. There is really little ambiguity about what that is - but set a target. I don't know what the actual post-pandemic rate is, but if we have a 23 per cent child poverty rate in this province, set a target. Maybe the target is 20 per cent. Maybe the target is 19 per cent by 2025, for instance. That is a target with a timed-down goal - and yet we don't have that.

The last time that I saw this province talk about a poverty reduction strategy was when I first joined the Nova Scotia provincial government, and was working on behalf of Finance with Community Services on the poverty reduction strategy of the last time that there was a majority PC government. And there was a strategy - there were actually lots of words and some ideas around what we're going to do. No, there were. There were areas of focus. But you know what there wasn't? There wasn't a target, and we were practically the laughingstock of this country compared to all the other work the provinces were doing around actually setting targets for poverty reduction.

If you do not set a target, you have no idea where you're going. You have no idea where you are. You have no idea where you're going. So when I hear in Estimates debates words like "if I could wave a magic wand, I'd get rid of poverty," you know, people's personal commitments to the ending of poverty, of course I would say we would all share that. But when you take on the role of government, it's time to flip into the planning that I've talked about. It's time to flip into things like plans, targets that are measurable, and commitments that are measurable and reported on using best available evidence and using program evaluation.

We often - maybe some of us - hear hopes and prayers as a response to gun violence, for instance in the United States, and kind of roll our eyes. Well, hopes and prayers for ending poverty in this province are just not good enough.

We talked a lot about what is not in this budget, what we would do if we had a billion dollars, and in closing, I would just say - like I said, I'm an eternal optimist. But there are too many Nova Scotians who remain worried. They wonder if they, their children, their parents, and their friends will get the health care that they need when they need it. No one seems to be getting it faster. Some are getting it much, much slower, such as the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Nova Scotia, and the messages that is sending are incredibly damaging.

Nova Scotians are stressed when they go to the grocery store or the pharmacy or try to access other essential goods, and we know that their household budget is not keeping up. People are worried about folks in our communities who don't have homes, and they know that the rates are increasing far beyond whatever we've experienced in this province before. Most renters are nervous. They are worried about their ability to stay in their homes and afford their homes in the future.

Nova Scotians want to see action on climate change. They want to see action on protecting our coastal climate, as everyone has probably heard in their email boxes, in terms of people's dismay that the Coastal Protection Act is being further delayed. Nova Scotians want us to rise to the challenge of reconciliation, social justice, and racial equity, and to overcome shameful pasts and ensuing legacies of colonization, racism, and exclusion.

Budgets are about choices, and I don't think Nova Scotians are dazzled by the choices that this government has made.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON.KEITH IRVING: It's a pleasure to rise on the FMA and make a few comments on the budget that has moved its way through the House. There's a lot to talk about, but I think I'll just focus on three points. Many points have been made by my colleagues on the many questionable choices that this government is making. I'm going to concentrate on three things.

First, this whole issue of governing by slogan. This is a government that is governing by slogan, and the slogan of the day, of course, with the budget is "More, faster." That's the slogan.

The other thing I'm going to speak about is the irresponsible use of sole-source contracts by this government, and to wrap up, talk about the lack of competence with respect to fiscal management by this government.

Let's start with "More, faster." Now, you really have to dig to try to figure out what that actually means and where it came from. It's a bit of a shell game. Takes a little bit of work to figure out where that ball is. It appears it's really just a talking point.

Let's go back. Where was that "More, faster" coined? Well, it was coined on December 15<sup>th</sup>, when the changes to the QEII New Generation project were announced. There was a press release and a news conference that there was going to be this big change with respect to how the QEII New Generation project was going to be delivered and it was going to be more and faster.

I am going to point out the few facts that we have been able to gather because the only evidence of what the plan is was a press release on December 15<sup>th</sup>. We've seen no plans, no budgets, no schedules, and we've only had the opportunity in Estimates to try to peel back the layers of what this project really is.

During Estimates the minister said we're moving more quickly. The old project was going to be an 8- to 10-year build. Now we've got a five-year build. But we learned in

Estimates that the five-year build is starting in 2024. So for three years nothing has happened. We're short on details.

[8:00 p.m.]

Last Fall the minister said it would start in April; now he has revised that to the Summer. The real critical piece of information that we were interested in and the press were interested in was there is no contract for this project until 2024.

Let's do a little math: In 2021 they took over a project that was going to be 8 to 10 years, but of course we have a Premier who wants to go like hell so let's say this government could have delivered that project in eight years. So in 2029 we would be opening a new QEII hospital. Now with this more is faster, we know that they intend in 2024 to sign a contract and it's going to take five years to build. Completion date, 2029, so not faster.

Let's look at the evidence we can find in the Capital Plan. If you look at the Capital Plan, the more is faster government has a \$260 million underspend in health care projects. In this upcoming year they are actually going to spend less than what they even intended to spend last year, and we're still trying to figure out what that spending is, because the minister said we're going to spend \$100 million on the Cape Breton Regional Hospital project, \$27 million on the Bayers Lake Community Outpatient Centre and we're going to spend \$130 million for site work on the Halifax Infirmary project. But the budget for health care spending is \$253 million.

Now there are 28 projects on the list for health care and yet the three that they've mentioned are spending more than what they've got in the budget. I suspect, my best guess is the Halifax Infirmary expansion is not actually in this budget because they don't know if that's actually going to become a reality.

The other thing we learned, which was absolutely new language, we've never heard this spoken about but when I inquired with the minister about all of these new builds that were announced in December 15<sup>th</sup>, which included a new mental health and addictions campus, a new Nova Scotia rehabilitation and arthritis centre, a new heart health centre of excellence. They all sound great but the minister let us know that that is Wave 2; they are concentrating on Wave 1. So those projects are barely a glint in the eye of this government. Perhaps they are not even real until after we get finished doing the work taking us to 2029.

These simple facts show that projects have slowed under this government and Nova Scotians could easily conclude that absolutely nothing here is going faster.

More is faster? It's not going faster. It's slowed down. And what have been the costs of slowing these projects down? To come into government and for a good 18 months put the brakes on this project. What has that cost us?



The Minister of Public Works confirmed in my questioning that what we've heard on the street is construction costs have increased 30 per cent in 2022. I would submit that inflation has not stalled. It will continue this year and it will continue until 2024, when the government actually begins working on this project.

The minister did, under my inquiries, confirm - the minister responsible for this major multi-billion-dollar build, that, yes, this project has been affected by inflation. What are these three years of delay costing Nova Scotia taxpayers? We don't really know because there's no information in the public realm of how big this project is.

There were initial numbers of \$2 billion; I've heard numbers like \$3 billion. I've talked with others who say it's got to be way more than that. Well, let's just imagine it's \$3 billion. We just had a year of 30 per cent increase. Maybe it's 3 per cent this year, 33 per cent increase in construction costs in a short period of time. The delays by this government, it is realistic to conclude, have increased the cost to the Nova Scotia taxpayer of a billion dollars - a billion dollars.

The only thing that's more in "More, faster" is the cost of this project that has ballooned under this government. The only thing that's more is the amount of debt that Nova Scotia taxpayers, our children, are going to have to pay to complete this project. If this government had moved and continued on the path of the project as it stood, it was an environment where the Bank of Canada interest rate was 0.25. Today it is 4.5.

You have a project that you're financing for - I don't know, we don't have the information - 30 years. And we now have it costing a billion dollars more, and an interest rate - I haven't even done the math here - 17 times bigger of an interest rate. These are extremely, extremely big numbers for a small province to saddle our children and grandchildren with this debt.

It's extremely disingenuous to hide all the information of what's going on in the backrooms of this government by delaying a project, allowing it to balloon, allowing interest rates to take over, to come and tell us as a province that this is more, faster. It is slower and it is more costly. That's what more, faster means.

The second area I wanted to speak about is really the irresponsible use of sole-source contracts. The one that we know information about is the hotel, a hotel that was purchased in a day for \$34.3 million. An incomplete building, and they purchased this project at top dollar with a professional architect's recommendation that this building would not be suitable for its purpose without extremely costly renovations. So they sole-sourced a purchase, and then they turned around and sole-sourced a \$15 million contract within weeks. That's serious money. I think we're spending - what did we work out, \$450,000 a room? Is that a good use of the public purse?

AN HON. MEMBER: It's mind-boggling.

KEITH IRVING: It's mind-boggling. Thank you.

I want to move now to the other big sole-sourced contract, and that is our biggest build in a generation. As I indicated to the minister during Estimates, during the time of this government, they lost a second bidder in a process before it closed. We have one bidder. They're negotiating with one bidder. I'm a professional architect, and anyone in the construction industry knows that to get the best value for your dollar, you tender.

When I spoke with the minister about this in Estimates, I have to say this: I was shocked when the minister explained how he wasn't giving a blank cheque. This is what he said, something to the effect of, you know, the way you build a deck. The minister who is responsible for a multi-generational, multi-billion dollar project is comparing it to building a deck?

Surprisingly, the minister could not even confirm that this build was in the fiscal plan, and based on the numbers that I see in the fiscal plan, based on the little bit of information we've been able to piece together from our questions, this is not in the fiscal plan. The fiscal four-year plan that's adding \$5 billion to debt does not include a project that could be \$5 billion.

One of the reasons - and I spoke about this with the minister during Estimates - that you use a P3 project. One of the major selling points that the construction industry uses to compel governments to entertain P3 projects is the transfer of risks to the private sector. Governments are willing to pay a contractor more money to transfer those risks.

What have we learned through this project? It's that the risks are too big even for the private sector. These are experienced big contractors. We all know that. PCL and EllisDon - these contractors know what they're doing. They're highly experienced, they do big projects, and EllisDon walked away from this project because the risks were too big.

What did we learn from this? The P3 model, the contractors aren't even willing to take money to take on the risks. What is going on in those back rooms as they negotiate this contract? I would submit that in all likelihood, the risks are resting with Nova Scotians.

Let's think about being a contractor right now, sitting down at a table, negotiating a contract for a multi-billion-dollar project, and you're the only one at the table with government. You're at the table with a government that has said, I'll pay whatever it takes. Nova Scotians, I'm going to pay whatever it takes. I don't know what contractors everyone in this room has worked with, but any contractor I've worked with would have such a big smile on their face to have a client who has said, you're the only one at the table and I'm going to pay whatever it takes.

This government has abdicated their negotiating position by publicly going out and saying, I'll pay whatever it takes. We still don't know how the Nova Scotian taxpayer will

be protected. There's some talk about hiring Deloitte to do some kind of review. The government will pay Deloitte to tell them what they want to hear. This government wants to hear we're moving forward, go like hell. These are big dollars, and the government has abdicated their negotiating power.

[8:15 p.m.]

Nova Scotians are going to have to ask themselves, whenever this number comes in, whether this Premier, if the number is too big, if he gets any kind of advice that this is beyond any reasonable, sane number, that the government would actually pull back. The government has backed themselves into a corner. They're going to spend four years talking with one contractor who is in an extremely strong negotiating position, and do you think the Premier is going to be strong enough to say, that's too much money, even though I said I'd pay anything? The contractor knows this.

Who is protecting Nova Scotian taxpayers in this process? Who? It's certainly not this government. We'll get a sound bite that they're going to protect Nova Scotian taxpayers. We'll get a sound bite, we're going to protect Nova Scotian ratepayers. Those are all words. There is nothing in this process that is protecting Nova Scotia taxpayers.

Nova Scotians want these projects to proceed. We need these facilities. We don't want them slowed down. We wish this government had continued on the path that was laid out by the previous government instead of stalling it and then shuffling the shell game to make it look like they're actually moving faster than they are. The irresponsible negotiation position that this government has put the Nova Scotia taxpayer in is really shocking. As we know, this is falling on our children and grandchildren.

We are, as a government, going to improve our health care for our over-65 crowd - I'm not quite there - and ask our children to pay for it. We need it, don't get me wrong, but our children want to know that this government is being prudent and responsible with their future.

My final point, and it really bleeds into what I've just spoken about with respect to the billions at risk, it's about competent fiscal management. My colleague from Halifax Citadel touched on this, our leader touched on this, our Finance Critic touched on this: Hundreds of millions of dollars have gone out the door in a matter of days - as my colleague said, most of this without any plans, without any accountability. The government did this in the face of an Auditor General who came out firm and strong on additional appropriations.

The Auditor General's report is, in essence, scathing on how these additional appropriations have grown. I know I can't defend what the previous government did when they approved \$300 million, or \$400 million of additional appropriations, but we're now

talking about \$1.4 billion, or 10 per cent of the budget. The Auditor General is very clear that we're the only province in the country.

Yes, it was bad when we were the only province in the country spending 3 per cent of our budget under additional appropriations. I'd agree with the Auditor General, our government should have looked at changing those rules to come more in line with sound fiscal management and democracy that happens in every other province.

Now we have a government spending 15 per cent of taxpayers' money with no accountability. I have never seen a finance minister less interested in strong fiscal management. Even under the NDP, the NDP had a finance minister who resigned because he did not believe that his government was doing strong fiscal management. He put a stake in the ground as a finance minister and said, this is not responsible fiscal management, and he resigned. I give that finance minister a lot of credit. A bit too much? He's in Nunavut. I don't think he's watching.

There is absolutely no interest in this government, in this finance minister, to balance a budget. As I stated before, earlier in this, we are the only province - well, let's back up - half of the provinces in this country have come in with balanced budgets. Many of them, probably all of them, having the same kind of windfall, unexpected call on the prior year adjustment that increased their revenues. What did they do? They responsibly balanced their budgets, allowed the excess to flow to the debt, opening up debt room for future needs. The other half that couldn't balance their budgets at least had a plan in one or two, and I think the latest it might have been Quebec, saying they are on a path to balance for 2027.

Nova Scotia is the anomaly. No interest, no talk, no evidence in the fiscal plan that there is any interest in balancing a budget. The bizarre rationale or argument that comes back, the response from the finance minister is, "well, we are spending on what Nova Scotians want." I pointed out that they purposely ran a deficit. They had a windfall of a huge amount of money, and they purposely sent money out the door willy-nilly.

They gave \$40 million to a university that didn't even know it was coming, didn't even know what the project was. That sounds like a conservative approach, yes. We'll call up a university and say, we want you to build a school, so here's \$40 million. The argument is, we're spending on what people want. The university didn't even want it.

The argument is, we're spending on what people want. Well, people want to eat. People want more money for income assistance. Students want lower tuition. The wine industry needs support. Unions want fair contracts. Parents want universal lunch programs. That argument does not hold water.

These were choices, choices to fund a building project that didn't exist instead of increasing income assistance. It was a choice to run a deficit rather than a balanced budget.

Is this sound fiscal management? Did Nova Scotians want sole-sourced contracts given to friends? Was that what Nova Scotians want, that the minister was referring to so that he could run his deficit? Did Nova Scotians want millions of dollars to go out the door with no way to measure whether they have any impact or outcomes?

This is a shocking, shocking way to run a government. I can't believe that there's the word "conservative" in the name of this government. These decisions have impacts beyond the sound bites and how the government is able to somehow convince Nova Scotians that they are prudent fiscal managers.

If you're not prudent fiscal managers, the bond rating agencies take notice. Our government worked for years - years - with Nova Scotians to get our fiscal house in order, and our bond rating increased, lowering our borrowing costs for our children. A downgrade means higher interest rates - higher interest rates when the government is going deeper and deeper into debt and needs to spend even more to build billions of dollars of infrastructure that needs replacement.

To be so casual about signalling to the world that we don't care about deficits, that we have no plan to get back to balance, raises red flags for bond rating agencies. I don't know where the cut-off is and when they will downgrade us, but I really feel it's in the realm of possibility, the way this government has signalled how they are fiscally managing this province. The government's own section in the budget on the bond rating, and these are the words in the document - and we have an S&P rating of AA-. What does the minus mean? It's in the document. "Note that (neg) refers to a negative outlook, indicating the rating agency may change the respective Province's credit rating downward over the next year or so." Those numbers, those rating agencies, those ratings, they mean something, and they mean something in dollars and cents.

This government is about to, over the next three years - if you look in the budget documents - refinance \$2.5 billion of debt and they will be going to bond agencies to finance - what's it going to be? Another \$5 billion to fund our health care needs, \$7.5 billion being refinanced? Again, going back to when we had a project in 2021 that was getting under way when interest rates were .25, we are now at 4.5 looking for \$7.5 billion.

My concluding remarks: in 2021 Nova Scotians gave this Progressive Conservative government a four-year mandate to fix health care. After 20 months, hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent while things are getting worse. How many more years will it take just to get back to where we were in 2021? The government is adding billions to debt, hundreds of millions - billions, in fact, in sole-source, untendered contracts where they have abdicated their negotiating position with no transparency to taxpayers.

Nova Scotians have a right to ask their government, where are the outcomes? Where is the improvement? Here is the tragedy that is really unfolding: in 2025, Nova Scotians will realize that after four years of this government, after billions spent on health

care, and billions added to debt for our children, nothing has improved. This is a tragedy on how this government is managing taxpayers' dollars.

[8:30 p.m.]

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

KENDRA COOMBES: I don't normally speak on the Financial Measures Act but tonight I want to discuss the FMA and the lack of support for Nova Scotians. I am going to focus my remarks on Cape Breton, the home of our hearts, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, the PCs are continuing the Liberal projects in Cape Breton, yet so much is lacking, Madam Speaker. Yes, I do acknowledge that there are some things for Cape Breton, and they are projects that had been started by a previous government, but let's talk about what is not in this budget.

First, no new public housing builds. Not a single public housing unit will be built by this government. A 2022 point-in-time count in Cape Breton found 256 Cape Bretoners to be homeless. For anyone who doesn't know what a PIT count is, that is a point in time. This count does not represent all Cape Bretoners who are homeless because it is only a snapshot, and it requires somebody to self-identify as being homeless and many do not. Because of couch-surfing many do not see themselves as homeless, even though they are, unfortunately.

In 2022, a self-identified point-in-time count in one day found 256 Cape Bretoners homeless. Cape Bretoners experiencing homelessness are sleeping, as I said, on families' and friends' couches, in their cars, the woods and parks, and anywhere else they can find to lay their heads, and that includes abandoned buildings. For the government's information, there have been a number of people who have died in abandoned building fires in Cape Breton who were homeless. We have people who have died because they are homeless, maybe not from freezing to death, but from fires in abandoned buildings.

Like elsewhere in the province, individuals in Cape Breton who are homeless are waking up over this past Winter with frost on their bodies. This was people who were talking to news reporters who said, "I woke up this morning with frost on me."

Earlier in the session, which was not that long ago, 14 days ago we started this session, I had done a debate into Supply, and I had asked in that speech if we were embarrassed yet, if we were ashamed enough yet, and how many more people need to die before this government built more public housing. I'm not saying this government created the homelessness problem. Do not get me wrong. This government did not create a homelessness problem, but they're certainly not helping it.

I'm still waiting for an answer, because there's still no new money for new public housing builds. How can the ever-increasing number of people who are homeless not spur this government into action to build deeply affordable housing? I don't understand, Mr. Speaker, I really don't.

Thirty per cent of an individual's income is the accepted definition of affordable housing, yet this Progressive Conservative government changed the eligibility for rent supplements to 50 per cent of a person's income as spent on housing. In Cape Breton, 13.4 per cent of households are in core housing need, in which they are spending 30 per cent or more of their income on housing. Meanwhile, this government has made so many of these households ineligible for rent supplements.

This government, which talks about their precious rent supplements and touts them as if it's the saviour or the holy grail of housing, went and changed the eligibility and made more people in Nova Scotia who are increasingly in need of core housing ineligible. My goodness. This holy grail called the rent supplement only works if there are places to rent. I don't know how many times I need to say that. I feel like I say that so much I might as well have it on my phone and just click play.

In Cape Breton, rent went up 6.3 per cent in 2022, while vacancies in private apartments dropped from 8.2 per cent in 2020, 6.1 per cent in 2021, and in 2022, 1.5 per cent. 2022, 1.5 per cent. 8.2 per cent in 2020. Two years, 1.5 per cent vacancy. Yet, no new public housing. Again, rent supplements, the Holy Grail that this government basically calls them, that could help individuals, won't work because there's no places to rent with a 1.5 per cent vacancy in 2022.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to see the 2023 numbers. I am actually terrified to see those numbers.

On this topic we have no new housing, rent supplement eligibility is now beyond many people's reach. Now, Mr. Speaker, it comes to income. The average income for individuals 15 and older, according to Statistics Canada, is \$34,400. In Cape Breton we saw an 8 per cent increase in household costs in 2022. Cape Bretoners saw the highest increase in the province when it comes to the cost of shelter, which according to the CCPA is at 14 per cent, yet no new public housing, ineligibility for rent supplements.

Again, I don't know what this government has to pat themselves on the back about. Cape Breton has the highest rates of child poverty in this province. My colleagues who come from Cape Breton, I know it angers me, it has to anger you, it has to upset them, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry.

In the federal riding of Sydney-Victoria the child poverty rate is 26.1 per cent. In my riding of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier one in three families - that's 30 per cent live in poverty. That has not changed in a very long time. When this government talks

about the fact that we have lifted people out of poverty, we have lifted children out of poverty - no, no, it was the federal government's benefits during COVID-19 that lifted the children out and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives said that the provincial government didn't do much. Yet income assistance from this government, this was the response, income assistance was frozen - not frozen, cut. I keep saying frozen, but it was cut because of inflation. So not a single cent more for income assistance. Meanwhile child poverty rates are high, seniors' poverty rates are high, single individuals' rates are high, for those living with disabilities poverty rates are high. Not a single cent.

Nothing in the budget to account for inflation, nothing in the budget to account for a poverty reduction strategy, nothing in the budget to address food insecurity except to rely on the overworked, overcapacity, mostly volunteer food banks that have been begging government to do something about food insecurity in this province for a very long time because they don't want to be open. They thought when they opened 50 years ago, 30 years ago, 20 years ago, they would be closed by now. They weren't expecting to still be open. They want people to be food-secure in this province yet in Cape Breton that is not the case.

Mr. Speaker, I really could go on some more but I'm going to end it with this: There is nothing in this budget that addresses poverty. There is nothing in this budget that addresses core housing. There is nothing in this budget that really addresses the homelessness and there's nothing in this budget to address food insecurity. What do we have to be proud of?

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: I want to start by thanking everyone in the House, the government included, and staff in their departments for the time that they've put into putting together the budget that we've been debating over the last several days or couple of weeks. I know that a tremendous work does go into it, so it bears a thank you - certainly from myself, but I know I speak for all members in that.

I represent Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. After close to 10 years in office, I would suggest that the primary areas of interest are schools and education, health care, taxes and the cost of living, and the community's kids and grandkids.

To start with, I want to give kudos to the Minister of Community Services for her department's work with respect to the Disability Support Program, the Flex program, and the Independent Living program. I think that there's a great deal of merit in the progress that they have made on that file. I know, in speaking to constituents about their experiences, getting quicker access to those funding streams and to opportunities to live more independently is really valuable.

I will also give kudos for the initiative to provide more flexibility related to primary care in pharmacies. The Brookline subdivision is home to one of the locations that have



been positioned to take on more patients with respect to primary care. I want to wish Chintan and his team at the Brookline Pharmacy good luck with that endeavour.

I will say that after providing that kudos, I do need to be critical as well. My particular files are Community Services and Advanced Education. With respect to the efforts and the decisions that I believe both ministers have focused on, I believe that they've missed the fundamental components to each of their portfolios. Namely, student income assistance has not been increased, and income assistance at DCS has not been increased, and I would say for the second year running.

Both ministers and this government speak to targeted funding when it comes to what they're doing to help Nova Scotians. They speak to a great deal of funding that's going out the door. They can always say that we're spending more money and that their targeted funding approach to distributing public dollars is going to help Nova Scotians.

But in all of the pointing the finger to different funding streams, I believe that it's distracting from the fundamental pieces with respect to making the challenges around cost of living in Nova Scotia easier to manage. We've heard testimonial from human rights lawyers at Law Amendments Committee with respect to the inaction on income assistance as a human rights violation. We have heard from Feed Nova Scotia with respect to a lack of activity with respect to poverty and food security as deep cruelty.

The actions that we've seen this government take with respect freezing income assistance rates, not increasing student assistance, and increasing the percentage of income threshold that enables so many Nova Scotians to have access to rent supplements from 30 per cent to 50 per cent - we're losing so many Nova Scotians in that cohort between that 30 per cent and 50 per cent. Now, despite an increased number of rent supplements, we're missing a significant cohort of people who need that financial instalment just to meet their basic needs, their housing needs.

I do have to reiterate - I did touch on it a bit in Estimates - that I was frankly disappointed that when I asked the minister to speak to the goals that she and her department have with respect to her mandate around poverty reduction, she could not verbalize even one metric - no goals. We want to make it better. It was broad stroke statements. It was, we're doing a lot of programming around self-improvement - which I support - and if people do well in those programs, then we know that we're reducing poverty.

Mr. Speaker, there are no metrics tied to that. They have no goals set out in terms of how many people they are trying to help. How many people are going through those programs but are having to come back into the system? There's no way to judge progress without having a way to evaluate what's going on. Patting yourself on the back and saying that you have done a good job and saying this is how much money we have spent is not a way to measure success. It just isn't.

There are so many out there who are begging for assistance, who are struggling every day to figure out how they're going to feed their families, how they're going to put meds in their cabinet, how they're going to pay their rent, how they're going to keep their home. There's no plan around poverty reduction other than to say, well, we're spending money here, here, and here. There are no targets to judge if that money is being spent reasonably and effectively in terms of making quality of life better and making Nova Scotia a place where you are more capable to live.

Mr. Speaker, I do have to say that with respect to those primary areas of focus for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, we are excited about the opening of Broad Street School. I would suggest that this is an icing on the cake moment. Our government at the time recognized that this is a community that is desperate for infrastructure to support the growing enrolment pressures. That pressure is continuing to build, and I would suggest very directly that the minister needs to be intentional about looking to the next steps around capital planning in our community. Broad Street School and C.P. Allen in particular are going to be stuffed, and the system is going to be strained in very short order.

Our systems for judging or projecting enrolment in our schools are completely ineffective at this point in time. To rest and say that what we have presently is good enough surely will be a mistake if that is the choice that is made. We need to think quickly about what is next.

With respect to health care, this government has titled this budget, or hash-tagged this budget, as a health care budget. But literally with respect to every metric that you can look at - with respect to the OR closures, the Need a Family Practice Registry - the numbers continue to grow, and not in a good way.

On top of that - with respect to my comments around income assistance and people falling farther into poverty - there's a direct connection with respect to poverty and poor health outcomes. To label this a health care budget when the actions that are portrayed through this budget - they just don't support that. Again, they can say that they're spending more money in health care. We did that year over year. The budgets of the past are available to anyone who chooses to take a peek, and it demonstrates those investments. The important thing to look at is the outcomes that are attached to that spending.

The tax situation and the cost of living - with respect to the interests of people in Hammonds Plains-Lucasville - Nova Scotians are overburdened with taxes that are amongst the highest, if not the highest, in the country with respect to taxation. There's an expectation that their government is going to spend those dollars that they're receiving wisely.

In the interest of another priority, their kids and their grandchildren - good fiscal management, having a plan. If there is a plan to spend and have a deficit, and it creates a better scenario, then I think that Nova Scotians are reasonable and will appreciate that. But

by all accounts, things are progressively getting worse - and no plan to control spending or get back to balance - it's not going to be looked upon favourably, to put it lightly.

With respect to these spending habits and the lack of planning, we saw in the last several months \$1.6 billion go out the door in unchecked spending, in spending that came outside the budget process. If a government can spend \$1.6 billion outside the budget process, I don't even know why we're here. I don't know why we're debating a budget when there's so much latitude that a government can come in and spend \$1.6 billion on top of everything without a plan to do it.

This ties into the lack of forethought around the spending that took place these last several months. I want to say that we value the work that our nurses have done and continue to do across the province. The nursing bonus that was put forward by the Progressive Conservative government was well-received by the people who got it, but it is creating a divide amongst nurses who are in the system who did not receive that money, who did not receive that thank you.

I spoke to an individual just this morning who has been in the profession for more than two decades. They spent two and a half years on the front line through COVID-19, jabbing people in the arm, dishing out PCR tests, putting her health and wellness and safety on the line every day through the pandemic. That person got COVID and now has long COVID - got sick a week before the cut-off to be eligible for this bonus. This person is left in the cold.

She's a permanent, full-time nurse who has been on the front line working through COVID-19, and has been working in the profession for more than 20 years. This lack-of-forethought bonus planning leaves that person on the outside - not to mention it also leaves the casual employee who's filling in for them while they're out sick.

These actions have consequences. I believe it's important that the government revisits the way that they're establishing their baselines, and the way that they're planning and assessing progress. Nova Scotians are paying attention.

The numbers we're seeing that we're able to table and point to are not doing the government justice. I really hope that next year's budget will have a change in tune, and that there will be some further degree of planning and fiscal management.

Just on a personal note, it's a tough pill to swallow after several years of balanced budgets, of working hard, of challenging departments and people to get us back to balance so that our children - I can say that now - are not burdened with the decisions of the people who came before them. Mr. Speaker, we're all here to make Nova Scotia a little bit better. It's challenging to get behind a budget that doesn't do that for the next generation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

[9:00 p.m.]

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'll just add a couple of words to this debate. My budget speech is entitled *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*.

I don't know if anyone has seen that excellent film. I'll just remind everyone that in *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*, there are gunslingers who are after the gold. Sometimes there are negative themes such as cruelty and greed. There is some befriending of people, then double-crossing them and throwing them to the side. I just wanted to give that context for what I'm about to say. That's *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*. It's a great score.

The good in this budget, Mr. Speaker: arts funding. I'm going to talk about the arts but in a good way this time. After many years of being in this House, and questioning, and talking to ministers on the Progressive Conservative side, and ministers on the Liberal side about the absolute importance of the arts, and the need for a major increase in stable arts funding, this budget has delivered on that request - and I am really pleased.

Last year at this time, I said this: Fund the arts properly. There is no money in this budget dedicated to providing emergency funding to arts and culture organizations, organizations that are used by this government as assets to leverage tourism. Organizations that contribute in a substantial way to the GDP of this province and that contribute to the cultural life and the attracting of professionals like doctors and nurses who, if they want to live and work in Nova Scotia, they'll want to know that they can take in a concert or a play or a dance show after a long day.

In the period leading up to this budget - when people can make budget submissions - there were many arts organizations that wrote to the government about these specific things. They were very specific asks. I know because I was copied on many of those submissions. I just want to congratulate the hard-working and long-suffering artists in this province who have been working very hard to make sure that the government knows the contributions that they make to this province. I am grateful that this government has heard them, but I want to say that it is the work of 17 years of advocacy since there was one increase in arts funding. So thank you for that.

But I just want to tell the minister that we won't be letting the department off the hook. The money is excellent, but we won't stop there. We need arts funding. I know this is continuing funding, but we need to make sure that we index it in some way that there are some built-in increases, so that we don't have to wait another 17 years for another investment.

I also want to say that I'm very pleased to see the money for physician assistants in this budget. Physician assistants are something that our caucus has been talking about for a long, long time. I remember there was a press conference or a media release that we put

out that listed a bunch of ideas for health care - and we said we encourage the government to take these ideas and run with them.

Unfortunately, not all of them were taken and run with, but the physician assistants one has been. I'm glad to see money for more physician assistants. I hope that we see a robust increase, even after this budget, in physician assistants and nurse practitioners working in primary care especially.

That was just a little gift, folks. Those folks on that side of the room are tired. Everyone's tired. That's the good. There's some other good. (Interruption) The minister is suggesting I talk about something really good in Dartmouth North, but I've asked the minister about this, and I haven't gotten a really clear answer - so I'm not going to talk about it in this. But if she wants to talk to me after, then I'm really happy to talk about it in public.

Now we get to the bad. Sorry, folks. There's some stuff that could be good. There's some stuff that could be good. But because there are such vague answers about it, I can't call it good. What are the details on the primary care investments, I asked the Minister of Health and Wellness? What are those details? There's a lot of money for health care, but how are we actually planning to retain our health care workers?

Bonuses of \$10,000 and \$5,000 - those are important bonuses, and a good way to appreciate the work that has been done in our health care system. It may bring some people back into the permanent working system. But until the system issues that have caused the exodus of health care workers - including physicians, including nurses, nurse practitioners, paramedics, and more - we can't say that it's all good.

Paramedics are largely ignored in this budget. When we ask about it, we are told that they need to come to the table. Come to the table, we'll negotiate something better for the paramedics. Other health professionals have not had to come to the table. Not saying that that's good or bad, but I'm just saying that when there's a will, there's a way. It doesn't seem like there's a real will at this moment to support our paramedics and make sure that this vital aspect of our health care system is taken care of.

The other major omission - and my colleague talked about this earlier - is the lack of investment in midwives. Jessica MacDonald, the president of the Association of Nova Scotia Midwives, said that she was surprised by the exclusion of midwifery in the budget, despite many calls to expand the program and increase the scope of practice for midwives. Quote: "It's certainly something we keep bringing to the table that hasn't been met with a lot of acceptance in terms of moving that forward. But it's something we continue to fight for," MacDonald told CBC's Information Morning Cape Breton. CBC News requested an interview with Nova Scotia's Health Minister, but a spokesperson said they were unable to accommodate the request." But then they sent an e-mailed statement: "The Department

continues to focus on stabilizing existing midwifery programs while working with Nova Scotia Health to see how we can increase access to the service.”

We heard this in Question Period. We heard it in Budget Estimates, and yet it doesn't actually make a lot of sense. I understand that we have to stabilize the positions that are there, but we have to expand the program - because the problem with the positions that are there now is that midwives are working in silos. Working with just one other midwife doesn't work. You're constantly on call, you can't actually avoid burnout and illness. We need a real expansion.

I have friends who are midwives in Ontario, who have written to me to say, we would love to come and practise in Nova Scotia. We would love to. These are younger than me, so you know, young people, who have young families, who are again, people who we want to come here and add to our life here in Nova Scotia. But they can't come because the program is not robust enough to help them actually settle here and have a permanent dependable job.

So, it's not just bad, Mr. Speaker, it's really bad that midwives have been ignored in the budget that purports to be about health care. It's also bad that there's no money for the African Nova Scotian policing strategy. It's also bad that there's no money for strategy that is required under the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act to get at the issues of structural racism in this province. My colleague spoke about it so eloquently earlier today. It's bad. It's shamefully bad that there's no money for those things.

Now we get to the ugly. The ugly of this budget is that there is no real explanation or money attached to how we are going to fund our climate plan. In Estimates, the minister did not answer many questions. We don't have much time left before we get into the catastrophic impacts of global warming. We have a plan, a much-touted plan. We have a Green Fund. We have another fund being created, the Nova Scotia climate change fund, or whatever it's called. I'm sorry, I don't know the actual title. But there is no plan for the spending, and we have lots of wonderful goals. We don't have timelines and we don't have money attached to those goals. So until we see that, we cannot say that this is good in the budget.

We've heard this before but I'm going to reiterate it: There is no money for affordable housing builds. It is shameful. There's no money for public housing, for new public housing. Excuse me - I know there is some money for renovating some public housing. We have seen through this, and we've talked about in this session, the fact that the rent supplement program is being gutted because there is too much pressure on the program, Mr. Speaker.

We need in Nova Scotia an adopted definition of what affordable housing means, and it needs to be something that is rent, or mortgage, geared to income. This government

refuses to hear that part. This government talks about all the money going into housing, and all of the market housing that is being built. None of it is guaranteed to be affordable.

There is no one who will answer that question. Yes, I understand the Overlook. I am so happy about the Overlook. The Overlook is a good part of this budget, if it's in this budget. That type of housing is really important, and excellent. I'm so proud that it is actually in Dartmouth North, and that people who work at the Overlook are incredible. The people who live at the Overlook are incredible. I'm happy that they finally have stable housing.

But when we're talking about the homeless and the housing issues that we have in this province, there needs to be much, much more. When my colleague talked about if I had \$1 billion, that would be the first place I would spend it as well. There's no increase to income assistance.

For years - well, not years, I've only been here for five or six years - but for several years at the beginning of my time as an MLA, I was the spokesperson for Community Services. I think the minister, current minister, may be quite happy that I am no longer in that position. I talked about the need for real increases, and indexing income assistance and nauseum to that government - to those folks over there. I was continually told the reasons why it couldn't be done - the reasons it couldn't be done.

It wasn't until a new leader in that party was elected at the very end of their mandate that there was some substantial change, and it was welcome. It was, don't get me wrong. The \$100 increase was life-changing for people on income assistance. We called for it for years and it was life-changing and I applaud that Premier for doing that. Unfortunately, he didn't get a chance to continue that good work in that place.

I will tell you that until that moment, that government also caused great stress on the poorest people of this province. Transformation, I was told, the almighty transformation. Let's wait until transformation is over. It costs millions of dollars to transform the system and it's nowhere - I mean it's slightly different than it was, and the money is no better, except for that \$100.

This government has a duty to make sure that people are healthy and stay healthy in this province and you cannot be healthy when you are living in abject poverty because income assistance rates are not rising. It is not okay, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I am trying hard to make my points, but I really can't because of the noise in the Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm going to ask people to respect the speaker. Everything was quiet. I don't know if it's the speaker or if it's the people trying to stir up the speaker but please respect the speaker.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you very much. Anyhow, my focus will come back to this. This is truly ugly because this government had a chance, an opportunity to increase rates, and don't forget that we are in a time of quite unprecedented inflation, so the level of poverty that folks on income assistance are living in is much worse because of inflation and the high cost of everything, so it is unbelievable that this has not happened.

[9:15 p.m.]

Essentially, we see a cut in this budget for public health. Now, people will explain that and say, well, that's because we don't need to spend as much on COVID-19, but guess what? Previous to COVID-19, Public Health was underfunded. Now that the bump that was given to Public Health for COVID-19 is gone, it's a cut into Public Health. Also, don't forget that public health is upstream health care funding.

This leads me to say that if we don't invest in housing, if we don't invest in income assistance and food security, if we don't invest in upstream public health - and that can include climate goals, and that can include parks and recreation, and that can include active transportation and all of those important parts of health care - we are always going to spend unprecedented amounts of money on health care. We will always hear that it is the most money we've ever spent on health care, ever, and all these great platitudes, but really it's kind of a waste of money because we could be spending much more useful money upstream and have people healthier, have less suffering in the world and, guess what? It would be cheaper. So it's all very ugly.

The last thing I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that one of the ugliest things about this budget - and not about the budget but about what's happening in politics right now in Nova Scotia - is the lack of transparency. This government, this Premier, made a lot of noise when they were in Opposition about transparency. They sued the government, they demanded reports. We did, too, because transparency is important.

Now, when they are on that side of the House, transparency seems to be, lo and behold, less important. I feel like I'm in an upside-down world a little bit because the first thing is, well, we don't need a board that governs health care, we don't need a health authority anymore. We're going to just take the reins, take control, make sure it happens really quickly, but there's no transparency. No one gets to publish the minutes between the CEO of the Nova Scotia Health Authority and the Minister of Health and Wellness. That's just not something we have access to anymore, and we did have access.

Under the Liberal government, we had access to the Nova Scotia Health Authority. Thank you so much for making that transparent.

We now are going to regulate our health professionals in Cabinet. What? That's not very transparent. Give me some more examples of the lack of transparency.



School board - no, no, that's them. We are focusing on them. I know, we are focusing on you right now. We're focusing on the government at hand.

AN HON. MEMBER: They were going to reinstate school boards.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Oh yeah, wait, sorry. That's true. They believed in school boards, Mr. Speaker. They were going to reinstate school boards, and now they haven't reinstated school boards, so we still have that lack of transparency.

Anyway, I could go on - oh, sorry. Here's another one: the lack of public tendering for the Hogan Court health hotel. No public tender, gotta get it done fast, and so we are going to put transparency aside for a minute so that we can just get that done, but who knows the shenanigans going on over there.

Anyhow, I am going to leave it there. I am going to close with a quote from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice says this: "If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?"

That's how I feel right now, Mr. Speaker. With that I will take my seat.

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

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: It is what it is. I rise to close debate on Bill No. 279, the Financial Measures (2023) Act.

I want to first start by acknowledging the Opposition members of the House for all the things they've put on the record over the last number of days pertaining to the budget and to the Financial Measures Act. I know they do it out of concern for the people they represent, and I want them to know that we are always listening. The things that they are saying, we are hearing people say, but I am also going to defend our budget, Mr. Speaker, because I believe there is a lot of good in it.

We did hear some good. I've heard some good here just moments ago acknowledged, which is nice.

At the end of the day, I think everybody in here cares about who they represent, and I know that despite things getting hot from time to time in here, people believe in what they are saying, and I think that's a good thing. We are lucky to have the Legislature and the opportunity to express that. I want to thank everybody for expressing what they have expressed.

I am going to continue defending the budget now. I want to start by (Interruption)  
- I was doing so well.

I want to start by talking about the suggestion that we are growing the debt faster and that there has been an alarming change in the debt-to-GDP ratio. I do want to point out that if you look at the last, the former, most recent Liberal government's budget, their debt-to-GDP ratio was actually rising higher by 24-25. That is a fact. People can go back and look at the budget documents from the Liberals' last budget and they will see that the debt-to-GDP was actually growing higher under that Liberal government. They were projecting that themselves in their own budget. I need to make that point.

I want to say that there was a suggestion that there was no support for people who are at lower income levels. I did not hear them criticize the federal government, yet in the federal budget, compared to our provincial budget, if you look at the supports provided to seniors, we provided more than two times the support the federal government provided to seniors, and we provided more to children through the Nova Scotia Child Benefit.

Mr. Speaker, we feel we are doing our part, and we also feel that all governments need to do their part to help people with affordability.

Some of the other measures - we have talked about housing. I know in the budget, there's 1,000 more rent supplements. Yes, people have to be able to find a place, no question. We started spending millions of dollars on housing three weeks into being sworn in as a government. Then we spent more - I believe it was a couple of months after that. That time it was \$45 million.

The fact is, when we came to government, 18 months ago, there were 5,000 rent supplements in the province. With the addition of the 1,000 in this budget, there are going to be 8,000. That's a 60 per cent increase, and it's a real difference for 3,000 people or families who need housing.

Another thing I want to point out is Family Pharmacare fees and Seniors' Pharmacare fees. They are not increasing in this budget. The government is absorbing those costs, because we know those costs go up every year. That is another way that we are helping people with the cost of living.

I think about all the money we have been investing, and we think about home heating. Last year, we increased the home heating assistance rebate to \$1,000 and raised the threshold of eligibility up to \$85,000 for a household. We did that before the heating season began because we wanted people to have that support before they needed it. On top of that, of course, is the millions of dollars we have been investing and have put towards energy efficiency. There are supports.

I want to talk about the carbon tax. We have talked about it a lot. I'm going to talk about it again, because it is an issue of affordability. The economists say it's going to be a drag on the economy, and it will be. We talk about the cost of food and how it's gone up for people, yet what affects the price of food more than the price of fuel? Economists will tell you that food and fuel inflation travel together.

We think about the carbon tax. It's going to go on the cost of agricultural inputs. It's going to go on the cost of fertilizer. It's going to go on the cost of trucking, whether it's trucking the inputs to a farm or trucking the output from the farm to a processor. It's going to go on trucking costs to move it from a processor to a retailer. It's going to go on top of the gasoline bills for people when they go out to buy their groceries, when they go to the grocery store.

This is a cost that keeps on taking and taking and taking. It's going to go up in July, 14 cents per litre on fuel in this province, but it's going to go up 37 cents per litre in a few short years' time, in 2030. That is something we have taken great pains to fight in this Legislature. It's something we continue to highlight. It's something the federal government should never have done to people who are already dealing with the cost of living and the dramatic change we have seen since the invasion of Ukraine, which has triggered much of the inflation, made it a lot worse coming out of the pandemic.

I want to mention that our government made a decision to extend \$165 million in credits to the power utility in the province. That is going to save Nova Scotians from the impact of emissions costs, carbon taxes, on Nova Scotians ratepayers, on their power bills. We were able to do that. We chose to do it. We made that happen because we want Nova Scotians to be able to be protected from the carbon tax as much as we can, as much as we can control because we know it is the federal government that's doing it.

Now, what was one of the ideas that we heard from the Opposition, Mr. Speaker? We heard it again today in Question Period, is give up the fuel tax, give up the provincial fuel tax revenues which are used to fix Nova Scotia's roads. Why would we do that if only to make way for the federal Liberals to put a carbon tax right back in its place? Why would we do that? To think that, what sense would it make?

I can tell you, in the constituency of Inverness, the issue I hear most about is roads, and I know for a fact that members in this House hear about roads every day. I felt like saying something that Stunning Steve Austin used to say in the ring, but I'd better not say it in here, Mr. Speaker, because I think it's - I was going to call for support - can I get a - but I'm not going to say it. That's a little inside mention for our Clerk here because we had a discussion about a bill last night that was No. 316, which was a reference to that wrestler. Anyway, I digress.

Roads are important to Nova Scotians, and it would be silly for the government to get rid of its source of revenue to give Nova Scotians better roads if only to make way for a Liberal carbon tax.

[9:30 p.m.]

I want to talk a bit about the issue of bracket creep which was raised and was raised here again tonight. There's no question, that would be something nice to do for Nova Scotians, but we are still, with this budget, it's another deficit budget. We are spending money. We need every dollar that is coming in because we are trying to help fix health care, and that's good for every Nova Scotian. No one knows when they're going to need the health care system, but when they need it, they sure want it to be there for them and we want it to be there for them.

The issue of bracket creep - there was a document tabled and it was actually a quote from myself. There was dispute as to who really benefits from indexing tax brackets, so I had a double-check with my staff and said, "Was I really wrong when I said that?" Would you believe, Mr. Speaker, they confirmed I was actually right. So, Mr. Speaker, don't take my word, take the word of the good people who work at Finance and Treasury Board across the street.

Almost 250,000 tax filers pay no income tax, so they're not going to benefit from indexation of tax brackets. The next almost 250,000 of tax filers who were in the lowest income tax bracket are also not going to benefit because they're in the lowest income tax bracket to begin with. Almost half the population of the province - maybe more than half, depending on how many tax filers - would not benefit from the indexing of tax brackets, and we focused on targeted relief for those who need it most, so I have to put that point on the record. I have to correct the members who were trying to look very factual in tabling things that I said in the House here, and presented the paper as evidence, but I have to come back with some evidence myself.

One of the other comments I heard was about the hundreds of millions of dollars spent at the last minute in the fiscal year that just ended. Well, there were hundreds of millions of dollars spent, and they were spent on things like affordability, health care, housing, Hurricane Fiona, arts and cultural organizations. There was a suggestion that it all happened in March. Well, when I looked at the calendar - and I didn't have to double-check this because I know that most of the bad storms we get happen in and around August and September - Hurricane Fiona did not happen in March. That money was spent long before March because we wanted to help people, and it was doing exactly what the Opposition would have called upon us to do anyway.

The other measure, affordability, made well before the heating season began, Mr. Speaker, is another example of something that didn't happen in March. It happened long before that. I have to point that out.

There were also lots of comments made about the fact that we should be taking additional appropriations and debating them in the Legislature. I know that the member for Kings South talked about that tonight and I thought to myself, here is a Saul on the way to Damascus, Mr. Speaker. A change of heart, because for the eight years that that member's party was in government - they just came out of government about 18 months ago - never once did I hear a concern about bringing additional appropriations for debate in the Legislature.

There was an entire year where the Legislature didn't even sit. It sat for about 10 minutes to close it back down, while other Legislatures - I checked with the Legislative Library on that, and I was told that every Legislature and the Parliament of Canada and the provincial governments across the country sat from between about 20 to 80-some days that same year. We didn't in this province.

In my mind, for the first time in over 150 years, we didn't have responsible government in the province because we didn't have a Legislature open in any shape or format, including virtual format, where there was an Opposition that had the ability to question the actions of the government. I don't call any of those investments in affordability, health care, housing, Hurricane Fiona, arts and cultural organizations, and nurses - I don't call those investments madness. I'll leave that to the Opposition.

Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker, if we didn't make those investments? Could you imagine if we came in here and showed a surplus? Imagine if we forecasted a surplus what they would have said. They'd be saying, why didn't we spend the money? Can't believe you're not spending the money.

Imagine if we gave it all back to people on their income tax. They'd be saying, why would you do that when there are all these needs to spend money on? Things like health care, on housing, to help people with Hurricane Fiona, to help people with the issues of affordability. Mr. Speaker, they would have criticized us for what we didn't spend it on. Follow this logic, though: We spent it on those things, and they still criticize us. You can't win.

I also want to mention that there were many points made about the debt and that it is accruing at a more rapid pace. I want to point out a couple of facts. Mr. Speaker: Last year our government actually finished in a position of surplus when it was all said and done. About \$300 million to the good. This year, we're forecasting a deficit - yes - of \$279 million, but it's within 2 per cent. I think that's very reasonable. To me, a suggestion that there's just spending going on that's not valuable or important, it doesn't wash. Those two numbers, I think, explain it pretty clearly.

I also want to point out a significant increase to the debt that's projected that has to do with an accounting change. That is a new accounting standard. Like other Canadian provinces, we're adopting a new standard in how we account for the cost to retire tangible

long-term assets. This is going to add \$626 million to our net debt. It's a significant amount of money. That's because of an accounting change, not because of anything that we did.

I'll explain it as simply as I can: Asset retirement obligations are legal obligations associated with the retirement of tangible capital assets, like buildings with asbestos and lead, underground fuel storage tanks and X-ray machines. There are specific disposal requirements for those things.

Although the timing of when these assets are removed may not be known, the new accounting standard requires they be recorded in the current fiscal year. This is a one-time financial impact of \$626 million, an increase to the debt. I want to put that on the record, Mr. Speaker, because I think that's important. That's simply an accounting change.

I also want to say that we are making transformational investments in capital assets. This is what I would say strikes me as amusing. I have already pointed out that the previous Liberal government, their debt-to-GDP ratio was actually going to be larger than what's in this budget. The common thread is that both that government and this government are committed to making significant generational investments in health care, and that is causing our debt to go up. We know that is a fact. We accept it.

Mr. Speaker, is it debt? Yes, but is it also an investment? I think it is.

I have something here in my notes, and I'm going to mention it - it's actually not part of my speech, but I'm going to mention it. The Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care mentioned to me the other day that there are zero long-term care beds closed due to staff shortages right now. Compare that with almost 500 empty beds when we assumed office. These are investments, and that is progress. That is a pretty good metric.

I want to talk briefly about some local notables, some things that I thought were good for the people of Inverness. I think about changes being made to the roundabout at Port Hastings - traffic delays, a real irritant for the local population, for people in the quad counties of Guysborough, Antigonish, Richmond, Inverness, and beyond. You get some Newfoundland truck traffic roaring down the hill towards the roundabout, suddenly the swing bridge is opened again for the second time in about an hour and 10 minutes, the first blockage has not cleared yet, and you get some traffic delays there, Mr. Speaker. I want to acknowledge investments being made there.

I want to acknowledge one million tonnes of asphalt for highways across the province in this budget and increases in the rural local road maintenance budgets - significant increases. I had the percentages written down the other day. I have already said them. They were quite impressive. We have to keep investing because the cost of road-building is also going up. Our government wants to put a stamp to fix roads in this province, and we're doing that in this budget.

I want to highlight the contributions to arts and cultural organizations and to museums. For the first time in 15 years they are getting an increase, Mr. Speaker. Provincial parks - Nova Scotians started going to the parks during the pandemic. They couldn't go anywhere else, so they started going to outdoor parks. I think there has been a rediscovery of the value of parks. We see that. That's why we're investing in them in this budget, fully 10 times the past capital investment. (Interruption) We got that in there.

I want to mention in Cape Breton Island the Cape Breton Regional Hospital, the significant investments being made there and the Marconi Campus of the Community College. Those are wonderful investments . . . (Interruption) The medical school for Cape Breton University. I think about the additional nurse training seats continuing this year at universities like StFX. I know a lot of people in Inverness have gone and will be going to StFX. Of course, the Premier, as we know, personally made a job offer to everybody who is trained to be a registered nurse in this province.

This budget is about empowering people. The centrepiece of it is health care; 22 per cent increase compared to the previous government. To me, that's something we should be celebrating on all sides of the House, because we all know the system needs it. That system has been feeling overwhelmed. I wouldn't say it's been functioning well for the population we had, let alone for the population we're going to have in the future.

Are capital investments just debt, or are they an investment? Is the operational spending irresponsible, or is it reasonable, given we are a growing province, and so are our tax revenues? They're growing, too. If you question this, ask a loved one who is now able to receive 4.1 hours of care in a nursing home. Ask someone who's waiting for a surgery if they would like that wait time to be reduced. Is it having an effect on their life? You can bet it is. Those are the real things we're trying to make a difference with in this budget.

I do know one thing: This budget must be a nightmare for the Opposition. We have a strong economy with more people working, and some earning higher wages, as is evidenced by our increased provincial income tax revenues. That means the Treasury is growing, and Nova Scotia's provincial government has the capacity to invest in people, to empower them: farmers; people doing silviculture work; manufacturing like Michelin and the recent announcement there; local roads; parks; housing; education and children; health care and nursing homes; supports for seniors; children and their families; young people starting their own adult lives; transitioning away from income assistance; foster families; arts, culture, and heritage organizations; museums. For people coming to make their home in Nova Scotia, and for that we should count our blessings.

From January to January, 38,000 people called Nova Scotia home. One way to defeat inflation is with supply. Those people and those who continue to come to Nova Scotia will supply businesses and our economy with the people we need to build our homes, to care for our loved ones, and create new jobs. Let's invest in those things, and in that

spirit, I call upon all members of this House to give sober second thought to their budget votes and support all the measures put forth here in this Financial Measures Act. (Applause)

[9:45 p.m.]

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I think in my fervour I forgot to actually move to close debate on Bill No. 279.

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

There has been a request for a recorded vote.

The bells will ring until the Whips are satisfied.

[9:50 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. A recorded vote has been called for.

I recognize the Clerk.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[9:52 p.m.]

**YEAS**

Hon. Brad Johns  
Hon. Tory Rushton  
Hon. Barbara Adams  
Hon. Kim Masland  
Hon. Tim Houston  
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

**NAYS**

Hon. Keith Irving  
Hon. Derek Mombourquette  
Hon. Zach Churchill  
Hon. Kelly Regan  
Hon. Iain Rankin  
Susan LeBlanc  
Claudia Chender  
Kendra Coombes  
Suzy Hansen  
Gary Burrill  
Lisa Lachance  
Rafah DiCostanzo  
Lorelei Nicoll  
Hon. Ben Jessome



Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek	Braedon Clark
Hon. Brian Comer	Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin
Hon. Colton LeBlanc	Carman Kerr
Hon. Jill Balser	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	
Kent Smith	

THE CLERK: For, 30. Against, 19.

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: I move that we just take a short recess until the Lieutenant Governor arrives.

THE SPEAKER: We'll take a short recess until the arrival of His Honour.

[9:56 p.m. The House recessed.]

[10:12 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: His Honour the Lieutenant Governor is without.

THE SPEAKER: Let His Honour the Lieutenant Governor be admitted.

[The Speaker and the Clerks left the Chamber.]

The Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Arthur J. LeBlanc, preceded by his Private Secretary and by David Fraser, Sergeant-at-Arms, bearing the Mace, entered the House of Assembly Chamber. The Lieutenant Governor then took his seat on the Throne.

The Sergeant-at-Arms then departed and re-entered the Chamber, followed by the Speaker, Honourable Keith Bain; the Chief Clerk of the House, James Charlton; and the Assistant Clerk, David Hastings.

The Speaker, with the Clerk on his left and the Sergeant-at-Arms and Assistant Clerk on his right, took up his position at the foot of the Table of the House.]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: It is the wish of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor that everyone present be seated.

THE SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the General Assembly of the Province has, in its present session, passed certain bills to which, in the name and on behalf of the General Assembly, I respectfully request Your Honour's Assent.

[10:15 p.m.]

THE ASSISTANT CLERK:

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

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

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

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

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

**Bill No. 273 – Road Trails Act.**

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

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

THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR: In His Majesty's name, I Assent to these bills.

THE SPEAKER: Your Honour, having been graciously pleased to give your Assent to the Bills passed during the present Session, it becomes my agreeable duty on behalf of His Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, his faithful Commons of Nova Scotia, to present

to Your Honour a bill for the Appropriation of Supply granted in the present Session for the support of the Public Service and to request your Honour's Assent thereto.

THE CLERK:

**Bill No. 316 – Appropriations Act (2023)**

THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR: In His Majesty's name, I thank His loyal subjects, I accept their benevolence, and I Assent to this Bill.

[The Speaker and the Clerks left the Chamber.]

[The Lieutenant Governor left the Chamber.]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: His Honour the Speaker.

[The Speaker took the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: I would ask the members to please rise and join me in the singing of our national anthem.

[The national anthem was sung by the members.]

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Please be seated.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I move to adjourn, I'd like to thank a number of people here in the House who made sure that this session moved along very smoothly, I'd say.

On behalf of all members of the House, I want to acknowledge our Pages and thank them for incredible work; the fine folks at Leg TV; the Clerks of the House, James and David; the folks at the Legislative Counsel Office, who draft the bills that we debate on this floor; the team in the Legislative Library - I think they got a few references over the last few days for their work; the House Operations staff - thank you to the House Operations staff; our Sergeant-at-Arms; the Commissionaires - thank you to the Commissionaires). We have a birthday tomorrow in our Commissionaires' ranks. Happy birthday tomorrow. I tried to get them to stick around for one more day for your birthday, but they want to get out of here, sorry. (Applause)

To our constituency assistants, the teams who keep things going in our offices while we're here in this House, thank you to our constituency assistants; the entire Public Service. We have incredibly dedicated public servants in this province. They want good things for

Nova Scotians every day they come to work. I would stack our Public Service against the Public Service anywhere; our families and our support networks, who keep things going at home while we're here. I thank our families for allowing us the opportunity. I thank them for their continued support. And thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your work this session, for sure. (Applause)

I want to wish each and every person here, and certainly all the members, a safe and healthy and happy, productive Summer. I'll see some of you sooner, but I'll see the rest of you in the Fall. I can't wait.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words I move that this General Assembly be adjourned, to meet again at the call of the Speaker. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House now adjourn to meet again at the call of the Speaker.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 10:24 p.m.]

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**NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)****RESOLUTION NO. 683**

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas Ada Frank of Port Joli, Queens County recognized that we have students in our communities in need of appropriate warm outerwear for the Winter months, and has been knitting mittens and hats for any child at Dr. John C. Wickwire Academy who is in need of them; and

Whereas the kind-hearted, caring, and generous Ada has so far supplied well over 100 pairs of free mittens and numerous hats this Winter;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in applauding Ada for being incredibly community-minded, and in thanking her generous support of our youth and families in Queens.

**RESOLUTION NO. 684**

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas this April 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Mill Village and District Volunteer Fire Department will be celebrating their 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary; established in 1948, the department has been and remains a vital and active hub in the community; and

Whereas in rural Nova Scotia we know too well the vital roles these volunteer organizations play in our communities, these men and women recruit, train, educate, and fundraise; and

Whereas they often put their lives in harm's way in order to service and protect their neighbours and they selflessly go above and beyond;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating past and present members of the department on this impressive milestone, and in thanking them for their years of invaluable service to the constituents of Queens.

**RESOLUTION NO. 685**

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas Nykola Killam and her Grade 4/5 class at Dr. John C. Wickwire Academy in Liverpool have recently been awarded a first place finish in a North American-wide coding competition; and

Whereas called "So You Think You Can Code," the competition is hosted by Boston-based leading education company Unruly Studios, and includes five categories; and

Whereas Ms. Killam and her class of 25 students worked hard together to produce four videos, claiming the top prize in the School Spirit Category;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Ms. Killam and her students on this very impressive award, and in applauding the incredible teamwork that these innovators of the future have shown.

**RESOLUTION NO. 686**

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas Pure Salt Scrubs of Liverpool was recently named the 2022 New Business of the Year at the Lunenburg Queens Business Excellence Awards Gala on March 6<sup>th</sup>; and

Whereas an avid beachgoer, entrepreneur Kaylee Oickle was inspired in July of 2022 to make sea salt from sea water collected from beautiful Summerville Beach, she experimented and developed her product, and began selling exfoliating salt scrubs at her local market; and

Whereas Kaylee's Pure line now includes many products, most made with locally harvested sea salt, and she remains committed to producing high quality products with natural ingredients;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Kaylee on receiving this well-deserved award, and in wishing her continued success with her business.

**RESOLUTION NO. 687**

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas the South Queens Middle School Wildcats Cheer Team recently claimed the Western Region Junior High/Middle School Championship banner on March 29<sup>th</sup>; and

Whereas coached by Jessica Adler and Tina Whynott, these 11 athletes worked incredibly hard this year to progress to more and more difficult skills; and

Whereas they competed in the Junior High Intermediate Division, and their hard work and determination paid off, earning them their school's very first regional championship in the sport of cheerleading;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in applauding all team members and their coaches on this impressive win, and in wishing them continued success in their sport.

**RESOLUTION NO. 688**

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas the Queens County U18A Cougars recently won the Annual Joe Lamontagne Tournament in Cole Harbour on Sunday, March 19<sup>th</sup>; and

Whereas the tournament began on March 11<sup>th</sup>, and the Cougars finished the round robin in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and they faced the host team Cole Harbour Wings in the semi-final and after an exciting overtime win, they advanced to the final against the Shediac/Cap-Pele Predators from New Brunswick; and

Whereas in a hard-fought game which was scoreless until the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Cougars earned an impressive shut-out victory over the Predators, by a score of 1-0;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating the players and coaching staff of the U18A Cougars on bringing home the banner to Queens.

**RESOLUTION NO. 689**

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas Betty-Ann Daury of Queens County has recently been named the 2022 Coach of the Year by both Special Olympics Nova Scotia and Special Olympics Canada; and

Whereas Betty-Ann has volunteered with the Lunenburg Queens Special Olympics for the last 36 years, and has coached athletes at five Canada Games and one World Games and in addition she has served on the Special Olympics NS Board and the Provincial Leadership Council, and has mentored athlete leadership and developed new coaching education courses in her sport of snowshoe; and

Whereas she received her provincial honour at the Inspire Gala on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, and her national award at the Canada Awards Night this past November 1<sup>st</sup>;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Betty-Ann for both of these well-deserved honours.

**RESOLUTION NO. 690**

By: Hon. Steve Craig (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas the Lake District Recreation Association (or LDRA) has been hosting a Volunteer Appreciation Awards Ceremony for the past 42 years; and

Whereas after a three-year absence, LDRA will gather this year on Wednesday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> to celebrate our wonderful volunteers; and

Whereas nominations for these awards are received from community groups who put forward the names of their volunteers who commit and dedicate their time and heart to the community;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly applaud our wonderful volunteers from one end of Nova Scotia to the other, who do not volunteer for the recognition but do so in order to make our world a better place.



**RESOLUTION NO. 691**

By: Hon. Steve Craig (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas Cheryl Newcombe has been instrumental in making the Sackville Area Shelter Housing (or SASH) become a reality through her hard work, dedication, and commitment to provide the unhoused with a comfortable place to lay their heads at night; and

Whereas Cheryl, in conjunction with the Province, has put in place the necessary counselling and support services to ensure that those who are struggling receive the means to improve their current situation by helping them find permanent housing, jobs, and whatever else would help to improve their lives; and

Whereas Cheryl received the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal this past year for her remarkable work with SASH;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Cheryl for all she does to help the less fortunate of our community.

**RESOLUTION NO. 692**

By: Hon. Steve Craig (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas Debbie Adams and Earl Smith recently organized and hosted a Scrabble fundraising event in support of Beacon House Food Bank; and

Whereas this well-attended event took place on February 25, 2023, at the Royal Canadian Legion in Lower Sackville; and

Whereas members of the community brought their own Scrabble boards and, while playing the game for a couple of hours that afternoon, enjoyed winning prizes and had a whole lot of fun;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Debbie and Earl for organizing this event, which resulted in an impressive \$2,000 being donated to the Beacon House Food Bank.

**RESOLUTION NO. 693**

By: Hon. Steve Craig (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas I was honoured to be able to congratulate the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal recipients of Lower Sackville; and

Whereas having to choose only 15 community members to be nominated for the QEII Platinum Jubilee Medal was challenging; and

Whereas I was very pleased to be able to present medals to these deserving recipients: Cheryl Newcombe, Cleveland Munroe, Eric Yeung, Jamie Munroe, Jon Cyr, Julie & Scott Briand, Mary Marson, Michelle Champniss, Paul Russell, Paul Savoie, Reverend Dr. Ross Bartlett, Robert Rines, Robert Taylor, and Theresa Scratch;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating all recipients of the QEII Platinum Jubilee Medal from across the province and thank them for their amazing contributions in making Nova Scotia a better place to live.

**RESOLUTION NO. 694**

By: Hon. Steve Craig (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas the staff of the Sackville Business Association, along with the organizing team of the Sackville Snow Days, held the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Sackville Snow Days Festival; and

Whereas Sackville Snow Days events took place this year from February 17<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup>; and

Whereas once again this year, the team was able to bring the community together to celebrate and bring fun to the Winter season;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating the Sackville Business Association, along with the countless community groups, organizations, businesses, volunteers, and sponsors who continue to support the Sackville Snow Days Festival each year, as without their commitment and hard work, this winter fun weekend would not be possible.

**RESOLUTION NO. 695**

By: Hon. Steve Craig (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas this year's Spring Duck Race will take place on April 29<sup>th</sup> on the Little Sackville River; and

Whereas local businesses and families are invited to purchase ducks of all sorts to race down the River; and

Whereas proceeds from this event will assist both the Acadia Recreation Club to maintain Acadia Park, as well as the Sackville Rivers Association to continue their endeavours in keeping the Sackville Rivers clean, with the hope of encouraging the salmon to return to the area;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking the organizers and participants for continuing to make the annual Spring Duck Race such a successful, fun-filled family event.

**RESOLUTION NO. 696**

By: Hon. Steve Craig (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas Rose Degenhardt, owner of Venture Counselling Therapy, recently opened her counselling office in Lower Sackville; and

Whereas from a very young age, Rose knew she wanted to help others and, over the years, she has worked with those experiencing substance abuse, mental health issues, anxiety, depression, domestic violence, and has specialized in working with children as a play therapist and gender-affirming care; and

Whereas Rose believes that her clients deserve to be heard, respected, and understood in a safe, supportive, and non-judgmental environment and her favorite part is being allowed into somebody's story;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Rose and thanking her for the efforts she makes to fill the lives of others with happiness and acceptance.

**RESOLUTION NO. 697**

By: Hon. Steve Craig (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas Walter N. Regan has been involved with the Sackville Rivers Association for many years, where he served as President for 22 years and volunteered for the past 35 years; and

Whereas in June 2022, the Halifax Regional Municipality designated park land on Sackville Drive as the Walter N. Regan Park; and

Whereas the newly designated Walter N. Regan Park is not only a physical sign for all to see, but also honours Walter's efforts to protect the environmental health of the Sackville River and its watershed not only for today, but for future generations to be able to enjoy;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Walter for having the Walter N. Regan Park dedicated to him.

**RESOLUTION NO. 698**

By: Hon. Steve Craig (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas the Warm and Cozy Quilters are a group of senior volunteers from Lower Sackville who meet every week to share their time and stitching talents to design beautiful quilts; and

Whereas these quilts are generously donated to dialysis patients; children from Memory Lane Family Place; and children and adolescents from the Garron Centre at the IWK; and

Whereas the Warm and Cozy Quilters have received numerous messages from recipients letting them know how grateful they are to have received one of their unique works of art;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking the Warm and Cozy Quilters for their compassion and dedication, and for warming the hearts of their recipients one stitch at a time.