



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

## DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

**Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane**

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### First Session

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2023**

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2023**

**Sixty-fourth General Assembly**

**First Session**

**9:00 A.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Good morning, everyone. Happy Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, all day.

We will now begin the Daily Routine.

**PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, we are going to have some guests present in the gallery today for the presentation of this petition. I see they're not seated yet. Would it be all right to move to future parts of the order and then get unanimous consent to come back in a few moments for presenting the petition when the guests are in the gallery?

THE SPEAKER: With unanimous consent, does everyone agree?

It is agreed.

**PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES****TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS****STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS****GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. TIMOTHY HOUSTON (The Premier): Before I read my Government Notice of Motion, I beg leave to make an introduction.

I'm honoured to introduce a very special guest today sitting in the Speaker's Gallery. Today with us is Honorary Consul Consuelo "Connie" Lacson, who represents the Filipino community in Nova Scotia. I ask Connie to stand. (Applause) Thank you, Connie. Welcome.

Accompanying Connie, and I'll ask them to stand as I read the names as well, are her children, Adrian and Micah Lacson - please stand and receive the welcome - and Linda Hamilton, Peachy Forbes, and Scarlet Salcedo. (Applause) Thank you so much.

Micah is currently the President of the Filipino Cultural Society in Nova Scotia. I just want to welcome you all to the House today. I just came back from a trip to Manila, and I'm so excited about the potential opportunities between Nova Scotia and the Philippines.

There are 115 million people in the Philippines with an average age of 24. The energy there is incredible. I'm so inspired by what's happening there with the opportunities for trade and for education. We can do a lot to support our two regions. Thank you for being here today. It's my absolute pleasure to introduce you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

**RESOLUTION NO. 701**

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

Whereas Honorary Consul Consuelo "Connie" Lacson represents the Filipino community of Nova Scotia with pride, creating important links between the Philippines and Nova Scotia; and



Whereas Honorary Consul Lacson is unmatched in her commitment to breaking barriers for women of Filipino heritage here in Nova Scotia and far beyond our province; and

Whereas Honorary Consul Lacson will receive the Foundation for Filipina Women's Network 2023 100 Most Influential Filipina Woman in the World Award at a distinguished ceremony in Prague, Czech Republic, later this month; (Applause)

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Legislature celebrate Honorary Consul Consuelo "Connie" Lacson's outstanding leadership and public service in the Province of Nova Scotia.

Thank you, Connie. We are very proud of you.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. I hope you enjoy your visit here, and congratulations.

The notice of motion is tabled.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: In my excitement over Connie, I forgot to ask for 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, Nay? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 702**

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

Whereas continuing care assistants are vitally important members of our province's health care team who have and continue to provide exceptional care to many Nova Scotians in their homes and communities; and

Whereas their dedication to caring for our most vulnerable seniors and citizens of our communities represents what it truly means to be a compassionate Nova Scotian; and

Whereas these health care providers truly make a difference in the lives of those they care for, their families, and their loved ones;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature join me in recognizing October 9 to 13, 2023 to be Continuing Care Assistant Week in the province of Nova Scotia.

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 Labour, Skills and Immigration.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 703**

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

Whereas Wednesday, October 11<sup>th</sup> was International Day of the Girl, a day to celebrate the voices and power of girls, champion their rights, and reflect on the challenges they continue to face simply because they are girls; and

Whereas this year's theme was Invest in Girls' Rights: Our Leadership, Our Well-being - a statement that asks for a collective effort in dismantling the systemic barriers that hold girls back; and

Whereas programs like Techsploration are helping to dismantle those barriers by empowering young women and non-binary youth in Grades 9 through 12 to explore careers in science, engineering, trades, and technology, with statistics showing that almost 50 per cent of the program's alumnae go on to pursue or are in the midst of pursuing a career in one of the program's areas of focus;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly congratulate Techsploration for the work it does to contribute to gender equality and encourage young women to achieve their full potential.

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.

**[PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS]**

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: May I introduce our guests who are here for the presentation of the petition?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

GARY BURRILL: With us this morning we have three members of the team in Halifax Chebucto who have participated along with me, in the months since the House last sat, in gathering the signatures from every corner of the constituency that I am about to present. This is extremely important democratic work, and I ask Tom Bell, Jim Houston, and Margie MacDonald if they would please stand and be recognized for this democratic contribution. (Applause)

I beg leave to present a petition which reads as follows:

“Whereas over a quarter of those who are homeless for the first time in the HRM are over the age of 60; and

Whereas nearly 5,000 people are on the waitlist for public housing with an average wait time of over two years;

Therefore be it resolved that the provincial government ban evictions of seniors who have been in their same accommodations for multiple years for the duration of the housing crisis.”

In accordance with the rules of the House, it is my privilege to join my signature to this petition.

[9:15 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration on an introduction.

HON. JILL BALSER: Thank you, Speaker. I beg leave to make an introduction to go along with my Government Notice of Motion. In the gallery today we have representatives from Techsploration, the program that helps introduce young women and binary students in Grades 9 through 12 to pursue careers in fields of science, engineering, trades, and technology. I would ask them to rise as I introduce them.

We have Emily Boucher, Executive Director of Techsploration, along with alumni Ardena Paul, Victoria Henneberry, and Emma Beeler. I also would like to introduce Donna MacGillivray, Manager of Youth & Equity Programs at the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency. I would ask that all members in the House join me in giving them a very warm welcome and thank them for the work that they do. (Applause)

Thank you, Speaker. These women are opening doors to careers for opportunities that are not often considered by women. I just want to say thank you for joining us today, and for all that you do.

#### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 332 - An Act to Amend Chapter 10 of the Acts of 1994-95, the Workers' Compensation Act. (Hon. Jill Balsar)**

**Bill No. 333 - An Act to Amend Chapter 27 of the Acts of 2000, the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act. (Hon. Derek Mombourquette)**

**Bill No. 334 - An Act to Amend Chapter 197 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Health Services and Insurance Act. (Hon. Brian Comer)**

**Bill No. 335 - An Act to Amend Chapter 217 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Income Tax Act to Reduce Income Tax. (Hon. Brendan Maguire)**

THE CLERK: Thank you. Just for the information of this Chamber, I mis-numbered the previous bill. It should have been Bill No. 335. My apologies.

**Bill No. 336 - An Act to Amend Chapter 401 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Residential Tenancies Act, Respecting Eviction Control. (Gary Burrill)**

**Bill No. 337 - An Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2004, the Electricity Act. (Hon. Tory Rushton)**

**Bill No. 338 - An Act Respecting the Creation of a Provincial Ambulance Service. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 339 - An Act Respecting Certain Financial Measures. (Hon. Allan MacMaster)**

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

#### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 704**

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

Whereas hundreds of citizens of Nova Scotia have signed a petition, which I have earlier tabled, calling on the government to ban the evictions of low-income seniors in the present housing crisis until such time as rent-geared-to-income seniors' public housing is available to provide them with a place to move to; and

Whereas seniors' homelessness in Nova Scotia is an urgent issue, with 15 per cent of the unhoused population of the province being over the age of 60 and more than a quarter of the unhoused population of Nova Scotia, whose first experience of homelessness has been in the last year, identify themselves as seniors, with the result that seniors living in their cars and in tents has become a prominent feature of the housing crisis in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas other jurisdictions are responding to this crisis, as for example in Quebec, where evictions of seniors with incomes below the qualifying threshold for public housing, when public housing wait-lists make it de facto unavailable, are not in fact permitted;

Therefore be it resolved that on Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, immediately following Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers, the House shall devote a period of not less than two hours to debate the scandal of seniors' homelessness in Nova Scotia.

I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

There have been several Nays.

The notice is tabled.

### **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston. (Applause)

#### **BLACK CULT. CTR.: 40<sup>TH</sup> ANIV. - RECOG.**

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia on their 40-year anniversary.

On September 16, 1983, the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia opened its door with the mandate to protect, preserve, and promote Black culture in our province. The Black Cultural Centre has been a cornerstone institution, representing Canada's oldest and long-standing Black communities across our province.

Speaker, I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to please join with me in congratulating the board, members and staff of the Black Cultural Centre of Nova Scotia for a successful 40 years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, may I make a quick introduction, please?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I would like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery. We're joined here by Heather Mulligan of the Canadian Cancer Society of Nova Scotia. She's here in support of a former colleague of hers and a friend to many in the House, Rafah DiCostanzo, who of course is dealing with her own cancer battle. I would like to thank Heather for being here and providing that support to our colleague and her work to improve policy that can improve the lives of people, especially those dealing with cancer in the province.

I have a member's statement that is totally not related to that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

#### **HINES, LLOYD: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I rise today to recognize and pay tribute to a former colleague and dear friend of many of ours in the House, the former honourable member for Guysborough-Eastern Shore-Tracadie, Lloyd Hines.

[9:30 a.m.]

Lloyd had a long career in elected office and a deep commitment to public service. He knew how important rural Nova Scotia was to the future of our province and how much wealth is generated to our provincial economy from our rural areas. He fought constantly to make sure rural voices were heard in this Legislature and beyond. His deft stewardship of the province's highway twinning and hospital infrastructure programs, as well as his support for our resource sectors, are legacies that will impact our province and people for generations to come. As a student of Nova Scotian history, he always had a story to share that would enrich our understanding of how we got here and where we need to go. More important than that, Speaker, he was a loving husband, father, and papa.

My thoughts are with his wife, Patricia, and children, Victoria, Sarah, Shannon, and Regan, and his beautiful grandchildren. I'd like to thank them for sharing Lloyd with the rest of Nova Scotia. We are a stronger province because of him.

Speaker, I'd like to ask your permission for a moment of silence in Lloyd Hines's honour.

THE SPEAKER: I ask that we all stand for a moment of silence, please.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

Please be seated.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

### **FORMER SPEAKER: LEADERSHIP - THANKS**

LISA LACHANCE: I rise to honour the MLA for Victoria-The Lakes. The honourable MLA assumed the role of Speaker in September 2021.

As a new member of this House and then a new deputy speaker, I relied heavily on the guidance and example of the honourable member. Indeed, his concern, attention and humour provided a firm foundation for the discussions of the House.

Sometimes the members of this House make a Speaker's life difficult. You may be thinking of when members forget to follow the standards for decorum in this House. A Speaker is perhaps most challenged from presiding over discourse when members go on and on. A Speaker must judge exactly how wide the discussion can range before being

reined in. The honourable member demonstrated great endurance and patience in this regard.

The Speaker is also responsible for ensuring the efficient and ethical management of the Legislature and its staff. This has not been an easy task since September 2021, as managing a public building and a professional team during a pandemic required his careful consideration, responsiveness, and clear communication.

Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking the honourable member for his leadership and kindness and welcome him to the debate on the floor.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

### **PHARMACY ASSOC. OF N.S.: GALA - CONGRATS.**

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Speaker, pharmacists are among the most accessible health care professionals in Nova Scotia. They work tirelessly in cities, towns, and villages, and they are key members of health care teams in community pharmacies, hospitals, long-term care, and in other health care settings.

Pharmacists provide pharmaceutical care, helping patients optimize their health, preventing drug-related morbidity and mortality, and they administer thousands of immunizations annually in Nova Scotia. As well, pharmacy technicians play an essential role in the medication use process, including the preparation of prescriptions and the prevention of medication errors.

I ask all members of the Legislature to please join me in congratulating the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia on the occasion of their annual meeting and awards gala that is to be held in Dartmouth this weekend.

THE SPEAKER: I would like to recognize the honourable member for Clayton Park West. It's wonderful to see your lovely face. We are all thinking about you and sending positive vibes and good wishes for a healthy recovery.

The honourable member for Clayton Park West on a statement.

### **BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MO.: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I rise today to recognize something that is near and dear to my heart. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. One in eight women in Canada are expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer this year.



Speaker, in March I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and it has been the biggest mental and physical challenge of my lifetime. Cancer is hard. It humbles me every day. I am learning to be grateful for and celebrate each step forward.

As I approach my final chemo session next week, I have gained much knowledge about this disease and its treatments. I am blessed to be an elected member of this Legislature, and when my strength has returned, I am committed to using this privilege to advocate for policy changes to improve early diagnosis, follow-up, and treatments available to all Nova Scotians.

I am so blessed to have a supportive network of family, friends, colleagues, and members of the Canadian Cancer Society in Halifax, who are all living this journey alongside me. The words truly do not express my heartfelt gratitude.

I would ask that the House please join me in honouring those who are fighting cancer, and their families. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

#### **FEMALE SPEAKER ELECTION: MILESTONE - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, as the House Leader for the New Democratic Party and the chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians for the Nova Scotia chapter and the Canadian region, I rise today to congratulate you on your historic election as the first woman Speaker of the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia.

With your election, you can join a list of only 20 women ever to be elected as the Speaker of a legislative assembly in Canada, and you join only two current female Speakers in Canada: the honourable Nathalie Roy in Quebec and the honourable Darlene Compton in Prince Edward Island.

Women make up just over half of the world's population, and yet are very underrepresented in the political realm, a place where decisions are made that affect the well-being of all people, and a place where women's voices must be present so that laws are as effective and equitable as possible. Here in Nova Scotia, our Legislature can boast 34 per cent women or gender-diverse members, which hits the benchmark for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, but does not come near the United Nations' women's benchmark, which is to see 50 per cent representation.

Speaker, representation matters, and with you in that Chair, let us hope that more women and gender-diverse people will recognize politics as a place where they can be, contribute, thrive, and leave - lead. (Laughs) And leave eventually.

Congratulations once again. May many more women stand on your shoulders as we move toward equal representation in the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

**ROCKWOOD, DAVID: EMERG. LEADERSHIP - RECOG.**

KENT SMITH: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your historic new role.

I rise today to bring recognition to Dave Rockwood, who joined us yesterday in the gallery. Dave is a forest resource technician who works in the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables in Head of Jeddore.

Dave has an impressive list of skills and recognitions, including division supervisor, situation all-unit leader, public information officer, type 4 incident commander, UTV instructor, ATV instructor, and hockey coach for the U-9 Eastern Shore Mariners, where he coaches his daughter Ella and my stepson Beckett.

Dave played an essential role in providing critical information during the wildfires that ravaged parts of the province earlier this year. Not only did Dave demonstrate professionalism and excellence in leadership, he and his team, with their knowledge of forestry and emergency management, helped to ensure the safety of emergency crews, communities, and property during the critical events that took place in June 2023.

I ask that all members of the Assembly join me in expressing our sincere appreciation to Dave and all members of the team who were involved in the efforts to put out the fires.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**FILLIER, REV. MATT: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

HON. KELLY REGAN: I rise today in gratitude for the service of Reverend Matt Fillier, who has served as the lead minister of Bedford United Church for the past five years. I wanted to thank Matt for his service to Bedford United and the wider community during this extremely challenging time. We experienced a pandemic, a mass casualty incident, wildfires, flooding, and several other extremely serious matters at BUC. Matt responded to every situation with caring principles that guided his flock with love and sensitivity.

Matt has now moved on to a new leadership challenge. As of early September, he's signed on as the grief and bereavement lead at the Nova Scotia Health Authority. He's already hard at work assisting the Nova Scotia Health Authority, hospices, and wider partners. While I'm really sad to see him leave Bedford United, I'm also tremendously

grateful that someone with his abilities and heart is now leading the work we started to improve palliative care in Nova Scotia. It's important work, and I'm so glad to see it continuing.

I also want to congratulate Matt, his wife Lorna, and their daughter Isabel as they travel this new path together. I wish them all the best.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**ACCESS NOW N.S.: PROVIDING CONTRACEPTION - RECOG.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, I rise to recognize an important and newly formed coalition of which I am very proud to be a member: Access Now Nova Scotia.

Access Now is a broad coalition of health care professionals, not-for-profit advocacy organizations, and politicians who have come together to pursue barrier-free access to contraception in consideration of gender equity, best medical practices, and smart economics.

Access to contraception is recognized as a basic human right. Additionally, best medical practice indicates that providing contraceptive choice without barriers is fundamental to the overall health and well-being of patients. Unintended pregnancies can have significant negative impacts on the physical, emotional, and socio-economic lives of patients, their families, and their communities.

Our caucus is proud to be a part of this coalition as we continue to press for free and unfettered access to contraception for all Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

**DOUCET, STEPHANE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, congratulations. Nova Scotians are very lucky to have you serve as the Speaker of the House of Assembly.

Madame la Présidente, je prends la parole aujourd'hui à la mémoire d'un ami, Stéphane Doucet, un membre important de la communauté qui nous a quitté trop tôt.

Stéphane travaillait au Conseil scolaire acadien provincial depuis 20 ans et plusieurs le connaissaient comme enseignant, entraîneur et coordinateur des Jeux de l'Acadie. D'autres le connaissaient comme un ami, un collègue, ou un mentor.

Il menait une vie saine et aimait être dans la nature. Stéphane avait aussi une passion pour la musique. Mais avant tout c'était un mari et un père dévoué. Il aimait passer tout son temps libre avec sa femme Brenda et ses enfants, Sophie et Thomas.

Brenda, Sophie, et Thomas, sachez que notre communauté vous offre son soutien en ces temps de deuil.

Speaker, I rise today in memory of a friend, Stéphane Doucet, a valuable member who left us too soon.

Stéphane had been with le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial for 20 years serving as a teacher, an administrator, and a mentor. Many would know him as one of the key coordinators of Jeux de l'Acadie. Others knew him as a friend, as a colleague, as a great mentor.

He led a very healthy lifestyle. He led by example. He loved being out in nature. He was also a music enthusiast. Above all, he was a devoted husband and father; he loved spending all his spare time with his beautiful wife, Brenda, and his children, Sophie and Thomas.

Brenda, Sophie, and Thomas, please know that our community stands with you, and please know that during these times of grief and mourning, we love you all very much.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**FORMER SPEAKER: WORK IN HOUSE - RECOG.**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I want to rise in my place very quickly to recognize my friend and colleague from Victoria-The Lakes, who's proudly served as the Speaker of this House. More importantly, at times, for us Cape Bretoners, I like to consider him a generational politician on the Island. I joke with him, saying that he was an MLA before and after Facebook, so he's survived it all.

I do want to tell a quick story about him. We'll hear lots about Speakers, but the first time I met Keith, I'm at the hospital at seven o'clock in the morning at an appointment. He shows up with a friend, and I said, "Are you all right, Keith?" He said that his buddy needed a drive to get to his appointment. He drove this guy over two mountain ranges for 2.5 hours so he would meet his appointment. That tells you what that MLA for Victoria-The Lakes has done for his constituents.

As I said, Cape Breton has a long history of very successful politicians who have won multiple elections and have done a lot for their communities. He's one of them. I was one of those young guys who watched him as I started out in my political career.

I rise in my place to recognize the MLA for Victoria-The Lakes, but also a friend to me and a friend to many Cape Bretoners, for all the work that he's done not only in this House, but for the constituents all over Cape Breton Island. Congratulations to my friend.

[9:45 a.m.]

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

**NEW WAT. RESIDENTS: LG AWD. RECIPS. - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I'm immensely proud of my community of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier. Today I honour the residents of New Waterford and the surrounding area as the 2023 Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award recipients. The community was nominated by Island Breast Friends, a fantastic group of people who raise money and provide comfort packages to people undergoing breast cancer treatments.

This community rallies together in times of need, celebrates the accomplishments of individuals and organizations, comes together as a community in times of grief, and comes together as a community to celebrate all of our achievements. It is a community that gives back and has a strong volunteer base in many of its community organizations.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating the community of New Waterford and surrounding area on receiving the Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

**MARTIN, KAREN: SOAR LEADERSHIP - THANKS**

CHRIS PALMER: Speaker, I would like to, as well, acknowledge the historic position you're in. I heard from two of my daughters yesterday who thought it was awesome that you're sitting in that chair. I just want to pass that on to you.

I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize Karen Martin, a Kings West resident, for her advocacy for survivors of sexual abuse. In 1993, Karen co-founded SOAR, Survivors of Abuse Recovering, a volunteer organization that has helped countless people deal with the trauma of childhood abuse. Karen continues to guide this volunteer organization and has been recognized for her tremendous work in our communities. I was pleased to honour Karen with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal in November 2022. This year SOAR celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> year of serving those traumatized by sexual abuse and will be celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary at a fundraising dinner on October 28<sup>th</sup>.

Please join me in thanking Karen Martin for her years of selfless work on behalf of vulnerable residents in our communities and congratulate SOAR on this wonderful milestone.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

**DAUGHTER, ISLA ROSE - BIRTHDAY WISHES**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, today I stand to wish my little baby girl, Isla Rose Maguire, a happy seventh birthday. Isla is becoming a strong, intelligent and beautiful person. She is a free spirit who loves the outdoors, doesn't take bull from anyone and is a kind soul, always curious and first to help.

Her birthday was perfect. It was filled with Squishmallows - and if you don't know what that is, you don't have a 7-year-old - Squishmallows, Sailor Moon and Starbucks, a perfect day for her. Isla, I love you and I will always be there for you. Never get too old for our snuggles. Happy Birthday, Isla. Daddy loves you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**CHIG. ISTHMUS: NEED TO PROTECT - RECOG.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, people living on or near the Chignecto Isthmus have growing fears that a storm or a hurricane will have catastrophic flooding that will affect their homes and properties. Flooding is predicted to occur on the Chignecto Isthmus due to the rising sea levels and increased incidents of storms. It's only a matter of time.

Local and international supply chains will be broken, telecommunications, electrical infrastructure and natural gas transmission lines. Hectares of farmland could be flooded and damaged due to salt water. This could also harm local food production, as well as valuable marshlands that capture carbon.

While problems with affordability, health care and housing are significant issues to Nova Scotians, they will pale in comparison if the supply chains and critical infrastructure are destroyed on the Chignecto Isthmus. If the lack of action continues, this will not only harm the people of Cumberland North, but all Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**NDP WORKERS: EVICTION BAN PETITION - RECOG.**

GARY BURRILL: I want to recognize also in this forum the important democratic contribution of the members of the NDP in Halifax Chebucto, who have joined me in the months since this House last sat going door to door in our constituency with the petition that I have already tabled calling for a ban on evictions of low income seniors until such time that there is actually a place in rent-geared-to-income public housing that they can go to.

Every Friday afternoon since mid-April, with just occasional pauses in the summer, we've gone out with this petition and without exception there has been an excellent response. It hasn't, in fact, been rare for one or more of us to have the experience on a Friday afternoon, going all afternoon without encountering a single negative response. This is true across the highly varied demographics and income spectrum of the riding I represent.

People's moral senses are simply offended by the number of seniors in the HRM forced to live in their vehicles at Walmart or in tents. The petition is evidence of people's strong opinions about this subject and every democratic credit is due to the team that has given them this opportunity to express their views.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

**TALLAHASSEE DAYCARE CTR.: GARDEN CLEANUP - THANKS**

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to Eastern Passage business owner Lesley Corbett and staff at the wonderful Tallahassee daycare centre for their hard work and excellent care of our children in our community and their dedication to a huge cleanup at our local community garden.

I want to specifically recognize Jennifer Morrison, Terri Spence, Kim McDonnell, Leanne Raftus, Genevieve King, Kathryn Morrison, Tamara Kerly, Jenny O'Brian, Sara Eddie, Karen Peters, Amanda Daigle, Amanda Webber, Maggie Jie, Alyssa Taylor, Kenzie Paiva, and Noah Bowes.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in thanking the staff at Tallahassee Early Learning Centre in Eastern Passage for their hard work, dedication, inspiration, and leadership in giving back to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**PELTON, ANGELA: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

HON. KEITH IRVING: Speaker, may I add my congratulations as well on your election to this important seat in this House. Congratulations.

Volunteers are the backbone of our vibrant rural communities. I rise today to recognize the extraordinary dedication of Angela Pelton from Avonport, who has devoted 23 years to volunteering with the Annapolis Valley Apple Blossom Festival. Angela's commitment to the Valley's premier festival has left an indelible mark on our communities. Her countless hours of hard work and boundless passion have contributed significantly to the success and growth of the event.

Beyond her exceptional organizational skills, Angela's warm and welcoming spirit fosters a sense of belonging and unity among festival participants. Her dedication serves as an inspiration to us all, reminding us of the profound impact one individual can have on a community's cultural fabric.

I ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in thanking Angela Pelton for her remarkable volunteer contributions to community and being an inspiration to the next generation of volunteers.

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

**PROSPER, SARAH: DANCE ACHIEVEMENTS - RECOG.**

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: I would like to welcome Sarah Prosper to the Legislature. (Applause)

I rise today to bring the achievements of Sarah Prosper to the attention of the House. Sarah is from Eskasoni Mi'kmaq First Nation. Amalkewinu holds a BSc. in Therapeutic Recreation and is an MA student in Leisure Studies at Dalhousie University.

She has performed at Neptune Theatre, Highland Arts Theatre, Stratford Festival, the 2023 Canada Games, and the 2023 North American Indigenous Games opening ceremony. She has also performed at Roy Thomson Hall with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Yo-Yo Ma, and Jeremy Dutcher, is a continued collaborator with Symphony Nova Scotia and Choirs for Change, and works with artists across disciplines in many parts of the world.

Sarah's work encompasses a Mi'kmaw lens that deepens the threads of respect and reciprocity to dance, movement, social science, social justice, mental health, and the land. In 2022, Arts Nova Scotia and the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council recognized Sarah with the Indigenous Artist Recognition Award. Her first work created as an artistic director and choreographer is SAMQWAN. For that, she received the awards for Outstanding Choreography and Outstanding Independent Production at the Robert Merritt Awards presented by Theatre Nova Scotia.

I ask all members to join me in acknowledging the many contributions that Sarah has already made to Mi'kma'ki.

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



**NAUSS, CAROL: CHESTER HER. SOC. WORK - RECOG.**

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Thank you, and I would like to say congratulations, Speaker. It is fantastic. I am very proud of you and the people's government - our government - for making a historic moment yesterday.

I rise today to bring recognition to Carol Nauss of Chester for her tireless work on behalf of The Chester Municipal Heritage Society. A member from the beginning, she has served as Chair for over 20 years. The Chester Municipal Heritage Society was established in 1981 to promote and cultivate awareness of a unique heritage of the Municipality of the District of Chester. The preservation of this historical, significant properties and of the delivery of education programming is a benefit and an enjoyment of both present and future generations.

Carol was a driving force behind the restoration of Lordly House and Maple Cottage. She is hands-on and she is always on the lookout for artifacts or stories to add to the archives. For example, the most recent property acquisition is a caboos which was decommissioned some 35 years ago. This asset was refurbished at their site, which is on the original Halifax and Southwest Railroad station site in Chester.

Carol Nauss is a go-to person for anything Chester, and is the heart and soul of any organization or group that she is involved in. Her dedication to her community, knowledge, and ability to keep order makes her invaluable. She believes that if someone asks you to help, that is what you should do. Carol is the epitome of the phrase: If you want something done, ask a busy person.

I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in thanking Carol for her work as a volunteer in our community and happy retirement - sort of - because although she is no longer Chair, she will always be in service for the community.

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

**FOUGERE, EMILY: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, congratulations on your election to this very prestigious role of Chair, but including me, don't let any of us take advantage of your kindness and make us stick to 60 seconds.

Today I rise to recognize and celebrate the outstanding contributions of Emily Fougere, a dedicated and long-term member of the Centennial Arena Board of Directors. In her role as President, Emily displayed exceptional leadership during the challenging times of the pandemic. Her guidance and support extended not only to the dedicated staff, but also our loyal patrons.

Emily's commitment to the well-being of our community shone brightly during these unprecedented times. Her continued presence on the volunteer board brings invaluable experience and stability, ensuring that the arena remains a pillar of the Fairview-Clayton Park community. It's not just a place for sports and recreation, it's a vibrant community hub connecting residents and fostering a sense of togetherness. Under her guidance and support, the arena has continued to adapt and meet the ever-evolving needs of the community. Her dedication to this volunteer board and the arena staff will have a long-lasting impact, reinforcing the arena's role as an essential asset to our community.

I ask all members to join me in acknowledging and celebrating Emily's commitment to the Centennial Arena and showing the positive impact one individual can have on the well-being and unity of a community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

#### **ORGS. & PARTICS.: N. AM. INDIG. GAMES - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, this past July I had the privilege of volunteering at the 10<sup>th</sup> North American Indigenous Games, which were held in Kijipuktuk, Punamu'kwati'jk, Millbrook First Nation, and Sipekne'katik. The much-anticipated games hosted an astounding 5,000 athletes from 725 nations across Turtle Island, participating in 16 sports, as well as their supporters, the planning team, and all the staff and volunteers. The dream for the games for Indigenous Peoples began in the 1970s, and the first-ever North American Indigenous Games was held in Treaty 6 Territory, Edmonton Alberta.

As one of 3,000 volunteers at the games, I had such varied tasks as handing out volunteer kits, learning about and then teaching smudging at the RBC Centre Smudging Station, staffing the penalty box in a couple of lacrosse games, and being on the Medal Ceremony Crew at Lake Banook. At each shift I met incredible people and was impressed by the camaraderie and excitement of the athletes.

I ask the House to join me in saying wela'lioq to the entire North American Indigenous Games team for bringing such an exciting and culturally rich event to Mi'kma'ki and wellukwen to all participating athletes. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

#### **QUEENS GEN. HOSP. FND.: RECRUITMENT - RECOG.**

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the members of the Queens General Hospital Foundation and acknowledge their tireless work in the pursuit of physician recruitment. The year 2023 has been a very successful year for the foundation, with six new doctors coming to Queens General Hospital in Liverpool so far.

[10:00 a.m.]

The foundation members do more than lead in getting physicians to come to Queens by showcasing what the hospital and community have to offer; members also focus on retaining their services through community, integration programs, and by providing key support and advice to the doctors and their families.

It is with great pride and personal thanks that I recognize the foundation's ongoing work in the vital and high-profile area of health care professional recruitment and retention.

THE SPEAKER: We will now begin Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers, and time of conclusion will be 10:50 a.m.

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM.: HRM HOUSING - COLLABORATE**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, yesterday the Premier and his Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing minister unilaterally took control over HRM when it comes to housing in the capital city. I'll be very clear: the Liberal caucus supports the reduction of red tape when it comes to housing. We have to build more quickly, and we do support reduction of costs. However, we think this can be better achieved through collaboration with our municipal leadership, not by unilaterally taking over their authority.

Furthermore, because the Premier and Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing minister couldn't answer questions on how this is going to impact speed of housing development, how many more units are going to come online, or if this is going to impact rent, I am concerned that this is more about politics than actually about housing.

My question to the Premier is: Is the reason he refuses to work collaboratively with HRM primarily political, or is this about achieving housing targets that his government has?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Speaker, I'm loath to even stand up and dignify a question like that. We are concerned about housing for Nova Scotians - period, full stop. We want to make sure Nova Scotians have housing. We'll work with anyone, for sure. We have not taken control over the HRM. What we have done with HRM is say, Let's make sure we're having a commonsense approvals process.

Just so far, since we have been in government - two short years - working with HRM through the executive panel on housing, we have shaved six to nine months off the approval process by common-sense things like removing the requirement for newspaper notification, reducing the notice period, and allowing digital submission. We will continue with common-sense solutions, putting Nova Scotians first, not politics, like that member used to.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, the Premier says he wants to work with HRM, but in fact, the mayor said he didn't even get a call about this piece of legislation. I'll table that. The Premier says this isn't about politics, but I do want to bring his attention to some comments that his Minister of Justice made on November 16, 2021 at the East Hants Council meeting. The Minister of Justice said, and I quote: The Premier does recognize the importance of non-HRM ridings - totally politically - but we don't do very well in HRM. We do very well in the outskirts and other places in the province.

I'll table that. When I hear that comment, and I watch the Premier point fingers at HRM and not work collaboratively, I have to think politics does have something to do with this.

If politics does not have something to do with the finger pointing in HRM, stepping on their toes in such a way, then why did the Minister of Justice say this?

THE PREMIER: Speaker, the member can try to attack my character and the character of my government. That's fine, because he can't attack the policies. The policies we put forward are moving this province forward on many files. For eight years, that member was part of a Cabinet and a government that looked the other way. We will not look the other way. We will not look the other way in Metro. We will not look the other way in Pictou County. We will not look the other way in Shelburne or in any other part of this province. We will definitely not look the other way in Yarmouth, because they deserve good representation. They haven't seen it yet.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, we're not talking about character here. We're talking about motivation and incentives. When we have a minister of the Crown who said the Premier does recognize the importance of non-HRM ridings - totally politically - but we do very well outside of HRM, that has to tell you the minister heard that from someone, presumably the Premier. The Premier wants to talk about the facts. Here are the facts since he has taken office: Housing starts are down over 52 per cent since last year alone, rents are up higher in Nova Scotia than anywhere else in the province - and yet the Premier will stand in this Chamber and again blame everybody else, but not take responsibility himself.

Now that the Premier has taken control over HRM's decision-making, will he say now in the House, in front of everybody, that when it comes to housing - how much we build, how quickly, how affordable it is, how high rents are - the buck stops with him?

THE PREMIER: Speaker, of course the buck stops with me. That's why, for the first time in 30 years, we're investing in affordable housing. That's why this government has the courage to change the way short-term rentals work in this province. Do you know who didn't have the courage? The government before us, and the government before that, and the one before that.

We will continue to move forward on housing. We will continue to move forward on health care. We will continue to move forward on every single file that matters to Nova Scotians because they matter to this government.

I will leave the honourable member with one thought: If he thinks we don't do good in Metro, he should look directly across the aisle from his chair right now. For the first time in 20 years, the people of an area said: That PC government is getting it done, that PC government has the best candidate, and we're going with the PC government.

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

#### **PREM.: AFFORDABLE HOUSING - CREATE**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, the people I speak with - individuals, seniors, and families searching desperately for housing - are not saying that. They are wondering why the Premier is allowing vacant lots in the HRM - like the old Bloomfield and St. Patrick's-Alexandra school sites - to sit empty for years, and sometimes decades.

Experts say that we will have a shortage of 33,000 affordable housing units by 2030. That's 33,000 affordable - affordable - housing units. Speeding up permitting isn't going to help if developers don't build.

Does the Premier think it's acceptable that vacant lots in the middle of our largest city sit empty while families search for a place to live? If he doesn't, what is he going to do about it?

THE PREMIER: As the Premier of the province, I don't have the luxury of picking a position one day and a different position the next day. Every single day, we get up as a government and we do good things for Nova Scotia. We do what we think is right. Just yesterday, that member stood in the media and said that the provincial government is really budging their way into HRM. Today, the member is encouraging me to go a little bit further. Speaker, we are focused on housing for Nova Scotians. We will continue to be the party of action. We will continue to be the party that gets things done for Nova Scotia. We won't flip-flop in the wind depending on what we think might sell in the media that day.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Unlike the Premier, we are in dialogue with our municipal units, and we understand what they want. One of the things they want is permissive

legislation developed in concert with their provincial partners. This is one of those pieces of permissive legislation.

Speaker, anyone searching for an apartment right now will tell you the only lease available to sign is a one-year, fixed-term lease. The inevitable result after a year is up is a rent hike or an eviction. You can't keep rents reasonable or protect people's homes with this kind of constant churn. Does the Premier think people should be forced out of their homes because their fixed-term lease is up?

THE PREMIER: We're concerned about this situation in housing. That concern is why we're acting so quickly on so many things. That concern is why we table a piece of legislation that involves the HRM in speeding things up to get housing built. That concern is why we've made over \$300 million in investments this year to try to make sure there's housing available to Nova Scotians. We are moving forward, and I ask the honourable member to please support the actions that will lead to more housing. They will absolutely lead to more housing in this province. The solution to the housing crisis is more housing, and we are focused on that.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The legislation that we propose is enabling. The legislation that this government continues to pass is a direct incursion, in the words of the Mayor of HRM. Speaker, the one thing this government doesn't seem to consider, when they don't answer questions about things like fixed-term leases and taxing vacant land, is the impact this has on families. Across the province, vacancy rates for two- and three-bedroom units are much lower than other types of units and are getting tighter and tighter. Rents are rising faster and faster. What is the Premier's plan to make sure families can stay in their homes as Winter is coming?

THE PREMIER: We're concerned about the housing situation in the province. I'll just reiterate, that's why we're seeing so much action. The questions around fixed-term leases have been answered by my colleague many times. The Opposition might not like the answers, but they're the answers, they're the position. We'll move forward on building more housing stock to make sure there's housing available. We'll move forward with protecting tenants. We'll move forward on just moving opportunities for people to have a place to live, and we'll work with the municipalities. I'm very proud of the work the minister has done with the municipalities right now renegotiating an MOU that hadn't been changed in 25 years.

We are working with the municipalities. The municipalities know it. I'll tell you what won't happen, Speaker, is we won't slow down. We will put Nova Scotians first, and we will move quickly on these files.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

**FTB: HOUSING POLICIES - COLLABORATE**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The fact is, since this government has taken office, things have slowed down demonstrably on housing. We have 52 per cent lower housing starts than last year alone. When we have seen this government be successful and move forward with good policies, it's actually been when they've worked in collaboration with other governments. We saw that after we called them in to follow the federal government's lead on reducing HST on new apartment builds. We saw that just this week, when the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the mayor worked together to get 200 new shelters available in Nova Scotia. When we've seen this government fail is actually when they've taken this confrontational posture when it comes to power rates that have gone up, when it comes to the carbon tax.

My question to the Premier is: Has he not seen, based on his own record, that he actually achieves more for Nova Scotians when he works collaboratively than when he's confrontational?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I'll try to explain it in the seconds I have. I often hear this refrain from the provincial Liberals, that we could have arranged a different deal with the federal government to avoid the carbon tax. If you look across the country, everybody's paying the carbon tax because it's the law. We didn't make it the law - the federal Liberals made it the law. The three years that they often refer to are years that the government got a special agreement because the federal government recognized the cost of wind energy years before under an NDP government, and recognized that Nova Scotians made sacrifices by paying higher rates because of that and got a special three-year deal. That was out, and they knew when they were in government that that deal was coming to an end. We had to accept the law that the federal Liberals put in place.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Carbon tax is not in every single province. Quebec still has a cap and trade system. By the way, we on this side - and I'll be clear again - do not support a carbon tax here in Nova Scotia. That's why we negotiated a different deal. We do not have the alternative markets to get onto electric vehicles, or to have the infrastructure for charging stations, so we don't get the behavioural change here with carbon tax, which is why we have been opposed to it and negotiated an alternative.

That's the difference. We worked with the federal government to negotiate an alternative. We worked with Nova Scotia Power to negotiate a 3 per cent rate stability rate for eight years in a row. Every time this government has picked a fight, whether it's with Nova Scotia Power, the federal government over the tax, or the isthmus, what have we seen? Nova Scotians pay with 14 per cent increases in power rates, with the carbon tax that came to Nova Scotia for the first time.

When will this government understand they're probably better served themselves with their own goals when they actually just start working with the people instead of fighting everybody and blaming everybody else?

[10:15 a.m.]

ALLAN MACMASTER: Nova Scotians want us to stand up for them against the Liberal carbon tax. That's what they want. One of the reasons is because it does nothing for the environment. It's just a cost to people. The Parliamentary Budget Officer stated that in Ottawa, that it's a cost. In fact, it's going to cost our economy this year over \$200 million - over \$400 million per household. There is a cost to this that Nova Scotians are suffering with, and we're standing up for them.

### **DCS: POVERTY ACTION NEEDED - RECOGNIZE**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Standing up is one thing; achieving results for Nova Scotians is an entirely different thing, I would argue. I think we're better off being motivated in this Chamber to actually achieve results for people instead of focusing on headlines and speaking points that you can run PR campaigns on. Here's the reality in Nova Scotia: Food Banks Canada released a report recently about poverty across the country. The result for Nova Scotia is pretty grim. We're the only province in the country to receive a failing grade, and I'll table that.

It said the majority of Nova Scotians feel worse off now compared to a year ago. Speaker, the Premier is quick to blame everybody else for the troubles that Nova Scotians are facing, but at the same time, the Premier cannot run from the stat.

My question to the Premier is: Why are the majority of Nova Scotians feeling now, this year, worse off than they were last year?

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Certainly, there is no question that Nova Scotians and those across Canada are feeling the pressures of inflation, the added carbon tax that we've been accustomed to. Certainly, when we get information from organizations like Food Banks Canada, we take that into consideration and certainly identify opportunities for us to do better and support our most vulnerable.

We recognize that that's important information and we realize that, as is highlighted in the report, there's certainly more for us to do here in our province. We'll continue to do what we can for our most vulnerable and support Nova Scotians through these difficult times with an affordability crisis.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Again, Speaker, we have the government blame every single thing on the carbon tax. Okay, the government failed to negotiate an alternative, so we have it now. That's the reality, but guess what? There are still a lot of tools in the provincial government's belt to actually help Nova Scotians deal with this affordability crisis and they're doing nothing but pointing the finger.



How about, for example, indexing income assistance to inflation? This government has frozen income assistance for two years in a row, with the most financially vulnerable Nova Scotians among us. People are having a hard time buying food, paying for their increased power bills, paying for rent, and this government says they care about them, but has frozen their assistance for two years in a row. I say this is shameful and I'd like the minister to please tell us: Is he going to change this terrible discriminatory practice toward our most financially vulnerable Nova Scotians?

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Poverty is certainly significant in the long term and a challenging and complex issue. Our government has, over the last number of years, rolled up a number of specific, targeted supports for our most vulnerable. It's gone across departments; this isn't just with Community Services specifically. We have increased the Nova Scotia Child Benefit over the last two budgets, twice. We've created targeted supports for those on income assistance. We've created and increased our support with the Seniors Care Grant. We've reduced child care fees with the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and there's more that we can do. We know there's more to do. We'll continue to try to do that, and we'll support our most vulnerable.

THE SPEAKER: I recognize the honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

#### **DCS: INADEQUATE INCOME SUPPORTS - ADDRESS**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, as we've heard and as we all know, we have the highest inflation in Canada, yet this government's income assistance and other support programs don't even come close to what they should be.

Take, for example, one of my constituents who receives income assistance gets only 20 cents per kilometre when travelling for medical appointments, which doesn't even come close to what is needed. This is causing them harm and being unable to afford going to their own medical appointments. I think this is shameful. My question to the Minister of Community Services is: Will he change this policy and increase that rate?

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Once again, we do recognize that poverty is a significant challenge for many here in our province, and the cost of living and the affordability crisis is certainly impacting many Nova Scotians. Employment Support and Income Assistance is one of the tools that we use to support our most vulnerable. You look at the urgent needs of Nova Scotians, and I've discussed some of those that we've worked on as a government.

I'm also proud of our government in looking at the preventatives and those types of initiatives to support people, to prevent them from getting into situations where they can't thrive. Again, we know there's more to do and certainly we will continue to do what we can for Nova Scotians.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: There's always more to do, but they had the chance to do it. This is a tool that the government can use. School started; where is the lunch program? School started; where is the support for school supplies? There's really been no messaging coming from government at all that this is coming, that they're even looking at some of things that they can be doing now as a government, that they can flick the switch on to help Nova Scotians today. It's no surprise that we are the only province in the country to get an F on poverty reduction.

They talk about being the government in action, but a government that has talked all about action wouldn't freeze income assistance rates when we have the highest inflation rates in the country. To the Minister of Community Services: Why can't this government recognize that the current supports don't even come close to what is needed to support Nova Scotians? They've been the government now for over two years. It's time to act.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Certainly, our government is committed to supporting our most vulnerable and providing the services and supports that they need. We know there's more to do, and certainly we'll continue to do what we can. As I've mentioned, there have been a number of targeted supports that we've done, and I've mentioned certainly some from various departments, including the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development with the decrease in fees for child care. We talked about significant funding for more rent supplements that has come from this government, and also the announcement for the first time in 30 years of public affordable housing. I'm encouraged by what my department is doing, but also what the departments across government are doing to support our most vulnerable.

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

### **DCS: HOMELESSNESS SITUATION - ADDRESS**

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Community Services. As the cost of housing in this province continues to rise, more and more Nova Scotians are being pushed into homelessness and housing insecurity. For the last year, Charlene Marie Johnson has been living in a small tent in Sydney with her husband, and I'll table that. She is one of dozens of people living outside in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. Can the minister tell us where Charlene and her husband will live this Winter?

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Certainly, having a place to live that is safe and stable and has a sense of belonging is important to all Nova Scotians. I'm really happy to highlight some of the initiatives we announced this week, certainly with our Pallet shelters that are being deployed across the province, 100 here in HRM and 100 across the rest of the province. We'll continue to work with our service providers across the province to identify the opportunities that we have.

I'm going to read something here, and I'll table it. CBCHA, which is the Cape Breton Community Housing Association, has "seen a dramatic increase in the number of homeless individuals utilizing the supports and services we offer in CBRM. With that, we have also witnessed a steep rise in the number of unsheltered individuals living rough . . . This situation requires immediate attention, and we are pleased that the provincial government is taking progressive and timely steps to address this." I will table this.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I did not hear what Charlene and her husband are going to do this Winter. There was no plan in place for CBRM. The Ally Centre of Cape Breton in Sydney helps people with mental health, addiction, and homelessness issues. Of the 683 clients who visited this year, 30 per cent say they are homeless. I'll table that. For these folks, finding an affordable rental or owning a home is simply out of reach. It used to be rare that someone had to live outside in the CBRM. Now it is commonplace. When will these folks have a permanent place to live?

HON. JOHN LOHR: It is something that weighs heavily on all of us - the unprecedented growth in the province - which we do want to see continue, we want to enable - but that has put a strain on housing across the spectrum on every level. We see the most vulnerable being the most affected by it. That's why we've made a historic investment in new public housing, which I know that your party was calling for, certainly, and we're doing that. It takes time to build that out.

We've also invested in a number of things in CBRM. We put \$5 million into Tartan Downs for student housing, and we certainly recognize the impacts that Cape Breton University has had on that community. We are also investing in affordable housing in CBRM in various ways. We've put \$3.8 million into affordable housing projects with Stephen Jamal Property Rentals. Another one in Sydney Mines.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

### **FTB: COST OF LIVING CRISIS - ACT**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Inflation, housing price increases, carbon tax, and grocery costs - it has never been more expensive to live in Nova Scotia. Power rates are going up 14 per cent, food inflation is 20 per cent, food bank usage is 25 per cent and we just received an F from Food Banks Canada on poverty reduction. I will table all that.

Nova Scotians need help now and into the future. What is this government doing to fight the cost of living crisis and tackle it head-on?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: We are continuing to provide targeted supports because we know that in these inflationary times it is hurting some people more than others.

That's what we will continue to do. We'll continue to look at ways. We've increased the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, we created the Seniors Care Grant, all kinds of targeted supports that are designed to help people most in need and we'll continue to do that. The question I would have for the member opposite is: Why is the federal Liberal government piling on with a carbon tax at a time like this when their own Parliamentary Budget Officer told them that it's going to cost households more money, Speaker?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: That would be a question for the MPs and Justin Trudeau, not the MLA for Halifax Atlantic. The truth is that life continues to get more and more expensive. There are tangible and important changes that could be made right here in Nova Scotia, like a universal school lunch program or indexing income assistance, cutting income taxes, cutting fuel taxes, and making rent supplements easier to access, but the truth is that these programs cost money. My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: When can the people of this province expect these common-sense ideas to be fully funded and implemented?

ALLAN MACMASTER: There is no secret that our government is focused on fixing the health care system. Our health care system didn't have the capacity that it needed for the population we have, let alone for the one that we are growing to right now. We have to fix that health care system. That's something for everyone. I'll just pick one. One of the suggestions from the Opposition is that we lower the fuel tax. Why should we lower the fuel tax to make way for a federal carbon tax? Our fuel taxes pay for the roads and if we were going to try to do something to help people, wouldn't it be better to help those most in need with something targeted instead of a broad relief like fuel tax? I disagree with him in two ways on that one question, Speaker.

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

### **DCS: HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY - ADDRESS**

LORELEI NICOLL: We all know about the report card that gave Nova Scotia an F for poverty. I am reading an article here and it is actually referencing people. The Premier started this Question Period by saying that we can't attack the policies. Well, according to Kirstin Beardsley, "It really is a result of a lack of action, a stagnation around any sort of policy advancements to address poverty, to address food insecurity."

We need action now but we're hearing from the minister that he says that people need a sense of belonging. I don't think the people in tents all around our province need a sense of belonging. What is the action plan now to get the people out of tents and to address poverty in Nova Scotia?

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Last year our government created the supportive housing plan. That plan was created with the idea of supporting certainly our most

vulnerable. With that plan over the last couple of years of our government we have created 417 supportive spaces that were not there previously.

[10:30 a.m.]

Also, as a continuation of that plan, we've announced again just this week about the Pallet shelters and the tiny homes programs. Those two programs are certainly there to support our most vulnerable. The Pallet shelter plan we are working on very hard and urgently, certainly with Winter coming. We know we need to do more and we'll continue to work on what we can for communities and our most vulnerable.

LORELEI NICOLL: I'm not into weather forecasting, but Winter's coming again. Therefore, we're not ready for it. We need action now. I'm going to table this report, because it is a good report, and it should be the basis for any decision-making by this government. We see people at the door of a food bank before they show up in federal statistics. We went to Cape Breton, and there are people using food banks who used to donate to food banks, and I can't believe that they're there actually shopping at a food bank to feed their families. I want to ask: What exactly is this government going to do, and act now, immediately, before this Winter comes?

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Certainly, we are working hard with our partners: municipalities, HRM, and our service providers. We are working urgently to support our most vulnerable. We know Winter's coming. These Pallet shelters are one tool, and certainly an innovative way of doing that. We've also announced three other shelters that will be provided: one in HRM, one in Amherst, and one in Bridgewater. Those are certainly things that we're getting up and moving quickly. We'll continue to do what we can and work with our service providers as quick as we can to get these off the ground to support our most vulnerable.

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

### **FTB: BETTER PAYCHEQUE PROMISE - EXPLAIN**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, when Nova Scotians elected this Premier, they were promised a Better Pay Cheque Guarantee. They were promised more money in Nova Scotians' pockets. But Speaker, we have never been given a clear answer on where this so-called "better paycheque" is. My question is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board: Why has no one gotten a better paycheque under this government except for his friends?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, the Premier has many friends in this province, it is true. CCAs, I believe, are friends of the Premier - a 23 per cent pay raise. I think of people under the age of 30 in skilled trades and other occupations who are eligible for More Opportunity for Skilled Trades. They have better paycheques. I think about all

the work we've done at the collective bargaining table - a table that the former Liberal government never liked to go to. There are a lot of people with better wages through respect for collective bargaining. The Premier has all kinds of friends, yes, and many of them are earning better paycheques.

PATRICIA ARAB: I wonder if the EMTs feel like they're still friends of this government or not?

We've asked about the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee multiple times because it's the first thing in the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board's mandate letter. I'll read: "Within the first 90 days of your mandate, prepare a timeline for completion of all tasks below over the next four years. The initial timelines are to be updated quarterly thereafter." The next bullet is the implementation of the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee - and I will table that.

Speaker, we can't get an answer on where their promised Better Pay Cheque Guarantee is, so my question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: Will this government admit that they have given up on their promise to give Nova Scotians a better paycheque?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I will refer back to my first answer to the question. I also want to say that, as a government, we have been spending a lot of money, and the Opposition has been critical of that. Where have we been spending it? We've been spending on extreme weather events to help Nova Scotians. Those were expenses unforeseen two years ago. Two years ago, the housing crisis was not what we see it is today. We've been spending millions of dollars on housing. We've been spending millions of dollars in health care. Really, Speaker, sometimes we've been able to take action because we've decided that if we see something we can fix in health care, let's spend the money now to get it fixed more quickly. We've been spending the money on all of those other things. We're trying to be prudent as well.

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

### **FTB: SKILLED TRADESPEOPLE - SUPPORT**

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has reported that Nova Scotia needs an additional 70,000 housing units by 2030. I'll table that. We know that one of the key challenges in addressing our province's housing shortage is the availability of skilled labour. It's estimated that the construction workforce will decline by 1,200 people in the next 10 years, due largely to a rapidly aging workforce. How is this government supporting and encouraging the next generation of skilled tradespeople?

HON. JILL BALSER: Speaker, of course here in Nova Scotia we want young Nova Scotians who are working elsewhere to come back home. We know that we need their skills and talent to be able to support the challenges we're seeing across the province. The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency is doing incredible work, and we now need to focus on retention. We know that Nova Scotia is a province of opportunity, and people are coming here because our province is growing. Now we need to focus on keeping them here. That also means welcoming communities and improving workplaces with welcoming initiatives. We're doing lots to support the trades. We want everyone to know that Nova Scotia is a place where they can work and be successful.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, one of the key tenets of this policy has been around the MOST program, and now we have a chance to do some PC math. The MOST program was supposed to cost \$21 million. However, FOIPOP documents show that only \$4.5 million has been paid out, and only a fraction of the projected 7,600 workers is actually benefiting. We still have a massive labour shortage. Can the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board explain how he's going to attract skilled workers when his government's flagship program is such a disappointment?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I would disagree. Ask any young Nova Scotian under the age of 30 who has gotten their provincial income tax back. They're not disappointed, they're happy. As the word gets out, they'll be more happy - young Nova Scotians under the age of 30 - doing the good work to help us, to help us fix the health care system, to help us fix the housing challenges in the province, and to help us grow this province in a way that is sustainable, and where everyone gets ahead.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

### **EECD: UNIVERSAL LUNCH PROGRAM - IMPLEMENT**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, when it comes to important issues facing Nova Scotia, affordability is top among them. Over the last two years, Nova Scotia has become one of the most unaffordable places to live in the country. That is disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable among us.

Access to healthy food for children should be among the highest priorities for this government, and yet they have waffled on a position of a universal lunch program for kids across the province. The most recent excuse is that they're waiting for federal investment. A universal lunch program is an equitable program that ensures all kids have access to healthy food. In this cost of living crisis, the government should be doing whatever it takes to help kids and families get the food they need, especially with regions in this province with such high child poverty rates. Why has this government, which is responsible for the well-being of children in schools, still not implemented a universal lunch program?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Let me be very clear. We know affordability is a challenge for many Nova Scotians, and we know how important it is that students in schools have access to healthy, nutritious food. We make sure that students in schools do exactly that. Every student who needs food in schools gets food in schools. We have a breakfast program that is provided across the province . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. The minister has the floor.

BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you, Speaker. We are not waiting for the federal government to move forward on lunch programs for students as well. We have rolled out pilots across the province, expanding access to available lunch - nutritious lunch. We're working in partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness, and we're working with the Department of Agriculture, on salad bar and fruit programs, on providing access to vouchers for farm workers locally. We are working continuously to make sure students have better access to food in schools.

IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, I simply don't believe that all kids are getting access to lunch when they need it - especially when it became evident in our platform that we needed a lunch program. It's because of conversations we have had with people in P.E.I. - teachers who have said that they were aware that kids were simply not getting access to lunch programs unless they had it in schools. That's why it's important. According to a new report, it costs almost half a million dollars to raise one child from middle-income families, with 17 per cent of that - \$82,000 - being spent on food. The government refuses to implement a universal lunch program at a time that families need it the most.

The first step that our government put in was a breakfast program, which I believe that side of the House supported. Why won't they support a lunch program like P.E.I. did that has been successful to help those that need it the most?

BECKY DRUHAN: We are working hard to be ready and in a position to go with the universal lunch program. Part of that is extending access across the province, which we are doing as we speak with all of those programs that I just talked about. I would encourage the member opposite - all of the members opposite - to reach out to their federal Liberal colleagues. I remind the members opposite that the federal government has promised and committed to supporting the universal lunch program. We are ready and waiting to go.

We haven't given up on the federal government, but we're moving ahead while we wait for their response. I would look for the support of members opposite in encouraging the feds to stand up to their promises, and commit to that money and support us in our work on universal food.

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

### **MAH: VICTIMS OF WILDFIRES - ADDRESS**



HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, 151 homes were destroyed during the wildfires in our community. More than 200 were severely damaged. This government made an investment of \$7.4 million to provide modular homes for people who lost their homes. What we're hearing directly from community members is that that investment did not land the way it was intended to. I am wondering if the minister responsible can share with the House how many modular units are out the door. Can the balance of the investment that's not being used on modulares be reinvested and repurposed for the people affected by wildfires throughout our province?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I would like to thank the member for the question. Our hearts go out to these communities that have lost all these homes. One of the responses was to provide these modulares. We said in the beginning that it would take time. It takes time for people to work through what their insurance programs will offer them and how they will rebuild. Not every home has a site that will even make these fit. But at the moment I understand, just going from memory, that we have five out the door and three more, so we have eight. Will we repurpose these for other ways? We've said from the beginning that these units would not go wasted. We would use them wherever we see them needed.

We do still see that program being active. If there are issues getting them out the door, and if there are issues with our primary partner in managing this - it's the Red Cross - get back to us and let us know, and we will try to work through those problems.

BEN JESSOME: Part of the issue is that there is no place to put an additional home on a property that has a home that's trying to be rebuilt on it. This program is matter-of-factly not landing the way that it was intended to. I would invite the minister to come out to my community and meet with some of these victims and ask them: How can the minister meet the needs of these victims? There is \$7.4 million in this investment - a very considerable amount. These are middle class families who don't have thousands of dollars to meet their needs outside of what insurance will cover.

There is a program for flood victims to meet unmet needs for flood victims. I'm wondering if the minister will address the specific needs, meet with my constituents, meet with the victims to find out the best way to meet the needs of wildfire victims in my community.

JOHN LOHR: Certainly, I'm willing to meet with your constituents. I'll probably have to do that after the Legislature rises. There are lots of elements to your question. What I will say is that the DFAA program is primarily a flood program because flood insurance has never really been readily available. That's starting to change, but it isn't. There's an expectation that citizens will have fire insurance. Fire insurance is widely available and well understood.

That will be the first line of defence for any citizen, any homeowner. To have fire insurance is a fundamental requirement for your mortgage. You have to have it. That's the

first line of defence on that. Certainly, we recognize that the terrain of certain areas where these fires occurred are just not suitable for putting units on. One of the challenges we face is: Where do you put them?

[10:45 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**DHW: CUMB. CO. AMB. SERV. - IMPROVE**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. On September 26<sup>th</sup>, the Auditor General gave a report on ground ambulance services. The report reflected, certainly, what I'm seeing in Cumberland North each and every week. Family members are contacting me angry, emotional, because they've called 911 during a medical emergency and either there's no ambulance available or one arrives one to four hours later.

I also am having paramedics message me confidentially at least two, sometimes three times a week, letting me know - usually it's at about midnight - that there are no ambulances available in all of Cumberland County.

Can the minister let us know today: What action is being taken that will result in improvements to emergency ambulance services in Cumberland County specifically, as well as all throughout all Nova Scotia?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: First question, yes, I thank the member for the question. We really have worked very hard with our EHS system, so I want to highlight a few things that have happened. Recently, we purchased a fixed-wing that allows non-critical transport patients to come from Yarmouth and Sydney. As a result of that one intervention alone, over 1,300 hours of ground ambulance services have been put back into the EHS system.

We know that there are a lot of concerns around ambulances. We have a medical communications physician now who works 24 hours a day to help our paramedics in the field, we have a registered nurse who is working there, and also a critical care paramedic. We have separated the transport system, all with a view to making sure that paramedics are responding to emergencies as they're required, so there are a number of things that are under way.

I'm always pleased to speak about the EHS system. We've been very invested in that, and we will continue to support paramedics throughout this province.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, the Auditor General's report spoke to exactly what we're seeing on the ground, things like that the department is not holding

the private company, Medavie, accountable for the poor ambulance response times. Although we know - all of us in this House know - that the ambulances are not arriving on time, the government has not penalized or fined this private company. In addition, the department has not posted an annual report from EHS since 2011-12.

I'm going to table some letters that I've sent to the minister with examples from people who are struggling - have struggled - with a lack of ambulance response times. Can the minister let us know today how the minister will hold Medavie accountable, and will the department commit to making that information public?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Recently we did have the Auditor General's report, there were a number of recommendations, and we fully support - that was not news to us. We had been at Public Accounts Committee prior to that, as a government, recognizing that there were a number of concerns.

We have already said and begun to implement all of the recommendations that the AG has given. In fact, the AG recognized that the report only went to December 2022, and in the last nine months there's been significant change in our ambulance system, and commended to the government, in fact, that if these things weren't happening we would be in a far worse situation than we were.

I fully support the Auditor General. We have said that we will accept those recommendations. They're already under way, and we will continue to work until we improve the system throughout Nova Scotia.

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

#### **EECD: ACCESS TO FOOD IN SCHOOLS - INCREASE**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Does the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development honestly believe that every student in Nova Scotia, including the three schools in my riding that have no cafeteria facility, have access to food when they need it?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, we know that it is important that students have access to food in schools. If the member opposite is aware of situations, I encourage her to bring them to my attention. I'd like to know about it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During Question Period, when the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development was responding to a direct question from a member of the NDP, there was a yell of, "It is a lie." That is unparliamentary language, to suggest that the response that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development was giving is a lie. I ask for that statement to be retracted.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the NDP.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: In anticipation of this point of order, I reiterated the question that had been asked previously to the minister where she stated that every student in Nova Scotia has access to food, and she changed her answer. I apologize for the use of unparliamentary language. I stand by my statement that not every student in Nova Scotia has access to food in school.

THE SPEAKER: I would ask that the Leader of the New Democratic Party please retract the statement and speak on that only.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I apologize for my use of unparliamentary language.

THE SPEAKER: Retract it, please.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I apologize for my use of unparliamentary language.

THE SPEAKER: I need the member to retract as advised by the Clerk.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The statement that I made was true, and I apologize that I made it in an unparliamentary way.

THE SPEAKER: I will kindly ask the Leader of the New Democratic Party to please retract the statement indicating that it was a lie. It is unparliamentary, and I will ask one more time, as advised by the Clerk, to retract.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I apologize for my use of the word “lie.”

THE SPEAKER: I’m going to ask the Leader of the New Democratic Party - I’m going to give one more chance to stand in your place and to please indicate that you will retract the statement. If you do not, I have been advised, and I will follow through with, sadly, having to remove you from the Chamber.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I cannot retract a statement which is true. I apologize for my use of unparliamentary language in the Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: I would ask now that I have assistance from the Sergeant-at-Arms to remove . . .

We will now begin with calling upon the honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Let me first just say congratulations on your historic appointment. You are an inspiration, and it's an honour to be in the House with you. I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: You may.

BECKY DRUHAN: This week, as we recognize the International Day of the Girl, as we celebrate your historic role, as we welcome the first African Nova Scotian female member of Cabinet, it's fitting that today my mother is joining us. I draw the members' attention, please, to the East Gallery. Gail Boyle is here, as is her good friend Ken Edwards. Welcome to both. (Applause)

Speaker, every girl should have a champion and I want to express my gratitude for the love, the support and the steadfast belief in me that my mother has shown. She truly has been my champion and it's an honour to welcome her to the House. Thank you. (Applause)

## GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Thank you, Speaker. Would you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Second Reading.

## PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 319 - The First Responders Day Act.

### **Bill No. 319 - First Responders Day Act.**

THE SPEAKER: I will, at this point in time, recognize the honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: It is my privilege to say a few words on Bill No. 319, the First Responders Day Act. As I indicated yesterday in introducing Peter Roberts, who is a Valley Search and Rescue member from the Annapolis Valley, this is his suggestion that we do honour first responders. Let me first go by my notes, and then I will say a few personal words too.

I move that Bill No. 319 be now read for a second time. Today I'm pleased to speak about the First Responders Day Act. I think everyone in this room will agree - our province

has been through a lot in the past few years: the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, floods and hurricanes. Our valiant first responders have been called upon more in recent years than any of us could have ever imagined and, like always, they answer the call.

They are there when we need them. Their heroism and willingness to sacrifice their own safety to protect others knows no bounds. It deserves our recognition and respect and acknowledgement. Speaker, that is why today I am pleased to stand before you here to speak about this new legislation that will create a day to recognize these everyday heroes who make their focus keeping Nova Scotians safe from harm, and for their critical day-to-day roles in health care, law enforcement and emergency services.

Speaker, this legislation would declare the first day of May each year as First Responders Day in Nova Scotia. It is intended to acknowledge, honour, commemorate and celebrate the dedication, sacrifices and achievements of all professional and volunteer first responders in the province. I know first-hand the care and dedication that our first responders have had for their communities. They deserve our recognition and respect each and every day, and they deserve to have their own special recognition. They deserve First Responders Day.

On a personal note, I will say that I have had four or five opportunities or moments in my life when I've called 911 and had my neighbours respond - people who fix my car, whose children I coached in sports, who went to the same church I went to. These are some of the darkest days of my life that I had to call 911, I can tell you. They respond in the worst moments of our lives, in reality. The darkest days of our own personal lives, these responders come, our own friends and neighbours and community members.

I just think that anything we can do to acknowledge that, I'm happy to do. I look forward to hearing the comments of other members in the House on this bill.

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, through you to the minister and the government, thanks for making a point to acknowledge our first responders in such a fashion. Certainly, our party supports the intent of the bill and the objective by setting aside a day to acknowledge the work and sacrifice that first responders make. My community of Hammonds Plains-Lucasville - I touched on it earlier during Question Period - 151 homes completely destroyed, 200 impacted or affected by the fire. Communities throughout this province - Barrington - affected by the fire this summer, flooding throughout the province, particularly in the Windsor area. My heart goes out to the families who suffered losses from those incidents.

Throughout all that chaos this Summer - and since then and before then - this group of Nova Scotians, our first responders, regardless of what the situation was, they put their

time and effort and lives literally on the line to go out and stumble into whatever adversary they were faced with.

[11:00 a.m.]

If you come to Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, you can actually see lines where the fire was held. That was the work that these folks were doing. There are at least a couple, perhaps several, firefighters - first responders - who lost homes during that wildfire, who still managed to pick up the courage to get back out there and keep fighting to protect the community and protect the other assets that were out there. It's not lost on anybody. We're eternally grateful for the work that these people do, the sacrifices that they make, the effort that they put in, knowing that they're putting themselves directly in harm's way. We're very grateful for that.

I think that beyond a bill, however, is how we can truly reach a point of gratitude for first responders. We have to empower our fire services all throughout the province. We have to enhance the capabilities of our first responders to communicate when there's an emergency. We have to protect our first responders with the best possible equipment to be sure that they maximize their ability to be safe.

So while we do support a day to acknowledge our first responders, I think that this government and we as legislators need to take some bigger swings when it comes to empowering our ability to respond during an emergency, to protect the people who are putting their necks on the line, and to ensure that Nova Scotia has the best capability to respond during a crisis. We know that there was tremendous work done this Summer - not limited to this Summer - but we in the Liberal caucus feel like we can do better. We want to make sure that we wrap our arms around not only the people who are working on the front lines during these crises, but also wrap our arms around the system and empower them to do the job that they do.

With that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'd just like to take a couple of minutes to respond to this bill, and also express the NDP caucus's support of it.

I just want to take, first, the opportunity to thank our first responders in Nova Scotia, especially for their service this particular year. We've had many terrible events happen in the last several years in Nova Scotia that have taxed our first responders, and then this year, with the fires and floods and hurricane - possibly more to come - we've really put our service to the test. We express our deep gratitude for knowing that first responders in Nova Scotia are there when we need them.

Obviously, I'm pleased that this bill honours volunteer first responders as well as professional first responders. We're very supportive of the bill. It is important to have a day to recognize first responders.

I would like to echo my colleague from Hammonds Plains-Lucasville's comments a little bit and say that these types of days are extremely important for many reasons, but we also need to back up our support with real, tangible effort. One of the things that we need to improve desperately in this province is supports around PTSD for first responders. We need to make sure that every first responder who has PTSD from their work has good coverage and effective treatment for that PTSD and holistic support around them.

We also need to make sure that first responders in their jobs are able to do their jobs effectively. We have heard from the Auditor General about issues in the paramedic service. We know that firefighters have called for many changes in terms of cancer coverages and those kinds of things. We need to make sure that we are listening. It is important to honour these workers and these people with a day, but we also need to be listening to what they need to do their job better and in a healthier way.

Like I said, we are extremely supportive of this bill. We want to express our deep thanks to first responders throughout Nova Scotia and call on the government to make sure that first responders are getting the care that they need to do their jobs properly.

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

DAVE RITCEY: I am truly honoured and proud to speak to the bill the Premier introduced yesterday, the First Responders Day Act. This piece of legislation will obviously proclaim May 1<sup>st</sup> as the date to recognize our heroes, and they truly are heroes in all of our communities right across the province.

Sharing news to members of these organizations within my constituency yesterday, I was very proud and honoured to do that. It was well-received in Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River. We value our first responders, but we also value the people that they protect and keep safe each and every day.

Speaker, these organizations not only respond to emergencies, they continue to work and give back in many different ways - for example, in our community during Hurricane Fiona. The Village of Bible Hill and the volunteer fire department opened a comfort centre. They worked tirelessly outside of responding to those emergencies in their community.

This is a great day to recognize them. I fully support it. We value the important work that these professionals and volunteers provide our communities. We appreciate these hard-working heroes, and this piece of legislation is a way for us to thank them and



acknowledge their contributions with this special day of recognition. With my short remarks, I just want to say thank you to all the first responders.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm just going to speak quickly on this. I think it's certainly an important bill, and obviously we support this bill, we on the Opposition side. I think it's pretty unanimous over here. I will say that we hear a lot of things like "heroes" and "hard work" and "support" and things like that. While I think first responders appreciate those terms, and ones that I speak to appreciate this bill, I think we also have to remember that this is a 24/7 job. First responders are emergency medical technicians, they're police officers, they're firefighters, they're people who respond.

They don't always get the support they need both financially and publicly. Sometimes some of our first responders, depending on the situation, some people will support them, and some people won't support them. What I will say is this: that we need to realize how important first responders are to our society. We need to realize the job that they do and the trauma they go through. Just right now outside of these doors, we have first responders, police officers, who help keep us safe. It might seem to some of us like just one of those jobs that you don't notice, but I'll bet you notice it when we need them.

Take the time and speak to your first responders, ask them how their day is going, get to know them a bit, and really find out what it's like to do their job. Then you'll find out why it is so hard to attract people to those jobs. It's not just the pay. It's the things they have to go through.

I'm very proud that when we were in government, we made changes to PTSD support. I will say that Dave Wilson, who was the former NDPer and a former first responder, brought some of these things to our attention, and we worked collaboratively with the Opposition at the time to support our first responders.

I feel that doesn't go far enough. I think we need more. You realize how important they are when we're hit with tragedy, when we're hit with forest fires, when we're hit with flooding. But when we're hit with personal emergencies - and I'll give you a small example of how first responders come in all different shapes, sizes and professions.

There was a young girl who fell at my daughter's school, in the EXCEL program, and she hit her head really bad and lost consciousness. The mother contacted me because of how everything went down. She contacted 911, and they contacted the paramedics. Unfortunately, at that time it was almost two hours before a paramedic could show up on the scene, so instead the fire department showed up. That's extremely common in cases of emergencies and car accidents and health issues. It's our firefighters, it's our police officers who show up.

While I stand here today and I listen to everyone say how we need to stand here and support them because this bill is coming forward and it's a feel-good bill, I would say to people today is October 13, 2023. Remember that spirit. Remember that positive feeling that you had today because of this bill, and keep moving it forward every day of the year. Stop and talk to them; realize how difficult their job is. They're making life-or-death choices, they're showing up at scenes that are horrific.

I know there are former paramedics in this Legislature, there are volunteer firefighters, there are all kinds of people who have been first responders, and they can tell you first-hand how difficult the job is.

Support this bill. They are heroes. And I don't actually use that term very often. I think the term "hero" gets thrown around a lot for everybody and everything, but they really showed what they were made of during the wildfires. They really showed what they were made of during the flooding. They really showed what they were made of when that little girl at my daughter's school fell down and hurt her head. They really show what they're made of each and every single day when they keep us safe.

I would ask that everybody keep that same spirit, and everybody keep that same positivity toward them, not just on October 13, 2023, but 365 days of the year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I would like to stand in support of this bill and thank the Premier for tabling this bill to honour our first responders throughout all of Nova Scotia. I want to make special mention of those whom I represent in Cumberland North, a person with specialized training who was among the first to arrive and provide assistance at the scene of emergencies such as accidents, natural disasters, terrorist attacks and such - drownings. Those are the people we're honouring with this piece of legislation.

I want to make mention of some of those people in the area whom I represent - people who serve as volunteers, as well as paid firefighters throughout Cumberland North. We have the first one in Wallace: Chief Tom Flynn, who does an amazing job, and all of his team there. I want to make special mention of Lisa Betts, who has been an instructor with the firefighters, with the volunteer fire department in Wallace, for over 30 years. We also have the fire chief from Westchester, Justin Rushton; the fire chief from Pugwash Fire Department, Andy Yarrow; Shinimicas Fire Department, Andrew Legere; the fire chief from Leicester Fire Department - which is actually the member for Cumberland South's fire department - Clayton Brooks. I want to make mention of them because they sometimes respond and help out with fires that happen in Cumberland North. Tidnish Bridge fire chief Mike Coffin; Trumanville Fire Department, Lyman Bacon; Amherst Fire Department, Chief Greg Jones.

I want to make mention as well - just to give an example of something that happened recently in Cumberland North - of some of our volunteer firefighters from the fire department of Shinimicas, as well as Tidnish Bridge Fire Department. They went to our local elementary school in Northport, and provided a free barbecue for the children. They gave every child in the school a free smoke detector that those children could take home to provide to their families, and help remind the parents to make sure they all had smoke detectors in their homes.

Then the firefighters went on to do some fire safety demonstrations for all the children at Northport Elementary School. They did the fire demos both inside and outside of the building. That's just a recent example. We also recently had a very sad tragedy in Cumberland North, where a gentleman was deceased - he drowned. He was actually missing for over 24 hours. That was very upsetting to the people in our community in the Tidnish area.

I went out to say thank you to the local first responders. Just watching them in action is incredible. It's very inspiring. We had the RCMP, Amherst town police and neighbouring first responders from New Brunswick, because we are a border community, and we all work closely together. Our paramedics, ground search and rescue - everyone there working together. People were dropping off food, water, anything at all that the local first responders needed while they were searching for this man. Local businesses brought food - the Amherst Shore Country Store, as well as the Tidnish Scoop Shack - all donated.

We also have law enforcement - Amherst town police, as well as Cumberland RCMP detachment that are first responders. I remember a few years ago, in my first couple of years as an MLA, having a conversation with one of our local Amherst town police officers. We were talking about their job and how difficult it is. He shared with me just a few examples, confidentially, of some of the experiences that they just had in that one week - experiences that most of us cannot even imagine.

I am a registered nurse and I've seen a lot in my 32 years of being a registered nurse, but there are things that I've never experienced that paramedics, police officers - those who are first responders - have experienced that are unfathomable. They have to live with that trauma for the rest of their lives. We do owe them a real debt of gratitude. Giving them this day in honour of the work they do is commendable, but I must mention that I also believe we need to do more than give this day.

Specifically, to one group of first responders, I want to emphasize the need to give them better working conditions and higher wages that are competitive with their colleagues across the country. Those are the first responders who are our paramedics. Our paramedics deserve more. They work in very, very stressful conditions, like I mentioned. Earlier, in Question Period, one of our colleagues brought up the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee. Well, certainly our paramedics are not getting a better pay cheque, Speaker.

[11:15 a.m.]

I want to emphasize the need for our paramedics to be treated fairly, responsibly, and to be compensated equitably - the same as those of their colleagues across the country of Canada. We need to stop the bleeding of our paramedics, first responders, from the province of Nova Scotia. One of the ways we can do that - it's not the only way, but one of the ways - is by compensating them with a better paycheque. They deserve that, and I urge the government to go back to the table and offer them a fair wage settlement. That is how we will truly honour the work that our first responders, specifically paramedics, do for us here in the province of Nova Scotia.

With those few words, I'll take my seat and stand in support of this bill.

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

JOHN WHITE: When we talk about first responders, we talk about who you call on the worst day of your life. We talk about firefighters and about paramedics, but we also talk about health professionals. Many of you know that I'm a volunteer firefighter. I've been retired for 22 years - medical first responder. I'm still a mental health professional with the citizen team for the province. I have a lot of experience. I want to tell you, when you call on the worst day of your life, you are sometimes calling a backhoe operator. You're sometimes calling a tow truck operator. You're sometimes calling a fisherman. You're calling anybody in the community who has the resources to help assist somebody on the worst day of your life.

When we talk about firefighters, there isn't a whole lot of difference between career and volunteer - both are highly trained. When you talk about volunteer firefighters, we're talking about countless hours in training, not calls. Glace Bay Fire Department, where I come from, does anywhere from 400 to 700 calls a year. That's a volunteer department. Dominion Fire Department is just as active. I've watched Dominion Fire Department put their lives at risk in the recovery. I watched Glace Bay Fire Department do the same. When we talked about Hurricane Fiona, I was not active at the time. Glace Bay Fire Department was on the cliffs of New Aberdeen while the truck was being pelted with rocks from the shoreline, which is 90 feet high, and they came off the scene when roof structures flew over their heads. These are volunteers.

I believe that everything we do in life comes with you as you travel through your life. Everything impacts you - everything. You make sense of all your current situations based on your past experiences, and you just can't unsee what you see. As a 22-year firefighter, there are lots of things that I see today that I wish I didn't see. That's a fact.

I'm very, very proud of this government. That minister over there has never failed to ask me for my opinion as a volunteer firefighter. That minister over there has given not once, but twice \$10,000 to all fire departments across this province. As a firefighter, I know

one of the things we always said in Glace Bay was that we're not doing coin cards anymore. We got fed up with fundraising because we did so much work as volunteers. We're answering the call, we didn't want to raise money. That minister over there made that easier for us. That minister over there, with a couple of other departments, has increased the cancer coverage to now 19 cases - and I'm extremely proud.

I wanted to stand up to give recognition to all the first responders we see across the province, but I also wanted to give recognition to that minister because that man has done more for first responders than I've seen in my 22 years as a volunteer firefighter. Thank you, minister.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ALI DUALE: First of all, I'd like to recognize the Premier - his goodwill recognizing the first responders of this province. Sometimes I wonder how often it takes us to take the first action. In this province, we have all kinds of days that we recognize, but it took us that long to recognize those who have dedicated their lives to serve our communities. Having said that, we're here today, October 13, 2023, in this House to recognize those who make the ultimate sacrifice in their life to serve for their community.

First of all, I am in favour of this bill, and I will be the first one who will support it. At the same time, I have to acknowledge it took us that long to recognize those who deserve as a province, as a community, utmost respect and honour of their services. I could be biased, standing here today speaking this spiel because I am a former - and I still uphold my uniform and am willing to serve for my community and the people of this province. I would say that, but also, the fact is the fact - these people who dedicate their lives for this province from one corner of the other deserve more than a day of recognition.

I can make this testimony in this House. I know members of the first responders who are not here with us today who took their lives to serve and to save our communities. That is the ultimate sacrifice any human being can make in this life, and this happens very often, but we don't talk about it very often. Sometimes those individuals become names and numbers. Even within hours, their position will be filled - somebody to make a phone call to fill that role. How ironic is that? How unacceptable is that?

We know some of our members of the first responders work 24/7 with absolutely no condition. Even though they have lives as we do, they have families as we do, they have conditions as we do - whether it is a sickness or what have you - yet they show up. They show up for their communities. They show up for the people of this province. Here we are in 2023 acknowledging to recognize once a year. Is that good enough? We as members of this House sit here today in the leadership of our Premier to say we recognize you one day of the year. I think we can do better than this, and I really believe they deserve better than this.

Let's put our heads together. Let's look at each other eye to eye, and let's put up House bills that could change peoples' lives. Let's put up bills that can have an impact. Those who make the sacrifice for our communities.

[11:30 a.m.]

Though I stated earlier that I am one of the first members of this House who will support this bill, let's move forward and take one more step, one more action, one more bill that could change their lives and could have an impact on their daily life.

Also, we have seen the devastation that has taken place day after day in our communities. It's undeniable. It's my understanding of the condition that this will continue.

I would like to see this House produce bills that will create prevention, how we can avoid these catastrophes - to not have them very often and to mitigate their impacts. Let's think about how we can change how people act within their environment. Let's figure out how we can come together when something happens.

I do have the intention - and I hope to have the support of this House - to bring forward bills that will have an impact for our first responders and that could have changed their lives.

Speaker, I am a believer. We could do better than this outside of politics. We know how this House functions, but there are certain things that unite all of us, irrespective of what party and what political idea and agenda you have. The subject matter of the first responders has no boundary. Let's unite, let's come together, and let's do what's best for our first responders. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'd like to stand to rise in support of this bill for a day to recognize first responders and the volunteers. Having gone through the largest fire in Nova Scotia's history in Shelburne this past Summer, I have the utmost respect for the dedication and the hard work these people do - the long hours. It's just unbelievable, the efforts that were pulled together.

During that fire, I had time to sit around, talk, listen, and hear some of the stories and events that were happening. When we had access to where the fire was again and got to actually drive around and look at the county, you'd see many charred and burned trees and everything burnt but the houses. A lot of the houses remained in place, and that was through the direct efforts of the volunteers. I just want to say I have the utmost respect for people who take on this position.

Our government has done some things, as mentioned previously, around cancer coverage and additional funding. There's always more that could be done. There are always things that could be looked at, but to start to have a day just to recognize the efforts that are put in there is a really positive start.

The volunteer fire departments alone that had come through Shelburne County - it really shows we united this province. Annapolis Royal, Aylesford, Barrington, Port La Tour, Bear River, Berwick, Blandford, Blockhouse, Bridgetown, Bridgewater, Brighton, Brooklyn, Canning, Chester, Chester Basin, Conquerall Bank, Dayspring, Digby, East Pubnico, Eel Brook, Greenfield, Greenwich, Gunning Cove Harbour, Hebbs Cross, Hebbville, Hubbards, Ingomar-Roseway, Barrington Island Passage, Italy Cross, Jordan, Kentville, Kingston, LaHave, Lake Vaughan, Lapland, Little Harbour, Liverpool, Lockeport, Lunenburg, Mahone Bay, Martins River, Meteghan, Middle and Upper Ohio, Midville Branch, Mill Village, New Germany, New Minas, New Ross, Nictaux, North Queens, Northfield, Oakville, Port Medway, Port Williams, Riverport, Sable River, Shelburne, Smiths Cove, Tri-District, Walden, Waterville, West Pubnico, Western Shore, Windsor, Wolfville, Woods Harbour, Shag Harbour, Yarmouth (applause), and all the other volunteers who help keep everything going in the efforts for the fire. I just want to express my appreciation and thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

TOM TAGGART: I am very honoured to stand today, to rise and speak in support of our volunteer first responders and to recognize this as a day we've set aside to recognize them. Most importantly, I need to say that in my communities of Colchester North, those who volunteer - first responders and fire brigade members - are the heart and soul of absolutely every community in Colchester North. They are the people we turn to whenever, whether it's medical first response, fires, or people in danger in the Bay of Fundy, on the mountains behind our communities, or within our communities. We couldn't do without them.

I look to when Hurricane Fiona came through. We were very fortunate we missed the floods, and the fires missed us. We're very fortunate in that way, but Fiona devastated many communities in Colchester North. Those volunteer firefighters turned out at their halls. They had warm coffee and meals, and they were about their communities with generators trying to preserve people's foods.

I just want to close by saying I'm honoured to be part of a government that has supported these volunteers, firefighters, and ground search and rescue members in our communities, because they are the heart and soul of our rural communities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm honoured to rise in my place to offer a few comments about this bill but also about the first responders. In communities across the province - of course, I always like to talk about home, about Cape Breton, and my own experience and seeing first-hand, whether they were career or they're a volunteer, whether they were supporting our hospitals. Sydney was kind of the beginning of what the province saw as a string of really terrible, very difficult events that impacted communities across the province over the last number of years.

I always go back to 2016 - very similar situation in Sydney at the time. It was Thanksgiving weekend, and a system came through that dropped well over 200 mm of rain within hours. It was a shock to everyone in the community. It was one of the first times we'd seen a situation like that in modern history where you entered an area that saw so much flooding it destroyed over 20 homes at the time. I still remember the pictures of our firefighters, police officers, EMT - everybody rallying in a situation that's very uncommon for many of them, at the time, and for the community to see people being rescued on rafts in the middle of neighbourhoods in the middle of the city.

I think that training that our first responders take is so important. They do it with passion, they do it with pride for their community. I saw first-hand in Sydney during that time, the caring, the love, the professionalism of all our first responders to come and support communities across the Island. We've continued to see it, not only in their day-to-day work they do to support all of us, but also as we've seen in the very terrible and tragic events that have impacted communities here in Halifax and on the South Shore.

A lot of the speakers have said it too. Really, the work to support our first responders can never end. There have been some great bills that have been passed in this House over the last number of years to support our first responders. As they adjust to the needs of our communities, we also need to adjust to the supports we provide them.

I think as we sit here and we discuss this bill, in recognizing a day for them, we also need to hear from them more. We also need to understand that their job is evolving. We've seen it in the last number of years. Our first responders, who, as I've said, do so much every day to support all of us and our communities, are now adjusting to severe climate events. They have been for the last number of years. They are expected to take on so much more, and have taken on so much more, so what as a government and what can we be doing as MLAs to advocate, to help them adjust to their abilities to help us? I want to say that.

I want to talk about Cape Breton too. As the member for Glace Bay-Dominion said, there's career and there's volunteer. A lot of men and women, who over the years have travelled back and forth for work, would go away for work, come home and then they would go and volunteer. It means so much to our communities on the Island. I represent kind of the core in Sydney, and I have a little bit of the volunteer aspect as well when it comes to our first responders.



I do want to take this opportunity to thank all of the members within our first responders community within the CBRM, whether it is the police, the fire, EMT, the folks who support them, 911, everybody who is doing that job when that phone rings or that event happens. I do want to thank them. Many of them are career, but we also have many of them who are volunteers, who take the training, who also are there not only as first responders, but they donate their time to support our kids, they donate their time to support many of the causes that help the most vulnerable members of our community.

It's a love and support for the community from our first responders, not only to protect us and support us when we need it but also to support the community and support many of the organizations that all of our communities have across the province that do great work to support our kids, to support our families in any way we can.

I am honoured to get up and say a few words about the bill, but also to get up and thank all the first responders across Cape Breton, across the province, for your support, your love and your dedication to all of us.

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

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I would like to thank all my colleagues in the House for all their kind words. Some of you gave me goosebumps with some of your comments, particularly the member for Shelburne and the list of fire departments - all of my fire departments were in that list - and the incredible response to the fires and floods we saw. We all understand that very well.

Thank you for all your kind words from all of you to all of our first responders, whom we all know so very well. With that, I move to close second reading on this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 319, the First Responders Day Act.

All those in favour? Contrary minded. Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Thank you, Speaker. It certainly was really heartwarming to hear all the great comments about this bill and the respect and admiration that we have for our first responders. I would ask for unanimous consent of the House to skip Law Amendments Committee and Committee of the Whole House and to move this to third reading, please.

[11:45 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for unanimous consent.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried. Thank you. (Applause)

Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Third reading.

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

THE SPEAKER: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 319.

#### **Bill No. 319 - First Responders Day Act.**

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: I move third reading of Bill No. 319.

THE SPEAKER: I recognize - sorry, that was wrong. Please forgive me. Are there any speakers?

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you. I wanted to wait until third reading to talk on this bill because I didn't see any sense in talking on second, because third is where the bill will be passed. I think this is a good bill. It's a great bill to recognize our first responders and the work that they do in our communities and to have one day where we take pause to really, truly recognize that work, I think, is important.

I think it's also important that we recognize the families that are involved in this work. Because it's not just that first responder - it is their families too. It is the families who, during a sit-down dinner, end up - you get that phone call, and their family member is up, and they are leaving their food midway through, and they are running to their call. They're the ones who come home - these family members are the ones who when the first responder comes home, they're the ones who have to deal with the aftermath of that call with them.

They are the ones who deal with any PTSD or trauma that occurred during those calls. They sacrifice a lot for that first responder. I want to recognize them as well, because they are very important. Without them, our first responders have no solid ground to stand on and they provide that solid ground to our first responders.

In Cape Breton, I want to recognize all first responders, Cape Breton Search and Rescue, paramedics, 911, EMT, and our career and voluntary fire departments who bring so much to our communities. With that, I want to recognize the volunteer fire departments, Scotchtown, New Waterford, New Victoria, South Bar, Grand Lake Road, Reserve Mines, and of course, our career service in Sydney. I thank every single first responder and I thank every first responder's family for stepping up and serving our communities.

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, it's a huge honour to stand here and speak on this bill. As many in the House know, I spent 21 years in the fire service - five of those as a Deputy Chief and 12 of those as a Chief. I also had the great opportunity of being a leader at the Maritime Fire Chiefs level, as President for a stretch, and still represent that group of individuals.

It's not just the fire service, as my colleague across mentioned, it's family that actually commit to this whole regime. Whether you're career or volunteer, there are things that you're always going to take back to your families and there are things that you're going to keep from your families. There are things that I've spoken about with family; there are things that I've not spoken about with family.

At the end of the day, one of the most rewarding things that kept me going for 21 years is to know that the community sort of had their arms wrapped around you. As a volunteer, not a career individual in the first responder spectrum, most of the time it was just those quick thank-yous or the winks or the nods as you were going by that were gratitude, and so appreciative of the times that there were bad calls.

I can recall in 2003, our town flooded, the whole community flooded. We were pretty much shut down for a whole week while we were doing things. It started on a Monday morning, and by Friday night, the fifth night, I was sleeping at the fire station. All volunteers remember trying to make sure everybody was getting home. It wasn't a sandwich, it wasn't a hot coffee, it was something special, but it was really not that much. It was a small postcard that a child sent to the fire department that day, just to say thank you for what you did to allow me to get back in my home, is basically what it said.

This bill means a different thing for different people in different communities in the first responder spectrum. I've held many hats. I was actually an EMT in the province when we actually had EMTs in the province, and I made the decision for personal reasons that I wasn't going to move on to the paramedic aspect. Certainly, as part of the government that's bringing this in - and I say that as the whole House of the government - I certainly sense the support for this bill. It's something that the first responders will certainly appreciate.

Out of context, as a first responder - and there are many of us in this room who are first responders, and we're such a small province that why wouldn't we be first responders? We're made up of community people and are able to come here and represent our constituents and the people who put us here. Many times people start in the community, but a special thank you for today and recognizing this day to move forward.

The last point that I'll make is, whether it's a search and rescue group or a fire station or that ambulance base, sometimes those first responder agencies in small communities in rural Nova Scotia, they're the centre point of our rural communities. I want to echo what I've already said and what our colleague opposite said: We're recognizing a family of first responders here today, but also let's not forget about the extended family that certainly supports them to allow them to do what they do on our behalf in the Province of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I just want to get up for a few minutes and recognize all the first responders from my community and across the province. As a former municipal councillor and warden, and as an MLA, I've had the privilege to see the outstanding work, especially around the volunteer fire departments we have in our community.

People don't realize, and maybe some do, but the hours on end they spend training and making sure that their departments are run well, the governance around that - basically the fire departments we have at home, I always say to them - when I get the opportunity to speak to them - how fortunate we are. It's 100 per cent volunteer, but they're as professional as any other department you'd see anywhere in this province. I just want to really take this opportunity.

We see every day - it used to be when you volunteered as a volunteer firefighter, you'd receive a call once in a while, every couple of weeks, but it's to the point now where they're being called out multiple times a week during the night for different occasions. They leave the comfort of their home and their family to go out and help their friends and neighbours. Again, this bill is certainly a good bill, as my colleague said, very important. I think all of us have the responsibility to keep recognizing the work they do, advocating for them to get the services and the supports they need, and recognizing that it's a really, really tough job that they do because they care, because they love their community, and they love their families. With that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I too would like to stand up briefly and thank all the members of my community who are first responders. I think about our volunteer fire departments throughout Antigonish and those who also volunteer as medical first

responders. It has certainly been a privilege, while I've held this role, to be able to speak with volunteer fire departments and support medical first responders.

The department is doing some work with medical first responders, recognizing the work they do in the community and the care they provide, and other first responders like paramedics. I've been working with paramedics since I was 18 years old. Many of those paramedics I knew then have accompanied me throughout my career. I have a deep appreciation as a former emergency room nurse, because there were many calls we shared together and many memories we have. Sometimes we can look at one another and remember those calls, as many first responders can appreciate.

I have always said we never, as an emergency room nurse, see who doesn't come in. Those memories are held in the hearts and the minds of first responders, paramedics, firefighters, and tow truck drivers - all these people who go to the scenes of emergencies. While they do their best to help, it isn't always successful. I know their families accompany them as they work through those.

I want to stand and acknowledge the work and the care. What I want them to know is there are many patients, families, and people who we carry in our hearts as first responders. I also want to remind them there are many people who carry them in theirs, and I hope that gives them comfort.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: I would be remiss if I, as Minister of Justice, didn't take an opportunity to stand up as well and to recognize the police throughout this province who are keeping our population safe and secure and the commitment that they have as first responders as well.

I also want to recognize the volunteer fire departments in the Sackville-Mount Uniacke area and their commitments. Often policing is not considered, or forgotten, when we talk about first responders, but I certainly want to make sure that they are recognized here as well, and that this bill recognizes them. Of course, on Sunday we have the Fallen Peace Officers' Memorial Service that will be taking place. That is certainly the ultimate sacrifice of first responders. I am pleased to see this bill going forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Speaker, I certainly want to stand and be on the record in full support of this bill. What more can be said after we have heard some of the great things our colleagues have been saying about those brave men and women in our communities who are the first to respond, whether it is natural disasters, terrible accidents, or fires in homes?

I would just like to say a big thanks, not only - like what has been mentioned - to the families, some of the women's auxiliary groups and fire departments, as well, that, I know, Speaker, you had a chance to recognize some ladies in your constituency. We all have auxiliaries in fire departments in our constituencies that do so much to make food and support those men and women who are on the front lines attending to tragic circumstances, in many cases.

This is Fire Prevention Week as well. I think we would be remiss if we didn't mention that. As well, just to recognize my fire departments in my community. Kingston, Berwick, Waterville, and Aylesford are full of men and women who are doing such great work on behalf of our - not only our communities but, as has been mentioned by my colleague in Shelburne, who were willing to travel down to areas hard hit around our province. It does show that we are fully united as a province.

To our paramedics and those who continue to do such great work, I value them so much. A lot of our volunteers and those who do what they do, they don't do this for a lot of recognition. They do it because they truly care. Maybe one day is not enough, but this is a great step. I am very thankful to be part of a government that's been doing so much great work for our volunteer firefighters and first responders.

I'd like to give a shout-out to a gentleman in my constituency named David Walsh, who was one of the founding members of Valley Search and Rescue just over 50 years ago. People like David - as MLAs, we get a chance to attend many events and banquets for volunteer firefighters. We know they're not there just to do it for a year or two. We know that we get to recognize and see members of these volunteer fire departments who've been there for 20, 25, 40, and some, 50 years of service.

I just want to be on the record as saying a big thanks to those in our province, and especially Kings West, for all you do as first responders. I'm proud to be part of a government that is going to be instituting a day in recognition of you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

HON. TONY INCE: Speaker, I too would like to be on record thanking the people who are first responders, the people who have sacrificed, who have put their lives in danger for all of us. Thank you, from one end of the province to the other, to all those who are tasked with oftentimes a very challenging and difficult job. Thank you so much for all that you do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, it's a humbling opportunity to speak briefly to Bill No. 319. I want to express my appreciation and gratitude to the Premier for introducing this legislation, as well as to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

for shepherding this important piece of legislation, which will enshrine a very important day in our province for eternity.

[12:00 p.m.]

As many members in this House would know, I had the opportunity to serve my community as a paramedic for a number of years prior to starting a different career path as an elected official. What I would say is that my time as a paramedic certainly shaped me in a special way that I carry every single day. I hope that helps me be a better voice for my constituents and a better voice for our province.

What I would say also is that whether it's a career or a professional first responder, it's not about the job per se. It's a calling, and that's what all our first responders have at their heart, a calling to serve their communities, serve their friends and families and neighbours in a very special way. I'd argue that in Nova Scotia we have a unique opportunity to do so because we are so interconnected with our friends, families and neighbours in our communities.

It is a tough job for many first responders. I want to acknowledge those who have fought and continue to fight some invisible demons because as first responders, they witness things that nobody else would - or should, actually - have to see. It's because of their dedication and their personal sacrifice to serve their neighbours and our province that we have the utmost respect for them, and we are served by terrific first responders.

As was mentioned, we have to also commend the families that surround the first responders when they do come home. It is a difficult job, as I know. I do want to acknowledge all the families and friends of our first responders.

Finally, before I take my seat, I'd say that real heroes don't wear capes. The heroes in our province are those we're acknowledging today in this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: I also want to rise and express my support for the bill. I'm extremely proud and thankful for our first responders in Annapolis and across the province - even more so these last couple of years, given our pressures of losing the emergency centre in Annapolis and depleted hours in Middleton.

I'm also proud and thankful for Annapolis first responders travelling to fires and floods and calls throughout the province, not just in their backyard. I also want to thank their families. I know how tough it is on the families that support them, and I want to thank them for sharing these special people with us.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I'm happy to rise and support this bill. Our caucus will be providing unanimous consent to pass this through as quickly as possible. We can all think of the individuals in our constituencies, whether they're police officers - RCMP or local officers - firefighters, paramedics. Some folks are paid and are first responders for a living, others volunteer their time to do it.

I think it's worth reflecting on the year that those folks - actually the number of years that those folks have undergone here. From the pandemic to the horrendous mass shooting, Hurricane Fiona, the largest wildfires that this province has ever seen on record, the devastating floods that cost some young Nova Scotians their lives, and then everything else that happens in between, whether it is a call to the scene of a crime, or a call to get to a domestic abuse situation that's unfolding, whether it's responding to a car accident or a house fire. These are really traumatic events that our first responders have to face on a daily basis. The days any of us start thinking that our jobs are tough in this Chamber, I think we just need to remind ourselves of those situations that these folks willingly - either on a voluntary basis, or for their work - face every single day.

I do want to take the time to thank our fundraisers for this. I do think it is a very good move from the government to move forward a day of recognition, certainly. We also have to recognize that the work cannot stop just with a day of recognition. That day of recognition needs to be a call and a reminder to all of us of the work that we need to do to further improve the working conditions of our first responders - that we can further do to improve the ability of our volunteer fire departments to respond to fires and do the critical work that they do, and to support our RCMP and our police officers.

There is a lot more work that needs to be done there, and we're seeing that now with the shortage of paramedics that we're experiencing in the province in particular. I've talked to volunteer fire departments that have expressed a real concern over recruitment to bolster their ranks, and we have a lot of our volunteer fire departments where the bulk of the volunteers and the staff are getting very close to the age of retirement. We still need to recruit people in the RCMP and our police forces as well. I just spoke recently with the chief of police from Cape Breton, who told us they're getting 5,000 more calls a year in Sydney, and their numbers haven't grown, their budgets haven't grown. I think we have to remind ourselves of that today as we move forward unanimously to support this piece of legislation, that the work to support our first responders does not end with this bill.

While it is certainly important and nice to recognize the incredible work and sacrifice and challenge that these folks face on a daily basis publicly, and to have a day when we remind ourselves of that every year, our work as legislators, our work within our community, and the work of government certainly needs to continue to improve a lot of things for these folks so that we don't run out of first responders like we're doing right now, so that we can reverse the labour trends for all the organizations that we need people to be working in if we're going to be able to keep up with emergency situations. That is so



critical, not just for those working in these fields but also for those who regularly need their vital and life-saving services.

Again I'll remind the House, an incredible image right now that reminds of the bravery is if you're driving along Highway No. 103. I'm sure there are 30-something kilometres of scorched earth on both sides starting to heal, starting to grow back, but there are homes intact amidst the fire carnage there. You can just picture the firefighters who stood there while that massive inferno was blazing and you see the same facing in Tantallon as well, with some of the homes that were able to be preserved. Those homes that were preserved are an incredible testament to that bravery and that courage and that ability to be so dedicated that you put your own life at risk to protect the property and lives of others.

Certainly on behalf of our caucus I want to thank first responders for their work, recognize that we have a lot more work to do to support them and ensure their working conditions and livelihoods and ability to recruit more professionals and volunteers in their organizations are as easy and as safe as they can be.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I did not realize that this bill was going to be pushed through today without paramedics and other first responders having an opportunity to come to the Law Amendments Committee. I am a little disappointed by that, I must say, because we are losing out on an opportunity for our first responders to actually provide input into the process of passing this bill.

I do want to add some final comments here on third reading to say clearly that while this bill is honouring first responders, it is not enough. What needs to happen is that our paramedics need to be paid better, they need fair wages and fair compensation and they should have had an opportunity to come to the Law Amendments Committee to share their feelings on this.

I am sure they appreciate having this First Responder Day to honour them, but to truly honour them is to give them fair compensation. Also, if we truly wanted to honour our first responders such as firefighters, we would improve the services of our paramedics and our emergency ambulance services. Too many of our volunteer firefighters are having to go to emergency medical situations and stand in because there are no trained paramedics available in a timely manner.

Just this week we had the fire chief from Cumberland South on CBC's *Maritime Noon* talking about how frustrated he is, as a fire chief, as a first responder, that he and his fellow volunteer firefighters are expected to go to medical emergencies and try to fill the gaps, because of the lack of emergency ambulance services in Cumberland County specifically. I know this is not an isolated problem to Cumberland County, but around the entire province of Nova Scotia.

Speaker, I do think that it's nice, this bill is a feel-good bill and I am happy that the Premier brought this forward. However, much more should be done to truly honour the first responders in this province, including our volunteer and paid firefighters, as well as our paramedics.

I am disappointed that this bill is being pushed through so quickly that we're not giving an opportunity for the public to come and have their say at Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I, too, wanted to get on my feet to offer, on behalf of my constituents, a thank you to the paramedics, the search and rescue, the RCMP, and the firefighters of our province. They have had a particularly challenging few years and I think we can all see and understand with climate change that they will be continuing to have those challenges. I have no doubt that each and every one of them will continue to answer the call and be there for the citizens of Nova Scotia.

I particularly want to thank the New Minas RCMP, Valley Search and Rescue, the New Minas Volunteer Fire Department, the Greenwich Fire Department, the Wolfville Volunteer Fire Department; all organizations that work so hard to protect the citizens of Kings South.

I think it's important for us to take one day out of the year to remind Nova Scotians that these men and women deserve our thanks. They deserve it every day. Their work is not just the one day they have shown up at your fire or your car accident. They are volunteering 365 days a year and deserve our thanks continuously. They not only answer the call, but they do training, fundraising, public education, and serve for safety with respect to community events such as parades.

I'm fully supporting this bill. The one thing I don't think we've spoken about here, and should not be lost, is the families that support those first responders. The families give up their spouses, their parents, and their children to serve their communities. They do that willingly and with deep generosity as they watch their loved ones go out the door and put their lives in danger. It's not only their physical lives. It's also their mental health. It's for that reason that I believe this bill - this recognition day - is so important. It's also important that all Nova Scotians thank our first responders each and every day.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: I just wanted to say I appreciate all the comments made across the Legislature here this afternoon. I realize the enormous connection each of us has in our own communities to our own volunteers. I know you all know your own community so

well and care about them. That's one thing every member of this Legislature has in common. I really appreciate that.

[12:15 p.m.]

At this moment, I move to close third reading on Bill No. 319.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 319, the First Responders Day Act.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Public Bills for Second Reading.

**[PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING]**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 322.

**Bill No. 322 - Opioid Damages and Health-care Costs Recovery Act (amended).**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I rise today on second reading of amendments to the Opioid Damages and Health-care Costs Recovery Act. The proposed amendments to this Act are being made so Nova Scotia, along with other provinces and territories in our country, can hold opioid companies accountable for the damages and impacts of their actions on Nova Scotians and Canadians.

They are also being made so the Province can try to recover past and future health care costs that are a result of opioid-related diseases, injuries, and illnesses. These impacts have been and continue to be experienced across our province. Hundreds of Nova Scotians are dealing with opioid use disorder, and dozens die each year from opioid-related overdose. In 2022 alone, 63 Nova Scotians died from opioid overdoses.

The impacts are heartbreaking and can be devastating for individuals and families. Opioid manufacturers, distributors, and their consultants should be held accountable for the deceptive practices that have led to the opioid use disorder and overdose in Nova Scotia, and across the country. These practises misrepresented their opioid drugs as being less addictive and more effective at managing pain than previous opioids.

In 2018, British Columbia filed a lawsuit against the Purdue Pharma companies and more than 40 other opioid manufacturers and distributors on behalf of all Canadian jurisdictions, including Nova Scotia. In 2020, this House passed this Act so that Nova Scotia could participate in this class action lawsuit. Amendments are now needed to this Act to allow Nova Scotia, along with other provinces and territories, to support the class action lawsuit against the companies that have caused these damages.

The proposed changes include adding a direct clause of action against consultants to opioid manufacturers and wholesalers, altering the definition of opioid product to include active ingredients, allowing for different formulas to be used to calculate the market share of manufacturers/defendants, and providing for direct action by the federal government.

Speaker, the provinces and territories have passed - or are expected to soon pass - similar amendments to their legislation. So far, B.C. and Saskatchewan have made these changes. A similar bill is being tabled in Quebec right now. Other provinces and territories are expected to pass amendments before the certification hearing, which is taking place in November.

In addition to aligning our legislation with other jurisdictions, these changes will also help build accountability, and they will help in our overall efforts to address the health and well-being of Nova Scotians. This is part of our strategic plan to improve health care in our province. By working with other provinces and territories, we are helping to address a significant health issue that affects our province and country, and ultimately improve health outcomes for Nova Scotians today and in the future.

The Department of Health and Wellness is working to reduce the impact of opioid use and overdoses through our provincial framework. This framework includes strategies to reduce the impacts by focusing on understanding the issue, preventing use, reducing harms, treatment and prescribing practices, and criminal justice and law enforcement.

In addition, Speaker, our province's Take Home Naloxone program provides free kits to all Nova Scotians at risk of opioid poisoning, and those most likely to witness and respond to one. Over the past six years, this program has distributed more than 32,000 kits. Government has also funded hundreds of new treatment spots. Passing these amendments will help in our overall efforts to reduce the impacts of opioid use and overdoses on Nova Scotians, ensure accountabilities for companies that cause these damages, and allow government to try to recover past and future health care costs related to the issue.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm just going to talk quickly about this one. I want to thank the minister, and the government, actually, for bringing this bill forward. I have a four-letter word that I would like to say, but I can't because it's unparliamentary, when I speak about the companies that put our family, friends, and our loved ones at risk.

I know that the Minister of Health and Wellness had some statistics about the number of deaths that have happened so far this year. I think it's 35 deaths associated with opioid overdose. It's funny, because the bill that we just passed talked about first responders, and I speak to a lot of first responders in my community. They'll tell you that the impact of the opioid crisis - and it's well beyond a crisis, it's a tidal wave, it's a tsunami - is well above that.

Those deaths, I think, are probably - and correct me if I'm wrong when the minister stands back up - direct results from the drugs. That doesn't include murders and all kinds of other things that are happening because of this drug. These companies were given years - in some cases decades - of free rein, not just in Canada but the United States. It ruined, I would dare say, millions and millions of lives in Canada and the United States, and at the same time became some of the wealthiest and most "important" people in western society.

I'm not privy to the lawsuit, so forgive me for not knowing, but I hope you take them for every cent they're worth - not just their companies, but every single person who profited, from the top on down - for what they have done to our society. You know what, there was a - I've watched many different - and this is personal for me, because I've had friends and family members who have been directly impacted by this. We've lost a lot of people in our community because of opioid addiction. We see once proud, productive and strong individuals who were part of our society - people I grew up with and people I love - who are struggling every single day to get methadone or are struggling every single day to deal with this addiction.

I've listened to a whole bunch of different podcasts on this over the last year actually, and watched some documentaries. I think everybody is familiar with the painkiller one on Netflix. If you haven't seen it, it will absolutely make you throw up - what these individuals at Big Pharma did and knew exactly what they were doing. I was listening to a podcast the other day. There was an individual who was an Olympic gold medalist - probably one of the strongest people you'll ever meet and has been through everything in his life - became addicted to opiates because of injuries he had sustained in his career.

He talked about how it wasn't facing the Russian for the gold medal, who at the time was one of the scariest human beings on earth. It wasn't the pain and torture of going through something he called exhaust training and different types of training. The worst thing he'd ever done in his life - the most difficult thing he'd ever done in his life - was going through withdrawal from these drugs.

Again, I think of the impact that it's had on our society, not just from the overdoses, from the criminal aspect of it, but also from the suicides, from children who have been torn away from the families because of drug addiction. Yet these individuals still have money in their bank accounts and they are able to walk our society free.

I'm glad that the minister brought this up. I'm glad that this government is putting it forward. I hope and pray that you take them for everything they're worth. I hope that each and every one of these people ends up in jail and then rots in hell.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I will just add a few short words to this debate. On August 31<sup>st</sup> there was a rally, as there is every year, for Overdose Prevention Day, and I attended it at City Hall. I took note of a sign that somebody was carrying that said, "Every death is a policy failure." There were a number of people who were wearing t-shirts that said, "Harm Reduction is Radical Empathy." I agree with both of those statements, and this piece of legislation is a policy fix, and it is harm reduction. These are good things. We need both these things to address the terrible crisis that is opioid addiction, and the poison drug supply as well in Nova Scotia. Those can be the same thing, but they are also slightly different.

I am glad to see that these changes are coming that would enable us in Nova Scotia to participate in this class-action suit. The minister says that this is sort of based on legislation that has happened, and the class-action suit that has started in B.C. We know that B.C. has been, until recently I think, the epicentre of the opioid crisis in Canada, but we all know that the crisis has reached Nova Scotia quite severely.

Every overdose death is like a community having to hit a brick wall. My own community has had some terrible, terrible losses in the last couple of years, including a well-loved and precious young teenager. Every death is one too many, and we need to make sure that we curb the use of addictive substances, and that we end the poisoning of the drug supply.

We also have to address situations like the housing crisis, homelessness, mental illness and access to adequate primary care. These all contribute to the problem. The government needs to work on all these issues at the same time. Overdoses are just the tip of an iceberg of growing social and health care inequalities. Ultimately any damages from a class action lawsuit should be applied specifically to mental health and addiction supports and recovery supports in the province.

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

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

[12:30 p.m.]

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues across the aisle for their comments. It is something that touches many Nova Scotians, individually and as families and communities. There will be more to say as we move through the bill process. For now, I rise to close debate on second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 322, Opioid Damages and Health-care Costs Recovery Act (Amended).

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 327.

**Bill No. 327 - Motor Vehicle Act (amended).**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Madam Speaker, I move that Bill No. 327, amendments to the Motor Vehicle Act, be read a second time.

It is my privilege to rise today to talk about these amendments. As Minister of Public Works, I am very proud of the work of my department. Nova Scotians deserve to drive on safe, well-maintained roads and highways.

This government has invested significantly to ensure just that. We have more than doubled the gravel road program and more than tripled the Rural Impact Mitigation fund. This year we announced more than \$1 billion of investment into our five-year highway plan. We completed the twinning of Highway No. 104 to Antigonish. In the coming weeks, Highway No. 103 will be twinned all the way to Hubbards.

It's a lot of work, Speaker. If you drive Nova Scotia roads as much as I do, you know just how much work it is by how many construction crews you see in the summer. I know drivers don't love seeing those crews as much as I do. That's because when they see highway workers, it usually means delays.

We owe it to Nova Scotians to do this work as efficiently as possible, and that's where these amendments to the Motor Vehicle Act will make a difference. As it stands,

every time a construction or traffic control company wants to use an automated flagging assistance device in a new location, it needs to get approval from the traffic authority. It's a time-consuming process that involves paperwork and waiting for review and approval by the traffic authority.

I am pleased to be able to stand here and say that we are cutting through that red tape here. Through these amendments, companies will be able to implement their plans right away by following the Temporary Workplace Traffic Control Manual. By being able to get to work faster, construction projects can be completed sooner and our work sites will be safer.

Speaker, automated flagging assistance devices are relatively new to Nova Scotia. The most important part of these devices is that they protect people. They can be operated remotely, which protects workers, because they don't need to stand on the road close to traffic. When it comes to our roads, safety will always be our first priority.

The reason behind these amendments is quite clear - we want to protect workers, cut red tape, and get the job done faster. I believe these amendments to the Motor Vehicle Act do just that. Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from my colleagues from across the aisle.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: Speaker, I thank the minister for her comments on this. I think this is a good bill. This is a common-sense bill. This is something we can all get behind, of course, which is safety on our roads and, in particular, safety for those who are working on our roads as well. This is one of those solutions that's easy, that's fairly simple.

We're just getting through construction season now. We've all been sitting at construction zones for a few minutes and there's a person right there on the road. To have that person off the road or off the shoulder operating these things remotely will certainly make things safer.

I know that companies here in Nova Scotia have been innovative in pushing these systems forward, so it's wonderful to see that they will be able to use those products here at home as well. I know that the minister and her department always take the safety of the roads as the number one priority. I know that's the priority of the staff as well.

All in all, I think this is an excellent piece of legislation, and we're quite happy with it. With that, I will take my seat.

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



KENDRA COOMBES: As somebody myself who has many, many roads - especially a lot of provincial roads - and who has to travel about 4.5 hours or so, depending on the construction that is occurring, to come here to work, I understand what it can be like for drivers and the flaggers and that safety issue that comes about being so close to the road.

I know there are people in the province who have been looking to government to make it easier for use of these devices. For example, the home-grown system SmartFlagger. They have the potential to increase the safety at temporary traffic stops. That's something where this would really be helpful, those places like Nova Scotia Power, where power has to go out for the day and needs those stops. These would work really well in those areas, because it would be fast and quick, and wouldn't have to go through all the permissions.

It would reduce risks at work sites, so it is important and I'm glad the government is taking a step in this direction. I do hope to ensure that this will not lead to job losses for Nova Scotians who are already facing the cost of living crisis. I look forward to hearing from witnesses at Law Amendments Committee.

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

The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I thank my colleagues from across the aisle for their comments on this bill. I rise to close debate on Bill No. 327.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for Bill No. 327. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 321.

**Bill No. 321 - Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act.**

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

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I move that Bill No. 321, An Act Respecting Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, be now read a second time.

As Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, I have the privilege to guide and shape work that provides positive, lasting impacts for the future of Nova Scotia students, educators, and communities. My department works closely with the seven Regional Centres for Education and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial. We are all driven by a shared moral imperative: supporting the achievement and well-being of Nova Scotia students by providing a world-class education and by building learning environments where children see themselves and their cultures reflected.

For our Acadian and francophone first-language students, the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial provides this sense of belonging. Yesterday, I had the pleasure of introducing the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act in the Legislature, supported by the Hon. Colton LeBlanc, Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie; Marcel Cottreau, the board chair of the CSAP; and Michel Collette, superintendent of CSAP. It was an exciting day for me and, I know, an equally exciting day for them. Nova Scotia has many Acadian and francophone communities dispersed across the province, from Clare to Cheticamp to the new school our government introduced in the historic Acadian community of Tor Bay in Guysborough County.

Section No. 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms recognizes the significance of ensuring children have access to education in minority-language communities across Canada. The Conseil scolaire acadien provincial oversees this French first-language education in Nova Scotia. The conseil serves more than 6,700 students in 23 schools. Their unique governance structure, confirmed within this new legislation, respects CSAP's vital role in safeguarding the Charter rights of francophones.

This Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act speaks to our unwavering commitment to ensuring the preservation and promotion of French first-language in our education system. Speaker, this legislation was first promised in 2018 by the previous government. When I took office three years later, in 2021, it was no further ahead, despite the hard work of the department and the passionate advocacy of CSAP.

In 2021, I prioritized building a constructive and collaborative relationship with the CSAP, an important educational partner. The CSAP reciprocated with a willingness to engage and to work together. I am grateful to the incredible staff at the department and at the CSAP for embracing this mandate, for quickly aligning on our shared objectives, and for working to build the kind of relationship that will provide mutual support for the delivery of French-first education to Nova Scotia students.

This Act signifies the importance of ensuring ongoing collaboration. Within the legislation, we have clarified the roles and responsibilities of the CSAP board and removed duplication in the existing education legislation. We have also provided for a memorandum of understanding between myself as minister and CSAP that outlines our shared commitment to continue to collaborate and work together in partnership as we have done since I have taken office.

The Act reaffirms the current responsibilities and authority of the role of the CSAP, while also guaranteeing consultation about policies and regulations concerning French-language education. It also provides for additional supports, including a new director of French first-language education within the department. I remain so honoured to be able to introduce the first ever dedicated French first-language education Act in Nova Scotia and in Canada. Yesterday, Marcel Cottreau, board chair of CSAP, expressed his great enthusiasm for this Act and his hope that Nova Scotia can serve as an example to the rest of Canada.

Our department, CSAP, and Acadian Affairs and Francophonie are aligned in shared purpose and in our desire for legislation that empowers the Acadian and francophone communities and serves as a commitment to protect French first-language rights in our province. I am proud to be delivering on that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Premièrement, j'aimerais prendre cette occasion pour remercier la ministre pour déposer le projet de loi intitulé la Loi concernant le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial. Nous savons tous que ça fait plusieurs années que le CSAP travaille énormément fort pour faire avancer un projet de loi qui encre dans la loi l'éducation en français langue première. Ils cherchaient avoir une loi qui va promouvoir et protéger la langue acadienne et francophone dans nos communautés à travers une éducation en français. Ils voulaient avoir une loi indépendante et séparée qui conforme à la Charte et qui donnerait au CSAP le droit de gérer leurs propres affaires autant que possible.

Sans doute, c'est une loi qui est extrêmement importante à la communauté acadienne et francophone et important au CSAP. J'aimerais féliciter Marcel Cottreau et Michel Collette et tous les membres du CSAP pour tout le travail qu'ils ont fait pour travailler avec le gouvernement pour amener cette loi ici de là-bas.

I'd like to begin by thanking the minister for putting forward this bill. I'll try to repeat as much as close as I can. We all know that the CSAP has been advocating for a long time on a bill that would put into law their right to an education in first French language, a bill that would be independent and separate, and that would promote and protect the language and culture in our Acadian communities, a law that would be independent and separate, that would be Charter-compliant, and would give the CSAP the ability to manage their own affairs as much as possible.

I don't want to take away from this historic bill. I think it is an achievement for our Acadian communities, and it is an important bill for many Acadians across the province. I want to congratulate the CSAP: Marcel Cottreau, the president; Michel Collette, le directeur général; and all the board members who have worked and advocated with the Acadian community. This, again, is good for the Acadian communities, for the CSAP, and

the language. I want to congratulate everybody involved in that, as an Acadian coming from an Acadian region and seeing the importance of it.

[12 :45 p.m.]

I have to put my critic's hat on. There are some questions that come to mind when I read the law. Some of them were around the concerns that were raised to me when we did table the bill in 2021 around the CSAP law. Some of the concerns there were specific to communications between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the CSAP. These were especially around policies and directives coming from the department that were in English that created a lot of challenges and a lot of work and administrative burden for the department, which I fully understand - the translation, and all those things.

Another area, of course, is being able to more or less try to manage their own affairs, have more control over the way the operations are managed through the CSAP. One big one, also, was, when it comes to infrastructure and setting priorities, it was pretty clear that although the CSAP does put forward a capital plan, they were looking for having maybe more say in that process, and they were looking for a bill that would put that into law.

The way this bill is formulated is that most of these concerns, from my understanding, will be addressed through a regulations consultation and an MOU, which could achieve the same goal, but as the critic, it does raise some concerns that I want to get some assurances from the department and from the Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie that this will be a priority for the government. In saying that, I look forward to hearing what the stakeholders have to say at the Committee on Law Amendments. With that, I take my seat.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Ça me donne énormément de plaisir de me lever afin de parler quant à ce projet de loi. Ce projet représente des affaires des communautés acadiennes et francophones tout au long des années. Donc, j'aimerais remercier le CSAP et ses alliées pour leur travail dédié.

C'est important de continuer de réviser nos lois pour être au courant avec les défis d'aujourd'hui. Ce projet est clef pour promouvoir et protéger les droits de la Charte quant à la langue et l'éducation.

On attend la représentation du conseil lors de la réunion prévue du comité de modification des lois. On voudrait être certain que ce projet de loi répond à des besoins et des demandes des communautés acadiennes et francophones. Ceci dit, je reprends mon siège et attends la réunion du comité de modification des lois.

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

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I'll be echoing my honourable colleague the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development's comments en français.

Madame la présidente, je veux intervenir aujourd'hui pour faire écho aux remarques de ma collègue la ministre de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance, non seulement en tant que le ministre des Affaires acadiennes et de la Francophonie mais également comme fier Acadien.

En tant que ministre des Affaires acadiennes et de la Francophonie, j'ai eu le privilège de travailler avec la ministre de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance pour contribuer à des travaux qui ont des répercussions positives et durables pour l'avenir des élèves, des éducateurs, et des communautés acadiennes et francophones de la Nouvelle-Écosse. L'Office des Affaires acadiennes et de la Francophonie travaille en étroite collaboration avec la ministre, son ministère, ainsi que le CSAP.

On connaît comme fier Acadiens et Francophones qu'une partie de la fondation de notre culture et de notre identité culturelle est notre langue. C'est ça l'importance de foncer d'avance avec ce projet de loi. Nous nous réjouissons par un impératif moral commun: soutenir la réussite et le bien-être des élèves néo-écossais en leur offrant une éducation de classe mondiale et en créant des environnements d'apprentissage où les enfants se voient eux-mêmes et leurs cultures se reflètent.

Pour nos élèves acadiens et francophones de langue maternelle française, le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial apporte ce sentiment d'appartenance. Hier j'ai eu grand plaisir d'appuyer la Loi sur le CSAP à l'Assemblée législative - présentée par la ministre de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance - aux côtés de Marcel Cottreau, président du conseil d'administration du CSAP, ainsi que Michel Collette, directeur général du CSAP. Ayant été moi-même diplômé du CSAP, c'est une journée émotionnelle pour moi. Je sais qu'elle l'est tout autant pour eux.

La Nouvelle-Écosse compte de nombreuses communautés acadiennes et francophones dispersées dans la province, d'Argyle à Clare, Chéticamp, Île Madame, et à Tor Bay même, là où nous avons vu une nouvelle école que notre gouvernement a créée dans le comté du Guysborough. L'article n° 23 de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés reconnaît l'importance de veiller à ce que les étudiants aient accès à l'éducation dans les communautés en situation langues minoritaires du Canada.

Le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial supervise l'enseignement du français langue première en Nouvelle-Écosse et dessert plus de 6 700 élèves dans ses 23 écoles. Sa structure de gouvernance unique, confirmée par cette nouvelle législation, respecte le rôle vital du CSAP dans la sauvegarde des droits des Francophones garantis par la Charte. Cette loi provinciale sur le CSAP témoigne de notre engagement inébranlable pour assurer la

préservation et la promotion de la langue française première dans notre système d'éducation.

Madame la présidente, cette loi a été promise en 2018 par le gouvernement précédent. Lorsque moi-même aussi j'ai pris mes fonctions en 2021, elle n'était pas plus avancée malgré le travail acharné du ministère et le plaidoyer passionné du CSAP. En 2021, aux côtés de la ministre, j'ai donné la priorité à l'établissement d'une relation constructive et collaborative avec le CSAP en tant que partenaire éducatif important. Je suis reconnaissant au personnel des ministères, également le ministère de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance ainsi que l'Office des affaires acadiennes et de la Francophonie et du CSAP d'avoir accepté ce mandat, de s'être aligné sur nos objectifs communs et d'avoir travaillé à l'établissement d'une relation qui apportera un soutien mutuel à la prestation d'un enseignement en français aux élèves de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

Cette loi souligne l'importance d'une collaboration continue. Dans la loi, nous avons clarifié les rôles et les responsabilités du conseil du CSAP et éliminé les chevauchements dans la législation existante sur l'éducation. Nous avons également prévu un protocole d'entente entre la ministre de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance et le CSAP qui souligne notre engagement commun à continuer à collaborer et à travailler ensemble en partenariat.

La loi réaffirme les responsabilités et l'autorité actuelles du CSAP tout en garantissant la consultation sur les politiques et les règlements concernant l'éducation en langue française. Elle prévoit aussi des appuis supplémentaires, dont un nouveau directeur de l'éducation en langue française au sein du ministère de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance.

Je suis très honoré de pouvoir appuyer la toute première loi sur l'éducation en français langue primaire en Nouvelle-Écosse et au Canada. Hier, Marcel Cottreau, président du conseil d'administration du CSAP, a exprimé son grand enthousiasme pour cette loi et son espoir que la Nouvelle-Écosse puisse servir d'exemple au reste du Canada. Le ministère de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance, l'Office des Affaires acadiennes et de la Francophonie, et le CSAP partagent le même objectif et souhaitent l'adoption d'une loi qui renforce les communautés acadiennes et francophones et constitue un engagement à protéger les droits linguistiques des Acadiens et des francophones dans notre province. En tant que fier Acadien et membre francophone de cette Chambre, je suis très fier de participer à ce moment historique.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Madame la présidente, félicitations au gouvernement pour cette pièce de législation. I want to thank the government for moving forward this piece of legislation.

I do have to recognize that the work on this began back in 2018. There are some folks who haven't been mentioned yet that I do think we need to recognize. That would be former CSAP Chair M. Kenneth Gaudet, whose life work, I think, was to create a bill like this and Michel Comeau, former superintendent and executive director of the CSAP who worked very hard on this bill as well.

The former Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie, Hon. Lena Diab, was a great advocate for this and, as minister, worked very closely with the CSAP and the Acadian community as well as the honourable Michel Samson, who was one of the initial voices in the previous government pushing for a piece of legislation like this.

Credit where credit is due. This is not something that we got done quickly enough when we were in government and we lost the chance to pass this bill. I am thrilled that the government has moved forward with that work and built on that work that happened previously to pass this piece of legislation today.

I certainly know that this probably wouldn't have happened without my neighbour, the member for Argyle and the Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie, who, I know for a fact, would have been a champion of this at the cabinet table and within caucus. I think that this is a great example of the continuum of government that happens; even when governments change, really important work continues on and gets passed.

I do want to thank Marcel Cottreau, with whom I got to work for a bit during my last days as the former Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. He's an incredible partner and advocate for French language and the Acadian community.

I'd also like to thank Michel Collette who took over after Michel Comeau, whom I know is very dedicated to French language in education in this province and has and will continue to perform really well in his position with the CSAP.

I'd like to thank the member for Clare as well for his advocacy on this. He presented a version of this Act which I did think went a little bit further than the current one in the first or second session of the Legislature. I know the member for Clare has been a great advocate for this and certainly will take some time to talk to stakeholders in his area, as will I, to make sure this bill is done right so we can provide further constructive feedback, if needed, in the future.

As someone who comes from Yarmouth in the southwest part of the province, I do want to talk about the impact of the Acadian culture and the French language on our community. Probably 10 to 15 per cent of my constituency is Acadian. I grew up spending a lot of time in Pubnico, Argyle, and Clare. I won't talk about all the fun we had back then. This is a really rich culture that we have in our province - the Acadian culture - one that experienced oppression, suppression, and discrimination in the history of this province, but one that has persevered and that, I think in some regards, really got the last laugh on the

British. Acadians were given some of the poorest farming lands in the province after la déportation, which just so happened to be some of the best fishing areas that we have in our province.

[1:00 p.m.]

The Acadian culture in my part of the province, as in others, is really built around language and the sea, and the wealth that has generated now in these communities is so critical to our economy, rurally and provincially, overall. I think the vast majority of the wealth that's generated in Nova Scotia actually comes from the sea, from our fishers, and from rural Nova Scotia. The fact that it's been our Acadians in parts of our province who - particularly in District 34 - they go out and fish in the Winter, in the hardest, most gruelling time of the year and bring ashore the most valuable lobsters in Nova Scotia, I'll add as well - the fact that that's the work our Acadian communities do speaks to their resiliency, strength, and fortitude as well.

I do think we're going to take some time to consult on this bill, to make sure it's right and it's achieving all the intended goals. I'm very pleased the minister has brought this forward. We do thank her for that. I do think this can have a real impact on the future of French language and our Acadian communities, as well as our ability to immigrate more French speakers into our province. We have had a decline in our relative French-speaking population. I met recently with la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Ecosse, who talked about this issue and is also pushing the government to look at targets for immigration from French-speaking countries to bolster the number of people here who speak French and to help preserve that critical language we have here.

Before I sit down, I want to recognize the many folks who've done work on this over the years. I don't think today would have been possible without them. Kenneth Gaudet, former chair, and Michel Comeau, who I know aren't in those current positions right now but will, I think, be very pleased with this bill finally getting through the Legislature - as well as former ministers Lena Diab and Michel Samson, who were great advocates for this.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm glad to rise to speak to this bill. I understand this bill has been a long time coming, and it's something the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial has advocated for and worked tirelessly to make happen, so I want to acknowledge and thank them for all their work. We hope to hear from CSAP representatives at Law Amendments to ensure this new bill remedies issues identified in previous legislation and aligns with their requests.



Moving forward on this bill is a positive first step to enshrine the Charter rights of French-first education for Acadians and francophones and preserve and promote the French language in our province.

As the MLA for Clare has said, to reiterate that, initially it was to be an independent piece of legislation that works collaboratively with the Education Act that we have right now. I'm hoping to hear from CSAP representatives to be able to clarify some of that. We hope to see this collaboration and consultation with the CSAP continue as the department implements the changes in this bill.

I will note that this highlights the important work and advocacy of elected school boards. As the only remaining elected school board in our province, CSAP has been able to bring the needs of its students and communities to the forefront.

I hope we will see this government make good on their promise to reinstate elected school boards across the province, as we can see the value this brings to working together collaboratively. We look forward to hearing directly from the CSAP and other stakeholders at Law Amendments.

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

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I'm pleased to hear the supportive comments of colleagues in this Chamber, of all the members in this Chamber. This is a really exciting and historic development and we're proud to be advancing it. We look forward to further conversation and hearings for it as well, and conversation at Law Amendments and at further readings. With that, I move to close debate on Bill No. 321.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to move second reading on Bill No. 321 - Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Would you please call Bill No. 320 - Tourist Accommodations Registration Act.

**Bill No. 320 - Tourist Accommodations Registration Act (amended).**

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 320 now be read for a second time. Today I'm pleased to talk about amendments to the Tourist Accommodations Registration Act.

Amending this Act is part of government's overall plan to address the housing issue. The Tourist Accommodations Registration Act, TARA, requires operators who provide accommodations for 28 days or less to annually register their accommodations in a provincial registry. This includes both traditional tourist accommodations like hotels and motels and other sharing economy-type short-term accommodations like Airbnbs.

Nova Scotia is facing an unprecedented housing crisis. The government is working to get more housing built, but that takes time. Meanwhile houses and apartments that could potentially be long-term homes are being rented short term. The changes to this legislation will help to address Nova Scotia's urgent need for housing. They will also require government to have the flexibility to be able to make further changes through regulation in the near and longer term as the housing situation evolves.

There are several amendments being proposed: first, changes related to language used in the Act. This includes changing the title of the Act to the Short-term Rentals Registration Act, to better reflect its scope and intent and align with government housing goals. It also includes changes to the language related to registration rates. These rates will continue to be set in regulations; however, the amounts currently being considered represent an increase beyond what is required to administer the program. As a result, under the Finance Act, it is required that this be characterized as a tax, rather than a fee.

Other amendments will provide authority for further changes to be made in regulations, giving government the flexibility it needs to address current and future needs, including moving part of the definition of short-term rental, currently 28 days or less, from legislation to regulations, allowing different tax rates based on different locations and types of accommodations, for example, to address urban versus rural issues, setting fines and annual maximum fees, and creating an administrative penalty system.

There are a number of benefits to these changes. These amendments are foundational for future changes, like planned higher registration rates and different rates for different classes of accommodations.

The proposed changes continue to demonstrate that the province is taking action to create a strong regulatory environment, support municipalities in their efforts to regulate short-term rentals and strengthen enforcement and compliance. It is believed these changes may free up some housing supply, which will reduce pressure on our rental and overall housing market as a part of government's overall efforts to addressing the housing issue. Every home counts.

Since 2016, Nova Scotia has experienced a significant increase in short-term rental accommodations, most of which are whole home rentals. At the same time, we've seen historically low residential vacancy rates and a competitive market for home buyers. The proposed amendments to the Act and subsequent regulatory changes may free up housing supply, which will reduce pressure on the rental and overall housing market.

I look forward to hearing comments from my colleagues.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I don't think this bill is going to cut it when it comes to housing. This is really a cash grab to Airbnb providers that is not going to change anything in the short-term rental market.

I watched the scrum when this was announced. It seemed to be very haphazard, last-minute. Communications staff were scrambling. The messages were very unclear, even to the media. Simple questions couldn't be answered. The minister even said he didn't know how much of an impact this was going to have. I think that's important to emphasize here today.

We've got 6,000 short-term rentals in the province. We need a number of those to accommodate tourists. I'll give an example: In Yarmouth, when the NDP cut the ferry, we lost half of our room accommodations overnight. Hotels closed, motels closed, we went from 500 rooms in Yarmouth to 250. When the ferry came back, Airbnbs played a critical role in accommodating tourism revenue. A lot of them were in people's houses, so it is helpful in certain markets.

I think an issue with Airbnbs is when long-term rentals are being leased at a large scale and then sub-leased through Airbnb. The problem isn't the folks who are renting out a room in their home or a tiny house on their property who are now going to be taxed more money. The real problem is going to be if there are folks who have 5 to 20 to 30 or 50 units that they are pulling off the long-term rental market that are intended for long-term rentals that are then Airbnbs. That is an issue.

Taking \$3,600 from them isn't going to create a real disincentive. If you are looking at Airbnbs here in the city, that is a week's worth of income. They are going for \$300, \$400 a night here, so this isn't going to create a major disincentive. It's just adding to the cost of doing business in that rental market. It's a quick cash grab for the province that even the minister himself said he didn't know that it would have an outcome that's even noticeable at all. That was made very clear in the comments the minister made in the scrum.

It's concerning, too, because we've got the PCs who think that having a quick cash grab with Airbnbs is going to make a difference here. Then on the other hand you have the NDP, who want to tax landowners more. I'm sorry, but charging more money and taxing

more is not going to get us out of the housing crisis that we are in right now. We actually have to reduce the costs of development. We'll see if the government is able to do that with the legislation they've brought forward. I do not think this little half-measure is going to have an impact. It's going to be an annoyance and an extra cost to businesspeople without achieving any noticeable income, in my opinion. I stand to be corrected on that.

[1:15 p.m.]

I think, with the absence of the housing strategy, we don't even know if this is something that housing experts told this government to do. We have four housing strategies now that are not being made public by the government. We've seen this rush in the last two weeks, before we've gotten into the House, to demonstrate some sort of action on housing. It seems to be driven less by the actual housing pressure and more by the pressure that is being applied politically on this issue.

We don't know if any of these actions even are consistent with what experts at the government paid to produce a report said that we need to do. The Premier was asked today why he hasn't released the housing strategy. There is no answer to that, other than he doesn't want to. We have to think in this Chamber: Why is the Premier not releasing the housing strategy? Is there something in it that he doesn't want to do? Is there something in there that he doesn't want the public to see? Are the recommendations not consistent with the actions of the government? These are the only logical reasons why he would withhold the housing strategy that he paid for that was due last Spring to be made public. What other reasons would you have for keeping that information from the public at all?

The minister thinks a quick cash grab is going to make a difference here. I don't believe it is. What this could do is - in the markets where Airbnbs are actually necessary to accommodate tourism and the massive revenue that comes to this province through tourism - it could potentially have a negative impact there with people who are just trying to get a little extra income out of their homes now having to give more money to the Province.

I just have to get on the record here and say that I don't think this is going to do anything other than pull more money out of entrepreneurs' pockets. If it was going to generate an income and get hundreds or thousands of more units back onto the long-term rental market, sure, let's do it. But certainly, this isn't enough to do that, and I think as time passes, that's going to be made very clear to the government.

The next question we have to ask is: Where is this money going to go? How is this money going to be applied to help housing? That's something that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is going to have to answer: Are the revenues that are being generated from Airbnb entrepreneurs going to be applied directly to the homeless situation that we have right now? We've got a thousand homeless people in Halifax alone. Hundreds more reported homeless from one end of the province to the other, in Sydney and all the

way to Yarmouth. We have tent cities now, even in some of our rural communities like my own.

Will the minister commit in his closing comments today to actually apply this money to deal with the most critical symptom of our housing crisis - a growing rate of homelessness, and that has been growing at an exponential rate. It's doubled over the past two years. That's frightening. It's creating health and safety issues for the individuals who find themselves in this situation. It's also creating broader public safety issues in neighbourhoods and discomfort for people.

We need to know how much money is going to be collected by this cash grab, how it's going to be redeployed, if it's going to go into the general coffers of the Treasury, or if there's going to be a specific stream of funding that is going to support - in particular in this case, those who are homeless. Because even though the government announced some shelters coming in this week - 200, that is good - we hope that those go up very quickly. We hope that they get up before Winter. Neither the minister nor the Premier could confirm if that was going to be the case, but this is extra revenue that's going to be coming in right now.

Again, if there's going to be any impact out of this, it's probably going to be on how that money is spent, because I don't see this really having an impact on the short-term rental market. It is not enough money being charged to make a difference or create a disincentive. At the end of the day, it's just going to be taking a little bit more money from entrepreneurs.

I'd certainly like to hear the minister respond to these questions in his closing comments today, and we can certainly ask more questions about this as we head into third reading as well.

The other thing I think we have to ask is: Obviously we're tracking short-term rentals, so will the minister commit to informing this House, at least in the new year, on what the impact has been? Are we actually going to see short-term rentals come off the market and become long-term rentals? Is the minister tracking that? Is he going to track it? If this little half-measure and cash grab plays out to be as ineffective as I think it's going to be, will the minister commit to changing course on it?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: This bill creates the ability to levy higher fees for short-term rental hosts and platforms, and allows for inspection capacity to ensure the rules are being followed. I was very disappointed to learn that no penalties had been paid under the existing system, so it makes sense to strengthen inspection, and enforcement of fines and fees. We've seen from other jurisdictions that, without enforcement, there can be tragic

consequences from illegal short-term rentals. It's also true that we have to address the root causes of affordable housing.

The minister has admitted that the number of units that will be converted from short-term rentals to long-term housing is likely low. In the face of a massive shortfall in affordable housing and the absence of a housing strategy, enforcement and inspection is good. This is a tool, yet a small tool, in this toolbox. We will need to see so much more. We look forward to hearing from stakeholders at the Law Amendments Committee when the time comes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: I just want to get up and speak a little bit on this bill as well, and echo many of the comments that we heard earlier from the Leader of the Opposition and from the minister himself when this bill was announced just a couple days ago.

As was mentioned, we're looking at fees here - at taxes on this bill - a low of \$240 in the most rural areas, and a high of \$3,600 here in downtown Halifax. If you look at the Airbnb market here in downtown Halifax, for example, during the peak season of the Summer months - May to October, which we're just coming out of - you could easily charge \$400 per night, maybe even more on some weeks and weekends here in the city, so \$3,600 is less than two weeks, maybe 7 to 10 days at most.

To think that 7 to 10 days is going to change an Airbnb operator's mind to the point where they say, I'm getting out of this business - which can be very lucrative obviously - and I'm going to convert this into a long-term rental, I think it is very unlikely that will happen in any kind of scale whatsoever. That's not just my opinion. The minister himself made that point when this bill was announced - that the likely impact of this will be quite small.

If there are 6,000 units of short-term rentals here in the province, and even if 5 per cent converted to long-term rentals - and I think that's being pretty generous - you're talking about 300 units. The shortfall over the next six years, as we've heard through CMHC, is 70,000 units of housing here in Nova Scotia. This is - to be generous, to be charitable - a drop in the bucket when it comes to the need across the province.

As we'll talk about later this afternoon as well, housing in HRM is one thing - and it's certainly a big issue - but the housing crisis does not stop in HRM. It is every corner of this province. I think the evidence on this bill is that the impact would be very minimal, and it will tinker around the edges, and do close to nothing to actually solve the crisis here.

I want to echo the comments of the Leader of the Opposition around what this funding will be used for. How much money are we expected to raise? What will that funding actually be used for? I don't think it should just go into the general revenue stream

to be disbursed who knows where. If we are going to raise any money out of this program - and I'll be curious to see how much that is - that funding should be going directly to housing programs.

In general - and I'm sure I'll speak to this again later this afternoon - the scale of the housing crisis is vast here in Nova Scotia. What we need is real systemic structural reforms to the system in order to make some progress that are well-thought-out and will have a proven impact. This, I think, falls well short.

I hope that in due time, once this system goes into effect, we'll come back to the minister and try to find out: (a) how much money has been raised through this program; (b) how many of the 6,000 short-term rentals have been converted to long-term rentals; and (c) what, if any, impact this has had on the overall housing crisis. Unfortunately, I think it will be very, very minimal.

With that, Speaker, I will take my seat. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I just wanted to follow up on the comments made by my colleagues here with respect to the lack of understanding of what the impact of this policy is going to be.

I have a few questions for the minister that I hope he can provide to this House and to those who are in the tourism sector who rely on this income. I can think of the retired single woman trying to make ends meet, renting out her one room, and now the government is going to tax that activity. For what? As my colleague said, I think the outcome in terms of the housing crisis is pretty questionable.

Any government that is going to introduce new taxes on Nova Scotians should have a very clear understanding of the numbers. How much revenue is going to be collected for this from Nova Scotians, and what is the net benefit to that tax collection? We are now creating a new tax regime that is going to need a number of FTEs to manage and enforce this.

A question for the minister, that I hope he can answer before this bill passes, is: How much is he increasing the civil service to administer this small pot of money that is, in fact, doing really virtually nothing - unless proven otherwise - to deal with the housing issue? It's a very questionable policy with no measurable outcomes that are going to deal with the housing crisis that we have here in Nova Scotia.

If the minister could come back and be prepared at the Law Amendments Committee to present to the industry how much revenue is going to be collected, how much tax our Airbnb operators are going to be putting into the public purse, how that money is

going to be used, and how many full-time equivalent employees of government are growing the civil service just to manage this small pot of money.

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

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'll say a few things. First of all, I'll say that every home counts, and if that's the home that you're moving into, that's a pretty big number, even if it's "one" - you're moving into it.

We don't know the true impact that this will have. However, what I will say is that we also don't know the number - 6,000. That 6,000 is 6,000 registered. We really don't know how many there are - so how many more. These changes will determine that, so we will learn things about the scale of the industry in the province.

There will be very significant fines for platforms advertising unregistered accommodations. There are four or five - maybe more. There are at least four platforms operating. It's not just Airbnb. There are other ones: Expedia, VRBO - a couple more.

This is a fast-changing area. We're bringing in regulations. Once we have a better handle on the number unregistered, that will also inform our municipalities. We really don't know how many there are exactly. That information will be crucial to all 49 municipalities in the province.

Those are the two comments I will make. Some of the uncertainty in the numbers rests in that uncertain number, right? We believe that this bill will bring that number out.

I move to close second reading on Bill No. 320.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 320.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 323, Regulated Health Professions Act.

**Bill No. 323 - Regulated Health Professions Act.**



[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 323, the Regulated Health Professions Act, now be read a second time.

We have 21 self-regulated health professions in our province. While these professions work together to protect Nova Scotians, we know from the experiences of other provinces that more can always be done. The Regulated Health Professions Act will do just that. It will do more to protect Nova Scotians and to support current and future professions that wish to pursue self regulation.

Before I explain how this will work, allow me to tell you why we are doing this. As mentioned, we have 21 self-regulated health professions in our province. Each of these professions have their own Act and their own regulations, processes, and rules. These professions and their governing bodies work very hard to ensure their members are meeting their standards of practice, opportunities for training and professional improvement, and ensure that measures are in place to protect Nova Scotians from harm, including ways to file, address, and respond to complaints.

Another benefit will be the system's ability to respond quickly to the changing health care needs of Nova Scotians. This Act will reduce legislative barriers, which will allow the health care system to evolve more quickly and easily, in such areas as adopting new technology, training, and care models. This means better and improved care for Nova Scotians sooner.

While these professions have, until now, operated within their own legislative frameworks, it is time Nova Scotia joins other jurisdictions in implementing overarching legislation that will set out common regulatory and accountability processes for health care professionals. Simply put, it does not make sense to have multiple Acts with differences in similarities when, as a province, we can have one.

The Act ensures regulators will continue to drive self-regulation with control over individual matters of conduct and fitness while the government will have a clear and effective oversight role. Each profession will continue to have its own set of regulations that address the unique requirements for their fields, in areas such as scope of practice, entry to practice requirements, and licence categories.

Although the bill does establish a process to provide government with authority to intervene when a regulator is unwilling or unable to meet its legislated mandate, it is and will be a method of last resort. It is our expectation that we will never need to use it and that concerns can be addressed through other steps first.

This bill also creates more opportunities for health professions that wish to pursue self regulation. It reduces barriers to self-regulation because they can now join other professions under one governing board, for example, to share resources and supports.

As a government, we look forward to continuing our support of self-regulated health professions in Nova Scotia and believe that this Act will continue to honour this commitment.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I am going to offer very few comments at this point. We are always very interested to hear what happens as we get past this reading into Law Amendments Committee. I did not hear the word “consultation” from the minister in her remarks, unless I missed it. That’s something we always look for. It’s something they did when they were in opposition. When you go through an amalgamation of services or certain aspects or stakeholders within a system of government, you always want to make sure that proper consultation has been done, so we will be looking forward to hearing a bit more about that, something we’ll be looking for, and we look forward to hearing the comments at Law Amendments.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I’ll just add a few comments as well. Too soon to know for sure if we’re going to support this bill. We understand that the intent is to simplify the oversight and accountability, enhance the quality improvement mechanisms, and allow for the potential for smaller bodies of health professions to amalgamate. I know that this has been a long-term project, and I want to say thank you to all those people who have been working on the changes.

As we saw earlier this year, it’s critical to the “C” word, consult, and work together with health professional bodies when making changes to these regimes. As you will remember, we saw regulators express concern that the hasty drafting of Bill No. 256 meant that it included language that could force regulators to licence an applicant who has had disciplinary issues or even a criminal record in a certain jurisdiction, and we saw a huge movement at Law Amendments Committee and beyond from the health profession regulators around that bill. Unfortunately, this government style of non-collaboration means that they railroaded the bill anyway without the changes recommended by nurses, doctors, and many others.

This bill would have been a great opportunity, while we’re changing the self-regulation of health care providers, to clean up the language in Bill No. 256 and make sure that it’s very clear what the intent of the bill is. Our caucus is supportive of any changes that improve public safety, enhance oversight, and hasten approvals in the licensing of health care providers. We must work together with the experts as we do these things. We

look forward to hearing from the health regulatory bodies at Law Amendments, and we'll have more to say on third reading.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I look forward to hearing from those who come to Law Amendments to speak to how this bill will impact them and their opinion on that. I agree with the member for Sydney-Membertou that ideally there should be consultation, especially around health care and with the respect of colleges.

It's my understanding that the minister would already have jurisdiction to intervene if there was a problem with any of these colleges, although we have a situation with one of my constituents that a particular college is not responding to complaints, and I did send a letter to the minister with my concerns and was directed for that person to go back to the college. The college simply is not responding to my constituent. Perhaps there is a need for intervention and for changes legislatively to the regulatory pieces of legislation. I look forward to hearing from each of those colleges.

I will mention one of the things that I would like to see, and this maybe is more pertaining to the residents of Cumberland North that I represent, but I would like to see more collaboration with our fellow Maritime provinces or Atlantic provinces with regard to registration and legislation regulating health care professionals. We have seen the Atlantic Council of Premiers work together on licensing for physicians in Atlantic Canada; however, when you speak to physicians that actually go through that process, their communication to me is that actually nothing has changed. You still have to go through all the same processes in every province.

There is a reduction in the fee, but they do still have to pay an additional fee to be licensed, say, in neighbouring New Brunswick, and they still have to go through criminal record checks, all of the same paperwork and bureaucracy. None of that has been diminished. There is an opportunity here if we truly want to make some changes that will really help our health care professionals to be more portable throughout the Maritime provinces, and that is to collaborate . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. There is a little bit of chatter in the Chamber.

The honourable member for Cumberland North, please continue.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Thank you, Speaker. I would love to see more collaboration with our Maritime provinces - with our Atlantic provinces - around health care legislation and self-regulation. I think there is opportunity there to do so. The current changes, as I just mentioned, that have happened with regard to physicians licensing with Atlantic Canada really has not brought forth, I don't think, what it was meant to. With those few comments, I look forward to Law Amendments Committee.

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

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I am grateful for the comments from my colleagues across the floor. I will let them know that there has been extensive consultation with a number of the colleges through the Nova Scotia Regulated Health Professions Network as well, but we can certainly say more about that.

Just to kind of reassure everyone that the expectation of this Act is that the regulators will continue to drive self-regulation with control over individual matters, but that oversight really is clear and effective when there is a gap in self-regulation by a licensing body. People will be surprised to know that the ministerial reach has been quite limited. As a self-regulated health care profession, we were always taught it was a privilege, not a right, and if we didn't govern ourselves accordingly as a profession, we could lose that right. That, in fact, is not entirely the case.

This will allow us to support first and step in only if required in the event that a college is not regulating their profession adequately. With those brief comments, I move to close debate on Bill No. 323.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 323.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 329.

**Bill No. 329 - Halifax Regional Municipality Charter (amended) and Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality Act (amended).**

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 329 now be read for a second time.

This province is in the midst of a housing crisis like we have never seen before. Over the past two years, we have been working on a number of fronts with all levels of

government, businesses, and community partners on solutions, but we need to do more and we need to do better.

[1:45 p.m.]

The amendments to the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter and the Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality Act that we have put forward will remove barriers, increase density, and ensure that housing remains a priority focus in our most urban centre.

Many of the amendments are intended to address recommendations put forward by the consulting firm Deloitte Inc. in their October 2022 HRM Housing Development Barrier Review Final Report. Perhaps one of the most exciting and innovative amendments is the requirement for HRM to work with our team to develop and implement one of Canada's first trusted partner programs.

A key recommendation of the Deloitte report, this program will recognize qualified developers and work with certified professionals who have a solid track record of quality development submission with more streamlined and expedited services - an express lane, if you will, for those who follow the rules and are known to have solid development practices. Being part of a trusted partner program allows those who are experienced builders with strong planning and development processes to get their shovels in the ground faster. That is exactly what we need them to be doing.

Another key change is intended to help speed up the development of critical health care facilities like long-term care facilities. Nova Scotia has an aging population, and there's no question that we need to have more assisted living and residential, long-term care facilities to ensure that our seniors have a safe place to call home.

With that in mind, we are proposing that, like hospitals and schools, those critical health care facilities - whether operated by the province or privately - should be exempt from the land use bylaws. This would allow more urgently needed beds to be built faster in the communities where they are most needed, and with less red tape.

Speaker, as I've said many times, our planning rules simply have not been able to keep pace with the demands and needs of the modern-day housing landscape. In some cases, viable developments are being denied or severely delayed based on outdated policy. This needs to change.

Other changes will include more flexibility on unit mix for buildings; increasing the minimum floor plate size for high-rise buildings; reducing minimum lot sizes and increasing allowable coverage; and we want to see the suburban plan, which is overdue, approved. We are also proposing amendments to the Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality Act that will help further improve the predictability and timeliness of

approvals. These amendments provide tools to help speed up smart development where it is needed for the benefit of residents.

There's been much focus on additional authorities provided to the minister. As a tool of government, it is certainly not uncommon. Other provinces have similar authorities. It is an effective tool that allows government to be more nimble and responsive to a rapidly changing housing landscape. It ensures that any time-sensitive opportunities that may arise are not missed.

Amendments to both the Charter and the Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality Act will be supported by strong regulatory framework when it is introduced, which we expect will be soon.

We need more housing faster. There is no magic cure for this problem, but these amendments will help remove barriers and address critical housing supply issues in the HRM, and that in turn helps all Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: First, let me say that this caucus supports and has, in fact, called on the government to reduce regulatory red tape to build housing more quickly. Certainly, there are bylaw challenges, zoning issues, in our province that do need to be updated and reformed in light of the housing crisis that we're experiencing right now.

We certainly also support, and have called for, a reduction in the cost of developing. A lot of the costs associated with developing is public cost, either in taxation fees, putting in public infrastructure, et cetera, that fall on those who are developing. That is debt that's carried for years and then, of course, passed on to renters or to home buyers.

I want to be very clear about this, because I know the government will try to say that we don't care about speeding up the housing process. We do. We called on it this week. We did call for courage on this file, and leadership from the province. We certainly hope that we are able to expedite housing and development in this province.

I have concerns about how this was done that I do think are legitimate and worth noting. Also, when we called to reduce red tape and costs, we did so in the context of working collaboratively with our municipal governments and municipal leadership. We have seen, even in recent weeks, the success that governments can have - the success that this government can have - in working in collaboration. We saw that with the federal government that took the lead on reducing HST on new apartment builds that are beyond four units, I believe. We called on the province to do the same with the provincial portion of the HST. They did. That was a good thing. That was working in collaboration with the federal government. It was also taking advice from the Opposition.

We saw that earlier this week when, again, the government rushed the shelter announcement out the door. Collaboration with the Mayor of HRM, with HRM, resulted in identifying a location, a private partner. Hopefully we'll see an eventual plan to get those units up before Winter. These are the successes we've seen when the government has actually taken it upon themselves to work collaboratively, co-operate, work with other orders of government, respect the duly elected nature of those governments and the importance of that relationship.

We do not see that in this case. In fact, we've heard from the mayor as recently as this morning that he didn't even get a call that this legislation was coming forward. That's shocking. From one day celebrating a partnership with the municipality and the private sector that hopefully will result in 200 shelters being put up in Halifax - we haven't seen a plan for where those are going to go or how quickly they're going to go up yet - but the day after, this is sprung on Halifax Regional Municipality. This does not breed trust or a spirit of co-operation with our municipal leadership.

I'll say whether you agree with the municipal leaders or not, they represent their constituents, they have authority in this system, and we do have a responsibility to work with them. I say this, again recognizing that we do need to reduce red tape and costs for building housing: We have to do that quickly.

My concern here is that there's been a massive power grab. The minister now, who hails from beautiful Kings North, a lovely area of the province - I hope to get my family there this Fall again to get in the corn maze and see the pumpkin people. Kentville has done really well over the last number of years with development and growth, as have many of our municipalities. But the minister doesn't represent constituents in Halifax. There is no direct accountability with voters here, and now the minister has assumed all this control over development and housing planning in HRM.

Again, if this results in addressing the housing crisis - if we've got 70,000 more units that are built in the next six years, if we have rents that go down - hey, you did it. I don't know that that's going to happen, because we have not seen a plan from the government on housing. In fact, the strategies that they've commissioned - the housing strategy, student housing strategy, a report on tenancy enforcement, a housing needs assessment - all four of these things have been kept from the public.

We've had this massive power grab. We're told that action is going to be taken, that we are going to build more houses faster, but there is no plan to back that up. I think that's what's primarily concerning here. You're grabbing all the authority from HRM and you're telling everybody: Just trust us, we know what we're doing. But the government won't even release reports that were commissioned from experts to give advice on dealing with this housing crisis, dealing with the student housing crisis, helping municipalities identify how many units they individually need to build in the next six years to meet with demand.

My concern here is that we've got a big power grab. We've got a fast-track process for certain developers. It does not sound like it's going to be a competitive process for that. Now the minister has all the control over that. We are losing accountability on this. We don't know if this is going to result in the changes in the housing market that we need to see because, again, this government has previously taken further control from HRM on the special planning areas. They did that a year ago. (Interruption) Eighteen months ago - almost two years ago that happened.

I'll remind the government that part of this authority from HRM was taken 18 months ago, and what has happened since then? Housing starts are down 52 per cent since last year. Since the government took that authority, we have not seen an increase in housing starts. Rents are up. We have the highest rental increases in the country. I think they went up an average of 10 per cent this year. So even with the government taking more control over this file, we have not seen any outcomes that we can point to as being demonstrative of success. That's my concern here.

The Premier in the media scrum today said that Nova Scotians don't care about plans or strategies - they just care about action. We want action, and we want investment certainly, but I think most members in this House would agree that having a good strategy, having a good plan, will help ensure that the actions, the investments, have the impact that you want to have. Would we not agree to that?

We now have a situation where again this government has made a big power grab - basically taken over housing from HRM. I've certainly heard concerns from developers on red tape, on length of time certain applications have taken. I think these are legitimate concerns that we need to be aware of, and there does need to be proactive action taken to expedite housing as quickly as possible because we are in a crisis that people are experiencing. How we do that really matters.

Again, I want to juxtapose - when this government has been successful, it has been working with other governments on the HST reduction for new apartment builds, and on the recent announcement for shelter. When this government has actually failed in very clear ways is when the government has taken a confrontational attitude or position toward other orders of government, or the power utility.

When you compare the difference there, think about where the government has gotten the best outcome. It's been when they have collaborated, when they've worked with other partners, and not tried to do everything themselves. When the government has said, We're going to go for the good politics on this, we're going to get good headlines, we're going to show that we're being tough and that we're standing up for people - again without a plan to achieve an outcome - this is when we've actually seen the government fail on their objectives, and Nova Scotians pay as a result of that.



We saw that with the spat with Nova Scotia Power. The Premier chided me for meeting with the executives of Nova Scotia Power. They run our utility. I want to know what they're saying. They have a big responsibility.

I don't have to always agree with them, but I can still meet with them and hear what they are saying, and be informed by what they are saying. The Premier, on the other hand, hasn't met with them. He won't meet with the executives. Instead, he fought with them in public to get the headlines. He told this House that he was going to stop power rates from going up - I think to under 2 per cent a year.

He brought in legislation that hurt the utility, that downgraded their credit rating, which makes it more expensive now for them to finance any projects. Now power rates are going up 14 per cent. Who won there? The government didn't win. Nova Scotians are paying for that now - 14 per cent in two years - an increase in power rates during a cost of living crisis that's affecting not just the most financially vulnerable but affecting working families, middle-class, seniors alike, because the government prioritized getting headlines and prioritized the perception of them being tough. Nova Scotians are now paying the price for that.

We saw it on the carbon tax. Easy politics: Fight the federal government. Nobody likes the carbon tax. They did not take the time to do the work - the homework or the negotiation - to have an alternative like the previous government did, not only with the carbon tax, but also with power rates, which were kept stable for eight years, and the carbon tax was kept out of Nova Scotia - so another situation where you are prioritizing this public fight to capture the headlines of the moment, and Nova Scotians are paying the result of that - more taxes, higher fees, the cost of living going up across the board. Easy politics, wrong outcomes for people. That always seems to be the priority with this government.

We saw it with the Isthmus. The federal government put 25-cent dollars on the table. New Brunswick was going to pay for the other half. Twenty-five cent dollars on the table, so that means it would have cost Nova Scotia 25 cents for each dollar invested in the Isthmus. What's the priority? No, we're going to fight the federal government instead of actually working with them to get money in the Isthmus.

Our connection - I'm happy the minister said she applied, that's good news. It didn't look like it was going to be that way for a while. So again, to my point, prioritizing the public fight, even though they applied anyway for the money. Hopefully we get it, and hopefully we get that work done, because we've got \$50 million a day coming into our province through that Isthmus, and it's vulnerable to extreme weather events.

So, I'm worried that we're going to see that again here. That we have this big push to grab a headline, to gain control, without a plan to actually execute on the deliverables. And the deliverables in this situation will be to reverse the housing starts that we've had,

which have gone down again 50 per cent since last year - again, since the government took more control over HRM 18 months ago, over the housing process.

[2:00 p.m.]

This needs to be judged on if we're actually going to be bringing down rents - which, again, are the highest rental increases in the country - and if we reduce the homelessness situation. There are very clear metrics that we have to assess the success of this government by, right? How expensive is it to live here? Are we keeping up with new builds at the rate that we need to? Again, that is 70,000 new units that need to be built in the next six years.

Are we addressing this chronic issue of homelessness, which, again, is the most extreme symptom of the housing crisis, but not the only one. We've got seniors who can't afford the cost of living right now. They're on fixed incomes. Many of our seniors - their pensions aren't indexed to inflation. Not only can they not afford to upkeep their current house - because as we heard in Cape Breton, one-third of single-family homes are actually owned by single seniors. One-third of big family homes are being occupied by individual seniors. Many of them may want to stay there. I would bet a number of them would like to downsize, if it wasn't going to hurt them financially. Again, high rents, or high interest rates on buying a smaller property if you can find one on the market - these are financial disincentives for seniors to put their family homes back on the market and downsize. They're not able to.

There is a generation of young people now growing up in Nova Scotia, and in the country - to be fair, it's not just here - that are losing the dream of owning a home and building a family. That is frightening for the long-term prospects of our province. We've taken population growth for granted over these last 10 years. The government has benefited from good population growth. They say they're going to double the population. I don't know how we're going to do that when we can't house the people here now.

But think of the long-term impact to our population if a third of our young people are saying, We don't know if we'll ever be able to afford a home here in this province. We don't know if we'll ever be able to build a family here because it's so expensive. And again, housing is, I think, the biggest symptom of the cost of living crisis right now. High housing prices, on top of the highest inflation in the country - again, under this government - on top of the highest rents, and on top of the highest taxes.

Young people we're hearing from are starting to say, my God, I love Nova Scotia. I want to be here. I want to be with my family here. But it's not affordable to be here anymore. It used to be. People were okay with having the highest taxes in the country, until everything else became expensive.

Again, these are complex issues. This is a generational moment right here that really matters. It matters not just for the immediate moment, for young folks, for seniors, for those that are homeless. But if we don't fix this, if we don't reverse the trends, we are going to have more homeless people here. We are only going to have trailer parks available for people to live, and tents. We are on a scary trajectory right now, and I don't know if the government knows how serious this is. I say that because, yes, they've made some headlines this week. They are trying to demonstrate they are taking action, but they won't release the plan or strategy to deal with it.

There are not simple solutions to this. Grabbing control over HRM housing policy - is that going to result in quicker development? We'll see. I don't know that answer at this point but again, that is not going to fix all the issues we have with housing development in this province: high interest rates, lack of skilled labour to build, as well as restrictive bylaws and regulations in other municipalities across the province. In order for this House - in order for our party - to have confidence in this government that they are doing the right things on housing, certainly we would like to see if the actions they are taking are in line with the strategy that they paid experts to develop for them. Until we see that, until we know that, until we start seeing outcomes, it is not easy to have confidence in this piece of legislation.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I am reminded of a song called "Here We Go Again." What is old is new again because we are seeing again in this session - after last session and the session before that - the consolidation of power and the disrespect to municipalities.

I am going to start with this: We are concerned that this bill is marking that pattern of this government - power-grabbing and cutting municipal partners out of important conversations. The key to good communication is listening, is collaborating, is co-operating, yet HRM gets cut out of a conversation on HRM. This is ridiculous.

We understand the municipality - I think we need the public to understand that those living in the HRM, their municipality, their councillors, and their mayor were not consulted or aware of the development of this bill. Now I know if this would have happened in the CBRM, we would be enraged by this kind of treatment. In fact, we have been treated like this, and we didn't stand well for it. I can only imagine what the residents of the HRM feel.

As our province faces an ever-worsening housing crisis, it is more important than ever for the Province and the municipalities to work in collaboration for the benefit of all Nova Scotians. Placing more power and decision-making in a singular - with the singular discretion of the minister - raises troubling questions about transparency and accountability in this decision-making process.

This legislation will do a number of things: create a trusted partner program that will allow qualified developers to fast-track projects; exempt long-term care homes from land use bylaw development agreements and policies; freeze all municipal permit and development fees for two years; reduce minimum lot sizes for buildings; accelerate development approvals; allow the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to approve any development across the entire HRM; and allow the minister to act without any requirement to consult with the municipality. It is not clear that any of this will increase housing builds in HRM, where thousands of units are already permitted but delayed because of labour shortages and high interest rates.

What is clear? What is clear is that this Conservative government does not understand municipal planning. It does not understand what the function of a municipality is. That is - let me educate - water and sewer. It is not sexy, but it is fundamental to what municipalities provide.

In order to have new builds, in order to have big facilities for health care, and in order to have large apartment builds, these municipalities need to be able to handle the infrastructure required. That is why they have planners to tell us where we can develop and where we shouldn't and why. It is why Port Hawkesbury, when they said that we can't develop in this spot that the minister wanted them to develop, they couldn't do it. Want to know why? Because the land, when it was housing, when there was something there, their infrastructure couldn't handle it.

That is what planners do. That is what this government does not seem to get, time and time again. I have to ask the question: Why does this government want to continue to do this and continue to fight with the HRM rather than working in collaboration?

Mayor Mike Savage said: "This proposed legislation is an incursion into the municipal authority, undermining the public role in thoughtful, responsible planning that supports not only housing but community livability. These measures could undermine our ability to support affordable housing projects, risk our commitment to sustainability, and potentially limit access to municipal services while consolidating power in the office of the Minister." I will table that.

Also from HRM: "The measures announced today do not address the larger issues regarding development and affordable housing - which include high interest rates, lack of labour and supply chain issues." We need to be working on things that we know will move the needle on the issues, not picking a fight with our municipal partners.

I look forward to Law Amendments and hearing what others have to say.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: It's a very important bill that we have before us here today that I'm happy to speak to.

I want to start by saying that when I listened to the minister speak, in his opening remarks, if he had stopped about halfway through, I would have been happy. I do think that there are some things here, as the Leader of the Official Opposition has said, that we agree on in terms of reducing red tape and reducing costs, whether it's minimum lot sizes and so on. Those are all things that I think we can agree on and that are helpful.

I think the minister - in all public communications, whether it's the press release on this announcement, speaking in the House today, or speaking to the media - has deeply underestimated and underplayed the amount of power that this bill gives solely to the minister. I want to be very clear on this point because I think it's really important. If you look at the bill, there are a few clauses here and I'll read a couple of them just because it tells you how centralized the power is on this bill: "Clause 13 clarifies that the Minister may exercise the Minister's powers without consultation or a recommendation or request. Clause 14 allows the Minister to make an order designating any or all of the Municipality as a special planning area." That's from one end of HRM to the other. The minister can decide on a whim to designate the entire municipality as a special planning area, which gives him the ability to do whatever he wishes within that area.

The power grab that we see here is really unprecedented, I think, in at least the last decade, when we talk about municipal and provincial politics. As we've heard before, we've seen just this week and in the past couple of weeks, that when orders of government work together, we actually get progress on housing. We've seen that with the Housing Accelerator Fund and the federal government investing \$79 million in housing in HRM.

As a result of that, HRM made some very significant zoning and bylaw changes - very quickly, actually, to their credit. Earlier this week, we also saw announcements between the Province and HRM where HRM is donating land at no cost, where HRM is going to provide snow removal and garbage removal, and all kinds of services to make sure that people who are homeless this Winter will have somewhere to live. That's all positive, which makes it even more puzzling to me why the very next day, the minister and this government basically say: We control all housing and development in HRM, full stop - nothing more to be said on that point.

This bill, in its essence, is all stick and no carrot - complete and total control by the minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing when it comes to development within HRM. We all recognize that there is a housing crisis in HRM and in Nova Scotia. I wonder how we hope to deal with this housing crisis in our capital city when we have an ongoing feud between the two orders of government as to what is going on. That is not a recipe for success. That is not a recipe for progress. That is a recipe for continued disaster on this file when we have HRM council and the government completely offside - and unnecessarily so.

[2:15 p.m.]

I also think that one of the things that we haven't talked about a lot here are the issues that this bill raises in terms of transparency and accountability. If you look at the Executive Panel on Housing - the special planning area group that was created about a year and a half ago - from that group, we had real issues with accountability and transparency. We got two-page reports once a month saying what the minutes were: "We discussed Special Planning Area 10." Okay, what did you say? Who said it? What's moving on next? That was when we had the Executive Panel on Housing, and that group has basically been rendered moot by this bill.

Now the authority is the minister, as we see in legislation, and there is absolutely no mechanism in this bill to say if a developer comes to the minister, how does it happen? When does it happen? Is it reported? Where is it reported? What do they ask for? What do they get? Where is the development going to happen? None of that is laid out in this bill. That should raise very serious questions for the residents of HRM.

No one is disputing the fact that sometimes approvals take too long, and there are too many rules, and there are too many plans - municipally, in some cases. That's fine. Everybody agrees with that. As I said at the beginning, a few of the points the minister made through the first half of his address are reasonable and fair. That's great. I think we should be as non-partisan as we can be on this issue.

But to completely consolidate all control with the minister is, I think, a huge mistake from a policy perspective. Politically, what it does as well, as we talked about earlier today, is put control of housing entirely with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and ultimately the Premier of Nova Scotia at this point. The buck does stop there. If in a year's time we see that rents are up another 9.5 per cent, if we see in a year's time that the homeless population here in Halifax is up another 200 or 300 or 400 people, if we see in a year's time that housing starts and construction are still slow, then the Premier and the minister can't point fingers at HRM anymore, because HRM has no power on this issue anymore. We know where the blame will fall. It will be with the Premier and the minister if we do not see the action we want to see.

Today we heard the Premier and the minister talk about how nobody wants to see studies, nobody wants to see plans, nobody wants to see reports. People want to see action. Eighteen months ago, this government announced with great fanfare the creation of special planning areas in HRM - 22,600 units of housing across HRM. Three of those special planning areas are in my riding in Bedford South. A year and a half ago, if you drove past those sites, you would see trees and rocks. Do you know what you would see today if you drove past those sites? Trees and rocks. You will not see any homes. You will not see people living in any homes.

I can't speak to all nine or ten special planning areas there are now, but I know in the three special planning areas in my riding, there are zero units built over the last 18 months. That's a lack of action. That is a big problem. I think to say we're going to take action on housing by passing these bills - fine, you can say that, but again, the proof is in the pudding, and so far on special planning areas, we are seeing very little progress.

Again, if you're a developer in HRM, I guess you have - it's unclear and maybe the minister could clarify for us - three options, to my reading, to get a development done. You can go through HRM, as you have in the past; you can go to the Executive Panel on Housing; or you can go right to the minister. Well, which are you going to choose? It's pretty obvious. Time is money.

Developers are in the business of business - and that's fine. That's their right. But our duty as legislators is to make sure that there's some kind of transparency around that issue so that people can't just go right to the minister and say, "Hey, this is the development we want in this area," and it's done in an afternoon and nobody knows what's going on until it's published in - what? An Order in Council a month later? *The Royal Gazette* a month later? What are we talking about here? There are very serious issues of transparency and accountability that need to be addressed, and I hope the minister in his comments can give us some clarity as to when or if we will know about what's happening in development in HRM.

The final point I want to make here is that the housing crisis does not stop at the borders of HRM - not at all. Over the last year or so, I've been to Antigonish, I've been to Bridgewater, the Valley, Cape Breton twice to talk about housing. No matter where we go, we hear the same story: not enough houses, and those that exist are far too expensive.

Again, I hope the minister can give some clarity as to why every other municipality in the province is not being addressed in this bill. Is it because they don't want to face the fire in rural areas, where the vast majority of the government caucus comes from? I'm not sure. I wish the minister would explain it, because to suggest or to imply that the housing crisis is only happening here in HRM is to miss the point entirely, and I think is a bit insulting to those outside of HRM who are struggling. There are many, many Nova Scotians outside of HRM who are struggling with housing.

To summarize, this is a massive overreach of power. There are major issues with transparency and accountability. There are major issues with results when it comes to housing from this government. This is an issue that is massive, that will take concerted effort. I think if we have the largest municipality in the province and the provincial government fighting constantly about housing, we will never achieve the results we want to achieve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I am just going to start off with: What's wrong with HRM? What's going on here? We should be working together. This is a process that needs all levels of government in order for things to work. I'm saying this because I am the MLA for Halifax Needham, and that's my area in which I see no action or movement from this government doing anything to help with the housing situation. Yet we want to take away more responsibilities, take away all these things, and give the minister absolute power. I don't think anybody's really thinking about this, and I think my colleague alluded to that.

Did we even read the piece of legislation? It literally is very scary. It's very scary. I know we're so happy, that we want to get things moving, and a ton of things need to be done, but the fact that we as a Province, and the minister in particular, didn't consult with the municipality on a change with a piece of legislation that will affect the municipality is really disheartening. We're supposed to be working together with other forms of government. The municipality has a lot of work to do, and they are representative of their own ridings. They are elected officials like we are, and they have a responsibility, which in turn is what their job is. We should be working with them and not fighting against them.

I'm also going to point out, as Mayor Mike Savage said: "This proposed legislation is an incursion into municipal authority, undermining the public role" - public role, which means people, public, communities, consultation - "in thoughtful, responsible planning" - responsible planning, which means taking time to consider certain things responsibly - "that supports not only housing but community livability."

We talk about how we want Nova Scotia to be a place where everyone can come and they can live, stay, and continue to work here, and do all those things. But if we don't take into account the impact that this will make on the municipality's decision-making and their processes, then we're really - like I said, it's really disheartening.

"These measures could undermine our ability to support affordable housing projects" - which is what we all agree upon here, affordable housing, so folks can afford to live in a home - "risk our commitments to sustainability" - which is another key element to who we are as people, having a sustainable Earth, and having things for folks to be able to look forward to - "and potentially limit access to municipal services while consolidating power in the office of the Minister."

I'm not going to say much more, but I will say this: Something struck me when we talked about consolidating power and putting absolute power under the minister's helm here. We had a discussion in our previous sitting where we talked about how the minister could have complete override over planning on African Nova Scotian communities and on lands that are held by African Nova Scotians. I already know that Crown land is being expropriated, but some of that Crown land was given to African Nova Scotians. I worry and I'm very concerned about the fact that plans can be made by the minister without any consultation or discussion or any of that. That's very worrisome when it comes to deciding where housing will be or deciding who owns land and who doesn't.



I want us to be very mindful of what is being put forward here today. I know we're going to go through this motion again, and I wait to hear from folks at the Law Amendments Committee. I also want us to take into consideration what it is that we're doing by putting absolute power in the hands of the minister without any accountability, no transparency, lack of action, and having a concerted effort to completely override municipalities.

I just wanted to say that, and I wait to hear from folks at the Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I could probably reiterate many of the comments my colleagues from this side of the House have made - some very important points. I would certainly love to underscore them, but I won't take that time. The one thing that struck me about the minister's comments is that he was talking about a completely different Halifax, and a completely different housing problem, with a completely different set of solutions than the Mayor of HRM. It was like they were in two different cities.

The Mayor of HRM - who has the experience of living and working in this city, leading this city, leading a group of elected officials who know their communities, working with roughly 200 planners on the issues this city is facing with respect to sustainability, greenhouse gases, community, recreation, transportation needs - has stated clearly in the media over the last couple days that this bill will do nothing to address the barriers to building housing.

The Mayor of HRM, has said this bill will do nothing. How can a minister at one end of Barrington Street and a mayor at the other end of Barrington Street have such a different perspective on how to solve this problem, this challenge? Why are they not talking?

We learned 18 months ago that the minister made that error of not consulting with the HRM and brought in legislation that was pretty darn bad - not as bad as this - and announced, with great fanfare, 2,600 units, and building in Nova Scotia was cut in half. Clearly, that power that the minister needed to increase housing didn't work.

The minister is barking up a completely different tree than where the problem is. Mayor Savage outlined where the problems are. Why won't this government work on the problems that are actually preventing housing from being built?

The minister is talking about action. Well, his actions last year cut housing development in half. I think the one action that Nova Scotians - the people of HRM - would like is the action of the minister walking down Barrington Street and sitting down with the

mayor. I think Nova Scotians deserve that, the people of Halifax and their elected council deserve that.

[2:30 p.m.]

How can the minister bring in such draconian, authoritarian legislation, and not talk with the leader of HRM? It confounds me. I just don't understand. Nova Scotia is not that big. If the minister needs an Uber ride down Barrington Street, I am sure my colleagues and I will find some money to buy him an Uber to meet with the mayor.

Please, Speaker, we need to encourage the minister to talk to municipal leaders. There are people in the streets, in tents, and we need to all be working together, not bringing in heavy-handed legislation that is going to do nothing to solve these issues.

The people of Nova Scotia want this issue dealt with, and they want everyone working together and ensuring that there is a common understanding. We need a common understanding of the barriers and the solution to this, and we do not have that between the HRM and this minister.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I'm only going to take a couple of minutes, because I really feel like a lot of my concerns and issues have already been spoken to by other members of this House. But I can't not stand up and talk about this bill, which effectively disenfranchises all the constituents of my riding and is not respectful to that electoral and democratic decision-making process at all.

I think I do find it actually quite appalling, and I don't understand how people can allow this to proceed, that the Mayor of Halifax doesn't receive a phone call, doesn't receive a heads-up about legislation like this, and instead - in fact, the only way to have dialogue is through the media, through news releases, and I applaud him for doing that, but really what we need is people working together.

I think, as my colleague from Kings South was talking about, we need a shared understanding of what the problem is. I know that we've heard that the government's actually not going to release a housing strategy and not actually going to release a student housing strategy. The first comment I have about that is that it's also incredibly disrespectful to the stakeholders. As recently as last week, I was meeting with student leaders, who have all been waiting for months and months and months for the student housing strategy, who have been assured by the folks that they can connect with at the minister's office and at the Department of Advanced Education that a student housing strategy was coming, and now it's not coming. This pattern of complete disrespect and ignoring of stakeholders - and, frankly, their rights to be heard and to be engaged - is really concerning.

Just a few words on the strategy. I understand we need action, absolutely. I don't think anybody on this side of the House has been saying we don't need action for two years. We've been calling on the government to act for two years. We absolutely want to see action, but I don't understand how the minister can even go forward without an understanding of the various initiatives and what problems they're trying to solve. That's Step 1 if you're developing a strategy. Step 1, what's the problem and how does the community understand it? How do other stakeholders understand it? Obviously, that's kind of where the problems start for this government because the moment that it involves stakeholders, either in civil society or other levels of government, it's time to either fight or just consider that their input is probably not useful and to ignore it.

Another step in developing a strategy is identifying the challenges. As Mayor Savage pointed out, as we've pointed out many times, a huge challenge is actually the labour shortage. We learned today about - I would say - the failure of the MOST program to fill those gaps. I would say that if a program that I estimated at \$21 million was barely able to expend a quarter of that, I would think I have a problem, and I would probably want to talk to other people about it and other experts, other levels of government. I do think that this overriding power in HRM, obviously, is the easiest thing to do. It's a lot easier than coming up with solutions to solve the labour shortage problem, but I'm not convinced it's going to actually result in any improvements.

We saw this in the last session, where we had so many Crown corporations come under the direct purview of ministers. We're seeing this again. I don't think it's going to get the results that are needed, and I think the citizens of HRM are right to be very concerned about the complete ignoring of the HRM council. With that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: Before we begin, I'd just like to take an opportunity. I have been surprised to see in the Speaker's Gallery my cousin, Dr. Neil MacKinnon. If you would please stand. Welcome to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. (Applause)

Dr. MacKinnon will be the guest speaker tomorrow at, I believe, the annual general meeting for the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia, so all the best tomorrow. It's really, really nice to see you, along with friends of mine. If Scott and Erica MacKinnon would stand up and accept a warm welcome from the House as well. Thank you for being here. (Applause)

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

LORELEI NICOLL: I want to thank the DJ on the morning radio who decided to play Boston this morning. "Livin' in competition, All I want is to have my peace of mind." That set the tone for this meeting, because what gives us peace of mind? Accountability. Do we see it in this bill? We've heard many people speak. And to my colleague from Bedford South, some of these clauses will help, and I thank the minister for that.

Clause 4 is about not increasing development fees. Fees that have been currently lowered by the HRM and removed entirely for affordable housing. That's for the big-city mayors to deal with, because I'm sure the minister is listening to them.

Clauses 14 to 17 are to speed up the provincially approved Special Planning Areas, some outside of the water and serviceable boundary. Is the province going to pay to extend these services? It's been 1.5 years since the Special Planning Areas were announced, and some of them are in Cole Harbour-Dartmouth. Nothing there. Nothing there.

I know 2008 is when I came on Council. I approved many applications, and guess what? There's still nothing there. If this bill is to make things happen quicker, it's yet to be seen, because at the end of the day, there are not enough developers of mid- to low-rise development applications. Everybody wants to be in the urban regional centre. I think the minister said that himself. The urban centre specifically.

It's the demands of the modern-day landscape. Are we going to destroy the built heritage that the HRM is so dearly trying to protect? It takes time to build out, said the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. He acknowledges this. He really needs to explain to this House how this bill will shorten the time to build housing that is so desperately needed.

Oh, and by the way, with regard to targets, HRM's regional plan is a 25-year growth management plan, with targets in the regional centre, in the suburban and rural areas. Many of us moved here decades ago. We would have loved to have lived in the urban centre, but we couldn't afford to, so we live in the suburban areas or beyond. HRM is now engaging with the public to understand what the public wants to see outside the regional centre. Well, I guess this is a foolhardy endeavour, because their input is not going to mean anything.

The Premier says you can't attack our policies. But I guess it's okay to attack HRM's policies. Nova Scotians deserve good representation, said the Premier. Is the minister going to actually establish a hotline for people to call when they don't like what is going to be developed in their neighbourhoods? How is compatibility going to be protected? We heard many times that the task force that was established proved to be very successful but this bill is not going to even involve them.

Leadership needs to be about accountability, without blaming someone else or another order of government. Full disclosure, I'm an idealist, and I expect accountability. It's very, very disheartening as a Nova Scotian to come and be present in this House and see none. If the province wants to take all the development powers away from HRM, they also need to take all the responsibility.

On a more personal note, I just want to add that whenever I come into this House and I'm faced with bills like this, there's only one thing that pops in my mind. I say, thank

God that I'm not sitting on that side of the room. I acknowledge those that have the same knowledge that I have that are in the room and have to accept this.

[2:45 p.m.]

If you really want to help the province - I heard it, there were staff from the province that came to HRM Council and said, please, please, can we have some of your planners to create a regional plan for our municipal units? We don't have one. Please, can you come and help us create an economic strategy? Because we don't have one. Why isn't the province helping the other municipal units create their own regional plan and economic strategy? I'm asking the minister that: What is the plan to help?

I come from Richmond County. I'm proud to come from Richmond County. Proud to be an Acadian. We're hard-working. If we want something, we figure out how to get it. Being heavy-handed is not the Acadian way.

I can't express enough how I would hope that my province and this government would actually look at the fullness and the breadth and wealth of all of Nova Scotia, and plan for its future. My family comes up to Cole Harbour, and they say that it's nice to see children, it's nice to see young people, because their neighbourhoods are dying. There's no growth there. So plan some growth for them, please.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I wasn't going to stand up and say anything, but we've heard a lot here today. I'm sure that we'll hear a lot more on this.

I just want to be clear before I start. It feels like a lot of political feelings are hurt. People living in tents? People living in housing where they can barely afford it? People who are about to be renovicted? They don't care about politicians' feelings, quite frankly.

What they care about is having a safe roof over their head, and a place to call home. On all sides of the aisle and all levels of government, if your feelings are hurt, maybe you put that aside and direct your emotions and your effort into fixing this problem. This is an actual, real problem.

Each and every person, no matter what side of the aisle you're on, when you drive to work every day, when you come in here every day, or if you go to your office every day, you're driving by tents. And if you don't see them, you choose to ignore them.

I heard something, and I don't know if it's true, but somebody reached out to me today and said, do you know that the Remembrance Day ceremony, for I think the first time ever, in Halifax at City Hall and Grand Parade Square - they're thinking about

cancelling or moving it this year. Why are they thinking about moving it? Because there are 50 tents. There's 50 unhoused people sleeping in tents at Grand Parade Square.

When I drive to work every morning - both sides of the rotary, for those of you that know; I know some of the MLAs are acutely aware of where the Halifax Rotary is - on all sides of the road in the woods, there are tents. There are porta-potties.

There are people living in some of the worst environments that you can possibly imagine. We like to pretend sometimes that this issue is just a certain level of income issue, but it's not. It's happening more and more. We're hearing stories about working class families being renovicted or kicked out of their apartments who can't find a place to go to, and people working two or three jobs who can't find places to live.

Quite frankly - forgive me - by just shutting up and doing the work, we are going to stand here and get angry with each other about who is at fault and who should do what, when there are real lives at stake here.

Winter is here. I know we're in the Fall, but Winter is here. It was just hailing outside. What I will say to people is if you've ever experienced homelessness, if you have ever experienced being without, I think it changes your perspective on life, and I think you carry that for the rest of your life.

I understand some people will say it's this, it's that, it's the other thing. I've had the privilege of representing my community for 10 years. The apartments in the community I live in went from \$535 for a two-bedroom apartment 10 years ago to \$1,900 today. So where are those people - let's be quite frank, seniors, people living on income assistance, working-class families - where are they living? That's why we've seen an explosion in tents.

I am back and forth on this one because I understand how council feels about this. It's kind of the same way the Province feels about the carbon tax, right? It's kind of the same. The Province is upset a carbon tax was imposed on them. I understand that, but at the same time I don't care about any of their feelings. Just get it done. Build.

There are a lot of things we need to stop and plan and breathe and look - but housing, I just feel like we've been doing this forever. In the 10 years I have been an MLA, from the HRM, from the federal government, from the Province, from all different parties, I've heard task force, reports, By Design, and this, that and the other thing. The only thing that has changed in my community, which used to be the most affordable community in all of the HRM, is prices have gone up.

If you have a plan, feds; if you have a plan, Province; if you have a plan, municipality - show it to us. Instead of just showing it to us, implement it. If you can't implement it, then get out of the way. That's how I feel, because each and every day we

have at least a dozen people come into my office who are saying, I have nowhere to go. I have kids. I have pets. I have nowhere to go.

We used to be able to say things like, hey, we'll put you in public housing or we'll put you in a co-op or we'll get you a rent supplement or we'll do something. We now know that for public housing the wait time is close to two years. To put that in perspective, when I first started as an MLA, there was priority housing. I think most people, if you have been around long enough, you know what priority housing is - somebody fleeing domestic violence, somebody fleeing an unsafe place, someone who needs housing immediately. We could call up Housing in the Department of Community Services and say we have someone who needs priority housing. We'd fill it out, and within a week or two they would be in priority housing. Maybe the minister can correct me, but I think it's eight months now. It's at least eight months. That's not priority housing.

The thing nobody wants to talk about, quite frankly, is that we had massive immigration to this province, which is a great thing, but our schools were not prepared for it. Our hospitals were not prepared for it. Quite frankly, our housing was not prepared for it.

I get a little nervous when I hear ambitious goals of two million people. I would love to have two million people in Nova Scotia, but we don't have enough houses for one million people. We have a brand new high school in my community that is busting at the seams. I know members behind me who represent Bedford. The school was over capacity before it was even built, and they were talking about building a new high school before the new high school was even open.

I quite frankly don't care if you put housing on top of the Legislature. Go 20 storeys up, I don't care, just get it done. I will say, the one thing I will ask this minister to stand up and comment on is there is one thing about building housing; we've had this discussion. It's another thing about building affordable housing, and affordability is different depending on who you are, and there is also building low-income housing. I will say that we have had the conversation about Regent Park several times and how that was a very successful project in Ontario. If people don't know about Regent Park, I would ask that you go and maybe - Speaker, you probably know it in your former role about Regent Park, but take a look at it.

I think what we are going to have end up happening is, obviously developers are in it to make money. That's just the truth. If they are going to build - if they are going to be solely responsible for building homes without any type of oversight, it is going to be housing at \$3,000 to \$4,000 a month and stuff like that. I would hope that the minister, before these approvals happen, realizes that we still need \$600 a month, \$700 a month, \$800. We still need housing in that range. While I was very happy to see the tiny homes - I've been a big proponent of tiny homes for a long time - I can proudly say that I worked with the then-minister, now the current Leader of the Liberal Party, on the changes to the

building code regulations to allow for tiny homes in Nova Scotia. That was five years ago, I think. We worked on that because we saw the potential of tiny homes in Nova Scotia, which were illegal then, which is insane because they were not illegal anywhere else in Canada.

What I would ask the minister is maybe at some point in his comments that he addresses the affordability aspect of it, the mixed housing aspect of it, and I will say once again, we've got to be less concerned about politicians' feelings because I'll tell you, the only ones who care about politicians' feelings are the politicians. We've got to be less concerned about politicians' feelings and more concerned about the people whom we were elected to represent and the Nova Scotians who are out there struggling each and every day.

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't get up and add a few points, particularly on the heels of a Summer where our community was - 16,000 people were evacuated during a wildfire. There are two main arteries in and out of our community. Sixteen thousand people being evacuated at once created a major challenge. I really don't have a problem with the bill, honestly, but what I do have a problem with is the concept of unchecked development approvals.

I believe that there are some valid and important exercises that the municipality undertakes to ensure careful planning and development. It is never fast enough and quite frankly, the infrastructure to meet the needs, at least in my community in Hammonds Plains, has not kept up. My hope is that if the minister does become the sign-off on developments . . . (Interruption) The member for Halifax Atlantic, please leave. Thank you. Sorry, folks. Excuse me.

The point I'm trying to make here is that our community in Hammonds Plains-Lucasville is overwhelmed by population. The infrastructure has not kept up to support the number of people who are there. It created tremendous challenges when the community was evacuated. As I said, 16,000 people were trying to get out through the end of a very narrow bottleneck.

We continue to see what's called as-of-right developments pop up, which still don't encourage the type of infrastructure upgrades that are required at home, for some reason. We haven't seen a lot of leadership on that at the municipal level, quite frankly. We do have some statements from ministers of the government and the Premier about being a willing partner to advance that agenda with respect to infrastructure upgrades, with respect to connectivity, with respect to emergency egress and services.

That's positive, but when we're talking about development approvals not having to go through channels that are designed to add a thoughtful process to a development



approval, it leaves me with anxiety. I'm concerned that developments will be approved more quickly, of course, but what is going to be done alongside of a development approval? Is the minister going to ensure that the infrastructure is upgraded to allow for emergency connectivity, allow for more successful commutes in and out of the community?

[3:00 p.m.]

When my community hears about this, they're going to want to know that these things are being enshrined as part of the minister's decision-making process. It's no joke. Earlier this year or last year, there were changes to the Municipal Government Act, again with respect to some consolidation of power in the minister's office. The minister's office and the government reassured me at the time that the municipality would still be permitted to undergo their planning exercises because they believed it was important work, and believed in the process that the municipality had to ensure that appropriate, thoughtful development of communities took place.

With this bill, it has me concerned. Is that still the case? The Premier did say in Question Period today that the buck stops with the Province. Does that mean every time I have a concern about a development, that I've got to go the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing? If that's the case, then fine. Obviously, the government is accepting that responsibility and the critiques that go along with it. No problem there.

On behalf of my constituents - 16,000 people evacuated this Summer - the minister needs to provide the community with some reassurances that the expedition of approvals that we're talking about here for much needed housing stock will be done in a thoughtful way that contemplates and ensures that emergency services are available, emergency access routes and access routes in general are available. Without that reassurance, folks from my community are going to have a big problem with this type of activity.

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

The honourable Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing.

JOHN LOHR: Thank you for all your comments. I know my staff listen. You've raised many issues about the bill. Maybe what I'll do is ask my staff to incorporate some of the answers to some of your questions in my third reading remarks.

In terms of the last couple things - because there are so many things. In terms of getting in and out of communities, what I can say is that we absolutely all recognize with the fires - what happened this Summer, and how critical that is. That will be a lens going forward. The design of those subdivisions that gave one way in, one way out, was a municipal planning decision. It was based on the idea that people in subdivisions don't want a lot of through traffic. That made sense, I guess, at that moment in time, but we all understand now that you need two ways out.

The Joint Regional Transportation Agency, which we've stood up, I'm sure will address some of those issues. We certainly see that as a lens going forward - the extraordinary importance of more than one way out, of adequate transportation. I know that we're expecting a report soon from the Joint Regional Transportation Agency. I'm not sure when, but there are a lot of different elements to public transportation and transportation corridors that will be addressed in that.

The one other thing I want to say - I guess I'll put that in the "In Case You Missed It" - when we announced the 222-unit public housing build, there were a couple of other components to that announcement. The second component, which hasn't really gotten any attention, but I think could be just as significant as building 222 units, is the commitment on our part to duplicate Regent Park in three areas of the province. We sort of know where that will be, but we have a little bit more due diligence to do on that. We will do that.

I have gone to Regent Park. I have looked at Regent Park. We are building that out. We are going to act on that. I know that's just a name for most of you who don't understand what I'm talking about, but I'll just give you the thumbnail sketch. It was a 1950s public housing disaster on very good real estate in downtown Toronto which maintained the same number of public housing units, but instead of it being 100 per cent public housing units, there are now condos, grocery stores, and market housing, so that there's still the exact same number of public housing units, but they're all new public housing units. The whole area's been redeveloped to allow an advantage of that valuable real estate. I realize that's off the topic of the bill.

I will ask my staff to look at your comments, and we can work on having an answer.

With that, Speaker, I move to close second reading on Bill No. 329.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 329.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Thank you, Speaker. That concludes government business for the day. I move the House do now rise to meet again on Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup> between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Government business will include second reading for Bill Nos. 332, 334, 337, and 339.

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The Law Amendments Committee will also meet on Monday, October 16<sup>th</sup> from noon until 6:00 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup> from the hours of 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Before we adjourn, I just want to say thank you to everyone in the Chamber for being very patient with me the last two days. I may have been here for a decade, but I know that once in a while we tend to get things mixed up. I really appreciate your patience, help, and support. Thank you.

We are now adjourned.

[The House rose at 3:10 p.m.]