



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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

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

First Session

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2023

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HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2023

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable Premier.

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Yesterday during Question Period, an unacceptable, hate-filled post on Twitter was the subject of several questions. The words and images in that tweet are hurtful, anti-Semitic, and completely without justification. There is no place for hate in our province. We must have zero tolerance and must always stand up against discrimination and hate. We must also be sure to not falsely accuse.

When I learned about the tweet, I was horrified. I reached out to community members to share my pain and immediately instructed my office to conduct an investigation to confirm who was responsible for the post and to hold them to account. We had to ensure that the correct person was held responsible.

This investigation confirmed there was unauthorized access to the account in question. We are now satisfied that we have identified the person responsible for the tweet. I can tell the House that this person is not an employee of the Province, caucus, or the PC Party. However, this person was a member of the party. I acted immediately and removed the individual from the Party.

We have also suggested to the account holder that they notify the authorities of the unauthorized access. Even though the access was unauthorized, it was made easier by the actions of a provincial employee who shared social media login information with an individual outside of government. This was also an obvious breach of trust. As a result of that breach of trust, that individual no longer works for the Province.

There is no place for hate in the PC Party or in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I want to thank the Premier for his comments and for his commitment to ensuring that hate speech is not allowed within the government, the caucus, or his party. That is something we certainly all must ensure in all of our caucuses and our parties, particularly when global and local tensions have risen as of late as a result of terrible situations.

This is a very serious situation, though. If there was a hack or a wrongful login, we all need to ensure that we have better procedures in place. We do have procedural protocol - a manual I tabled yesterday - that I believe should be followed. With a government employee having this situation happen, I do wonder if the Information and Privacy Commissioner has been notified. Also, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, the Deputy Premier, has suggested that the government itself - not just the party - was going to conduct an investigation.

We would like to hear what the results of these security folks are, the professional security folks within government, so that we can have, first, confidence in the outcome of this investigation - certainly I think that's important, that we can all have confidence in that - but also to ensure that all of us are working with the best procedures from a cybersecurity standpoint in place in every single caucus.

We would like to get more details on this investigation. We certainly would like to follow up with the Deputy Premier on his commitment to have - he said the government security folks were going to be looking at this - and would also like to know if the protocols were followed with the Information and Privacy Commissioner as well. I think these are very important questions to have answered.

THE SPEAKER: We will begin with the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Speaker, I beg leave to table the 2023 Annual Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, I beg leave to table the 2023 Annual Report of the Standing Committee on Community Services.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 707

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

Whereas today, October 18th, is Persons Day, which recognizes the 1929 Court of Appeals decision that recognized a select group of Canadian women as persons under the law; and

Whereas Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, and Henrietta Muir Edwards, known as the Famous Five, launched the legal challenge that changed the course of history for women in Canada; and

Whereas I am proud to add the member for Preston and the member for Pictou West to the list of first females in Nova Scotia that includes: Gladys Porter, the first female MLA; Maxine Cochran, who was the first Nova Scotian female Cabinet minister; and Alexa McDonough, the first woman to lead a major recognized political party;

Therefore be it resolved that all members in the Legislature honour the courage and determination of the Famous Five, and all of the extraordinary women who have blazed a trail and have fought to strengthen and expand the rights of women and join in continuing to do the work that is still needed to advance women as leaders in all aspects of society.

Speaker, I 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? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

RESOLUTION NO. 708

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

Whereas Mi'kmaw History Month began October 1st with Treaty Day, and this year's theme of Mi'kmaw Sports, Traditional Games, and Pastimes celebrates activities passed down from generation to generation in Mi'kmaw communities; and

Whereas young athletes showcased their skills in the traditional Mi'kmaw sports of archery, canoe, kayak, and lacrosse this Summer during the 2023 North American Indigenous Games, and the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Summer Games, and

Whereas Mi'kmaw elders and other community members also honour their ancestors by sharing knowledge of traditional games including waltzes, where there's an opportunity to do so;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly join me in recognizing October as Mi'kmaw History Month and take this opportunity to learn more about Mi'kmaw sports, traditional games, and pastimes by visiting the website mikmaqhistorymonth.ca.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 709

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

Whereas the sport fishing industry is a significant contributor to the Nova Scotia economy, generating \$70 million annually and many anglers volunteer their time towards conservation and industry development; and

Whereas Larry Shortt has focused his passion for sport fishing through leadership roles with the Nova Scotia Salmon Association, the Sackville Rivers Association, Fishing Fever Fly and Tackle Shop, and countless hours teaching young anglers like his grandson Dylan and great-grandson Brayden - ironically Gaelic for salmon - the importance of conservation; and

Whereas Larry has served for 30 years on the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture Inland Fisheries Advisory Committee bringing his candor, thoughtful advice, and insight to countless issues and topics;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in thanking Larry Shortt for his many contributions to sport fish management and conservation that have helped shape the sport fishery we enjoy today.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

HON. BEN JESSOME: I'd like to direct the members' attention to the Speaker's Gallery, where we're joined today by three very special guests: my mother-in-law Mary, who's visiting us from British Columbia; my wife Elizabeth; and our new baby boy Luke. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House.

The honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

HON. JILL BALSER: I request to revert back to Statements by Ministers and have my Notice of Motion read as a Ministerial Statement so colleagues across the floor can respond.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request to revert back to Statements by Ministers with unanimous consent. Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS]

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

LORELEI NICOLL: It is an honour today to rise as a woman in my place to recognize Persons Day. Ninety-four years ago, women were finally recognized as persons in Canada; however it's important to recognize that this only included some, not all women.

Today, I thank all the trailblazers like the Famous Five. They bravely fought for our rights against patriarchal systems that were never intended to include women. Although they lost many battles, they never gave up and continued until they were successful in 1929.

We know that there is much more work to be done, especially for marginalized women. I know the women who will come after us in this place will carry the torch to do more for gender equity for all women. We must not lose sight of the importance of achieving gender equity. We must not forget those who came before us to ensure that we have a voice and a place in this House of Assembly.

Thank you, Speaker. You are Nova Scotia's first female Speaker of the House of Assembly. May there be many more.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: On this day in 1929, the efforts of five courageous women - Emily Murphy, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, Nellie McClung, and Henrietta Muir Edwards - led to women being recognized as legal persons in Canada, paving the way for women to be involved in all aspects of public life. While this was a milestone and an important breakthrough, we cannot forget that these rights were not won equally.

[1:15 p.m.]

Many women in Nova Scotia, particularly Mi'kmaw women, racialized women, African Nova Scotian women, and women with disabilities, faced inequalities, discrimination, and barriers to participating in civic life that persist today.

While Canada granted personhood to women in 1929, of course, at that time Indigenous women could not vote. Segregated schools existed here in Nova Scotia. Canada maintained exclusionary immigration laws that specifically limited immigration by people who weren't white. It's clear that while women were considered persons, this personhood only extended, and not even fully, to white women.

Today in Nova Scotia, Indigenous women are overrepresented in the corrections system. Black and Indigenous children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. We are still waiting for proper statistics to be kept and data to be collected that represent the experiences of Black women. We are still fighting for justice.

The work for gender equality and equity in Nova Scotia remains unfinished. Now more than ever, we need to put in place policies and services that help achieve justice and equality for women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people. New Democrats will continue to fight for accessible child care, affordable housing, free prescription contraception, full reproductive rights, and support services for people who experience gender-based violence.

On this day, October 18, 1929, the efforts of five courageous women led to women being recognized as legal persons in Canada. I would also like to acknowledge and recognize on this day, October 18, 2023, 20 elected persons are in this House who represent their ridings and have broken barriers. In this House, we have the first woman Speaker. We have the first African Nova Scotian woman Cabinet minister, we have the first non-binary deputy speaker, and we've had the first African Nova Scotian deputy speaker.

Our NDP caucus, as you can see, is the only party sitting that has five out of six women and non-binary members who identify as themselves here. New Democrats will continue pushing for equality and equity for everyone, because when we lift each other up, we build a society where we can all thrive.

THE SPEAKER: Just for the record, I'd like to let the gallery and the members know that the honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration - that your statement will stand, and we have taken it as a Notice of Motion instead.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

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

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

BECKY DRUHAN: Can I draw attention to the East Gallery, where I'd like to welcome the honourable Mayor Carolyn Bolivar-Getson, Councillor Leitha Haysom, and Councillor Martin Bell? The amendment to the Lunenburg Common Lands Act that I will be introducing today will enable the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg to enter into conservation easement with the Nova Scotia Nature Trust. That will ensure that the land associated with common lands in Cape LaHave Island will be protected in perpetuity in a natural and undeveloped state, protecting the rare species, important habitats, and natural ecosystems, not only for today but for future generations.

Our guests today have been advocates for this amendment, and it has been my pleasure to work collaboratively with them to bring this to the floor. I welcome them to the gallery today. (Applause)

Bill No. 348 - An Act to Amend Chapter 72 of the Acts of 1897, the Lunenburg Common Lands Act. (Hon. Becky Druhan)

Bill No. 349 - An Act to Expand the Heating Rebate Program. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

Bill No. 350 - An Act to Amend Chapter 401 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, The Residential Tenancies Act Respecting Pets. (Gary Burrill)

Bill No. 351 - An Act to Amend Chapter 135 of the Acts of 1925, the Bethel Presbyterian Church, Sydney Act. (Hon. Derek Mombourquette)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: May I introduce a guest in connection with the bill I'm going to present?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

GARY BURRILL: I'd like to direct the attention of the House to the West Gallery, where we have as a guest today Dr. Hugh Chisholm. Dr. Chisholm is providing leadership

in a campaign called No Pet Left Behind, which is addressing the growing problem in residential tenancies of pet eviction. I invite the House to make Dr. Chisholm welcome.

Bill No. 352 - An Act Respecting Fair Fuel Pricing. (Gary Burrill)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KIM MASLAND: In the East Gallery today, we have joining us two of my constituents from Queens: Terry Feener and his grandson, Eric Faber. Eric is in Grade 8 and has a real interest in politics. Terry has been one of my wingmen throughout this career. I want to welcome you. Eric, the first time I came to the House, I sat in the exact same place you did. I hope someday you're sitting here. Welcome.

Bill No. 353 - An Act to Strengthen Nova Scotia's Social Safety Net. (Hon. Brendan Maguire)

Bill No. 354 - An Act Respecting Used Vehicle Sales. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 355 - An Act to Eliminate the Payment of Taxes on Tax. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 710

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

Whereas *Welfare in Canada, 2022* was published in July 2023 by Maytree and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and is a comparative analysis across all Canadian provincial and territorial jurisdictions of the total income levels from all government income transfer programs, including income assistance, refundable tax credits, child benefits, and supplemental assistance payments that are not automatic or recurring, referred to in aggregate as a total welfare income; and

Whereas the Maytree report shows that a single, non-disabled individual in Nova Scotia receives a total welfare income of \$9,493 a year - the second-lowest in this category in all of Canada and approximately half the benefits received by those in parallel circumstances in Prince Edward Island and Quebec - while a single person with a disability in Nova Scotia receives a total annual welfare income of \$12,687, also the second-lowest in this category in all of Canada, and approximately half the benefits received by those in parallel circumstances in Alberta or in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

[1:30 p.m.]

Whereas a single parent, one-child family in Nova Scotia receives a total welfare income of \$21,724, which is the least adequate income from total government transfers relative to Canada's official poverty line for this household category of any province in the country;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly directs the Standing Committee on Community Services, at the earliest possible opportunity, to summon witnesses and provide an examination of the deep, comparative disadvantage relative to the rest of Canada experienced by those who must rely on government transfers for their income in Nova Scotia.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Before I begin my Member's Statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: In the Speaker's Gallery - your Gallery - I have very important volunteer people who mean a lot to me here, and I want to acknowledge them today: Chief Jason Cochrane of the Brooklyn Volunteer Fire Department; Deputy Chief Jamie Harvey of the Windsor Fire Department; Deputy Chief Brett Tetanish from the

Brooklyn Fire Department; Captain Dave Mailman from Windsor Fire Department; Chief Chris Spencer, Summerville Fire Department; Deputy Chief Paul Maynard, Hantsport Fire Department; Captain Jason States, Hantsport Volunteer Fire Department; Jason Butler with West Hants Ground Search and Rescue; and Janet Cooper from West Hants Ground Search and Rescue. I would ask that they stand and accept the warm welcome of the House. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the Gallery.

The honourable member for Hants West.

FIRST RESPONDERS: FLOOD EFFORTS - RECOG.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, on the night of July 21 and July 22, 2023, Hants County was changed forever. A record amount of rainfall led to rising water conditions too high for waterways and roads to handle.

The host department, Brooklyn Fire, immediately put out mutual aid requests and had 31 different teams from across the province respond. For 16 hours these dedicated groups, assisted by many West Hants residents, rescued more than 100 victims from flood waters, homes, vehicles, and even trees.

I would like to commend the historic and heroic efforts of these local volunteer fire departments, ground search and rescue, Canadian Mountain Rescue Atlantic, and numerous other agencies - too many to list here today - because for nine days these volunteers tirelessly conducted a search recovery that was nothing short of extraordinary.

We will never truly know how many lives were saved that night, but we are forever grateful for their dedication and for their bravery. Without their determination, we would not have been able to provide the families and the community with closure.

I ask that all members join me in applauding these tremendous efforts. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I would like to also thank the firefighters in the Gallery for the incredible work that they've done throughout the course of the last year.

I would like to also make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to bring the attention of the House to the West Gallery, where we are joined by four women from the Tri-County Women's Centre: Trish McCourt, former Executive Director; and Shannon Watkins, who is currently occupying that role; along with the board chairpersons, Nancy d'Entremont and Tiffany Trefry. I want to congratulate these women for these leadership roles they occupy and for the incredible work they do in our community supporting girls and women, particularly those who are in need of the service.

If you could stand and receive the warm welcome of the House, I'd really appreciate it. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

TRI-COUNTY WOMEN'S CTR.: EQUITY WORK - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, today, October 18th, is Persons Day throughout Canada. It marks the day in 1929 when the historic decision to include women in the legal definition of persons was handed down by Canada's highest Court of Appeal. On Persons Day, the bravery and determination of the Famous Five are honoured. Their landmark case helped pave the way for women to participate equally in all aspects of life across Canada.

We also honour all those whose work in the years since then has expanded and strengthened those rights. The Tri-County Women's Centre, located in Yarmouth but servicing all the tri-counties, was established in 2002 through the efforts of Women for Community Economic Development in southwest Nova Scotia.

The Tri-County Women's Centre is a community-based organization that understands the need to offer direct services and programs as well as carry out community development and social advocacy as a means of achieving equality for women.

Women's economic and social independence is central to women's equality. To that end, the centre works with all people to achieve an equitable and equal world for girls, women and their families. Today and every day we thank the countless women's organizations across our province for the important work they do with the limited resources they have.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, may I make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'd like to draw the attention of the House, the members' attention, to the West Gallery, where today we have two folks from the film industry. Shelley Bibby is the business agent for IATSE 849, and Betty Belmore is a member-at-large at IATSE 849. They are here because I'm going to honour the work of IATSE in my member's statement, so please accept the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

IATSE MBRS.: VOL. EFFORTS - THANKS

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, IATSE is a union representing behind-the-scenes workers in film, television, and live performance. Its members are the backbone of our arts community here in Nova Scotia. Due to the actors and writers strikes in the U.S., film production has been affected and hundreds of crew members have been out of work for months.

IATSE members know what it is to face challenging times. When they heard of the many students at John MacNeil Elementary school in Dartmouth North who were in need of shoes and warm coats, they wanted to help. IATSE Locals 849, 680, 667 and the ADC 659 worked with SchoolsPlus and Operation Warm to purchase 300 coats and 192 pairs of shoes for students at John MacNeil Elementary.

On October 14th, the IATSE volunteers distributed them to children who otherwise would have been facing a very cold Winter. That same day, IATSE locals played the Directors Guild of Canada in a softball fundraiser for Feed Nova Scotia, reviving a tradition that had to be stopped for several years because of COVID. The game raised \$545 for Feed Nova Scotia. Unfortunately - just kidding - the Directors Guild won.

I would like to take this opportunity and ask the House to join me in thanking IATSE and its locals for working so hard for our amazing arts sector, and also for giving back to the greater community in such a generous and meaningful way.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

PILLAI, HON. RANJ: NEW YUKON PREMIER - RECOG.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, let us acknowledge the Honourable Ranj Pillai, who grew up in the constituency of Inverness, who was sworn in as Premier of the Yukon. Ranj always provided comfort in social settings. It is no surprise that his warmth towards others has brought him to the highest position of elected offices of provincial territorial governments.

His Liberal Party formed a minority government on January 14th of this year, and he has since secured a confidence and supply agreement with the NDP to ensure stability for his new government. The Yukon is in good hands. I'm certain Ranj will prove deft in his ability to navigate success for the people of the Yukon territory in a minority government, where there will be a need to find paths to agreement.

All of his friends at Judique-Creignish Consolidated School are proud of his success and happy to see him where he is today, and so are residents of the communities of Inverness and Brook Village, who remember him fondly. May he find success leading the Yukon for years to come.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

SMALL BUS. WK.: CONTRIBS. TO ECONOMY - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. They employ people from one end of the province to the other, in every little pocket of this province. They also employ people in every sector, from retail to fishing to arts and culture. It's estimated that approximately 50 per cent of jobs that are created in Nova Scotia have been created by our small businesses.

Small businesses are also at the heart of our communities. They sponsor our children's hockey jerseys and local community events. They give back to their communities through donations and volunteering. The previous government made great gains in reducing red tape and regulatory burden for our small businesses, improving Nova Scotia's grade on the CFIB report card from a D to an A in just three years. But there's still a lot more work to do.

During Small Business Week, we recognized the contributions small businesses make to our economy. I hope that all Nova Scotians will join us in thanking small business operators and entrepreneurs by supporting their local small businesses, not only during Small Business Week, but every week of the year.

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

ORGANIZERS: SKEETE MEM. RUN - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: On August 12th, my family and I joined many community members to participate in the Jonathan Skeete Memorial 3 Mile Fun Run in Whitney Pier, starting and ending at the Menelik Hall. Jonathan grew up in the Pier and was the first Black person from Cape Breton to become an RCMP officer and be given a post. He died of cancer in 1987 at the age of 35.

To honour RCMP Officer Jonathan Skeete, his fiancée Debbie Morrison and friends Blair Best and Bradley Burke began hosting the run in his memory. Thanks to all the organizers. It was a great day for everyone - plenty of laughs, food, and fun for all the kids. As anyone who knows me in my community knows, I don't run, but I walk at a very brisk pace.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

PERRY, KOREEN: BOMB BISH BAKERY - CONGRATS.

HON. JILL BALSER: Speaker, as it is Small Business Week, I would like to rise today to congratulate the owner of Bomb Bish Bakery & Café for her new business in Digby. Located at the Conway Place Plaza, Koreen Perry celebrated her grand opening on October 15, 2023. Bomb Bish Bakery offers everything from sandwiches, wraps and local coffee to smoothies and delicious sweets.

It's evident that Koreen loves what she does. Otherwise, she wouldn't have woken up at three o'clock in the morning on the grand opening to bake cupcakes for everyone who attended and given them out for free. Koreen works extremely hard. I know that her new bakery will flourish, and I hope that the support of the entire community will make this new bakery a home. I wish all the best to Koreen and her new beginnings of being a brand new owner of Bomb Bish Bakery & Café, and I encourage everyone in the surrounding area to check it out.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

FRED TILLEY: In the West Gallery we have my constituency assistant, Joann Horgan. Welcome, and thank you for everything.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DAUGHTER, EMILY: MARRIAGE - CONGRATS.

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, October is a very important month in the Tilley household. My wife and I celebrated our 30th anniversary on October 2nd; my parents celebrated their 58th anniversary on October 2nd; my daughter's birthday - turned 28 on October 10th; and just this past weekend on October 14th, we were able to celebrate her marriage to Liam Nicholson.

It was an amazing day that we got to share with friends and family. We're so proud of our daughter Emily and her new husband Liam, who treats her like a queen - and she treats him like a king. That's all a parent can ask for. I want to wish them a wonderful congratulations and a happy and prosperous life together.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

JONES, VINCENT, SR.: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise in my seat today to recognize an amazing father, grandfather, uncle, brother, community leader, and community mentor: Vincent Jones Sr.

[1:45 p.m.]

Vincent Jones is my neighbour. He lived across the street from me for many years, and we grew up knowing him as the community dad. He always looked out for all the young people, but in his professional role, he was in the schools as a support worker for African Nova Scotian students. All students respected him, as he was the football coach at St. Patrick's High. He was immersed in community, and I know so many people in Halifax are grateful to have been inspired to have been touched by such an amazing person.

Vince is a tall man of stature and as gentle as they come. He is kind, always smiles, and gives the best advice. Vince is super-approachable, and you could always be comfortable to have a chat with him about anything. If it was important to you, it was important to him, and you knew he was listening.

I want to stand today to recognize Vince for being such an amazing person. He has made an impact on my family, and I want to express my thanks for his always being a father figure in our lives. I would like all members of this House to help me thank Vincent Jones for his unwavering support. Thank you for being the voice of reason and for being there for all of us who needed a listening ear and a smile of hope.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

ORGANIZERS: CURL FOR A CAUSE - THANKS

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate organizers of Curl for a Cause, a community bonspiel in support of health services at Fishermen's Memorial Hospital.

Curl for a Cause has become a much-anticipated winter weekend filled with friendly competition, great food, and loud curling pants. This year, the event raised a remarkable \$47,000 that will be used to purchase six new beds for the Dr. Arthur H.

Patterson Centre for Restorative Care. Added to past totals, the event has now raised more than \$831,000 over a quarter century.

My most sincere thanks and appreciation to the Health Services Foundation of the South Shore and the dozens of volunteers who leave no stone uncurled for this very important cause.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

INFLATION: ACTION PLAN - ADOPT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I rise on behalf of thousands of people in my constituency of Cumberland North to add my voice to theirs calling upon this government to address the lack of affordability and the cost of inflation that is impacting so many Nova Scotians.

Six weeks ago, I developed, along with my constituents, a five-point action plan highlighting ways this government could help Nova Scotians. These suggestions included reducing tax on fuel, indexing tax brackets, and increasing the income tax basic personal exemption - also pressing the Bank of Canada to hold or reduce mortgage rates to encourage more housing construction and offer grants to those constructing a greenhouse to grow more local food.

I encourage the government to look at all and any ways to improve affordability for all Nova Scotians so they can keep a roof over their heads and food on their tables.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

PATH LEGAL: LEGAL IMPACT AWD. RECIP. - RECOG.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise today to recognize PATH Legal, recognized this Fall with the Legal Impact Award as part of the 2023 Reisman Awards for innovation and excellence in the legal space. It happened in Nashville, which is really cool. The Reisman Awards celebrate the legal industry's game changers, groundbreakers and pioneers.

Many Nova Scotians who have been incarcerated face barriers to accessing justice and advocacy that they require and deserve. The team at PATH Legal - a non-profit law firm based in Dartmouth, founded by members of Valent Legal and the Elizabeth Fry Society, and helmed by the inimitable Emma Halpern - is interrupting this cycle by supporting people who are currently incarcerated and people who have suffered from miscarriage of justice, at no cost.

Please join me in congratulating PATH Legal on this receiving this award and in recognizing their commitment to justice for all Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

HORNE, HELEN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BRIAN COMER: Speaker, I rise in my place today to recognize the late Helen Horne of Mira.

Helen was a pillar of the community who helped make our world a better place. Just last year, at the age of 94, as she was on her third battle with cancer, she handcrafted pins and raised over \$1,000 to help with Ukrainian relief efforts.

She was a talented crafter who learned to knit from her grandmother and learned to sew from her mother. Many people in the Mira area own a hat, scarf, or quilt from Helen, and she shared her kindness with the less fortunate. She also made 100 quilts for folks experiencing homelessness in CBRM.

Mrs. Horne was a member of the Ladies' Auxiliary at the Albert Bridge Fire Hall and a volunteer at the Riverside Elementary School lunch program. She loved the Mira area and would often sign cards or gifts with the famous phrase "Out on the Mira" from the song "Song for the Mira" written by the talented Allister MacGillivray.

Mrs. Horne's spirit and love for the community is something we can certainly all admire.

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

STEPHEN LEWIS FND.: 20TH ANNIV. - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: On this Persons Day, I recognize all women doing important work, and I'm honoured to rise and speak about the Stephen Lewis Foundation, which this year will celebrate the 20th anniversary of its establishment.

The mandate of the foundation is to provide care for women suffering from HIV/AIDS, to assist orphans and other children affected by AIDS, and to support grandmothers caring for orphaned children. This year, the Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign is proud to present a commemorative quilt in honour of the Foundation's anniversary. This remarkable work of textile art is the collective effort of over 300 grandmothers from across Canada and six countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

It holds the story of what becomes possible when women gather, connect, and share their resources, creativity, and compassion. The quilt will travel across Canada and be on display at various sites in HRM during mid-October.

I ask the members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking the Stephen Lewis Foundation for their 20 years of dedication to this worthy cause, and it is a beautiful quilt.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

BANGLADESH FEST.: HER. CELEB. - RECOG.

GARY BURRILL: The congratulations of the House of Assembly are extended to the Bangladesh-Canada Friendship Society on the second annual Bangladesh Festival, October 14th and 15th at the Halifax Forum.

Like the inaugural Bangladesh Festival in 2022 and the Bangladesh New Year Fair, this year's Bangladesh Festival brought a special spotlight to Bangladeshi heritage, language, culture, music, and cuisine, and hence to the distinct and unique contribution of the Bangladeshi community in Nova Scotia.

The Bangladesh Festival is a testament to the recent growth in both size and stature of the Bangladeshi community in this province. It is a warm and multi-faceted celebration of the community's development and presence in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

GUILDERTON, DR. GLENN: CHIR. AWD. - CONGRATS.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Congratulations on your election as the Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate Dr. Glenn Guilderson of Lower Sackville. On September 22, 2023, Dr. Guilderson received the Nova Scotia Chiropractor of the Year Award from the Nova Scotia College of Chiropractors during their annual general meeting.

After graduating from the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College in Toronto, Glenn returned to his hometown of Lower Sackville and opened up Back to Health Chiropractic. This was in 2021. Glenn, along with his team, including his wife, Monique, who is the clinic's osteopath, offer their patients a solution to better health without the use of medications or surgeries.

I would ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating Dr. Glenn Guilderson on receiving such a prestigious award and for his continued efforts to help his patients live a more vibrant life.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

SOMERS, RYAN: MUSIC ACHIEVEMENTS - RECOG.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise today to recognize Ryan Somers from Beechville. The legendary singer, producer and DJ Ryan Somers, also known as R\$ \$mooth, is celebrating two special anniversaries. The first is 30 years on the airwaves at CKDU, the Dalhousie University campus radio station. The second anniversary marks 25 years of hosting his own show, *Smooth Grooves*, every Sunday evening, featuring a variety of music not featured on mainstream radio stations.

Ryan always loved music, and I remember in junior high he'd be onstage pounding the music while we'd shoot some hoops until the bell rang. He first got his start with radio after discovering as a student he would volunteer at CKDU radio station. The service of volunteering opened the door and led to an offer to co-host the show that paved the way for his lifelong career.

He's now a professor teaching broadcasting in the radio, television, and journalism program at NSCC. Even though his role as a host at CKDU remains a volunteer position, the benefits over the years have led to incredible career advances, recognition, and interviews with artists such as 50 Cent.

I'd like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking and congratulating R\$ \$mooth on his many accomplishments and for his perseverance over the years to highlight Black artists in our communities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

TRANS CHILDREN: RIGHTS PROTECTION - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I have a T-shirt that says "Protect Trans Kids." I bought it at Cape and Cowl Comics, which is a great small business in Sackville. The last time I wore it was at a solidarity rally with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, when protests around the country were calling for changes to Education Acts that would take away the rights and safety of trans, non-binary, and queer kids.

I have two young children who are still figuring out who they are. Cisgender, transgender, gender-diverse, gay, straight, pan - who knows? What I do know is that it is my job, and my mama bear instinct, to protect them and all kids from the things that may harm them: the sun, not getting enough fresh air or exercise, or lack of self-love, or feelings of self-worth or self-confidence. Every child, no matter who they are, deserves the rights afforded them under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They deserve school curricula that reflect them and respect them and keep them safe from ideas and people who don't believe they are worthy of love or safety.

We in this Legislature and all lawmakers must do everything in our power to protect trans kids, queer kids, Two-Spirit kids - all kids.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Victoria-The Lakes.

PERCY & CLARY: FLOWER FARM - RECOG.

HON. KEITH BAIN: Speaker, this is my first opportunity to publicly congratulate you on becoming Speaker of the House of Assembly. We know you'll do very well. Congratulations.

I rise today to recognize newcomers to the Boularderie Island Community who truly brightened many community faces this past Summer and made a lasting impression.

The former George Harrison construction property on St. James Road in Big Bras d'Or was purchased by a young couple from British Columbia named Percy and Clary. The young couple planted seeds on the property, which developed into a beautiful field of sunflowers.

Percy and Clary's dream was to develop a flower farm, as well as establish an event space by renovating the old barn on the property. With a successful crop of sunflowers, they decided to have a U-pick. Using Facebook as a communication tool, the word spread far and wide, and they were up and running, selling over 9,000 sunflowers.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in welcoming Percy and Clary to our community and wish them the best in their future endeavours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

TEAM RUBICON: FLOOD ASSISTANCE - THANKS

HON. KELLY REGAN: I'd like to thank the members of Team Rubicon for their outstanding assistance in Bedford following the floods of July 21st. For those who don't know, Team Rubicon serves communities by mobilizing veterans to continue their service, leveraging their skills and experience to help people prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and humanitarian crises.

Here in Canada, the organization got its start during and after the wildfires in Fort McMurray, Alberta, back in 2016. It uses the talents of veterans, first responders, and - to paraphrase their own words - kick-butt volunteers to help people on their worst days.

The folks from Team Rubicon came to the aid of so many people in Bedford following the floods in July. They helped clean up the mess left behind, which helped

people assess the work ahead. I can't say enough about the tremendous work they did on Union Street. So many people told us about their tremendous work.

I would like to thank them for their dedication. It turns out that some heroes don't wear capes - they wear grey T-shirts.

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

[2:00 p.m.]

VOLUNTEERS: TERRY FOX RUN - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: On September 17th, the Terry Fox Run was held in New Waterford. Every year, Bobby Aucoin and his volunteers, including the B.E.C. Interact Club, organize the run, jog, walk, and bike at your own pace. Bobby is deeply committed to the Terry Fox Foundation. He wastes no time getting the word out to the community via lawn signs, social media, and other avenues.

It is an event I try not to miss, and I took the entire family with me this year. It is an incredible community and family event that raises money and awareness for cancer research.

Bobby is passionate about raising funds for cancer research and ending this dreadful disease that impacts so many in our communities. I want to thank him and his fantastic group of volunteers. Thank you, Bobby.

THE SPEAKER: We are about to begin Orders of the Day with Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. We will just wait for the time to be two o'clock, and of course, we will finish at 2:50.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: RISKS OF OVERRIDING MUN. - REASSURE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: First, let me say that the Liberal caucus does support reducing unnecessary red tape and costs when it comes to building to ensure that we have housing being built more rapidly.

We have watched with trepidation some of the actions that have been taken by this government, particularly in light of what's happened in Ontario. Premier Doug Ford has

unilaterally overwritten local approval processes for development and given some developers preferential treatment. That has resulted in Auditor General investigations and an RCMP investigation.

I'd like to ask the Premier, considering that the actions that this government have taken seem very similar to what Premier Ford has taken: What guarantees can he give this House that a similar debacle will not happen here in Nova Scotia as a result of this?

THE PREMIER: I'll ask the member if maybe he can elaborate on how they're similar.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Where the minister was given overriding authority over local authorities when it comes to development and approvals, and where some developers were given preferential treatment. That's been listed in the AG Report. There's been public coverage of that.

That also has resulted in the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing resigning. Minister Calandra has said, "It was a process that could not be supported. It was a process that took us off of what we have been trying to do for the last number of years, which is make it easier to build homes for people, make it more affordable."

Considering what's happened in Ontario and that similar actions are being taken here to override, unilaterally, local government and create an avenue where there can be preferential treatment given to developers, can the Premier please tell us what assurances this House will have that similar situations won't happen here in Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: I think this is just an incredible reach by the Opposition, who is really kind of at odds with what to say about the incredible work we've done on the housing file. There have been incredible investments in housing.

I'll have to deduce, but I'll play along a little bit. If the member is referring to the trusted partner program that's part of the legislation that is before this House, I would just ask the member to read a little more carefully in the legislation because it is the municipalities themselves that identify those trusted partners.

I'd just ask the member to speak to the issue at hand. The issue at hand is we need housing in this province. This government is taking bold action. The only thing we are concerned about is housing for Nova Scotians. The Opposition can focus on character attacks. They can take the tactic they want. We're focused on Nova Scotians.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Asking for assurances is not a character attack. Asking for proper process is not a character attack. It is our obligation to do that in this Chamber.

We actually have listened to municipal governments and councillors who've said that this bill is an autocratic intrusion, a shoddily conceived backroom deal, a step back in the relationship for the province and the municipalities, and should be cause for concern for everybody.

We know that the Premier does have close ties to the development community. A developer, who is one of our best in Nova Scotia - incredible - is the Chair of the Premier's transition team, and I believe still plays a very important role in the Premier's government. Can the Premier please tell us if that individual who led his transition team, who still plays a role in the government, was the person who advised him to move forward with this policy?

THE PREMIER: It's incredible to see, session after session, the members of the Opposition party attack Nova Scotians who stand up for their communities and stand up for this province. They can go after my character because they can't really come in on the policies. They can attack my character. They can . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. We're really going to try hard to respect one another in this House. When someone's speaking, let's listen, please. Thank you.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: It's one thing to extend, for me, to Nova Scotians that just step up and want good things for their province, for their families, for their kids, for the future generations. We actually want that on this side, too.

I will just assure the member I know that people come to the Law Amendments Committee and they make statements. Those statements don't always translate into facts. I would just say that.

What I would say to the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition: In terms of the legislation that is before the House, we had input from the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency. We had input from the federal . . .

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

PREM.: ACCESS TO FOOD IN SCHOOLS - AGREE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Despite the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development's assertion last week that every student who needs food in schools gets food in schools, we continue to hear concerns from parents and teachers about the children without enough to eat in schools across this province. A teacher from Dartmouth told us that they do everything they can at their school to support members of the community and that teachers and support staff - this happens all

across the province - bring in food and extra clothes. They purchase hygiene supplies. This all comes out of their own pockets to the children they can identify.

Does the Premier agree with the minister that all children in Nova Scotia have access to healthy nutritious food in schools?

THE PREMIER: Of course, I remember very well the exchange last week when the Leader of the NDP used unparliamentary language and refused to apologize to this House, despite being asked five times to apologize. I remember the exchange very well, when the Leader of the NDP had to leave the Chamber because of the language she was using and her own actions. I remember that very well. I also remember what precipitated that discussion. I want to assure the member and all Nova Scotians that the work the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is doing to support teachers, to support children, and to support families is work that I'm very proud of. There's more work to be done, of course, but I want to thank the minister and all those teachers who step up for students and for Nova Scotians. They do it in a way that is respectful, not like what we saw in this Chamber last week.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: My question to the Premier was whether he stood behind the minister's statement that I took issue with. I didn't get an answer, but I'll move to the next one.

Last year, the Auditor General reported that some students would not eat for the entire day if the school did not provide them with food. That's a quote. Right now, if the child is going hungry at school, they must put up their hand and ask for food - a barrier that we know prevents many hungry children from seeking help and underscores the importance of a universal program. This makes it abundantly clear that not all children who need food are getting it.

Does the Premier believe that hungry children should have to ask for food in school?

THE PREMIER: In respect of the first part, I want to assure the member that not only do I stand behind the minister, I also stand beside the minister. Were it necessary, I would stand in front of the minister to protect her and her department against the types of allegations that people sometimes make. The minister and the department are doing incredible work to support students. There is more work to be done. Our teachers in this province go above and beyond every single day to support students. I'm not aware of any teacher or school that would have a policy that would ask a student to put up their hand and ask for food. If that's a situation happening in classrooms, then that is not acceptable.

What I would say I'm aware of is breakfast programs across this province. I'm aware of students being supported every day by teachers. Those are the teachers whom I stand with.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The Premier stands with the minister, but does he believe that children in Nova Scotia who need access to healthy food get it? Food bank usage across the province is rising, up 27 per cent this year alone. One-third of Nova Scotians accessing food supports are children - one-third. The impact of this is seen daily in our schools. Another teacher told us simply that they are seeing more and more students throughout the entire school population come to school hungry. Can the Premier tell us when every child who needs food in school will actually get it?

THE PREMIER: We know the struggles Nova Scotian, Canadians, and people around the world are feeling. This is putting incredible pressures on families. That's why, as a government, we have worked to increase the Nova Scotia Child Benefit. We have done that in each of our last two budgets - increased the Child Benefit. That's why we're working to reduce the child care fees. That's why we're working to enhance the supports available to foster families. That's why we're investing in new children's tax credits for families. Of course there is more work to be done. Nobody in this House, nobody in any community, no Nova Scotian I know would be satisfied with a child being hungry. That's not something that we accept. We work to do the best we can and will continue to do that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

MAH: DEVELOPER IN PREMIER'S OFFICE - INFORM

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I think the House would be better served when the Premier realizes that these debates in the Chamber aren't about him when it comes to housing. They are about the people who cannot find a place to live in this province. They are about the folks who are experiencing the fact that housing starts are down 50 per cent under this Premier's watch, that inflation is higher in this province than anywhere else in the country, and where rent increases are higher here than anywhere else, and the government's response is to take unilateral control over housing development in this city.

We have a right to question whether there are going to be conflicts of interest there, because we have seen, and I will table this, times when there has been preferential treatment given to friends and allies of the Premier. We have a developer who is very involved in the Premier's office.

THE SPEAKER: Question.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Can the Premier please tell us what the involvement of that individual is and if they are directing policy when it comes to housing?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: It is a pleasure to stand on behalf of my colleague and just highlight some of the investments that we have made since taking over government. I mean, \$83 million for 222 new units in the province, 80 accessible units serving 522

people. This is an investment that has not been seen in this province for over 30 years. Our government is taking bold actions, that includes in HRM, but we are going to represent all of Nova Scotia.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I am very concerned by this. We have legitimate questions based on what happened in Ontario, where there is an RCMP investigation, an Auditor General investigation in relation to the province there overruling municipal, local processes. We have seen favouritism by this government when it comes to friends and allies. We have a developer who, again, is an incredible person, an incredible developer, has done work in this province that every member of this Chamber should be proud of, but the question is: Is there a developer who could potentially benefit from directing this level of policy from the Province? The fact that the Premier is not answering this - I find that very concerning. Could the Premier please tell this House who is directing this policy and is there any particular individual from his transition team who is doing so?

TORY RUSHTON: I will carry on with some more highlights to make sure Nova Scotians do get into homes. Another \$13 million that we have invested to address a wait-list - a wait-list of people who have been applying for home repairs for many years. We inherited this list and \$13 million were invested in those people.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on a new question.

MAH: CONFLICT OF INTEREST RISKS - REASSURE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: These are simple questions that should be very simple to answer. If there is not a conflict of interest there when it comes to individuals directing government policy who could potentially benefit from them, we should get a very direct answer in this Chamber. I will give the Premier one more chance to answer that simple question: Does he believe there is anybody directing policy on this that could be in conflict of interest?

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Yes, absolutely there is consultation taking place and the consultation is with Nova Scotians who need their houses repaired. A \$7 million increase in Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program projects that we are going to be putting into place for the residents of Nova Scotia. We are hearing from residents that we need to invest to assist them in getting affordable housing, in getting repairs done on their needed housing, and moving this province forward.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, we support reducing costs to building and we support reducing unnecessary red tape, but we want this to be a fair process that is competitive and that results in houses actually being built faster and more affordably for

Nova Scotians. We have seen in Ontario when this sort of overreach was brought in, it did not result in that. It resulted in the minister resigning, saying it wasn't working. It resulted in an RCMP investigation and an Auditor General investigation.

At least can we please have some assurances from this government that there are going to be processes in place that will prevent the same thing from happening here in Nova Scotia?

[2:15 p.m.]

TORY RUSHTON: Obviously, we are certainly interested in investing in Nova Scotians. The \$300 million that we have invested is . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Minister of Natural Resources has the floor.

TORY RUSHTON: Thank you very much, Speaker. As I was saying, \$300 million that we're investing into the housing stock - we are taking bold initiatives as a government to ensure the housing developments do take place. We will carry on and do what we need to do as a government that was elected to stand for the people who need housing developments here in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on a new question.

SNS: RENOVICTIONS - PREVENT

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Here's why we're asking these questions, Speaker. Yesterday, I received a letter from a desperate senior couple in Cape Breton. They are over 70 years old with health issues, and they are being renovicted from their home on October 31st, just two weeks from now.

For three years, the couple has been on a wait-list for public housing. Despite their emergency circumstances, they have been told there are 20 to 30 people ahead of them, and the wait could be 10 to 15 years before they are placed in a home. This couple will be experiencing homelessness in two weeks. There are policies this government can put in place to make sure these sorts of renovictions to our most vulnerable seniors don't happen.

My question to the Premier is: Will the Premier please prevent this from happening?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Although I don't know the specifics of that case, I wouldn't be able to speak to them publicly. However, without knowing the entire details, what I would say to the member is to encourage the tenants involved to file an application to the Residential Tenancies program. Just because a Nova Scotian is served with an

eviction notice, for whatever the reason, doesn't mean they are being evicted. They have every right to apply to the board to have that heard and a decision made.

We passed protections in this Legislature in my first sitting as minister pertaining to renovictions. That's just one element that we're continuously looking at to strengthen the program.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, this couple's letter was quite moving. They suggested that had they been - and this is their words - "stray animals on the street," they would be able to find a place to live because the SPCA would take them.

I know that is hyperbolic, but this is the sentiment that many people are feeling in Nova Scotia - that they have no place to go and are ending up in tents. These aren't just people you would normally expect - people who are dealing with addictions and severe mental health issues. These are seniors and working people who are finding themselves in this situation.

The government can also bring in policies that can prevent situations like this from happening to vulnerable people who are experiencing homelessness - not because of any fault of their own, but because they are experiencing renovictions.

My question to the minister is: Will the minister please stand in this House today and ensure that this does not happen to this couple?

COLTON LEBLANC: We all know as members in this House of the housing crisis and the challenges that Nova Scotians are facing. That's why we are working every single day as a government to meet the needs of Nova Scotians. The announcements and the investments that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has done over the last number of weeks certainly demonstrate that.

We understand that Nova Scotians facing an eviction notice because of renovations can cause some concern and distress for them. That's why I encourage all Nova Scotians, if they are served with a notice and they do not agree with it, to again apply to the Residential Tenancies program - a process that does work.

We will continue working every single day under the leadership of this Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to move the housing file in the right direction.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: HEALTH CARE FOR UNHOUSED - ADDRESS

SUSAN LEBLANC: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Last week, it was reported that three-quarters of the rooms on the health care floor of The Bridge shelter are sitting vacant. Meanwhile there are hundreds of people experiencing chronic homelessness in Halifax, many of them with serious health issues. We know there are staffing issues at The Bridge and across the whole health care system, but how is it possible that this government is allowing shelter beds to sit empty in the middle of a housing crisis?

HON MICHELLE THOMPSON: We are in a partnership with the Department of Community Services with The Bridge to support individuals experiencing homelessness and who may need health care. Our portion of The Bridge is to look at those folks who need a space to get community-based health care. We look at the ability to prescribe periods of time where people can be sheltered to get that care and make sure it's safe for both the individual receiving care, as well as the person who is delivering care. We continue to work with our partners in HRM to make sure that those spots for people requiring health care at The Bridge are used appropriately.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That sounds excellent. That sounds great. That's exactly what we thought that that part of The Bridge shelter was for, and yet three-quarters of it is sitting empty. Meanwhile, there are people on the streets with severe health problems - people who are being released from emergency departments out into homelessness again, instead of to that area.

A spokesperson from the Nova Scotia Health Authority stated that on any given day, there are multiple homeless community members who are identified as people who would benefit from intake on this floor. I can table that. Despite this fact, there are already more names on the floor's wait-list than there are rooms. People awaiting surgery, people using wheelchairs are living rough in this province. How does the minister plan for all these people to be safely and appropriately housed before Winter?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I said, we work across departments to find solutions for individuals based on their circumstances. The Bridge is used for people who require short-term care in community, who are experiencing homelessness. Unfortunately, it is not a long-term housing situation for them, but we do work with our allied health care professionals, such as social workers and other individuals in the health care system, to support transition to community for those who need additional support.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

FTB: RES. TENANCY ENFORCEMENT UNIT - IMPLEMENT

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, I'd like to read and table a request that was sent to me from individuals in the Cobequid Ballfield Gated Community: We have a

lovely 74-year-old woman at an encampment with two small dogs. She's looking for a place to call home. Her budget is \$1,800 a month, everything included. Any leads would be appreciated.

The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board recently held a press conference where he proudly touted a \$116 million surplus - taxpayers' money. Looking back, does the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board think that this money would have been better spent on resources and housing for Nova Scotians? What does he say to the 74-year-old woman and others like her who are in desperate need of warm, affordable, safe housing?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I'd like to empathize with anyone in this province who's having difficulty right now making ends meet, including this woman. When people read in the paper that all of a sudden there's a surplus, they're wondering, Well, why did they save that money?

Well, the truth is, we don't know until well after the end of the year, and in this case that was - what the member was speaking about was in the Summertime, back in August, I believe it was, when we closed the books on the last fiscal year. Only then did we know - shortly before that did we know - that we were actually going into a surplus. Before that, we were actually going into a deficit, because we'd been spending more money on things like housing to help people like the individual whose situation the member has raised today.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Last Spring, the Carr family - who have two young children and live in Sackville - were wrongly evicted from their three-bedroom apartment, where they were paying \$1,000 a month. The family is being evicted so that the landlord's sister can move into the duplex. But the Residential Tenancy Act only allows a landlord to turn out a tenant for an immediate family member to move in. As adults, immediate family members have to be a dependant, not a sibling.

This was not caught at the hearing for the Carr family. The simple mistake in Small Claims Court resulted in the Carr family having five weeks to find a new home. By the time the case can be appealed, they'll be homeless. My question is to the minister responsible for the Residential Tenancy Act: In the absence of a Residential Tenancy Enforcement Unit, what tools are in place to help Nova Scotians like the Carr family, and when will they implement a Residential Tenancy Enforcement Unit?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: To the member's question, family members are limited to a landlord's spouse, a child of the landlord or the landlord's spouse, or a parent or legal guardian of the landlord or landlord's spouse. So what I'd say again to the member and all Nova Scotians is that the program does work.

If a landlord serves a tenant with an eviction notice, it does not mean that they are being evicted. In fact, when the tenant applies to the board, it stops the clock on that

hearing notice until such time as there is actually a hearing heard and a decision made by the tenancy officer. I can't speak to that particular case, but again, I encourage all members to support their constituents. We have a number of guides and resources through the department that we can help distribute to all MLA offices and ensure that we're getting the message out on the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

SLTC: SENIORS CARE GRANT - BACKDATE

FRED TILLEY: This government continues to tout the Seniors Care Grant as one of the pillars to addressing poverty in our community. Many seniors are benefiting from this program, which is wonderful. In our office, we see lots of people who benefit from the Seniors Care Grant.

Unfortunately, there are a number this year who qualified last year, but due to the fact that they received a slight increase in their federal pensions now no longer qualify for the Seniors Care Grant. These individuals are struggling to pay their bills, struggling to pay for heat, prescriptions, and food.

I'm sure it's an oversight, but my question to the minister is: Will this government commit to increasing the threshold of the Seniors Care Grant, and will they backdate it this year so that those who have been denied can now qualify?

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: We're always mindful that when the federal government makes changes, it may impact on some of the decisions that we are making. That's why there are a number of programs targeting seniors in the province of Nova Scotia, one of which was if you are receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement, you're going to get a rebate on your HST. That helps mitigate something that the federal government implemented.

The Seniors Care Grant in the first year was \$500. This year it's \$750. We also have the Heating Assistance Rebate Program, as well as the Property Tax Rebate for Seniors. We are always looking for new ways to help with the affordability crisis for our seniors, and we will continue to do so, along with what the federal government is doing as well.

FRED TILLEY: Many of these seniors are in a worse-off position by receiving their slight increase from the federal CPP. They might have got \$300. If you have two people in a household, \$600. They're losing out on \$750. It's really tough right now for seniors to survive.

We have seniors who are getting the Guaranteed Income Supplement, which is a form of social assistance, which tells you how bad they're struggling. They're no longer

eligible. It's a simple fix. Will this government commit to increasing the threshold of the Seniors Care Grant so that the seniors can be looked after and thrive in our community?

BARBARA ADAMS: We recognize that there are unprecedented pressures on our seniors across this province. Of course, we know that there are other challenges and other opportunities to help. There have been changes to the housing grants in terms of being able to make renovations.

[2:30 p.m.]

One of the things that we are bringing forward is the Capable program in the province of Nova Scotia. That was brought forward by a Liberal member across the aisle. That is going to bring an RN, as well as an occupational therapist, into the home for 10 visits, as well as a home renovator. This is directly going to impact low-income seniors in the province, and we're going to continue to look at more targeted investments to help our most vulnerable.

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

DAE: STUDENT HOUSING STRATEGY - ADDRESS

LORELEI NICOLL: As we know, students are coming to Nova Scotia for the promised good education from our incredible institutions, but students are facing incredible challenges and barriers in their ability to get this education. The biggest barrier is housing. Students are concerned about the long-awaited student housing strategy, which would support over 55,000 students as housing pressures continue to grow. This government's answer to those students was a student housing strategy.

We know that international university students are deciding to stay here after university, so is the student housing strategy actually in existence - one that could actually result in population growth for this province?

HON. BRIAN WONG: Students are at the forefront of absolutely everything that we do. We do realize that students are facing challenging times when looking for housing. As a government, Speaker, we didn't wait. We announced three Nova Scotia Community College housing projects right off the bat. We have one right across the harbour at our NSCC Ivany Campus. We have another one at Akerley Campus and if I look in a long, straight line, I see the one up at Pictou Campus.

We won't wait. We'll continue to do things. We are a government of action.

LORELEI NICOLL: I acknowledge the growth or the housing for our community colleges but university and student groups have been waiting for this student housing plan for two years, yet the government is not supporting students who are forced to drop out,

live in tents or couch-surf. The answer to the crisis was a student housing strategy. Now it seems to be lost or perhaps it never existed.

My question to the Minister of Advanced Education is: If the strategy exists, why won't the government do the right thing, release it for the students who need the housing, and make this public strategy public? Put it on a website, as you always say.

BRIAN WONG: I agree with the member opposite that the problem is not the strategy, the problem is housing. That's why we continue to make investments.

I am very proud of the historic investments that this government has made in housing, in health care and will continue to make. We'll continue to make investments, such as the \$5 million that we invested in the Tartan Downs project geared towards student housing.

We will continue to make investments, like the \$3 million we gave to the Atlantic School of Theology for their student housing projects. We'll continue to invest in short-term solutions, like Happipad, so that students and nurses and seniors can find housing where they need it. We'll continue to invest and we do need to do more and we will do more.

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

SNS: HARP CUTS - EXPLAIN

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Service Nova Scotia. Too many people in Cape Breton are facing a very difficult Winter. A 2019 report found that Nova Scotia had one of the highest proportions of families living in energy poverty in the country but this government has slashed the Heating Assistance Rebate Program so that even fewer people in Cape Breton will get even less.

My question to the minister is: Why is this government leaving people in Cape Breton in the cold?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, we are all very aware of the tough times Nova Scotians are facing from one end of the province to the other. That's why we are committed, as a government, to strive every single day to meet the needs of Nova Scotians. We know there is a lot more work ahead of us and we will continue to do that.

With respect to the Heating Assistance Rebate Program, that's more than \$82 million for this year alone in the Heating Assistance Rebate Program. No government had touched this program for many years in recent history. If you look at the original program, about 49,000 eligible households could apply. I hear the member say I am a liar but I'll disagree on that.

Furthermore, now this year's program, for which we've increased the rebate - we've also increased the thresholds. In the original program there were 49,000 eligible applicants; this year, there are 130,000 eligible applicants.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I did not hear any explanation as to why this program was slashed and what is going to happen to people this Winter. Many people in Cape Breton will face the difficult choice this Winter of paying their heating bill or putting food on the table.

Earlier this month, we learned that so far this year, Nova Scotia Power has disconnected 2,825 residential customers from power because they were not able to pay their bills, but somehow the minister thinks that people deserve \$400 less this year to pay their heat bill. How is the minister comfortable with this?

COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, for the record, in fact we tripled the rebate that the NDP slashed in 2009.

We know there is a lot more work ahead. We know there are several initiatives our government has implemented: the Seniors Care Grant that our government brought in, which has further expanded to \$750; the Heating Assistance Rebate Program; the Property Tax Rebate for Seniors; and, under the leadership of my honourable colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables, \$140 million in energy efficiency programs to support Nova Scotians to decrease their reliance on oil, therefore decreasing reliance on electricity and other sources and meaning more money in their pockets every month.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DED: PEGGYS COVE ZONING - INTERVENE

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, Peggys Cove is an iconic Nova Scotia landmark. The Peggys Cove Commission has recently made a zoning decision that has their community in an uproar. The residents of the community have asked the Minister of Economic Development to please intervene in the situation and set things right. My question for the Minister of Economic Development, who has indicated they are not willing to intervene in the situation: Why won't they intervene, and will they intervene?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I will take a few of my precious seconds to welcome the honourable member back to the Chamber after a Summer of some health problems and their return to being my critic. I'm glad you can take a licking and keep on kicking. (Laughter) I do mean that genuinely.

The situation is that the commission was set up to be independent of government. It is absolutely essential that I do not overreach and put my thumb in that pie. We are at the

final stages of a bylaw review that has had much community consultation, and I await the commission's report on that review.

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, I'm just wondering how the minister knew my middle name was Timex.

Given the fact that the minister won't intervene and doesn't want to overreach, we're currently doing that. This government is currently doing that in HRM with their current bill, so the fact that - it's intervene when you want to, don't intervene when you don't want to.

Given the fact that the minister won't intervene, my question to the minister is: Will the minister meet with the concerned citizens of Peggys Cove and at least hear their side of the story so she can fully understand the situation and make her own decisions?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: The process that has been undertaken at Peggys Cove has extended far longer than anyone would wish. It's a reflection of the fact that the legislation that exists today is antiquated. It's far out of date. We will get to the point of updating that legislation once the bylaw review is finished.

In government, we are not enabled to ignore the legislation that exists. I would, as regards the comparison to our bill regarding housing development in Halifax - we are submitting legislation on that front. We are respecting current legislation for Peggys Cove.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

MAH: COLLABORATIVE HOUSING PLAN - PRIORITIZE

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, in the two years since this government took office, the housing situation in Nova Scotia has mushroomed into a full-blown crisis. A record number of young adults cannot afford to be homeowners. I'll table that. Students coming here for post-secondary education cannot find affordable places to live, and some are even living in their cars. I'll table that. We have higher rental prices than Ontario. I'll table that. Mortgage payments are skyrocketing. I'll table that. We have a record number of seniors on the housing wait-list. I'll table that. In fact, as we heard last week, some are resorting to living in tents.

This government's solution to the worsening housing crisis? A we-know-best approach, railroading other levels of government, ignoring recommendations of the housing panel, taking power away from people on the ground. To the Premier: Why doesn't this government value solutions that come from outside the Cabinet?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: As I highlighted earlier, we are taking bold actions. This is a situation that we're seeing all across our whole country. We are investing into these.

We certainly see and have sympathy for all those who are in need. We have programs for those first-time home buyers. We've invested \$300 million and we'll continue to invest where we can.

KELLY REGAN: Nova Scotians need more than sympathy. We'll say it over and over again: They're struggling to find and maintain affordable housing. Vacancy rates are at their lowest in more than two decades. Rent has increased by some of the highest rates in the country. Homelessness has doubled in the last year alone. We were promised a housing strategy in the Spring. It's nowhere to be found. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing or whoever is filling in for him: When will a full-fledged, collaborative housing plan be a priority of this government?

TORY RUSHTON: Just a few of those investments out of the \$300 million: 222 new public housing units; improvement to the Down Payment Assistance Program so we have an opportunity; a strategic asset management initiative to include three pilots to add density where public housing is already in existence; common-sense approvals that have shaved off six to nine months from the process; allowing digital submissions of planning documents; land for housing programs - 25 properties for opportunities; through affordable housing development programs, invested \$43 million. These are just a few of the initiatives that we have taken in this government.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

FTB: HST ON FUEL TAX - REMOVE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, we're hearing a lot about housing today. The bottom line is people just are simply having a very difficult time keeping a roof over their heads and being able to put food on their tables. One of the things that we've seen - the biggest increase is, of course, in the price of fuel, mostly driven by inflation. Of course, high fuel prices increase the price of food and just about everything else.

The price of fuel in this province includes provincial motive fuel tax, federal excise tax, and carbon tax. Nova Scotians are paying tax on tax - 15 per cent HST. This government has received a windfall of surpluses from this high price of fuel.

Can the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board confirm the amount of tax that he has collected from tax on tax, specifically the provincial portion of HST for fiscal year 2022-23?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, there is no windfall. The fuel tax is a volumetric tax. As the price of fuel goes up, we're not making any more money off it. However - and we noted this last week - the federal government is putting a carbon tax on fuel trying to get people to stop buying it. The fact is people are driving more. If you look at July this year compared to July last year, there's even more volume of fuel sold. If you look

on a per capita basis, it's not due to tourism, and it's not due to more people living in the province. A couple of points here: One is that the carbon tax is not going to discourage people from driving, because they have no other choice; and two, the member's assertion that the fuel tax is something we're getting a windfall from is not true.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I'm quite surprised by the minister's response and would encourage him to speak to the people in his department to actually look at those numbers a little more closely. The provincial motive fuel tax is 15.5 cents per litre, but HST is 15 per cent on top of the entire price of fuel. Also, we hear a lot about the carbon tax, but under the previous government, it was 1 cent per litre, and under this government, it's over 8 cents per litre. People are paying 15 per cent on top of that. The government has absolutely had increased revenues from this. Tax on tax is fundamentally wrong.

[2:45 p.m.]

I want to ask the minister again: Will he commit to removing this unfair tax? HST, tax on tax. It's unfair to Nova Scotians.

ALLAN MACMASTER: When we look at HST, and if the member is suggesting we're getting a windfall in HST due to fuel sales - I had this discussion with my staff at the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. You have to look at the broader economy, because we're getting HST revenues from all kinds of sources, not just sales of gasoline or diesel.

Again, there is no windfall there. We've been using these revenues to help Nova Scotians. Yes, we've been spending money to fix the health care system, to help people with housing, to help people deal with extreme weather events we've seen in this province, to help people with targeted affordability supports - all things that we've been hearing during this very Question Period that we should be investing in.

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

EMO: EMERGENCY ALERT - ADDRESS

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister responsible for Emergency Management. Following July's devastating floods, the Premier committed to investigating the decentralization of our emergency alert process. The Premier stated that stakeholder meetings to discuss this would be happening in a matter of weeks. That was over two months ago. Lives are at stake without a properly functioning emergency alert system. Will the government act now to address this?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Coming from the emergency sector before being elected, it's an important tool that we do have in the province. I certainly will take this

concern back to the minister upon his return and have that conversation to make sure we have progress on it.

KENDRA COOMBES: I thank the minister, and I look forward to hearing the minister's answer later. During the recent Tantallon wildfire, it only took 11 minutes from the first 911 call to the RCMP to begin evacuating the area. However, an emergency alert wouldn't be sent for well over another hour. The HRM's *Upper Tantallon Wildfire Lessons Learned* report noted that: "The breakdown in communication and unclear accountability between HRM and the province had a noticeable and detrimental impact on the situation . . ." and "Emergency alerts were not disseminated promptly . . .".

How will the minister ensure this doesn't happen again?

TORY RUSHTON: Certainly, when an emergency does arise, we want to make sure that the information gets shared in a timely manner. I've heard the minister say this time and time again. I know that there's consultation that has taken place and is ongoing right now, and I think it's fair to say that Nova Scotia needs a break. In those breaks, we need to have these conversations that we can respond to each emergency as they come to us in a better, meaningful way and learn from our experiences and move forward. I look forward to speaking to the minister upon his return.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West, who is attending virtually.

MAH: DEVELOPMENT PROCESS - EXPLAIN

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: We know that this province and the HRM need more development. Supply is the issue, but now the entire decision-making process for development in the HRM rests solely in the Office of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Premier. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was quoted as saying that he will rarely use his powers, which I have tabled through email.

My question to the minister is: Why give himself new powers that are supposed to expedite housing if he is not going to use them?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: There are bold initiatives that we are taking. We know that we need more housing stock in Nova Scotia. As a government, we recognize that. It's something that's being asked for by Opposition. We are going to utilize the tools that we have in our hand, and I know there's a bill on the table that is going to be debated later on. We'll have ample opportunity to answer these questions.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I hope we get more real answers next time.

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Go ahead.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I want to bring your attention to the Premier's comments directed towards me during Question Period, which I do believe are a breach or decorum. The Premier dared me to say what I was saying outside of the Chamber. That's a breach of decorum because it's insinuating that I am misleading the House with my line of questioning. Also, more nefariously, it is an inherent threat that I am going to get sued if I walk out of this Chamber and say something. Why else would the Premier say that: "I dare you to say it outside the Chamber"? Because I lose my legal protection when I do that.

I've asked you to take a look at this. This is the second time the Premier has said that to me specifically. We also want to point out that this is a government that has also put a censorship motion over a member because they didn't like what they were saying.

I am asking serious questions here. They deserve to be taken seriously with answers. I didn't get any answers today. I not only have a right to ask those questions without being told I am misleading the House or insinuating that without threat of legal action.

I have a moral obligation to ask these questions, especially as I laid out in Question Period what is happening in Ontario, especially in rural - when you consider what counsellors are saying in relation to the current government's actions.

Again, I am only asking questions, and there were no answers given today. Instead, what I was given was a potential threat of legal action if I say what I am saying in the Chamber outside of it. I do not think that's right. I think it's a breach of decorum, and I'd like a ruling on it, please.

THE SPEAKER: I thank the member for that. I will be perfectly honest: I knew there was something going back and forth, but I did not hear any comments from either one. Because of that, I will make the ruling that it's out of order. What I will say is I do see a lot of individuals going back and forth. I can't always hear, that's for certain. Therefore, as we know, the rules here are, What do I hear? Maybe we had best just speak when it is our turn to speak.

ZACH CHURCHILL: There is an ambient microphone in the House. It's above us, coming out of this light fixture. Sometimes that ambient mic does pick up things that are

said that aren't on the record. I don't know if it's picked up the comments of the Premier or me. I would ask if you could potentially review Hansard records because I have seen Hansard records where, based on the ambient mic, comments that have not been on the record have been placed in Hansard. I would ask you to review the Hansard record from today.

THE PREMIER: Sure. I'll save you the trouble, Speaker. What I would say is that words absolutely matter, and in this Chamber we do have privilege. We can say whatever we want about any member here or any member of the community. Oftentimes the Opposition takes that privilege and runs with it.

With privileges come responsibility. I understand that, and I encourage the members opposite to think about that a little bit, too. In the case of this situation right here, I'll retract any comments I made and we can move forward.

THE SPEAKER: I thank the Premier for that, and I thank you for the information that was given to me with regards to the mic that is above us. I had no idea, so thank you - a little bit of information for me.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, during Question Period, the minister responsible for Service Nova Scotia used the word "liar" in reference to a back and forth with the member for Bedford. I know that the word "liar" has been ruled unparliamentary in the past. When she didn't actually use the word, he referenced that she was implying he was a liar, which she never said, so I'd ask him to retract his comments.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for that. The honourable Minister for Service Nova Scotia was indicating that he thought he was called a liar when we know that the member for Bedford Basin had said "Not true," so I am just going to move forward from here.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Opposition House Leader.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Would you please call Bill No. 324.

Bill No. 324 - Rental Supplements Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: With your permission, just a one-minute recess so I can confer with the Speaker to make sure I have the bill numbers correct. I'm not seeing them on my sheet here.

THE SPEAKER: We will take a couple of minutes.

[2:56 p.m. The House recessed.]

[2:57 The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Thank you for giving me a moment to get organized. I'm honoured to talk about this bill for a few minutes, and the importance of what the rent supplement program meant across the province. I speak now, more so in a position - it's something that we used a lot in the CBRM, but now what we're seeing in the CBRM is very similar to what is happening in the HRM, when it comes to the fact that we've seen explosive population growth.

Which has been wonderful for our community - a community that has been in decline - CBRM has been, at times, based on a rich industrial history. Now we're seeing a real transition and a real resurgence of energy and economic activity and quality of life at home. These programs have become even more important in the CBRM. I know we're going to be talking a lot about municipalities as we move forward through the bills, which is going to be a very interesting debate when the time comes.

This bill, particularly for us - we need to be doing whatever we can to provide supports for Nova Scotians that are looking to put a roof over their head. A lot of the debate in the Legislature has been around exactly this: housing and affordability and the cost of living for people. For us, when we see changes to the Rental Supplements Act that actually make it harder for families to access, it's a huge concern for us. I have a number of points that I'm going to make when it comes to this bill.

The government cut rent supplements from 50 per cent to 30 per cent quietly in January, and we started to hear that more from our constituents, that they're getting denied for rent supplements due to this government's decision. There's been a lot of back and forth on this about this change, and the government will defend it.

Ultimately - and I'm sure the other MLAs on the Island and across the province are getting the same calls that I'm getting - people who used to qualify for this don't any more.

And not only do they not qualify for this, but they now live in a province with the highest inflation in Canada. They live in a province with the highest rent increases in Canada. They're seeing - as we've talked about and we've had in Question Period - cuts to certain programs, or ineligibility of certain programs, based on a decision around the CPP, or our decision around this government to scale back on those programs. That's something that I remember talking about in the House last year, saying that the government made the decision to up the limits of some of these programs to help people based on the cost. I said that they should have kept them there and they didn't.

Now we're in a situation where in opposition, we want to be bringing forward bills that are tangible and can help everyday Nova Scotians with the costs of everything, really - and this is one that the government can change. This isn't one that's directed by a relationship with the federal government or the municipalities. This is a direct provincial program that many of the folks who are in government who were in opposition were heavily against - I'll also say members of the New Democratic Party as well - but now support.

[3:00 p.m.]

The minister has been on his feet multiple times saying that they've increased rent supplements. He's also supported the program, so why cut it back? Why cut it back knowing full well all the trends that are out there that say - we all hear it - people are struggling everywhere you look?

You can talk about any aspect of life. You can talk about your fuel, you can talk about your rent, you can talk about your mortgage, you can talk about the utility. You can talk about it all. Again, we've seen the government time and time again get into these public battles when it comes to the utility and power rates. The government lost and the power rates went up. Then we had the fight on the carbon tax. The government lost and the carbon tax came in.

We're seeing another fight with the HRM. It will be interesting to see how that ends. I feel like there's a fight coming with the CBRM - and we are going to see how that goes. That's going to cost the residents of the CBRM a lot of money. Again, this is something that the government - this is internal to them. This is a decision that they can make where they can say: Now we're going to support this bill, support rent supplements more, and we're going to look at increasing that threshold again, bringing it back to where it was to give people more opportunity, and more people eligible to be part of the program.

I have a number of statistics here that I can talk about - a lot of stuff that we've all been debating back and forth here in the Legislature. It also says that you should not spend over 50 per cent of your income on rent to get support. In this cost of living crisis, it doesn't meet the basic needs of Nova Scotians, so we really are scratching our heads around the change that was made.

We also know that we need more developments and supply across the province. People should not have to choose between rent, prescriptions, and groceries, but because of this government's decision, more Nova Scotians are finding themselves in this situation.

I feel like you're looking to say something, Speaker. No? You're good? Okay. I was waiting for that red light to come on.

I go back to what I've been saying, which is that there are a lot of tools that governments will use to support people. Governments of all stripes do that. I heard the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables and the Minister of Service Nova Scotia mention it today - around the efficiency stuff. It's important stuff. When we were in government, we expanded all of those programs that never included homes that had multiple heating sources. That's important stuff. That transcends governments - environmental policy, energy efficiency.

In our time, we had the best solar program in the country. I don't know if that's still classified as that now or not, but it was a focus for us to help people save money. We looked at HARP and all these programs. These are all programs that governments look at that have been implemented well over multiple governments and all these things, so governments ultimately make decisions on these based on the factors of the day.

Now we're into the worst cost of living crisis we've seen in a generation. We never, of course, were going to advocate to cut any of these programs, because people are really counting on them. As my colleague, the member for Northside-Westmount, indicated today in Question Period, now you're starting to see these situations pop up where one level of government tries to do something to support but it actually ends up being a net loss for people in the end.

Again, you go to this program. This is one that is 100 per cent controlled by the provincial government. It's been around for a while. It's something that, as I said, multiple governments have supported. This is kind of one where it's like, again, government can just make the change if they wanted to. They don't need to go to Ottawa, or fight with Ottawa, or fight with the community, or fight with the utility. That's what they like to do a lot. I've noticed that. It doesn't matter the political stripe.

I've seen the strategy at the municipal level, at the provincial level, and the federal level. Every time I see that strategy, where predominantly you want to fight with people, the people lose every time. Very seldom do the people win - but hey, it looks good in the newspaper. Ultimately, with every one of those fights, Nova Scotians have paid more, and they're paying more on the rent supplements now, and fewer people are qualifying. That's why this bill is so important to us. Again, I have some documents I can table too, Speaker, and I'm happy to do it.

CBC reported in August that a 69-year-old was renovicted from a \$637-a-month Halifax studio apartment at the end of August. The 69-year-old, who lives on a pension, will do so without the help of a rent supplement. He's one of hundreds of people who have been denied financial aid in recent months under the change that has been made to the joint provincial-federal program. I have the document here. I'm happy to table it in one moment, once I have it here in front of me.

The numbers provided recently to CBC News by the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing show that since the change, 324 applications have been denied for not meeting the new 50 per cent threshold. That's 324 families, and that is a concern. That's a lot of folks, right? That's a lot of families who were looking for a roof over their head that, because of that change in that program are - I'm sure they're having a journey right now. I hope everything has worked out for them okay, but when you see numbers like that, your fear is that here are 324 families who could have applied for this program who now can't. I think that number alone should say something to government - that we should look at the way this program was, and the criteria that was in place for people to be eligible.

I'll also reference as well, this October - right before the House session - the government changed requirements for seniors, but this does not go far enough. Seniors who were denied, who would now find themselves in precarious situations, have to go through the application process again. This will only open up supports to 100 new seniors, which we all know there are more than 100 low-income seniors in need of support. Again, the government will get up and they'll say: This is why we did it, it's fast-tracked, more people are actually applying, and it's a better program. The government's going to defend it. They're going to defend their decisions, like every government does. But we've seen it, and the numbers say that 324 families were denied who would have qualified under the program if it would have stayed the same.

It's challenging enough to make ends meet every day. We hear that in our offices. Our seniors are really vulnerable in this environment, based on the fact that they're making real decisions between food, gas, and prescriptions. They apply for a rent supplement. This is very real in my office, and I'm sure it is everywhere else. We've had multiple situations where, because people don't qualify anymore, they've had to move in with their children, they've had to look at various options. One has even had to move away because there was just no other option. They went through the process of applying for a rent supplement, realized that the rules changed, and then they no longer qualified. Now we're telling seniors, You've got to re-apply again - and there will be fewer opportunities for seniors to get in. I just don't understand it.

It's one of these things that can be fixed now. It's one of these things that we can help in a cost of living situation. Also, it's all interconnected when it comes to the housing in the communities. You have seniors who want to downsize for whatever circumstance. They qualify for a program, they're able to do it, so they downsize. Then their house is

available, a new family comes in. This is a big conversation in CBRM right now, because we have a lot of homes with one person living in it. It's in the hundreds.

If we could provide options to those families for affordable housing - which has been built for years. We talk about public housing and affordable housing. I do want to recognize the fact that there was an announcement around public housing, but there's been affordable housing built in communities across Nova Scotia for years. There have been a couple of really good developments in Sydney that have been built over the years. If we had more options like that - or if we had more incentives for landlords so they could build so we could actually access these rent supplements - we would be able to really open up a lot of stock when it comes to the housing market.

With a minute left, I appreciate the opportunity to get up to say a few words on this. I'll leave it at this. We put this bill forward because we've heard this from Day 1 - that the changes that the government were making to the rent supplement program were going to be problematic. We're hearing it in our offices from people who thought they qualified and they didn't qualify. Then we have a cost of living crisis that comes, and then we have a housing crisis that comes. We have a program where the criteria have changed. It's more difficult for people, the thresholds have changed, and the government should really look at this. It's one of those internal tools the government has that they can just change now, and it would help a lot of people.

To the government, I implore that you help our seniors, help people who are trying to find a place to live for them and their families. I presented some numbers. It's in the hundreds. We can help those families by changing the criteria around those rent supplement programs. I encourage the government to support this bill.

THE SPEAKER: After consultation with the Clerk - you're implying that you're moving the motion. However, you never formally moved the motion.

The honourable Opposition House Leader.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I move second reading. Is that what you're looking for, Speaker? Speaker, I now move second reading of Bill No. 324.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: I'm grateful for an opportunity to speak to the very important operation of the rent supplement program in the form of speaking to this Rent Supplement Threshold Reduction Act.

The first thing that ought to be said about this subject is that the core policy proposal that's in this bill is a proposal that's exactly right - that is, the proposal to restore the eligibility requirement for receiving a supplement from paying 50 per cent or more of a

person's income on their rent to paying 30 per cent or more of one's income, as it was before this major cutback in the program that was introduced by the government not very long ago.

We ought to really underline - as the previous speaker had pointed out - what a significant part of the population of Nova Scotia was cut out from the support of rent supplements when that change was made from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of one's income going to rent as the eligibility threshold. Government surely knew in a concrete way that this was going to be the case. One of the great difficulties is that a big component of that disenfranchised population, when they made the move from 30 per cent to 50 per cent, is in fact seniors.

It's not hard to figure out how this works. If you're getting OAS, GIS, and perhaps some CPP - or as is very common in Nova Scotia households, OAS, GIS, and perhaps some survivor's benefits of CPP - it is very likely that your rent will be right in the wheelhouse of this category: 35 per cent, 40, 45, 47 per cent of your income, exactly the category that has been completely disenfranchised by this change.

[3:15 p.m.]

We've heard quite a bit in recent days here about this recent Food Banks Canada report that gave Nova Scotia the F grade in poverty reduction. One of the things that that report, in its national review of income situations, emphasized about Nova Scotia - they said, you have to understand, when you're dealing with Nova Scotia, that this is a province that has the highest percentage of low-income seniors anywhere in the country. That's a key defining fact of the situation.

What the government did when they moved the rent supplement threshold from 30 per cent to 50 per cent was take that exact category of people and plow them right between the eyes. I think that the government's defence of this has lacked forthrightness. Over and over again, when my colleague the member for Halifax Needham, who speaks for our caucus often on issues of housing, has challenged the fairness of cutting out those whose rents take up 30 per cent to 50 per cent of their income, members of the government have responded to her as though this was some kind of generosity act on their part. In their view, as has been explained to her, what they were doing was focusing on those who were in special situations of higher need, when in reality what they had done was target many people whose financial pain was very real and simply cut them entirely out of the picture.

It's a bit of a lack of reality. It's a bit like yesterday here, when the Minister of Service Nova Scotia, speaking about the cuts to the Heating Assistance Rebate Program, said that this is part of the government's program of responsiveness to people's needs. Come on. If you're going to make a cutback, stand up straight and say you're going to make a cutback. Don't insult people's intelligence and pour salt in their wounds by masking it as though you're doing something other than what you are.

I want to pause for a second, Speaker, and acknowledge, in thinking about the rent supplement program, that the government made a positive adjustment in this program last week when they ended the discriminatory practice by which the formula used for calculating people's rent supplement eligibility was a different formula according to whether you were under 58 or over 58 years of age. This was a discriminatory practice that had the effect of costing people 58 and over, very often, in the area of \$700 or so a year. I want to acknowledge, while we're on the subject of the rent supplement program, that this change from last week on the government's part is a step forward, and that it is a good thing, a welcome thing, that the government has brought this entirely unjustified previous practice to an end.

But there are many other things about the rent supplement program that require this same kind of attention and require this same kind of fixing. For example, the major part of the formula that determined the amount you're going to be eligible for with your rent supplement is what is called the "average market rent" in the area that you live. But if you've ever heard of anything so ridiculous - the figures that determine this so-called average market rent are taken from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation numbers that are well over a year old, exactly during this period of an explosive, exponential increase in rents.

A person contacted the Halifax Chebucto constituency office just lately about this problem. He was helping a friend who wasn't particularly used to working with forms and so on apply to see if she could get a rent supplement, and he wanted to check with the staff in our office if in fact he had understood this: that the supplement that his friend could potentially get was going to be based not on her real rent - not on the real rent that people pay in the part of the city where she lives - but on what he quite correctly called the fantasy rent of outdated CMHC numbers. What is doubly scandalous, he rightly pointed out, is that anyone with the most minimal computer skills could find the up-to-date CMHC data just with two seconds of Google to look it up.

Now this is a subject that has been written about recently, I think in a very effective way, by Dr. Catherine Leviten-Reid at Cape Breton University. She has made this case with a sound analysis and lots of evidence in a recent article in *The Monitor*, which I'll table. She points out further, when we're thinking about the subject of places where the rent supplement program stands needing improvement, that in Nova Scotia, the formula to determine the amount of a person's rent supplement actually doesn't take in at all the cost of utilities. She points at what a significant part of a person's rent, in fact, the cost of utilities is and how the effect of leaving utilities out of the calculation is to skew downward the amount of rent supplement that a person actually receives. She points out further that in the United States this is not the case in rent supplement programs. In the United States, rent supplement programs always factor utilities into the cost of the rent, thereby having an upward influence on the amount of rent supplement that people eligible for the program are apt to receive.

In the same analysis of the rent supplement program, Dr. Leviten-Reid also points out the quite serious defect in the government's current rent supplement program that, unlike older such programs in Nova Scotia, there is in this program no inspection component. She writes quite correctly that - these are exactly her words - "providing a government subsidy to a tenant living in housing needing major repairs without mechanisms to ensure that landlords address those repairs is hugely problematic." Well, that's putting it mildly, to say it's hugely problematic, because what the lack of an inspection component in the current rent supplement program in fact does is subsidize and incentivize landlord neglect. These are improvements in the rent supplement program that are called for.

The mother of all the injustices in rent supplements in Nova Scotia at the moment is the one that is put front and centre in this bill. That is that the government, in the midst of the present historic rent increases, cut completely out of the picture of supplement assistance - all those who had formerly qualified but who do not qualify any longer because the eligibility threshold was raised from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of your income being taken up by rent. This bill would fix that and, Speaker, it should be fixed.

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

HON. BRIAN WONG: Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak on how our government is taking action to address housing. We are certainly experiencing a housing crisis, and our government is making significant investments to help move seniors and families to find safe and affordable places to call home.

I also appreciate this opportunity to talk about some of the things that our government is doing as part of our tool box. Rent supplements are certainly part of the tool box that our government has in place. After many years of neglect, our government is taking real action and it takes many forms. It also takes some short-term solutions, which I will also get to.

One of those options is certainly rent supplements. The thing about rent supplements is it's something where you don't have to wait to plan a community. You don't have to wait for city planners and municipal planners to approve housing or communities or infrastructure such as water and sewer. There are already existing properties within existing buildings, people's homes for which people can actually apply for these rental supplements. They are a very important tool. They're a very important tool, such as the introduction we had with Happipad.

Happipad is one of those important tools where I was very proud as Minister of Advanced Education to partner with the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing in developing a program where people who have excess housing within their homes can actually offer that out in a safe way through an app called Happipad. People who are looking for housing, such as seniors, such

as students, such as people who are looking for housing - appropriate housing - can actually partner through this program. It's a short-term program that can also be used for skilled trades workers who need to do apprenticeship training in a certain area if they have to come into Nova Scotia Community College in order to do so. Rental supplements are a part of that tool box, but an important piece for short-term solutions.

This year, we're investing \$21.6 million more in rent supplements. It's offering 8,000 rent supplements and it goes to those who are most in need. We've recently changed the way we process applications. It prioritizes those with the most urgent needs while we continue to invest in a new supply of affordable housing and the historic investments that our government has made in recent weeks in affordable housing should be applauded.

The purpose of this change is really to prioritize those with the most urgent needs and the investment in rent supplements has actually doubled in the last two years. The threshold to take it from 30 per cent to 50 per cent has allowed us to actually make it accessible to more people, so 8,000 households will be served with a rent supplement which is up from 5,000 in 2021. We will continue. We will continue to listen. We will continue to work with community and review the program in looking to assist as many of the most vulnerable Nova Scotians as possible.

We've also taken action to support our vulnerable seniors. Just this month, our government has made changes to the Province's rent supplement program which will expand eligibility for low-income seniors and put more money in the pockets of seniors who receive this supplement. With this eligibility change, more than 100 low-income seniors could qualify for this supplement. I also want to remind the House members of the Seniors Care Grant. This grant has been increased to \$750 and now includes home heating as an eligible service. To qualify for this, Nova Scotians must be 65 years or older by March 31, 2024, live in a home they own or rent, and have an annual household income of \$37,000 or less. Of course, as I mentioned, rent supplements are an important tool for Nova Scotians to afford housing, and the affordability of housing is certainly a concern for many. The housing crisis has been brewing for some time.

There are a number of short-term solutions. I did talk about Happipad and our rent supplements. At a long-term view, the solution to the housing crisis is to build more housing, and our government is fast-tracking. Our government is working hard on getting more housing, and we have a number of bills that are pointing us in that direction.

I'd like to share some of the things that we have been doing in order to make more housing for all of Nova Scotians. Our government has increased overall housing investments from \$143 million in 2021-2022 to \$269 million in 2022-2023. As part of the overall increase, the Province significantly increased investments in community housing programming sustainably to over \$60 million in 2022-2023. This comprised of \$30.8 million for programming directed to grow and sustain the sector, and \$31 million to increase supply of community-based housing.

Speaker, \$83 million is going to build 222 new public housing units over the next five years and will house 522 people including families, individuals, and low-income seniors on Provincially owned land in Halifax, Cape Breton, Bridgewater, Kentville, and Truro. This is all part of the tool box that goes along with rent supplements. This is in addition to the \$50.7 million in new capital funding to be invested over the next four years to preserve and improve the public housing portfolio.

Our strategic asset management initiative, which was launched to effectively manage Provincially owned housing and leverage existing sites to add new units of between \$80 million and \$100 million a year, will help reduce financial barriers and encourage the development of new rental housing.

[3:30 p.m.]

The Executive Panel on Housing in the HRM sped up the planning for major residential construction projects by designating 10 special planning areas that will fast-track the construction of 23,000 housing units. Construction is already under way in some of these areas. This shaved off between six and nine months from both the province's and HRM's approval processes through legislative changes. These changes included removing the requirement for newspaper notification and reducing the notice period, allowing digital submission of planning documents and land use bylaws, shortening timelines for provincial review, improving development agreement authority, and expediting development agreement approval processes, including security and deferral of bonus zoning while occupancy permits are issued.

We have also changed how short-term rentals such as Airbnb are regulated to help address housing availability and to create a more balanced operating environment for tourist accommodations in Nova Scotia.

Speaker, \$32 million has been invested through the Sustainable Services Growth Fund in 2023 to help eligible municipalities invest in capital infrastructure for water, wastewater, accessibility, and active transportation projects that support the development of new housing to help growing communities.

The Rapid Housing Initiative is a federal program aimed at creating new, affordable housing for vulnerable populations within 18 months. The province invested \$20.1 million to create over 200 deeply affordable housing units.

Our Land for Housing Program was launched in May 2022. To date, 25 property opportunity notices have been released and six proposals have been awarded, accounting for 231 units. As many as 3,000 potential future housing units could be created based on these and additional proposals received that are currently under review.

Through the Affordable Housing Development Program, in 2022-23 the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing invested \$43.4 million to fund 17 projects to help create 335 units, of which approximately 245 will be affordable; 46 per cent are in the community housing sector. This includes \$22 million to create new, modular housing supply, \$2 million for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and \$20 million through the Housing Trust of Nova Scotia for health care professionals and skilled tradespeople.

On September 11th of this year, the first site was announced. The former Wheelhouse Motel on the South Shore will be converted into mixed-income housing for health care workers. The site will include 10 to 12 one-bedroom units, plus six townhouses suitable for families. We also launched an innovative partnership with Happipad in June 2023 to promote companion housing to unlock some of the estimated 130 empty bedrooms in Nova Scotia. As of September 2023, 159 houses and 331 renters had registered.

The Minister's Panel on Pre-Apprenticeship and Trades Training was established in December 2022 to provide recommendation on trades programming at the Nova Scotia Community College that is needed to meet the demand of employers. Investing \$400,000 to help the Nova Scotia Building Officials Association support two cohorts of building inspectors through their new training program will help to bring new housing units to market faster.

Our More Opportunities for Skilled Trades program, launched in June 2022, will help recruit and retrain workers. The program provides provincial income tax rebates to trades professionals under the age of 30. If they were employed and registered as apprentices or certified journeypersons, they will not pay income tax on the first \$50,000 earned.

We amended the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Act General Regulations to update the apprentice training ratio to 2:1 for all trades, which creates more opportunities for apprentices. In addition, starting in June 2022 and for the next two years, all non-compulsory voluntary trades in the residential construction sector will automatically be approved for variance to a 3:2 ratio. For the compulsory trades, applications for ratio variance will be reviewed under the new criteria and responses will be expedited. All these things are part of the tool box that will help expedite more housing - all part of the tool box that includes, of course, our rent supplements.

We created Nova Scotia's first supportive housing model. The Department of Community Services, together with the Department of Health and Wellness, the Office of Addictions and Mental Health, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, are working to ensure everyone has a home that best meets their needs. A total of 398 new supportive housing units has been created since April 2022. This represents 70 per cent of all supportive housing units in the province.

Using available commercial property, partners converted a Dartmouth hotel into 60 new affordable housing units, with harm reduction services such as counselling and peer support for people experiencing homelessness who actively use substances. The building operates under the leadership of the North End Community Health Centre and the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, with financial support from the Province. This project is one of the nine Rapid Housing Initiative projects the Province has supported and referenced above.

Across the province, the number of shelter beds and housing support workers has increased to help those experiencing rural homelessness. Organizations like Viola's Place Society in New Glasgow, Haven House in Truro, Beacon House in Sackville, and Open Arms in Kentville now receive annual funding for their shelter operations and support the Province's prevention focus work to help keep people housed. Additional housing supports have been established on the Eastern Shore and in the Valley.

This is all part of the tool box that our government is using to make sure people have homes that are safe and that are affordable. We have made historic investments, and we will continue to do so.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: We're very pleased to move forward this piece of legislation that would increase the eligibility for rental supplements in Nova Scotia. The reason we're doing this is because people are really falling behind right now. That's become very clear and anecdotally what our constituents are telling us. It's becoming very clear in polling data, where 52 per cent of Nova Scotians think they are falling more behind than they were last year - that they haven't gotten ahead. That's in Year 2 of this government's mandate.

In Year 2 of this government's mandate, Nova Scotia now has the highest inflation in the country. We've got the highest increase in rents. We've got power rates that are going up by 14 per cent over two years - the first time in eight or nine years that we've seen power rates escalate like that, at a time when Nova Scotians are struggling the most and when they are telling the government - in our offices and in polling data - that they're falling farther and farther behind.

When other data points are being found that indicate this too, including the fact that Nova Scotia is getting the highest rate of food insecurity in the country - more and more people not being able to afford proper food to put on the table for themselves, their kids, and their loved ones. Nova Scotia is also facing an extreme and rapid rate - exponential rate - of increase in homelessness. The number of people who are homeless in Nova Scotia doubled since last year.

I don't think we've seen meaningful action from this government. There's been some tinkering at the edges here. There has been some movement in some programs that I think are helpful, and you have to give credit where credit is due. That's good. There are going to be some seniors who get a little bit more money from some programs.

The overall macro picture is very problematic: highest inflation, highest rate of food insecurity, highest rent increases, and 14 per cent power increases. The macro picture is very troubling for Nova Scotians right now. While we've seen some small movements with certain targeted supports, what we haven't seen is broad-based support for working families, or even a plan to figure out how to deal with the fundamental issues that are affecting working families.

We spoke today in Question Period about how there are seniors who are being renocted from their homes. They can't find a place to live. They're on a wait-list for public housing that's 15 to 20 years. They don't know what to do. Fear is really increasing in people. Anxiety is increasing in people - and this is a government that says they're going to fix health care. Again, we are not going to fix health care when people's health is getting worse in Nova Scotia.

If you talk to emergency doctors in Nova Scotia, they can tell you who's showing up in the emergency rooms. It's a lot of people who are homeless or are concerned about where they're going to live, if they have a place or not. They're living in tents. People who don't have access to good food, people who are financially stressed out. This is impacting every single demographic, whether you talk to a senior on a fixed income, or a young working family with kids at home, or a young person who's in their 20s - either coming to school here and trying to find a place to live or trying to find a place to rent after school - or a whole generation of people who are coming up in Nova Scotia who don't know if they'll ever be able to purchase a house.

These are real fears, and our housing crisis is a generational issue. Again, CMHC is telling us - and I think these numbers are probably higher, because they don't really take into consideration the exact needs assessment of our rural communities - that we need 70,000 housing units brought online if we're even going to keep up with current demand. At the same time, the Premier is telling everybody he's going to double the population, really without a plan to actually accomplish that, when people are going homeless right now under current population pressures.

What we've seen with some of the government policy has been very troubling, because it's reduced support for people during this time that is very critical and very consequential for people. They've reduced the eligibility for rental supplements. Again, for people who don't know what this is, this is financial support for people to help them cover rent. We have the highest increase in rent in the country, on top of the highest inflation. Exactly what the PC government has done that we're trying to reverse with this bill is reduce the eligibility for these rental supplements. They've reduced it from - if you're

paying up to 30 per cent of your income in rent, now you have to pay 50 per cent. You're paying 50 per cent of your income in rent.

I just heard the minister say that this has made way more people eligible for this. I don't see how you can make that argument. There are fewer people who are eligible. In fact we know, based on the changes in these criteria, that 324 applicants to date have actually been denied. This has been tabled, Speaker.

We've got hundreds of Nova Scotians who now can't access this program which has been so critical to them. If you're paying 50 per cent of your income in rent, you're in a lot of trouble, but you're also in a lot of trouble if you're paying 30 per cent in your rent. Your power rates are going up, your grocery store bills are going up, gas prices are going up. Your interest rates are going up if you have any loans. All these things are accumulating on people and creating a very, very dire situation, creating a lot of stress. Again, this is impacting health outcomes for people.

This government has also frozen income assistance for two years in a row at a time when we have the highest inflation in the country, we have the highest increase in rents, and our food prices are going up. I've heard ministers say that they have targeted supports for these people, but the best targeted program we have is income assistance. It's targeted based on level of income. I believe it's been a very callous thing for this government to freeze those on top of pulling back rental supplements, and on top of reducing the income eligibility for the Heating Assistance Rebate Program. Not only is the government reducing targeted income support for the most financially vulnerable in our province, they're also telling us that these cost pressures and housing pressures are only a problem for those on the low-income side of the spectrum. That is not the case.

All of us are hearing from young working families, from people in their 20s who are working, from seniors on fixed income. The cost of living pressures they're experiencing now are impacting them. It's impacting a broad breadth of our population, not just those who are the most financially vulnerable.

When the government reduces the income threshold - like they've done with rental supplements, like they've done with the Heating Assistance Rebate Program - they pulled it back from a household income of \$85,000 to \$75,000 - this creates a major pressure for the middle class, who are paying higher taxes, also paying some of the highest taxes in the country when it comes to income tax and sales tax and property tax. I think this is where the government is really missing the mark here.

The cost of living pressure and the housing crisis are not only impacting the most financially vulnerable. They're impacting working people. They're impacting the middle class. In fact, in some cases, because of the higher taxes they're paying and the bills they have to pay and the kids they're trying to feed, financial pressure can be actually building more on them. What the government has done is remove these supports from many

members of the middle class and the working class in Nova Scotia. We certainly think that's a problem.

The government does keep bragging about some of their marquee housing moves. Happipad: It's an app that people can go on to find rooms for rent. By the way, rooms that are for rent for \$1,200 a month - for one room. Like there isn't Kijiji or Facebook Marketplace or any other social media platform that young people are already using to rent these places or to find availability. Finally, we've got Happipad - I mean, really? This is to get a headline. This is not to make a difference.

A very small fee increase, relatively, on Airbnbs. It's a cash grab that isn't going to result in any major amount of units coming back on the market, and you're taxing people who, in some cases, are creating necessary spaces for the tourism market, which generates a lot of income in Nova Scotia. These are not consequential moves. These are not things that will have an impact. They're catchy. They capture a headline for a day, and they give ministers speaking notes that they can point to and pat themselves on the back.

[3:45 p.m.]

Let's think about it: What are these things actually going to do? I do want to commend the government on building more public housing, but it's 200 units. We've got a 5,000-person wait-list. In the meantime, pressure is mounting on public housing because, as we mentioned earlier today, we have seniors who are being renocted, who can't get into public housing. We are not going to get these public houses built in time. I do not think that the shelters the government has announced are going to be built in time for Winter. I think that's becoming very clear. I don't even know if they have a plan for that. The minister seemed confused about it when they made the announcement. There have been no real details on that. Hopefully that does pan out and we do see some shelters come in.

Again, while we wait for these new builds to happen, the government does need to bring policies in place to help people in the interim. We can't sit around and wait the years it's going to take to bring in more public housing or the years it's going to take to reverse the terrible trend we've had on housing starts. By the way, the other thing the government has bragged about is special planning zones in HRM. I hope that does yield some positive results on development, that we see faster growth in the housing market. We need to see that, but to date we've seen the opposite.

Since the year that the government brought that in, we've actually seen housing starts decrease by over 50 per cent. Now the government has taken unilateral control over HRM's planning process.

I will restate that we do think we have to reduce unnecessary red tape and costs when it comes to building. I think that's the only way we are going to get more affordable and attainable homes that are market and non-market on the market as quickly as possible.

We have not seen any evidence that this is actually going to result in a change in how this works. In fact, the day after the government touted this big move - great action on housing, now you don't have to go through the city's processes, you can go right to the minister - the day after that the minister then says that actually, it's going to be very rare that I intervene.

This is confusing. I think it's indicative of there actually not being a plan to address these issues in a real, meaningful, and strategic way. This is indicative and creating examples of a government that is chasing its tail on this, that is chasing headlines because they don't have a plan for this and the pressure is mounting on them, because of demand for housing and affordable housing, because of pressure that has been applied by the Opposition, pressure that is now being applied by the federal government and, of course, their constituents.

We have not seen it result in anything. Here, if the government passes this bill, this is one tangible way that this government can support and have an impact on the lives of everyday working Nova Scotians - young working families, seniors on pensions and fixed income. They can reverse, I think, their very damaging decision to reduce the income threshold for rental supplements. If the government moves on this, hundreds more Nova Scotians will have access to critical financial support to help pay for their rents - again the highest increases in the country - we are also facing the highest levels of inflation in the country, higher than every other single province.

We are facing some of the highest increases in power rates. This is actually a bill that can help those people - again, working-class Nova Scotians, single parents who are struggling to make ends meet, young couples who are trying to build a life, seniors on a fixed income. This bill can provide some needed help to those folks and I hope the government considers passing it.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable Opposition House Leader, it is to close debate on second reading.

The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'd like to now close debate on Bill No. 324, the Rent Supplements Act. I'd like to call for a vote.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a call for a recorded vote.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[3:54 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Are the Whips satisfied?

The Clerk will now conduct a recorded vote. I ask for silence, please.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[4:29 p.m.]

YEAS

Hon. Patricia Arab
Hon. Keith Irving
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Zach Churchill
Hon. Kelly Regan
Hon. Iain Rankin
Susan Leblanc
Claudia Chender
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Rafah DiCostanzo
Hon. Tony Ince
Lorelei Nicoll
Hon. Ben Jessome
Carman Kerr
Ronnie LeBlanc
Fred Tilley
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin

NAYS

Hon. Brad Johns
Hon. Tory Rushton
Hon. Barbara Adams
Hon. Kim Masland
Hon. Allan MacMaster
Hon. Michelle Thompson
Hon. Trevor Boudreau
Hon. Timothy Halman
Hon. Kent Smith
Hon. Dave Ritcey
Hon. Brian Wong
Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek
Hon. Brian Comer
Hon. Colton LeBlanc
Hon. Jill Balser
Hon. Pat Dunn
Hon. Greg Morrow
Hon. Becky Druhan
Larry Harrison
John White
John A. MacDonald
Hon. Keith Bain
Chris Palmer
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Danielle Barkhouse
Tom Taggart
Nolan Young
Hon. Steve Craig

THE CLERK: For, 19. Against, 28.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Please call Bill No. 345.

Bill No. 345 - Working Families Power Bill Reduction Act. (Hon Iain Rankin)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I move second reading on Bill No. 345, this bill I'm bringing forward in the context of the climate crisis that is omnipresent. We have a number of issues facing this province that we've talked about today, around housing and affordability in general. I think that it's really critical, given we continue to see these catastrophes across the province. There have been some even since we last sat in the House.

Over the last year alone, I believe there were three states of emergency proclaimed in our province. The significant fires, floods, tail ends of hurricanes, post-tropical storms, the polar vortex, I could go on, and on, and on. I thought it was important that we do debate a bill that has something to do with the environment and our efforts to reduce our emissions here in our province. And I think we can do that with a win-win-win.

When we speak to things like efficiency - so I'm talking about reducing greenhouse gas emissions - we can do that and also look at reducing power bills for people and growing jobs in a sector that's an important one in our province. This bill looks at our existing programs, and I anticipate the government will get up and list off all the great programs that have been put together over the last number of years, and our government and the governments prior to that.

EfficiencyOne does great work. We were the first province to come up with an independent utility. It was my predecessor, Bill Estabrooks, who brought forward EfficiencyOne, as it's known now, that does great work with lots of programs for heat pumps and things like that for Nova Scotians. I wanted to bring this forward so we could accelerate that work. If we're going to tackle the climate crisis, we have to not only bring on renewable energy, we have to reduce our energy demand. It's actually the most cost-effective way to reduce our emissions. This is why I wanted to bring forward something that actually benefits people who need it the most.

At least on this side of the House, we have been advocating for support. We just talked about a bill that would do that for renters. We talked about trying to reduce income tax. Power bills seem to be one that can have a direct impact right away - given that power bills have gone up seven per cent and are about to go up another seven per cent next year, with the rate part of the power bills.

This government is watching a 14 per cent increase. All we are doing is trying to ease that burden, since they are allowing rates to go up on the actual bills. This type of

investment, up to \$5,000 directly to people who need it the most, is something that can achieve that.

The difference with this, in a lot of the efficiency programs, is that it is an up-front grant. I know the members opposite would probably hear from their constituents, as I do, that they are waiting six, seven, eight months or more for rebate cheques. Those most vulnerable, trying to come up with the cash flow, liquidity, to try to pay for these really important investments, are simply going to not apply for that type of program.

This is aligned with the recent federal announcement around the switch from oil heat to heat pumps, which is eligible for a \$5,000 grant. That only applies to people who do heat with oil. This applies to any type of heating system, whether it's propane, natural gas or electricity, and it would be combined with that \$5,000. That effectively would buy you a heat pump, but a heat pump is only good enough if you can insulate your home. This would be eligible for insulation, and it goes even further to that and looks at all types of ways to improve your efficiency at your home, and further to that, the health and safety of where Nova Scotians are spending much of their time - of course, at home. Things like radon systems, which are in the range of \$1,000 or more to install in your home. Things like mould removal, which is actually not eligible, but you need to do that work at home before you even look at insulation improvements. Right now, a lot of the aged structures in our homes, you can't find money to spend to actually do the work required to make the air better to breathe. Carbon monoxide readers - things like those.

I think there's an opportunity for the government to bolster the existing programs, offer another \$5,000 up front that will effectively lower power bills and make the air cleaner to breathe in homes for families that make less than \$79,000. It's tempting to go higher than that, and I think that we should eventually, for families. In order to reach those who need it the most first, I thought that was a good starting point, based on looking at existing programs.

I didn't really specify whether it's one, two, three or four people in the household because we're really trying to find ways to reach those, not just who have kids, not just our seniors, but all people, all working families making less than \$79,000, and make the biggest impact to the environment, at the same time, that I know will reduce energy bills. That's important at this time of the year, as we're getting close, we're starting heating season now and people are seeing their heating bills go up. It's important because a lot of people are facing their mortgage renewals with the inflation and the increase in interest rates that have happened over time, so this is a critical time that we help people pay their bills. This is a way we can do it while reducing our envelope for greenhouse gas emissions.

That's the intent of the bill and I hope that we get support from the members opposite, given that the increasing costs we're seeing across the board, whether it's power bills, whether it's income tax by not indexing, whether it's HST increases on the gas,

whether it's the property tax that's going to go up in the HRM, especially because of the new bill that they put forward and downloading the fees in HRM.

We've seen taxes go up; we've seen power bills go up. The cost of living is obviously a huge factor here in Nova Scotia, probably more than anywhere else in the country, certainly in the Atlantic region. Their neglect in trying to find a solution with carbon pricing. All those things together really have an impact under this government. This is one of the things they can do, a modest investment.

We have great organizations, like Efficiency Nova Scotia or even the Clean Foundation, that can administer the program and make sure that every dollar goes to families that need it the most. This is the way, I think, that we can do it best to target those who make under \$79,000.

With that, I look forward to comments from members opposite.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you to the member for Timberlea-Prospect for demonstrating his understanding and commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I think that this bill, while it reinvents the wheel a little bit, is really important. I would love to see a combo of existing programs and this bill, or using this bill to improve existing programs that we have to make efficiency programs and greenhouse gas reduction much more attainable for many more people in Nova Scotia. Right now, the programs that are there are good for the people who qualify for them, but as the member has said, there is a number of - waiting months and months and months for rebate cheques, that kind of thing. Up-front payments, up-front grants would be a much more sensible way to do things.

But in some cases, that does happen. The HomeWarming program, for instance, does - I don't believe that a homeowner who qualifies for HomeWarming actually ever - money never changes hands between them and the service providers. Rather, the government just looks after that.

The other thing I would like just to point out about the bill, while I have it in my hand, is that I do think that this idea of the mould removal is a really important one for efficiency programs, because when we're insulating homes, it doesn't make any sense to insulate over top of mould. The mould does have to be removed. There's no sense in changing out windows if the mould is still in the house. All of that has to be done, and there is no contemplation of that in any of the efficiency programs that we have right now.

Carbon monoxide detectors and radon systems, I think, have a place, and there should be support for those systems in Nova Scotia. They aren't going to reduce power bills for working families, which is the title of this bill. I would say, if we're going to pick

at things a little bit, yes, let's provide radon pumps, radon mitigation systems for people who need them. But it could be a separate program that's not about reducing power bills.

I'm glad to speak on this bill. Like I said, the up-front grant idea is a good one. Currently, the HomeWarming program has a bunch of different income thresholds, depending on how many people are in the home, and I think that this idea that the member has put forward, of just making it one amount - \$79,000 - makes way more sense to me. The fact is that the costs are the costs, and the improvements in the home and the power bills are the same no matter how many people live in the home. I feel like it is a good idea to do that, and I would even say that at this point, Speaker, it might not be a bad idea to look at a higher threshold than \$79,000.

[4:45 p.m.]

That being said, the HomeWarming program for people who do qualify for it pays the entire shot, not just \$5,000. In many cases, a lot of the work will cost more than \$5,000 to do. But even with all of that, efficiency programs and efficiency work is the cheapest and most effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I've said that a couple of times this sitting already, and I will continue to say it. It doesn't make any sense not to do this work, or not to help people do this work.

We know that Nova Scotians face one of the highest rates of energy poverty in the country, and that a 14 per cent increase in power rates will make it even harder for Nova Scotians to make ends meet. Efficiency retrofitting is essential to help Nova Scotians afford to light and heat their homes. We know that Nova Scotians are living in older, less-efficient homes, and that they will more deeply feel the impact of rising fuel and electricity costs and carbon disincentives.

We need to help all Nova Scotians, especially those who are vulnerable, through the transition to renewables. Currently, the work of these efficiency programs and grants is conducted by Efficiency Nova Scotia, which does offer a variety of programs to help Nova Scotians make necessary upgrades. As I said, it's not clear from this bill how it's intended to work with the existing programs, but I would say the spirit of this bill is a good one, but I do really think that the government and EfficiencyOne ought to take a look at this bill and see how its programs can be improved - with increased investment from the government, of course.

One of the challenges facing Nova Scotians who want to make these improvements is the complex and vast landscape of the rebates and the grants and the programs offered. There are various levels of government now contributing to this work, but it's confusing how the government programs work together or work against each other, where someone can best use what program to ultimately save the most money and get the most benefit.

We don't disagree that there needs to be increased funding and eligibility for efficiency upgrades, but we would hope to see work towards a more streamlined and navigable program instead of all these piecemeal ones. We would also have liked to see this bill address the gap of efficiency programming for rental households that often aren't able to access the efficiency programs or make the important upgrades because they don't own where they live, and it's ultimately up to the landlord. It's not always an incentive for a landlord to do the efficiency work.

This was talked about at a recent Community Services Committee meeting as the split incentive dilemma, where renters face challenges upgrading property they don't own but landlords aren't incentivized to lower the energy bills that they're not paying. The loser is the renter paying high energy bills and all Nova Scotians, because we're not reducing energy usage and therefore bringing our greenhouse gas reductions into line. It's an important consideration that needs to be addressed in ongoing discussions of efficiency programming.

While we're on the topic of energy bills and energy poverty and the high cost of energy, I would be remiss not to mention our disappointment in the NDP, with the cuts to the Heating Assistance Rebate Program. The cost of home heating oil has increased by 8 per cent this year, and the government thinks a reduction of 47 per cent to the benefit is justified. It doesn't make any sense. We know that many Nova Scotians relied on that program last Winter to heat their homes, and many are counting on it this year. While efficiency upgrades are important to long-term energy security, we know that we also need to help people now, while they're waiting, if they qualify for efficiency programs.

In addition to strengthening efficiency programming, we would urge the government and the Opposition members to look at additional ways to help lower power bills.

I understand that after an 18-month delay, the government has finally begun work into low-income power rates, and that is welcome news. It's imperative that this work continue and not face any further delays. In the meantime, there's enabling legislation currently on the order paper that would allow the Utility and Review Board to consider these kinds of rates. For beginning the work, all one needs to do is look at the order paper and see that there's a bill that can basically enact that.

We also think it's important to look into the ownership structure of the province's electrical utility, especially the grid components. The Province's renewable energy plan involves important investments into a grid that we don't even own. After the Conservative government sold off the public utility, our province has been at the mercy of the monopoly that is Nova Scotia Power, and it's time to consider a better deal for Nova Scotians.

We know that Nova Scotians are struggling with rising costs across the board, and energy costs are no exception. In fact, I would say that in some cases it is the highest cost -

aside from rent or mortgage - for many Nova Scotian households, so we're glad to be having this important discussion, and we look forward to continuing the work toward an equitable and sustainable energy future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

TOM TAGGART: This is most certainly my first time to congratulate you on your new position. I know you'll do a great job that we'll all be very proud of.

It's my honour to get an opportunity today to stand and speak on this Bill No. 345, referred to as investments in clean affordable energy.

I will agree with two things that my Opposition colleagues said. They said I would get up and list all the great things we've done. We have done a lot of great things, and we're very proud of them. I will most certainly go through that list. The other thing is that it is a lot of different federal-provincial programs and sometimes it's hard to understand and navigate them. I agree with those kinds of things.

I've got to tell you, when I look at this bill - I guess maybe it's one page of aspirational thoughts. To me, it's kind of a list of could've/should've/would've - I guess it's a way for me to look at that. I really want to point to where we are as a government and where we have a plan. We have a long-term plan - we call it the 2030 Clean Power Plan. It's a clear path to get us to green, affordable energy - to 80 per cent clean affordable energy by 2030. I'm very proud of it, and I'm going to run through that list of things we've accomplished in our short time in government.

As we work toward our climate change goals, we're committed to protecting ratepayers. We're making sure they have clean, reliable, and affordable electricity. Nova Scotia is a leader in energy efficiency programming. Each year we invest more than \$60 million in our core energy efficiency programs. These programs create jobs, help families save money, and reduce emissions through energy efficiency.

Heating oil accounts for 50 per cent of Nova Scotia's space heating energy - the highest in Canada. We want to change that. Additionally, rural Nova Scotia carries a heavier burden because of the traditional older-stock homes that are not always as energy efficient. Predominantly heating with oil, they don't have the opportunity for natural gas and that sort of thing. We carry a heavier burden.

This is the part that I most wanted to comment about, and of course it is the impact that the carbon tax has had on rural Nova Scotians. The people across the aisle will do what they've done for the last six or eight or ten months, as we've sat in committees and talked about these things - they will say, Oh, you guys, all you talk about is the carbon tax. The impact the carbon tax has had on our rural residents, in my view, makes these - what I call aspirational ideas - pale in comparison to the damage that's done. The challenges the

federal carbon tax has created for rural residents are unbelievable. I think it's a bit - whatever. I'll leave it at that.

Our investments - and I speak to this as investments. That's what we have - a long-term goal. Our investments are helping fight climate change while also reducing people's energy costs. In December, we announced new funding to help Nova Scotians move away from oil heat faster. We invested \$140 million for energy efficiency programs - \$140 million - then leveraged another \$145.5 million from our federal counterparts. That means free heat pumps and other upgrades for low-income households. It means extra financial support for middle-income households to make upgrades. These investments will help over 13,500 low-income and 30,000 middle-income households in Nova Scotia.

We do a great deal of this work with incredibly dedicated partners like Efficiency Nova Scotia . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. There's a little bit of chatter in the Chamber. We just have a little bit more to go.

The honourable member for Colchester North.

TOM TAGGART: We do a great deal of this work with incredibly dedicated partners like Efficiency Nova Scotia, one of the best efficiency organizations in Canada. Through legislation last Fall, we strengthened their ability to help Nova Scotians move off oil and reduce their energy bills.

Our investments have real impacts. For example, they have provided deep energy retrofits for 1,350 Mi'kmaw homes and 2,800 public housing units. We've helped people save more than \$100 million a year on energy bills. That's \$100 million a year in savings on energy bills.

We've helped more than 23,000 low-income Nova Scotians get free home assessments and energy efficiency upgrades since 2007, and we've reduced electricity demand by 12 per cent. We've helped avoid more than one million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions every year.

Like I say, we have a long-term plan. We've done the work. Our ministers have done the work. We'll start with some of the programs that people can apply to through the Efficiency Nova Scotia website. If you're not sure which programs are for you, you can call them at a 1-800 number, and they'll help figure things out for you.

The HomeWarming program provides energy retrofits at no cost to low-income households. Our latest funding includes free heat pumps and any electrical panel upgrades needed to install them. Again, a plan.

Our Home Energy Assistance Top-up provides up to \$5,000 in incentives for home energy retrofits; \$5,000, that's a common number. Our latest funding doubles that amount for middle-income households, bringing it up to \$10,000.

The Mi'kmaw Home Energy Efficiency Project is in partnership with the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs. We are delivering the Mi'kmaw Home Energy Efficiency Project. This program is a \$26 million provincial and federal investment, reaching 13 First Nation communities in Nova Scotia. It provides deep energy retrofits to all homes in these communities. In Phase 1, about 1,200 homes were upgraded with \$14 million. In Phase 2, another \$12 million will allow upgrades for 1,000 more homes. We're now up to 1,350 homes in these communities completed so far.

[5:00 p.m.]

The province is also funding the Energy Advisory and Contractor training for Mi'kmaw community members to join the clean energy force. Qualified contractors of Mi'kmaw communities are hired to install upgrades whenever possible.

Speaker, I want to talk about our Affordable Multifamily Housing Program. This program covers up to 80 per cent of energy efficiency projects. The program is for multi-unit residential rental properties and co-ops that offer long-term affordable rent. It also opens to facilities that help low-income and disadvantaged Nova Scotians, such as shelters, food banks, and health centres.

We have the Green Heat program. Green Heat provides rebates on residential space and water-heating equipment, and it helps things like high-efficiency heat pumps, biomass, and thermal systems.

The Efficient Product Installation Service provides homeowners, landowners, and renters with free installation of energy-efficient products at no cost: products like LED lighting, smart thermostats, hot water tanks, and pipe insulation. Households can save up to \$240 a year.

Small Business Energy Solutions is for small businesses, non-profits, and institutional customers. It provides support for informed decisions about energy efficiency upgrades, and rebates to overcome financial barriers to making them.

The Heating Assistance Rebate Program provides direct rebates to income-qualified households. The program opens again in October 2023.

The Seniors Care Grant offers a one-time home heating grant of \$250, and it's accepting applications until March 31, 2024.

Green energy: All of our efficiency programs support the local green workforce. That includes heat pump installers, lighting specialists, solar PV installers, and builders. There are more than 2,600 Nova Scotians currently working in the energy efficiency industry. These are good-paying jobs, many in rural areas.

With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat. I just want to reiterate that I'm very proud of the work we have done in the past two years. Sure, there will be things to critique on it, but we have worked hard. Our ministers have done a great job. We have a plan - an affordable plan to get us to clean, green energy at 80 per cent by 2030.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, I'm going to take only a few minutes to respond to this. Actually, I was going to forgo my time, but the member opposite inspired me to come on and say a few things on the record.

I find it laughable that this side of the House is accused of always talking about the carbon tax, when it is members of the government and the caucus who constantly remind everybody that the carbon tax is the cause of all ills in this world. Everything that anybody discusses is blamed on that one particular federal policy.

What the government forgets is that they are the government. It is their job, their role, to implement relief. It's their role to implement programs, and to help offset some of the problems that Nova Scotians are facing. The fact of the matter is that Nova Scotians are struggling. They are struggling with the costs of absolutely everything. They are struggling. Those who are fortunate enough to have a roof over their head are questioning how they are going to pay their bills, how they are going to heat their homes, how they are going to pay for groceries.

Nobody on this side of the House, in response to this particular bill, discredited any of the programs that are being offered. They're all wonderful programs, and we applaud the partners, the stakeholders, who helped facilitate those programs. What this particular bill does is address some of the issues that Nova Scotians are facing when it comes to accessing those programs - some of the backlog that needs to be addressed so that rebates can happen and refunds can happen, so that more money is coming into people's pockets to help alleviate some of these costs, to give them incentives to look at alternative energy sources for their homes. This is in addition to that. It is not a criticism of anything else that is happening.

It also touches a group of people who are normally overlooked. Those are people who don't have children, who aren't seniors, who are one-income households - who again, maybe they should sell their house but if they sold their house, where are they going to move? There is definitely nowhere for them to rent. This is a piece to that. This is looking

at a portion of the population that is often overlooked. There are no actual programs at the moment that are there to help that group.

Again, most of the Opposition bills that come up aren't meant to be critical of how government is running. It's meant to offset. It's meant to collaborate. It's meant to give ideas. It's not meant to point fingers. It's not meant to exacerbate problems.

Maybe I am naïve, but even after a decade of being here, I still like to think that maybe we can listen to each other, and we can find ways. I still believe that everybody puts their name on a ballot in order to help those people in their community who elect them, and even those who don't elect them that they still have to represent after election day.

What we're trying to say on this side is that there are Nova Scotians who are feeling they have been overlooked or that they are forgotten about. This piece of legislation in particular is trying to address that, and trying to offer a workaround for government in order to address those shortfalls - again, not in a critical, finger-pointing way. It's in a way that is meant to be collaborative. It is meant to help offset what is already happening, and really meant to try to alleviate some of the stresses that so many people who talk to me are feeling day in and day out.

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'm not going to take long. I certainly recognize why the member opposite tabled this, and I appreciate him spelling that out today. We know there are many issues. We have many programs that are out there.

I just want to talk a little bit about a few of the programs. There was a little chatter back and forth with the previous Minister of Energy. I certainly recognize the fact that previous governments had started other initiatives: the Mi'kmaw Home Energy Efficiency Project, which the previous minister did start. As government, we were very pleased to build on that and expand it out even further when we took over as government to allow the project to come to fruition.

This is very much a recognition that we know Nova Scotians are in a very difficult time, financially, right now. We also recognize that the \$140 million that we did invest in the energy programs in December - it's a program that has seen huge success. I heard a little bit of chatter back and forth about the backlog that EfficiencyOne is seeing right now because of the program.

This does tell us that the programs that are announced are a success, because Nova Scotians who want it are now put on a waiting list, and we are trying to work with EfficiencyOne to overcome the burdens that they're feeling. What can we do as a government to assist in that process, and certainly, the need for other programs? While I

was in Ottawa this week meeting with my counterpart, this was one of the discussions as well: How do we expand on, not just the heat pump program, but efficiency programs, period?

Certainly in collaboration with my counterpart at the federal level, I'm very encouraged to hear that there's interest to carry on conversations. What more programs can we put in place for Nova Scotians? What other spectrums or missing stakeholders are not receiving these efficiency programs? Whether it's a low-income free heat pump, or whether it's the \$5,000 for efficiency program retrofits, how do we make sure that every Nova Scotian who wants to do their part has an ability to take part in some of these programs?

As we move forward with the Affordability Plan, with the Clean Energy Plan, certainly the comments opposite are heard. We are doing what we can right now with the ability that we have. We want to do more. As we do consultation with our federal counterparts, we will do what we are able, and assist Efficiency Nova Scotia in whatever way we can to reduce that wait-list. We want to see that as quickly as possible. We want to see that program utilized a hundred per cent - the same as the previous minister wanted to see the Mi'kmaw Heat Pump Initiative fulfillment utilized to its hundred per cent.

These aren't programs that were just thrown out there. I know Nova Scotians are listening. These are funds we want you to apply for. These are programs that we know are needed to help us get to a cleaner, affordable energy utilization. I certainly don't think that this is across party lines. This is something that all Nova Scotians want.

I certainly appreciate the information that's been shared here today. I want to let the members opposite know, as minister, I'm listening. I'm always looking at how I can improve the programs that are being developed now - even programs that might have been put there before the previous minister but improve on those as well - and not for the party, not for the government, but for all Nova Scotians. Thank you very much for the few minutes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Just closing comments before I close out. I want to concur with the minister on some of his comments. I had the privilege of working with that staff for a number of years and saw a lot of great initiatives come out of there. It's really crossed multiple party lines over multiple governments. He's absolutely right. I do want to give a shout-out to the folks in that department who were colleagues of mine for three years. They're really great people.

I'm going to close out on Bill No. 345, and I'm going to call Bill 335 next.

THE SPEAKER: I would ask the member, are you moving to adjourn debate?

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Yes. Sorry, Speaker, I should have known that. I'm moving to adjourn debate on Bill No. 345.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 345.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I apologize for the confusion there. I'd like to now call Bill No. 335.

Bill No. 335 - Income Tax Act (amended).

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: I'm pleased to stand today to talk about the bill to reduce income taxes for Nova Scotians.

As we know, we're in a cost of living crisis here in Nova Scotia. We're the only province in Canada that's yet to address income tax bracket creep. Any slight increase that people get in increased salary goes to taxes. It puts them potentially in another tax bracket, which of course then puts less money in their pockets at a time when folks really need that money. As a matter of fact, an average of \$635 per family, which is significant, given the fact that gas costs more, food costs more, living in general costs more, people are struggling at home and in Nova Scotia to pay for their prescriptions, to pay to keep their families healthy.

This is a simple, very easy fix indexing the tax brackets to inflation, which will help Nova Scotians keep more in their pockets. As a government, the government is receiving basically a windfall on the backs of Nova Scotians. As an example, if we use the recent \$10,000 bonus that was paid out to nurses this year - which is a wonderful thing to keep nurses and attract new nurses, but it probably puts the nurses in a new tax bracket, which means more of that gets taken away. If it's a \$10,000 bonus, they might end up with \$5,000 or \$4,000. It's hard for people to make ends meet. We give away money and we give settlements for wages, and then we take it back through the provincial income tax system.

We've seen in the last number of years significant surpluses in this province. Granted, the minister indicates that we're not quite sure what those surpluses might be, but we've seen significant swings from potential deficits through to significant surpluses.

If I was a betting man, which I'm not, I would bet that we're probably going to see another surplus this year. It would be wonderful to put some of that surplus back in the hands of Nova Scotians simply by indexing those income tax brackets to inflation. Last year, I think Nova Scotia had a 7.5 per cent inflation rate, which was one of the highest in Canada. P.E.I. has recently just indicated that they've moved forward with indexing income tax brackets. With us, they were the only other province not in compliance. Here we are - we're the only province in Canada that is left with this archaic system.

[5:15 p.m.]

We talked about the Seniors Care Grant today in one of my questions. We talked about the fact that by not indexing the income limit for that, some Nova Scotian seniors were left out. It's a simple fix. It's just indexing to the inflationary rate or indexing to - in that case you could index it to the raise, but it all ties back. If we don't index the Seniors Care Grant income limit, and we don't index the income tax brackets, it's a double-edged sword for Nova Scotians. They're getting taxed at a higher level as their income rises. They move throughout those tax brackets, and as their income rises, they're then not eligible for specific programs that can help alleviate some of those costs.

Another example would be the Heating Assistance Rebate Program, which is designed to help Nova Scotians, but it's reduced from last year. Nova Scotians who are depending on this help from their government - it's not there. It's reduced by 40 per cent over last year. We all know that, yes, the government indicated that last year was a one-time payment, but things have not changed in this province in that year. We're still facing the highest inflation. We're still facing a large cost of living.

Not only are we reducing the amount, but we're also reducing the threshold. This is another example where Nova Scotians are getting squeezed out of the system. As they receive modest increases through their employment, they're penalized at the income tax bracket level. They're penalized at the Heating Assistance Rebate Program level, because they may have qualified last year. Now you take \$1,000 that they got last year out of their pocket, add another \$635 because the income tax brackets are not tied to inflation - we're leaving Nova Scotians behind. Nova Scotians are falling through the cracks. They're not seeing improvement in their day-to-day lives.

It also affects their disposable income that they're able to spend. When thinking about making that purchase from a small business, from going and buying that new car or purchasing another item for the family, or when we look at activities for the children - all of these things come into effect. They're not able to achieve them because they have to pay their taxes. It's one thing in Nova Scotia that we expect - people pay their taxes. But we're gouging them by simply not indexing the tax brackets and moving them along.

In a time when there's no inflation, it's not as big a deal. In a time - back a number of years ago, when the raises were at 0 per cent and 1 per cent - we all remember those

times. It's not moving people higher in those tax brackets, so their disposable income is staying somewhat the same. Their take-home is staying the same.

Today, when everything costs more and the raises that we're seeing from employers are significantly higher, which means they're moving faster through the income tax brackets, when you look at an average family losing \$600 a year because the brackets are not indexed, that's significant. They have to work a lot of hours to make that kind of money. It's a month's worth of groceries for some families. It's half a tank of oil during the Winter months.

I think that we should really take a look at this bill - or come up with your own bill. But for the sake of Nova Scotians, I urge you to please take a second sober look at this bill and to look at adjusting the income tax brackets to the inflation rate. Let's give Nova Scotians a break that they truly deserve. Let's do the right thing here. The right thing is to join in with the rest of Canada and make our citizens as whole as can be.

With that, Speaker, I will take my seat.

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, I'm just going to say a few words, because I'm curious to see what the government has to say about this.

I think that there are obvious downsides to being a jurisdiction that is more highly taxed than others. The member has enumerated those well.

I also think it's important to look at what we're talking about here. From the perspective of our party that has put forward, over the past couple years in particular, a number of programs to deal with the inflationary pressures we're under, the benefit of indexing tax brackets would be concentrated at the high end of earners.

Households earning under \$23,000 per year get no benefit. Households earning \$23,000 to \$33,000 per year would receive \$19 over a five-year period. Middle- and high-income earners also would see a moderate increase. Those making \$70,000 to \$80,000 per year - maybe some of those nurses we were talking about - are looking at a savings of about \$50 per year.

We do want to be in concert with other provinces. We don't have a problem with it per se, but of course our focus is on a progressive tax system so the people who can best bear it pay the taxes.

The reason we feel that way is because we understand - I've heard the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board speak to this - that revenue is important and that revenue helps the government do the work it needs to do.

The challenge in this circumstance is that the current government spends those revenues with almost no oversight. It makes it very difficult for us to understand if they are, in fact, doing the work that Nova Scotians need most.

We go through a budget process every Spring. I've heard ministers say: The Opposition likes to attack us for appropriations. Over a billion dollars in spending outside of the budgetary process is not democratic.

Bills that we have now before this Legislature are doing things that are reducing the democratic nature of the way we conduct our business. I know this bill doesn't directly deal with that, but I think it's important because, as a party, we do believe that tax revenue is important. We do believe in a social safety net.

We do believe in making sure government can provide for people. When we push for housing, we're also saying we understand government needs revenue to provide that and they should. When we talk about the need for better health care, we understand that revenue is required for that. We also believe that goes hand in hand with transparency. The transparency is what we don't see.

That is challenging. If we wanted to cut straight to the chase in terms of actually helping people with the revenues we have, we could do it by things like a universal school food program. We could do it by unfreezing income assistance rates.

We could do it by any number - the Affordable Living Tax Credit is something that has been shown to help people immensely. It's a credit. It's not a rebate. At the front end, it's hugely helpful to people who have a challenge in meeting their bills.

These are important issues. These are issues that were not dealt with during the eight years the Liberals were in power and certainly could have indexed tax rates but didn't. They're not being dealt with now.

As to whether that's something we need to do again, if we are talking in particular - the one compelling argument I heard was about attracting health care workers to this jurisdiction. We need workers. We have labour force issues. If we want to attract physicians and other people, we have to have a competitive environment in which to do that.

We understand. We also think that if we're really talking about the cost of living and we're really talking about helping working families, seniors, and other people who need that help, there are several bills on the Order Paper that we have put forward over the past couple years that might be a more direct path.

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

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I'm not surprised the NDP weren't exactly stampeding to put money back into taxpayers' pockets. I noted that the remarks were quite short.

I also note that the member talked about money being approved outside of the budgetary process, but this very process was put in place by an NDP government.

I think I've highlighted how Opposition parties sometimes in government do one thing and once they get in opposition try to say that we should do something different. I'll say the same thing about the Liberals now. What an epiphany, Speaker. Here is a party that was in office just months ago and they had the chance to do it, and they never indexed tax brackets.

I can see how important it is to all of them over there right now, on their faces over there.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I know, we have just a few minutes left. It's tough, I realize, but the honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has the floor.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I can see how important it is on all of their faces over there.

In 2018, when the Liberal Party was in power, when they reviewed this matter in great detail, they chose not to index tax brackets. It's sort of like the Liberal carbon tax - their deal with the federal government only lasted three years. If it was such a wonderful deal, why hasn't it lasted longer?

I think some of these things ring hollow now that the NDP and the Liberals are in opposition. They are kind of, I think, the reason why some people lose faith in voting and in politics, because they hear one thing when a party is in government and another when they are in opposition.

I will not speak against the idea of adjusting tax brackets to provide tax relief because I believe that it is something many people would like to see. I believe most of those same people want us to fix the health care system. Both are valuable goals for government. Fixing the health care system is our priority for Nova Scotians at this time because we believe it to be their priority.

Look at the state of health care when this government was elected two years ago. Gosh, I've got only about two minutes here, Speaker; I'm going to have to save that for another day. I am going to have to trim the speech, but at some point I'm going to bring those points up. I'm sure they'll give me another opportunity.

If we have to choose - and we have to - there's only so much capacity for spending or tax relief. We are choosing to fix health care. I was going to talk about all the things we've invested in health care, but I've got to trim this speech even further. I would say, health care, when you are the person who needs it, is more important than indexed tax brackets.

It should be noted that indexing of tax brackets has limited benefit for people at lower income levels. It does benefit anyone earning incomes above the next tax bracket for that extra marginal income they are earning.

[5:30 p.m.]

Our focus in this time of higher inflation, higher interest rates, has been to help people most in need with targeted supports. I was going to list those but I don't have time to do that, so I have to trim this speech even further.

Yes, Nova Scotians are paying for those targeted supports but we know people are getting something for that. Those most in need are getting money in their pockets.

Speaker, our economy has performed better than expected and we've had revenues that were unexpected. We could have let them go into debt, we could have given tax relief, but we chose to spend that money on the very things the Opposition is looking for, things like health care, housing, targeted supports, and helping people whose personal lives have suffered because of extreme weather events.

Nova Scotians' government has been there for them. Which of these four things will the Liberals or the NDP give up to index tax brackets? I do not believe they would give any of them up because Question Period after Question Period, they have been asking us to do those very four things. They can't have it both ways. The Liberals did have the chance just months ago and they chose not to index tax brackets.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time allotted for debate on Bill No. 335 has elapsed. Pursuant to Rule No. 22, the debate is deemed to be adjourned.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, that concludes government business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Thursday, October 19th between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. Government business will include Committee of the Whole House on Bill Nos. 320, 321, 322, 323, 327, and 329, second reading of Bill No. 340, and second reading of Private and Local Bill Nos. 351 and 348.

THE SPEAKER: We now rise to adjourn for today, and we'll sit between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. for Thursday, October 19th. I move that we adjourn.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

[The House adjourned at 5:31 p.m.]