



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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First Session

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2023

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HALIFAX, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 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. We will now begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, Speaker. I beg leave to table a petition entitled "Former County in CBRM," the operative clause reading:

"We, the undersigned, as residents of the former County of Cape Breton in the CBRM we are requesting annual maintenance of the ditches and overgrowth of trees, shrubs, etc. along our roads that are owned and maintained by the Province of Nova Scotia through the Department of Public Works. The lack of regular maintenance due to lack of funding and equipment access has created serious conditions for residents, drivers, and pedestrians. Due to lack of maintenance and overgrowth ditches have overflowed causing flooding conditions breaking up the roads and damaging homes. The overgrowth has also made it dangerous for drivers to see on coming traffic when making turns and makes it difficult for pedestrians to walk safely on roads that do not have adequate sidewalks. Again, we request scheduled maintenance of these local roads and an increase in funding to support this work which is carried out by the hard-working individuals at Public Works."

There are 142 signatures, and I've affixed mine as per the rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, Speaker. I beg leave to table a petition entitled "Reserve Mines' Roads." The operative clause reads:

"We the undersigned, as residents of Centreville, Official Row, and Neville in Reserve Mines, NS request the Department of Public Works repave the above-mentioned roads as they have fallen into disrepair. These roads are heavily used but have become dangerous for drivers and pedestrians."

Speaker, there are 103 signatures, and I have affixed my own as per the rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister responsible for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health.

HON. BRIAN COMER: Speaker, I beg leave to table the Review Board under the Involuntary Psychiatric Treatment Act's Annual Report, April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

As Speaker of the House of Assembly and pursuant to Subsection No. 24(1) of the Ombudsman Act and Section No. 28 of the Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act, I am tabling the Office of the Ombudsman's 2022-23 Annual Report.

The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 711

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Hamas is a terrorist organization responsible for the slaughter, rape, and kidnapping of innocent Israeli civilians; and

Whereas on October 7th, Hamas perpetrated a horrific and callous attack on Israel, leaving innocent civilians, including Canadians, dead, missing or taken hostage; and

Whereas Israel has the right under international law to exist and to defend itself; and

Whereas Nova Scotians condemn the callous actions of Hamas;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature join me in solidarity against these vicious attacks and stand with the people of Israel and its right to defend itself.

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 Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, avant de déclarer mon avis, j'aimerais faire une félicitation.

Speaker, before I do my notice of motion, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Je suis très heureux et ravi d'accueillir dans votre Tribune et puis dans la galerie de l'est, des membres de la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse et représentants d'un bout de la province à l'autre, de Par-en-Bas à Sydney, qui font partie de l'événement Équipe Acadie, un événement pour sensibiliser les députés élus ainsi que les fonctionnaires.

Speaker, I'm really pleased and thrilled to welcome members of the Acadian and Francophone community from Argyle to Sydney who are gathering here in Halifax for Équipe Acadie, an initiative to meet with elected officials as well as the Public Service to bring awareness of important issues to the Acadian community.

In your gallery, dans votre galerie, Madame la présidente, nous avons Kenneth Deveau, président de la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Delaney Clarke, vice-présidente de la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Allister Surette, recteur de l'Université Sainte-Anne; Pierre Roisé, directeur générale du Réseau Santé Nouvelle-Écosse; Véronique Legault, directrice générale du Regroupement des aînés de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Laurie Martin Muranyi, directeur générale du Conseil jeunesse provincial; Gwen LeBlanc, de ma circonscription de Par-en-Bas et également membre du bureau de direction de la FANE; Josette Marchand, directrice générale de La Picasse; Natalie Robichaud, directrice générale de la Société acadienne de Clare; et Issam Wade, Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

Je m'excuse à tous les autres invités qui je n'ai pas eu l'occasion de souligner votre présence, mais je suis énormément ravi de vous accueillir ici aujourd'hui. Je vous demande tous de vous lever pour recevoir l'accueil chaleureux de la Chambre. (Applaudissements)

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

RESOLUTION NO. 712

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, à une date ultérieure, je demanderai l'adoption de la résolution suivante :

Attendu que la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse est formée de 29 organismes membres représentant différentes régions et différents secteurs de la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse; et

Attendu que la mission de la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse est de promouvoir la croissance et le développement global de la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse; et

Attendu que la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse a réuni ses membres dans le cadre d'une initiative intitulé Équipe Acadie, les 18 et 19 octobre 2023, afin de présenter les priorités et les succès de la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse avec les membres de cette assemblée;

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que les membres de l'Assemblée législative se joignent à moi pour reconnaître la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse et la vitalité de la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse pour célébrer ses contributions sociales, culturelles, et économiques continues dans notre province.

Madame la Présidente, je demande l'adoption de cette résolution sans préavis et sans débat.

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

Whereas the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse is comprised of 29 member organizations representing various regions and sectors of Nova Scotia's Acadian and Francophone community; and

Whereas the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse has for a mission to promote the growth and global development of the Acadian and Francophone community of Nova Scotia; and

Whereas the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse has brought its members together for an initiative entitled Équipe Acadie on October 18 and 19, 2023, to share the priorities and successes of Nova Scotia's Acadian and Francophone community with members of this House;

Therefore, be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me in recognizing Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse, as well as the vitality of Nova Scotia's Acadian and Francophone community, and to celebrate our ongoing social, cultural, and economic contributions to our province.

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

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

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried. (Applause)

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. I'd like to draw your attention to the gallery opposite. A few of the reasons that I'm here today: I'd like to welcome, for the first time since I've been in here for five years, my mother and father, Les and Nancy Rushton.

Also with them today is somebody else who's supported me 100 per cent through both of my campaigns: my Uncle Bill. With him today is somebody who is no stranger to the hallways: my special adviser, Shelly Boone.

I'd like everybody to welcome them. (Applause)

[1:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

RESOLUTION NO. 713

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

Whereas foster caregivers are among the most dedicated volunteers in this province, and we have been redesigning the foster care system to support the children and youth in their care; and

Whereas October 15th to 21st is Foster Family Appreciation Week, an opportunity to recognize the Nova Scotians who are the backbone of our child welfare system with special recognition to our first two hub home families, Debbie Cain and Evelyn and Russell MacInnis; and

Whereas foster families deserve our gratitude not just this week, but every day of the year for providing vulnerable children and youth safety, security, and love;

Therefore, be it resolved that members of the House join me in thanking Debbie Cain and Evelyn and Russell MacInnis, and all foster caregivers in Nova Scotia for everything they do to support the children and youth who need them.

Speaker, I would 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 honourable Minister of Public Works.

RESOLUTION NO. 714

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

Whereas our province was soaked by more than three months of rain in a single day in July, resulting in unprecedented damages to roads, bridges, and other infrastructure across our province; and

Whereas the record rainfall resulted in roughly \$70 million in damage to provincial infrastructure in addition to previous damage that occurred during the wildfires and Hurricane Fiona; and

Whereas crews stepped up, working long hours in less than desirable conditions to make necessary repairs to ensure our roads and critical infrastructure was safe for travel and the movement of goods;

Therefore be it resolved that this Legislature offer its thanks to the hundreds of Public Works staff and private contractors for their quick response, hard work, and professionalism during this disaster.

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.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

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

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I beg leave to make an introduction in relation to this bill.

THE SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Joining us today in the Gallery are Gaynor Hart and Elizabeth Shein. They are both patient advocates with Dense Breasts Canada. I'd ask them to stand up and receive the welcome of the House. (Applause)

Bill No. 356 - An Act to Expand Breast Screenings for High Breast Density Patients. (Rafah DiCostanzo)

Bill No. 357 - An Act Respecting Cellular Coverage on Highways. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

Bill No. 358 - An Act to Establish a Flooded Homes Buyback Program. (Hon. Kelly Regan)

Bill No. 359 - An Act to Amend Chapter 7 of the Acts of 2011, the Fair Drug Pricing Act, Respecting the Seniors' Pharmacare Program. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 360 - An Act to Create a Registry of Vulnerable Persons. (Lorelei Nicoll)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: May I beg leave to make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Please do so.

STEVE CRAIG: Thank you. In the East Gallery, today with me are Mr. Ron Chambers and his neighbour, Mr. Ed Corbett. Mr. Chambers and Mr. Corbett live at the end of Memory Lane in Lower Sackville, in the house closest to Bedford. But it is also the convergence of Highway No. 101, Highway No. 102, the Bedford Bypass, and the Sackville River. And I would ask all members of the House to show their appreciation for them being here today before I make my member statement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

CORBETT, ED: FLOOD RESCUE - RECOG.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: I rise today to applaud Ed Corbett of Lower Sackville. On the evening of July 21, 2023, long-time friend and caring neighbour Ed Corbett became a hero to Ron and Esther Chambers. Ed anxiously watched as Ron and Esther's home became surrounded by flood waters. As the water level kept rising, he quickly realized they had no way of escaping or being rescued from their home.

Without giving it a second thought, he left the safety of his own home and swam through 12 feet of water in at least 14-foot-deep water that was contaminated with furnace oil and other unknown debris to be sure they were okay. It was 12 hours before the water levels receded and they were rescued.

I would like to ask all members of the House of Assembly to join me in applauding Mr. Ed Corbett for risking his life that night to ensure his friends and neighbours were safe.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I beg leave to make an introduction, please.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined by five incredible advocates: Ms. Starr Cunningham, President and CEO of the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia; Ms. Cynthia Carroll, Executive Director of Autism Nova Scotia; Mr. David Nicholson, Chairperson of Autism Nova Scotia; Ms. Erin Christie, of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Nova Scotia Division; and Ms. Shobha Gashus, of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Nova Scotia Division. I'd ask these folks to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

INVISIBLE DISABILITIES WEEK: WORK OF ORGS. - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, today we are recognizing Invisible Disabilities Week from October 16-22. This day is intended to bring awareness to individuals living with invisible disabilities. Many disabilities are easily seen. However, invisible disabilities that are psychosocial, mental, physical, and developmental are not always necessarily recognizable, but they do exist.

Today I am welcoming representatives from three organizations that work closely with Nova Scotians who have invisible disabilities. These include, as I mentioned earlier, Ms. Starr Cunningham, President and CEO of the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia; Ms. Cynthia Carroll, Executive Director of Autism Nova Scotia; Mr. David Nicholson, Chairperson of Autism Nova Scotia; Ms. Erin Christie of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Nova Scotia Division; and Ms. Shobha Gashus of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Nova Scotia Division.

Invisible Disabilities Week reminds us that not all illnesses or disabilities are visible, and many people are fighting battles that we can't see. Thank you to the many organizations that support Nova Scotians living with these invisible disabilities. Please know that this House has an obligation to work with you to improve lives and conditions for those folks whom you represent and advocate for.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

YARR, AL: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

GARY BURRILL: I wish to raise up before the House the memory of Alan Yarr. Al Yarr was a legendary Dalhousie head coach for four decades in cross country, track and field, and basketball. His coaching career began in 1963, when he first coached Dalhousie men's basketball. He led the Dalhousie Tigers to 60 Atlantic Universities Athletics Association conference championships. He was head coach of the Canadian women's team at the World Athletics Cross Country Championships in Belgium in 1991, Dalhousie Coach of the Year in 1987, and he continued his involvement in coaching for many years beyond his 1999 retirement.

Alan Yarr was a long-standing member of the New Democratic Party in Halifax Chebucto. He passed away after a long and fulfilling life on May 26th at age 89.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

SCHWARTZ, DIANA: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I rise in my place to recognize a resident of Cape Breton whom many loved and we lost in the last few weeks - and that is Diana Schwartz from Sydney. She was the wife of Irving Schwartz, whom many people would be familiar with.

She was an advocate and a big supporter within the Jewish community in Cape Breton and beyond. She had a great love for the arts. She was a big advocate for the local library. She made a lot of contributions to the Cape Breton Cancer Centre.

I can tell you, as a kid who grew in the neighbourhood, Irving and Diana were staples in our community for the work - not only that they did in Cape Breton but really all over the country.

I rise in my place today to recognize a really beautiful woman. She had a heart of gold. She was so good to all of us growing up in the neighbourhood, and she was so good to her family, her friends, and the greater Cape Breton community. I'm honoured to rise in my place to remember and celebrate Diana Schwartz.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

BRIDG. & AREA LIONS CLUB: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Bridgewater and Area Lions Club, whose members have supported our community since 1955. Our Lions champion kindness, work actively to contribute to life on the South Shore, and help community members in need.

The Lions also delight children with their wagon train at local events. This year they installed an insulated pantry at Souls Harbour Bridgewater that is stocked with canned and dry goods as well as toiletries.

They also support those who are sight- and hearing-impaired through the provision of new and reconditioned eyeglasses and hearing aids. They provide CPAP machines to people with apnea and give books to children to encourage literacy. Lions help community members with medical expenses, medication costs, and power bills, and provide significant support to many local organizations. They are important fundraisers and supporters of disaster relief and Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides.

I ask the House to please join me in thanking the members of the Bridgewater and Area Lions Club for enhancing the lives of those they support.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. I welcome Debbie Kennedy and Kelly Quenneville here today to hear a statement in honour of their daughter and sister. Please give them our welcome. (Applause)

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

KENNEDY, AMIE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise today to honour the life of an amazing Nova Scotian, Amie Kennedy. Amie was one of those souls who cared for others more than for herself. She was a rescuer of animals, whether to take home as part of her forever family or to transport wild creatures to Hope for Wildlife for rehabilitation.

Amie also worked with neurodiverse children, those young people struggling in school and in community. Amie connected with these children like no other, and she made them feel special and understood every single day. She also made sure they felt like kids and could experience the joys and ridiculousness of childhood. She would light up when she would talk about her days, whether it was her successes of the day or just her interactions - it gave her so much purpose.

I ask all members to join me in offering our condolences to Amie's friends, family and special animal friends on the loss of this extraordinary person. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

[1:30 p.m.]

ARSENAULT-CROSSMAN, MARLENE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, today I rise to honour the life of Marlene Arsenault-Crossman. She passed away suddenly and tragically on October 12th, last week. Her funeral is ongoing right now, as we speak today, in her home community of Amherst.

She was born and raised in Amherst, Nova Scotia, and worked in a number of retail positions in Amherst, Sackville, and Moncton, New Brunswick, all while raising her boys. Over the past few years, she managed the Amherst Theatre, formerly known as Cineplex, where she mentored young people and modelled a strong work ethic for the many youth who began their work in Marlene's capable hands. She was always willing to take on special projects, and if you ever had the opportunity to interact with Marlene, you would definitely remember her smile and her kindness. She was a woman whom everyone felt a natural connection with.

Please join me in extending sincere condolences to Marlene's sons, Corey and Bradley, and to her siblings and extended family. Our area has lost a wonderful woman who will be greatly missed by our border communities.

Speaker, may I request my MLA colleagues rise and honour Marlene Arsenault-Crossman in a moment of silence.

THE SPEAKER: Please rise for a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

MACKINNON, MIKE & CINDY: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. PAT DUNN: Speaker, every year communities across Nova Scotia celebrate the remarkable power of volunteerism. What you do has a far greater impact than what you say. Volunteerism is really a selfless act of giving your time, skills, and hearts to make a difference in the lives of others in the communities we share. Volunteers are the unsung heroes of our society, dedicating their efforts to build a better world.

Mike and Cindy MacKinnon from Hillside, Pictou County have been volunteering for decades. My wish today is to recognize the MacKinnons, who continue to dedicate their

time, resources and energy to uplift our communities. Their generosity is seemingly endless.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

SAMBRO: COM. LG SPIRIT AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: When I was young, I took a chance and travelled the world, so I got to see a lot of beautiful places. I may be biased but Sambro, Nova Scotia, is one of the most beautiful and best communities in the world - beautiful beaches, trails, coastlines and people. It really has it all. They say that people make the community, and Sambro has some of the best people you will ever meet - hard-working, welcoming, family-oriented, and a volunteer spirit.

Well, Speaker, the secret is out as the community of Sambro recently received the Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award - a long-overdue recognition that they are one of the best. Congratulations to the family, the friends and the community of Sambro - simply the best.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

R & M RUBBER STAMP: 60TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, in recognition of Small Business Week, I'd like to congratulate Dartmouth North small business R & M Rubber Stamp for 60 years in business. R & M Rubber Stamp has been making custom rubber stamps, business cards, labels, and corporate seals in the HRM since 1963. They are currently located in Dartmouth's hub of commerce, the Burnside Industrial District.

As a notary public and Commissioner of Oaths, I require several custom stamps, which I was happy to purchase from R & M Rubber Stamps. Just as their website says, they offer a quick turnaround, and they even delivered the stamps to my door.

I ask the House to join me in thanking R & M Rubber Stamps for doing business in Dartmouth North, and congratulate them on six decades of business.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley.

WEATHERBEE, CAMDEN: WORLD CUP PERF. - CONGRATS.

LARRY HARRISON: Thank you, Speaker. I have looked forward to the opportunity of addressing you as such. (Laughter)

Recently, Camden Weatherbee of Shortts Lake received an unforgettable phone call inviting him to join Team Canada in the WBSC Americas Pan American Softball Championships in Columbia. Although the only Nova Scotian player, he had Colchester County company as Stewiacke's Garth Perrin joined as part of the coaching team. Mr. Weatherbee and his team won bronze in the six-team tournament, securing their spot in the WBSC U-18 Men's Softball World Cup this November in Morocco.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Camden Weatherbee, his teammates, and their coaching team, including Garth Perrin, on their bronze medal win. I also want to wish them the best of luck in the upcoming World Cup. We will be watching and rooting for them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

L'ACADIE VINEYARDS: GOLD MEDAL RECIPIENT - CONGRATS.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Speaker, in recent years Nova Scotians have witnessed the extraordinary growth of our wine industry. Within this growth, we are seeing a diversity of approaches to vineyard development.

L'Acadie Vineyards in the beautiful Gaspereau Valley, established in 2004 by wine maker Bruce Ewert and his family, has built a reputation for their dedication to sustainable farming methods and excellence in wine production. L'Acadie Vineyards has focused on organic and biodynamic farming methods through innovative vineyard management techniques, energy conservation measures, and eco-friendly packaging choices.

Earlier this year for the first time ever, a L'Acadie Vineyards wine won a gold medal at the Decanter World Wine Awards in London - a first for our Nova Scotia wine industry. L'Acadie's 2017 Prestige Brut Estate earned this gold medal in competition among 18,250 wines from 57 countries.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to L'Acadie Vineyards for this well-deserved recognition, and for their continued commitment to excellence in our Nova Scotia wine industry.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

MANITOBA ELECTION: FIRST NATIONS PREMIER - CONGRATS.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, today I rise to mark a defining event which took place in Manitoba yesterday. For the first time in our country's history, a First Nations person was sworn in as Premier of a province. This is a moment for Canadians to celebrate. Like many, I was up in the early hours of the morning cheering on the results of that election from afar.

I would like to congratulate the people of Manitoba for choosing the politics of unity and inclusion, and rejecting the politics of division and hate, which were so present in that election. I ask all members to join me in marking this occasion and offering a hearty congratulations to the incoming Manitoba New Democratic Premier, Wab Kinew, and his cabinet. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

PARKES, ALAN: BUS. SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, during this year's Small Business Week, I'd like to rise to congratulate a local long-time business owner, Al Parkes, on 10 years of successfully operating his business in Mount Uniacke, the Mount Uniacke Self Storage. Al was inspired to start his business after discovering and then binge-watching *Storage Wars*, and of course seeing a demand in the community for a storage solution. Soon after, he purchased and started operating Mount Uniacke Self Storage. Since then, the business has flourished and expanded a number of times. Al is proud that he is able to assist his community with keeping their valuable possessions safe.

I ask members of this House to join me during this year's Small Business Week to congratulate Al on his accomplishments and wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

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

GIRLS U-14 BASEBALL TEAM: MEDAL WIN - CONGRATS.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, today I'm filled with immense pride and joy, as I congratulate the Nova Scotia Girls U-14 Baseball Team on their remarkable achievement as the Atlantic Champions, bringing home the gold medal in the championship game against Newfoundland and Labrador. What makes this victory even more special is the presence of Fairview's own Gracie Downing, proudly wearing No. 27. Gracie, now in her third year of playing, has been an integral part of this back-to-back championship-winning team. Her dedication and exceptional skills have undoubtedly contributed to the team's outstanding success.

Gracie is not only a baseball star, she's an extraordinary multi-sport athlete, excelling in baseball, hockey, and javelin. Her talent, determination, and commitment to sport are truly inspiring.

Congratulations to the entire Nova Scotia Girls U-14 Baseball Team for your remarkable achievement. I eagerly anticipate witnessing Gracie's continued success in the upcoming hockey season, and look forward to the wonderful things she will achieve. Let us celebrate the incredible accomplishments of these young athletes, who serve as a wonderful example of the dedication and excellence that can be achieved through sports.

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

ORGANIZERS: LAMBERT TODD DAYS FESTIVAL - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: The Lambert Todd Days committee and their partners, the Reserve Mines Volunteer Fire Department and the Reserve Mines Seniors and Pensioners Club, have done it again. The Lambert Todd Festival was amazing.

The community came together for several days of fun. Some of the highlights for me were the kickoff party in the park - which included local horseback riding, the bouncy tent, food, a magic show, and many other fun activities - the delicious pancake breakfast, hosted by the Reserve Mines Seniors and Pensioners Club, and the volunteer fire department's junior firefighter competition. The firefighter competition was held on one of the hottest days, and quickly turned into a water fight, which the kids did not start.

Congratulations, and thank you to the Lambert Todd Days committee and their partners for a unique, successful, fun-filled festival.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

PARTICIPANTS: RUN FOR THE CURE - THANKS

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month - a month that reminds us of the importance of breast cancer prevention, early detection, treatment, and support for those impacted by this terrible disease.

This month started off with the CIBC Run for the Cure in Halifax. My colleague the member for Digby-Annapolis - who is a survivor - and I joined more than a thousand participants in the largest single-day, volunteer-led event in the country in support of breast cancer. It is initiatives like this that allow us to continue to support research in programs and services.

In my constituency of Argyle, a group gathered in West Pubnico on October 4th for their Run for the Cure event. Together they raised \$4,100.

I ask all members of the House to join me in thanking all participants, volunteers, and those who have played a role in the success of this year's Run for the Cure. We send along our positive thoughts to those currently fighting all forms of cancer, including our honourable colleague, the member for Clayton Park West.

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

NORTHRUP, HAROLD: COM. SERV. - THANKS

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, I rise today to recognize one of our valued Cole Harbour-Dartmouth residents, Harold Northrup. Harold is a veteran who is a lifetime member of the Royal Canadian Legion. He is a lifetime member of the Royal Canadian Air Force Association, and a lifetime member of the Korean conflict.

Some of his numerous contributions to our community include acting as the treasurer of the Cole Harbour Place building committee, during both the build and following its completion. Harold was responsible for acquiring donations and following up to have a new cenotaph built at Cole Harbour Place, where Remembrance Day ceremonies have been held since its completion.

In addition, Harold was chairman of the Cole Harbour County Planning Commission, was an auxiliary constable in Cole Harbour for 35 years, and was involved in organizing many parades for our community. Thank you, Harold Northrup, for your service, your time, and valued contributions to Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

DALHOUSIE UNIV.: STUDYING SLAVERY CONF. - THANKS

SUZY HANSEN: Between October 18th to 21st in Halifax, Dalhousie University and the University of King's College, in partnership with the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, will host the Universities Studying Slavery Conference 2023.

This is a major international conference on slavery's role in higher education and its legacies, which include the international movement for reparations and redress. This will be the first USS Conference held outside of the U.S., and the first USS Conference to foreground the history of slavery in Nova Scotia and Canada, and the experiences of African Nova Scotians particularly. Some keynotes will be from H.E. John Mahama, the former President of Ghana, Dr. George Elliott Clarke, the poet and professor, among many others.

I'd like all members to welcome the many visitors to our wonderful city and, as well, thank you to Dalhousie University and the University of King's College, in partnership with the Black Cultural Centre, for hosting this conference.

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

MCFADGEN'S BAKERY: 75TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, I believe the recipe for economic success is held by McFadgen's Bakery in Glace Bay. The third-generation, family-owned, wholesale bakery

has been operating since 1948 and is now managed by Darren and Stacey McFadgen. In 2014 they completed an expansion of two facilities, giving them the ability to complement their product base, and now they employ more than 90 people. You have most likely seen their products across Atlantic Canada, Ontario and the Magdalen Islands under the brand name Mom's Bakery.

[1:45 p.m.]

The basis for the McFadgen recipe is the community support demonstrated by its commitment to supporting local fundraisers and topped off with a healthy craving by the community, for sure. The McFadgen family is proof that our entrepreneurs are the backbone of our economy, creating jobs and long-term economic growth. Congratulations Darren, Stacey, the McFadgen family, and the rest of their staff for 75 years of serving up sweet treats.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

FRIENDS OF CLAYTON PARK: COM. SERV. - THANKS

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the non-profit society called Friends of Clayton Park. What I love about the society, which was established 17 years ago, is that they target diverse youth aged 14 to 25 to learn the value of giving back to the community through volunteerism and learning valuable leadership skills while bringing our community together.

This Summer I had the pleasure of working with this wonderful group for our annual community summer barbecue, with the hard work of the board members, President *Matthew* Samaan, Vice-President AJ Kapilan, Treasurer Essa Hashem, Secretary Olivia Liu and media rep Vishaal Pradeepan. They fundraised, they planned and executed everything needed for this event and it was a great success, with over 1,200 people attending.

I ask the House to join me in thanking Friends of Clayton Park for their hard work and dedication to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

KEMP, WALTER: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

GARY BURRILL: I wish to lift up the memory of one of Halifax's great musical presences, Walter Kemp, who passed away on the 9th of June at the age of 84. Dr. Kemp, as he was so very often referred to, came to Halifax in 1977 to become Chair of the Music Department at Dalhousie, and he remained one of the city's most prominent musical figures for over 40 years. A legendary choirmaster directing the Dal Chorale and the Royal

Nova Scotia Tattoo choir, Dr. Kemp was also an accomplished organist at both St. Paul's Anglican Church and the King's College Chapel. Additionally, he was conductor of the Gilbert and Sullivan Society and artistic and administrative director of Opera Nova Scotia.

We in the NDP are proud to work in our Provincial Party Office with Carol Grimmitt, Dr. Kemp's daughter. I am sure the House joins our party in extending every sympathy to the family and friends of Dr. Kemp.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

STEVENSON GOLF TOURN.: FUNDRAISER - THANKS

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Speaker, the annual Constable Heidi Stevenson Memorial Golf Tournament took place on May 26th at The Links at Penn Hills in Shubenacadie. The annual tournament is an opportunity for the community and former RCMP colleagues to get together and raise money in memory of Constable Stevenson, who is still very much missed in East Hants and beyond. This year, over \$10,000 was raised to be given to the East Hants Crime Prevention Association, which will be used for bursaries for East Hants Rural High School students in Heidi's memory.

I'd like everyone in the Chamber to join me in thanking everyone who organized and participated in the event. Heidi very much cared for our community and this event makes it possible to continue the good work she was known for.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

VOL. ORGS.: HOSTING EVENTS - THANKS

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, volunteerism is alive and well in the community of Northside-Westmount, and today I would like to recognize several groups that put on major events in our community over the Summer, starting with the North Sydney Fire Department and their hard work and dedication to put on Canada Day events for the community. It was very well attended and very well received. Also, the Canada Day Committee for Petersfield Provincial Park puts on an amazing event to celebrate Canada Day, and I thank them for their efforts. New Deal Development, for the second year in a row, put on their Sydney Mines Heritage Festival with lots of music and entertainment in the community of Sydney Mines. It was wonderfully attended, and it was a great addition to the community. Father Doug and his committee put on the first Sydney Mines Highland Games, and it was wonderful. Finally, the Northside Boys with their Show Your Ride event - a wonderful event and a lovely attendance - and the Northside Gals who continue to volunteer in our community.

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

VARIOUS ORGS.: FOOD ACCESS WORK - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: I'm sure everyone in this Chamber has heard stories from their constituents about not having consistent access to nutritious and affordable food. This past Monday, October 16th was World Food Day, and I want to recognize some of the groups in Halifax Citadel-Sable Island who help bridge gaps to food access in times of heightened need.

In my constituency alone, people in need of a meal for themselves or their family will turn to the Halifax Community Fridge, Connections Halifax, Feed Nova Scotia, Laing House, Out of the Cold Community Association, Phoenix Youth Programs, St. Matthew's United Church, Saint Mary's Cathedral Basilica, Meals on Wheels Nova Scotia, Halifax Public Libraries, St. Andrew's United Church, Spencer House, Square Roots, and food banks at Saint Mary's University, Dalhousie University, and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. I'm sure I probably missed some people and organizations doing this good work along the way.

Speaker, I ask that my colleagues in the House join me in recognizing World Food Day, as well as the responsibility of the province in ensuring Nova Scotians have consistent access to affordable and nutritious food.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

DAUGHTER, PAGET: PASSED BAR EXAM - CONGRATS.

THE PREMIER: I'd like to take a moment to congratulate my daughter Paget. She graduated from Queen's Commerce and Law in the Spring. In the Summer, she wrote the New York State Board of Law Examiners bar exam. She received her mark today. She is now officially a real New York lawyer. I'm so proud of her. I'm proud of you, Paget.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

COMEAU, GEORGE: VOL. OF YR. AWD. RECIP. - RECOG.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Nova Scotia recently acknowledged exceptional volunteers from across the province, each representing volunteers from their community. Clare's representative was George Phillip Comeau, an unwavering volunteer for the Terra Fondo, our area's mountain bike ride. Before the event, Mr. Comeau meticulously planned the optimal route and trained road safety volunteers. On the day of the Terra Fondo, he arrived early to ensure a safe and enjoyable day.

Mr. Comeau also dedicates his time to the Little Brook Fire Department, the Clare Rail to Trail Association, and the Sou'West Nova ATV Association. I invite all members

to join me in recognizing George Phillip Comeau for his award celebrating his contributions to promoting outdoor activities and safety.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

WORLD MENOPAUSE DAY: AWARENESS - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yesterday was World Menopause Day. As a member of this Assembly who is in the throes of menopause, I feel I am a good person to stand up and speak to this for a moment. Menopause exhibits symptoms in many ways and many kinds. It could be hot flashes, it could be raging hormonal mood swings, it could be irritability, it could be lack of sleep - but seriously, it's all very serious. It can affect the way people with uteruses go about their lives and are able to do their daily business, care for their families, et cetera.

When I was in Ghana two weeks ago, representing the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, we had conversations about this very thing. In certain countries, it's very much taboo to talk about menopause - to talk about anything to do with women's health or the health of people with uteruses. I'm standing today to say - for those people who are about to or who are already experiencing menopause - I see you. It's a serious health issue, and we need to focus some attention on it so people can live their best lives all the way through the change of life.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for that. I can sincerely relate.

The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

BORDEN, RUSSELL: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.

HON. GREG MORROW: Speaker, this my first chance to stand up and formally congratulate you on your historic appointment. Better late than never. Congratulations.

I rise today to congratulate Russell Borden of Hazel Hill on his recent retirement from Fanning Education Centre/Canso Academy. During his 43-and-a-half-year career he served as janitor for more than 23 years. In the last 20 years he shifted roles and became a school bus driver, which he continued to do up until retirement. In his years as a school janitor, Russell took pride in his work and was always a smiling face to students and staff. In his role as a school bus driver, Russell always showed kindness and compassion for students who were fortunate to travel on his bus.

Known to the students as Uncle Russell, he had a wonderful send-off to retirement from all the students and staff, with posters, cards, applause, and some tears. Russell made a difference in his career and his dedication to his role. He will always be remembered by the students, parents, and staff. I ask the House to join me in a round of

applause for Russell Borden and wish him and his wife Hattie well as they start this new chapter. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: I beg leave to make an introduction. In the East Gallery today, we're joined by an old friend of mine. He's the manager of HRM's Council Support Office, Quenton Hill, as well as my special advisor, Nadine Yuriev, who've both come to listen to Question Period today. I'd like to ask the members of the House to welcome them both here today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

KERR, PIPE MAJ. ANDREW: NETHERLANDS VISIT - THANKS

CARMAN KERR: In May of this year a re-enactment group representing the 1st Battalion of the Black Watch of Canada Pipes & Drums visited the Netherlands to commemorate the end of World War II. This group of 40 volunteers was made up of pipers and drummers from across Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Their ambitious itinerary had them performing official ceremonies across Holland, including a full Remembrance Service at each cemetery where a Black Watch member was buried.

My constituent Pipe Major Andrew Kerr led the group and he tells me that everywhere they went, the Dutch people showed their legendary respect for the Canadians. I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking Pipe Major Andrew Kerr and all members of this group for their efforts to ensure the sacrifices of Black Watch members during the Second World War were not forgotten.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

TOULANY, HALIME "BUD": DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise today to recognize the life and mark the passing of long-time Dartmouth South community member Halime "Bud" Toulany. For nearly two decades, Bud and his family have run the Hungry Hut on Ochterloney Street. Bud was known for his friendly waves, hard work ethic, and fierce loyalty. He was genuine in his love and care for community and generous with his smiles and kind words for his customers.

As with many Dartmouth businesses, the Toulany's are fixtures of our community. Many remember Bud from his days as a child running around the Toulany's Prince Albert Road corner store. Bud loved Dartmouth and Dartmouth loved him right back. He will be deeply missed. I ask all members to join me in offering condolences to Bud's parents and

his siblings, Raymond, Hana, and Saleem, and on a happier note, to welcome them back as the Hungry Hut re-opens this week.

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

[2:00 p.m.]

MACKENZIE, JAKE: NEW JIU-JITSU SCHOOL - CONGRATS.

DAVE RITCEY: Congratulations on your well-deserved and historic election as our Speaker.

Today I recognize a Jiu-Jitsu World Champion who happens to be from Truro, the talented Jake MacKenzie. Jake's passion for martial arts began at only 12 years old. By 16, he was travelling back and forth from Canada to Brazil for training camps and competitions. Over the years, Jake has won more than 100 championship medals from nationals to world championships. Jake has won more tournaments in Brazil than any other outside the country of Brazil in the history of the sport.

He and his wife Melissa recently returned to the Maritimes to take on their new roles as coaches and gym owners, recently opening Jake MacKenzie's School of Jiu-Jitsu in Halifax. They also take the time to move back to Truro and teach the youth. I wish them all the best in this exciting new adventure and ask the members to rise and congratulate Jake and Melissa on their new business venture.

THE SPEAKER: The time is now two o'clock. We will finish Questions Put by Members to Ministers at 2:50.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: ELIMINATE CELL DEAD ZONES - COMMIT

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, Nova Scotia has faced countless extreme weather events, and this year, particularly, with the largest wildfires on record, one of the largest hurricanes, and of course the tragic floods that took lives in Nova Scotia, we are very well aware of the danger to Nova Scotians.

When faced with emergency, whether it's due to weather events, accident, or health events, Nova Scotians need to be able to rely on cell service to receive emergency alerts

and call for help. Unfortunately, many parts of our province, both urban and rural, are dead zones, leaving people in very vulnerable situations when they need help the most. A government report to identify cell service gaps was conducted last year, but like most reports under this government, it has yet to be released or actioned on.

My question to the Premier: Why has he been sitting on this report on cell coverage when it's becoming a growing concern for Nova Scotians, particularly those who can't call for help when they need it most?

THE PREMIER: Obviously, in the past year we had Hurricane Fiona, we had flooding, we had the fires, and we had the tragic flooding with loss of life. That's just in the past year, for sure. We know that there are more of these to come. There's no question we need to be prepared as a province. Having an adequate, reliable cell network is part of what is necessary, for sure. I know Build Nova Scotia is actively engaged in this file right now, and putting a plan together to make sure that cell service is there for those people who need it, particularly in those cases of emergency.

ZACH CHURCHILL: This government wouldn't release the report that we do have on cell gap analysis. Unfortunately, Nova Scotians had to go through the cumbersome freedom of information process to receive that. I'll table that. What it discovered was that 21,000 households lack cell service in their homes, and there are more than 1,000 kilometres of primary roads that are dead zones in this province. No matter where you are in Nova Scotia, cell service is a major concern and a safety hazard. It's not just when it comes to extreme weather events, although at those times it particularly matters. It's also people dealing with car accidents on our highways or our highly travelled roads, or experiencing health events when they're travelling as well. Can the Premier please commit today to do what other provinces have done and step up and ensure that there is an elimination of dead zones for cell coverage in Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Of course, that report that was prepared is informative. It helps Build Nova Scotia move forward with the plan. We know the issues exist. The issues with cell coverage have existed in this province since cell phones were developed. I don't think ours is a government that's known for resting on these issues. We're a government of action. We feel the urgency of the cell phone issue. I think incredible progress has been made around internet service, but certainly cell service, we need to catch up. We feel that urgency as well, Speaker.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Certainly I'm happy to see that the government is taking some ownership over this. Before today, the government simply pointed the finger at the federal government and said that it was up to them. We know that governments need to work together, particularly on big-ticket items like internet coverage and like cell coverage.

Even on their own, other provinces like British Columbia have stepped up and provided legislation that would ensure cell coverage on highways in British Columbia. This is done not just because it's so annoying for everybody when we lose coverage when we're travelling, but because it can be a life-and-death situation for many individuals when they can't call for help, particularly if they're alone or stranded. Can the Premier please commit today that his government will engage in an action plan to address the cell coverage gaps in Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Will and have. It's already well in progress. Like a number of issues with our government, we move on these things. We don't look the other way. We don't put them on the side of desks. I can tell you, Speaker, that we almost had to order new desks for many of the ministers' offices, because when we took government there were so many reports and things to do sitting on the side of the desks that the desks were crooked. We're getting it done on behalf of Nova Scotians.

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

PREM.: HUNGRY CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS - ACT

CLAUDIA CHENDER: If the Premier is ready for action, I've got a project. My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, he told this House that he wasn't aware that any hungry children would have to ask for food from teachers in order to receive it in school. The Premier and his government continue to maintain that every child who needs food in school receives it. If the Premier doesn't think that hungry kids are asking for food in schools, how does he think they're being fed?

THE PREMIER: Poverty, child poverty, these things are issues that nobody can accept. We're deeply concerned about the issues that are facing families and certainly children in this province. Yesterday, the member said that children have to raise their hand and ask in front of their class for help. I know a lot of teachers, and I don't know a single one who would put a child through that. I know lots of teachers who take food to school to give to children, take school supplies. I know our teachers are stepping up in every single way to support those kids in front of them. I don't know a single teacher who would say to a student in front of an entire class, Can you please raise your hand if you need support? That's not true. I don't accept that. I do accept that there's a lot of work to do in this province.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: A Nova Scotia Health Authority report from last Fall found that in some schools, students have to approach a teacher or administrator for free meals, and this approach risks singling students out. I've tabled that report.

Also, last Fall, an executive director from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development told a government committee that a child would receive food who "comes to school and presents themselves as not having food or being hungry." I'll table that.

I'll ask the Premier again: Does he think it's acceptable that a student is required to present themselves as being hungry?

THE PREMIER: I don't accept it as acceptable that there are hungry children in this province, but there are. We'll work hard to alleviate that. I think what the member is missing is that in classroom situations, in many situations around this province, teachers actually talk to students. Students approach teachers quietly, and I know teachers approach students quietly. They go both ways. There is absolutely no question in my mind that a student may approach a teacher quietly and say, Teacher, I'm hungry. I absolutely know that goes the other way, that teachers say, Could we have a little chat? No question that happens in our society.

I am not accepting of the fact that any teacher in our province - I'd like to know who they are, if it's happening, there's no way it's happening - says in front of an entire class, Raise your hand and present to the class that you want food. Let's talk about the real issue and stop with the theatrics on this issue.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I have a better idea than demonizing teachers. Why don't we have food in schools for all children who need it? Nova Scotians are confused by this government's response to this issue. My messages, my email inbox, my phone are filled with messages from parents and teachers who know that not every child who needs food in school receives it. They don't believe it.

According to the executive director of Nourish Nova Scotia, the provincial partner for school-based healthy eating programs, we're not always reaching the students who are in greatest need of access to food. That is clear. I will ask the Premier again: Does he stand by the minister's statement that every child who needs food in school receives it?

THE PREMIER: I actually think that to suggest to this House and to Nova Scotians that there are teachers in this province who would request a student raise their hand in front of an entire class - that's actually demonizing teachers. I would never say that to the House. I support teachers.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Yesterday, the member made a statement. We can get the Hansard and get the exact words, but the gist of it was, and the theme has continued today, that students are expected to raise their hands - I believe was the phrase I heard yesterday - and suggest that they need food. I don't accept that that happens in this province. I believe that anyone who actually uses that language is demonizing teachers, because teachers are far too compassionate to do that to a student.

There is an issue with child poverty in this province. There is an issue with family poverty in this province, and we are working hard. I'd be happy to talk about the real issues

and the real solutions if we could just get past the sound bites and kickouts that the member opposite looks for.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

EMO: EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM - UPDATE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, once again during natural disasters we saw that the emergency alert system in Nova Scotia was not being used in an effective manner that could have potentially been life-saving to Nova Scotians. We've heard this from family members and advocates of those who were severely impacted with loss of life during the floods. The mother of one of the victims said publicly that we should be ready to go with an EMO system that can be delivered within a timely manner.

My question to the Minister responsible for the Office of Emergency Management is: When can we expect the emergency alert system to be updated? Time is of the essence, and this can be life-saving.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, first of all, you know, like all Nova Scotians, we are heartbroken at the loss of life that happened in the event of the floods. One of the things coming out of that was that the Premier has instructed our department to do a review of the emergency management protocols that we have, the National Emergency Response System, which we use, how we are using it. That's under way right now. We've done two rounds of consultations with fire chiefs, with EMO directors, First Nations, first responders of all sorts. That work is under way and not completed yet but it's certainly under way.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, we have actually heard from those who have been advocating on behalf of family members of the victims that they are not satisfied with this process. We've heard that this consultation is happening behind closed doors and that there's no accountability. I'll table that.

We've heard from another advocate who said, It saddened me greatly to have received only one response to my correspondence on this issue. As well, we've heard that the people of our province don't want excuses. It doesn't matter how legitimate they want to be, they want accountability and acknowledgement of the system failures. They want change.

Speaker, if the minister is moving forward with this in a proactive way, why are advocates and family members of these folks not being included in the consultation process?

JOHN LOHR: What I can say, again, is that our hearts go out to the family members and all those involved. What we are doing right now is going through the process

of trying to sort out where we need to be on this and talking - as I said, to repeat the answer the first time - to talk to our first responders of all sorts.

We've done that in three different sorts of engagements right across the province. We'll continue to do that work. When we're ready with where we know we want to be with that, then we will speak to the families for sure.

[2:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DPW: CHIGNECTO ISTHMUS PLAN - INFORM

FRED TILLEY: On October 6th the Minister of Public Works told reporters that rerouting and emergency plans are in place should the Chignecto Isthmus be compromised by a severe storm. The rerouting plan is merely a working group to develop a plan. To no one's surprise, the department won't release the details of the group's work, but they will release it when the time is right. I'll table that.

Speaker, the time is right now. We are potentially one storm away from the Chignecto Isthmus being wiped out by Nova Scotia. It's no longer an if, it's a when. This government needs to update Nova Scotians immediately. My question to the Minister of Public Works is: Does this government have a legitimate plan should the Chignecto Isthmus be compromised?

HON. KIM MASLAND: We certainly understand how important the isthmus is: \$100 million worth of trade crosses that isthmus every day. If we were to lose it to a storm, the effects of it would be felt all over Canada.

This is a 10-year project. We've been very clear in our statement that we believe this is a federal interest and federal responsibility. We have sought a court decision on this, but we continue to do the work. Part of the work is developing a strategy to go around the isthmus if necessary. It is a working plan, but it is a plan that if we need to move products through, we still can.

FRED TILLEY: On the same day that the minister noted the government is taking court action - and she just alluded to that - she said, "We strongly believe that constitutionally, the federal government is responsible, but again we know the importance of this trade corridor to our province." I will table that.

The Premier's MO is to blame other people for things when we need to get to work, get this looked after, and get this done. Whether it's a 10-year plan or a 5-year plan, we need to start now. To the Minister of Public Works: What will it take for this government to drop the blame game and get started on the good, important work that we need right now?

KIM MASLAND: Speaker, this is not a wrath of the blame game. I mean, my gosh. Do you want to know what we've been doing? We've identified the areas with immediate needs. We're preparing for consultations. We have a contingency plan including rerouting. We've identified the next stages of technical work. We've applied to the federal government for disaster mitigation funding. We haven't even heard from them yet. We applied in July.

When are we going to hear from the federal government to help with funding on this project? We just had folks in New Brunswick last week. We have folks who are going to speak in Ottawa next week. We are doing the work. We understand the importance of this. I'm tired of getting the finger pointed at me that I'm not doing anything on this file.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

MAH: FLOODED HOMES - BUY

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, on the night of July 21st, Bedford Basin experienced extensive flooding. On Union Street, many residents barely escaped with their lives. There was no warning that the Sackville River was flooding. Even if there was, some residents don't have cell phones, some don't speak English. No one came to warn them. Residents waded out of their homes in chest-high water in the middle of the night - some with disabled children, some with disabled parents, some in bare feet. They left family heirlooms behind. They were fleeing for their lives. Both the exits off Union Street were flooded and impassable. Residents say the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing - who came to visit them, which I really appreciate - told them he couldn't help them move from their flooded homes by buying them because we're in a housing crisis.

Speaker, what will it take for this government to care about the residents and the safety on Union Street?

HON. JOHN LOHR: We care about residents in every part of this province. We're provisioning. We lined up the DFAA program almost immediately for flood victims. I think when Hurricane Dorian happened, it took four months for that DFAA program to show up. Hurricane Fiona, unprecedented support. We're supporting flood victims everywhere. I'm very proud of the actions this government has taken to support victims of all the events that we've had in the past Summer and this past year, which have been unprecedented.

KELLY REGAN: When we ask about this government buying these severely damaged homes, the answer keeps changing. First the minister told residents they should stay where they are because of the housing crisis. Then the Premier claimed that there was no program to buy these homes, even though he knows full well he could just create one. Then, well, they might buy the homes but only if the municipality requested that they do so.

On September 12th, Halifax Regional Council directed the mayor to write to the Province asking it to buy the severely damaged homes on the floodplain on Union Street. I'll table that. Only Councillor Paul Russell voted against that motion. I've had confirmation from the feds that the purchase of these homes would be considered an eligible expense under the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements, and the Province could recoup that money.

My question is: What are they waiting for? Let these people live in safe housing. Buy their houses.

JOHN LOHR: To my knowledge, we have not received a request from HRM. I realize stuff has been said in the press, but we have not actually received that request from HRM. At that point, we would look into that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE - COMMIT

SUZY HANSEN: Earlier this week, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development told the House that the practice of wait-list fees has come to an end. I think the minister might be misinformed. We've heard from parents as recently as last month who are still being asked to pay these fees. Wait-list fees are banned in some other provinces. However, the minister has refused to address this issue and ban them in Nova Scotia. My question is: Why won't the minister commit to protecting families from these exploitative fees?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Let me make it abundantly clear that we are not in support of daycares or child care centres issuing fees to parents or families associated with wait-lists. That's inconsistent with the work that we're doing to provide accessible, affordable, inclusive, quality child care across Nova Scotia.

I think this reflects a bit of a trend because on this issue, I've not actually heard from any of the members opposite. As I said the last time this question was asked, if they would bring it to my attention, I would be more than happy to address it. But this actually is consistent with the theme around food. I have not heard from a single member of that caucus on food either, despite the fact that we've heard the Leader of the NDP mention that her inbox is flooded with that issue.

SUZY HANSEN: I would like to really go back over what the minister just said - that she's never heard from me. Absolutely, she's heard from me. I've emailed, I've messaged, I've called, I've gone to her office. When the MLA says that they haven't heard from me, that is not true.

A report released this Spring found that nearly half of all Nova Scotia children live in communities without adequate access to child care. I'll table that. This government has previously set ambitious targets for the creation of new spaces, but continues to fall short of these promises. We have seen this government drop the ball on their promised child care spaces. When will Nova Scotian families have access to the care that they need?

BECKY DRUHAN: I do recall very clearly the member opposite reaching out on multiple occasions about the CUPE strike, and I recall a really good conversation that we had about 2SLGBTQIA+ and support for those students.

To address the question that the member opposite asked, we are making incredible progress on child care in Nova Scotia. We have increased spaces by over 2,000 new spaces. We have increased our ECE wages from 14 per cent to 43 per cent. This is a five-year transformation. We are making progress. We are building spaces and increasing access to child care across the province, and we'll continue to do that work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

ECC: CLIMATE EMERG. IMPACTS - PREVENT

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I'd like to know what the government is doing to prepare our communities for the next big flood, next big hurricane, next big disaster that is now becoming the norm. We need to deploy known practices now to mitigate the risks associated with climate change, especially when it pertains to our infrastructure. The solutions are there. Within the last year, we have had three states of emergency declared from events that can be directly attributed to accelerated climate change. To any minister, perhaps the Minister of Environment and Climate Change: What exactly is the government doing to step up efforts to prevent the worst impacts of the climate emergency?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Indeed, this Summer has been an eye-opening experience for Nova Scotians. Certainly, the damage caused by wildfires and flooding - these aren't just physical lives that were lost. For many people in communities, their homes were lost, memories were lost. Certainly, it's on government to make sure we take action to protect our residents.

We know from the climate risk assessment that extreme weather events are going to become more and more problematic. That's why, as it relates to these extreme weather events, we've established a Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund. This fund was topped up by \$15.4 million just recently for a total of \$30 million to help communities adapt to the realities of climate change.

IAIN RANKIN: I'm glad he mentioned the risk assessment, because I'm wondering if the minister can identify exactly what infrastructure is the most at-risk in our province. Can he explain what efforts are under way, including the funding required, to

retrofit or upgrade any area that is of vital importance before our next major event? I'd also like to ask if any of those solutions that he's going to deploy are nature-based, which will last in the long term.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Certainly, the climate risk assessment, which I'll table, outlines the challenges that we're going to have. We know in this decade flooding and wildfires are going to be a major concern. That's why my department has taken action to hire a flood coordinator and a storm water engineer to help us coordinate a response to potential future flooding.

Along with that - as pertains to the member's question with nature-based solutions - last week, with the federal government, we signed the Canada-Nova Scotia Nature Agreement, where Ottawa has allocated \$28.5 million for Nova Scotia to work towards land conservation. We have a very strong 20 per cent land and water conservation target, and this will very much contribute to our nature-based solutions for climate change.

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

EMO: DISASTER FINANCIAL RELIEF - INCREASE

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, the wildfire this summer in Hammonds Plains-Upper Tantallon damaged 200 properties, destroying 150 homes completely. More than 16,000 people were evacuated. The government made a decision to allocate \$500 per household to help deal with the financial burden of being evacuated from their homes.

For Hurricane Fiona, government funding was in excess, for some households, of \$1,750. The Alberta government provided as much as \$3,500 per household. Is \$500 really an acceptable amount for a family of any size in this day and age to deal with the panic associated from fleeing from their homes during the wildfire evacuation?

HON. JOHN LOHR: We recognize the stress that all of these events have caused across the province, from Hurricane Fiona to the fires and the floods. In terms of this specific case, we know that this was a program that we had administered through the Red Cross. We know that money can never reduce or remove the tremendous stress that families felt during this. We recognize that. This was a program that we chose to do, and we're very sympathetic to the fact that money will never make that better - the enormous stress our communities felt. We're just thankful that through those fires, incredibly, we didn't lose any lives. This was a choice we made as a government, and we feel that this was an adequate response for that duration of time.

BEN JESSOME: As I remarked in a previous question, if the minister would like to come out and speak to some of those victims, and the people who fled that fire, he would know that \$500 was a poor, poor amount - it doesn't even cover one night in a hotel in some cases. The issue is leadership here. We see other examples in other disasters in our

province under the leadership of this government. We see other governments in other jurisdictions taking stronger stances to provide people with more financial resources.

In today's day and age, everybody's finances are stressed. Insurance companies come in at different points in time, and people didn't know whether they were going to get some support from their insurance companies or not. Speaker, will the government please revisit this \$500 amount so that if stuff like this happens again, \$500 is not what people are going to look for?

[2:30 p.m.]

JOHN LOHR: I believe I already made a commitment in a previous Question Period to visit his constituents at a later date. I will say that I think the Opposition is singing from a different song sheet, when I look back to Dorian in 2016, when it took four months to open up the DFAA. I don't recall there being any funding like this. We were, at that time, begging the then-Minister of Agriculture to open up DFAA for all the farmers who had lost crops through Dorian, and corn had been flattened across the province. I recognize it's easy for the Opposition to say one thing, but we we'll say actions speak louder than words.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville on a new question.

BEN JESSOME: It's really easy for me to take political banter on the chin, if it means that this government can be encouraged to revisit a program that's going to help Nova Scotians.

Communication was clearly an issue throughout the evacuation, through the response to the wildfires. Our Mass Casualty Commission reported that communication was an issue that needed the government's attention. I'll table those recommendations in that report.

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

EMO: MCC REPORT - RESPOND

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, on a different question, given the need to evaluate and make improvements to the overall communication related to emergency response, what has the minister done in response to the Mass Casualty Commission report to improve communications?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I can answer that question, maybe, in terms of emergency alerts. There are a lot of elements to the Mass Casualty Commission. We know that one of the requirements, or one of the mandates, of the Mass Casualty Commission was that the National Public Alerting System, which we use in Nova Scotia, would be under review.

That process is under - the federal government is reviewing the National Public Alerting System.

As I said earlier in a question, under the direction from the Premier, we are in the process of reviewing how we use it all. We recognize the extraordinary importance of the emergency alert system. Unfortunately for our province, the mass casualty event has transformed how we see that, which is a real tragedy.

BEN JESSOME: I should state for the record that most people actively got information from an unofficial Twitter account while the emergency was taking place. Separately, Speaker, to the point of addressing communication issues, communication with victims in particular needs to be trauma-informed. During the chaos of the wildfire, victims of the wildfire were invited by Halifax EMO via email to come on a bus tour to see if their house was there or not. This is not trauma-informed. While this is coming from the Halifax office, it's up to the minister to ensure that this happens across the province. Will the minister do so?

JOHN LOHR: Honestly, I'm not quite sure what the question is in terms of what Halifax EMO did or didn't do. We certainly respect all of our EMO municipal partners and note that Halifax EMO stepped up and worked very hard, as across the province we've seen our municipal partners do. We have a lot of respect for the EMOs and whatever actions they are taking.

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. Yesterday, when I was asking the minister why his government slashed the Heating Assistance Rebate Program, he said that thanks to his government, people have more money in their pocket every month.

Does the minister really believe that the people of Cape Breton have more money in their pockets now?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: We recognize the tough times that Nova Scotians are facing. That's why, again, as a government, we work hard every single day to meet their needs, understanding that there will always be the opportunity to do more. Again, we are the first government - in fact, if you look from the original program to what it is now, it's tripled. I remind the House again that when the NDP formed a government in 2009, they actually slashed the program at that time.

But let's not dwell too far in the past. We're currently focused on the needs of Nova Scotians. That's why we will invest in HARP - \$82 million. That's why we will invest in

the Property Tax Rebate for Seniors. That's why our government brought in the Seniors Care Grant and more.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, it seems that the minister really loves to live in the past. If he loves to live in the past, why don't we take that \$400 that he slashed and bump it back up? There's an idea.

According to the most recent Statistics Canada report, the cost of living has gone up by 4.8 per cent year over year in Nova Scotia. This was the largest increase of any province in the country. People in Cape Breton are paying more for gas, groceries, rent and everything else. Let me tell you, the residents I talk to don't have more money in their pockets. Will the minister table the analysis that showed that the people in Cape Breton could afford a \$400 cut to the Heating Assistance Rebate Program?

COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not remind the House that our government also invested \$130 million to support an expected 450,000 households with the Your Energy Rebate Program. And again, \$140 million that our government has invested in energy efficiency programs so that Nova Scotians can reduce their reliance on home heating oil, reduce their energy consumption, meaning more money in their pockets.

I believe that's what I said yesterday. I wonder if the member would actually stand up against the Liberal carbon tax. I think it's now a Liberal/NDP carbon tax, and that's what happened there. Every day, Speaker, that is impacting Nova Scotians and hitting them hard where it hurts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

ECC: COASTAL PROTECTION - IMPROVE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Earlier, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change cited the Climate Action Plan. I'd like to draw the minister's attention to commitment number 12, which I'll table, which says they will "strengthen and coordinate responses to coastal and inland flood risk by investing in natural flood protection and implementing new regulations under the Coastal Protection Act in 2023." I'll table that.

Notwithstanding a recent press report that does refer to the topic of coastal protection, I want to ask the Minister of Environment and Climate Change: Is it still a promise by this government in the plan to actually have the regulations in place in this calendar year? And if it isn't, why should we believe any of the other commitments in the plan?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: On September 29th, the Nova Scotia government launched the most recent consultations on coastal protection. This is a targeted consultation for coastal property owners to engage in discussion with government in terms of what coastal protection should look like. The general public, of course, is invited to participate in that as well.

We have a multi-pronged approach to adapting to climate change. We have 68 goals in that plan, and Speaker, for the House I'd like to table our most recent update on where we're at in accomplishing the goals. One of the goals, of course, is coastal protection, but here is a clear update to the House on where we're at on climate action.

IAIN RANKIN: I think I'll take that as a "no," but he has two months left, so we'll see.

Just a review on the consultations that took place under the Coastal Protection Act: We actually consulted in 2018, before the Act even passed - it passed in 2019 - and then there were further consultations that the whole public could participate in, in anticipation of proclaiming the Act in 2021 with regulations. This is important not only to protect the environment from building, but actually protecting people from the environment and actually having disasters happening on their homes.

This not happening in some distant future. Our caucus has talked about the last year, and all the disasters we have faced. These are places where it is dangerous to build, and this is deemed by certified professionals.

Can the minister state why, after two years of their government, they still don't believe in the urgency to take action and protect our coastline?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Certainly a lot of work has gone into coastal protection, and that work I certainly appreciate. In the previous two rounds of consultation, we had an opportunity to hear from municipal units. We had an opportunity to hear from engineers and specialists. That's feedback that we appreciate. It's feedback that we value.

We didn't hear, in terms of clarity, the views of coastal property owners: 40,000 individuals, families that will be impacted by these extreme weather events that we're seeing. It's really important that we take the time to listen. Listening is very, very important, and it's something that as minister I value..

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

EMO: INSURANCE REFUSAL - ADDRESS

HON. KELLY REGAN: Earlier this week, I had a call from a resident who's one of those who experienced flooding on July 21st. He's concerned about filing a claim by

October 31st for assistance under the Disaster Financial Assistance Program. Most of us know you have to have your insurance company sign off on some documents to be able to file, but when this constituent bought the home he's in, he got a new insurance company. He wanted the same kind of premium policy that his neighbour had. He told the insurance company that. He asked for the most complete coverage available, and that's what he was told he was getting, only to discover after the flood that the insurance company did not in fact give him what he asked for, so he has decided to sue his company.

Now, his insurance company is refusing . . .

THE SPEAKER: Question.

KELLY REGAN: . . . to provide him with the documentation he requires. What does the EMO Minister suggest my constituent do in the face of the refusal of an insurance company to live up to its obligations?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Certainly, we're well aware that in some cases homeowners may have trouble - the insurance companies, if you think about the last year, the insurance companies in some cases, the adjusters and the people who work for them are flat out. We would encourage anybody in that situation to put an application in even if it isn't complete, and we can work later on with that application to work through the process if there's further information needed. We've said that publicly a number of times. We know that these types of situations can arise.

KELLY REGAN: Actually, the story gets more appalling. My constituent has continued to pay for his insurance because it's protecting what is left of his house. To add insult to injury, my constituent had to move into rental accommodations, so he contacted the company and arranged for rental insurance on those accommodations. They sent him proof that he was insured, which he provided to his landlord as he was required to do. Only this week, the insurance company told him he actually wasn't covered, but now he's covered again. They sent him a letter saying he was covered, and then they said, no, you actually weren't covered. What does the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board recommend my constituent do in the face of an insurer that is not protecting Nova Scotians?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: It's a unique situation, the first I've heard of it today here in Question Period. I'd be happy to take a look at it. Insurance is regulated in the province, but I wouldn't make any comments further than that here in Question Period because we don't have the details and haven't had a chance to assess it. I would encourage members any time there are unique situations that they face to bring them forward to government. They don't need to happen in Question Period, but they can if members want. I'd say, for the sake of the people involved, give them a chance to have it resolved.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DPW: CHIGNECTO ISTHMUS - PROTECT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I just have to say how excited I am to see the passion from the government side, especially the Minister of Public Works, about the Chignecto Isthmus. I will say, on behalf of the people I'm here to represent, we would love to see that passion put into action. We would love to see action. This 10-year plan is not good enough. Every time we have a hurricane or a tropical storm come through, people are literally holding their breath.

[2:45 p.m.]

A few minutes ago, we heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs say that you guys are a government of action. We are not seeing that in the Chignecto Isthmus. We are not seeing that. Every time I think of this, I think of the honourable Premier Roger Bacon and what he always used to say is, Get shovels in the ground. Can the Minister of Public Works tell us today: Will she commit to going faster than 10 years and get shovels in the ground to protect the Chignecto Isthmus?

HON. KIM MASLAND: My gosh, wouldn't it be just as easy to put a shovel in the ground and fix a project that is going to be 10 years? There is significant work that is happening on this project. I've already listed it. I can list it again: identifying areas with immediate needs; regular meetings with our colleagues in New Brunswick. My staff were in New Brunswick last week meeting with colleagues. We're going to Ottawa next week to talk about funding.

We've applied for disaster mitigation - adaptation fund approval from the Liberal government in Ottawa. We haven't even had a response yet, Speaker. I am definitely passionate about this project. I've worked darn hard on this project, and I will continue to work hard on this project.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Again, I'm so excited to see the fervour and her colleagues cheering her on. But what the people of Cumberland North, and I believe all Nova Scotians want to see is action. We want to see - put some of that energy into actual action, boots on the ground. We had visits from the member from Yarmouth; we had visits from the member from Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

We have not had a visit from a member of the government to come and actually look at the Chignecto Isthmus and see the tides for themselves. Let's see you come. Let's see actual money put in the budget. We have seen the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and the Premier allocate zero dollars to the Chignecto Isthmus. If it's really that important to this government, why are we not seeing funding? My question, again, is to the minister: Will the minister commit to putting money into the Chignecto Isthmus and fast-tracking this timeline? We cannot wait 10 years.

KIM MASLAND: There are a lot of people working on this very significant, large file: a lot of people from Cumberland North, a lot of people from Cumberland South. The member from Cumberland South talks to me about this project. We've had multiple conversations. Just because there's not a Facebook post doesn't mean someone hasn't been there to look at it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

EMO: DAMAGE CLAIMS DELAY - EXPLAIN

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: My question is not for the Minister for Public Works. (Laughter) No, thanks. I get enough. Speaker, people all over the province, and certainly in Cape Breton, are dealing with the fallout from Hurricane Fiona, and while there have been more natural disasters since, we know that people are still waiting to hear about their claims around damages from Fiona. My question to the Minister responsible for the Office of Emergency Management: How many are still outstanding and what is the delay?

HON. JOHN LOHR: We certainly recognize the incredible impact that Fiona had on our province. I know everyone knows, but I will say it again: We reacted in an unprecedented way and put about \$40 million worth of supports out. Also, further to that, generators and all that, but meanwhile, we have had more than 1,700 Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements applications, and it's my understanding that 80 per cent of them have been paid out. You have to understand that we have had further events, too, which have really stretched the resources of our EMO office. We've added resources into that to deal with it, but we're 80 per cent there.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: We are also hearing those who have been tempted to settle have been settling for a miniscule fraction of what their total damages are. Many in our communities are frustrated and are not getting straight answers on what to do when they receive such low claims, and don't even come close to covering the damages they received. Can the Minister explain the process, and what is the average time for an appeal?

JOHN LOHR: I'd be happy to explain some of the process. One of the parts of the process, as the member knows, is the DFSA is a federal program which we share with them, so there are some things in the federal - it can be restrictive on some things. The DFSA will pay for driveways, but it will not pay for further damage out behind the house. It won't pay for a deck. Sometimes there are things that qualify under DFSA, and some things that do not qualify under DFSA.

I know that's a frustration for not only members across the floor, but I know my own colleagues have brought cases to me where we're looking at this federal program, and how does it work for us, how do we make it work? We've had numerous conversations

with then-Minister Bill Blair - now there's a new minister on the DFAA trying to make it work exactly . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

EMO: CELL SERVICE IMPROVEMENT - COMMIT

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, farmers in my riding are extremely concerned about the lack of cell service in their area. For example, one farmer told me that cell service is so awful, she has to drive to different fields and orchards to pass on information in a timely manner. To the Minister of Agriculture, where is this government's commitment to improving cell service?

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

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: I should have tabled this as part of my response in Question Period, but I'll table it for the benefit of the House now. It's from Hansard yesterday: the Leader of the NDP saying, "Right now, if the child is going hungry at school, they must put up their hand and ask for food." I don't believe that's a policy in this province, but I'd like to table this for the benefit of the House - the Leader of the NDP's comments on that subject.

THE SPEAKER: It is tabled.

The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville on a point of order.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, I just wanted to raise a point of order and remark that during Question Period, in an exchange with the Minister responsible for EMO, I asked a question related to leadership on trauma-informed communication. He seemed to take it and respond to it in a way that asserted that I was categorizing the work that EMO offices do, and perhaps a lack of respect for the work that they do. I wanted to clarify . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. This is not a point of order. I'm sorry.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 340.

Bill No. 340 - Municipal Reform (2023) Act.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 340 be now read a second time.

Today I am pleased to talk about the Municipal Reform Act. When I became minister, I was given a strong mandate by the Premier to renegotiate the memorandum of understanding with municipalities, something that hasn't been done by any government since the 1990s.

A new service exchange agreement will mean more support for Nova Scotian municipalities, and that will help build safer, more vibrant communities with more opportunities for housing, better roads, and infrastructure improvements.

The intent of this new bill is to create a piece of legislation that includes amendments to four existing pieces of legislation: the Corrections Act, the Education Act, the Housing Supply and Services Act, and the Municipal Grants Act. These amendments are needed to support some of the changes agreed to as part of the renegotiated service exchange agreement. For municipalities under the renegotiated service exchange agreement, proposed amendments include:

- Under the Corrections Act, proposed changes would remove the requirement for municipalities to pay a contribution toward correctional services. This change alone represents millions in savings for municipalities.
- Under the Education Act, proposed amendments would change the process around obsolete schools built prior to 1981. With the changes, ownership of these buildings would change back to the Province when they are deemed obsolete, with municipalities getting the first right of offer to purchase the building at a negotiated price if they so choose. Where opportunities exist, any returned assets could be then repurposed by the Province, and the serviced land used for other purposes, such as housing.
- Under the Housing Supply and Services Act, proposed amendments would mean municipalities would no longer be required to pay a portion of the

operating losses for public housing. Once again, this represents millions in savings for the municipalities.

- Under the Municipal Grants Act, proposed changes would provide greater flexibility to adapt, modernize, and respond to the changing need of the municipalities down the road by moving many of the elements of the municipal financial capacity grant formula out of legislation and into regulations. This will allow us to implement the new formula agreed to by municipalities in our negotiations.
- With each of these amended pieces of legislation, there will also be regulation-making authority added, providing a mechanism to address the needs of the Halifax Regional Municipality.

I want to point out that these proposed amendments were not created in a silo. The proposed legislation is the result of hundreds of hours of consultations over 18 months, working directly with all municipalities across the province. Thousands of ideas were shared. These discussions and perspectives helped shape the proposed changes we're bringing today.

Municipalities are key partners in growing this province. These legislative amendments are necessary to implement the renegotiated MOU and will help ensure that our municipalities are sustainable now and into the future.

The impact of these changes will vary by municipality and will vary by year. For instance, what we call the net operating losses - I just want to explain that a little bit for you to understand. Every year, we as a province currently spend about \$165 million on public housing. Approximately \$65 million comes in as revenue in rent. The other \$100 million is cost shared between the federal government, the provincial government, and municipalities. Municipalities pay 12 per cent. For every municipality, their share of that 12 per cent every year depends, really, on how much work we do on those units in that municipality. We can do a fair bit of work in some cases. Sometimes, there's a fair bit of work done in a municipality. That's their share of the operating losses.

We're taking that on. For instance, for a community like - as I said, every year, it depends probably mostly on how much work we do in that community. Sometimes we can do a fair bit of work in that community.

I just want to give an example. This could amount to several million dollars for a municipality, if there's a high density of housing there. I do want to give a specific example. I will talk just very briefly about CBRM. This number, because there's a high density of public housing in CBRM - and we're actually doing a lot of work there on public housing - this number is annually \$3.5 million. That's very significant savings to CBRM, that they won't receive this bill. The corrections bill annually for CBRM is in the \$1

million range. This agreement immediately is \$4.5 million to the better of CBRM for them to use in other areas.

This story is repeated - with different numbers, of course - across all 48 municipalities. It's a very significant benefit to them.

The obsolete schools, one of the problems with obsolete schools is, typically, they have asbestos in them. They were built prior to 1981, some of them were built in the 1950s or 1940s. The obsolete schools are, generally speaking, complicated and expensive to deal with, and this is why obsolete schools have been an issue. They always reverted back - in most cases; it's a bit of a mixed bag, but in almost all cases - they revert back to the municipality. In some cases, obsolete schools go back to a body that started that school, like maybe a church. They may; it depends on the school. But most of them go back to the municipalities. We're taking on that cost of remediating those sites, because this has been expensive for municipalities. Then afterwards, we know those sites typically still have some value.

These are things that we are doing, and I just gave one municipality's approximate numbers. Obviously, the net operating loss numbers change every year. Obsolete schools, we're not putting them in the calculation. Overall, generally speaking, we know that for our 48 municipalities, this stands them to the better by approximately \$40 million.

There are other elements to this, too. There's infrastructure funding. There's some road funding. We're committed to seeing our municipalities thrive. This is really the renewal of the 1995 Service Exchange Agreement. There are things that are not in this. What we didn't deal with yet, we're calling that Schedule A. We will continue to work on that. That will be the second iteration of this agreement, which deals with some other issues. We haven't gotten to that yet.

I just want to assure everyone in the province that this a great deal. We instructed our staff, really - I know in the last year, we always talk about what other governments did and didn't do. The reality is, the NDP government took a swing at this, I think in 2013. I believe the previous McNeil government did some work on it in 2017-18. We picked up on that work. We didn't throw that work away. We used that work to move forward in terms of what we were doing.

Meanwhile, the NSFMR has done a lot of work on this. They had a roads committee that did a lot of work on it, so there has been a fair bit of work going into the whole thing. It's a really good step, a very beneficial move to our municipality.

With those words, I look forward to hearing comments from my colleagues.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

[3:00 p.m.]

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I am honoured to get up in my place and provide some commentary on this bill and I believe a few others are. Obviously for me this is something - the minister is right, we were talking about this. I was minister in 2017 and we started some of that work back then. The government previous to that was doing some work, so there has always been some sort of conversation around eventually getting to a point where the relationship would be such that it was one of sustainability for municipalities, one that had a stronger relationship with the Province and a reflection of the fact that the Province has a role to play in communities that are all unique.

You are dealing with 50 municipalities across the province. You've seen some amalgamations over the years, and you've seen some pretty heavy debates on some amalgamations that never happened. It's always a moving target when you're looking at a lot of this stuff, so I know a lot of work goes into it.

I'm going to take some time today to talk about a number of things with the bill. A lot of the folks - it is going to be on the CBRM - did not sign on to this. They did not approve what was presented. To be honest, the relationship and the conversations have been very frustrating for the CBRM. We are learning more. We know that their council is talking a lot about this and have been. I know they have been engaged in a lot of conversations, and I'll get into that in a minute.

The real foundation for the CBRM - and this goes back to the CBRM's creation. The CBRM was created under the same foundation, under the same idea and goals as Halifax - the two supercities. This was back in 1995. I didn't even have my licence then, but I was engaged enough, because I had family who were municipal councillors at the time. Some folks in here would remember that time.

It was agreed that you had a number of towns - you had the City of Sydney and then you had a number of towns - New Waterford, Northside, et cetera - some of them were financially strapped at the time, and similar probably here too as well. There were the county councils and then there was the city council. At the time, the powers-that-be said we're going to have two supercities. One of them is going to be Halifax and one is going to be the CBRM. That was the name where they finished off.

This journey from 1995 - and if you look at the CBRM, which was heavily industrial, a long, proud history of steel-making and coal mining and our communities were built on immigration. We had people coming from all over the world. I had the honour of representing Whitney Pier as part of my mandate as an MLA for a number of years and the African Nova Scotian community, the Polish community, Ukrainians, Italians, all of these families travelled from all over the world, settled in the Pier to work the plant.

Then, of course, we have the rich history of mining, where tens of thousands of people were working over the years. That was really the foundation of what the CBRM was built on. Halifax was a little more modern in the sense that you had military, and you had a lot of the government offices, a lot of government buildings, so there was a stronger foundation.

I'm not taking that away from Halifax. The port of Halifax is the capital. We want every community across the province to be strong. Again, I say that these were both created at the same time, under the same foundation and expected to be treated the same in the sense that if you're going to look at uniqueness in the size of Halifax as your largest core and your largest population, then you have the CBRM, which is over 100,000 people which, in this bill, is being compared - the closest city, I believe - and I have to go back and look at the numbers, so I may get this number wrong. Please somebody correct me. If I'm right - the MLA for Truro may be able to answer this - I think Truro is probably the second-largest population centre outside of CBRM and Halifax. I think that's around a population of 10,000.

When you're looking at a service agreement in a memorandum, you cannot compare the CBRM, with full public transit, maybe the second-largest police force in Atlantic Canada, and a full career and volunteer fire service - all servicing 100,000 people with a huge post-secondary institution and which now has, to put it in perspective, in the MOU - if Truro is a population of 10,000 people and CBRM is being compared to Truro, there are 10,000 students at CBU right now. I think the number was 9,100 that was announced this past week.

Really, a lot of what I'm going to be talking about today - I think the history is important. As somebody who's lived there - I love home, I love what I do, and I love representing the community - I've seen a big transition. We went through years and decades of decline, as many communities did across Nova Scotia. Other communities were industry-based, like Pictou. You look at some of these mining communities. I'm sure MLAs could have a list a mile long. Industries come and industries go. People migrate. A lot of folks went out west in a lot of the communities - in your community, Speaker, as well.

It's like Cape Breton: a lot of folks went out west to find work. CBRM has been on that journey, and lately it's been exciting. I'm proud of what we did in government - working with some amazing people in our community who saw a vision that we could grow CBRM and finally start to make that transition away from the industrial era but also capitalize on entrepreneurship, capitalize on new energy within the community, and make the right strategic infrastructure decisions to encourage growth. You saw that, Speaker. You've been to Sydney - the construction of the Nova Scotia Community College, the hospital redevelopment, and some of the construction decisions we and the current government have made around schools, which is important.

Even some of the decisions that we had to make to not let go of schools and instead buy them, because we started to see the shift the other way. Now we're in a situation where CBRM still has challenges, as every community does, but our population is surging, our economy is growing, we have lots of construction under way, and we have years of construction ahead of us. The trajectory has changed completely. We still have some industry. We have the Donkin Mine. I hope that report gets done soon. That's important for those families, to make sure all the safety checks are done, and then that mine can get back open. We do have a lot of opportunity.

For me, as a kid who grew up in the area, who saw the decline - I was a councillor. Hard to believe it was 15 years ago yesterday I was elected to CBRM council. I don't know where that went. That was a blur. Who would have thought? I saw that decline. I lived that. You make policy decisions. It's tough in decline. There were conversations CBRM was having about legitimately getting rid of public transportation because there was just no usage. There wasn't enough usage to keep it going. You start looking at some of that stuff, and you're really making decisions to hold on to what you've got.

Now we're in situations where growth is starting to see some of the stresses and the challenges that the CBRM is facing when it comes to ensuring we have an even larger public transportation system, that we have adequate infrastructure to support the population growth, and that we have the right deal in place with the Province, which is important with this bill. I know I've got to get back to the bill here at some point.

That's really the importance for me with the bill, is that - again, I can go on all day about a lot of the positives and a lot of the challenges we face. I've started to hear about the negotiation on this. To me - and this is why I can never support this bill, and it's not any shot at any other community. If this works for their community, that's great, but you're dealing with a population of 100,000 people in a major urban core, and the second-largest population centre in the province, and you're comparing it to a community that is a tenth of its size that doesn't have half of the services that CBRM has to provide to its residents.

That's why when - and I said this before and I've said this publicly already - that when these conversations started on the MOU, CBRM should be treated as similar to HRM and have a separate negotiation to a point where you would develop a charter. This was something that we talked about when we were in government. We had community consultations. There's lots of feedback on it - the minister could probably still find it in his department. We went into CBRM, and we had a number of stakeholders come forward who talked about what they felt was important. It was everything from public schools to services to agriculture to industry to tourism, to everything.

It was important because it was people saying it's time for the CBRM to have the identity that it was supposed to have in 1995. It wasn't all about money. You'll hear a lot about the Municipal Capacity Grant, which we'll get into, but it wasn't all about money. It was about the identity. It was about finally saying HRM has a Charter that they follow, and

it was a reflection of how they were created in 1995, being the major population centre and the capital of this province. CBRM was created at the same time, and a charter should have really been written then.

Fast-forward and we're talking about a charter in the CBRM 20 years after its amalgamation. We're still talking about it now. We went through that process, and as I said, the minister's staff could probably brief him on those conversations. We held them over a day or so. At the time, we gave it to councillors to finish and it never got over the finish line, which is unfortunate. It doesn't mean that it shouldn't happen.

We're taking a really big step here with the MOU with municipalities. It's important, but the sheer size of the community and the services that it offers that are just vastly larger than you would have in any other community, the support services that are needed, the housing that is needed. All of these things are not as big, maybe - maybe that's not the right way to say it. It's no less significant than it is in HRM. The size may be different - HRM, of course, is bigger than any other community - but you're dealing with a regional municipality, and a regional municipality that has very similar challenges because they're dealing with population growth. I would argue even stronger because we've dealt with so many years of decline. Now we're growing, and as I said, I went through those tough decisions around public services, a declining population, and a declining economy. It's pretty exciting to be on the other end of it, when you're talking about this.

Obviously, these are good problems to have. Sydney's starting to see traffic jams, and we're starting to see some of the pressures of parking and stuff. I say all the time: I'd rather have those pressures than what we had in 2008, when the conditions weren't as favourable. I give all level and stripes of government credit for that. Investments were made. I talked about some of the stuff that we invested in. I think the medical school at CBU is fantastic. I think some of the work that some of the government's done around some infrastructure projects around the Island is also great.

Governments have made various decisions to support projects that would support the growth of the community, and ultimately it supported the growth of the community that supports the services that make people want to go there. Adequate public transportation, opportunities for kids, infrastructure for families, all of these things. These are challenges in communities all over the place, but in the CBRM, as I said, going through so many years of decline, and now you have this really golden opportunity to really reflect the CBRM for what it is - a regional municipality. Give it that identity on paper, develop those policies, sit down and have an independent conversation with them about their own separate negotiation. I think it's critical, I really do.

Here's my challenge: We're starting to get indications that the conversations with CBRM didn't go well at all. I think there's a number of points - and I'm sure you'll hear more from council - I wasn't part of the deliberations - but there are some aspects, and the minister talks about \$4.5 million in savings. I should have written it down - but you've got

to remember, those correctional fees and stuff, they were never revenues for the city, they were flow-throughs.

You collect them and you transfer them. They're not savings. This idea that the municipality is going to save this money - they're not saving the money. It was never their money. It's funny for me that I'm saying that, because, full disclosure, people will look at me at home and say, You didn't do this, or you didn't do that. That's fine.

[3:15 p.m.]

But this idea that the Corrections, and removing these fees, is going to save the CBRM money - it's not saving them any money at all. It was never their money. Unless - again, I can only speak for myself, but I think council will say it - unless the government is encouraging them to keep charging them, in which case the Province would collect the money, and then if the CBRM didn't adjust the tax, just keep collecting the \$4.5 million - so actually, people would be charged twice for it.

This government doesn't have to take responsibility for it, so if people started asking questions of why CBRM didn't reduce that, all the government has to say is, Well, that's the CBRM. This is part of the MOU conversation. When I heard the minister say that it was like red flags immediately. That is not a savings for people at all. That is just removing that fee, and it's a flow-through. The CBRM never saw that money.

Although they argued to me all the time, full disclosure, that when the capacity grant was \$15 million, this argument was that you're giving us 15, but we're giving you 17 back. But it was never CBRM's money. It was always a flow-through. Again, that's something important to know when the minister says that, is that that money was never CBRM's money.

It can be CBRM's money, if CBRM decides not to take that out of their tax rate, which I think the government may be encouraging them to do. I can't say that officially, because I wasn't there. We'll wait for council to say some of this stuff, because I'm sure as this gets closer they're going to deliberate on all of this.

That was the one thing that I heard the minister say. Again, I've also heard that it hasn't been - there's been this talk that every municipality has signed off on this. That's not true. Not every municipality has signed off on this. The CBRM has not signed off on this. What I do know at this point is that there was a deadline of early October for the CBRM to hold the meeting, pass a motion that they wanted something different, or take what you get.

I know the CBRM tried to reach out to the government and they never heard back. So the deadline has passed, and as we get into more readings on this, I'll have documents to table. Again, I wasn't in these deliberations. I can only go off what I've been hearing at this point, but of course I'm happy to provide more information. There'll be lots of speakers.

This is great. We're going to have a conversation about Cape Breton today. Not too often that that happens. A couple of hours about the CBRM. It's going to be great. I encourage my members on the government side to get up and talk about their communities. We all get an hour. I know. Good for you. I can't wait to respond to the member from Glace Bay.

Anyway, I hope they do, because I think they realize how important this is to them, and I think they realize - hey, we're political parties. We talk a lot of politics.

We fight with one another, especially the Cape Bretoners. We get really catty at one another at times. That's part of it. Who got protested more than me and the former member from Glace Bay? It was a like a daily thing in Cape Breton. Yes, I'm channeling my inner Alfie MacLeod right now. Again, this is something that's important regardless of political stripe. This is important to the politicians in Cape Breton.

We have a great relationship outside of the politics, but I am going to say this to the folks on the other side: You've got to stand up on this one. This is about home, you know what I mean? There are no votes up here - the votes are home.

Right now, what I'm seeing in this - and I've heard this, too - I don't know if it came from the minister or staff - they told the CBRM that you can raise your taxes, you have the room to do it. That was the other part of this that came out of these conversations, that you have a window to raise taxes in a community that arguably has the highest taxes in the province. That is the carbon tax on steroids, if you do that. Double-digit tax increases were encouraged to the CBRM by staff.

Imagine in Glace Bay, taxes going up 16 per cent on residential properties - 16 per cent in Glace Bay, or in East Bay, or in Sydney, or in The Pier? Think about the commercial rates. These are the things that were talked about in the negotiation with the CBRM. I'm sitting there going, This isn't an MOU anymore. This is the best deal you're going to get - accept it. You have room to charge people more and if you don't, you don't qualify for anything else.

Now CBRM is scrambling, everybody is scrambling. We're watching this going and the worst cost of living crisis we've seen in a generation, where gas and food and rent and every aspect of life is more expensive, and the government says to the CBRM, You've got room to raise your taxes, so you can just do that.

There's a big difference with the government saying that. If that happens, where the CBRM is in that situation, that isn't the carbon tax from the feds, that isn't a fight with the utility - that is a direct, complete, 100 per cent directive from this government to go to the CBRM and say, Raise your taxes. You can't blame anybody else for that.

These are some of the conversations that we're starting to hear happened as part of the negotiation. I know all the MLAs were pulled in and we were all told the same concerns, so I'm not saying anything that the government MLAs from Cape Breton wouldn't have heard themselves, because I was hearing the same thing, and all the caucuses had the opportunity to meet with the CBRM and they did.

Again, this hasn't been very rosy for the CBRM. As I said, we're going to be talking about this through today and we're going to be talking about this as we move through the process of Committee of the Whole House and eventually a third reading, but we're probably going to hear more from the CBRM about this.

Again, we're in a situation where the message is: We want to grow the population by two million people. Hey, I'm one for population growth. I talk about it. The whole community of Whitney Pier is probably one of the greatest examples in our country's history when it comes to people coming to a community from the melting pot, coming from all over the world. Some of the greatest writers, some of the greatest people in the arts, some of the greatest athletes, some of the greatest stories you'll ever hear come from people who have come from all over the world to work at that steel plant, and they did. My grandfather was one of them.

My grandfather came over from Poland, the Novaks came over from Poland. Actually, he worked in the mines. My grandfather was the vice-president of the union at the steel plant, Tom Mombourquette. I never met him, he was a good man, they say, a big union guy.

Population growth is so important, it is, but you need to have the infrastructure to do it. If you have a projection to, say, 2060, I think was the number, by two million – I may not be right on that, but it doesn't matter – if it's a 10-year projection, you've got to think 10 years out. You go into the second-largest population centre in the province, and you say: We want to grow to two million people but we're going to give you less money to do it. You have infrastructure issues. You have 100-year-old pipes. Every community - this is an example for lots of communities. You have all this underground infrastructure.

We heard this in Bridgewater, actually - a great example, recently. If you're making these announcements that you want to raise it by two million people, then you get into a memorandum discussion with the second-largest population, or regional municipality. You tell them, Well, you can do more with less, because we're going to give you less.

We're going to essentially tell people, Oh, the city's going to save \$4.5 million because we're going to take these fees away. What you're also telling the city is, Well, now you have room to do stuff with your taxes. You can raise your tax ceiling.

People in Glace Bay pay 16 per cent more on their mortgages than Sydney and all over the community. Let's grow by a substantial amount of people and not give the CBRM

the ability to have the conversation about some of the things that government wants them to play a more active role in when it comes to housing, when it comes to poverty and supporting our most vulnerable, and infrastructure - to actually be able to deal with a lot of the challenges that come with growth.

We have a bill now in front of us that in the first two or three years looks okay, but when you get out past Year 3, you start to see the decline in the capacity grant. You start to see the decline in some of the other aspects of it. You start to say, in the long run - which the government likes to say they do, bigger desks with bigger files, and all that stuff in Question Period - you're actually making it harder for us to get to that goal.

You're slowly telling the CBRM, Oh, we're going to just cut it. This is your window and that's it, instead of sitting down and having a real conversation away from politics to say, Listen, you're growing. You're the second-largest regional centre in this province. You have a sizeable police force, you have sizeable services that you have to offer people, you have a university with over 9,000 people in it now. You have a lot of potential, you have tourism, you have it all.

Let's have a conversation, but let's also finally put an MOU in place with a charter that finally outlines CBRM for what it is, which is a regional municipality created at the same time as Halifax. That will go a long way. That charter isn't - hey, everything costs money. But just the identify of it, I think, is important. I think the government can do that, and you know what? I wish I would have been able to do that when I was in Municipal Affairs and Housing. You can't do it all.

Anyway, it is what it is. Governments change. This government will do good things, and our government did good things, and the governments after us will do good things. It's a case with this that this potentially could hurt the community more than people understand.

I just don't get the relationship from this stuff, in the sense that - I'm sure the minister will respond at some point, and I look forward to it. I've always had good conversations with the minister. It seems like the relationship between this government and the CBRM is awful. It's another level of government that nobody's talking to. I'm not placing the blame one way or the other. It's a case of here we are again in another conversation, which I can predict is going to blow up into another public fight between a level of government and this government, like it did with the federal government, although sometimes they like the federal government and sometimes they don't. It depends on the situation. It depends on the dollar amount, I think. It does. No, it's true. Listen, I'm not trying to make jokes about it. It's obvious. You can just go to the paper. Carbon tax - we don't like the carbon tax. None of us likes the carbon tax. But the public fight matters.

It was like the utility. I was the Minister of Energy and Mines for three years. We negotiated hard with Nova Scotia Power every day. We had rate stability for eight years: 1

per cent a year in the three years I was there. I'm proud of that. I'm proud of the work of staff in the Department of Energy and Mines - all the people. I don't take credit for anything myself. Good people do good things, in the bureaucracy and everywhere else. You just do your job.

[3:30 p.m.]

Again, another public fight looks shiny and good in the newspaper, but guess what? In both those cases, Nova Scotians lost in their pocketbooks. They lost. (Interruption) What's the break? I look forward to the comments from the minister, the MLA for Inverness. I left the tax hikes out of Inverness in my conversations. The point is that we'll all sit here and jar about our records. I'm proud of our record. Great stability. I'm proud of 1.2 per cent increases below the level of inflation. We negotiated hard for people. We brought in a lot of the very programs that all the ministers talk about in energy efficiency - Mi'kmaw homes, solar program - best in the country. A lot of good people do a lot of good things in government.

The point is that here comes another fight, and this time it's with home. It's personal for me in the sense that it has taken us so long to get to this point. Being on the government side for seven years and making the decisions nobody else wanted to make - again, there are a few of us who were elected on the government side at that time, so we all wear it.

This government hasn't had to make any decisions like that in Cape Breton. They have not lived the protests. They have not lived closing the hospitals. They have not lived any of it. I lived every bit of it because what we saw was what potentially could be on the other end, which is that we could really stimulate the economy. We knew health care needed a jolt. We knew the doctors wanted the infrastructure, and that they knew they needed to recruit more people. We made those tough decisions, and I can tell you, it was tough going to Sobeys for months. It was tough. (Laughter) You know what? Some people laugh in here, but they weren't easy on us, either - some of the MLAs in Cape Breton.

Now everybody wants their picture. Everybody wants their picture, right? It's like, I'm very proud of that. Was it tough? It was super-tough. It was tough on my family. It was tough on all the families that were involved in those conversations because people didn't understand that we were moving away from what I said before. We were very heavy industrial. We knew we needed to pivot. Like any development, you run into snags and things happen, but that pivot for us in the community was just a lightning bolt of confidence in people who were investing money in our community. They were saying, Finally, somebody's making decisions on this stuff. It was exciting.

Then the protests stopped, and everybody rallied together. Some of the MLAs in this room were at those protests and protested all those projects, which I don't forget. I

remember every face that was in those crowds, let me tell you. When I see those pictures on social media, I kind of laugh.

Back to the MOU and the bill - yes, I'm getting there. There is a point to this. The point is that we go through and make these tough decisions, and now here we are. This is the next step. We've taken the community in a different direction. People are excited. Entrepreneurship is at an all-time high. You see businesses popping up everywhere. We have people from all over the world attending CBU. It's really exciting stuff.

What's happening at CBU is amazing. It really is. It's amazing, but I graduated from CBU when there was a population of about 3,000 people there, give or take - 3,000 or 4,000. Now there are 9,100. When I was there - I was student union president out there - there were 39 international students. Now there are thousands, which is great. It's great for the school. It's great for the community. The stories, the culture, and the work ethic they bring - they love being in our community, but we need to be able to support them.

The government should be saying, That's great. You know what I mean? We've got 9,100 students at CBU, but I recall reading comments not from the minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing but from the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education saying, Well, we don't have anything to do with that - that's all CBU. I'm sitting there going, Man, you celebrate this stuff. You're the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education. There are 9,100 students at CBU. What can we do to help?

They did make an investment in the housing thing. I'll give credit for that. That Tartan Downs project is great. They've got to get the rest of the federal money, so let's hope that works out.

All these things are happening, and now we're into an MOU, which is a fight. I'm sitting there going, Why does this have to be a fight? We should all be celebrating this. Let's sit down as a community and say, Embrace the change, embrace the growth, embrace this. Instead, all I'm hearing from council is that this deal - and I think I can speak for council in CBRM in saying this - if this works for Truro and any other community, fantastic.

When I was the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I toured the province. I was never in Pictou - it's beautiful. I got to see everything. We talked about a lot of the things that are in this MOU back then. Issues around infrastructure and issues around internet - internet was kind of one of the big ones that really started taking off in 2017. I'm sure it was an issue before I was there, but it kind of became a consistent theme as we talked about cell service. People are moving into these communities.

If this works for them, that's fantastic. But it's not even close to trying to compare a community of 100,000 people with a community of 10,000 people. You can't. The services are completely different. I'm looking at it and going - and as I said, now I'm hearing that

staff went in and said, Oh, you're going to save \$4.5 million on this - no, you're not. Not at all. That's never been CBRM's money. The only way they're going to save that is if the residents pay twice for those fees. In other words, the Province picks up the tab and CBRM doesn't change their tax rates. That's how they "save" the money. They're not saving any money. It's a flow-through. That money's all going to flow through forever.

This fight - I'm sitting there going, Man, here's another fight with another level of government that is going to come. But this fight is squarely at the feet of the government. Not the federal government. Not a utility. If taxes go up, it's because of this government. If fee service declines, it's because of this government, because they 1,000 per cent control what happens here - every bit of it. It's their bill. The Province is doing the negotiation.

So where do we go from here? I think the most important thing that the government needs to do is pull CBRM out of this. Pull them out of it. They can still do what they need to accomplish with the bill, but they need to sit down and have a serious conversation with the CBRM, and have a serious conversation about supports that are necessary for the community. This is where the government MLAs in the community really need to fight, in my opinion. They need to fight for the CBRM now, because if this gets lumped in, one of the legacies of this government will be the declining resources that go into the community. It's that simple.

I get that at some point, services change. Service agreements change. But why would you take a community that has taken decades to get to this point and just ultimately needs that extra push? Eventually this may change again. These service agreements change all the time, but you're trying to compare a community that is so much bigger than everywhere else. It's not even close.

I get what the government's trying to do. I don't disagree. As the minister said, these conversations were started back in 2017. We talked about it all. We talked about service exchange. There's great staff. I know many of them are still there doing a lot of this work. As I said, we toured around the province. We heard from every council. Every council had their own unique challenges, but there were some consistent themes as well.

You all live in beautiful communities. It was wonderful. It was obvious to me that when we got to CBRM and HRM, you're on a totally different playing field in the sense that they're just dealing with so many more complex issues. The population is just so much more. Your population and the wants for services, and the growth and the expansion of not only the - I always say - above-ground services, but the below-ground services, which nobody seems to talk about a lot. You can build all this housing and stuff, but you need to be able to have the infrastructure underneath the ground to deal with all this growth.

Government wants to promote population growth. Great. I think it's great. That's how communities are built, but don't do that and then say to your second-largest area, Here's the deal: You're going to be lumped in with communities that are a tenth your size,

and if you don't like it, you have until October 4th to pass a motion of council, or we're just going to assume. Then CBRM reaches out to government to say, We're willing to do that, we're happy to do it, but it would be good if you could come down so we can actually have a legit conversation about what this means and get into a fruitful conversation around the MOU that I think is important for the CBRM. But they didn't. Government didn't show, and they put a hard deadline on, and it's like, why?

Again, it's just that combative, adversarial, do it or else. Why would you want to do that? Why would you want to have that conversation? This hurts the community and, I would argue, politically it's really not a smart move. You're telling the second-largest community: Or else. It's a population of 100,000 people. Then staff go in and tell all these people, You've got room to raise your taxes and you're going to save \$4.5 million, when you're actually not because it's a flow-through. You'll save the money - just keep your tax rate the same.

Eighteen minutes. What can I talk about for 18 minutes? I want to talk about CBRM. That's a good point. Let's talk about CBRM. Eighteen minutes - let's talk about CBRM. This is why CBRM should not be part of this MOU. Back to the bill. CBRM, as I've said, has a population of 100,000 people. It has a university with a population close to the second-largest community that's indicated in this MOU. It has a full transportation service that is desperate for more resources now because we're growing, which is a wonderful problem to have. It's a tough problem to have, but it's a wonderful problem to have.

We have people coming from all over the world, essentially rewriting the story of what many of the communities of Cape Breton are - communities that were built on diversity, culture, hard work, industry, family, and tradition. Now we're seeing it all over again. It's wonderful. I'm so proud of home. I'm so proud to raise two little girls there who love their home. My colleague makes a good point. You have a police service that is - I'm going to check this for sure, but I'm almost certain it is or is close to the second-largest police force in the Atlantic region. I was the Chair of that board for years.

I'm proud of the work that the Cape Breton Regional Police Service does, but they need the resources, so that's a challenge. As we continue to diversify how we support our most vulnerable, those conversations are important. You have police and fire that are legit - hundreds of people who are in these, and we have volunteers as well. I want to shout out to our volunteer firefighters. We've got a lot of them in CBRM too, and all over the province. We're running full-fledged services that are way larger than the wonderful communities that just don't have the population that we have. You're saying that they're the same, and it's just not the case.

Again, we've seen such wonderful progress in the community, and we've seen lots of great infrastructure. As I said, this government has made some good decisions as well. You look at the MOUs - and my colleague just made an excellent point. Every government

does something when it comes to this stuff. I can say this about us when we were in government: This has been a lifelong battle for the CBRM. It has been. Since 1995, CBRM has fought for that identity that they deserve. We have fought this and debated this - and I've been on the government side, so, hey, this has been a conversation when I was here.

They fought this identity that we were created at the same time as Halifax. Just at least accept the community that it is what it was supposed to be, a super-city, which it is, in the sense when you start looking at the size and the comparison of the other communities that are mentioned in the MOU. This has been a lifelong journey for the CBRM.

When we were in government, we made some decisions around it, and they weren't MOU. We talked about it, as the minister said, but we made the investments that they needed, and they were done under collaboration. We sat down with the mayor and council, the Premier, multiple times. Stephen McNeil was happy to go to Cape Breton and meet with the mayor, and he did.

And that's another thing: The Premier has rejected meeting after meeting with CBRM council, which has been public and in the news. The CBRM at the time came to us and said: We need help, because we're federally responsible for wastewater. This is millions and millions of dollars. We gave them their portion. We gave them their portion. It was tens of millions of dollars that we took the pressure off the CBRM at the time.

That was a decision because they're a regional municipality. It was unique to them. The infrastructure that they needed was necessary. There are still some challenges around that when it comes to the operations of them, but we sat down and collaborated with them. Then we talked about other projects. The MLA, former Premier, from Timberlea-Prospect - Charlotte Street redevelopment. They sat down with us and said, We need to rebuild our core. So we did that, and I give him a lot of credit for that. The Premier at the time, he saw the importance of that stuff.

We increased funding to volunteer fire departments, all over the board at the time. This government has done it, too, through their grants, but we started the process. We started giving them more, because it was stuff that the CBRM was saying to us, saying, These are some of the challenges that we have in our community - infrastructure, transit.

Transit was another one. We started to see the population growth. We started to see the construction happening. And then Cape Breton University really started getting into - we started to see the first influx of international students come in. We bought buses, and we bought more buses, and we bought more buses, and then we gave them money to build the terminal. And then we started looking at the electrification of buses. We started thinking about all this stuff along the way.

Then we all knew that the CBRM needed a big economic boost, so we moved a community college. Boy, am I proud of that. And the MLA for Northside-Westmount,

(unintelligible) principal, Geoff MacLellan, Stephen McNeil, and a whole bunch of people were involved, but I'm proud of that.

[3:45 p.m.]

Then we said: We need to be a more inclusive community, and a place where everybody should belong. We built Horizon Achievement Centre, and then we built Haley Street Adult Services Centre, and then we did the accessible ball fields on the north side and in Dominion. I'm going to get to the bill. That's right.

The point I'm making, Speaker - you're right to bring me back, I know I was going off a little bit - is that every government makes these decisions. This government has made the decision on the MOU. This is how we're going to navigate our relationship with councils - great. For many of them, they could be very happy. I can't speak for communities. I know enough when I went on tour that I'm sure that the MOU probably reflects some of the work that they want, and some of the things.

And I believe - I forget, there was a three-panel group that really came forward with the recommendations. Again, for many communities it could be great. But this isn't good for CBRM, and CBRM did not approve this, and CBRM did not sign off on this, and I know that that is the message. But they did not. They're not even close at this point. The best thing the government could do is take a step back, remove CBRM from this. This is my message to the MLAs on the Island, too: Take a step back. Have a conversation.

I know one of the steps has happened, and I'll give the UNSM credit - UNSM, that's, I'm speaking - NSF. It used to be called the UNSM. People are probably laughing from the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities right now if they're watching. But I know there were consultations on this, because there was one point that CBRM was going to take over all the provincial roads. That was part of the deal, and that still might come, and I'm sitting there going, They don't have the capacity to take on all the roads.

I would argue - nobody's talking about this - you would see massive layoffs in the Department of Transportation if that happened because the CBRM does not have the capacity to take on hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of roads. I think every MLA in rural Nova Scotia would agree with that. I think there have been some changes around that. Again, we'll hear more as we go, and I'm sure you're going to see a crew at the Law Amendments Committee. People will be up talking from all municipalities.

I don't want to take away from the work, either, because I know the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, and I've always had a great relationship with them, so I know they're watching. I would ask them, too, to say, You need to take a step back on the CBRM. The NSF should, too, and look at this bill and say, There is no comparison between a community that has 100,000-plus, and a community that has 10,000. There's no comparison.

It doesn't have to be a combative, negative process. Just show the CBRM that you see them and identify the community for what it is: this beautiful, 100,000 population on the best island on the Earth that is rich in culture, in tradition, in love and support and families but needs a proper agreement, that needs one that reflects its growth, one that reflects all the newcomers who are coming into the community.

Talk about legit savings for the CBRM, because that's not legit, in my opinion. It's a flow-through. I'll talk about this again in third reading. In the last eight minutes - I'm going to talk about this - again, it's the relationship. The relationship right now, in my opinion, between the local government and this government is the worst I've seen in my political career when it comes to communicating.

I've seen it pretty rough. I was a councillor from 2008 to 2012 and in those years, you know what I mean, there was a lot of back and forth. What I do know is that there is zero communication between the Premier's Office and the mayor's office, and no trust. There's none, for no reason. Everybody wants the same thing, even in opposition.

I'm not sitting here saying, Oh, the government's wrong on this. I think a lot of this stuff is good. I think for many communities that's great, if you're happy and the MLAs in this room can speak for their own communities, but this is what I know: The relationship is terrible. The communication is terrible. The response back from government on requests to the CBRM are not being answered. They're not being responded to. MOU, this is the best example probably of late; it seems to be confrontation all of the time.

Again, this confrontation isn't by an external factor. It's not the federal government saying, We're going to impose a carbon tax, so we're going to fight you publicly on it and the carbon tax is still going to show up. It's not Nova Scotia Power: Oh, we're going to raise your power rates 7 per cent. On the MOU, I'm going to get there. Now we're into an MOU, and this is a direct fight as a result of the decisions of the government. I'm telling you, it's going to be a fight.

The residents are starting to pay attention, and the rumour is starting to get around town: The government wants to raise my taxes 12 to 16 per cent. It's the conversation at Tim Hortons. All the major decisions are made there, at Tim Hortons - joke, joke, are we in Sydney? People are starting to talk about it. Why? Wait a second, the government's going to raise my taxes 12 per cent? This is what they're saying now. What's this MOU all about? What's this negotiation all about? Why is the CBRM always fighting with the government?

It's just like, you don't have to do this. You can legitimately, like literally today, the minister could say, You know what? I consulted with my Cape Breton MLAs. I'm going to give them their messaging, like a communications person. I'm going to tell them exactly what they could do right now.

I consulted with the member for Glace Bay-Dominion, and the member for Victoria-The Lakes, and the member for Inverness, and the member for Cape Breton East, and we all agree that we should pull back on this MOU and have a real conversation with the CBRM. Bring in all the MLAs from all over the Island and have a conversation about a community that is growing, about a community that is in desperate need first and foremost of a strong healthy relationship with the government but particularly with the Premier's Office.

Again, I have heard that loud and clear. There's just no response coming from the Premier's Office to any requests. Why? I don't get it. You get into debates with organizations, and you disagree on this, that, or the other thing, but we ultimately get into this to help people. All of these fights aren't helping anybody. Here's another fight that's not going to help anybody. Just respond back and meet with the council. They're the second-largest council in the province. They deserve the right to meet with their Premier - every right to meet with their Premier. (Interruption)

Yes, you have MLAs at the Cabinet table, right? I'm the guy they're coming to a lot of the time on stuff. I'm sitting there going, Meet with the Premier. I'm a Sydney guy, so I'm close enough to city hall, but it's a case of pick up the phone and respond to requests. CBRM doesn't want to fight. They're excited. Everybody's excited about what's happening at home. You have a council that's looking at numbers saying, In the long run, this is a bad deal for us. We're now engaged in a conversation that is not reflective of who we are as a community.

You know what else I was saying? Congratulations to the other communities if this works for them. They don't want to fight. They don't want to be in this conversation. They're good people. I served with them. I have a ton of respect for our mayor. They're trying their best to do what they can in a situation when our population is growing. All of these exciting things are happening, but they're the ones who have to make the decisions on the ground every day and a lot of times deal with a lot of provincial jurisdiction, which is a whole other conversation for this House around housing and what the role of local government is. They're dealing with all of this stuff and they can't get an answer back from their Premier. They can't get an answer. They're told, Do this or else. Here's your date. If you want something else, pass a motion in council. They said, Great, we'll do that. Come down and see us. Oh, we can't make it.

Again, I don't understand this necessity to fight. Another one is coming. Another one is coming. I can see it, but it can be stopped right now. It can be stopped. Walk out of here in front of one of those cameras and say, We're going to pull back; we're going to have another conversation with CBRM. Of all the fights I've seen in here, all the public battles in the newspapers, this one has been picked by them. The government is 100 per cent responsible in this case if the taxes go up, if the fees go up. It almost becomes like a Tory tax on CBRM. It's true. You can talk carbon tax all you want, but this MOU does not

reflect the CBRM. I can't use names in here, but I have an idea. The minister over there is having fun listening to me. I know he is.

Again, this is 100 per cent on the government if this happens - 1,000 per cent. One hundred per cent - you can't blame the feds. You can't blame the old government for this one. The old government spent \$1 billion in the CBRM. (Interruption) That's right. You can't blame Darrell Dexter from the NDP in 2009. This is straight up - the government went in to CBRM with an MOU. They said, You're going to save money, and they're not. They said, We believe that you should be in the same group as communities that are a tenth your size, so we're not going to reflect that you're the second-largest municipality in the province. And - this is the big one - you can raise your taxes. You have the room to raise your taxes, the new PC tax for the CBRM. It's the carbon tax on steroids, I call it, Speaker. It is.

It all doesn't have to happen. This is the first time I gave a full hour's speech in here, and there's more to come. What a day for Cape Breton in the Legislature. We're going to talk CBRM all day long. I'll say this: I should have worn my Cape Breton tartan tie. Eighteen seconds left.

None of this has to happen. Cape Breton MLAs need to step up here. They need to go to the Premier. They need to request a meeting with the CBRM with him. Get it done right, or face what's coming. You can stop it now or continue on.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Congratulations to my neighbour, the member for Sydney-Membertou, for going his first hour. Wow. All right, let's talk Cape Breton.

When we as a party forward a bill on CBRM viability, and what that required was \$50 million over three years before an MOU and a funding formula could be developed between the CBRM and the Province, this is not what I had in mind. I did not have in mind that the CBRM would get less in a funding formula review. I considered it getting more money in an MOU funding formula.

I expected to see a rise in the capacity grant - also known as equalization - of a substantial amount, so that all municipalities that receive this funding, their boats would lift too, because rising tides lift all boats. What I'm seeing here is that this government, the Conservative government, picks winners and losers. This government picks winners and losers in this MOU. The CBRM, which I'm going to focus my attention on because I am the proud member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, is one of those losers.

This government has decided that they want to pick a fight with the federal government. They want to pick a fight with CBRM and HRM. The way to pick a fight with the CBRM is through the funding formula, through the MOU. This is how this

Conservative government is choosing to pick the fight with the CBRM. Really, they have been picking a fight with the CBRM since they came into government. I have my speculations as to why, which I'm not going to go into because I think some of the members know why.

[4:00 p.m.]

Let's look at the contents. Let's talk about this bill. As my friend from Sydney-Membertou discussed, the bill removes the municipality's requirement to contribute to Correctional Services and offset public housing losses, which the government says will save the municipalities money. Full stop, it does not save them money. I am going to concur with my friend in the Official Opposition, because I, too, have heard that staff of the minister indicated to the CBRM that of course it would save them money, because they could keep charging for things such as Corrections and housing, which they're no longer collecting for.

Continuing to charge them: That wouldn't be ethical at all, to tell a municipality that - it doesn't seem ethical to me, to charge residents on Correctional Services, on housing. I think Justice is in there as well. Does that make any sense, to charge our residents for things that you are no longer collecting for? The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing thinks it is. The Premier thinks it is, apparently, from what I've heard from very reputable sources several times over - 13 or 14 times over, actually.

Or they could not adjust their taxes and continue to charge things that they're not actually collecting, or they could also raise their taxes more on an overtaxed population with the highest poverty rates in Nova Scotia. One in three families in Cape Breton is living in poverty - one in two in my riding. Yet this government was suggesting, from what I've heard, that they could charge more taxes.

Let me be straight with all of you here. The funding formula, the capacity grant, equalization, are there to lower taxes, not raise them. That money is supposed to have comparable taxes in comparable services. The whole idea of the grant is not to raise taxes but to lower them and provide better services. Yet it seems that, from what I've heard from very reputable sources, this government, while talking to the municipality about the MOU, suggested raising taxes or continuing to collect on things that they are no longer collecting. I don't know about that. That seems to me quite wrong, and I am sure my fellow Cape Bretoners across the aisle would feel the same way. I can't speak for them, but I would hope that they would.

There are a few other things here. I have some things here from Mayor Amanda McDougall-Merrill, quotes that she provided to the CBC in an article that I will table after I've read it. What the article says is, "The changes are part of a deal between the province and the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities which represents municipal governments

across the province. The changes proposed in this bill do not affect the Halifax Regional Municipality which is involved with its own direct negotiations with the province.”

Let’s digest this and dissect it for a few minutes. The HRM is getting its own separate negotiations. My understanding is that the CBRM has requested numerous times to have a sit-down with the minister to discuss the CBRM having its own negotiations, separately from this MOU. Like in the past, it seems that there is no communication back, from what I’ve been told.

The relationship between the Province and the CBRM has broken down considerably. It’s very well-noticed in our area. I have residents talk to me all the time about it. Why did this happen?

Yet the HRM’s being treated differently. I would put forth the argument, as has been in viability studies for several years now - I think the last one was in 2019 - I believe that also states that the CBRM has a unique situation and needs a charter.

Full disclosure: I worked on that Charter. I don’t mean offense to my neighbours across in the Official Opposition, but it was hard to get any leeway in that Charter. The staff at the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing did not want to seem to discuss it. Everything we brought to them about what we wanted in a Charter - it could have been done in the MOU, they said, or it could have been done with the NGA. The NGA is still under review. I think it’s been under review since 2015.

Every time we said what we wanted to do and what we wanted in the Charter, we were denied constantly. Yet viability studies over time - 2019 was the last one - all stated that we needed a new MOU and we needed a Charter. We do not have that, so here we are today.

The CBRM is the largest municipal unit in this agreement. HRM is not in the agreement. CBRM is. It shouldn’t be, because it’s larger than every other municipal unit. It has different circumstances. When we were forced into amalgamation - it wasn’t asked of us, and I’m sure the Speaker remembers that quite well, also having Cape Breton roots - our debts were not forgiven. We did not get any incentives to amalgamate.

Other municipalities, over time - I have heard - received incentives to amalgamate. Debts cleared. Start off a new slate. We didn’t get that opportunity. CBRM has been working off a debt situation since the start of amalgamation. Yet this MOU doesn’t take that into consideration.

I want to track back to two-plus years since our election. I believe - and I go back to a bill that I had tabled - the Conservatives here took our idea in the NDP caucus and used it in election campaigns as their own.

Great. Fine. You took government. Great. That means CBRM is going to get a better funding formula. Where is it? Where is that promise that was made in the election? It's not in this MOU. This MOU stands for the CBRM to lose money, not gain.

[4:15 p.m.]

To my fellow Cape Breton colleagues in the PC caucus: You ran on a campaign promise that would provide the CBRM with more money, and you delivered for only one year. Then you took it away again. That's not a promise kept. That's a promise broken. Check. No, that was part of the MOU. Part of the MOU is to provide funding. The PCs ran on it. My Cape Breton colleagues ran on it - the promise that, if forming government, the CBRM would receive more money in funding that the CBRM government could use. I don't know what's happening, but there's something happening over there, something about the age of six.

There was a promise made and I was happy with that because I've always said that I don't care what bill gets passed, what you call it, who gets the pats on the back and on the shoulder. I care about what it's going to do for the residents of the CBRM, in my riding, the residents of District 11 at the time when I was a councillor, and the residents in Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

I didn't care that the PCs took our bill. I cared about the funding for the CBRM. They promised in campaigns. They won a campaign election on it, and delivered for one year. One year - that's all it was good for. Why? Because of this MOU? I was expecting better. I expected a better funding formula. I expected something that would have all winners across this province, not winners and losers.

Please, to my fellow Cape Bretoners, my fellow colleagues from the CBRM, don't kid yourselves - the CBRM gains to lose from their measly \$15.3 million that they get now, over \$2 million. Once this fully comes into fruition, they stand to lose over \$2 million. That's what you are going to be supporting with this bill - the loss of funding for your residents. That's what you are going to be supporting.

I know that the CBRM Council, well, they're going to come in. They're going to come in and they are going to have a fight, and they are not going to be too happy. They're going to be mad. The Mayor of CBRM says that what the Province is offering isn't really savings at all: "Saying that the municipality will now save millions," - this is the mayor saying - "that's wholly untrue," McDougall told the CBC in a phone interview on Tuesday. "This is just a flow-through for collection." McDougall says that if the municipalities no longer have to pay the Province for jails and public housing, they will stop collecting to cover off the bill, as they should.

They shouldn't do what I've heard from others, that was suggested to them by this government, to keep collecting. No, no, they are going to do the right thing - stop collecting - so there you go.

As for the Province talking over old schools, McDougall said this would have been a help had it come much sooner: "For the CBRM, that would have been great about 20 years ago, because we've already taken ownership of all those schools, so that means nothing to the CBRM." Don't bring that up, because guess what? It means nothing. We've already unloaded those schools. We already dealt with the bills. I know. I was on CBRM Council dealing with them. I know the member for Sydney-Membertou was also dealing with those when he was on council.

Now I'm going to quote from *SaltWire*: "The mayor of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality says she will not accept a proposed \$2-million cut in annual equalization money from the Province. According to Mayor MacDougall-Merrill, this early funding, now referred to as the Municipal Financial Capacity Grant, is said to be dropping from \$15 million to \$13 million on the details from the proposed renegotiation of the MOU with the Province . . . 'The long and short of it is this: It's a terrible, terrible deal for the CBRM,' MacDougall-Merrill said. 'The new amount of funding that the municipality would receive is lower than what we receive right now. They did propose that we would offer a top-up for a number of years, but that would only be temporary.'"

CBRM was already struggling with the \$15 million. Now the PC government wants them to accept a further cut. I mean, really, if I were on the government side of the aisle, for one, this wouldn't even get to the floor. I never would have allowed it. I'd have walked out of my caucus first. I would have walked out of my caucus before I ever allowed this to get to the floor, because it's about my constituents. They put me here to do a job for them. I wouldn't be doing my job if I allowed something like this to get to the floor. I just wouldn't be doing my job.

I feel this very passionately because I was a CBRM councillor. I sat in seats with councillors who had been fighting this fight for years. I'd been fighting that fight for years. I watched Mayor Morgan fight that fight for years, and it nearly killed him. This MOU is a slap in the face to the residents of the CBRM. They asked all of us in CBRM to bring back more funding, not less. This MOU does not reflect more funding.

The other parts of this I find interesting are that this bill will remove existing clauses related to the calculation, and instead will send the rate calculations to regulations. To me, that doesn't sound as transparent as it should. It sounds like a lack of transparency - to send everything to regulations. This government sends everything to regulations so that it doesn't have to come to the floor of this House. This government sends everything to regulations so that it does not have to hit this floor, so that we have no say in what is in that part of the bill, because it's in regulations.

How are we supposed to have oversight and transparency on how much of this funding is getting calculated? Where is the money going? Far be it for me to say, but sometimes when things like that are hush-hushed, some money can get funnelled into constituencies that might be of interest to parties. Who am I to say?

The language in it also - "Requiring the minister to make these payments" - has been weakened, replacing instances of "the minister shall" to "the minister may." Again, "the minister shall make these payments," or "the minister may make these payments."

"Shall" means "must," and "may" means what it is: You can do it; you don't have to do it. "Must" means you have to. It's required. "May" is meh, we may do it, we may not, depending on the day, how we feel, and what have you - because apparently everything's in regulations when it comes to the funding formula.

What we wanted to see with the MOU was a real funding formula that would be in legislation and would be transparent and accountable. We wanted to see a funding formula that lifted all boats. I'm talking about the CBRM, and the CBRM is a big loser in this at a time when, again, it was campaigned on and promised that they receive more funding. Now, in this MOU, there's \$2 million less.

I'm going to keep saying it because this is one of the cruxes of the issue. This is one of the cruxes of the issue: The PCs in Cape Breton - and in CBRM specifically - campaigned on a new funding formula, campaigned on raising the grant, and they only did it for one year.

Now, when the CBRM is already struggling with the \$15 million, you want to see them take another cut, or raise taxes more on an overtaxed population with high poverty rates. That's what's been suggested. How else are they going to make up that money? Where else can they make up that money?

If this bill was to pass - let's talk about what it means. Services may have to be cut - transit, which is booming right now. That moratorium on new sidewalks in the CBRM? That's never going to get lifted, apparently, because there's not going to be enough money.

Local CBRM-owned roads that are in serious need of repairs may not get them. Water lines and sewer lines that are continuously breaking down because the infrastructure is so old may actually not get fixed at a rate that they need to. Those are just a few - just a few.

Fire service? CBRM is a majority volunteer fire service that is in need of equipment, that has to continuously fundraise. You've got your career, that are just centrally located pretty much in Sydney, and there are a few scattered in other areas. What does it mean for them? A police service that really is stretched because you've got a lot of

area that is rural. They are stretched. In some areas, some people may not get to actually see them patrolling because they don't have enough.

Further cutting that grant, you're cutting services to our residents. That's what's going to happen. Services may be cut to our residents. This is not being hyperbolic. This is the reality. This is not being dramatic or anything else that I can be accused of, that I often get accused of being in this House. I know that I get accused of it a lot, and I hear it from across the aisle quite a bit, but I'm not being hyperbolic. This is the reality. This is the stark reality. This is the reality that I know I dealt with, and I know the member for Sydney-Membertou dealt with, while sitting in council chambers.

[4:30 p.m.]

We dealt with these things at budget. We just saw the CBRM go through one of their worst budget deliberations, trying to find money. It was the longest process of the budget deliberations I'd ever seen in the CBRM while they tried to find money, trying not to cut services. Why? Because the money that they were promised by this government, that was coming, the help that they were promised, only came for one year and left.

Now they've got this MOU to deal with. Now let's talk about something that was supposed to be in the MOU that the minister discussed in his opening statements, about Schedule A, I believe it was. One of them is roads. I've got to tell you something. I almost fell off my chair, and when I say I almost laughed, I don't mean I laughed as in: Ha ha, this is funny. I laughed as in, Huh, huh, I can't believe this would even be suggested kind of laugh. You know, the laugh of shock?

The province decided that they don't want to pave their own roads. This is why it was taken out, by the way, I believe, because it caused so much pandemonium and chaos, that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Premier and this caucus would suggest that they no longer pave their own roads, their own local roads. Now I live in a riding with a lot of local provincial roads. I just tabled a petition on a few of them, and I've tabled a few over time and I will probably have tons more.

It was suggested that they're no longer going to pave their own local roads. Instead, what they wanted to do was wait for them to go into disrepair, or have the CBRM, or any other municipal unit - that the Province would pave the roads only if the CBRM or any other municipal unit took them over afterward. Think about that for your own areas, please. Think about that for your own area, what that would mean. Could your municipalities afford to keep up maintenance on more roads than they already have? The CBRM can't. The maintenance of it, the plowing - they barely have money to cover their roads now with the measly \$15 million, plus other revenues.

Let's talk about that MOU, \$15 million. Now you are going to cut it to \$13 million and say, Oh, by the way, ha, ha, the joke is on you. We are also going to have you, in order

to get your local provincial roads paved, guess what? We'll pave them, but you have them afterward. That's what was suggested. That apparently is what was in Schedule A. That's why we don't see it right now.

Thank goodness we don't see it right now, because if it was in there right now – actually, I kind of wish it was. I kind of wish it was in there because I would see more people upset about this MOU, because then it would affect their constituencies. But it's coming. I'm sure those agreements are being made and I don't know, I think there are going to be more losers, if that actually happens, than there are winners.

So, we have a Premier who has been rejecting meetings with the CBRM, we have an MOU that disregarded a campaign promise made. Then he disregards it. Residents voted some of our colleagues in because they promised a brand new deal for the CBRM, more funding, but instead they got a minus \$2 million. I am laughing because it is absurd. That's where we are.

Apparently, the CBRM had been told to either continue to charge on taxes, items such as housing, corrections and education. Actually, no, they are still going to be getting education, not the schools, though. Apparently also in this agreement is that they are still going to have to do collections for education and still have to pay their fees for education, which, by the way, are calculated differently than with the province. The municipalities - I know the CBRM - there's a different calculation of how the CBRM's portion of education is calculated than what the province is calculated. There is an inequity there, but that part is apparently going to still stay in the MOU. Why? Because education is only going up, so that means they are going to have to pay more and more.

Really, there are no savings for the CBRM. There are losses, lots of losses. The CBRM is not winning in this. My community of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier is not winning in this MOU. I am responsible for ensuring that they are protected, just like the members opposite are responsible for ensuring that their residents are protected and that their interests are being served here in this Legislature.

Well, mine aren't. Mine are not being served by this MOU. My colleague for Sydney-Membertou and my colleague for Northside-Westmount - their residents aren't being served. My colleagues for Cape Breton East and Glace Bay-Dominion and some parts of Victoria-The Lakes will not be served by this. Why will they not be served? Because our CBRM council and their CAO have told us that they're not going to be served well by this, and yet it was promised that they would. It's a promise broken. It's a relationship broken with the CBRM.

I'm not going to continue on, but I am going to say that I do look forward to the Law Amendments Committee, because I'm going to have a lot to say in third reading from Law Amendments. May I suggest to the Law Amendments Committee that they allow every voice to be heard equally in that, and that you go in Law Amendments Committee for

however long you have to go. The people who are going to be coming to Law Amendments - maybe we're going to get some residents. I know we're going to get some CBRM councillors. I know we're going to get a mayor. I look forward to hearing them, because who they're speaking for - keep in mind, they're going to be speaking for every single resident of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

With that, I will take my seat.

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

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, you know what? I'll start with this. In any other city outside of Halifax, the Cape Breton MLAs would probably be fighting beside each other. We would stick together, absolutely. I understand that anywhere outside of Cape Breton or Halifax, we would stick together. But you know, perspective is really something to me. I'm not going to get riled up here. I'm just going to state the facts that I know.

The truth is, I'm a teacher. I'm not a politician - not a career politician. I have not had a career in municipal politics like the member for Sydney-Membertou has mentioned. He comes in here with a lot of experience that I don't have, and that's great. I appreciate him sharing it with me, absolutely. I talk with Darren Bruckschwaiger quite often to understand this stuff, because I don't get it. I really don't get it.

What I do know is that we met - Minister Comer, Speaker Bain, and myself met with CBRM council. What they asked us for was to open up the MOU. They asked for that. It's ironic that the member for Sydney-Membertou was not only a councillor, but he was also the minister of this department and still refused to open this. He painted a very clear picture that Cape Breton is suffering. I get that, and I agree with him on that, but I question why his government did not open this to even look at it.

One of the other things they wanted was a charter. They want to write a charter. For 28 years, they've been asking for a charter. For 28 years they've been dealing with a very difficult situation at home, absolutely. I'm curious if the member knows that the CBRM Council were offered to do a charter. They asked us for that, and the Cape Breton MLAs went to caucus and we went to battle for that. They were offered to do a charter.

Just to say this before I forget to say it later: There is a choice. They have a choice. They can take the \$4.5 million that's in this MOU right now, that it's going to save for them - which is actually going to save for the residents of Cape Breton Island. I get that. I'll agree with you on that. That's going to save it from your tax rate, that CBRM residents will save \$4.5 million on a residential tax rate by not paying for housing and Corrections. That's a choice that CBRM Council has to make. I don't want - I wouldn't want to be in that boat. I get it. CBRM is struggling. I understand. I'll stand shoulder to shoulder with anyone saying that. But at least they have a choice, because this government opened up the MOU. This government engaged them all the way through.

I know they took part in every bit of the opportunity they had to negotiate, and I'm proud that they did that. I'm proud that Cape Breton stood up for themselves and spoke, but they have a choice to do that, or they can go and engage in the process of our new charter.

[4:45 p.m.]

Now I would like to hear later on if the member across the floor agrees with that, because he said today that they do deserve the charter, and I'll agree with it, but I don't know the facts on what's going on inside council because I don't have the luxury of having that in my history.

Speaker, I want to tell you what it's like in Glace Bay and Dominion; well, in the entire CBRM. We have one-third of homes that are being lived in by a single individual. That makes it difficult to pay taxes, absolutely. We have on the board here where they could save \$4.5 million. The CBRM could do a rate increase, I guess you'd call it, to accept some of that because I understand it goes to the Province. It's technically not a rate increase for the cash coming into the house, but it's a rate increase, I guess, nonetheless. I don't know the nuances of that.

What I do know is that choices matter. When I was sitting at home and in my classroom with my students and they faced no option but to move away, I made a choice to step in and try to support those students so they have a choice to stay in Cape Breton. I feel like the member across the floor does: I believe Cape Breton is a very proud place to grow up and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. But those students who reached me every day and said, What do I need to work out west? - they didn't see a choice.

This government - and I'm very proud of it - has gone back and opened up an MOU that was unfair to us. I really think I would lean into the charter. Personally, I think I would lean into the charter. I don't know the nuances, like I said.

What I do know is that in my town of Glace Bay and Dominion, we have Morrison School. Morrison School was vacated and left to deteriorate. As a firefighter, I did not allow any of my officers or my firefighters to enter the building without breathing apparatus on because it was polluted with mould. You could land a helicopter inside the upstairs building now since Hurricane Fiona tore the roof off. What does the CBRM have to tear that down? Absolutely nothing. They have \$120,000 to deal with dilapidated homes. That is not even going to tear down a part of that building.

The people on McLean Street and Catherine Street who came out to meet with me when I was trying to find housing and viewed that building - they want that building gone. Now the government can take it down. I'm sure there are people in that area of town who will be celebrating.

Bridgeport School is another one. Bridgeport School was in very good shape; it was an excellent building. Now it is left dilapidated. The community is enraged over it. Thank God it's coming down now for a long-term care facility.

I don't think these people in these communities should be living with that choice, because the CBRM, obviously, is cash-strapped. I don't blame that on them, but at least we're offering to help now.

We also had Dominion Elementary School on Main Street in Dominion. It is rodent-infested, it is next to a playground, it's an area that has been subsidizing. It's not safe and nobody knows what to do with it, and the CBRM can't tear it down. Now we can. Those are just three in my district alone.

I think that matters because, not just being proud of where you come from and your hometown, people are proud of their properties as well. If we are ever going to advance in Cape Breton, we need people to buy into that. We need people to start taking pride in what they have and where we are and who we are, because we can't continue to be negative and want people to move to Cape Breton. We have to be proud. I'm proud of my hometown and I'm proud to be part of a government that is doing something to help.

Is it everything? No, it's not. Could we offer buckets of money to Cape Breton? I'd take my truck up for that trip and pay the carbon tax just for that trip to take the money back to Cape Breton. You liked that one, didn't you? I would, just to take that money home.

I know that is not a reality, but we can take down some dilapidated buildings which makes the community better-looking. It looks like people are taking pride in the building and the place, and now we have land that we can develop. That matters.

Speaker, I also said that when the member across the floor was minister, he didn't open this MOU. He talked about choices to be made and perspective. I think he mentioned perspective.

We're a government that's looking at doubling the population. I don't know if I have to table this or not because like I said, I'm not a politician. I really am not a career politician. I think the former Premier is on record as saying that Nova Scotia will have enough doctors when we reach our optimum population. I'm pretty sure he said that. Are we supposed to shrink? Is this province shrinking? It's not shrinking, and I'm not happy that I as a happy teacher went into a position because I am fed up with my kids, my students, my community not having a choice. I'm fed up that I'm up here begging the same department we're talking about for housing in Glace Bay when we have Morrison School, Bridgeport School, and Dominion School dilapidated to the point where we can't even renovate them. Shame on that government for not looking at that - foresight down the road. Just five years down the road and you would have developed two buildings instead of letting them fall apart, and having people in the community who are now looking for a

place to live, which we hear in here every day, and I praise the members for bringing that up. Nonetheless, when you had the choice, why didn't you act on it?

I guess I'm lucky to be elected into a sitting government instead of Opposition, but I don't know. It seems like it's very clear on that side all of a sudden. I don't know, because they didn't see it when they were over here, and we are seeing it. The recent \$84 million into subsidized housing - I think it's been 40 years since we had any subsidized housing built in Glace Bay - \$84 million now. I'm hoping we're going to get some of that because I sure made a case for it. I did. I used their neglect to do that, because I went to Morrison School, and they said, Johnny, that's a mess. I went to Morrison School, and they said, That's a mess. I went to Dominion School and that's a mess. Now we're left with nothing more than the possibility of building, I guess.

You know, Speaker, it's choices. It's about a choice. I understand right now the CBRM is paying \$22 million - anybody can call me on these numbers because I'm trying to learn. I think they're paying about \$22 million and receiving \$15 million. Now they're going to pay out \$17.5 million and collect \$19.5 million. I'm not a career politician, but to me that seems like a plus. I'm not an accountant, either. I'm a teacher, so I can add. I know 19.5 is bigger than 17.5. (Laughter) Yes, true enough. True enough.

The choice is to the CBRM mayor and council - they have two choices. Do they want to take that \$4.5 million and increase the rates so that they get to use it to run the municipality? That's a difficult decision, and I'm not going to make light of that. They also have the choice of going into council and voting to do a charter, a Cape Breton charter. A Cape Breton charter - we finally get a chance to do it - 28 years. Cape Breton MLAs serving in opposition didn't do it, but we now have a minister who gave that offer. I think that's amazing. I think that Cape Breton, as bad as it is - I don't want to leave with all negativity because we are on the grow. We don't have enough employees to work right now. Anybody listening to me, come on to Cape Breton. We'll treat you great. We know how to cook lobsters and beer, so come on down.

Cape Breton is a beautiful place to live because we do know our neighbours. We do know people around us. I think that's amazing. I don't want to lose that, so let's take some of the people, but I don't want to take all of them because I want my space too. I really do. I like to have my space.

You know, it matters what we do in public. It matters. For anybody who hasn't been to Cape Breton, it does matter. Anybody who hasn't been to Cape Breton and doesn't know what we're talking about and hears this argument back and forth, I know that that downplays our hometown. We need to be proud of our hometown, and I know that members across the floor are proud of their hometown. I know that.

I think we can put the party politics aside and at least accept this: Cape Breton Regional Municipality wanted an MOU. They wanted it opened. We opened it. The Cape

Breton Regional Municipality wanted the right to do a charter because the MOU wasn't working for them, and for the very same reasons that the member for Sydney-Membertou mentioned, the fact that they're 10 times larger than the next biggest town. Those are very special circumstances. I believe our land mass is massive. The roads we look after are just insane. So great, now you have a choice. Go into council and have a meeting, have a vote on it, and come out and build your charter. I'm sure there's help to do that. I don't know where they start. They're the professionals in that area. I think it's important to do that.

Four point six million in savings: Whether the CBRM keeps that, gives it to the residents as it's meant to do to lower the tax rate - imagine that. What would happen with all this vacant land we have if we could lower the tax rate to promote building? We don't have enough tradesmen now. If we can get the residential market going, we absolutely have something. And I think that's valuable. I'm sure the member across the floor has some points to make on that and I would be happy to talk with him about it.

I really feel that there are choices here. It's not said and done. This is the current MOU in front of us. I don't know if I'm speaking out of turn here. Someone might have to get a cane and yank me back, but I'm pretty sure that it's public knowledge that the Mass Casualty Commission report has us talking about a provincial police force. I'm sure that means savings for the CBRM.

I know we're struggling with that. I know we can't keep up with the police force, we can't keep up with the wages. Chief Robert Walsh has talked to me about that. He's having trouble with trying to recruit. I get it. Maybe there's room there. The fire services are under investigation. We know that's going to happen. There are other areas. This is not the end of it.

People of Cape Breton, you now have a government that's listening - oh, yes. You now have a minister who never served on the CBRM, who never understood those issues, as detailed as was mentioned across the floor, but yet has the compassion to open this MOU. Because opening that MOU is the right thing to do. I do not think for one minute that I have the answers. I will thank Darren Bruckschwaiger for giving me lots of time and helping me understand this stuff. I will.

In the end it boils down to this for me: CBRM has an opportunity to save \$4.5 million that's coming out of residents' homes, one-third of which are single individuals. That money can either be left to the residents. They could increase part of it to use it to run the CBRM. I don't know. But they have choices. I know one thing: I always gave my students choices. Because we're not all the same. We're not all the same.

I don't know - I'm not about to run 44 minutes talking, that's for darn sure, because I don't stand here and talk about things that I don't know anything about, or I don't stand here repeating myself over and over again. But I do think it's important to understand that the CBRM has been fully involved in this. They have expressed - they absolutely have

expressed frustration with the unique situation they're in. They absolutely have dominated all of the meetings. I understand. And they wanted a chance to write a charter.

You can check every one of those boxes, because the Cape Breton MLAs on this side of the floor went to caucus and fought for that. We did fight for that. We fought hard to make sure that they had the choice. Now I would like to know what CBRM is going to do. I want to know. Are they going to step out and go do the charter? Do they have it in them? Is that the best thing for them? I don't know if that's the best thing for them. I don't know if that's what the residents of CBRM want, much less the mayor and council. I don't know.

That's not my job to know. My job here as a provincial MLA is to voice the opinion of Cape Breton and I went to caucus and I voiced the opinion. That minister over there listened to me, and I'm proud of that. I really am happy for that. Because he didn't know the council aspect. He didn't have a history that you had - that the member across the floor had when he was minister. I think I'm good. (Laughter)

You know what? I'm not good. I'm not good because I'm standing here and I'm thinking about Morrison Junior High, where I taught, actually. I remember visiting that place to consider putting residents in there, and to repurpose the building.

We need residents. We need people in Cape Breton, because it's too expensive to ship raw materials to Cape Breton and then ship a finished product back to the main market. People is business to me. That's business. I want people to come in because it's business. I want people in Cape Breton to have opportunity.

I can't help but to think of the poor folks on Catherine Street who are right up against Morrison Junior High. I don't know if there's five feet between them and the fence, and they have a rooftop that has blown off. They have racoons coming out of the building on a regular basis. I've seen one across the roof on a regular basis.

They have the back end of the building that's filled with mould, and no money to deal with it. I feel bad for the mayor and council, in that they can't answer that question. Now we have a place to get that answered, and I think of those people when I'm talking about this.

I think about the folks in Bridgeport, who are very fortunate lately with the Antonians ball field being built, thanks to Nicky Bonnar. That's all well and good, but they don't have a whole lot up there, and it's something I've been pushing hard to try to help that community.

Now we have a community that has a school that is dilapidated. Kids are breaking into it. God knows what's going on in there. Same with Morrison, same with Dominion. Now they're going to have a way to tear those buildings down. I think that matters to those folks, and that's going to make a very real difference in someone's life.

If I do anything as an MLA - if I stand here and come to work every day, and I gave up a job that I thoroughly enjoyed as a teacher - I'd darn well better be making a difference in someone's life, and I know I'm making a difference in those folks' lives by supporting this piece of legislation.

[5:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. I want to direct the House's attention to the East Gallery, where we have two familiar faces from southwest Nova Scotia. From Yarmouth County, we have two dedicated public servants with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development as well, one of whom is a municipal councillor.

We have Trevor Cunningham, who is a municipal councillor with the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth, as well as Steve Amero. I welcome them to the House.

THE SPEAKER: We welcome all visitors to the House. Welcome.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd also like to extend a welcome to friends of mine in the East Gallery. My councillor, actually, Councillor Cunningham - who comes from good Tory stock, I know - and Mr. Amero, who - during his time in education, I had the pleasure of working with in my years in that department.

Even more significantly, I actually was a student when Mr. Amero was supporting all those kids in our schools growing up who needed extra help with learning, particularly around reading. Thank you for your service, both gentlemen, to our community and our system.

I listened with interest to my friend from Glace Bay-Dominion's comments, where he admittedly said that he doesn't have any of the answers. I have to say, I do agree with him on that. I agree with him on that point. But I do also want to point out that that member has taken some liberties in rewriting some history of what's happened on Cape Breton Island.

That member can stand up in this House and point to my friend, the honourable member for Sydney-Membertou, former minister of numerous departments, and say that that member didn't fight for the people of the Island.

It's interesting, because when that member goes back, he actually takes credit for all the big projects happening on Cape Breton Island that actually happened under a

previous government: the new NSCC building being built in downtown Sydney; the biggest expansion of health care infrastructure in a generation on Cape Breton Island; the Miners Forum; new schools; and also the Horizon Achievement Centre. The list goes on: purchasing homes from those who were flooded out of their homes; expansion to daycare.

I will ask the honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion - whom I'm responding to here - that when he stands up and levels these accusations, to refresh himself on the history. He can see it . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'd ask the member to stick to the bill we're debating here. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm responding to the member for Glace Bay's comments on the bill directly. I will ask him, when he stands up and says the member for Sydney-Membertou didn't do enough, to look at the history and look at a lot of the projects he's now taking credit for on the Island, and he'll see.

In relation to this bill, I grow increasingly concerned about this government's approach to municipal government, how they're approaching the relationship, and their unwillingness to work with duly elected municipal leaders from one end of the province to the other. We have seen a real effort to not have to deal with these folks at all or to run roughshod over municipal governments, despite the fact very clear promises were made by this Premier and this government in the last election related to local decision-making and municipal government.

I think it's important to refresh the House's memories of those commitments, and I'll table this article. This was "Ask the Leader": PC Leader "talks decentralization, equalization payments for Cape Breton." These are promises that were made by the Premier to get elected. When it comes to decentralization, the author writes, "you are cited as indicating that you are a big proponent of local decision-making and would not rule out decentralizing some services, including health care and education." The promise made by the Premier: "Not only will I not rule it out, I will do it." Now look at what's happened - the exact opposite of that has happened.

He complained in this article about the amalgamation of the health authority. He further centralized that by getting rid of an independent board on health, with health care professionals on it, and centralizing control of the health care authority in his office with a partisan appointee, Karen Oldfield, who's a lawyer. She has no experience in health care.

He promised to bring back school boards. That hasn't happened. Now we see with local governments, in recent weeks, their approach to supporting local decision-making: running roughshod over HRM and saying, You don't know anything about housing. We're going to take it over - and the minister, who represents Kings North in rural Nova Scotia, and the Premier, who represents Pictou West in rural Nova Scotia, are now going to make

all the decisions related to housing development in HRM. Does this sound like decentralization or supporting local government?

Let's talk about CBRM. My caucus colleagues and I had the great opportunity to head to CBRM and actually meet with municipal councillors there: the CAO, several staff, and the Chief of Police. I was quite taken aback by what I learned there. The second-largest municipality in the province has not been able to secure a meeting with the Premier of this province. They can barely get meetings with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. A deputy minister was sent to meet with elected officials, and they weren't happy about it.

There are big issues happening in CBRM. We've got homelessness and a housing crisis, like we're experiencing in nearly every part of this province. We heard from the Chief of Police that they are getting 5,000 new calls per year when it comes to crime or concerns from citizens to which they need to respond. Eighty thousand calls per year. I'd like to thank my honourable colleagues for reminding me of that.

CBRM also has the highest tax rate in Nova Scotia. When you add on top that it has the lowest income, this creates a major cost pressure for folks in CBRM who are already dealing with the cost of living crisis, increasing cost in housing interest rates, food, gas - all these things. It's the second-largest municipality, not just in Nova Scotia but in numerous provinces in Atlantic Canada.

They reminded us about promises that the Premier made to them when it came to funding - again, to get elected, before the election. This is related to a question on fairness in equalization payments. "A local group calling itself" - this is a question posed to the Premier, again, when he was Leader of the Opposition, running to be Premier. "A local group calling itself Nova Scotians for Equalization Fairness (NSEF) has been taking politicians to task - both PCs and Liberals - regarding the distribution of equalization cash that the province receives from the federal government. You have pledged" - again, "you" the Premier, former Leader of the Opposition. This is when he was a candidate - "You have pledged to double the \$15 million grant the CBRM receives as part of a memorandum of understanding it has with the province. That said, this group would like to meet with you to discuss the issue in more detail. But in a (July 17) letter to the Cape Breton Post, Rev. Dr. Albert Maroun said that you refused their invitation to do so. What is your response to that and is there any chance that you would make it a commitment to speak directly to this group?"

"My position is this," said the Premier - again, as a candidate at the time. "The memorandum of understanding between the province and the municipality is very old, and it is time to refresh that. And that's going to take some time, some give and take, (and finding out) who's responsible for what. I'm committed to doing that, and they have my commitment on doing that." And yet he still has not met with the elected leadership of CBRM, the second-largest municipality in this province.

What he said on equalization payments: “we would double the payments to the municipalities. CBRM and others, whoever is receiving the payment from the province now, they would receive twice as much. I think that a \$32-million commitment is in our platform, and \$15 million of that will go to the CBRM.”

So what have we learned since the election? That funding is actually being cut from CBRM. It’s being cut. The Premier won’t meet with the council. They’ve got all these incredible growth pressures on them that are impacting the cost of policing, the cost of services, their ability to respond to the housing crisis, and they can’t get a meeting with the Premier. And not only can they not get a meeting, now they know that they couldn’t trust him at his word to deliver what he promised them he’d give them just to get their vote heading into the last election.

Is this a government that cares about their relationship with our municipalities? I would argue that we have to at this point. We are dealing with some of the most significant generational challenges that anybody’s had to deal with: the highest inflation in the country here in Nova Scotia, the highest increase in rents, the cost of living crisis that’s affecting everybody, a homelessness crisis that is now impacting every single community across the province. When you’re facing these massive challenges, it’s really incumbent upon all governments to come together and work together to overcome them.

We are not going to get anywhere with dealing with these complex issues - that, again, are going to impact this province for not just the next two years, but the next two decades. These are generational challenges, and to rise to the moment, I think it’s incumbent upon the government to realize that they don’t have all the answers - just like the member for Glace Bay-Dominion said, I don’t have the answers. Neither does the Premier. But it’s by working together with all orders of government - federal, provincial, and municipal, and of course our band governments, our Indigenous governments, and our stakeholder community in the private sector - to actually get somewhere on this. Instead, we’re seeing the exact opposite: a Premier who won’t even meet with CBRM to discuss this.

In relation to this bill, it is not just the CBRM that’s concerned about it. I will say that there’s a number of municipalities that are supportive of this bill. Some are very close to home to me that I know are very supportive of this. But there are still... (Interruption) One by me that likes it? Actually, there are multiple municipalities that don’t support it. We’ve got a letter here from the Municipality of the County of Kings as well. We’ve also heard from the Municipality of East Hants. So there are several municipalities that are concerned about this and don’t support it.

Again, on CBRM, I do think there’s rationale for that. As the member for Glace Bay-Dominion said, CBRM is 10 times larger than the next largest town, which would be Truro. This is the second-largest municipality, not just in this province but in the wider

Maritimes. As the member for Glace Bay-Dominion said, it's 10 times larger than the next largest municipality here in the province.

[5:15 p.m.]

They've got a rationale to be treated differently from this as well. That's actually been supported by the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. I'll read from excerpts here. This is not just a CBRM issue - although I think that CBRM clearly has the most to lose. They have certainly expressed the greatest amount of frustration, not just with the process that led to this, but also with their relationship with the Premier and with this government. They are being supported, actually, by the NSF.

I'll read this letter, Speaker. This is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in relation to the Service Exchange Agreement: "On behalf of the NSF Board of Directors, they want to thank you for the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding the service exchange discussion." They list a recommendation here: "There's a recommendation that the NSF write a letter to the Province accepting the Province's proposal for capacity grant, housing, corrections, obsolete schools, and infrastructure, but further that CBRM be dealt with separately from other municipalities. Further, with respect to roads, that NSF accept Part A of recommendations, and that Part B be placed in Schedule A for future discussion."

We actually have the group that represents municipalities, the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, that has said . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I would just ask the member if he could please table that when you're finished with it. Thank you.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I certainly will table all the documents that I'm referencing here. I may use them multiple times during debate tonight, so I will keep them on hand, but they certainly will all be tabled after.

Again, this is a letter dated September 14th to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This comes from Brenda Chisholm-Beaton, the President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. They state that CBRM be dealt with separately from other municipalities, with no impact on other negotiations.

So you've got the CBRM saying they need to be dealt with separately because of their size, and the specific nature of a number of the challenges that they're dealing with: tax base, homelessness, low income. Yet still the department has not allowed that to happen.

In fact, it almost seems as if the department is being a bit threatening toward CBRM if they don't play ball. I've got a letter here where the Province essentially outlines what they won't be getting if they don't sign off on this. This is how we're approaching our relationship with our second-largest municipal unit.

Again, from a Premier who, to get elected, claimed - I'll quote again from this article from *SaltWire* - I think the *Cape Breton Post*, on August 6, 2021 - that he will support local government in their decisions to govern on behalf of their constituents.

I don't think this is the right way to approach this relationship. As a member of a previous government who's certainly had arguments and debates with CBRM, and other municipalities and stakeholders, there was still a willingness to meet and work together.

Cecil Clarke was Mayor of CBRM when I was the Minister of Municipal Affairs. You don't get more Tory than Cecil Clarke. I don't know about nowadays - he's much more non-partisan. Still, we served together in this Chamber, on different sides, but we met regularly. Former premiers McNeil and Rankin met with our municipal leaders regularly. The CBRM can't even get a meeting with the Premier on this. Of course, they're feeling extremely discouraged about this, and they don't feel the government is listening.

From that meeting we discerned that they've also felt very disrespected by the deputy minister, who essentially told them that if they don't like the funding that's being provided here, they can raise taxes. Again, they are the highest-taxed municipality in the province that also has the lowest income when it comes to their taxpayers. Is that a responsible response from a deputy minister?

Usually when you are sending somebody in to meet with folks, it is going to be with the intention of working together and reaching a resolution. Clearly that didn't happen. I think we've seen this approach with other municipalities as well. We've actually seen it in Antigonish. Again, this is related to a word that was given and then not kept, which is what's happening in this bill with CBRM. They were promised doubling of their equalization payments, and now the money is being stripped back. That's a promise that was given that isn't being kept.

We saw that in Antigonish. Municipal leaders really put their necks out on the line to consolidate. They did so because they were promised by the PC government that they would be there to pass special legislation in this House and allow them to do that. As soon as the pressure was on - and again, we would have asked a lot of questions about that bill had it come forward in this session. Certainly, a lot of questions need to be asked. A lot of constituents in that area did not support this. We've actually asked questions previously in this House related to Antigonish amalgamation, but as soon as the pressure was on, the government just cut ties and said, We're not doing it.

Again, this is indicative of the relationship that this government is building with municipal units. The municipal units cannot trust what they're being told, what the word is of this government. That's a real problem here.

We've seen it in HRM in relation to the housing bill. Again, this is related to the bill because this bill is about a relationship with multiple municipal units. Let's look at the housing bill that came forward recently. Again, this is a government led by a Premier who said he's going to trust local decision-makers and decentralize decision-making - and what happened this week? Complete centralization of housing decisions, which is going to be done by elected officials who were not elected, for the most part, in HRM.

Mayor Savage slammed this egregious bill as a major overreach. I can quote some of the statements that have been made by the mayor. Again, a mayor who didn't even get a call that that bill was coming forward the next day - a bill that would strip housing and development decisions from Halifax council and give it to the Province. These are very consequential things that are happening here.

Listen to the words of the mayor: "This legislation is built on a demonstrably false premise, introduced with absolutely no notice or discussion." This is what Mayor Savage told MLAs at the Law Amendments Committee: "It is an autocratic intrusion into municipal affairs and completely ignores the biggest problem that it claims to address."

Here we have another bill today that is not supported by a duly elected local council and they think that their taxpayers are going to be penalized by it. There are similarities here. CBRM council believes that this bill is going to force them to increase taxes on their citizens because they're going to be harmed financially as a result of this.

Halifax - with the harmful housing bill, as they said - could also raise taxes here in HRM. I'll quote the Halifax mayor again. "This legislation is unnecessary and it's harmful," Mayor Mike Savage told the Legislature's Law Amendments Committee. Let's be clear: This will raise taxes for municipal taxpayers.

Now, I'll go on here before I get to my . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I just want to remind the member to speak to the bill and not Bill No. 329. We are on Bill No. 340. Thank you.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I certainly am speaking about the bill here. This bill, which is an MOU with the municipalities, is all about the established relationship with our municipalities. I think that's very clear.

This is a new agreement with municipal units by a government that claimed, when they got elected, that they were going to work with municipal units. Even further than that, they were going to decentralize decision-making, and make sure it was in the hands of local officials. That's clearly not the case.

We see similarities with what CBRM is saying in relation to this bill, Bill No. 340, and with other bills that are before the Legislature, in that the provincial government is not considering the outcomes of what happens here. CBRM is telling us this could increase taxes in their municipality, which is already the highest-taxed municipality in the province, and has the lowest income among residents.

The mayor has told us that government's action on them could increase taxes here in Halifax. Mayor Savage has said this would enable one single person - the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who doesn't have a thorough knowledge of HRM or planning - to single-handedly approve projects without accountability or justification. They've referred to this government's approach to dealing with them as being bullying, reckless, and dangerous. These aren't my words. These are the words of councillors.

It's not just HRM and CBRM that are dealing with this. We've seen this in Bridgewater on the South Shore, where this government's announcement related to housing came to the Mayor of the Town of Bridgewater as a complete shock. The Mayor of the Town of Bridgewater wasn't informed of this announcement. Again, there are issues at the local level of which the Province isn't aware but our local municipal leaders, staff, and elected officials are.

For instance, in some municipalities, they can't grow because their sewer and wastewater are already at capacity. When the Province comes in and makes an infrastructure announcement - without working or even calling the municipal leadership or the staff on an announcement - and then the municipality says, We can't even really do this because our infrastructure is already maxed out, that's a problem. That means money is either going to go to waste or these projects aren't going to be able to move forward, simply because we've got a government that won't work with our municipal leadership.

It's not just CBRM, Bridgewater, or HRM that has said this. We're hearing concerns from the Municipality of the County of Kings on this as well. Here's a letter dated in September to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This is related specifically to Bill No. 340, where they say, "Below please find our summary comments on the DMA&H proposal with specific references to components related to roads and the importance of having someone fully cost the programs before presentation to the municipalities . . ." is made.

Here's what I found interesting about this letter, and this speaks to the process of how we got to Bill No. 340. The "SERMGAR Committee was formed to discuss, consult and report regularly to municipalities. Instead, the members were asked to sign

Non-Disclosure Agreements, . . .” This is in relation to the negotiation that happened heading into this bill. “. . . did not report to municipalities and appear to have taken on the status of a negotiating committee. To top it off, that committee also had not shared its report with either the NSF Board or membership prior to us all being presented with what had the appearance of a fait accompli. Therefore, it cannot be inferred that any” - underlined - “of the recommendations have come from the municipalities.” This is coming from Kings.

[5:30 p.m.]

I’m going to read that again, because I think this is very important, and I will table these documents. First they say: “Regrettably, the Roads Committee’s report was overtly withheld from municipalities. We have just now received it as a result of numerous complaints on that front.” They had information that was withheld from the municipalities by the minister and his department. “Also, the SERMGAR Committee was formed to discuss, consult and report regularly to municipalities. Instead, the members were asked to sign Non-Disclosure Agreements, did not report to municipalities and appear to have taken on the status of a negotiating committee.”

Again, I’ll repeat this:

“To top it off, that committee also had not shared its report with either the NSF Board or membership prior to us all being presented with what had the appearance of a fait-accomplis. Therefore, it cannot be inferred that any of the recommendations have come from the municipalities. I have truly been confused by such cloaked procedures. They have done nothing to inspire confidence in this process.”

Listen to what the words are from our municipal leaders related to this bill and the process that got us here - cloaked procedures. It has done nothing to inspire confidence in the process. What they’re concerned about is financial and in relation to roads as well. This Province will not share in the cost, and the municipality assumes all cost, risk, and liability in relation to G, H, I, and J class roads.

I’ll read some more excerpts from this letter, because it’s very important. Again, non-disclosure agreements had to be signed here? Because the government didn’t want municipal leaders to actually be able to communicate either to their constituents about this or their councils? Where’s that quote again, what the Premier said about decentralization? Again, the Premier in this article is cited as indicating that he is a big proponent of local decision-making. A big proponent of local decision-making, and we have municipal leaders who have been involved in this process who had to sign NDAs so they actually couldn’t go back and communicate to their councils.

The Opposition is supposed to have confidence in this piece of legislation. These are legitimate concerns that we have here. Again, CBRM is concerned about their tax base, increases they'll have to make to taxes. They're concerned about the fact that they're losing money that the Premier promised them he would give. Other municipalities like Kings County are concerned about the cost of roads if they have cost-sharing agreements with the Province. It sounds like the Province is removing their portion of funding to these roads.

I'll read again from this letter from Kings County:

“Alternatively, if the Municipality chooses not to repave a G, H, I or J road under the new program, the province may allow the roads to deteriorate to gravel at its discretion. Most significantly, the proposed program has expanded beyond the 1,648 kms that the roads committee was dealing with, to include all G, H, I and J roads, totalling over 14,000 kms.”

One thousand six hundred versus 14,000.

We all know how important these G, H, I, and J-class roads are in our communities. We all get calls about them, about the need for gravelling, and we all have to work together, municipalities and provincial officials, to get the work done, but this is what they conclude on this issue - it's one of their concluding comments. “It seems, therefore, that the idea to include all G, H, I and J class roads” - again, 14,000 kilometres - “has been introduced unilaterally by the province.” What a great relationship this government is building with our municipal governments.

“The proposed program is silent about the associated infrastructure that should be improved or repaired prior to the transfer of a road to a municipality, such as drainage improvements, shoulders, culverts, bridges, etc. Without firm details in this area, and information about the current condition of G, H, I, AND J roads, no municipality would have had the information or time to fully assess and determine the direct and indirect costs associated with this program and the impact such increased costs would have on municipal ratepayers.”

We are seeing all of these actions taken by this government with CBRM, concerns raised by East Hants. I'm sure there are concerns in Bridgewater about the need to raise taxes when they can't afford to upgrade the infrastructure just to keep up with some of the announcements that the governments have been making in relation to new projects. Now we have concerns here about the increased costs to these roads.

I think we do have to question the motivations of this legislation, and question what the outcomes are going to be. We have some of the highest taxes - income tax, commercial

tax, sales tax - in the country. We'll take credit that this side did reduce income and commercial tax in the province, but we are still at the highest. A lot more work needs to be done on taxes here.

We brought forward bills in this House to reduce the tax burden on businesses and on individuals, and we'll continue to fight for lower taxes in Nova Scotia.

Here we have a government that doesn't care if they're creating the circumstances for municipalities that could force them to increase property taxes, or commercial taxes municipally. This is very concerning. Again, I wonder if the government just doesn't care if these taxes go up in our municipalities, so long as residents are blaming our municipal leadership, or if they're not paying attention to the details. I think that could very well be what's going on here, because if I can provide any observations on the culture of decision-making of this government, it's that the headlines matter more than anything else. So long as this government is winning the headlines of the day, it looks like they're taking action on key items. I don't think they think out the details, and what the impacts are going to be.

We have absolutely seen this across the board. We're seeing recent bills that have been brought toward this House in relation to housing: Look how much we're doing; we're going to build faster and more. When you talk to developers, they've actually asked themselves: Is that going to happen? What's going to change? When you talk to the municipality, they say, Actually, this isn't going to do anything to speed up development. It might slow it down, because now the municipality is considering fighting the Province in court.

Here with Bill No. 340, we've got concerns from municipalities that they're going to have to increase their taxes, because of the impacts that this MOU can have on their funding from the Province and funding and partnership related to roads that are very important to rural Nova Scotia.

Potential outcomes for this, according to Kings:

“Kings has prepared order of magnitude projections regarding Program B cost implications using the Joint Roads Committee approach, adjusted to reflect the province-wide ~14,000 kms of road lengths (less kms located within HRM) provided by the province, and utilizing the recent per kilometre capital costings provided by a Provincial official.

“These projections indicate that only 3% of the ~14,000 kms of roads could be resurfaced and maintained at the net program cost published by the Joint Roads Committee, a dramatic decline from the 40% used as an assumption by the Committee.”

Can we reflect on that for a moment?

“These projections indicate that only 3% of the ~14,000 kms of roads could be resurfaced and maintained at the net program cost published by the Joint Roads Committee, a dramatic decline from the 40% used as an assumption by the Committee. Should the uptake of resurfacing and maintenance reach the 40% assumption amount, the municipal cost swells to ~\$104.5M per year - a 14.5-fold increase from current contribution levels for J-class roads.

“These preliminary estimates of costs associated with Program B are staggering and would significantly impede a municipality’s ability to provide other critical municipal services and be of significant additional financial burden to residential and commercial property owners.”

I’ll read more from this letter. This is quite stark, at least from the perspective of this municipality.

“Apart from the direct financial impact, this type of program would undoubtedly create widely varied condition and service levels between all 49 municipalities. Those municipal units that don’t prioritize road conditions within their municipal budgets will eventually likely require provincial financial assistance to restore roads to standards demanded by citizens.

“In addition, the proposed program will create an enormous duplication of resources among the municipalities and represents an inefficient use of taxpayers’ money.”

Who cares, if the PCs can just blame all of this on the municipal government, even though they created the conditions for this? No one on that side is concerned about these impacts? No one’s concerned about the increase to property taxes in our municipalities? Our municipal leaders are telling us this. Anybody concerned about it? The member for Argyle has something to say. I’d like to know what his thoughts are on this. We’ve got a lot of J-class roads in our county. I’ve gotten calls about them probably every single year I’ve been in office, and I’ve been here for 13 years. Feels a lot longer.

It matters to people.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I just want to remind the member that this is a bill that's regarding grants and what they will do and how they relate to municipalities - relate to the MOU. Please, once again, just stay on track with what the bill is actually about.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

[5:45 p.m.]

ZACH CHURCHILL: This letter that I'm reading from, that comes from Kings County, is specifically speaking about the process that led to this MOU and the impacts that this MOU that's being put forward by the PC government is going to have on their municipality and ratepayers. Everything I'm saying and reading from this letter is directly related to the bill. This is municipal commentary in relation to Bill No. 340.

Again, I know the government didn't want to hear any of this, because they made the folks involved in negotiation sign NDAs on this, so they couldn't go back to consult with their councils or their citizens. Again, they called this process "cloaked." It cannot be inferred that any of the recommendations have come from municipalities.

This could drastically impact finances in the tune of over \$100 million and force municipalities to raise taxes at a time when Nova Scotians certainly can't afford more taxes. We have some of the highest taxes in the country. We have the highest inflation rate in the country. We have the highest increases to rent in the country. Again, all these things happened after the Premier centralized a lot of authority from various agencies and municipalities.

I think it's worth stating that, because we are seeing the Province again - again, from the perspective of certain municipalities, not all, but I think these voices are, of course, very important to amplify in this Chamber for the sake of this debate, so that we do understand all the potential outcomes for this. There may be some municipalities that benefit. We'd certainly like to hear from them. I don't know if they're able to because they sign non-disclosure agreements. I hope we can.

When you've got the second largest municipality in the province that is raising red flags on this; that have not been able to meet with the Premier; that have been unsatisfied with their meetings with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; that were not given funding that they were promised in an election campaign, have actually had their funding cut; and that are worried about impacts to their budget and their ability to fund their municipality - these are big issues.

When you're hearing from a large municipality like the Municipality of the County of Kings, and again I've heard - I don't have a letter from the Municipality of West Hants, but we're hearing there are concerns there as well - this stuff needs to be talked about here. Again, when we see a government run roughshod over other municipal units, including the

largest one in our province, HRM, we have to bring these issues to the forefront here in the House. We have an obligation to do that.

I think we should all be concerned about this, because what we've seen here is not just a disregard for potential financial impacts on municipalities. We have seen a disregard by the current government on financial impacts to taxpayers in these municipal units. Legislation does not seem to be well-thought-through - legislation that is just more attuned to capturing a headline to demonstrate that they're making progress on something, when in fact, in some areas there might be a serious regression of municipal services, regression when it comes to taxation.

That's why we have to keep urging this government to think beyond the headline here. Think about what the impacts are going to be, because again, we are facing generational and complex issues. The relationship and ability of the Province and the Premier to work with our municipal leadership, and our federal government, is key to overcoming these. Everybody has their own sphere of expertise. Everybody understands what certain outcomes are going to be if you make certain decisions once the dominoes start falling. Guess what? The Premier doesn't have all the answers. The ministers don't have all the answers.

Yet we have seen a serious centralization of decision-making, not just with independent boards. I mean, many of them have just been decimated - Health, Economic Development. Basically anybody that spends money, the Premier is getting rid of all those independent boards so there is no more oversight or accountability, so they can spend the money when and where they want.

We're now seeing this happen with our municipal units, and a real breach of trust, I think, is happening between the Province and certain municipal leaders in this province. I wonder if it just has to do with the politics of these folks. You have to wonder that, because it does seem that there are favourites with this government that will get the access, that can meet with the Premier, that can have the chats with the ministers. Then certain municipalities, particularly those that have been vocal in criticizing the government or providing constructive feedback - iced out. No dialogue whatsoever. That's happened in the CBRM, and it's happened here in Halifax.

The mayor of the city, the CAO, and councillors - nobody got a heads-up that the Province was going to take over housing and development, not even a call. We saw it in Bridgewater, where an announcement was made to capture the headline and to show the government really cares about housing. The municipality didn't even know that announcement was going to be made, and indicated they don't even know if they have the infrastructure - sewage and wastewater - to accommodate that. In fact, they don't.

What are we doing here? That's why this relationship matters. Because guess what? People know what's happening on the ground. You go down to Yarmouth. You talk to

municipal councillors from Yarmouth from all three parties and independents. You'll know the impact of the ferry service. You talk to municipal leaders up along the South Shore, in Argyle, Shelburne, Queens, Bridgewater, Mahone Bay, Chester, and all the way to Halifax. You know the impact of those services.

The fact that \$30 million is coming into the province that otherwise wouldn't - first-time travellers into Nova Scotia through that ferry that comes to Nova Scotia through Yarmouth - high-value travellers who don't come in from any other entry point. They only come in through Yarmouth from Grand Desert Island, one of the biggest domestic tourism attractions in the United States. They spend a lot of money to go there, and it costs them half as much to come check out the stuff we have here. That's why you see the Premier previously attacking that service, saying it's not worth the money and that it's a terrible business deal, because those conversations aren't happening.

I'll quote from the *Cape Breton Post* article. This is from a Premier who said he was a big proponent of local decision-making and wanted to decentralize services. I'll quote his words exactly: "Not only will I not rule it out, but I will do it." Clearly not as advertised here. I can't be the only one who sees that. Certainly, I'm not.

When you're bringing in something as consequential as this Memorandum of Understanding that is going to impact the majority of our municipalities - I think we have 55 - and some of these municipalities are really raising red flags on this: impacts to their ability to deliver services; impacts on the rates they're going to have to charge for taxes; and impacts on their ability to manage absolutely critical roads to people who live in very remote areas in our province, who depend on these roads for safety, and who depend on these roads being passable for ambulances, fire trucks, and school buses. We've got a problem on our hands here.

I think the problem that has led to this MOU is one built around the relationship that this Premier and his Cabinet have chosen to have with our municipal leadership. It's one where they can't trust the word that's given to them either before the election or after, where they can't trust their voices are going to be heard, and where they can't trust the government to actually be paying attention to really consequential issues that impact the safety, well-being, and finances of their taxpayers.

Right now, the evidence that we have suggests there is a lot to be concerned about with this bill - about the process that got us here, and about how this government's going to continue to treat municipal leaders and other orders of government as we move forward.

We haven't just seen it with municipalities. We've also seen it with the relationship with the federal government. Of course, that relationship is really important to municipal government as well. A lot of money that comes into our municipalities and into the province does come from the federal government, and is redistributed through the Province

to our municipalities - as the Premier would know when he committed again. I will read that quote again.

When it comes to equalization payments, he's recognized the importance of the federal funding that's come through, and that's why he promised that he would double payments to municipalities - CBRM and others. Whoever is receiving payment from the Province now, they would receive twice as much - \$15 million of that would go to CBRM. That's not happening anymore.

The Premier understands the importance of that funding stream - federal to province to municipality. That's how we get a lot of our big infrastructure paid for in the province - all the twinning of our highways that the government is now taking credit for that I think they voted against when they were in opposition. Hospital expansion, I think, received some federal support; recreational facilities, of course; green builds - all these sorts of things require federal funding.

When the Prime Minister was high in the polls, of course the Premier was his best friend. I think he said, in fact, to my friend - former Premier, member for Timberlea-Prospect - that he was more like the Prime Minister than the former Liberal Premier was. I thought that was quite funny. Now the polls turned, and of course now everything's being blamed on Prime Minister Trudeau. Now he fights him on every single issue that he can fight them on. He went from being his best friend, and more like him than any Liberal in the province, to being his chief critic. What changed there? The polls, and the potential impact on favourability with the Premier.

All three orders of government need to be working together here. We have a housing crisis. We have natural disasters that, if we haven't learned in Nova Scotia how impactful these are going to be over the last years, then we're never going to learn - and things are going to get worse. We have serious headwind starting to form in our economy. Climate change is reshaping our ocean around us.

I saw a report that said 70 per cent of wealth generated - I can't remember if it was Nova Scotia or the Atlantic Provinces - it may have been the Atlantic Provinces - comes from the sea, comes from fishing seafood. We have lobsters now that are migrating. Come down to southwest Nova Scotia - Clare, Yarmouth, Shelburne, District 34, you go up to Digby, along the South Shore, Eastern Shore, Cape Breton. The best lobsters do come from District 34, though, I will say. These communities are built around the fishery. We don't have these communities without a fishery.

We have a complex issue here. Climate change is impacting how many lobsters we're going to have here. We've seen it happen on the Eastern Seaboard of the U.S.: lobsters migrated up here, and we benefited from that. Guess what? They're going to keep migrating. We're not going to figure this stuff out if the Province is focused on grabbing headlines and fighting other orders of government. We have a cost of living crisis that is

burying people. Again, what's the government focused on? Oh, we're going to use public dollars to fund ads attacking the federal government, instead of actually negotiating an alternative with them for Nova Scotians to keep fuel prices lower here. It's all flash and no substance.

[6:00 p.m.]

We're seeing that again with Bill No. 340. Look how great we're doing. We finally dealt with the MOU. No other government could ever do this, ever. Of course, we're the only ones that can do anything. Now we're hearing from municipalities that the consequences could be pretty dire here in some of these municipal units in areas that really matter that I can't emphasize enough: how much tax people are spending; how many municipal services people are able to receive from the municipality; how those municipalities are able to keep roads upgraded in rural and remote parts of their community. Is this really a time to be patting ourselves on the back with this piece of legislation?

Again, we're hearing from CBRM that they don't feel consulted. The Premier hasn't even met with them. We have heard from NSFAM, who told us that CBRM should not be included in this process and that there should be a separate process for CBRM. So that's not just coming from the Municipality, that's coming from their association representing all municipalities across the province. We're hearing from Kings County that the consequences of this bill could be pretty catastrophic for them, and all these folks negotiating this had to sign NDAs so they couldn't talk about the potential impacts.

Again, from the letter, not a process that inspires a high degree of confidence. I think the process that led us here is indicative of this government's approach to dealing with anybody who doesn't really disagree with them, or anybody who slightly offends based on their public commentary, because they can totally interrupt and affect the ability to have a productive relationship. We even see that here in HRM with Mayor Savage, who I think not a single person in this Chamber can say is not affable or co-operative, or who does not have a genuine desire to work on projects collaboratively.

This is a mayor who used to be a Liberal, and he'll be the first one to say when he comes and presents to our caucus - which he did this week, because we asked him to. I wonder if the PCs asked the mayor to present to them on the housing bill. I doubt that happened, since he didn't even get a phone call. The first thing he tells us is, "Listen, I'm not here for partisanship, I'm not here to play political games, I'm here as a mayor and I work with everybody."

I think that's reflective of the numbers that he gets when he runs for election, and the fact that you don't have a single person in any single political party who can speak negatively about the man, the best potential person to actually partner with and co-operate.

And when the government has chosen to do that, on small projects on occasion, they've actually accomplished something.

We see with their housing bill they did the opposite, and now we're seeing with Bill No. 340 the same approach happening with certain municipal units not being listened to. Not only that, but not even being given a chance to meet and discuss these critical issues with senior leadership in the PC government. I am concerned about this bill, I'm worried about the outcomes, and more importantly, I'm worried about the relationship that this government is going to continue build and create with our municipal leadership.

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'm going to say a genuine few words about Bill No. 340. This is second reading. I am - I don't know if looking forward is the right term, because I don't anticipate it will be that pleasant, but I am anticipating Law Amendments Committee. At this point, I don't know, if we get more than a few hours' notice, I'm sure people will be there to have their say, which, as I think has been covered tonight in this Chamber, will really be the only say for many who either weren't properly consulted or met with about this, or else felt that they weren't heard in those consultations.

I think when I look at this piece of legislation, in the context of the other legislation that we have on the order paper and have seen from this government - particularly in regard to Municipal Affairs and Housing - the heart of it is a desire to centralize control, pick fights where it's expedient, do favours where it's not, and it's just disappointing to see that cycle continue. I think most of the residents of Nova Scotia live in HRM and in CBRM. I think it's important to point out that these are the parts of the province that our small caucus represent: HRM and CBRM. We are small, but we represent the areas with the greatest number of people in this province.

I think it is incontrovertible at this point that these are the areas, number one, where the Progressive Conservatives have the least representation, and number two, where they have found it most expedient to get into some public tussles. Unfortunately, those tussles are going to come at the expense of the residents of these municipalities.

In this case we've heard a list of municipal leaders across this province who are concerned about this bill. We've heard from some of them, I think, compellingly. We have been told - the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, the municipal units - many members here were municipal representatives at one time or another - they are not a monolith. Municipalities - you've got all kinds of partisan stripes, you've got all kinds of ideological ideas, you have different communities, yet the NSFMM has taken a public position that CBRM should actually be excluded from this, that they should not be part of this because they are a unique creature in statutory language.

It's funny. When I go to CBRM, one thing I've noticed that's really similar among a lot of the ridings there, in my riding, is that "amalgamation" is a dirty word. In Dartmouth, be careful where we say the word "amalgamation" because all these years later - Bedford, too, that's right - I think this is where we have some real solidarity with industrial Cape Breton, because I know there are big parts of industrial Cape Breton that feel the same way. I think that is still something that the municipality, as an organization, is grappling with, the impacts of that amalgamation and their fiscal capacity. They've been very clear about that.

I think what they've also been clear about is that this legislation not only does nothing to assist in these ongoing challenges but, in fact, could very well make them much worse. I think if I were a resident of CBRM, I would feel pretty disappointed in this government because in the end it's the residents who are going to bear the brunt of these kinds of decisions. The lack of consultation, the lack of conversation, the inability to focus on those issues that really matter. I think it was brought up earlier, some of the housing proposals that have been brought forward, announcements that have been made - there's not municipal capacity to deal with them.

We have a lot of policies and bills - this is one of them - that are on the order paper, that are going to vest in this government the power to make decisions at a municipal level that municipalities may not be able to fulfill. Then we're going to have a really big problem, that either hasn't been anticipated or the government doesn't care because it makes a good headline. I'm not sure. I can't actually figure out why this government is so resistant to actually engaging with municipal units, particularly in this case.

When we look at the bill itself, I think we see that this government keeps saying it is going to save municipalities money but what they are actually doing is just removing flow-through financing. We are all legislators. Certainly, we all understand what this means. The municipalities used to collect money and remit. Now they're not going to remit anymore, so are they still supposed to collect? What are they collecting for? It doesn't make any sense. That's not a cost saving, that's, "You don't have to remit these monies to us anymore." I think that's not a particularly genuine representation of what's in the bill.

I think one thing we heard that was compelling from the CBRM - unfortunately this isn't the case in many ridings in HRM - but this issue of schools. It has been the policy that schools built before 1981, I think, if they are closed then they revert to the municipality. In some cases that has been a burden on municipalities.

In my district, most of the schools - except for one, I think, was in fact built before 1981 - still have students in them, still have a lot of problems, still need to be replaced, but what we heard from the mayor of CBRM is that in fact in the CBRM most of those schools, for one reason or another, have already been replaced, so that's a solution to a problem that doesn't exist for them.

THE SPEAKER: Order. There's quite a bit of chatter to the left here, and I know that it looks like it's interrupting the honourable Leader of the NDP. Please, go ahead.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I think we see the same pattern in this legislation that we've seen in so many other pieces of legislation: a watering-down of accountability. A removal of important information from the legislation itself into the regulations. How is that supposed to give us trust in this government? How is this supposed to make municipalities feel like they are good and trusted partners of this government? Is the government's plan to entirely usurp the role of the municipalities? I don't know. That's the pattern we're seeing. If I were in government, I don't think I'd want that. I think the municipal units play an important role.

We see very strange language. It used to say the minister "shall" need to make the payments, the municipal grants. Now the minister "may." What happens if the minister decides he doesn't want to? That's a real problem. Before, the minister used to have responsibility - the minister retains responsibility over the amount of each grant. But where there used to be calculations in the legislation, now there are not. So how are those grants determined? Whether you've got friends in high places? I don't know. Could be.

I think these are real and legitimate concerns. They're concerns that are chiefly being raised by CBRM but are, of course, being raised by others. Again, we find ourselves in the legislative session that's going to last maybe a couple of weeks, with legislation that not only do we have no notice of beforehand but that many important people also don't have notice of. Now the Premier has said he has a lot of friends, he has a lot of people he talks to, so some people have certainly seen it.

But a lot of the people who are directly impacted by this - decision-makers who are directly impacted by this - have not seen it, have not been able to give their say, or have not had their contributions listened to. I think that's all I want to say at this point, and I do look forward to Law Amendments Committee. I do think it's important. I do, just for the heck of it, want to suggest that we give people more than 48 hours to prepare for Law Amendments Committee. I know that's probably not likely.

We like to hear about how we're the only legislature that has a Law Amendments Committee. Yes, other legislatures have lots of committees where they hear from experts. It takes them more than four days to pass a bill, and people have time to make submissions. If you're serious about passing a piece of legislation that you think is going to benefit Nova Scotians, that is going to be a positive move, then let Nova Scotians have their say. You still have the votes to pass it anyway.

I will part with these words, which are, Be open to criticism. Listen to what municipalities are saying. In particular, listen to what the CBRM is saying. The CBRM is our second-biggest municipality. It is a very important part of our economy, of our culture, of our province, and they are telling you this bill doesn't work for them. I would urge the

minister to go back, to meet with the mayor, to meet with the CAO, to have those conversations, and if he's not going to do that, then at the very least give us some time for Law Amendments Committee so that we can have the presentations that we need to hear to make this bill better, and that the government can act accordingly.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

[6:15 p.m.]

FRED TILLEY: As a proud Cape Bretoner, I'm very happy to stand today to talk about Bill No. 340 and the implications that it has for the residents of CBRM. Those implications are not good - the implications of raising taxes, the implications of lumping our second-largest municipality with the second-largest population in with other groups that are not anywhere close to being like it.

Before I get too far into my comments, I think I would be remiss if I didn't address some of the comments made by the member for Glace Bay-Dominion. I think the member's a great, great person. I really enjoy chatting with the member. But some of the things that the member indicated about Bill No. 340 draw huge concerns for me as a Cape Bretoner. What we heard is that the member is very proud of this legislation, and after his speech, he got a standing ovation from his side of the aisle, which was wonderful. He impressed all his colleagues from across the province on the government side. What those comments did not do was impress the residents of Cape Breton, and that's a problem.

The member talked about the member for Sydney-Membertou being a career politician. Like the member for Glace Bay-Dominion, I am not a career politician. However, we are all here because we love Cape Breton. We love our community, and we love Nova Scotia.

The member talked about being proud of this government's actions and this government's use of Bill No. 340, so I want to run through a couple facts. We are proud of lumping a regional municipality into a grouping with municipalities that are one-tenth its size - and that's the biggest, one-tenth. Proud of reducing the equalization grant from \$15 million to \$13 million, a reduction of \$2 million going forward. Although CBRM can keep this \$15 million for a couple years, until we decide - but in fact we are reducing the capital grant, so that's something of which to be proud. Proud of a government that gave an extra \$15 million - when we look at the Premier's comments when he was running to be Premier, he talked about the fact that we know this document needs to be renegotiated; in the meantime, we're going to give an extra \$15 million. What would that imply? That would imply we know there's a problem and we know we're not giving you enough. When we renegotiate, we're going to up that - but no, a reduction of \$2 million. That blows my mind. Proud of a government that says the CBRM has a choice - a choice to fool the residents of the CBRM? What kind of choice is that? A choice to say, Oh it's a saving of \$4.5 million.

You know something? The CBRM does the right thing. When they send out their tax bills to their residents, they highlight what each of the costs are for. They highlight the fact that we're paying an education fee, that we are paying a fee for housing, and that we're paying a fee for corrections.

Now, suddenly, as part of this MOU process, we hear, CBRM, you no longer have to pay that to us, but you have a choice to continue to gouge your residents. What kind of choice is that? Is the CBRM going to leave that on their tax bill and continue to charge it, even though they are not paying it to the Province? To me, that's kind of like fraud. You are not paying it anymore, but you have the choice to continue. In other words, you raise your taxes at the municipal level to accommodate for the part you were normally paying as a flow-through cost.

We've heard others talk about the flow-through cost. I must disagree with the member when – well, I don't disagree that he's proud of these things, but as a Cape Bretoner, I'm certainly not proud of the way the CBRM is being treated when it comes to the use of this Bill No. 340.

The member talked about the fact that an offer was made to the CBRM to do a charter, a special charter, with CBRM. I'd love to see that and if that could be tabled, that would be wonderful. That's essentially what needs to happen. CBRM needs to be removed from the MOU negotiation. They're the second-largest municipal unit in Nova Scotia - 100,000 people, Speaker.

When we listen to the member, who indicates that he's pretty good in math - I like to think I'm pretty good in math too, and I have my accounting degree and all that stuff. When we say it's X-number of dollars now coming in and X-number going out, and X-number coming in and X-number going out, what we're forgetting about is that \$4.5 million flow-through. That's not a real savings to CBRM, but what we have to keep in mind is that this government received an extra \$2.8 billion. That's a lot of zeros, Speaker - \$2.8 billion over last year. That's not the total equalization payment. That's the additional payment that Nova Scotia received from the federal government, yet we're going to cut the grant to CBRM by \$2 million. It seems like Bermuda accounting to me or something. It's not legit accounting. It doesn't make sense.

We have a region that has the highest property taxes in the province. Residents are struggling in CBRM. We hear stories all the time in our offices of a home that's a modest property in CBRM, and a much bigger home - more square footage - in HRM and they're paying half the taxes.

The equalization payments - we can hear, and we will hear, Your government didn't do this. I wasn't part of that government. The reason I ran - one of the reasons I ran - is because I want to make my community better. I know we all want to do that. We all want to make our community better. We have an opportunity here, for those of us who are from

Cape Breton, whether it be on the NDP side, the Liberal side, or the PC side to come together and help our community renegotiate a proper deal. I would certainly be willing to participate in any committee - non-partisan, across all parties. It's time to change the way we do things in Nova Scotia. It's time we come together as a unit and figure out what is the best thing for our region and then make recommendations.

If we started with something like Bill No. 340, what a difference we could make. Then imagine if we took what we are able to do for Bill No. 340 and apply that to health care. Members from different parties coming together to talk about the issues that we're facing on a daily basis in this province to make things better for our residents and our communities - that's what we're here for. Yes, Cape Breton caucus would be amazing.

CBRM is on a growth trajectory. They have grown substantially. My colleague talked about it earlier. We've got a university that's tripled its size in a few short years - tripled its size - and many of the students who are coming to CBRM are starting businesses. They're adding to the economy. However, when they start to determine how much the property taxes are in CBRM, they're shocked. They're shocked. We have the capacity. Year over year - I've only been here two years. The last two years, we've had significant surpluses - well over \$100 million, swings of \$600 million - that could be applied to an agreement that takes CBRM out of this MOU and begins their own negotiation. That's all the CBRM is asking for.

We know there are groups of people who have been advocating for years for large sums of money to be sent to CBRM. When I was first elected, I really wanted to dig into that, to find out - but you know, there's a lot more to it - I understand that. I understand that there are investments that the government makes in a region, and those have to be taken into account. A billion dollars were invested in our community over the last number of years, and that has to be taken into account. That's a form of equalization. However, it needs to be done in collaboration with the municipality. It can't be done to the municipality. It has to be done with the municipality, and Bill No. 340 doesn't do any of that. It hurts the municipality.

It's not just CBRM. We're hearing from other municipalities as well that are not pleased, or they don't think that Bill No. 340 is going to provide them what they need to have an efficient use and ability to run their facilities and run their infrastructure, and they feel it's going to have a detrimental effect on their future.

At the end of the day, a second look needs to be taken before this legislation is shoved down the throats of municipalities. We accomplish things together. We've all heard the saying "Two heads are better than one." Well, I would say that 55 heads are better than one. I'm sure we all have ideas in here that would help their prospective areas.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not naïve enough to think that we're going to all join arms and sing Kumbaya as we walk out the doors. But we all have a passion. We all have a

passion for our community. We all have a passion for what we think is the right thing to do. I know the members across the aisle have that same passion. But I think it's time we channel all of these passions. We need to stop governing for four years. We need to govern for 20 years. We need to change the way politics is done in Nova Scotia. We're never going to change the four-year and eight-year, the "we'll fix that but give us eight years to do it," and all that nonsense. It's not about that. It's about driving your community forward. It's now or never.

[6:30 p.m.]

We have an opportunity, as a group of legislators, to come together and at least talk about the future. We get in here for two to three weeks, which blows my mind as a resident of Nova Scotia - and I'm not saying it's just this government. I'm sure previous governments did the same thing, because the longer we're in here, the longer potentially you get less media, you get more media, and all this foolishness. That's not what it should be about. It should be about putting legislation in place to drive our collective province forward.

If we're going to grow to two million people, then doing things like Bill No. 340, this MOU, doesn't help prepare us to get there. Shortening up the time frames for Law Amendments Committee where residents can actually come in - it's a wonderful process, but nothing ever comes of it. We don't listen. I heard earlier someone say, We're listening to our constituents. At the legislative level, when people come in, we're not listening. I urge you to listen, because I know there are going to be lots of people who come in and tell us things we may or may not want to hear.

It's not too late for Bill No. 340. Even the NSFM - I got the acronym right, the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities - have said, "The Province should negotiate a separate service exchange agreement directly with CBRM, as they themselves have advised during the consultations." I'll table this. To me, that means taking CBRM out, proceeding with negotiations with the other 47 municipalities, and giving CBRM the due time and diligence they deserve in negotiating their own agreement.

In 1995 or 1996 - 1995, I guess, is when the amalgamation took place - the residents of CBRM didn't have a choice. They were told they were going to amalgamate into this big super-city. They'd be the second city - Sydney was always a city, but CBRM would grow and become the second-largest municipal unit. Two regional municipalities in Nova Scotia that - in Cape Breton, we always think and say: We hear that Halifax gets everything; if anything good is going to happen, it's going to happen in Halifax. We also say we need a strong capital in this province. We see that every day when we're here. There's a vibrant, strong capital in this province, which is awesome.

We have a second large municipality in this province that's just as unique and has just as many unique challenges as HRM does. I know they've all been talked about already, but I'd be remiss if I didn't say those same things.

A transit system. I can remember, in my former occupation as principal at Nova Scotia Community College, there was limited transit. If you were coming from my community of Sydney Mines over to the college and were on the same campus as CBU, it would take an hour and a half to get there, because we didn't have the ridership. But now, we have a ridership in the CBRM that has expanded. You see the bus stops, and we have to put sideboards on the bus stops, there are that many people waiting to get on the bus. It's incredible.

However, the CBRM is still operating with the same number of mechanics, the same number of staff, the same number of buses, and things are breaking down. They have no money to expand the system. That system is a lifeline for many Cape Bretoners. Without that, they can't accommodate their day-to-day activities.

Bill No. 340 doesn't provide anything for that. It doesn't help. If we were to pull the CBRM out of this MOU arrangement, we could specifically look at these extra cost pressures that the Municipality is facing and address each of those separately. But they can't do that under the MOU.

At the end of the day, for transit, it's a round peg in a square hole. There's not enough. It's a double-edged sword. You can use all the analogies you want. They have a growing demand, and the supply is stagnant. They cannot keep up with that demand: 9,000 students at CBU; soon to be 1,200 to 1,400 - I'm not sure of the exact number now - down at the new NSCC campus. The member for Sydney-Membertou talked about how proud he was of that new campus. If you've been to Sydney and you get a chance to look at it - and I know a lot of you will be there to cut the ribbon on it. I hope to sneak in, under the guise of darkness, to see it be opened because it's a beautiful thing for the CBRM. It's going to put students in a learning facility that is going to be second to none. It's just beautiful.

But the idea of this new campus being in the centre is that transit will take students there. It will reduce the number of cars that are coming into the core every day, but the number of people will increase. You think about the progression that has happened in the CBRM - millions of dollars in a new NSCC; hundreds of millions of dollars in new health infrastructure - yet we're choking off the funding flow for the CBRM with their ability to do things properly. Again, we can't afford to see higher property taxes in the CBRM. We just can't afford it. I get people in my office daily saying, Fred, I can't deal with it.

Cutting \$4.5 million from the flow-through agreement is a great thing. It's a wonderful thing if it can be passed on to the residents where it belongs. Put a little bit of money back into the residents' pockets, reduce the property tax rates by the amount that

they're currently paying for those services that they're no longer being required to pay for. At the same time, fund the municipality in the way that it's designed to be funded.

Currently, CBRM has the highest property tax rate and the lowest family income rates across the province. It ranks third in the province in child poverty. A third of our children are struggling for food. Bill No. 340 and this MOU does not help them. It does not help the families. It doesn't alleviate any of the pressures that these families are facing on a day-to-day basis.

[6:45 p.m.]

All CBRM wants is to be respected so that they can come together in a business format and discuss their issues - the issues that they are facing daily. We have PC members who live in CBRM, NDP members, and Liberal members. We all live in CBRM. We're all affected by this. I look at my property tax bill every six months when it comes in. I'm not shocked by it, but I'm appalled by it.

As Cape Bretoners, we all have that yearning for home. I spent a number of years in Pictou County, and I loved it there. It's a great part of the province, but - and to the member, I forget what riding, but I'm looking at the member.

AN HON. MEMBER: Pictou Centre.

FRED TILLEY: Pictou Centre? I think I lived in your riding. (Interruption) (Laughter) I loved my time in Pictou County. (Interruption) I didn't like the pizza, but that's okay.

There is that draw to home. My point around this whole thing is that we're drawn to home even though we know we're paying more. We know we're paying more for property taxes. We know the job prospects are not the best, but we're drawn to home because it's home. Just like if you're from Guysborough County or if you're from Antigonish County, you're drawn there because it's where you're from. You have that inside feeling of warmth and comfort when you're there. Just because you're living in a certain part of the province, you shouldn't be penalized for that.

We need to do a better job of taking the money that comes from the feds for equalization, which tells us that it's designed to have like services for equal taxes. We all know that we don't have like services for equal taxes. It's a fact of life. It's been a fact of life for many, many years. We can change that. We have the power in this room to make legislative change to improve the lives of those constituents whom we represent.

I think - when I talk about CBRM, and the transit side, we quadrupled the ridership, is the actual number. Quadrupled the ridership without the ability - so it's like, do more like this - well, one analogy we used to use at the college a lot is, change the tires on the buses

while it's still in motion. They're literally doing that in CBRM. They can't afford to take buses off the line to do the repairs on them, because they're so busy driving passengers. Which is what we want to see.

Homelessness, drug use, elderly people living in their cars - all things that we're seeing in CBRM. The implementation of Bill No. 340 can really drive that even further because the resources won't be there to help the people who are really struggling on a day-to-day basis. The police service in CBRM - we've got a population of just a little over 100,000 - they have about 80,000 calls a year. They can't recruit officers fast enough. They have a limited budget in the ability to offer those services that they need.

Taking CBRM out of this MOU and negotiating separately with them, we can understand. We've got the second-largest population in the province, second-largest police force in the province, an amazing fire service, a volunteer fire service that is struggling for funding as well. The implementation of Bill No. 340 will just further deteriorate those services in CBRM.

Or, as we heard earlier, there's a choice. CBRM has a choice to make - the choice to raise taxes. That's not a choice. That's not a choice in CBRM. Taxes are already the highest that they can be. I heard my colleague call it a Tory tax. Because if Bill No. 340 is implemented, CBRM is going to be forced to raise taxes in order to survive, and it can be fully attributed to this bill which the PC Party of Nova Scotia is going to vote through with the majority. It's very clear.

The residents of CBRM will be taxed more because of the government if changes are not made. There's still time to make these changes. I'm sure CBRM administration and council are only a phone call away and would be happy to discuss further negotiations. But it's got to be fair. It can't be a take this or nothing deal. Because that's not negotiations, that's dictatorship. And nobody wants to do that.

CBRM, I'm sure, doesn't want to come up with busloads of people and walk around the Legislature outside, protesting Bill No. 340. But if they have to, they probably will. I know some other folks, MLAs from the area, who will be right out there with them.

The last time that equalization was looked at was in the 1990s. Before it gets said, I'm going to say it: All political parties are at fault, all political parties. They've all had a hand, over the years, in not doing what's right. You have an opportunity right now to change all that and be the heroes of the CBRM and other municipalities that need it.

I know it's going to be hard to wrestle the belt away from the member for Sydney-Membertou. I'm sure he'll put up a bit of a struggle.

Another thing that I would like to talk to with regards to Bill No. 340 is the road agreements. As a Legislature, we really need to do something with J-class roads. We really

need to do something with the maintenance of those roads within the residential areas. Clearly, the equipment is not there in certain regions of the province to provide the level of service that a taxpayer would expect.

For instance, if I look at my constituency and I look at snow plowing, and I look at the residents who live in the former county, I can think of a large subdivision that, when it snows, their standard of service is 24 hours. Just down the street, the municipality standard is less than 12 hours. Sometimes it's plowed twice in 12 hours. It's a substandard service for the same taxes, which is the definition of equalization. We should be using some of those funds to provide better levels of service, not only in the CBRM. I'm sure it's the same across the province for those areas that share municipal services with Public Works services.

Bill No. 340 only makes that worse for CBRM. There may be some municipalities that are going to benefit from this, and that's great. That means that Bill No. 340 was designed for those municipalities. So go for it. Negotiate with those municipalities, pull the ones out that aren't going to benefit, and negotiate separately with them.

Speaker, to me it just seems so simple. Maybe sitting on the Opposition bench, it is simple. I understand that there are limited resources. But we've had major surpluses. We've had significant spending. This government has been a spend government. Now, if this is implemented, it's going to be called a tax-and-spend government, because Bill No. 340 in the CBRM is going to increase taxes. There's no question about it, and I know the local members from the government side have met with the CBRM, and they were told the same thing we were.

Staff indicated that there's a window to raise taxes up to 16 per cent or 19 per cent or something like that. Don't quote me on the number, but it's high, and I have nothing to table on that. However, even if it's 10 per cent or 15 per cent - whatever it might be - that's a significant percentage, a double-digit percentage tax increase for the residents of CBRM which they can't afford. They can't afford the taxes now. Bill No. 340 is going to cause a lot of residents of CBRM, unfortunately, to lose their homes. It's going to cause people to go into arrears in their taxes, and it's going to cause a lot of stress and a lot of undue strife for our residents. If we can avoid that, I think it's in the best interests of everyone to take another look at this bill.

You know, hard work and change require a strong vision. I think the members from Cape Breton on that side, along with staff and along with the minister, can work with - we'd be happy to help, but even if not - because at the end of the day, it's about getting the best deal. Credit - I don't care about that. What I care about is when someone comes into my office and says, Oh my God, thank God taxes went down. Thank God that \$4.5 million that the Province is no longer requiring - and my first answer would be, you know what? You can thank the Premier of Nova Scotia for that, because the Premier of Nova Scotia said, No, that's a provincial responsibility. We're going to pay for it. We're no longer

putting it on the back of the municipality. I'd be more than happy to say that because it would be the truth.

Too often, politicians - and it's no wonder politicians are down below lawyers when it comes to trustworthiness - sorry to all my lawyer friends - when it comes to trustworthiness from the public. No offence to our Clerk. But it's true, because the perception of people, rightly or wrongly, is that politicians tell you what you want to hear. They're at your door, and they just want your vote. Like, we're going to fix health care. It's a saying. I'm speechless on that one. It's a phrase. It's a phrase that politicians are guilty of using. And you know something, is that politician telling a fib or an untruth? No, because they firmly believe that they're going to do this when they say it. But the general public looks at it down the road as saying, You know what? You sold me a bill of goods and you didn't follow through.

[7:00 p.m.]

Here's an opportunity for this government to follow through on a commitment that was made during the last provincial election. The commitment was in this document. When the Premier was interviewed by the *Cape Breton Post* or *SaltWire*, he indicated that it's going to take time to renegotiate the process. We've got to figure out who is responsible for what and all of these things. In the meantime, we're going to double the grant until we can figure things out. Well, residents of the CBRM are now looking at that and saying, Oh, wow, you figured out that we're getting \$2 million less than when we started? That's a reduction of \$17 million. You gave us an extra \$15 million, now you're taking that away, plus an extra \$2 million and you are giving? Taking \$2 million away and giving \$4.5 million? That's like when I went for my accounting interview and they asked, What's one plus one? My answer was, What do you want it to be? That's the shell game. It's an illusion.

At the end of the day, there's an opportunity to restore some faith in the people of this province to say, You know what, this government did exactly what they said they would do - they doubled the municipal grant, they renegotiated and they came up through negotiation with a fair deal for the residents of the CBRM, instead of an illusion for action that looks like action - an illusion of action.

Let's give Nova Scotians - specifically in this case, let's give the residents of the CBRM - a reason to restore their faith in the political process and to restore their faith in those that represent them, to restore their faith to the fact that we're going to do what we say we're going to do.

The implementation of this MOU though Bill No. 340 accomplishes the opposite. It shows Nova Scotians that we don't follow through on our commitments, that we don't care about what we say, our word is useless at the end of the day. Action is powerful and there's

a strong opportunity, through our actions in this Legislature, to restore some faith in the political process.

I, for one, would be super-proud of a government that did that. I would be proud of the government - and I would be proud of both Opposition parties - of a government that was able to put petty politics aside and that four-year cycle thing aside, for the betterment of the residents that they represent. What a novel idea that is - and we have a chance, all of us, to be part of it.

We talk about consultation, and we talk about compromise, we talk about transparency, and collaboration as well. This government ran on being the most transparent government in many years, yet we're hearing that NDAs are required to be signed by folks who are negotiating the MOU who can't even go back and talk to their colleagues about it. That is not transparency, in my mind. That is a - I don't know what you would call it - a guise of divide and conquer. You have a choice - wink-wink, nudge-nudge - a choice that there is no choice.

The fact that we have the illusion of action, in that it took us a long time to come up with this MOU and a long time of negotiation. What we hear from our colleagues in CBRM is they can't even get a meeting to negotiate, discuss, or raise their concerns. We get, Well, until we agree to a certain part, we can't move forward. That doesn't make any sense.

At the end of the day, we should all be going toward the same goal here: strong municipalities across the province. Strong municipalities are going to make a strong provincial government. It's just a no-brainer. It makes sense.

What the implementation of Bill No. 340 and this MOU is going to do, if this government has its way - currently there's still time to change - is download more taxes onto individuals, taxes that people can't afford to pay. If I want to speak from a personal situation, my own family member - my daughter - bought a house in CBRM, and it's just up the street from mine. It's a modest bungalow. The taxes she pays on a 900-square-foot bungalow with a city-sized lot are astronomical.

Luckily for me, I've been in my home for over 20 years, so I'm capped. We have a young person who's paying a lot more taxes than I am and who's just getting started in life. How do we justify that? Through Bill No. 340, we're going to add on to that. We're going to compound it. We're dumping and downloading more tax onto people who are already stretched to their limits.

It really pains me to see that CBRM is on the cusp of just taking their municipality to the next level. All they're looking for is a hand up. They don't want a handout. They want a hand up just to get them through the next couple years, when their tax base is going to grow and when things are going to improve across this province, which is still

recovering from the pandemic and still recovering from Hurricane Fiona damages. They're just trying to get on their feet as a municipality.

Yet here we are again, the illusion of action. We're saying we're going to take \$4.5 million. It's not a solution. It's an illusion.

We're going to take \$4.5 million away from your tax. You don't have to pay us. Well, okay, great. Now we can't charge the residents for it. It's one minus one is zero, so there's no gain for the municipality. In order to make that up, the choice is that we add tax to the rate at the municipal level. Again, that will become and will be known as a Tory tax in Cape Breton. A Tory tax in Cape Breton - and I think my colleague used "carbon tax on steroids."

It's going to be known - and I know this government has loved to talk about the carbon tax, but this is going to be worse on individuals. Because with a carbon tax on fuel, again, it's based on how much you drive. But if we put this extra tax on top of their property taxes, people have no choice but to pay it. We talk about CBRM having a choice - there is really no choice here.

The choice is - the big choice is for this provincial government. The choice is whether you force this down the throats of CBRM, and maybe put the municipality in bankruptcy, or you take another look at it and renegotiate their own separate terms. Which is what they've asked for, which as the NSFM has suggested, which our member for Glace Bay-Dominion has said is on the table, a charter for CBRM. Let's get that done. Let's get that negotiated. Because as soon as we can do that and move away from Bill No. 340, move away from this MOU for CBRM, the much better off the residents will be in our community.

It allows the government to move forward with those municipalities that are going to benefit from Bill No. 340. What a win-win for this government. A win with the rest of Nova Scotia that's happy with Bill No. 340, and a win for CBRM, which doesn't fit Bill No. 340. It's not that they don't want to be in there - they just don't fit there. It doesn't make sense for them to be there.

Don't worry, I'm going to stop at zero. I guess in closing what I'd like to say is, Do the right thing. Let's renegotiate with CBRM. Let's get them out of Bill No. 340. Let's move on as a community, and Speaker, it will be a happy day for all of us here.

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

JOHN WHITE: I'd like to table a document that I referred to in relation to the CBRM's offer to create a charter.

THE SPEAKER: We can table a document. Can the member for Glace Bay-Dominion confirm that it is the document that was requested to be tabled?

JOHN WHITE: Should I read it?

“The Province is also willing to work with you, as part of negotiations, to develop a separate CBRM charter.”

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Could you please table it?

[7:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you to everyone who has participated in this riveting debate tonight. We're learning a lot. I thought all Cape Bretoners got along. This is new to me. This is the first time I've seen Cape Bretoners in this Legislature not be hand-in-hand. They stick together, but on this, I feel like there's some division. I don't know what's going on here, but I'm here to help mend the fences. I was asked personally . . . (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic has the floor.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm here to say, Listen, let's all be friends, let's all get along, let's all figure this out. I feel like this last session or so, there's been a lot of fighting between politicians, different levels of politicians.

We just had a Public Accounts Committee meeting where we had some discussion on resources around housing, for example. Mayor Mitchell came and said, Nobody asked me for my opinion, nobody asked me about developments happening in the community, nobody is talking to the stakeholders. I'm not speaking out of turn because, quite frankly, he did talk about it in the media.

We had Mayor Savage and several different councillors appear before the Law Amendments Committee on another piece of legislation, and the key was: Nobody is listening, nobody is talking to us - we are the major stakeholders here, we have the answers to these things. Now we're seeing in the CBRM, where we, Speaker . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I just want to remind the member that you can't say that nobody is listening. Just speak to Bill No. 340. Thank you.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I guess they feel - we've had a ruling on this before - they feel that nobody is listening to them, right?

I think there's an easy solution to people who feel like they are not being listened to. I think when we leave here Friday, there is going to be some discussion on the Island about Bill No. 340. I am sure of it. We have several members in this Chamber who are from Cape Breton who have to drive across the same causeway to get to Cape Breton. Why not call a meeting? How about the PCs, the NDP, and the Liberals get together with the CBRM, the councillors and Mayor McDougall, and have these discussions and listen, so at least you can take out the argument where they say, Nobody is listening to us on Bill No. 340. You could say, Hey, we sat down and we listened to you. Then maybe we could clear the air on some of this stuff, because there are a lot of quotes. I know there are a lot of people on all sides of the aisle here who feel like they are either being misrepresented or the truth might be played with just a little bit.

Speaker, there's an easy solution. I almost guarantee that if some of the members from Cape Breton picked up their phone and called Mayor McDougall or any of the councillors, they would probably answer. I'd bet you they would answer right now. I'd bet you that some of them are watching right now. Apparently, everybody in Cape Breton is watching right now. It's like Montreal and Toronto playing in the Stanley Cup finals. (Interruption) In that case, I hope they both lose.

Before I move on, I would like to put this on the record. It is referring to Cape Breton. I would like to personally thank the member for Cape Breton East, who did a massive thing for my community yesterday for a young girl who was struggling with addiction and problems. When I did approach the member for Cape Breton East, there was a solution to the issue that, quite frankly, saved that young girl's life. I would like to personally put that on the record and have that on the record forever. (Interruption) Absolutely. Without hesitation, too, I would say.

Continuing on. I was just up in beautiful Cape Breton. I drove up. I did the five-hour drive. I still haven't done the Cabot Trail yet. I'll get to it.

One of the things we heard from the councillors and the mayors is the high tax rate. Quite frankly, nobody wants to pay taxes, and they especially don't want their taxes to be high. What we're hearing is CBRM has one of the highest tax rates in all of Nova Scotia, if not the highest tax rate. In a time of high inflation, in a time of housing prices out of control, in a time of quite frankly - forgive me, I'm sure the members can clarify this when they get up later - I am sure there has been a massive influx of people moving to Cape Breton. I remember when I was younger, it wasn't like that. People were leaving Cape Breton to go to work in Alberta. Now it seems like people are staying, which is great, and people are moving there.

When we hear things like, For the shortfalls that this bill might cause, they can just raise taxes - that's just not sustainable. If anything, right now, everybody in this Chamber should be working to lower taxes - to put more money in people's pockets - because people are struggling. I think it is quite insulting, if that statement is factual, to say, We'll just raise taxes, or just increase the taxes.

I had the privilege of being the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for a short amount of time. One of the things I will say about that department is that that department in particular is about building relationships. That's what it's about. More than any other department, that one is really about building relationships, and believing and trusting the people around you. One of the first things I did when I was minister is I called every mayor, every warden in this province - personally. Some of the members are shaking their heads because they got a phone call. I gave them my personal cell phone number, and I spoke to the councils, and I gave them my personal cell number. I said, If you have issues, call me. When it comes to making legislation, call me - because I was not the expert of Shelburne. Speaker, you're the expert. You're one of the experts of Shelburne. You live there. I'm not the expert of Inverness. I'm pretty good, yes, pretty good. I live in Herring Cove. I'm barely the expert of Herring Cove. I can tell you how to get there and back.

We have to be able to build these relationships and rely on each other. I think sometimes when we try to do good, we do bad, or when we try to do right, we do harm. I'm not saying this is irreversible harm or this is some kind of evil or anything like that. What I'm saying is sometimes when we try to do something well, there are consequences. Sometimes when we think we're doing the absolute right thing, we have our own blind spots. We're all guilty of that. I think some of the blind spots in this bill in particular are the relationships.

The bill is going to go through. We have no doubt about that. That's how government works. We did it when we were in government. The NDP did it when they were in government. The Progressive Conservatives are doing it now that they're in government. They have a majority. They have a right. They won the right to do this. But what I would say is that if you want to continue to build relationships, and you want to continue to build trust, and you want to continue to build a brand, you have to listen to people. You have to stop and actively listen to people.

Everybody knocks on doors. I think - I hope - most people knock on doors during an election, at least. I think most of us are knocking on doors in between elections. It's the right thing to do - go to the doors, talk to people. We're constantly doing this. But when we're at the doors during the election, one of the first things we always say is: Oh my God, I'm listening. Yes, I know, I agree. Oh my God, the Conservatives - the big bad Conservatives, the big bad NDP, the big bad Liberals.

Then something happens when we come in here. We were accused in government by some of the members who were there when we were in government of being tone-deaf,

of not listening to stakeholders, of not being transparent. One of the things that was said was, When we get in, my goodness, we're going to listen. We're going to listen to our stakeholders. CBRM is quite honestly, maybe one of if not the biggest stakeholders that this government has. They don't feel listened to right now.

It's 7:30 p.m. on a Thursday night. In a half-hour, my youngest is going to bed. In an hour, my middle child is going to bed. In an hour and a half, my oldest is going to bed - and we're here debating a bill that could have easily gone through if CBRM felt like they were listened to. They're not the only ones guilty of it. My God, we would go to 11:59 p.m., for all of you rookies in here who think these are rough nights. They're nothing. Try getting two and a half hours of sleep in a 24-hour shift in the back on a cot and lying next to one of your fellow MLAs who's snoring. Someone else comes in, forgets everyone's sleeping back there, and they're gabbing, and you're like: Shh, go away, let me sleep.

[7:30 p.m.]

AN HON. MEMBER: Those Liberals, keeping all hours, all night long.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It was those Liberals, those darn Liberals. We would go to 11:59 p.m., and then the next shift would be at 12:01 a.m. Two minutes in between. We've all been guilty of it, but you'd think that those of us who have been here for a long time, or been here for a while, you'd start to evolve a bit and you'd get best practice. This is literally, I think, one of the most toxic workplaces you can ever be a part of, and it's not just what happens here. It's what happens out there, too.

When the members for Cape Breton go back to Cape Breton this weekend and they're celebrating, and they're going to the potlucks, and they're going to the different events, maybe this won't come up. Maybe the odd - I don't mean, like, literally odd - the odd person will come up to them and be like, Hey, Bill No. 340. I mean, Speaker, when's the last time someone came up to you and asked you about a bill like that? It doesn't happen very often.

What ends up happening is, six months down the road, a year down the road, when this bill is enacted and the impact of the bill happens, and then all of a sudden, taxes go up, or your fire service isn't what it used to be - that's where it's felt. I can guarantee you that if there are negative consequences from this bill, no sitting government is going to go, Oh wait, that was us. We did that. What they're going to do is they're going to look at the municipality. They're going to look at CBRM and go, What in the bloody blue blazes is going on up there? They're raising taxes, we're giving them money, and things are getting worse. Quite frankly, I actually think that, as much as I tease my Cape Breton friends and colleagues and I married into a Cape Breton family, it's one of the most beautiful places on Earth.

I was referencing that today in my member's statement, how I had the privilege at a younger age - I'll wrap it all back up, I promise - I had the privilege at a younger age, I decided, I threw caution to the wind, I had a great job and I said I'm going to take off for a year. I'm just going to go discover the world. I spent a lot of time in Europe, Eastern Europe in particular, backpacking, working, travelling. It was an amazing experience. I think that anyone who can do it, really do it. I did it on a shoestring budget.

I referenced today how Sambro is one of the most beautiful places on Earth. I truly believe that, but Cape Breton is a close second. That place is gorgeous, from tip to tip, side to side, up and down. Why wouldn't you want to listen to the people of Cape Breton, the individuals who were elected? Bill No. 340 was not born out of consultation. We have a Premier who says, I'm just going to get things done. You know what? Pedal to the metal, full steam ahead, we're getting things done. This is what this bill is and, in fairness, some of the stuff I believe you have to say, You know what? We're just going to do it. Let's just get it done. Stop arguing and complaining and just get it done.

That attitude, for certain situations, hasn't been in this province in a long time, but you can't use that same attitude for everything. You've got to be able to adjust. You've got to be able to look at things and say, We've got to go hard on housing. There's homelessness all over this province. We've got to go hard and we've got to come up with solutions. You can't do that with a bill that is going to directly impact the ability for individuals to govern the second-largest municipality in Nova Scotia.

No one doubts that a new MOU is needed. No one doubts that Cape Breton needs a charter. In fact, in my short period of time as Minister of Municipal Affairs it was one of the things I heard over and over when I would talk to them. One of the things I said to them is, Let's start the process; let's get rolling. It is a mature municipality. It is an economic engine and driver. It is a tourist destination. It is world-renowned. It has one of the best golf courses and golf facilities in the world. That was done because there was a vision for CBRM. The elected officials - municipally, provincially, federally - had a vision. They worked together.

Most of the members for Cape Breton are much, much older than me. They would remember some of the things where people butted heads in Cape Breton.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I just want to remind the member, and I know you're building up back to the MOU. (Laughter) There are a lot of important clauses in there, so I'll give it back to the member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Was it the age thing? I'm sure the member for Inverness, the member for Glace Bay-Dominion, the member for Sydney-Membertou, the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier - I'm sure they remember the controversy over the golf course. Right? We remember that. There were people who were furious that there was going to be a golf course put there, and there were others who had a vision. Unlike this bill,

where we're not working together toward a common cause, in that case - Cabot Links - they worked together. They overcame, they spoke, they talked. There were obstacles that they felt like they couldn't overcome, but they did, because they worked together.

Quite frankly - I've never been there, can't afford it, probably never be able to afford it, can't golf either - it is literally one of the greatest golf courses, if not in North America, in the world. It is absolutely a tourist destination. It has created jobs, and one of the things that - and this is why I bring this up - one of the quotes we got from one of the councillors at CBRM is: We need a vision to grow this province. We need a vision.

We can all agree with that, and we know what happens when we have a vision. At some point, somebody sat down where Cabot Links sits now and said, My goodness, imagine how beautiful this golf course would be. If this were a golf course right now, I bet people would fly in from all around the world to play here.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Speaker - the golf course that I think he's speaking about is not in CBRM. It's in Inverness. Just for clarification.

THE SPEAKER: I don't think that's a point of order, but thank you.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic. Just to remind him to . . .

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Quite frankly - I'll explain that a little bit. I didn't want to say Inverness. I didn't want to upset the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. I need some money for my community. I didn't want to get on his nerves tonight, so I'm just being a little nice - a little nice, okay? Give me a break there, Community Services.

If the members don't want to meet over Bill No. 340 - and I actually think that would be a great thing - the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board comes strutting in. In comes the Minister of Community Services. In comes the member for Glace Bay-Dominion. The minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health walks in that room - boom. And then in come the members from the third party and Official Opposition - together, hand in hand. They put that bill on the table and they say, You know what? We pause this bill. We want to talk. We want to create the best possible municipality that we can create.

All jokes aside, I'm trying not to - I'm trying to make some points, and I'm trying not to just dig in. I'm trying - a new path, right?

In all fairness, I think that all the members want the best possible things for CBRM, whether they live in CBRM or not. Whether they live in Inverness or Richmond, we can all agree, for the most part, that the economic engine of Cape Breton is CBRM. The vast

majority of the population is in CBRM. A lot of times, when people are coming to the Island, that's where they're moving, right? So why not make sure that they're not taxed out of owning a home? We heard that this could potentially be an issue with this bill.

If I can be honest, I actually have a huge issue with anyone saying to any politician of any stripe on any level, If you want to fix it, just raise taxes. If you want to fix it, tax it. There's just nothing left to give. There really isn't. They talked about a 16 per cent potential tax increase because of this bill, right? That's on top of inflation. That's on top of food. It's on top of something nobody in this Chamber has talked about since we got in here this session, which is mortgage renewals.

We're talking about a 16 per cent tax increase, the highest taxes in Nova Scotia, that could potentially happen because of Bill No. 340. I want to actually - I know.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Just a clarification on a point of order. As the member would know, being a former Minister of Municipal Affairs, one of the things the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing does is have an accounting system called FRAM, or Financial Reporting and Accounting Manual, which means every municipality presents their data in the same way, and that shows residential tax effort - I will table that - which shows the . . . Okay.

THE SPEAKER: I thank the minister, but again, I don't believe that's a point of order. Before I recognize the honourable member, I'd just ask that, with all the - plenty of important clauses - if we could stay focused on the bill.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I was willing to listen to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I do think the role of Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, obviously, is to help guide the municipalities. We have a lot of municipalities, and as the minister would know probably better than anyone not named Premier, we have a lot of municipalities that are in hard shape. We have a lot of municipalities that are struggling. COVID-19 did no favours. Let's be frank. COVID-19 did not help our municipalities, and it did not help our small businesses. A lot of people are struggling coming out of COVID-19, and there are going to be a lot of difficult conversations to be had on how we get this thing back on track.

I know this is a CBRM-centric bill. It's going to have the largest impact on the CBRM. I also think this isn't just about the CBRM. Each and every one of us lives in a municipality somewhere in Nova Scotia, and each and every one of those municipalities is facing their own struggles. I would ask you, Speaker, does the Minister of Municipal

Affairs and Housing know what all those struggles are? Does he know? Could some of those have been addressed in this bill?

I will tell you that within the first week to week and a half, I had conversations with every municipality, every warden, and every mayor, and I had a list. I still talk to them this day. If they are hit by a natural disaster, I've reached out to your municipality, quite frankly, to your municipal leaders. I've reached out to many municipal leaders all the time, when they are faced with difficult circumstances, just to see if they are okay, because I think that's common courtesy and it's the Nova Scotia way. I think this bill could have much more detail to help address some of the issues.

[7:45 p.m.]

One of the things that was said by the CBRM and their councillors was this - which is, quite frankly, scary if you are a resident of the CBRM. It's a scary quote. We are struggling - and I'll table all of this - we have increasing homelessness, increasing drug use, and elderly people living in their cars. We have a population of 100,000. Really listen to this: We have a population of 100,000. We have 80,000 police calls per year. We can't recruit police fast enough.

Let's round it up a little bit. For every resident, there are - let's just say one call per resident. I'm sure it fluctuates up and down, and all that stuff. That's money. That's resources. We have to recruit police officers. I ask you this in all sincerity, Speaker: Are you going to live in the most heavily taxed place in Nova Scotia, or are you going to look outward to find - if you're coming from outside of Nova Scotia, if you're a police officer, they come with their own set of difficulties, whether it's PTSD or the struggles that they face on a day-to-day basis - are you going to go and take a dangerous job, and go into an area where you're taxed more than anywhere else, or are you going to go to a municipality and keep some of that money?

Listen, we saw the evidence of what taxes do and incentives do in health care. HRM used to have one of the best doctor attachments in Nova Scotia, and then the doctor recruitment incentive was taken away, which is essentially a tax. What do they do? They go somewhere else. The recruitment is not happening as fast. Professionals are going to look to other areas, and I will say, there's only so much we can do with beauty. It's an absolutely stunning part of the province. It's a stunning part of the world.

You know what else is stunning? A 16 per cent tax increase. You know what else is stunning? Eighty thousand calls per 100,000. You know what else is stunning? The opioid crisis that every single corner of this province faces because of greed from pharmaceutical companies.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'd just remind the member - I don't remember reading the opioid crisis in the bill. I'd just remind the member to stick to the clauses in the bill.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'll tell you why I mentioned the opioid crisis - because we had CBRM councillors talk about how this bill is going to impact recruitment. They literally said it. I'm going to table that. They said this massive tax increase that's potentially going to happen because of the money they're losing is going to be downloaded onto the residents. Who bears responsibility? It won't be the Province. The Province isn't going to take responsibility for any type of tax increases. You hear a lot about equalization. Again, equalization: not addressed. Could have been addressed, not addressed.

I can tell you that when we were on that side of the aisle, I felt like I got a PhD in equalization from the members opposite. Every other day, we were getting yelled and screamed at about equalization. We know that equalization has not increased since the 1990s, but because of this bill, because of the actions of governments that do not consult and listen, it's been decreased this year, from \$15 to \$13 million. What could \$2 million do? You know what we could do with this bill if the minister didn't - if he's open for suggestions. Let's bake in some numbers in it. Let's get some hard numbers in there to make sure that the second-largest municipality in all of Nova Scotia receives a fair and equitable shot at success.

That Bill No. 340 provides them with comfort and answers, not questions and confusion. What we could do is - how about this? How about the members hold public consultation on Bill No. 340? Let's pause the bill. Just a little bit of consultation. I can tell you, Cape Bretoners are going to come out. How do I know that? I'm not a Cape Bretoner. How do I know?

Because I remember when the members on this side - Eddie Orrell and Alfie MacLeod, two legends, they're not in this Legislature, so I'm allowed - held public consultation on health care in Cape Breton. I don't think there was a single person at home that night. There were thousands and thousands of Cape Bretoners who came out to speak and be heard. They skipped hockey games and potlucks, and they came out. You don't think they're going to come out on Bill No. 340?

In all seriousness, we saw the turnout. I will say this about Bill No. 340, and any other bill that appears to impact, or has an impact on CBRM - I will say this about the former member for Glace Bay-Dominion and the current member for Sydney-Membertou: They went to that meeting, and they took a beating. But they went to the meeting. They stood there while members opposite, some here now and some gone, pounded them on that bill. They took it and they explained it.

Why can't we do that with Bill No. 340? Why can't we have a meeting, a town hall meeting on Bill No. 340? Why can't we hold meetings with CBRM and Mayor McDougall? Listen, as I said earlier in this, Mayor McDougall may be one of the most accessible politicians I've ever met in my life. Honestly. Like her or not - I quite frankly like her - but like her or not, she is extremely accessible. Don't believe me? I'll send you

her number. You give her a call, Speaker. I bet you she answers right now. Most municipal people aren't. She is. That's a joke. Most politicians are.

This has become a common theme about fighting and banging heads with our municipal partners. What I will say is this: We have some former councillors around here who, if they were still in council, they'll privately tell you they'd be screaming and yelling and furious about this bill. Furious. Bills like this that have come forward yet we're not hearing anything.

I wonder what their former colleagues think. I wonder if their former colleagues are proud that they remain silent while once again the government decides that they know what's best for municipalities. Why even have municipalities at this point? Honestly, is it just jobs now? Is that all it is now? I think you were a former councillor, maybe? I'm looking across, and I'm looking here, and I see councillors all over the place. Some of them are okay with this, but not all of them are equal. What I mean by that is, in size and in needs and in economic impact, not all municipalities are equal.

I'll give you an example. Did you know, Speaker, that CBRM is 10 times larger than Truro? Do you think that they have the same needs, on the same scale? I'd be interested to find out if Truro - which is impacted by this bill - if they had 80,000 police calls last year. They've got a good MLA, so he might have that answer. A very well-loved MLA. He might know, and maybe he can stand up later and give us the number. When I say not all municipalities are equal, I mean by the size of their needs. I'm 48 years old. My need to eat is much larger than my eight-year-old son's. What I eat is much larger than my eight-year-old son, because I'm bigger.

We have to look at that. We have to look at snow removal. How many plows do you need on your roads? How many police officers do you need? How many doctors and nurses and health care professionals do you need, and will this impact them? Again, I think what we should be doing right now is finding a way to reduce the tax burden on the residents of CBRM. Wouldn't that be great? You know what it could be? It just hit me. It could be - we know the member for Victoria-The Lakes is one of the greatest MLAs to ever grace this building. We know that he's a darn proud Cape Bretoner. I swear, every time I go to Cape Breton, just before the Causeway, you've got to stop in the Tim Hortons there and use the washroom and get a coffee, who's sitting there every time? The member is sitting there talking to people.

What we could do, as we know he's retiring, as a going-away gift, let's give him a tax-reduction package for Cape Breton. Wouldn't that be great? Let's reduce the taxes. We'll call it the Blank-Blank - that's his name - Tax Reduction Act. That's what you do. Blank-Blank, fill it in.

I think Cape Breton has had momentum, and I've seen it over the last 10 years personally. I was just up there, and I walked the waterfront. There was a massive cruise

ship in there. Thank you to the member for Victoria-The Lakes for that cruise ship. There was a massive cruise ship in there, but not only that, you know the thing that I noticed? I find that you see this in mature cities, municipalities, and towns. You start to see that in more mature cities and towns - I had the ability to travel, as I referenced earlier - you see culture. You see people of different beliefs, and people who look different, and it's an absolutely beautiful thing.

You see this in mature cities, but you're seeing it in CBRM now. You're seeing this beautiful municipality that's growing, that feels like it's about to hit its - I don't want to say potential, but it's about to hit a darn good stride. What we're hearing from councillors is, We're running and what you have done is tie our shoelaces, right?

[8:00p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. I just remind the member that props aren't permitted.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Why would we want to stop momentum, right? We're in a time when municipalities and businesses are struggling, and there's talk of amalgamation of this, amalgamation of that, decertification, and all these other things because people are struggling for money and struggling for vision and growth because we do know, no matter what anyone in this Chamber will tell you or will say, that COVID was unprecedented. It kicked people's behinds. It kicked municipalities' behinds. It kicked the businesses' behinds. We are playing catch-up, and they are playing catch-up.

I'm telling you, when I went up to the CBRM and stood on the pedway by the Holiday Inn - I got up there a little late - the sun was starting to set over the beautiful harbour, and I looked around and said, Wow. This place is growing. It's beautiful. It's happening. The last time I was up there, it didn't feel that same kind of *je ne sais quoi*, but it did in that moment. That's because - I believe it's because they have momentum and they have vision, and we don't want to take that away from them. We don't want them to lose that passion. They are telling us that Bill No. 340 can do this.

We are different. We are all Nova Scotians, but we are different. We all have different needs. Nobody in this room can sit here and tell me that Baddeck - an absolutely beautiful spot - has the same exact needs as West Pennant. Right? Nobody can tell me that Lunenburg - another stunning part of this province - has the same needs as in North Sydney.

With that, I'll pause here, and I move to adjourn debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a motion to adjourn debate.

There has been a call for a recorded vote.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[8:04 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

[The House reconvened at 9:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. We have reached the time of adjournment. We stand adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, October 20th, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 9:00 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 715**

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas marriages are an occasion for family and friends to gather together to celebrate the life of two individuals united as one; and

Whereas it was once said that a marriage is the celebration of love, trust, and partnership; and

Whereas on September 9, 2023, a very special occasion took place when Andrew Anthony and Alecia Bowers of Queens County celebrated their wedding;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Andrew and Alecia on their marriage and wish them a lifetime of health and happiness.

RESOLUTION NO. 716

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas marriages are an occasion for family and friends to gather together to celebrate the life of two individuals united as one; and

Whereas it was once said that a marriage is the celebration of love, trust, and partnership; and

Whereas on June 24, 2023, a very special occasion took place when Caylon MacDougall and Michaela Piekny of Queens County celebrated their wedding;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Caylon and Michaela on their marriage and wish them a lifetime of health and happiness.

RESOLUTION NO. 717

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas marriages are an occasion for family and friends to gather together to celebrate the life of two individuals united as one; and

Whereas it was once said that a marriage is the celebration of love, trust, and partnership; and

Whereas on August 12, 2023, a very special occasion took place when Jack Dunlop and Taylor Schrader of Queens County celebrated their wedding;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Jack and Taylor on their marriage and wish them a lifetime of health and happiness.

RESOLUTION NO. 718

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas the birth of a child is a momentous event and marks the beginning of a very satisfying journey down a long road, where the rewards far outnumber the challenges; and

Whereas a new baby is like the beginning of all things - wonder, hope, a dream of possibilities, author Eda J. Leshan wrote; and

Whereas on July 14, 2023, Justyce Brazier and Nicole Drake welcomed their daughter, Juliet, into the world;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Justyce and Nicole on this miraculous event in their lives and wish them many more happy years as parents.

RESOLUTION NO. 719

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas marriages are an occasion for family and friends to gather together to celebrate the life of two individuals united as one; and

Whereas it was once said that a marriage is the celebration of love, trust, and partnership; and

Whereas on September 9, 2023, a very special occasion took place when Matt Muise and Chelsea Henley celebrated their wedding;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Matt and Chelsea on their marriage and wish them a lifetime of health and happiness.