



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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

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

First Session

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2023

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2023

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

9:00 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order. We will now begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, I would beg leave to make an introduction, but I think the guests who are with me today are funnelling their way in. Perhaps I'll hold off and do the introduction after I table the paper.

THE SPEAKER: Sure.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, I have with me here today three pieces of information. One is feedback from the community of Highland Park. It is follow-up information from the community that suffered the largest number of damaged homes and destroyed homes. We held a virtual town hall so we have the feedback that was collected from that meeting.

Highland Park also put together a community survey on their priorities in response to the wildfire. That's one piece that I am going to table for the benefit of members in the House.

The second, and perhaps my guests are here now, but I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do so.

BEN JESSOME: In the gallery behind me we have representatives from a newly formed grassroots organization composed of many members throughout the community. I believe that their following now is in excess of 1,000 people. These are representatives of smaller community subdivisions from across the Tantallon-Hammonds Plains-Lucasville area who are very concerned about progress with respect to emergency management, egress, a number of different things.

These folks can be known as the Tantallon Wildfire Life Safety Coalition. I hope they're standing behind me. If they're here in the House behind me, please stand. Welcome to the House. (Applause)

For the record and the benefit of members in the House, I would like to table a letter from the coalition dated August 27th to the Premier, which lays out a number of thoughtful priorities, courtesy of one of the communities in our province that suffered a major tragedy this Summer.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: Yesterday during Question Period, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development said that she had not received any correspondence from me or my office and that this was the first that she was hearing of these issues.

I would like to table all of the correspondence from the past six months from my office to the minister on a number of issues regarding education and meeting with the minister directly.

THE SPEAKER: Just in reference to the honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville - just to table those documents.

They have been tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I would also like to table the call log from my office to the minister directly, mentioning numerous times - calling 15 times with no reply - to be able to have a meeting with the minister.

I'd like to table that within this House.

THE SPEAKER: The documents have been tabled.

I myself would like to table a document. Pursuant to Subsection 33(7) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Subsection 4(3) of the Privacy Review Officer Act, and Subsection 93(b) of the Personal Health Information Act. I am tabling the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia 2022-23 annual report.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister responsible for Military Relations.

RESOLUTION NO. 720

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

Whereas October 23, 2023 marks the 54th anniversary of the HMCS *Kootenay* disaster, the worst peacetime accident in the history of the Royal Canadian Navy; and

Whereas the explosion off the coast of England and the resulting fire and toxic smoke claimed the lives of nine crew members and seriously injured 53 others; and

Whereas the brave actions of the ship's crew prevented further loss of life and provided lessons learned to avoid future tragedies, and we offer our heartfelt appreciation for the sacrifice made in the protection of freedoms that we as Canadians enjoy;

Therefore be it resolved that October 23, 2023 be recognized by the members of the House of Assembly as HMCS *Kootenay* Day in the Province of Nova Scotia.

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

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

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care.

RESOLUTION NO. 721

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

Whereas Nova Scotians of all ages deserve to be comfortable and well taken care of in their homes or in long-term care; and

Whereas our dedicated staff, organizations, physicians, family caregivers, and volunteers go above and beyond to meet the unique needs of their residents and clients to ensure the highest quality of care to help them live their lives to the fullest in the places they call home; and

Whereas Continuing Care Month is a time to recognize and celebrate the dedicated people who work with and volunteer in long-term care, home care, and adult protection, supporting Nova Scotians in communities across our province;

Therefore be it resolved that all members in this House take the opportunity presented by Continuing Care Month in Nova Scotia to recognize the many hard-working people who work in this sector and thank them for their caring and loving care.

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 Seniors and Long-term Care.

RESOLUTION NO. 722

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

Whereas seniors live in long-term care and the people who care for them provide a wealth of experience, expertise, compassion, and inspiration; and

Whereas the annual Long Term Care Awards of Excellence shines a much-deserved spotlight on individual staff, teams, leaders, and residents who are making an exceptional mark in transforming our long-term care sector in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas this year's event recognized six dedicated individuals and teams for their achievements in leadership, diversity, innovation, and advocacy, and celebrated all of the contributions made in long-term care in Nova Scotia, making it a warm and welcoming home and workplace for all;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Nova Scotia Legislature join me in recognizing the contributions and leadership of those who live and work in long-term care across the province of Nova Scotia.

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

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

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

COLTON LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, dans votre tribune, nous avons avec nous aujourd'hui un monsieur de ma circonscription M. Roger d'Entremont, qui est récipiendaire du certificat de mérite Léger Comeau.

Speaker, in your gallery we have from my constituency Mr. Roger d'Entremont, accompanied by his son André. Roger is the recipient of the certificat Léger-Comeau. I ask the members of the House to welcome him to the Chamber today. (Applause)

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

RESOLUTION NO. 723

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

Attendu que le certificat de mérite Léger-Comeau reconnaît le travail exceptionnel d'une personne qui a apporté des contributions exceptionnelles au développement, à la

promotion, et à la vitalité de la communauté acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse dans un ou plusieurs domaines; et

Attendu que M. Roger d'Entremont, originaire de Pubnico West, est le récipiendaire du certificat Léger-Comeau en 2023; et

Attendu que M. d'Entremont a été de directeur général du Village historique acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse et, a titre de bénévole, a contribué à sa communauté en siégeant à plusieurs conseils et comités dont le but était de promouvoir la culture acadienne et la langue française;

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que tous les membres de l'Assemblée législative se joignent à moi pour féliciter Roger d'Entremont pour son dévouement et ses nombreuses contributions à la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

[9:15 a.m.]

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 Léger-Comeau Certificate of Merit recognizes exceptional work by an individual who has contributed to the promotion, development, and vitality of Nova Scotia's Acadian community in one or more sectors; and

Whereas Mr. Roger d'Entremont from West Pubnico is the 2023 recipient of the Léger-Comeau certificate; and

Whereas Mr. d'Entremont was the executive director of le Village historique acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse and has been actively involved in his community, volunteering and sitting on many boards and committees that promote Acadian culture and the French language;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in congratulating Roger d'Entermont for his dedication and many contributions to the Acadian francophone community of Nova Scotia.

Speaker, I request wavier 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 Environment and Climate Change.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Permission to make an introduction before I begin.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, in your gallery, I am so thrilled to welcome members of Nova Scotia's first Youth Climate Council. This council gives young people across the province a formal, direct, and dedicated way to influence public policy on climate change and the environment.

I'd like to introduce them: Sophia Lindfield; Morgan Bruhn; Avery Mackinnon; Sydney Griffiths; Morgan Roulston; Yashita Ghore; Mitchell Hiscock; Peter Oyedijo; Zaina Lamontagne; Keira Grady. As well, I'd like to introduce Hannah Estabrook, the Youth Engagement Lead for the Clean Foundation, which created the council in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia.

These youth are the driving force behind this council. Their passion, their energy, their unwavering commitment to addressing the climate crisis has inspired us all. Their voices have been resonating across the globe through marches, strikes, and relentless advocacy. I want to thank them for joining us today, and I ask my colleagues to give them a warm welcome to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. (Standing ovation)

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

RESOLUTION NO. 724

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

Whereas October 23rd is the International Day of Climate Action, a day that seeks to raise awareness and mobilize action to address the pressing issues of climate change; and

Whereas Nova Scotia's Youth Climate Council, of which some members are joining us in the gallery today, has demonstrated exceptional commitment and leadership in advocating for climate action, raising awareness, and driving initiatives to contribute to a more sustainable and resilient future; and

Whereas I commend the members of the Youth Climate Council, who have dedicated countless hours of their time and energy to drive meaningful climate policies,

organize rallies and events, and educate our community on the importance of climate action;

Therefore be it resolved that Nova Scotians join me in recognizing the International Day of Climate Action, and thanking the Youth Climate Council for their unwavering dedication, passion, and relentless pursuit of climate justice.

Speaker, I ask for waiver of notice and passage without debate.

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

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. It is my absolute honour to introduce today's distinguished guests in the East Gallery. We have with us - and please give them a warm welcome - Russell Grosse, Executive Director of the Black Cultural Centre; Dr. Isaac Saney of Dalhousie University, Coordinator of the Black African Diaspora Studies program; Bill Lahey, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kings College; and Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley, Dalhousie University, the Vice-Provost of Equity and Inclusion. I ask that they rise and accept the warm welcome of this House. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister for African Nova Scotian Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 725

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

Whereas Dalhousie University and the University of Kings College have partnered with the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia to house the groundbreaking 2023 Universities Studying Slavery (USS) Conference from October 18th to 21st; and

Whereas this significant international conference on the role of slavery in higher education and its legacies will mark the first USS conference held outside of the United States; and

Whereas this will also be the inaugural USS conference to spotlight the history of slavery in Nova Scotia and Canada, along with the experiences of the African Nova Scotians in particular;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly join me in thanking the organizers of the Universities Studying Slavery Conference and acknowledging the social, economic, and cultural contributions and achievements of Black people in communities across the Black Atlantic world, including those in Canada and Nova Scotia.

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

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

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Sure.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, I would like to make an introduction of guests in the Gallery, and I ask that our guests rise as I speak your name. Carri Barns, Flynn Waller, Raz Evrovski, Goldie Godfrey and Vicki Godfrey.

Vicki Godfrey works as co-lead of The Court Said Canada and I want to thank them for coming today and all the work that Vicki and her colleagues do to make positive changes establishing education and support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Thank you for being here with us today.

Bill No. 361 - An Act to Amend Chapter 238 of the Revised Statutes of 1989, The Provincial Court Act. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 362 - An Act Respecting the Electrification of Transportation. (Hon. Iain Rankin)

Bill No. 363 - An Act to Amend Chapter 120 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Early Learning and Child Care Act, to End Child Care Wait-List Fees or Deposits. (Suzy Hansen)

Bill No. 364 - An Act Respecting Accessibility and Affordability of Heat (Hon. Ian Rankin)

Bill No. 365 - An Act to Establish a Safe Indoor Air and Pandemic Preparedness Committee. (Susan Leblanc)

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 Cumberland South.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction before my statement that has nothing to do with my statement.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

TORY RUSHTON: I would like to draw the members' attention to the gallery opposite where we have two visitors. Somebody who's no stranger to the walls here is Stephen Moore; also a very warm welcome to staff from Forest Nova Scotia in the Legislature - Todd Burgess, his very first time in the Legislature. Let's give Todd a warm welcome from the members. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

HEBERT, BRIAN & LAURA: STRIMPLE AWD. - CONGRATS.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, I would like to recognize Brian and Laura Hebert, operators of the Fundy Treasures gift shop in Joggins.

Brian and Laura have a variety of unique and locally made art, gifts, candles, gemstones, and much more, all made by local artisans, and products from Nova Scotia. In addition to the gift shop, Fundy Treasures also offers fossil tours of the Joggins Cliffs, and crystal and gemstone tours in the Parrsboro area.

The Heberts travelled to Pittsburgh, where Brian accepted the Strimple Award from the Paleontological Society, which recognizes outstanding achievement in paleontology by amateurs.

Please join me in congratulating Brian and Laura Hebert of Fundy Treasures on their outstanding award, and wish them continued success in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

VOLUNTEERS: CELTIC COLOURS FESTIVAL - THANKS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the remarkable organization and dedicated volunteers behind the Celtic Colours International Festival, held in Cape Breton. Their unwavering commitment and hard work have brought joy and culture to thousands of people. The 2023 festival's incredible rebound is a testament to the resilience and passion that these volunteers and organizers have. I want to thank them for creating a spectacular event that showcases the best of Cape Breton in world-class talent. The efforts of these individuals have made a lasting impact on the local economy. Here's to many more years of music, culture, and fun in Celtic Colours.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction relative to my Member's Statement.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please.

LISA LACHANCE: I ask all members to extend a warm welcome to Bram St. Peters, who is here today with his parents Shannon Reidy and Craig St. Peters. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.
[9:30 a.m.]

ST. PETERS, BRAM: YOUTH AWD. RECIP. - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, today I would like to take a moment to recognize one of the youth in my constituency whose knowledge I know will help make Nova Scotia a better place. Bram St. Peters from Citadel High School is the recipient of this year's Youth Award at the Discovery Awards for Science and Innovation.

The Youth Award is presented to a student from Nova Scotia with the best showing at the Canada-wide science fair, and Bram's work clinched him the award this year. He discovered that he could stimulate plant growth in lunar soil by combining small amounts of human biosolids with earthworm castings. This sets an amazing precedent for future work in the field. I couldn't be prouder to say that a student from my constituency is helping make life on the Moon more hospitable to plants.

I ask that the House join me in congratulating Bram St. Peters for his discovery and wish him all the best as he accepts the Discovery Award later this Fall. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

SUTHERLAND, ALAN: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

TOM TAGGART: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Alan Sutherland of Bass River. Alan is a community-minded person who serves on numerous committees and boards. He serves as the treasurer to the Nova Scotia Blind Golfers Association and a board member of the G.I. Memorial Committee and Colliston House. He was also heavily involved in coaching youth baseball and hockey.

As well, Alan served with the Truro Fire Brigade for 25 years as captain and deputy chief, helping to protect the town of Truro. Alan also has served on the executive of the Canadian Fire Fighters Curling Association for 25 years and as president for the past nine. This past March, Alan retired from his position with the Canadian Fire Fighters Curling Association.

I wish to recognize Alan for his commitment to the fire service and the Canadian Fire Fighters Curling Association. I ask all members of this House to join me in wishing him well in his future endeavours. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

SLAUNWHITE, CRAIG: PRO STOCK TOUR WIN - CONGRATS.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Craig Slaunwhite from Terence Bay for winning the East Coast International Pro Stock Tour for the second straight year. This tour is considered the highest level of stock car racing in Canada and is recognized as one of the healthiest touring series in North America.

Slaunwhite has won the past two titles, picking up seven race victories along the way. His 2022 margin of victory by 84 points over Russell Smith Jr. was the largest in the 2022 year run of the tour. Slaunwhite has taken a one-race-at-a-time approach this season because he knows first-hand how difficult it is to win races. He has raced on tour for 16 seasons, has 14 wins, and 62 top five finishes.

He says winning starts with the car set-up because the teams are so close. According to Slaunwhite, there are so many good competitors around that if you miss it by a sixteenth or eighth of an inch before the race starts with your last final adjustment, it takes you out of the winners circle.

I would like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Craig on his successful win, and wish him all the best in the future races. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: ACTION NEEDED - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, violence is occurring in the homes and communities of each one of our constituencies. Just in the past two months, two women have died from domestic violence in my area alone. Two years ago, I met with our Minister of Justice to request changes in our legal system here to end the culture of misogyny. Too many victims of domestic violence and sexual assault face a non-supportive culture in law enforcement, Crown prosecutors, and provincial judges, further victimizing people and children who have already experienced great trauma.

The federal government passed a law - Keira's Law - honouring four-year-old Keira Kagan, who was found dead with her father in an apparent murder-suicide. This federal law will support the education of those working within the federal legal system to better protect women and children from domestic violence.

Considering the recommendations of the Mass Casualty Commission, I join all advocates in Nova Scotia to end domestic violence and sexual assault, and call for the government to do more to provide support and education. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

CHATER MEAT MARKET: COM. SERV. - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, my former office was located beside Chater Meat Market in Dartmouth North. That's what we used to say to people, "We're beside Chaters," because everyone in Dartmouth North knows and loves Chaters.

George Chater first opened his butcher store on Portland Street in 1969, and it is now an institution in Dartmouth North. As one of the comments on social media said, George had watched their kids and their grandkids grow up. Another person commented that their child refers to Chater's as the bacon store.

Not only is Chater's known for its bacon and freezer orders, cold cuts, and more, but it is known for how much Chater's gives back to the community. George and Chater's have been longtime supporters of the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre and were recognized by the centre for their support in 2018. They supported the North Dartmouth Outreach Resource Centre Society, Holy Trinity Emmanuel Church, and even Mary's African Cuisine, on Barrington Street, when they offered community members a free Christmas meal during the peak of the pandemic.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating Chater Meat Market on over 50 years of business and giving back to the community. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

FIRST RESPONDERS: WILDFIRE EFFORTS - RECOG.

NOLAN YOUNG: Speaker, I rise today to recognize and acknowledge the commitment of our local volunteer firefighters, Nova Scotia Ground Search and Rescue Association, and countless local volunteers who supported them this past Summer when Shelburne County experienced the worst wildfire in Nova Scotia's history.

More than 60 external volunteer departments joined the efforts in fighting this massive fire that burned close to 25,000 hectares of woodland, more than 60 homes, and a total of 150 structures. Their relentless effort to save homes was truly incredible. Although homes were lost, were it not for these volunteer heroes many more would have been destroyed.

I respectfully ask all members to join me in thanking these exceptional volunteers for their long hours of dedication to the residents of Shelburne County. We are truly thankful for their help. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

MADE IN THE MAR. BOUTIQUE: SUCCESS - RECOG.

HON. KELLY REGAN: As part of Small Business Week, I'd like to congratulate Made in the Maritimes Artisan Boutique. In late April 2015, Joel Kelly and Mark Smith opened their business at Sunnyside Mall. Their dream was to promote and share the work of local artisans. Now over 200 makers sell their wares through Made in the Maritimes.

They have expanded to new locations. They are now in a very large space in Bayers Lake as well as a heritage space in the Hydrostone Market, and they have a great online shop as well. I know I will always find something beautiful in one of their shops when I am looking for a locally sourced gift.

I do need to mention that Joel and Mark are giving back to their community. When Souls Harbour Rescue Mission set up new apartments for women and children along the Eastern Shore earlier this year, Joel and Mark ensured that \$15,000 worth of housewares and furniture made their way to new apartments. How heartwarming is that?

While I miss their being in Bedford, I do love that they are doing well. Congratulations, Joel and Mark, on eight years of business success. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

FATOUROS, FOTIS: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise today to mark the passing of an iconic Dartmouth restaurateur, Fotis Fatouros. A Greek immigrant who came to Canada with \$50 in his pocket, he built a vibrant community and a loyal following in Dartmouth. Mr. Fatouros was the energy behind two iconic restaurants, John's Lunch and the Pleasant Street Diner, which his two sons, Tommy and Stephen, opened after lifelong training at their father's knees. These eateries serve as community meeting spaces and always have a line of eager eaters waiting to get in.

I am saddened to say that John's Lunch will close its doors at the end of this month. Luckily, we will still have the diner to get our fresh fish and chips. Charming, mischievous, and a dedicated family man, Mr. Fatouros was famous for throwing big parties and leaving everything on the dance floor. He leaves behind his loving wife, children, grandchildren, and an entire city that thinks of him as family.

I ask all members of this House to join me in celebrating the life and legacy left by Mr. Fotis Fatouros. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

TOWN OF BERWICK: 100TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

CHRIS PALMER: I rise today to recognize that it has been 100 years since the incorporation of the Town of Berwick. Historically, Berwick has been pivotal in the province's apple industry, and has been known as Nova Scotia's Apple Capital for many decades. Orchards, farms, vineyards, and forests envelop the town, making for an idyllic rural setting.

The first settlers arrived in the area in the early 1800s, and it remained a community for a century before residents voted to become a town. It was incorporated on May 25, 1923. I was pleased to be able to bring remarks from the Province this past May at the official ceremony to celebrate the town's incorporation. It was a momentous occasion celebrated at the town hall, with many citizens enjoying heritage memorabilia, local musicians, children's events, and yes, of course, a big cake.

Berwick decided to not just celebrate a birthday. They are celebrating a birth year. Included in their celebrations are mural projects around town, and a special sticker added to the Valley Wildcats' helmets for the year. A local brewery created a special Berwick Centennial beer I may have tried once or twice.

Speaker, full of tradition yet progressive at the same time, Berwick is a model for a town in our province. Please join me in congratulating the Town of Berwick on their hundredth year and celebrations. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DAUGHTER, EMILY: HELP FOR KIDS - RECOG.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I got a message last night while we were in the Legislature from my oldest daughter, Emily, who had a question that she wanted me to bring to Halifax to everybody who's working. Her class is trying to decide whether they're going to donate socks or hats this Winter to kids who need them in the community.

The kids are talking about it in her Grade 4 class at Sydney River Elementary, so their teacher, Roberta MacIsaac, decided they should have a debate on it. Emily went to tell all of her friends that her dad is in the Legislature right now, so she's going to ask him the question.

One of the constituents you've got to keep a promise to especially - she is one of them. I do want to rise in my place and tell Emily and all of her friends and classmates how proud I am of them for stepping up to try to help kids in the community. I also want to recognize their teacher, Roberta MacIsaac, who is not only a great mentor and teacher to my daughter but to many kids in the community.

Emily, I kept my promise. I asked the question, and I know that you and your friends will raise a lot of either socks or hats for kids in the community. (Applause)

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

TEAM MISS BLUSH: SILVER MEDAL WIN - CONGRATS.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I am proud to have the Premier Cheerleading All-Stars residing in Gardiner Mines. On May 6, 2023, the Premier Cheerleading All-Stars' Miss Blush team won silver at the Allstar World Championship in Orlando, Florida.

This Summer, I had the opportunity to surprise the Miss Blush team at their banquet to offer my congratulations. They worked hard for that silver medal, and proudly represented our area on the international stage.

Congratulations to Team Miss Blush, coaches, parents, and the Premier Cheerleading All-Stars. (Applause)

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

BOOTH, ELIZABETH: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. BRIAN WONG: I stand here to welcome and thank a new resident of Fall River. Elizabeth Booth moved to Nova Scotia with her husband three years ago, and in her brief time here, she has become a valuable member of the community.

Elizabeth threw herself into volunteering right away, making connections and connecting community members. From her assistance with bingo games to a greater role with Keloose, Elizabeth has sprung into action to help Fall River.

Speaker, please help me extend a huge thank you to Elizabeth and her husband for their work in our community. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

KETCH HARBOUR: LOCAL EVENTS - THANKS

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you, Speaker, and happy Friday.

Speaker, today I'd like to thank the amazing volunteers and people of Ketch Harbour. They do so much to make it a welcoming community.

I want to bring to your attention the ice cream social in the Summer, and now, the hot chocolate and cookie social. While it's fantastic to get a treat, what is even better is the conversations, the friends, the family, and the community.

Words cannot describe the appreciation my family and I feel to be welcomed at these events. Thank you to everyone who makes this happen and makes Ketch Harbour such a special place to live, work, and play.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

BRUNS. CORN. PRE-SCHOOL: MILESTONE - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Brunswick Cornwallis Pre-School, 1963 to 1991. The preschool just recently celebrated a historic milestone, recognizing past teachers, board, staff, and community members. The Brunswick-Cornwallis Pre-school began as an interracial, interdenominational partnership between two neighbouring churches in the North End of Halifax: Cornwallis Street United Baptist Church and Brunswick Street United Church. The preschool in 1963 was a true testament of how community can come together to fill a need: child care for all children. The aim was to address the educational inequities for low-income and marginalized children in the North End, at a time when racial unrest existed. I would like all members to

join me in celebrating the Brunswick-Cornwallis Pre-school, and all of the organizers for their historical milestone and preservation of their rich history.

[9:45 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

SAMSON, GERRY: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Today I would like to acknowledge Gerry Samson, who has been a dedicated volunteer with the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 150 in Arichat for many years. Gerry has worked with the young cadets in the 235 Arrow Sea Cadets Corps and has received a life membership with Branch 150. His work volunteering with the local veterans is appreciated by so many residents. Gerry has also spent many hours volunteering at the St. Anne Community and Nursing Care Centre, entertaining the residents with his singing and guitar playing. He is also a key volunteer for the local fish fry meals, which make the trip to Arichat even more special.

Please join me in honouring Gerry Samson, who is a true friend to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

PENG, CARMEN: SCHOLARS AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. KEITH IRVING: It's always a great pleasure for me to recognize the achievements of our next generation of scholars. It shows Nova Scotians the promise of the future. The Irving Family Foundation at Acadia University recognizes the potential of very special students through their Scholar's Award, one of the most prestigious post-secondary awards in Canada, valued at \$60,000 over four years. Wolfville's Carmen Peng, a 2023 graduate from Horton High School, is the recipient of the Irving Family Foundation Scholar's Award this year. Carmen is an accomplished student, a social justice environmental advocate, and if that's not enough, she's also an extremely talented musician well-known to the Wolfville community.

Carmen created her own Waves of Change Foundation, holding eight conferences to raise awareness on climate action and youth mobilization. I have tremendous confidence in Carmen's future success and impact on our world. Please join me in congratulating Carmen Peng on receiving the Irving Family Foundation Scholarship.

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

NEW WAT. URBAN CENTRE: RENAMING - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: On July 18th, the New Waterford Urban Centre, home to many organizations including the library and the pensioner's club, was renamed to honour the late Dr. Daniel Nathanson. The building will now be called the Dr. Dan S. Nathanson Memorial Urban Centre.

It is a fitting tribute to name a central building in the community in honour of one of the most beloved and respected residents. Dr. Nathanson was dedicated to our community and sought to improve people's lives everywhere he could. He served residents as a physician, surgeon, and their mayor.

Dr. Nathanson was an advocate. He was a visionary. It is an honour now to have the Urban Centre named after him. His family are proud as can be. We had an opening ceremony, and the family gave us tons of stories about him. It was great.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MCKENZIE, LEO: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: This past September I had the honour of attending the retirement party for Leo MacKenzie. The touching tributes I witnessed only solidified my belief that Leo's leadership throughout his career has been indispensable to those he worked with and to our community as a whole.

Through his efforts with Better Together, Leo has transformed what it means to live in a group home. The guys at Better Together, especially within the last six months, have been everywhere in the community. Helping out every year with the Terry Fox Run and contributing toward the community cleanup: these are just some of the incredible contributions that Better Together has made with Leo at the helm.

While I'm sure this is not a final farewell, as Leo will still be around to help out, I wanted to take this moment to give a well-deserved acknowledgement to Leo MacKenzie for his services to Better Together and the community at large.

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

HELLO PETS: ONE-YEAR ANNIV. - CONGRATS.,

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: On August 26th, Hello Pets celebrated their one-year anniversary with a day-long celebration. Cali and I proudly presented them with a certificate to honour their work fostering the bond between humans and their furry friends.

Over the last year, owners and passionate animal enthusiasts Mohammad Ashiq and Hasibur Rahman Abir have integrated themselves into the Fairview-Clayton Park community by attending events, donating prizes for giveaways, and collaborating with community groups. They have created a space where love, care, and compassion abound, fostering an environment where both pets and their humans thrive.

Whether you're a seasoned pet owner or a first timer, you will find valuable advice, genuine camaraderie, and a passion for all things pets at Hello Pets. I invite all members to join me in celebrating this outstanding business that has dedicated their time and heart to improving the lives of our beloved pets and their human companions. Thank you for making our community a better place, one wagging tail and purring heart at a time.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

BYGGDIN, K.R.: BOOK AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

GARY BURRILL: I would like to extend the congratulations of the House to K.R. Byggdin of Halifax Chebucto, whose 2022 novel *Wonder World* received the prestigious Thomas Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award at the Atlantic Book Awards in June.

Wonder World plows its own furrow on the landscape of the migration and moving-home literature of the Maritimes. It tells the story of Isaac Funk, who leaves his conservative hometown on the Prairies to study music and embrace queer culture in Halifax, only to return years later to experience the contradictoriness of home.

The Raddall jury said of *Wonder World* that it challenges stereotypes of rural life and is a virtuoso exploration of hope, a story of building bridges to family and community while staying true to oneself. The Thomas Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award is the largest literary prize in Eastern Canada, and *Wonder World* is published by Enfield & Wizenty.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

E. PRESTON SENIORS CLUB: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: I rise today to recognize the East Preston Seniors Club, which will be celebrating their 33rd anniversary in December of 2023. The group meets every month and are highly active in their community and surrounding areas.

Seniors over 80 were honoured with a certificate for their continuing work with the club, sponsored by Community Links. They hosted information sessions on life and estate planning, insurance planning, and aging well at home. The club also has members on the executive council of Halifax County Seniors Council Zone No. 15 and the Federation of Seniors and Pensioners of Nova Scotia.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to please join me in acknowledging the East Preston Seniors Club and thanking them for the great work they are doing and will continue to do in our communities, recognizing that age is only a number.

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

COLE HBR. COM. FRIDGE: GRAND OPENING - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: I rise today to invite my fellow MLAs to join the Cole Harbour Community Fridge, located at the Cole Harbour Woodside United Church on Bissett Road, for their grand opening tomorrow between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

This community group is focused on reducing food insecurity in the Cole Harbour area. Like other community fridges, their fridge is modeled on a take-what-you-need, leave-what-you-can model. They will be relying on community members to come together to support each other through donations of non-perishable goods that are not expired, fresh produce, hygiene and personal care products, school-safe snacks, and easy-to-make meals to help them feed our neighbours.

I ask that members of the House of Assembly join me in not only thanking the community volunteers, but also for seeing the need to address food insecurity in our schools and community and working to make this community fridge a reality.

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

N. END COM. HEALTH CTR.: HOUSING PGM. - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Today I want to take a moment to recognize an organization in Halifax that is addressing housing inequity for 2SLGBTQIA+ Nova Scotians. Up to 40 per cent of Canadian youth who are homeless are also part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and youth and adults alike often struggle to find acceptance and safety in many shelters.

The North End Community Health Centre is looking to change that. This Fall, the North End Community Health Centre is starting a program to affordably house 2SLGBTQIA+ folks in Halifax. There will be shared living environments with multiple individual apartments and will welcome 2SLGBTQIA+ residents with various support needs.

I ask my colleagues in the House to recognize the North End Community Health Centre's work to ensure the comfort and safety of 2SLGBTQIA+ Nova Scotians and resolve to consider the same in their work going forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

BONA, DERRICK: HEALTH IMPROVEMENT - CONGRATS.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: I rise today to acknowledge Derrick Bona from Eastern Passage for his dedication to living a healthier lifestyle and for sharing his journey online to inspire us all. Derrick has already lost approximately 157 pounds in 36 weeks. Derrick's family, friends, and inspiring gym trainer, Rick, of RickMyTrainer, have supported Blue Jays fan Derrick through all of the challenging times, and helped celebrate Derrick with all the milestones that he has met.

Derrick's coworkers have also shown tremendous support, and Derrick even had a shout-out on social media from actor Arnold Schwarzenegger. We thank Derrick for continually inspiring all of us through his testimonials, like the one Derrick gave at our Music 4 Mental Health fundraiser in May.

I ask all members of Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in congratulating Derrick Bona of Eastern Passage on sharing his tremendous journey.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

UNIVS.: STUDYING SLAVERY CONF. - RECOG.

HON. TONY INCE: I'd like to recognize and join with my colleagues in recognizing the Universities Studying Slavery Conference 2023. This is a conference of universities studying slavery, and it is a consortium of over 100 institutions of higher learning in the United States, Canada, Colombia, Scotland, Ireland, and England.

These schools are focused on sharing the best practices and guiding principles of their engaged truth-telling and educational projects focused on human bondage and the legacy of racism in their histories. Speaker, this is the first time that the USS conference is being held outside of the United States. I do like to recognize and commend the University of King's College, Dalhousie University, and the Black Cultural Centre for their vision in this conference. I'd like all to welcome all the delegates and congratulate them on their in-depth conversations.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SCHWARTZ, SAM: VOL. AWD. RECIP. - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Just blocks from my constituency office is the North Dartmouth Outreach Resource Centre on the ground floor of Stairs Memorial United Church, and in that centre is housed the Stairs Food Bank. At the helm of the every-Wednesday food bank is President of the NDORC Sam Schwartz, and this past April, Sam was awarded a 2023 City of Halifax Volunteer Award for District 5 by City Councillor Sam Austin.

In an average week, the food bank provides food to 135 adults and 60 children. Sam has been instrumental to the food bank's move towards a client-centred model, where visitors can ostensibly shop for items of their choice, and led the food bank through the height of the pandemic. Every year there was a major operation to pack holiday hampers, which last year went to 160 homes in North Dartmouth. Every year I look forward to seeing Sam in his element, making all that work.

Although food banks need to go out of business, in the meantime I ask the House to join me in congratulating the very deserving Sam Schwartz for his recent award and for his efforts in tackling food insecurity in Dartmouth North.

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

WHITE SAILS BAKERY & DELI: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Today I rise to speak about White Sails Bakery and Deli. Not only is their food delicious, but they're always jumping in, not only to help the community, but anyone in need. For example, during the Tantallon fires, they did not miss a beat by providing fantastic food to all the firefighters. Now they are working towards Kennedy's Memorial Breakfast Program Food Drive. It's been a year since the family lost this beautiful child. While this was a tremendous loss, the family is very strong.

If you'd like to donate groceries, gift cards, nut-free cereal, fruit cups, or yogurt tubes, please drop them off between October 22nd to October 23rd at the White Sails Bakery and Deli. That's 12930 Peggy's Cove Road, or you can always Facebook them or e-mail them at info@whitesailsbakery.com. I just want to thank White Sails Bakery and Deli for being a wonderful business in Chester-St. Margaret's, and thank you for doing this food drive.

THE SPEAKER: Order. We will now begin Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers.

The time is ten o'clock and we will finish at 10:50 a.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: CENTRALIZING DECISION-MAKING - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, the Premier ran on an election campaign of empowering local decision-makers and decentralizing decisions made in this province. I'll

table that. What has happened is the opposite. The Premier has systemically scrapped independent boards' oversight accountability. He has cut independent board members who are experts, appointed his friends - his personal friends, according to him - and paid them \$1,500 a day to be in these positions. Now he is looking at taking over authority of the HRM when it comes to development and planning. Speaker, my question to the Premier is: Why, after the Premier ran on an election promise to decentralize decision making and empower local decision-makers, has he done the exact opposite?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): I believe the core centrepiece of our election campaign was to fix health care and make sure Nova Scotians can have access to health care. To fix health care and make sure people can have access to health care, you need to get things done. That's why this government is moving forward with results for Nova Scotians. Quite frankly, it seems to me that Nova Scotians are pleased with their government so far.

[10:00 a.m.]

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, after saying he would bring the health authorities back, he has further centralized the Nova Scotia Health Authority, and we have not seen results of that.

I will give the Premier credit; some things are getting done. We learned yesterday that - without documents, without studies to support it, and without any information - the Premier has made a \$9 million highway exit in his own riding. A \$9 million project in the Premier's home constituency that also wasn't tendered. We're seeing that the Premier's cutting of independent authority and oversight is not just impacting patronage appointments, it's also impacting spending in this province.

My question to the Premier is: Is that why the Premier has gotten rid of independent oversight - so he can spend and do how he pleases without anybody saying anything about it?

THE PREMIER: Speaker, I hardly accept the premise that there's no oversight of government spending. There's an Auditor General. There's an Opposition, which sometimes can be effective - they have that opportunity to be effective. There's the media. There are Nova Scotians every single day.

In terms of this exit, in particular - this is an exit that was always contemplated. In fact, the exits go from 27 to 29; 28 has been missing through my whole lifetime. There is a long distance between those two exits. It's a safety issue. It's a growth issue. The fact that we asked the person who is already building the highway to continue and build this exit - I don't think that should be a surprise to anyone.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The Premier says there's oversight in this House. He spent hundreds of millions of dollars outside of their own budget. Tell me there's oversight on that.

Here are the facts: the Premier has cut independent oversight; he has elevated his friends to positions of authority where they are paid big dollars; and he has moved on projects that are untendered - for this highway project, which is over \$9 million, and for the housing project. Taking over HRM - we consider that this is going to be the same thing. These aren't just my words; this is the Premier's record.

My question to the Premier is: With the Premier taking over HRM's ability to develop and plan their own city, which they were elected to do, what assurances can he give this House that the same pattern of favouritism, patronage, and pork-barrelling isn't going to happen again?

THE SPEAKER: Order. To the Leader of the Official Opposition, "pork-barrelling" is not parliamentary, so I would ask that you retract that.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I will retract "pork-barrelling" and say spending without tenders and oversight.

THE PREMIER: I completely reject the premise of the question. It is a completely false narrative that the Leader of the Official Opposition is trying to create. What I will say is this: we are getting things done on behalf of Nova Scotians. I'll point out the obvious to Nova Scotians: When we invest in projects, they scream, Why are you investing in these projects? And when we don't, and when we want to invest in projects, they say, Why didn't you spend more? You're spending too much, or you're not spending enough. We can't be bothered by the noise, Speaker. We're focused on results for Nova Scotians. That is what we will continue to deliver.

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

PREM.: ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING - IMPROVE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: As we've been discussing, the Premier is concentrating power, cutting out experts and planners, and giving some developers a fast lane to build, without regard for things like tenders or oversight, and with virtually no strings attached. Meanwhile, it's extremely difficult for families to get a construction loan to build their first home. The government program designed to help them hasn't been updated in over a decade. I'll table that.

With mortgage rates rising and building costs rising, will the Premier also help families and improve the eligibility under the Family Modest Housing Program so that they can build for themselves?

THE PREMIER: Everything we do is focused on families and on Nova Scotians. In fact, I think just yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced a loan program for granny suites on properties. That's an important announcement.

We have made a number of investments in housing. We put families and Nova Scotians at the very core of everything we do. There's more work to be done on housing, for sure. I wish the provincial government of Nova Scotia could control world interest rates and world inflation, but we can't. We deal with what's in front of us, and we step up every single day and support Nova Scotians.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Yesterday's announcement will help families who can invest enough to rent out a property, but my question is about families building for themselves. I want to know why the Premier is so reluctant to help families build, buy, or keep their own housing when he's giving over \$100 million in benefits, plus easy access, to developers, with no evidence that it will lower rents or the cost of housing for people.

Meanwhile, he won't even establish a simple residential tenancies enforcement branch that has been asked for by landlords and renters and experts to make sure that at least everyone is playing by the same rules.

Why is the Premier so reluctant to help regular Nova Scotians afford housing?

THE PREMIER: Speaker, in fact the bill that is before the House around HRM planning does exactly this. It gets housing built. The special planning area is about getting things approved that have been sitting and languishing for 10 or 12 years or something. There are a number of areas, and one of the areas is very close to the member's area, where there will be 800 to 1,000 families living in homes in that area. That number has been against us from the beginning. I wish they would never build there.

The reality is that we have a situation with the HRM where staff have advised Council that projects should go forward, and Council has said that is not happening. The proponents appeal to the NSUARB and the NSUARB decides in favour. We just want to cut it out. We want housing built. That's what we want.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: God forbid a member should suggest that we take environmental protections into account when building. For the record, which I will table tomorrow, my comments were that we could build and protect a wetland, but this Premier is too impatient to do that.

The kicker, Speaker, is that it's not even clear that this approach is going to have any impact. I have a line out the door of people in my office asking when the affordable housing at Southdale-Mount Hope is built. What we tell them is, It's not. No one who has come to our office for housing will ever be able to afford to live in that development.

Single-detached housing starts have plunged this year under this Premier's watch. They're down 34 per cent from this time last year in Halifax, and not one family is living in an affordable unit that was built because of a special planning area. Clearly, the Premier's plan is not helping regular Nova Scotians. Who is he trying to help?

THE PREMIER: The reality is I wish I could snap my fingers and a house would be built tonight. It can't be.

We know that the interest rates are having an impact on housing starts, for sure. If I could fix the interest rates, I would. If I could build a house tonight, I would build one. We need people to have houses. That's why we have the More Opportunity for Skilled Trades program. I wish the Opposition would get behind that, a crazy, innovative program that is helping people. That's why we made the changes to the apprenticeship program. That's why we're removing HST from building. That's why we're saying to HRM and other municipalities, Get moving. What needs to be built should be built. I ask the members opposite to stand with Nova Scotians, put the partisan hack shots to the side, and let's get some housing built for Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

MAH: POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST - INFORM

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: What we're concerned about is that we have a plan in place that's running roughshod over city council that is not going to result in more affordable housing. These questions are actually coming from developers who are concerned that they won't be preferred clients, and it's coming from the City that is losing control over developing their own city.

The Premier has said he consulted a number of people and organizations before they made that decision. Here's who they didn't consult: HRM and the mayor and city council didn't even get a call; the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia; and the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. Our concern is that there's a small group of people pushing the Premier to do this who have the potential to benefit from it. How can the Premier tell this House today that this won't happen?

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: First of all, I believe what we're talking about is a bill, the HRM Charter bill before the House. I just want to clarify with you that there will be lots of opportunity to debate this bill, if that's what the question is about. I'm happy to answer the question, but I just want clarification.

THE SPEAKER: Proceed with the question. It is not directly related to the bill. The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

JOHN LOHR: Just before I answer the question, I do want to table, for the benefit of the House, Statistics Canada year-over-year housing starts, which show Halifax, September 2022, being up 622 per cent year-over-year from January to September from last year, Nova Scotia being up 117 per cent. I'll just table that. I know the member has indicated a number of times in the House that we're down. I don't know where you're getting your statistics, but I'm tabling this one.

In terms of who we're listening to, where we get . . . (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order. There's a lot of talking, a lot of chatter. I know you all have your individual opinions on how I rule on things, but I will let you know that the Clerks advise me. We work together. I do not need other members of the House telling me what I should be doing. I will take my advice from the Clerks.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing says on one side of his mouth that HRM isn't building housing. Now he says they've actually been doing a good job. What is it? The fact that we can't get the Premier of this province, who's assuming power over municipalities, who's cut independent boards, who hates accountability, who hates lines of questioning, to answer more than one question in this Chamber I think is totally unacceptable.

I remember when this Premier used to suck up all the air in this Chamber when he was in Opposition, asked every single question. Now he can't answer more than one question when he's asked in this House after doing all this? We know that this government has very close ties to the development community. We know there's one in particular who chaired the Premier's transition team whom we're hearing advises the Premier on housing policy, whom we're hearing meets with developers who have housing suggestions.

THE SPEAKER: Question.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Can the Premier please tell this House what the role of that individual is, and who exactly was consulted before they moved forward with these HRM changes?

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

JOHN LOHR: I do want to answer that question. We listen to the big conversations. There's a big conversation on housing that's been going on for a number of years, where our decisions are informed by, first of all, the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission report, which came out in May of 2021. It was a very critical document that we founded it on. We've had the Deloitte report since then.

The Auditor General reports, HRM Auditor General report, our own Auditor General reports inform our decisions. We're basing decisions on that. We have something we call the Turner Drake report on housing needs which has informed our decisions. We also have the executive panel which has informed our decisions, and my department has a public-facing component that also speaks to many different individuals who inform our decisions.

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

[10:15 a.m.]

MAH: LACK OF HOUSING EXPERTISE - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: This is what I am concerned about. There are a lot of inconsistencies with what the minister is saying. A minister who now has potentially sole authority over development in our biggest municipality. He just referenced the work of that commission. He has actually gone against the strategy and recommendations of that group.

The minister has said in this House that he didn't know what was happening with density bonusing, how it was being spent. All he had to do was go on the front page of HRM Council and actually see where that funding is going. The minister just referenced this report when he said housing starts are up.

If you look at the year over year, according to the stats that the minister just tabled, housing starts are actually down. Here is what I am concerned about. We have a housing minister with no planning expertise in his office and clearly with no expertise on the subject himself. How does he think he can do a better job than city planners?

JOHN LOHR: We came into government following a government that had a policy of "do nothing" and we are working hard on a daily front to do things. I can tell you that we are a government of action. We had what I would call kindly "deferred maintenance." We were facing deferred maintenance in health care. We are facing deferred maintenance across government departments. We are facing deferred maintenance in housing, and we are struggling to catch up. We have made unprecedented investments in housing - more than \$300 million.

Yesterday we announced a secondary suite program which will allow people to put in a secondary suite. We will enable that. We are doing every possible good idea that we can do, Speaker.

ZACH CHURHILL: Speaker, here is what the government is doing: They are throwing money at the wall and seeing what sticks, and what we haven't seen are results from this government. We have housing starts that are down, the highest inflation in the

whole country, the highest increase in rents, wait times worsening at ERs, wait times worsening with ambulatory care, and yet the government still stands up every single day and pats themselves on the back about how much money they are throwing at these problems without having any single bit of return for Nova Scotians. I think it is totally unacceptable.

When it comes to housing, the government is now saying that the buck stops with them. They know better than every municipality when it comes to building and development. Will the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing say today: Will he take responsibility and accountability if these numbers for housing starts, the increases in rent, and affordable housing units coming on to the market do not change course?

JOHN LOHR: What is happening is that the Leader of the Official Opposition is throwing slurs at us, hoping something will stick when in reality we are working very hard and, I can tell you, good ideas come from everywhere. I will give you another example. I actually had one of your own members say to me in the beginning, You should go look at Regent Park - something that you guys knew very well about and we are actually enabling that. You might have missed that in our announcement on the 222-unit, unprecedented, first-in-a-generation public housing bill which we are doing. Another good idea.

Part of that announcement was to duplicate what Regent Park did. I said to my staff when we started to look at doing that, That's a lot of work for all of you, you know that. We want to do that, they said. We have a chance and I don't know if you know what that is, but others . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

DFA: ILLEGAL LOBSTER FISHERY - AGREE

RONNIE LEBLANC: We continue to see thousand and thousands of pounds of lobster being landed illegally every day caught out of season in what is a well-recognized lobster spawning area. Yes or no: Does the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture agree that there is an illegal commercial lobster fishery taking place in St. Marys Bay as we speak?

HON. KENT SMITH: Yes, we have heard from industry that there is an increase in potential illegal activity taking place in that neck of the woods. We have encouraged the folks who are seeing this illegal activity to report it to the proper authorities. We hope that the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will take this seriously, because there are a couple different avenues that the feds can be helpful with to remediate this problem.

RONNIE LEBLANC: In addition to immediately increasing the fine for the purchase of illegal lobster to \$1 million and reinstating a zero-tolerance policy on lobster buyers - where buyers lose their licence if they purchase illegal lobsters, as was the case

under the previous government - will the minister commit today to work with the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables to significantly increase enforcement resources on the ground to ensure the effectiveness of these policies?

KENT SMITH: We've already had communication between departments on increasing conservation efforts with increased patrols on the ground. That is already taking place.

With respect to the increase in fines, that is going to require legislation. I look forward to proposing that as soon as it is ready and appropriate to table before the Legislature.

I appreciate the member bringing forward these important concerns that are potentially detrimental to what is our largest industry in the province. Roughly \$2.6 billion of seafood is exported from this province every year, and 39 per cent of our exports are seafood. We recognize how important this industry is and we're going to do everything we can to protect it.

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

FTB: DEED TRANSFER TAX LOOPHOLE - ADDRESS

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. Our caucus has been made aware of an unfortunate side effect of the government's recent out-of-province deed transfer tax: For young people to purchase their first home, they often need a family member to co-sign the mortgage. For young people who want to move home to Nova Scotia but whose parents happen to live out of province, this is creating an expensive problem. Will the minister commit to closing the loophole and making sure all Nova Scotians are able to come home?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Under the legislation, there is discretion for the minister to look at specific situations. While I won't comment on that specific situation - because all the details can't be provided in the short time during Question Period - there's certainly an ability to look at these kinds of situations. We try to ensure, as long as the individual is following the spirit of the intent of that legislation, that people who are following it are not hurt by the legislation.

LISA LACHANCE: For some young people trying to buy their first home, this extra tax on top of rising interest rates means they can't buy their first home. This isn't about taxing wealthy out-of-province residents. It's preventing young people from coming home. I appreciate the minister explaining that there is some discretion within the legislation, but will the minister stand and commit to fixing the issue?

ALLAN MACMASTER: I would ask the member to raise the issue with the department. We will certainly look at it and see what we can do to help.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

DHW: HOME LOSS IMPACT - AGREE

HON. KELLY REGAN: I was recently contacted by a constituent. They lost their housing and have been unable to secure replacement housing within their budget. This sent them into a tailspin that had some severe consequences. You see, the person is on income assistance due to severe health issues. They missed some health appointments because of the severe anxiety this housing issue caused them. Because they missed appointments, they've been removed from the transplant list. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Does the minister agree that losing your home when you're already sick can have devastating consequences - life-altering ones?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I certainly am not aware of that individual. If the member would like to speak to me afterward in terms of the health issues that person is facing, I'd be happy to hear her out.

KELLY REGAN: I think I share the Health and Wellness Minister's concern. I am deeply concerned about this person. They are not expected to survive past next Summer if they don't get a transplant, but they're not on the list now, due to something outside of their control. I just want to let the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing know, we've been on Happipad, and \$1,200 a month for a bed on a floor in a bedroom is not adequate. This person is a parent, and they had to give up custody of their child because of this situation, because they don't have a safe place to live. My question is to the Minister of Community Services and the Minister Responsible for Homelessness: Will he work with my constituent to ensure they find safe, affordable housing so they can once again have their child returned to their custody and get back on the transplant list?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Certainly, when a situation arises with an individual like this, it's very concerning. Obviously, the Minister of Health and Wellness has expressed her concern and is willing to work with you and the individual. I express the same. Let's have a conversation and see what supports we can offer that individual, absolutely.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

DHW: VALLEY REGIONAL HOSPITAL EXPANSION - COMMIT

HON. KEITH IRVING: In recent months, I found myself getting an inside view of our health care system and its capacity limitations. I wasn't expecting to get this insight, and I wish it had been under different circumstances, but over five days I watched how treatment space is at Valley Regional Hospital. For example, our meeting with an emergency doctor on Mother's Day was in a space so small, it was difficult to close the door behind us. It seemed like an old file room.

At 1:30 a.m., our meeting to discuss test results and a life-changing preliminary diagnosis occurred in a hallway chair beside a sleeping patient, also in a chair. What about clients' rights to privacy? It's evident that, with the reduction in services in other Valley hospitals, our regional hospital is bursting at the seams. Can the minister inform the citizens of the Valley if there are plans in place to expand Valley Regional Hospital?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister for Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I want to thank the member for the question, and I want to acknowledge that it's been a difficult time. What I will say is that one of the major issues that we are facing in the health care system is the increased demand and the lack of capacity. It is an issue of beds, it is an issue of people, and we're working very, very hard to expand services where we can.

There are a number of things that are under way right now. Looking at services that are currently offered in hospitals - where can we put them in communities when they don't need to be in a hospital, to expand space, to let clinicians and patients have more access to private spaces? We're also looking at, where possible, where redevelopments can happen. I want to assure the member that we know that there is a capacity issue. It's certainly high on the radar of Nova Scotia Health, and we will be looking into it.

KEITH IRVING: Thank you, Minister. In addition to the strained capacity, we are losing services at our regional hospital. Last year we lost vascular surgery. Recently we lost an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, who, after providing service to Valley residents for 30 years, has had his just two days of surgery per month revoked, and he now has to travel to an operating room across the province. Our children's oral surgery dentist has lost OR privileges. The hospital chapel, which I have spoken about here, has been relocated to a small, bare room that I visited and took a picture of, which I will table, and it's unsuitable to the needs of Valley residents.

Minister, it would appear from these developments that rural health care services and investments are decreasing at the expense of the increased attention to building urban health care facilities. Will the Minister initiate a planning process and funding for an expansion of Valley Regional Hospital?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I want to thank the member for the question and the opportunity to talk about the reallocation of services. Certainly, we are looking at the capacity and the ability for us to create centres of excellence throughout the zones.

When there is an opportunity to utilize OR capacity, as the example that the member gave, for low-acuity surgeries, we are doing that to allow that those bigger surgeries that require more resources - like anaesthetists, like recovery room care - can have that. We are looking at a reallocation in order to maximize all of the assets in each of the zones. There will continue to be some changes. We can't leave any stone unturned. Certainly the under-investment in health care for a long period of time - particularly under the former government - has resulted in the capacity issues we're facing today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DHW: ER TRIAGE - IMPROVE

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, we've all seen the ad on television - the More Healthcare, Faster ad - and it's telling Nova Scotians that things are getting better. For me and for many others, this is just an illusion of action. This is not reality. Every metric has gotten worse under this government.

I am going to speak from my specific example on ER wait times: showing up in the ER with stroke symptoms, slurred speech, heavy right side, can't write. Called 811 and advised to get to the ER. They are sending everything there. Blood pressure on arrival is 250 over 135 - and I wait seven hours to be seen.

My question to the minister is: Is this an example of better health care faster? What is being done to improve triage in our ER departments?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I want to thank the member for the question. I certainly had the opportunity to read in the paper about the experience the member had. I am glad to see you here, and I'm glad that you appear to be recovering well.

I will say that there certainly have been some emergency enhancements that we have invested in over the last number of months. We look at off-load teams. We're looking at increasing capacity. We have patient advocates and patient care providers in the waiting rooms. There are a number of things that are happening.

The issue around the backlogs that we've seen is a lack of investment. When we look at why the emergency room is backing up, we have to look at the things that are happening in long-term care. We've been under-bedded there for years. There are no in-patient beds as a result of that lack of capacity.

FRED TILLEY: I thank the minister for her concern about my health. Things are moving better for me. I'm sure that the first time the government heard about my situation was not in the paper because I did receive some messages from that side. A simple reach-out to someone who is a co-worker to help, who has been through the system, would have been nice to see.

[10:30 a.m.]

Anyway, my inbox is inundated with similar stories, and I am not an anomaly: waiting seven hours in an ER without being rechecked, without talking to anyone, without anyone coming in, not seeing or talking to anyone until I get to the back room where care was great.

The patient advocate - if you want a glass of water or a blanket - wonderful thing. However, the name "advocate" is another illusion of action. Do we believe that this is better health care faster? No. What is being done in the ERs to improve access?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, I'm glad to hear that members of our caucus reached out. My role as the Minister of Health and Wellness is to ensure that everybody has access to health care, not just the people in this Chamber.

I want to make it very clear that we are working very hard on behalf of all people in Nova Scotia. There have been a number of things that have been invested in in the emergency rooms, in primary health care. We have 50,000 more appointments per month for primary health care access in this province.

I can look to my colleague in the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care to look at the capacity, and the work that she and her team have been developing in order to make more occupancy so that people are not waiting in emergency rooms. We have invested in a number of clinicians. We've started a physician assistant program in order to extend our physician hours. There are hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars being invested in health care.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: ER CONDITIONS - IMPROVE

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Health and Wellness. This week alone, there have been announcements for emergency room closures at Fishermen's Memorial Hospital, North Cumberland Memorial Hospital, All Saints Springhill Hospital, Queen's General Hospital, Eastern Memorial Hospital, Digby General Hospital, Glace Bay Hospital, and Strait Richmond Hospital. Does the minister find it acceptable that Nova Scotians in these communities are regularly left without an open emergency room in their area?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I will say, as I said a few minutes earlier, the biggest challenges that we're facing are our capacity in terms of beds, but also in terms of our health care workforce. We know particularly that there is a nursing shortage across this province. We have been working very, very hard. We have increased the number of seats. We're working with the College of Registered Nurses to bring in internationally educated nurses. We're doing a very intentional program in order to train and bring nurses into our health care system so that they're able to care for communities. We're looking and working with people in the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration to ensure that internationally educated nurses are settled and transitioned to communities in a very meaningful way. It is going to take time, but certainly we have seen an incredible amount of action and investment in health care since we've formed government.

SUSAN LEBLANC: ER closures cause crowding and long waits at regional hospitals as people travel further for care and cause massive stress and delays on paramedics. A FOIPOP filed by our caucus shows that the number of people leaving ERs without being seen continues to go up and up. It has increased again by 24 per cent this year. I can table that. This government promised to fix health care, but to the Nova Scotians facing emergency room closures and lengthy wait times, this just isn't the case. Yes, it takes time, but Nova Scotians can't wait any longer. When will the conditions in emergency rooms improve?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Things are improving. I would draw attention to the Patient Access to Care Act, and the work that's done with the college: 18,000 nurses have applied to come and live in Nova Scotia - a bill, I might add, that the NDP voted against when they were on the floor of this House. Here we are - we have just settled a new contract with nurses, and we have just settled a new contract with physicians. We are becoming a destination for health care workers around the world, as evidenced by the number of people who are coming here.

They don't want to look at the things that are going well. I can assure you that we are investing. We are working our tails off to make sure that Nova Scotians have the health care they need and deserve, which was never a priority under the two previous governments.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DHW: TESTING IN HOSPITALS - IMPROVE

FRED TILLEY: Certainly, the implication that I expected preferential treatment as being a member is not the case. As a matter of fact, I specifically didn't tell anybody who I was - what I was looking for. I was not advocating specifically. I'm here and I'm asking these questions because I want to make things better for all Nova Scotians.

When the ER doctor noticed that my O₂ was down, noticed I was sleeping, they automatically ordered a respiratory test, a sleep test. I was in the hospital for two weeks - didn't get the test. Another gentleman I spoke to was in a month before he got the test. Treatment could be started much quicker.

My question is: What are we doing to improve access to testing within hospital?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, we do look at, through a triage system, how and when people receive tests during their admission process. I have to depend on the clinicians who are looking after people in there to understand what the capacity is. Some folks can actually be transitioned home before they have a sleep apnea test or a breathing test, which the member is referring to. There is capacity within the system. Also, we're building capacity within the community as well, so that when people can be discharged sooner and have those treatments or tests done in community, those are offered there as well.

FRED TILLEY: A patient who has a stroke - sleep apnea is a major cause of stroke. It's one of the risk factors. I was told in the hospital that their access to testing units and access to personnel causes the delays.

Another example: As part of my treatment outside of the hospital, it has been noticed that I have a central apnea, and another test has been ordered for me. A polysomnography test has been ordered, which is an in-person sleep study. I'm told there's a two-year wait-list.

Is this an example of more health care faster? This video that we have is simply an illusion of action.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, the investments that we have made in the last couple of years are expanding capacity within our system. These things take time. There was a lot of deferred maintenance, and I absolutely can look into that service. I don't have those statistics off the top of my head, but this is what happens when you don't invest in the health care system in generations and generations, and then you expect within two years the entire system to be . . . (Interruptions)

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

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I certainly would have appreciated a number of investments over the last number of years that I worked in health care under the former government when there were none. It was constantly reducing and pushing money from one area to the other. I'm very proud of the transformational budgets we've delivered for Nova Scotians, and the transformational health care that we're bringing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

DHW: HEALTH CARE STAFF - SUPPORT

CARMAN KERR: Soldiers Memorial Hospital in Middleton has been a leading cataract centre for 20 years, yet like other health care services in Annapolis, it's under threat as well by this government.

This coming December, the GP anaesthesiologist and the only doctor assisting these surgeries is retiring. This government has known about this pending retirement for years, but instead of supporting these health care professionals, they've been told the plan is to eliminate anaesthesia support for cataract surgery at Soldiers. The plan is for ophthalmologists and nurses to use oral sedation only for surgeries and hope for the best.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: What steps is she taking to ensure these surgeons and staff are supported and able to continue to offer cataract surgery in Middleton?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I do want to talk a little bit about that. We are very invested in the ophthalmology service that's happening in Western Zone and in Soldiers Memorial. We do see that as an area where we can actually increase the number of cataract surgeries that are happening there.

Through the changes that the member has highlighted, there are complex cases that need IV sedation, but not all cases need IV sedation. As a result, best practice is now that oral sedation can be offered. As a result of that, there are more cataract surgeries being done in this province in the last number of years, and three of the four zones have actually exceeded targets for cataract wait times. We're working very closely with the staff in Western Zone to make sure we can meet and exceed those wait times as well.

We're also investing in terms of the replacement and increasing ophthalmology support in Western Zone.

CARMAN KERR: What I'm hearing is the opposite from those professionals on the ground - that this move will add to the wait-lists at other hospitals and take away from this site. The minister's senior staff has met with these health care professionals recently, and they were told that if they require more sedation, feel free to push more IV drugs without any medical support close by. This is absolutely unacceptable at this site. It may work at a regional hospital, but not at this community hospital.

Physicians and RNs, including those with prior ICU experience, are not comfortable with this. The government vastly underestimates the percentage of patients who can be done safely under oral sedation only at this site. Will the minister ensure that

these physicians and health care staff will receive anaesthesia support, or is the plan to cancel all surgeries at Middleton and remove another service from Annapolis?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I said in the previous answer, we're actually looking at investing in cataract surgery ophthalmology services in Western Zone. We will continue to work with the clinicians. Our intention and hope is that we'll be able to add more. We will work with conscious sedation. While it does have some complications, it is within the purview of physicians and nurses to be able to manage people who have conscious sedation.

We're going to continue to look at how we improve this vision-saving care. We're going to work with the clinicians around best practices. We're going to work with the hospital - make sure that we increase the number of folks that we get at Western Zone up to baseline and exceeding it, as we have in other zones.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DHW: CUMBERLAND CO. HEALTH CARE - IMPROVE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Earlier today in Question Period, we on this side heard the Premier say, "We can't be bothered by the noise, Speaker." It's upsetting as a duly elected representative to hear the Premier speak to us in opposition that way. We do live in a parliamentary democracy here in Nova Scotia and in Canada. Each one of us in this Chamber was elected to bring the voices of the people whom we represent, and to also in opposition bring accountability, and try to bring transparency. My question to the Premier is: Will he respect every MLA in this Chamber and agree to hear the voices of the people that I represent and improve health care in the areas of Cumberland, bring more paramedics, pharmacy clinics, and physicians.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Of course, we want to hear from our colleagues across the floor; we want to hear from Nova Scotians as well. That's why the health leadership team and I travelled to 22 communities across this province to hear directly from communities about what they felt their health care was in their area.

We started by listening to health care workers across this province. I hear regularly from my colleagues, not only in my own caucus but from across the floor. We hear regularly from associations. We have the Premier's summit, where we hear regularly from colleges and unions and associations.

We are a government that listens to every Nova Scotian. We are working very hard to improve services in every corner of this province in terms of health care, and we will continue to do that.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I wish it were that way. It is not that way. The current culture in health care is people are scared to speak up. People reach out to me daily - whether it's nurses, doctors, paramedics or other health care professionals - and the culture in the Nova Scotia Health Authority is very unhealthy and very toxic.

[10:45 a.m.]

They are scared to speak up and speak the truth because they're afraid of being reprimanded. That type of culture is misogynistic, and it starts at the top. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: When can the people of Cumberland County expect to receive improved health care? Just last night there was a medical emergency in Springhill, and the closest ambulance was in New Glasgow, two hours away.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As the Minister of Health and Wellness, I'm assuming that that comment is directed at me, that things start at the top. Certainly, I want a very inclusive environment in health care. I've been a registered nurse, and a woman, in health care for a period of time. I have been fortunate to find this leadership position. I depend heavily on the health leadership team, three out of four of whom identify as female.

I feel that we're working very hard with health care workers. There's union representation; there are associations; there are colleges where people give us feedback all of the time. We are touring hospitals; we are touring communities; I get regular emails from health care workers. I hear a number of things. We work very, very hard with health care workers across this province to ensure that they're heard, they're respected, and they're valued.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS - RECOGNIZE

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Earlier this year, the minister said that the annual rates of violent incidents in schools were relatively stable. But a FOIPOP obtained by the NDP caucus shows that these incidents have increased by 25 per cent this year alone. Will the minister step up and protect children and teachers in schools, or will she continue to deny that we have a problem at all?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Schools need to be safe spaces. We know that students deserve, and we want to deliver on, ensuring that our schools are safe spaces for our students. Our educators and our administrators and our staff work hard every day to make that the case.

Speaker, the member opposite has asked questions about statistics relating to violence, and those statistics represent a variety of incidents that happened. They are reporting incidents that occurred from pre-Primary all the way to Grade 12.

With respect to the specific question about rates of incidents, I can say, in fact, rates of incidents have remained stable. Perhaps, though, the member opposite didn't recognize that during COVID-19, people were not in schools as frequently and we've had an increase of students in school.

SUZY HANSEN: Teachers have been ringing alarms for years about this growing problem. We need to create a provincial strategy to address school violence. When will the minister start listening to teachers and release a plan to address this school violence?

BECKY DRUHAN: Let me be very clear: Although the rates of incidents have remained stable over the last number of years, safety is something that we need to, and do, work on all the time to continuously improve, because it is not acceptable to have . . . (Interruption)

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

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, earlier in Question Period, in response to a question that I posed to the Premier, he used the term "partisan hack shots" to describe the question that came from me. I would suggest that that language is unparliamentary and ask the Premier to please retract it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Speaker, I'll retract the statement and replace it with "silliness."

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, pursuant to Rule 5C, I move that the time for adjournment of the House today be not 1:00 p.m. but 5:00 p.m. I also move that hours for the House on Tuesday, October 24th be 1:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: There is a request to have the hours extended today until 5:00 p.m. and . . . (Interruption)

Order, order. It has been requested - a motion has been put forward - to extend the hours today until 5:00 p.m., as well as next Tuesday with hours to be from 1:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.

There is a motion. All those in favour? (Interruption)

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

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[10:52 a.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. There has been a request for a recorded vote. The bells rang, and I assume the Whips are now satisfied.

The Clerk will now conduct a recorded vote.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[11:52 a.m.]

YEAS

Hon. Brad Johns
Hon. Tory Rushton
Hon. Barbara Adams
Hon. Kim Masland
Hon. Allan MacMaster
Hon. Twila Grosse
Hon. Michelle Thompson
Hon. John Lohr
Hon. Trevor Boudreau
Hon. Timothy Halman
Hon. Kent Smith
Dave Ritcey
Hon. Brian Wong
Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek
Hon. Brian Comer
Hon. Colton LeBlanc
Hon. Jill Balser
Hon. Pat Dunn
Hon. Greg Morrow
Hon. Becky Druhan
Larry Harrison
John White
John A. MacDonald

NAYS

Hon. Patricia Arab
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Zach Churchill
Hon. Iain Rankin
Susan Leblanc
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Lisa Lachance
Rafah DiCostanzo
Lorelei Nicoll
Hon. Ben Jessome
Ali Duale
Carman Kerr
Ronnie LeBlanc
Fred Tilley
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin

Hon. Keith Bain
Chris Palmer
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Danielle Barkhouse
Tom Taggart
Nolan Young
Hon. Steve Craig

THE CLERK: For, 30. Against, 16.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PRIVATE AND LOCAL BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 348, the Lunenburg Common Lands Act (amended).

Bill No. 348 - Lunenburg Common Lands Act (amended).

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I move second reading of Bill No. 348, An Act to Amend Chapter 72 of the Acts of 1897, the Lunenburg Common Lands Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I move to close second reading of Bill No. 348.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 348.

There has been a request for a recorded vote.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[11:57 a.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The Clerk will now conduct a recorded vote.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[12:57 p.m.]

YEAS

NAYS

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

Hon. Iain Rankin
Susan Leblanc
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Lisa Lachance
Lorelei Nicoll
Hon. Ben Jessome
Ali Duale
Carman Kerr
Ronnie LeBlanc
Fred Tilley
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin

[1:00 p.m.]

THE CLERK: The results of the recorded vote are as follows: Yays, 47. Nays, 0.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

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

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Private and Local Bills.

The honourable Deputy House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, would you please call Public Bills for Second Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

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

JOHN WHITE: Would you please call Bill No. 340, the Municipal Reform (2023) Act.

Bill No. 340 - An Act Respecting Municipal Contributions and Grants, the Municipal Reform (2023) Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 340, the Municipal Reform Act. We will now continue.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic, who has a remaining 11.5 minutes.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I don't know if I can fill that much time, but I will do my best, because this is important.

Where was I last night? I drove home. I thought about this bill during the entire drive home. I was up late last night thinking about this. In fact, I probably woke up four or five times during the night, took notes. I had thoughts on this bill, and said, "What will be the true impact?" I will table my thoughts, if you want. It might be unparliamentary, but I'll table them.

What I would say is that we need more bills that are collaborative, and Bill No. 340 is not collaborative. If you don't believe me - if you think I'm being partisan, and just being confrontational and trying to hold things up - I would challenge anyone. We just had an hour of ringing the bells there on a very important bill, and during that time, and earlier, the CBRM had a press conference. They talked about why this bill needs to be put on pause.

From my understanding, they didn't say to stop. They didn't say not to move forward. They didn't say "Destroy the bill." It was about, hey, we are partners. If we want to have the best possible Nova Scotia, our municipalities have to work collaboratively with our Province. Part of that is these types of bills, and that type of response.

We do know - I mean, let's be certain here - that when the Law Amendments Committee is called, there will be a lot of people from the CBRM there.

I talked last night about the members on all sides who live on the Island, who live in the CBRM, who live around the CBRM. I ask them this weekend to get together as a group - NDP, PC, Liberal. Get together, meet with your colleagues in the CBRM, and have that discussion on why and what and how to make this the best possible bill it can be. I suspect that's not going to happen.

What I will say is that there's an opportunity. If you won't go to them, they're going to come to you. Law Amendments Committee - I would challenge the members for Inverness and other areas of Cape Breton to sit on the Law Amendments Committee and to hear directly from the individuals. There are some members who can sit on there. The member for Glace Bay-Dominion. The member for Victoria-The Lakes. The member for Inverness - beautiful Inverness. Cape Breton East. Of course, Richmond. I would say Antigonish. There are lots of members who are in, around, and part of - and really depend on - some of that economic impact from CBRM and the Island as a whole.

If you think this is just about CBRM, I've got something to tell you. What we heard today in that press conference was jarring. Sixteen municipalities are going to be negatively impacted by this bill. For those of you who don't live in CBRM, I have a sneaking suspicion you're going to hear from your councillors, your wardens, and your mayors.

I go back to theme. Public Accounts Committee - we had Mayor Mitchell show up to speak on housing and issues facing municipalities. I got to know Mayor Mitchell quite a bit over the years. I have a lot of respect for him - and anyone, no matter where they are, if they put their name in for public service. It's not an easy job. It's even more difficult having to speak out against stakeholders and other levels of government, and he did. He put them down. He didn't insult them.

What he said was to just listen. These are huge issues: housing, infrastructure, climate change, the Coastal Protection Act - all these different things that are impacting the province as a whole, but really, it's impacting our individual communities. What he said was, Where is our voice? Where is our voice in this? You can't download things onto us. You can't say you're going to do things to our municipalities, to our towns, and to our communities without consultation.

One of the things he spoke about was housing. He said, We all need housing, but there's an infrastructure piece to that too - water and sewer, sidewalks, schools, and hospitals. All these things are impacted, and we need to be able to be part of that conversation so these things are built properly, they're built quickly, and they're built in the right area, and so everybody's aware of the issues that come along with it.

I'll use my own community as an example. We have a water and sewer treatment plant in Herring Cove that was put there probably 30 years ago. When I speak to individuals within the Halifax Water Commission, the municipality, and different stakeholders, we know these systems have a capacity. We know these plants have a capacity. They're extremely expensive to build. They're extremely expensive to upgrade and maintain, but they have a capacity. What's happening, and what happens when we don't get the proper input, is that we do things that push this infrastructure past its capacity. Then we run into much larger problems: We don't have the water, we don't have the sewer, we don't have the schools, we don't have the hospitals - we don't have all these different things we need.

There's an easy way to prevent that issue, and that's just to talk and listen, right? I've been on that side of the aisle - and it didn't matter what bill, it didn't matter who we spoke to, it didn't matter how long we let the Law Amendments Committee run for - what we heard over and over and over from the Opposition, now the government, was that we didn't consult enough. That's what they kept saying to us.

We had Law Amendments Committee run for two, three, four days sometimes, for hours and hours. I will tell you another thing about the Law Amendments Committee. For the longest period of time, there was no time frame on how long a witness could speak. In effect, Opposition members - now government members - filibustered the Law Amendments Committee. They filibustered so that witnesses couldn't speak or that the witnesses would get more time. There were all kinds of different reasons.

Now what we are seeing is a government that says, We don't need to hear from you - we're good. We are going to move forward. We are going to do what we need to do, and the collateral damage you can deal with. The reason I use that expression is one of the things that was said about Bill No. 340, in particular to CBRM, is if you have a problem, raise taxes - raise taxes on the people of CBRM, the most heavily taxed municipality in Nova Scotia, which is the most heavily taxed province in Canada, which is one of the most heavily taxed jurisdictions in the world. Let's raise taxes.

[1:15 p.m.]

So they raise taxes. Let's say they have a shortage of police officers, men and women, and police officers. Let's say they have a shortage of health care professionals, they have a shortage of snowplow drivers, they have a shortage of any of these critical services, and they have to raise taxes. I will guarantee you, no one on that side of the aisle will stand up and say, We did that. That was our bill, and that was the consequences of our bill. No one will.

That's the problem here. I think a former member used to call these things a shell game. It's what it is. It's just passing the buck back and forth, and using Nova Scotians' bank accounts, and abilities to provide for their families, as a piggybank to build whatever they want to build, to do whatever they want to do without any type of input from the people they were elected to represent.

We're not asking you to stop. We're asking you - in your own words when we were in government - to pause, reflect, and review.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I just wanted to rise and speak for a few minutes on some of the concerns, and perhaps some options, for moving forward that could be more positive. I just want to say in advance that I am going to reference some documents that I have sent to be printed, so I will table them when they're available.

I've spent quite a bit of time in the last couple of sessions talking about the evolution of public governance and public sector management in Canada, and why we establish structures for accountability and transparency. I'm actually not going to travel back over a lot of that ground yet this session, but probably next week. I really think this is one area where the lack of co-operation and collaboration is really a glaring oversight, and it is really problematic.

I think the bill before us actually doesn't do anything other than damage relationships. It doesn't actually enable this province and its municipalities to move forward. The relationship is complicated, but it's also critical.

We're at a time with growing population, and that population growth is not just limited, thank goodness, to HRM and CBRM. We have municipalities like Kings County experiencing rapid growth and, of course, they need support to keep up with infrastructure, and be able to really harness the growth that's coming to them. Because the relationship is critical and complicated, I think a bill that doesn't do much other than create harm is not really worth the paper it's printed on.

New Brunswick went a different way. In 2021, New Brunswick published a white paper on municipal government. First of all, I'm going to talk about and share with you the title, because it's particularly instructive, I think: *Working together for vibrant and sustainable communities*.

From the get-go, there was this willingness to step back and look at the structures that exist, and whether they were holding up for the challenges of today. Similarly, as I understand it, we haven't really had the chance to look at municipal governance and structure since 1995 in this province. Again, I would suggest that the time is probably right to look at new ideas and new considerations, but this is a case where process is really important.

They published a white paper that looks at issues around local governance structure, regional collaboration, land use planning, and the financing of local governance. That was developed through the Local Governance Commission Act. New Brunswick actually established a third-party organization that would look at the current challenges of governance for the white paper but also going forward.

As opposed to the movement of this government towards the centralization of control into ministers' offices - in fact, this commission that was created also works with all sorts of other planning and appeal boards, the Commissioner of Municipal Affairs, and local government councils. In fact, they recognized this complex, complicated relationship by building a government structure that supports decision-making and discussions rather than limits them.

I thought I would quickly read through some of the things that are happening from the white paper, in terms of the path forward. These are publicly available accountability measures. You can read through Pillar 1: Local Governance Structure. This was - specific to the New Brunswick context, which makes a lot of sense - restructuring local governance entities, which was noted as completed.

Strengthen local representation by creating rural districts, and moving from 236 local service districts to 12 rural districts. I'm not an expert in municipal governance, so I don't know all the background information and the rationale that went into that, but this was a process that involved hundreds and hundreds of meetings and consultations as well as the service of a third-party organization that was able to look at these issues.

Define the responsibility for roads: completed. Determine the name and type of new local governments and rural districts: completed. Enhance asset management planning: under way. Establish an independent municipal commission - 2024 - and annual reports on viability starting in 2024.

Pillar 2, which is Regional Collaboration, is about expanding the role and mandate of the regional service commissions. Enhancing leadership capacity by expanding executive teams. Developing regional strategies and establishing standards and performance measures. That's a range of things that are complete, under way, and due to be completed in 2024.

Similarly, for land use planning, there's also a similar level of transparency and accountability, as well as Pillar 4, which is a whole section around financing local government. We know that we're really facing critical issues. We want our current municipalities to strengthen, and be able to respond to the challenges and priorities of today and we want to also support other parts of the province that are growing. As has been noted, we are in a newly enviable position of having a growing population.

I think we've heard from folks at Kings County that this bill doesn't do anything, that the process has been harmful. We have a really great example next door of a process that was undertaken that would offer us the chance to modernize our governance within the province, and really position us well for our future. With that, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I just want to get up for a few minutes and talk in support of my colleagues from Cape Breton and the residents of Cape Breton as well. I've had a chance to go to Cape Breton a couple of times with my colleagues the members for Northside-Westmount and Sydney-Membertou. It is a beautiful place, and the last time we were there we had a chance to meet with the CBRM council. As a former councillor myself, I always enjoy having that opportunity to speak with councillors to get their views.

I will agree that it is time to look at the service exchange agreement and the MOU, and there's some work that has to be done there. Things have changed a lot since the last time it was done. The role of councillors is to advocate for their communities, and I can say they do that very well. When I was sitting in that room with CBRM, I think they actually made a really strong argument. I feel I went into that meeting with an open mind, and the argument they're making - that they deserve a deal, maybe a charter for the CBRM - made sense. It is a compelling case.

You look at the population levels and the size. It's hard to compare the CBRM. We've been talking a lot about Truro, 10,000 residents, but there a lot of other municipalities that are much smaller than that, in the thousands. For me, the argument

they're making is a reasonable one. In my opinion, I think they should be separated from this agreement, and should have the right to have their own charter.

Municipal councils are forced to deal with a lot of different issues. Sometimes they're not always municipal responsibilities, but the position they're in is that they're the level of government closest to the people, so it is very easy for residents and organizations to reach them. This MOU - there are some good things in it around surplus schools and issues such as that, which affect municipalities financially. If you look at the last 20 years - I was elected in 2000, and I remember when I first got on council. The responsibilities, I feel, were a lot less. The financial demands were not as big, and the expectations on municipalities, to be honest, are far from the level of expectations we see today.

The MOU, the service exchange agreement, is necessary - and I'll say that again - but what's happening now through cost of infrastructure, demands from residents, limited ability to raise money through taxation - I mean, a lot of the property taxes are a regressive tax because it doesn't take into account how much income you make. Basically it is based on assessment. If you have your own home and your income is fairly low, you are paying more as a percentage of income for your property taxes.

The service exchange agreement with the MOU has to really come in and take a look at those things. For the CBRM, when you take a municipality of 100,000 people, the stresses on that unit are certainly different, say, than the stresses on the municipality of Clare. I think they mentioned yesterday that it's the second-largest police force in Atlantic Canada, if I heard that correctly, full public transit for the entire region. Those are extremely costly and the public expects it. The CBRM could be looked at separately through a charter.

I think one thing that kind of frustrated me or at least stuck with me through the meeting was I guess the councillors feeling disrespect or a lack of relationship-building. I think almost every councillor had something to say.

There have always been the questions of levels of government and that municipalities are creations of the Province, but I'd say that municipalities have a huge impact on communities and the residents and I think they deserve to be treated with a certain amount of respect when it comes to the services they provide.

It is a bad relationship and from my experience when all levels of government work together - municipalities, provincial governments, federal government - there are good things that happen. It's when that communication breaks down that it becomes extremely difficult to get anything done. Often what happens, because municipalities do depend on the provincial and federal governments for funding, it becomes a challenge for a lot of municipalities, and I'm sure the CBRM is no different. When you're trying to meet the needs of residents, be it housing or health care, which I'd argue are provincial responsibilities, residents still expect municipalities to play a role there, show some

leadership. But in the end, it does cost a lot of money and they have to have that open dialogue with the Province. I think that has to be the priority here: It's build relationships and be clear in your communication.

As a municipal councillor, I've seen the pressures put on municipalities, especially financial pressures, over 20 years. I know that in Clare we've invested in a health centre. We've invested in rural internet, which some would argue is not really the municipality's role, but what happens is municipalities, councillors, every day they are approached by people who are asking them to show some leadership, work with other levels of government and try to come up with solutions that will solve the problems that essentially they elected us to do.

[1:30 p.m.]

For the CBRM, I see it more than anything else as a relationship-building exercise to try to meet the needs of that community in a way that won't cause too much harm or any financial harm on those residents. If I remember correctly, the CBRM has the highest property tax rate in the province. I have to say it was a bit shocking when they mentioned that some people were paying \$7,000, \$8,000 in property tax. That's essentially a mortgage in some other municipalities. I understand the CBRM wanting to really have those discussions with the government, to try to relieve that pressure.

What's happening more and more, as well, is the Province is downloading its responsibility onto municipalities. I'd argue that municipalities have done a pretty good job, actually, in taking those responsibilities on with the limited financial resources they have to meet those needs.

We are seeing a lot of population influx, and Cape Breton is growing. We see a lot of students coming to Cape Breton University. There's no question that has to have a major impact on the infrastructure and financial resources of the CBRM.

Even in small rural municipalities where you see a smaller number of people moving in, you still have to provide the services, if it's recreation - in our case in Clare - or health. Like I mentioned, we did the internet. And now, one thing I'm noticing more and more - and I'm sure, hopefully the MOU - if CBRM could negotiate independently, and were in a position to receive a Charter, it would give them the ability to look at their unique circumstances, their unique challenges, and try to come up with an agreement that works for them.

I know one issue that most municipalities are struggling with now is cell service. I know in our municipality, and I'm sure it's like that across the province, where groups and business owners are coming into municipal councils and asking council, basically, to come up with a solution for cell service. I think through the MOU, there has to be more partnership and clearer communication on how those issues will be dealt with.

It is very challenging for municipalities. I do think some municipalities will take up the challenge and try to solve the problem, even though it is, I think, a provincial matter that should be dealt with. The majority of the responsibility, I would say, is by the private sector, but the government has to show some strong leadership there.

The other thing I imagine in CBRM is, as more people move there, the infrastructure challenges keep climbing: wastewater, more transit, more police, and more recreational services. We even see when it comes to provincial parks and building new recreational infrastructure, municipalities need more financing, and they need the ability to provide those services.

I'll say again that when you look broadly across the province, there are all sizes of municipalities, roads, towns. There are municipalities of a couple thousand people and others with 10,000. CBRM is the second-largest municipal unit in the province. I do think it's hard to come up with an agreement that everybody will sign on to if you have one unit that's so big compared to all the other smaller ones.

The issues are not the same. In Clare, we don't technically have public transit, so we have a smaller not-for-profit that tries to do door-to-door service. That's something the municipality tries to help with.

When you try to look at it broadly across the province, and try to compare or look at the challenges, there's no question that CBRM faces a lot more challenges, and different challenges than, I would say, a lot of other smaller municipalities.

When we had the chance to visit, which I was very pleased to be invited to by our great member for Northside-Westmount, he was able to bring me around Sydney, and we visited a number of organizations that I have to say are pretty amazing - volunteers who work day in and day out to try to provide services and help the residents who find themselves struggling. From what I can see from the meetings we had, I think CBRM, when it comes to taxation, are at their limit. I mean, really, maybe they are over the limit, but that's where they are now. I think there has to be some communication. There have to be meetings between CBRM and the government to try to come up with an agreement that works for that municipality.

With that, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I rise to speak on Bill No. 340. I have consulted with the elected municipal officials from Cumberland North. They are representing councillors from the Town of Amherst as well as the Municipality of Cumberland. I am waiting to speak in more detail on this bill once I have more robust feedback from the councillors in my area. I will reserve my decision today on how I am

going to vote on this bill until I hear more from them, but I will add some comments from the study of the bill and from the few comments that I have heard back from my area.

It is my understanding that the Mayor of the Municipality of Cumberland, Mayor Murray Scott, as well as Mayor Bolivar-Getson, co-chaired some of the consultations for this bill and we thank them for that. Mayor Murray Scott was a former MLA here in this Legislature and highly respected in our area.

When I first got the notice - along with everyone else here in the House - of the government release on this bill, some of the comments in the release - or some of the points in the release state that this bill removes the requirement under the Corrections Act for municipalities to make an annual contribution towards corrections and yet last evening when I read through the bill in more detail, the bill states that the cost is still being paid to the Province but will be determined by a calculation prescribed in regulations.

It appears as though the municipalities are still paying, but it is not clear in the bill that has been tabled if it will be prescribed in regulations. I am concerned, Speaker. How am I supposed to actually vote on a bill that I am not given the details on? It is hard for me to share an opinion and hard for me to - I've already had one councillor reach out and say, This isn't what we thought was going to be tabled and said - felt that - the word that they used actually, I may not be able to use it. Sorry. They were worried that it wasn't being transparent, the fact that it's not set out in the bill that it is going to be shared in regulations.

If the government would be able to share with us more details of what is going to be in regulations, then we would be able to make a more educated decision on how to vote for this bill. Will it benefit our municipalities or not?

Also in this statement released to us on this bill, it said that this bill will remove "the requirement under the Housing Supply and Services Act for municipalities to pay a portion of the net operating losses for public housing."

Again, it states in this Bill No. 340 that costs are still being paid to the Province from municipalities. It says, "Each municipality shall pay in each fiscal year a contribution towards the net operating losses incurred by the Province to support and provide public housing . . ." and it will be calculated as set out, again, in the regulations.

It does appear, from what I am reading in Bill No. 340, and maybe I am missing something, that the municipalities are, in fact, still paying for housing and are, in fact, still paying for corrections but again, maybe the minister, when he shares his comments, can explain. Maybe there is something that I have missed.

In the press release it also states that Bill No. 340 updates the Municipal Grants Act and moves elements of the Municipal Financial Capacity Grant formula into regulation so

it is more flexible and easier to adapt to the changing needs of municipalities and enables government to implement the new formula agreed to by municipalities.

Again, in regulation, it doesn't give us enough information to be able to vote on this from an educated standpoint. When I read the bill on that section around municipal grants, it says municipal financial capacity grants are to be determined by Governor in Council, so Cabinet will be deciding this, and it says the town foundation grants will be determined by the minister. Even more autocratic decision-making, not democratic. How does our town, how does our municipality know what these grants might actually be? They're being determined by Cabinet and being determined by the minister.

I am curious to know how much consultation did happen. I know that there was a lot of consultation led by the Mayor of Cumberland and Mayor, I believe, of Lunenburg. I'm curious how much consultation the Minister of Municipal Affairs was involved with. Were the 11 villages involved in any consultation? There's been a lot of conversation around this bill around CBRM. How much were they involved in consultation, and was the consultation considered? Were the municipalities genuinely supportive, or did they feel coerced into being supportive?

The reason I ask that question is I was told that NDAs were used in the deliberation and consultation for this bill. It's my understanding that in previous deliberations on this bill, staff were coerced into signing NDAs and were unable to share information with elected officials, despite the public elected officials - they're the ones who are elected by the people to actually make decisions.

I will say, if I - we all have staff as MLAs. I was trying to picture this last night when I was informed by a councillor that staff were coerced into signing NDAs and were forbidden to share the information given to them with the elected councillors. I personalized that, and I thought: If my staff in the MLA office had a meeting with someone pertaining to my MLA work and were coerced into signing an NDA and were not allowed to share the information with me, with my staff, I'd be pretty upset. I'm not sure if it's unethical. It's certainly not right when staff are not allowed . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Just to remind the member to speak to the bill, please.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: What I'm sharing about in this Bill No. 340 is that I was told that the consultation with municipalities for this bill involving staff of councillors of municipalities were coerced into signing NDAs, and the staff were not allowed to share the information, after signing these NDAs, with the actual elected councillors of that area. My comments are, I don't think that is actually good consultation, and certainly I would not appreciate that if it was my staff being asked to sign an NDA, that's for certain.

I think it would be good for this House to have clarification from the minister on that assertion from elected councillors who shared that with me.

[1:45 p.m.]

The Premier, leading up to the last election, including the PC leadership back in 2018, talked a lot about the importance of working collaboratively with our municipal leaders and opening up the MOU and having municipal reform with the Province. I will share an article with the House, and I'm doing this more in support of the spirit of my colleagues here in this House from CBRM.

In this article that was published by *SaltWire*, one of the questions posed to the Premier was: "There are some in the CBRM who are showing interest in the concept of regional autonomy, including a push by Senator Dan Christmas. What is your view about that sentiment?"

The response from the Premier was: "I think what you're seeing is when people are worried that they're not being treated fairly by the government, then they look for other alternatives. I think the underlying issue is people are wondering about the question of fairness and the level of services they're getting and how they're being viewed upon from the government. This is a great province, it's always going to be stronger when we're together and supportive of each other. I would rather focus the discussion on making sure that every area of this province feels welcome, feels like they're part of something, that they want to be part of something."

Next question: "You previously committed to doubling what CBRM receives under equalization as an immediate first step. Do you stand by that? What other steps would you take to address the growing gap that CBRM officials have identified between what it received in equalization and what it pays back to the province in mandated costs?"

The answer from the Premier was - I should give the date. This was from February 12, 2021 - so before the last election. "Yes. I think that feeds into the question of people making sure that they feel treated fairly and the MOU between the province and the municipalities is very old. It's over 20 years old and a lot's changed in the world since then and it's time to modernize that agreement. And there will be lots of moving parts to that discussion around equalization payments to communities, around property taxes, around exchange of services . . . what I've said is as premier I commit to having that discussion, to making that happen . . . and as a show of commitment to that, I would double the equalization payments to the municipalities across the province while that negotiation is happening."

I'll table this article.

What I'm hearing from my colleagues from CBRM is that they're not actually feeling that this work is being collaborative and that they're being listened to. I think, from the Premier's words before the election, that was his intent, so hopefully the minister would be willing to go back to CBRM and listen to the mayor, the council, and the people of CBRM out of respect for their concerns.

There has long been talk of opening the service agreement back up. I do want to table another document. This was a Department of Municipal Affairs and Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities Partnership Framework from 2018-19. A couple quotes from this framework follow:

"The Province of Nova Scotia and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM) are committed to achieving a shared vision of healthy and vibrant communities in Nova Scotia.

"The Province of Nova Scotia and UNSM recognize that joint engagement in government-decision making processes that impact local governments is critically important to success."

They agreed to work on a joint strategic plan that "encourages 'Municipal Modernization.'" I'll table this document as well.

I wanted to table this document just to emphasize the importance of working together with our municipal partners. It's important they feel respected. They have a lot of responsibility, and they are the true grassroots - our municipal governments, including our villages - are true grassroots politicians and elected officials. They deserve our respect, and the respect is shown to them in the legislation that is passed in this Legislature that impacts them.

When I read this bill, there's a lot - basically everything is left into regulations and decisions made by Cabinet, decisions made by the minister - decisions that are not being made democratically here in this Legislature, where the people have an opportunity to have their voices heard. That is the point of parliamentary democracy, of this Legislature. It gives the people of the province - the citizens, the taxpayers - an opportunity to have their voices heard, and that's why they send each one of us here to this Legislature.

As I finish my comments on Bill No. 340 here on second reading - and I look forward to sharing more in Committee of the Whole House, as well as in third reading, once I get more comments back from my councillors in the Town of Amherst as well as the County of Cumberland - my recommendations would be to go back to CBRM and ensure that all of our municipal governments throughout Nova Scotia have a copy of this bill.

When I first reached out to some of my councillors yesterday, the first comment I got back was that they're really happy to see J-class roads in the bill. I said, I don't think

you have a copy of the right bill, because there's nothing about roads in this bill. And they sent back and said, "Oh, there was supposed to be."

I think that there may be room for improvement with consultation and providing the most up-to-date, accurate information with our municipal governments throughout the province. I would encourage more collaboration and co-operation with our municipal partners. I would encourage the government to work with CBRM and actually legislate a Cape Breton Regional Municipality charter. I believe that that is what they want.

I also would love to see more work - collaborative work - with our municipal partners, specifically in housing. It's getting colder. There are too many people - there should not be one person without a warm place to sleep at night, without a roof over their head. In order to make that happen, we need to have a good relationship with our municipal partners. With those few words, I'll take my seat.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: I finally get to talk on this. It's interesting. I know when I first heard of it, they said this bill was to enable legislation. Well, legislation, and creating good policies, and building relationships - it's all done in good faith. As a municipal councillor since 2008, I've heard many things supposedly done in good faith. But I soon came to understand that the different orders of government do a lot of this, which I've now called the real coat of arms. Because the art of deflection - I don't know what it's like in other provinces, but it's alive and well in Nova Scotia.

This is about the Memorandum of Understanding. It says it right in there: Understanding. From what we heard from CBRM when we met with them, and then what we've heard from a municipality like Kings - and Colchester heard similarly - there wasn't an understanding with this bill. Again, it's only to enable legislation, so people have to wonder what exactly that means. And then in good faith and the art of negotiating, when this government came forward and starting infringing on HRM policies, right from the beginning, all municipal units across this province got nervous and did not trust what might be coming down the pipe for each and every one of them.

All municipalities are governed by provincial acts and the policies that come around them. Housing, corrections, education - all great ways to start, but they never were municipal responsibilities. We have no input in the policies that govern those acts, but the money is needed. The only way you're properly going to get an understanding of the municipal units, the three regionals - there's CBRM, Hants West RM, and HRM. There are towns, and there are - the remainder are rural municipalities.

I want to remind everyone the regional municipalities are all counties, so they have large land masses: Hants West County; Cape Breton County - which is kind of unfortunate and confusing because Cape Breton is also an island; the HRM, Halifax County - the

largest land mass and, coincidentally, the largest rural municipality in Nova Scotia. Don't forget that. I've heard it many times at the various NSFMC conferences that I've attended over the 12 years on municipal council - never did I not hear the rurals get up and point the finger at the big, bad, HRM. Walk a mile in each other's shoes. (Interruption)

What are you asking me? It is about the bill. The bill is about the Memorandum of Understanding, and I'm speaking to understanding. (Laughter) I didn't know what you were pointing at because my mic is on. Walk a mile in another person's shoes. You can come here - walk a mile over here.

My next comment was going to be about silos. How are silos formed? By not understanding what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes. In every form of public decision-making, there are the silos - and it continues to plague good decision-making in Nova Scotia. Sadly, that's what we see before us in this bill.

What we're hearing from other people is not - and I'm going to say it - this is good on the minister for bringing this forward. I was looking forward to this since I read it in the mandate letter. It's not always the what you're going to do, it's the how you're going to do it, and this is what we're discussing here today.

Someone once told me - she may have been biased because she was a municipal councillor. When I got elected, she said, municipal councillors make the best MLAs. I guess it's because we need to get out of those silos at the end of the day. That's exactly why I don't say levels of government, I say orders of government, because orders put us all on the same level playing field and, very importantly, it also recognizes our Indigenous government in doing so.

Another catchphrase that many councillors would know - we were often called, and I never liked it: municipalities are children of the province. Then I thought I was coming to the parenthood here at the Province. But now we're just asking the grandparents in the federal government to give us money as well - so now I'm just kind of caught in the middle.

When I came into politics, I didn't come into politics for the politics, because there's politics in everything. I came for the people. My husband asked, What do you want to focus on? As someone who grew up in Richmond County across from a fish plant that I saw go away, and people desperate to live and survive, I moved up here.

I never forgot where I came from. I still feel for the people there, and I feel for the people everywhere across this province. I said last week, Please focus on the other municipal units. They need your help, and here's your chance to give them the help they need with this Memorandum of Understanding - in good faith. Trust the process.

As I stand here, it's extremely difficult for me to trust the process. Since I got elected, I was called into a few briefings. One on Bill No. 225, the HRM noise bylaw, and

then this one for Bill. No. 340 on municipal reform. I was told in the briefing that this is what it's for - it's just for the noise bylaw. I found out later, not necessarily.

[2:00 p.m.]

I was told in the briefing for this bill that everybody's happy, except for HRM. We've got to do that one differently, because it's the Charter. Then, apparently, it's not. HRM is upset that they were included as being in agreement with it. How did that make me feel? What's the briefing process for? To give me a deal of goods that may not be correct?

Like I said, it's due time that it's done. It's been 30 years since the MOU was created. Everything was going well, so much so, but then the pandemic hit. Then, to my colleague from Clare who mentioned the budgetary pressures, yes, by all means. The budgetary pressures carried so much that many of the smaller municipalities, and the larger ones, are still trying to get their heads above water.

But to create a committee, having private meetings - was it six months, I believe, they said that they met for? It sounds like a long time, but when you're really trying to make up all the lost time of the 30 years that the conversation needed to be had, six months is not going to do it. The NDA process, we saw that the lack of transparency - even though the task force process, again - is not the way that you do things in good faith.

The Charter - I have the letter here from the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities who, when the bill was tabled, said it was pretty good. So I understand the towns are good. But the recommendation from them says the recommendation that "NSFM write a letter to the Province accepting the Province's proposal for capacity grant, housing, corrections, obsolete schools, and infrastructure, and further, that CBRM be dealt with separately from other municipalities, with no impact on the proposed MOU agreement."

It goes on further: "With respect to roads, the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities accepts Part A, recommends that Part B be placed on Schedule A for future discussion, and the current J-class roads program continued. Further, that NSFM and the Province continue discussions immediately on Schedule A, and that a five-year review be written into the MOU." I'll table that.

That sounds to me like the agreement was to sort of look and possibly treat CBRM differently, and that they wanted their own charter. I heard this before, and I gave them a little bit of a warning, because my experience with HRM's Charter wasn't necessarily an easy ride.

In 2008, the beauty of coming in at that time was that I had all three premiers of different parties: Rodney MacDonald, Darrell Dexter, and Stephen McNeil. The charter came through Darrell Dexter, and so I went to him to try get an understanding of the walk in HRM's shoes. He said, You have the Charter - you can do whatever you want now.

That infuriated my colleagues. I will table the current legislative amendments to the Charter that are required by this provincial government to pass. There are 41 of them. In good faith. Walk a mile in my shoes.

There is much more work to do. I think I've heard the minister say that. I'll even offer - I will work with the minister hand in hand. I have been known over my time in politics to be a great facilitator, so I'd be willing to offer that up.

The conversation needs to continue, and it's not something you can put a limit on. It's not something that you can take as a report card, and your mandatory letter, and just tick it off and say, yes, we've done that. It needs to be an ongoing conversation. That's what true relationships are.

I will conclude by just saying please consider going back to the table and renegotiating and continuing the conversation. The work of the committee is not done, and the work of the committee needs to be transparent.

Now, Speaker, I move that the motion for second reading be amended by striking out everything after "that" and substituting "the bill be not now read a second time but 30 days hence."

THE SPEAKER: There is a motion to amend on the floor.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou. (Applause)

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Thank you. It's nice to get applause because on a Friday afternoon, as the House Leader for the Official Opposition, not too many people are smiling at you like they were the day before. It's been a long day, and we're going to have some long days.

I will say that we're going to get into why I think we should delay this. Again, we're here debating this, and we don't need to be debating this. We talked about this last night. When hours are called until 11:59 p.m. and the government thinks that they can get out in eight days, this is what happens. It's a case of we're going to continue to debate this bill, which - I'll get into this in a second. I actually feel quite bad for my colleagues in Cape Breton, after what I'm hearing today from council and others. I think this hoist, and this motion, and delaying this for 30 days is important.

You learn a lot in 24 hours, as I said last night. I appreciate the comments from all sides of the floor. This is a passionate issue for home. What we're learning is that it actually isn't just about the CBRM at all. As we were talking last night, we started receiving messages from councillors all over the province saying, We didn't agree to this. We have concerns about roads. We have concerns about the capacity grant.

What we've learned today is that CBRM and 16 other communities are going to receive less under the capacity grant. I don't know an elected representative who would say yes to that. Again, why we should delay and go back and talk to these communities is that we are learning that there are 17 municipalities, many of which would be represented by government MLAs, that have major concerns and they are telling us that they don't support the MOU as it stands. Again, if it works - and I said this last time - if it works for a community, great.

I understand what the government is trying to do. I was part of those conversations a few years ago. As the minister indicated last night and the member for Glace Bay-Dominion tried to articulate, that we are wrong and we don't fully agree with this. The minister said it himself. These have been conversations that have been going on through successive ministers through various governments and I applaud the work that the department is trying to do and, as I said, I look forward to the comments from the minister when the time comes.

We learned a lot in the last 24 hours and we are learning a lot about what other communities are telling us now about the municipal financial capacity grant and about the roads - issues around roads - and they are saying we don't support the MOU as it stands. Why would you want to force this now? That is 17 communities out of 49 telling you they don't support this as it stands. They are getting less money under the capacity grant. I would poll those councillors of all of those communities and I guarantee you, the vast majority of them would say, No, we don't support this as it stands. That's why we made an amendment to the motion to extend it, hoist it, and extend the invitation for the government to really take 30 days, look this over, go back and consult with communities, and get it right.

I also had the chance, because CBRM held a press conference and they didn't hold back. They also just had an emergency meeting of council and they didn't hold back there either. They had some very serious concerns - very consistent to what all parties have said - which confirmed it again for me that we are thinking along the same lines, that the \$4.5 million in savings actually isn't savings; it's flow-through. They are not saving that money unless they don't adjust their tax rate and the CBRM residents continue to pay them money.

They have concerns around road infrastructure and one of the concerns I heard during the council meeting too is if that deal was to go through for the CBRM, you are looking at layoffs in the Department of Public Works, without question. CBRM does not have the capacity to take over all provincially owned roads. You have to look at this, and we are all hearing this - CBRM is very passionate about it. There are actually some concerns that came out of that council meeting about some of the comments that were made in those meetings, in those deliberations which are concerning. Not from the minister, but from the negotiations with staff. It just goes back to what we were all saying all along which is that obviously the consultation wasn't done.

Council at home in the CBRM have some major concerns. They have some major concerns with some of the comments that were made here last night about choices they have to make. They want the opportunity to sit down with the government and have that conversation again with the minister and the Premier, who again, based on I think what I have heard in the scrums today, has refused to meet with council again. The Premier - the second-largest municipality in the province, and this can all end today. It can become a very healthy conversation with now not only the CBRM, but with CBRM and 16 other communities that are going to see fewer resources as a result of this MOU.

[2:15 p.m.]

I don't want to get in my place here and be combative about it. It's just common sense. You are in a negotiation with stakeholders that are partners of yours. They are the communities that, as I said last night, deal with a lot of local issues, as we all know as MLAs, and they deal with a lot of provincial jurisdiction issues. They are on the ground. When you call a councillor, I always say, you're calling them at home. They deal with the vast majority of the backyard issues that we deal with as politicians.

They're very passionate today about it, and they want more time. What's 30 days? In the whole scheme of things, what is 30 days to take a breather for CBRM and 16 other communities? As I said, the other communities are happy? Great. We know other communities. There are communities out there that are happy with the MOU, and good for them. Again, you're dealing with 49 different municipal units, so you're going to be into this. Everybody has unique circumstances.

Go back for 30 days. Go back, have a conversation. What do you have to lose for 30 days? You could really fix this and do it right. At least if anything, if you're still at the same point in 30 days, you're giving the municipalities the opportunity to have a conversation. You know what that costs you? Nothing. That's free of charge. Go down, meet with the council, engage those other communities, have a conversation. It's not going to cost you a municipal financial capacity grant, or road cost-sharing, or derelict schools. It's going to cost you a cup of coffee. Do it right.

That's what we're asking for. As I said, CBRM was very passionate today in their press conference. They were a little direct in some of the comments that were made in the negotiation about the MOU. One of the comments said something along the lines of, All the money can go to Berwick. When I hear stuff like that - no offence to Berwick. Great community. I was there - beautiful; but when you hear comments like that, you ask yourself: What is the true nature of what is happening here?

It's a case of, people immediately get their backs up. Again, I'm referencing what was said at Council today. I don't know if they have an official Hansard yet, so I just want to make sure I'm following the rules if I reference anything like that, Speaker. Correct me if I'm wrong. I'm happy to follow any of the rules that are there. But when you hear stuff

like that - again, they publicly just met an hour ago, I'm sitting there and I'm going, Man, why? Why go through this? You can - I'll let you make a ruling. You're good? Okay.

Speaker, that's why we put this motion forward for the hoist. At some point - I'll say this, I never expected the debate to go this far. I think it's important that CBRM council gets to Law Amendments. I think they get the opportunity, as councillors - and other councillors are coming. Law Amendments, whenever that happens, it's going to be jam-packed. Because as I said, we thought it was just CBRM council. It's not. It's them and 16 others. I think that's going to be important for the government to listen to that.

I think it's another opportunity - even before you get to Law Amendments, you already know the issues. Just pull back for 30 days. For my colleagues on the government side, give them a chance . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East on a point of order.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: If you could get the member to table these documents. We've gone from CBRM to 12 to 15 to 17. He's throwing out numbers, so thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Unless the member is speaking directly, or reading from it, it's not a point of order. Yes. The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, to the member, he's not wrong in asking that, because I wasn't even sure myself. There's a CBRM council meeting that happened an hour ago. I am very mindful of the rules when it comes to this, because there are things that have been said in that meeting, and based on the rules of the House, how that works.

I am not reading from a document. I just knew this question was going to come. There will be an official Hansard, which I will happily table whenever that's printed. That's no problem.

I'll continue. As I said, council made some pointed remarks today about the debate last night. I don't want to get into that. All the MLAs for Cape Breton are going to see that themselves and they're going to hear that themselves as we move forward.

It does make me wonder how much the MLAs knew of the totality of what was being offered to the CBRM. That's in defence of them. You know what I mean? It seems like it has been a situation where we were all brought in as caucuses to talk to the government and talk about what the MOU meant for the CBRM. I think for all of us, that was really kind of the first time we got it in totality.

It's something that is problematic for the government MLAs because ultimately, they are the ones - and I've been on the government side, where you go home and must defend the policy decisions you make. I think for them, they are in a position where they

must decide and defend some of the comments and some of the decisions that have been made and make choices. As the member said last night, the CBRM has choices to make, but so do they.

Again, it's about choices. I honestly feel that the local MLAs and the CBRM could really take 30 days, take a breather, meet with their council, have a conversation, sit down, and talk about it; this whole conversation ends, and we go on to Law Amendments Committee. You make the revisions, or you pull the bill for now and bring it back, because right now you have one community that feels neglected by the government and, I would argue - this is me talking - neglected by the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, which is the other one. They are feeling kind of confused and shocked over the fact that they go through this negotiation as the second-largest municipality, and they would so celebrate the opportunity to take 30 days - not 6 months, not 90 days, not 2 months or 10 months, but 30 days - to sit down and have a conversation.

As I said, it doesn't cost you a thing. Well, maybe some gas to Sydney. Bring the Premier with you. I think that would be good. It's a sign of good faith. It sounds flippant when I say it, but it's the truth. I had two premiers I worked for who were happy to meet with any council. My colleague from Timberlea-Prospect went down and met with council, made some significant infrastructure moves, helped me protect some land at the Baille Ard Nature Trail, did some good, urban land protection in Sydney, Charlotte Street redevelopment, met with First Nations leaders, and did some great work at The Gaelic College campus in Inverness. That's him. In Inverness? Yes.

The point I am making is to take the 30 days, as we're saying in the hoist, and have the Premier come down with his MLAs and have a conversation. What's wrong with that? The member for Timberlea-Prospect and Stephen McNeil made a point of it because the CBRM is 100,000 people. Every time they came, they understood and respected the fact that the local government - whether it is the CBRM, Berwick, East Hants, or wherever - they have the mandate.

We have the mandate as MLAs to represent our communities here in the Legislature, but ultimately the councils - and I'm a former councillor. There are lots of former councillors in here, and I think you would all agree with me that when councils are into it every day - and councillors are so much more than we were back then. It's important to have more time to talk about this slice in the bill but they're into so many more jurisdictions, I believe, than they ever have been, when it comes to housing, and when it comes to roads, and when it comes to all of these things that we've been talking about over the last number of days.

They're making some really tough decisions, and they're looking for different supports from governments - some foundational ones, when it comes to the capacity grant and other things - but also to have a fruitful conversation with the provincial leadership about how we keep growing as a community. They're telling us they need more time.

They're telling us they're receiving less money. They're concerned that there hasn't been enough dialogue and engagement with all the MLAs in the community - I'm not just pointing the finger at anyone in particular, but all of us - and they want that extra time.

I'm saying, as one of the MLAs who represents home - we get into debates, and I've been on the government side, and I do this in the media, I've said this in the media before. If I'm here making a decision, and I'm presenting an argument in opposition, there's a part of me thinking, What would I have done if I were still in Cabinet? What would I have done if I'm still on that side?

I'm looking at this situation saying, I just watched CBRM Council, they're heavily upset at government, they're very upset at some of the comments that were made last night which are now circulating in the community. I'm on the government side in Cabinet saying, Free of charge, I'll take 30 days and go back and meet with council and get this right, and protect the MLAs that I have on the government side in Cape Breton, and give them a chance to meet with council - take the Premier, and have a fruitful, non-adversarial conversation.

Here we are on Friday afternoon at 2:27 p.m. Government calls hours until 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday. We've been here for a week, maybe - not even. There are no more bills on the floor. They put next to no legislation in place, so this is the biggest piece of it for me, and this is why they can take 30 days: Because they have lots of time. Again, it got chippy in here last night; it got chippy with a few of us at a local level. Some comments were made. Some of them I took offence. That's all right, we get chippy in here. That's what we do.

This is important for home. Those comments are being heard all over the community today. People are really engaged in this at home. What's the best thing we can do, instead of debating in here on a Friday afternoon? This can be over. It can be over. You have CBRM and these other communities that are like, We're not ready for this.

You have a bill on the floor, so take 30 days and have a conversation. Take 30 days and give the MLAs - as I said, Speaker, I'm trying to put myself back on that side. I'm going to my leadership, and I'm saying - I could use a bunch of examples from home.

As I said, we dealt with some very hot-topic, confrontational issues during our time in government in Cape Breton. Lots of protests, lots of that, but in this case, I'm saying to myself, If I'm still on the government side, I'm going to the leadership. I'm saying, Guys, we need to take a pause here. We had a conversation with CBRM, and CBRM had a meeting, and they laid out, factually, all of their issues. It's less money. It's not a savings. The roads are an issue.

What I'm also saying to the leadership - if it was the member for Timberlea-Prospect or McNeil - I'm saying not only does CBRM have a problem, now

we're learning that 16 other communities are going to receive less under the capacity grant. How do we deal with it? I can say this because he was awesome. He was very collaborative when he was Premier, talked a lot about a lot of issues, not only in Cape Breton but all over the place. We would sit down and talk about this, but the leadership was involved. I was minister, I'd go to the Premier, we'd have staff, we'd have experts in a particular area, and we would make the decision to proceed, or we would make the decision to pause.

[2:30 p.m.]

We've proceeded and paused probably an equal number of times. This is free of charge for the government, and it would save the government a whole lot of debate, a whole lot of controversy. It would probably be a great opportunity to learn about some of the challenges not only CBRM is bringing forward, but also what some of the other communities are bringing forward. I'm sure that's going to come up at Law Amendments Committee as well. That's why we have that.

You're going to pass a bill that 17 communities don't like. That's 17 communities. If all those 17 communities rallied, and you start adding the population, that's a big chunk of the population that's saying, I don't want to pay more tax. That's what they're saying to us. It's not just CBRM saying that, and that was brought up at council again today. I don't know who it was. CBRM was told to raise their taxes. It wasn't a choice. It was like, Well, you can raise your taxes.

Again, all of this is coming up, and I'm sitting there going, Obviously there's a problem. There's a problem with what is being presented. We're here again at 2:30 p.m. on a Friday afternoon, when the government could have, this morning, come to the Legislature and said, We're going to take a pause. We're hearing some concerns from CBRM. Let's take 30 days.

They're hearing it, too. If the councillors are calling us, I'm sure they're calling some of the government representatives as well. I know the member is shaking his head, and that's fine. If his community supports it, that's great. I've said this. This is not an "Oh, we completely disagree with the government" move. This is a legit negotiation with a whole lot of stakeholders who have very unique challenges, and . . . (Interruption) That's right. As my colleague said, the government said everybody agreed. No, not everybody agreed. We're learning that.

Again, some very interesting comments coming out of negotiations with staff in the CBRM. Anybody can go watch the emergency meeting of the CBRM Council. I would actually encourage people to do it, because I thought it was good in the sense that they talked about a lot of - it was consistent to what we were talking about last night, as I said. They need more time. They had a press conference today. They had an emergency meeting today. I suspect it's not done for them.

There's going to be a number of councillors coming forward to Law Amendments Committee to plead the case. They said that in their meeting today. All of this is public, so you can go and check it out. They had some very serious concerns about some of the comments that came from staff in the negotiation, which I would argue, in my opinion, are very unfortunate in some cases, because if anybody goes into a negotiation like that, it's not really a negotiation.

They had some concerns. They really don't like this idea - and I'll say this - this idea that there are these choices, that CBRM has a choice to either keep that tax rate the same or not. We're talking about money that never existed. They were offended by that. They were. I'm sure they're going to talk about that more.

I say this about the member for Timberlea-Prospect, and Stephen McNeil: Whenever there was a topic that was highly contested - and there's been a bunch in Cape Breton - we had our own conversations with the CBRM of the day. We took a different approach, we just went to Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and sat down with them. We started the MOU stuff. I get what the government is trying to do. It's consistent. That's good. But whenever there was something highly contested - I talked about it before, about the pause. It wasn't just about the pause, and why I think you should pause for this hoist motion for 30 days. It was also there to stand next to us when this stuff happened.

When council needed to meet, or a stakeholder needed to meet, or we were ever under fire, they were there, because we were always talking back and forth. We knew everything that was coming over the causeway every minute of every day - every cent that came over, every issue that was coming over, every project, every program, everything. That allowed us to either make a decision, or pause for 30 days, as I'm saying in this hoist motion. I've got to get back to the bill.

I don't understand the reluctance. The Premier can take 30 days, stand next to his colleagues from Cape Breton, from the CBRM, and have a conversation with the council that represents 100,000 people in this province. In the scrum today, I believe - you can correct me - he again indicated that he will not meet with CBRM Council. I just don't understand. We're here having a debate on a hoist motion, on the original motion, and we don't have to be.

It costs the government nothing, Speaker, to make that decision to sit at a table. I'm sure the CBRM mayor and council and staff would happily welcome the Premier and the MLAs from Cape Breton and the minister into a room. They would. We did it multiple times - Geoff MacLellan, former MLA for Glace Bay, and I had full access to the Premier whenever we needed him. Whenever we needed the Premier, whether it was the member for Timberlea-Prospect or the former Premier McNeil, when we needed him in Cape Breton, he was there. Every project, every issue, every question. If we needed him to come to council, he came to council. If we needed him go to look at a project, he'd look at a project. Whenever there was a flood or any other event, he was there.

The Premier can come this time and help and support the people who helped make him Premier by delaying for 30 days on this hoist motion. He could be there for his people, the people who put their name on the ballot for him so that he could be Premier. They need him right now. They need him to come to Cape Breton, and they need him to help fix this problem.

What a gesture to the people who knocked on doors, who promoted him, who promoted the brand, who stood next to him. Delay for 30 days, as the hoist motion says, and come to Cape Breton with his colleagues. It would show a lot to the community. Hey, I'd respect that. This is a big issue for the CBRM, a community that's in full growth, but with challenges. It's a community that needs more time to have a conversation, and to know that if they're going to have that conversation, that they're having it with the minister, and that they're having it with the Premier, and that they're having it with their caucus colleagues who, day and night, are there, responsible to act not in the best interests of their own ridings, but the entire CBRM.

That's the difference with being in government. It can't just be about your riding. You represent everyone. I'm sure they see that. I know that from the Minister Responsible for Addictions and Mental Health. He gets calls from everywhere.

I think they could use the support of their boss. I really do. You were a leader - still are, Speaker.

I'm on the bill. I'm going to get there. I'm making a point. It's a nice cup of coffee.

In this moment, when we're asking for this in this motion - we're asking for a 30-day delay, which is, I'll say it again, free of charge. It shows a sign of support and partnership and collaboration to the CBRM. It shows a sign of support and commitment and backing to the MLAs in the CBRM who are ultimately now going to be dealing with a public campaign where people will see that they've been told by government that their taxes can go up 12 per cent.

They need to delay this. I've lived in this world. I'm speaking from experience, where there have been some pretty heavy public campaigns in my experience in government. Some of them coordinated by people in this House, as some of the members would know. It was tough. Health care was tough. When you're closing hospitals, that's tough. Just like this case. You're into it now. There was a public meeting of council. They outlined what was said. They outlined what was said by staff.

They also indicated that it's not only them. They are not alone. There are 17 in total. The public campaign is on. The question is, what's next? This is going to hit the media pretty hard in the next couple hours. People in the CBRM are going to start reading the *Cape Breton Post*. They are going to listen to The GIANT, and they are going to listen to

New Country. (Interruption) *The Coast*. How could I forget *The Coast*? The number one fan is the member for Victoria-The Lakes.

Everybody at Tim Hortons is going to be having this conversation because they're going to find out their taxes could go up 16 per cent. They could find out that maybe all provincial roads are going to come under the jurisdiction of the CBRM, and then families that work for the Department of Public Works are going to start saying, Wait a second, how does that work? They are going to start looking at the government, and they are going to say, Wait a second. We now have a carbon tax, our power rates are going up, and now our residential rate might go up 16 per cent. What's happening in this province? They are going to start looking to the government and saying, Wait. These guys have to get back to the table and talk to one another.

The great thing is - hey, we get into banter here in politics but - there's some really great MLAs on all sides of the floor, and the guys care on the government side. I know that. Everybody cares. I am referencing the MLAs on the government side, so no offence. The point being is that they care. I see it. The member for Halifax Atlantic gave a great comment to the Minister responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions. He literally saved somebody's life yesterday. That's amazing stuff. No matter what issue we ever had at home - whether it was floods, fires, or anything else over the years - for as long as I've been here, everybody has been great. These guys are going to go home now and be under fire, big time - some of them more than others because of the comments they made.

They need support, and it's not coming. In the scrum today, the Premier is not coming to meet with the CBRM. I don't get it. No offence to the minister. Good man. Tried his best. He's fulfilling the work that multiple governments have done, but the elected leader of the province will not meet with the council. We're asking for a 30-day delay. Go down in two weeks.

The House - I can't predict when it's going to get out. It's not looking great right now, but that's the decision of your leadership. I'm given hours, and I'll use them. That's exactly what the government did, before many of the new MLAs came. People filibustered for four hours in the Law Amendments Committee. The Premier was one of the best. It was kind of impressive at times. Well, it was awful - but hey, you can filibuster four hours, you've got to give him that credit.

The point is, here we are again. The Premier goes to meet his scrum. We're saying take 30 days and come meet with the council. The Premier immediately, not even thinking again - like I thought for sure that government was going to get up this morning and say, You know what? Instead of having this public battle, which doesn't need to happen, we're going to take a pause. We're going to go down and meet with the CBRM because we have a community that disagrees. They didn't, and I was kind of shocked by that.

I thought for sure something was going to happen this morning. I said that to the people at home. People who were watching the debates started asking me - a lot of people watched the debates last night. Over 1,000 people watched the Legislature last night. It was interesting. That's what happens in Cape Breton. It's like the council meetings. People like watching that stuff. It's true.

[2:45 p.m.]

I thought for sure something was going to change and they were going to take a pause - that's why we're putting this hoist motion up to ask for 30 days - but it didn't happen. The Premier was doing his scrum, and I was waiting there and talking to staff. I was going to say, Well, I suspect the Premier is probably going to say somebody will go down and talk to the CBRM. Somebody will go down, have a conversation with them, and try to get a sense of what's happening.

Everybody knew there was a press conference coming today. It was public. Media advisories and everything were out. There was nothing. I'm sitting there going, what a golden opportunity. Because they've done it before.

I'll use this reference, and why I'm asking for the 30-day hoist on this. If you go back to the non-residents tax - and I'm going to tie it into what I'm asking for. When you go back to that, the government was, We're doing this. Then all of a sudden there was enough public outcry where they pulled back, because they realized it wasn't the right move. So changes were made.

That was on something that didn't even impact residents who were living here yet. So now you have a situation where you have a population of 100,000 people who are saying they need more time on this, and the council that represents them says, This is not going to work for us, we need help, come meet with us, give us time.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion on a point of order.

JOHN WHITE: Last night, I tabled a document that clearly stated that the CBRM had a choice to do a charter . . .

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

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I don't understand why he's getting confrontational. I'm not getting confrontational with the member for Glace Bay. I never even talked about the Charter. Interestingly enough, there was a point made about the

Charter today that I would encourage everybody to listen to. Actually, the member said last night that he was the only one talking about a charter.

I tabled a charter bill last year, so you can happily go see it. It's on the web page. So there's actually legislation already for a charter. This is not something that was just talked about all of a sudden by this government. But for whatever reason, the member for Glace Bay is getting confrontational about this. I'm not being confrontational with him.

I'm telling him he deserves protection and support from his Premier, and he's not getting it. Now he has to go home - and I'm asking for 30 days for him. I'm asking a hoist motion because I was on that side of the floor, and I dealt with issues like this. I had the full support of my leadership to go down and either meet with council or meet with anybody else, and not leave them out in the cold.

That's the other part of this I want to say, and why I think we need to hoist this for 30 days. I fundamentally believe that those local MLAs didn't know what they were walking into. They did not have full disclosure of that entire MOU from the government. They did not have that. That was obvious to me when I went into council and met with them. I knew immediately - all of us as MLAs were getting this information 100 per cent for the first time.

I've got to go back to the bill. So when the member is saying that, I'm asking for 30 days for him and for his colleagues. I see some of the veterans on this side nodding their heads in agreement, because we've lived this world. When decisions at times are made - I use the non-resident tax.

Look at Pharmacare back in the day. That was another one on the Liberal side where decisions were made. We learned very quickly that there were some concerns around Pharmacare. This government pounded us on it, rightfully so, and we made decisions to pull back and evaluate. The government already has precedent in taking a delay in doing it with the non-resident tax.

So now we have another situation where you have CBRM - and now 16 other communities - saying, Whoa, hold on. They're saying, Whoa. That's what they're saying. They're saying, Wait a second, we didn't say yes to this - we didn't sign off on this, and we're still trying to figure out what the sign-off is. But they didn't sign off on it. So again, you already have the precedent doing this.

I'm not even looking at the government saying you're completely wrong. You're not. In this whole debate, there are good aspects of this. I get fundamentally where the minister is going with this, and where the government is going with this. This is one of those concerns that has been a long-standing conversation with municipalities across the province, for years. Council said that today too. This was a big, monumental moment for councillors, because they wanted to re-establish a different relationship. I give the minister

credit for that, I really do. He's got a lot of big files right now, between this, housing and everything else - plus natural disasters and everything else. I understand that their staff is into it. They're good people.

Again, we put this hoist motion - we were talking about this as a caucus. What's the best course of action before a vote is had? When government changes - because eventually it will, as all governments do. Every party will run and win and lose. This government is here now and eventually the government will move, but what are you leaving in the long run? If a community is saying that for the first couple of years maybe it's okay, but in the long term, for the sustainability of the CBRM, this is not a great deal.

We have no relationship with our Premier. That would be a great opportunity to sit down and have a conversation. We welcome you to our community. We want to do this right. This is important for everybody. They don't want to be adversarial with government. Nobody does. I don't even want to be adversarial with government. I can't even believe we're here having this conversation at 2:50 p.m. on a Friday. We could be talking about all the other bills that are on the floor. We could be going through government business right now. I would be happy to be running regular hours, but now we're talking about a hoist motion about delaying a policy that is concerning for CBRM and many other communities across the province.

Again, there's a pathway here. As I said, the public relations campaign has begun. Media have started picking up these stories. Local government has been pretty direct in their comments at their emergency council meeting. I know the government MLAs. I've known most of them for a long time. I know they care. They're going to go home to this. It's not fun, let me tell you. Lived it. Any chance that we can sit back and re-evaluate like we're asking for in this hoist motion, I think is healthy, obviously.

I'm not going to get into too much of the comments that were made at council. Some of this stuff is going to make the media, which is going to make people's eyes roll if the media prints it. It would all depend on what the media wants to tell. Some of this stuff, people are going to be like, Okay, you guys have got to get back to the table, you've got to have a conversation about the best steps forward. We believe the best way to do that is through a hoist motion.

I joked last night that it's been great. It must be a record, two days of talking about the CBRM. It's been fun. I think we all learned a little bit too, and I'm really proud of the council. You can hear the frustration with them today. As I said last night, CBRM was created at the same time as Halifax Regional Municipality, in 1995, and they just want what many governments have tried - and have tried to deal with it in different ways. This government has decided to do it through the MOU, and all they're asking for is the ability to do that.

There was a hard deadline put on them - I think it was October 4th - to pass a motion, which was logistically impossible. That's the other reason why we're asking for the hoist motion. It was logistically impossible for them at that time. They got the correspondence from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to say by October 4th have a council meeting. Logistically, we just couldn't do it, so just extend the deadline. Extend the deadline. Go to meet with them and extend that deadline. Have a council meeting and get that motion. Again, we're into another public fight. I called this last night. Here comes another one. It started this afternoon. It started this afternoon, but as I said last night (Laughter) - it's okay. No, my colleague over there - I want to make sure he's all right.

I've been riveting the last two days, Speaker, I know. But he's a councillor too, so he gets it. There is a member that has served his community very proudly. I met him when I was . . . (Interruption) You understand what's going on, absolutely, and the deal for his community might be good. I don't know. I haven't talked about it. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order. I would just ask that, when we're speaking with members in the House, if instead of "he" or "you," you'd direct it through the Speaker.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I've been trying to follow the rules all day, Speaker. But I will say this, through you to the member, I met him when I was Minister of Municipal Affairs when I was on tour, and he would have a lot of good feedback, I think, on this subject, as well. I'd be curious to hear from some of the communities, right, because we know some of them - they like the MOU, and that's great. If it works for them, wonderful. We don't want to take that from anyone. As I said, this has been years and years of consultation, and a lot of hard work by a lot of people within the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Eleven minutes to go. It's been really kind of an honour, and interesting to talk about home as much as we have for the last two days. You can hear the passion in the MLAs from Cape Breton who represent the community because, personally, for me, I think - and again, the point I'm trying to make with the hoist motion is that it's taken us so long to get to this point, and I referenced some of this last night.

There were some tough decisions made. Incredibly tough, over the last number of years that I was involved with on the government side with other really good people who were either elected, still here, or are not and they've moved on. We went through a lot of tough challenges, we went through a lot of public battles, and I'll say - and I said this last night - some of the people in this room were at those protests. They were at them all, and they say how hard it was on me and others, but they were still at the protests. Now they're going to go home to a public battle. They are, and you know what? I don't wish those

public battles on anyone, because they are tough. They're tough on you, they're tough on your families, and we can debate in here and keep it respectful.

There were some jabs taken last night that I won't take offence to too much, but to the bill, these members have a chance to work with their Premier and avoid it. They have a chance to avoid what I can see has started. I've lived this, and they can stop it by supporting this hoist motion. They can stop it by taking that pause and avoiding another public fight with another level of government.

This one, as I said last night, is different, because when they go home - whether it's Cape Breton or anywhere else - you can't say it's the carbon tax that did it, or you can't say it's the utility that did it. This is a direct decision of an MOU that was negotiated in a way that CBRM council feels was not done right. A deal that sees 16 other communities lose the Municipal Financial Capacity Grant - they're going to have to go home, and they're going to have to defend it. They're going to have to defend when people start seeing - wait a second - 16 per cent? Again, this is what staff was telling the CBRM in these negotiations, You have room to raise your taxes.

I'm not pointing at the minister because he might not even know half of the stuff that was said in those meetings. They have a mandate to go down and negotiate them, but that's what they were told. That's what the public is going to start hearing today - today. They're going to start hearing, wait a second, my residential rate, they said it can go up 16 per cent. What's going to happen to my road? Who's going to look after my roads? I can't afford an increase in my taxes. I can't afford to put gas in the car. I can't afford groceries. I have to afford prescriptions. But they're going to start hearing today from the government why we're asking for this.

Politics aside, we all know people are suffering right now under the cost of living - highest in the country, highest rent increases in the country. Child poverty in Cape Breton is a big problem. It's a problem we all fight every day. Today, residents are going to start hearing, Whoa. The interest rate just went up on my mortgage. Now I'm being told that my taxes could go up 16 per cent.

Let's fight it out in the Legislature, or let's take 30 days to figure this thing out. With a population of 100,000 people, that will cost you zero cents - zero cents to have a cup of coffee in a boardroom and try to start, before the negotiation.

Why we're asking for this hoist also isn't just about the MOU. I said this last night. It's also about trying to repair some sort of relationship between the Premier's Office and the CBRM council. Obviously, again today in the scrum, the Premier is like, No, not going. I'm like, Why not? You have to govern when it's tough too. You have to govern when it's tough. This, as I said, is one issue for the government - again, it goes back to the hoist. I'm going to get there in two seconds. Again, it goes back to the fact that all of the other fights, outside of the non-resident tax, which sets the precedent for the government to pull back on

something, such as this hoist. If you pulled back on that, pull back on this. Have a conversation, get it right, and come back.

[3:00 p.m.]

This public fight started today, and this is solely at the feet of the government. Their best interest, because this thing will heat up very quickly, is to take that pause. Take that pause, have that conversation with the CBRM and help your local MLAs navigate and build a strong foundational relationship with CBRM because it is non-existent. I'm sitting there going, Hey, we all have our debates. My relationship with council at times wasn't the greatest, either. You debate things. You're a local guy, and you make decisions, and they're tough decisions, and council may not like them, but you still have to have a conversation because ultimately at the end of the day you're all in it for the same - there's only one taxpayer. We have different levels of government, but at the same time, we're all in this to help people.

Again, this confrontation, you're not winning this one. That's why as a guy on the opposite side who comes from a place of experience with some of the toughest decisions in the history of politics probably in Cape Breton around closing hospitals and doing what we thought was right, I'm sitting there with experience knowing my friends on the other side, saying somebody has to support them because this is coming. It has started. We don't need this in our communities right now. In a time when people can't afford anything, we can avoid this narrative and this conversation and this actuality that their taxes are going to go up under this deal.

I'm trying to be a friend, Speaker, to guys and colleagues whom I have served with for years, as a guy who went through this. Do not do this. You have the ability to pause and have that conversation with the CBRM. I've been around this too long to be too hyper-political about this thing. It's just - and I've said it - we don't disagree with everything here, but I do know what my colleagues are going home to.

THE SPEAKER: Order. We have a motion, and it would be to debate this or put a pause on this for 30 days. I'd ask you to stick to the intent of the motion and to the points of the bill, please.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Good Speaker. Good Speaker.

To the point of the delay - I'll finish off with this, and I'll reiterate - this costs the government nothing to do, to delay this for 30 days. It also gives the government the ability to try to repair and establish a positive constructive relationship with the second-largest municipality in the province. It also provides the local MLAs with the ability to go and meet with their local council. That's good. It gives them the ability to do that. It also gives

the Premier the ability to delay for 30 days and be the Premier, go down with his colleagues, and meet with CBRM council. The delay also gives the government the ability not to get into another public fight, because the residents are going to lose in this one, too. If this bill goes through, we've already heard it: less Municipal Financial Capacity Grant, questions around roads - all these issues. Just take a breather; it's free of charge.

What's 30 days in the scheme of things? You have CBRM, you have 16 other communities, and you have the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities that are saying, as well, that CBRM should have a separate deal. Listen to them. Take a pause for 30 days. I can tell you from experience, you'll really enjoy my recommendation if you do it, because as tough as the conversation can get, it shows a lot of leadership - like they did on the non-residents tax. It shows a lot of leadership to say, You know what? The member for Sydney-Membertou is right. We should take a pause.

Do the right thing for the community - a community that's growing, a community that I love and am proud to raise my family in. We also have a council that really needs help, that's reaching out for help, and that's frustrated. They have an open door and would happily welcome the Premier and the MLA colleagues - and the government, for that matter - in for a healthy conversation about their hopes and aspirations and the supports that are needed to help a community that has grown substantially, has a lot of growing to do, and has a lot of challenges to deal with, but needs a good relationship with their government.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaking on hoist, wow - a 30-day pause, that's what we're talking about here with this hoist. We're talking about a 30-day pause. The member for Sydney-Membertou talked about some of the reasons it would be good for the local Cape Breton MLAs to want these 30 days. As somebody who put a bullhorn in the face of the member for Sydney-Membertou over some of the issues we disagreed on - I do apologize - I have often said I'm sorry I had to do that, but I wanted him and the government to understand how important these issues were. I understand they were important to him as well, but those pauses - those stops we can have along the way - on bad bills or bills that could be harmful to our areas are extremely important.

That's what's going to happen if we don't pause this bill now. The members on the government side from Cape Breton, particularly from the CBRM, may end up with bullhorns in their faces and may end up with many protests outside their offices. I know - I was someone who was in those protests. I was someone who brought the bullhorn. I did that to the Liberal government. I did that to the member for Sydney-Membertou. I did that to the former MLA for Glace Bay a few times, because that's what I was asking for. Stop. Think about what it means to our community.

The member for Sydney-Membertou, when he is giving the cautionary tale to the members for the CBRM on the government side, knows what he is talking about.

I was watching the press conference held by the CBRM, and I watched the council meeting. They were also saying we didn't have time to dive into what this Bill No. 340 on municipal funding would do. We didn't have time to really dissect what was in the letter of September 15th, which keeps getting referenced. That's what they're asking for - a pause, a time. This hoist motion will do that.

This letter that keeps getting referenced - September 15th. I am of the impression when reading this - and I've read it - it says that, without an agreement, you will continue to pay the amounts related to corrections, approximately \$1 million for the upcoming year, and your share of the net operating losses for public housing, estimated at \$3.5 million for 2023-24. In addition, you would not be eligible to participate in other parts of the new service exchange proposal, including the \$15 million infrastructure program, or any road programs included in the agreement going forward. Also, responsibility for any obsolete schools would remain the responsibility of the municipality.

I would need serious pause on this. I would need time to talk to the minister about this. I've heard from the CBRM that they didn't have time to dissect this letter or have the minister come to the CBRM and explain it to them - explain what this would mean. A 30-day pause, a 30-day intervention, would allow the Premier and the minister to come to the CBRM, and to the other 16 municipalities, and explain to them the bill, explain to them what would happen should the bill be passed.

This sounds more like a threat, in my opinion, than an actual willingness to negotiate. I don't know why the government is so proud of this letter, because it sounds like they didn't want to negotiate. The CBRM still does, so they want this pause. They want these 30 days so things in this letter can be explained.

This letter also states - and this was talked about by CBRM council this afternoon - that the Province is willing to work with you as part of the negotiations to develop a separate CBRM charter.

According to what I listened to in the meeting that happened roughly two hours ago now, one of the councillors - and I'm paraphrasing here - stated that this government wanted nothing to do with a charter, wanted nothing to do with talking about a charter, until they found out that the CBRM was unhappy about this bill. Then, and only then, did they bring up a charter as a negotiation tool.

Again, a pause needs to be taken here. A pause needs to be taken. Thirty days needs to be had for all of that to be fully fleshed out. But then again, the other councillor went on to say, Well, what good is a charter to us, anyway? Look what's happened to the HRM. They have a charter.

So it's not much of a negotiation tool. But to hold this over the CBRM's head, as well as to say, You don't like what we have to offer? Fine, you can keep it all. You can keep paying for corrections, you can keep paying for housing, and you're not going to be part of any funding agreement - that needs to be fully fleshed out before the CBRM can - what is it, I quote: "At this time, I request a motion of council clearly stating whether you want to be included in the service exchange agreement and receive the immediate additional financial support for CBRM, totalling \$4.5M, or whether it is the preference of CBRM to delay potential additional savings while a separate agreement is negotiated with you. Once we have clarity, we can schedule further meetings with my office."

[3:15 p.m.]

I'm sorry - very sorry. This came September 15th. It is October 20th. The CBRM's council meeting is Tuesday, if I'm not mistaken. The CBRM was asking for a meeting with the minister to flesh this out. A 30-day intervention, break, pause, could give the minister and the Premier the opportunity to flesh this letter out with the CBRM, to talk about it, so that everybody fully understands what they're voting for. If I were sitting on CBRM Council still, in my old seat, I'd be looking at this letter going, What am I supposed to vote on? What am I voting on here? What are the consequences of this vote? I need a moment here. I need some time.

If I had my MLA standing up here in the Legislature and I was sitting up in the council, I'd be like, Find a way to press pause on this. Please find a way to press pause on this bill so we can understand what is happening here, so we can know what we're going to vote on.

That's that letter that was tabled last night. I don't know if I'm supposed to table it again or not, but it's on the record. I'm being told by the Clerks that I don't have to, because it's already there.

The other point of it is, the CBRM also doesn't understand how they're supposed to get that \$4.5 million. That also needs to be explained. That's why the pause, that 30-day intervention, is important: so that the CBRM can understand where the \$4.5 million is coming from. I was listening to their council meeting this afternoon. I took the time to listen to it, to hear what they had to say, because it was important for me as the MLA for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier to know what my council is saying on this topic. And they're saying, We don't understand where we're supposed to get the \$4.5 million. Are we supposed to keep charging our residents for things we're no longer collecting on to get that \$4.5 million? Or are we supposed to raise taxes to, what was it, 16, 17 per cent? That's what was suggested to them by a highly placed municipal staffer. I believe it was a deputy minister or something. I don't really remember what it was. The conversation I had with them was a while ago on this topic.

The CBRM doesn't understand where that money is coming from. So, we need that 30-day intervention, so that the minister can not only explain to the CBRM, but the minister can explain to the other 16 municipal units where they're supposed to make up that money. Then you can explain it to the residents of CBRM, and the residents of the other 16 municipal units. That's what can be done in those 30 days. Explain to the residents of CBRM, explain to the residents of the 16 other municipal units where that money is coming from - because it's not new money. There's no new money.

At this time, I think I also want to say not one part of me wants to see any municipalities lose funding. In fact, I wanted to see the pot rise higher for all municipal units that need the equalization money, to receive it. I think we should take that 30-day pause to do that. Let's find new money in those 30 days, to grow the pot, so that all municipal units that need the funding will receive the actual funding, rather than seeing decreases. Because that's not what was promised.

I think that we should also go back to this. It was also tabled earlier today, and that was from the NSFM to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on the service exchange. And it says, "The Province should negotiate a separate service exchange agreement directly with Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM), as they themselves have advised during the consultations." It goes on further to say, "The Board supports the CBRM's request for a separate service exchange agreement to determine their best path forward."

So, this letter was written September 14, 2023. My question is: Why are we not taking this pause? Let's take a chance. You've got an opportunity here. Take this pause, take the 30 days. Explain to the CBRM what the willing negotiating terms are. CBRM will come up with their offer of negotiation terms. Find a place where you can start. Anyway, find a place where you can start, and then start negotiating a separate deal. That's what can be done in those 30 days. That's what can be done in those 30 days.

What I'm trying to get at here is that the Premier made a promise. The MLAs from CBRM who are on the government side made a promise, and that promise was that equalization - they would be receiving funding, more funding on top of the \$15 million, for as long as - I'm getting there . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: On a point of order. The amendment doesn't even talk about the equalization. Can we get the member to speak on the amendment?

THE SPEAKER: Just for clarity, she's speaking on the advantages or disadvantages of having an additional 30 days to consult. But I will ask all members to stay on task to the hoist or the bill.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: As you said, I was speaking of the advantages and disadvantages of 30 days, but thank you for that time. It really helped me get my thoughts together.

As I was saying, the Premier and the members from Cape Breton - from CBRM - campaigned on a promise about the funding formula, the capacity grant, the equalization. They won an election on it. So why not take those 30 days that are being offered in this hoist to actually follow through and negotiate or allow for a bigger pot of money? That's what we're saying in this. That's what I'm getting at here. I'm saying that you can take these 30 days and start renegotiating. You can start talking to the municipal units in those . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East on a point of order.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Speaker, there's been 29.5 hours of consultation on this bill and two dedicated ones for CBRM. Can we please get back to the amendment?

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask that we stick with the advantages and disadvantages of moving this 30 days hence. If we could all keep our remarks to that, that would be great.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: Yes, that's what I was doing. I was speaking about the advantages and disadvantages of this 30 days, so that we get an understanding of what it would mean to have a 30-day pause on this bill. And so 30 days would allow - I understand my members across the aisle are getting mad and antsy about us talking about this bill and talking about the disadvantages and advantages of this 30-day pause. I get that they're getting antsy. They're tired, they want to go home, it's Friday. I understand that. I too would like to go home and be with my children, and be with my community in the CBRM, and talk to my CBRM councillors on this, but right now I'm here doing this work for my constituents. And my constituents want those 30 days.

My constituents need those 30 days, because they also want to understand how it is going to affect them, because the way we make laws here is so far out of left field. It makes no sense that we put these bills and we do not give people enough time, and the 30 days - this hoist motion - allows for my colleagues and me to go back to our constituencies and explain to our constituents what it would mean to them. It allows for the Premier and the minister to go back to the CBRM and have those conversations. It allows for the CBRM MLAs to go back and explain. It allows for the other MLAs who have residents in the other 16 municipalities that are going to be losers here to go back and explain to their residents what this bill could mean for them.

[3:30 p.m.]

This bill could - if we do not take a pause right now - this bill could mean a tax hike. Just one second. I need this good Cape Breton tea, it's really strong. It means a tax hike, because apparently that's how they're going to make up the money, the \$4.5 million. I'm telling you, Speaker, the residents, my community that I represent, Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, have not had the time to understand how this bill will affect them going forward, and they deserve that time. The residents of the CBRM deserve that time. The residents of the 16 other municipal units deserve those 30 days to fully understand what this bill would mean for them.

Again, I don't understand why the government side does not want to take the 30 days to look the bill over, to discuss it with their counterparts in the municipal units. Why not have that consultation? Why not have those conversations? Why not take the time for those negotiations?

If they walk out of here tonight, and they go back to Cape Breton - back to the CBRM either tonight or tomorrow, whenever they get there - or we leave this bill when the Legislature's closed, when the Premier has decided that we don't need to be here anymore and pass any more bills - and they go back to their community without taking this pause, without taking this 30 days, they're going to be met with very angry residents.

My colleague was right, but he was also wrong. He said that the fight started today - this afternoon. The fight started the moment this bill was on the order paper. That's the first part of this fight, when that bill went on the order paper. Let's stop the fight. Let's take 30 days. Let's take that breather. Everybody takes a deep breath. We calm down and we try to have a conversation together. That's what 30 days would allow, for us just to step back, take some breaths, breathe a little easier.

If we don't, if we leave here without taking that 30-day break, if we pass - God forbid - if we pass this bill - I'm not going to pass it, I'm voting against it, but if we did, if we did not take those 30 days, the members opposite in the PC government from Cape Breton Regional Municipality are going to face a lot of hurt constituents. If they take those 30 days and get to speak with their community members and get to speak with the councillors of the CBRM, then we might see things differently when we come back in 30 days.

There may be a difference of opinion on the government side. Wouldn't that be nice?

Do you want to know something? I am going to digress for just a little bit, Speaker. Please give me this latitude. I want the members in the Chamber here who are not from Cape Breton - not from the CBRM - to understand something. We in Cape Breton forgive a

lot. If you're willing to say, "I'm sorry, I made a mistake, I've changed my mind," we forgive. We're forgiving people. We may not forget, but we will forgive.

We especially forgive those who admit mistakes, because it takes a strong person to admit when they're mistaken. If we took those 30 days, and we all breathed a little easier, and the conversations that need to be had were had, the consultation that needed to be consulted - the thing that's missing here is that there are residents who have not been consulted. There are residents of every single municipality - this is not just the CBRM I'm talking about here. Whether it's good or bad for certain municipalities is not relevant because none of them has been consulted.

Let's take the 30-day break and start consulting the people whom we represent. Let them hear the full details. Let them ask the questions. The first time that they get to ask questions or provide information should not be at Law Amendments Committee. It should be in their communities with their elected officials. Those 30 days that this hoist motion would provide us would allow for that. Who knew open, transparent, proper consultation could happen in those 30 days?

Wouldn't that be nice to have that break to talk to our constituents about what this would mean for each of our municipal units? Then we could all come back together with more fleshed-out thoughts and opinions on it so that we could make a better bill and then a better Act.

The last time we had a service exchange - I'm just going to consult here because I always forget if it's 1992 or 1993 - 1994. The discussion paper was in 1993, I think, and then 1994 was the actual exchange. It has been so long. I was born in 1988, so I was only in school when this came to be. I do not think, after how many years of this was it - 27? Am I right in that math? I don't think 30 days is too much to ask after this long a wait. (Interruption) Oh, 29, I'm sorry. Oh boy, I was a little off there in my math. I don't think 30 days would be too much to ask, after 29 years.

If we did that, if we took those 30 days, and we all came back here, heard more from our constituents and we stood back up here and we were able to truly debate this, members - all your units, every single municipal unit. I'm sure there's a few of you who have maybe one or two, maybe three municipal units that you have to talk with. That's a lot of people. Let's take those 30 days, everybody. Let's go home to our constituents, hear the pros and the cons from them, hear their concerns, and get them answers for their questions, so that we all fully understand what's going to happen. That's what the 30 days is going to give, a little bit more understanding.

If the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Premier go out and do their part of the work - that is to talk to the municipalities, especially those that seem to have stuff to lose here. They take that 30 days that this hoist motion is going to provide, go

out and talk to the municipal units - especially the 17 that stand to lose - and they come to maybe a new understanding with each other. How great will that be?

In Whitney Pier, there's - it's called Powerful.Creative. It's a great company. Part of their motto is, "When we work together, powerful things can happen." I keep it on my phone as a reminder that when we work together, powerful things can happen. If we work together, all together, and we pass this motion - this hoist - to reconvene in 30 days on this bill, maybe powerful things can happen. Maybe something very powerful can happen. Maybe we can make a better bill than what we would have seen because we talked to the people it's going to affect the most. That's quite powerful. That's very powerful.

I'm not standing here on my own fighting. I'm not fighting just for me. I have residents behind and beside me for whom I'm fighting. I am fighting for them, and they deserve the 30 days. They deserve to have those measly, small-potatoes 30 days to understand how a bill that's passed within - when was this put on the Order Paper? A couple of days ago. A couple of days ago, a bill was put on the Order Paper.

If this hoist does not go through, we're going to go to the Law Amendments Committee at some point, and before 14 days of being in this Legislature is up, we might be voting on it. I don't mean 14 days as in the whole week; I mean the actual time we're in this building. Say we're here for 14 days. Within 14 days, we'll be voting on this bill. That is not a lot of time. That is not a lot of time to talk to our constituents, and that's for every bill because the way we do bills and pass laws around here is bonkers.

The 30 days - those precious 30 days - I mean, what is 30 days, really, if you're going to make a better bill in the end? What is 30 days if that allows for the Premier and the minister to go and talk to municipal units about this bill, how it affects the residents, and hear from the residents and from the municipal units? I don't mean just hear. I don't mean just sit there, nod our heads, and go, uh huh. I mean really listen, take it in, and hear what is being said.

If we as MLAs can go back to our ridings, engage with our residents and with our municipal units, and really hear what their concerns are, what powerful things could happen when we reconvene in 30 days? What we could come up with for a better bill if we came back in 30 days - I am amazed by that. That would be a change in how we do business. It'd be a change in how we do governance. We'd be doing better governance. We'd be better at our jobs. We'd make better bills, and all it would take is a 30-day pause.

My community of the CBRM - the residents I represent, and the residents that my fellow colleagues here represent - are going to want these 30 days. I hope the government is understanding of what that could mean for your municipal units as well. If we work together on this motion and we pass it, powerful things can happen.

I don't want to meander and go on and on and on, because I really don't see the point of that. But it is important that my colleagues understand that the issues that are in this bill - and some of the things that are not in this bill that are going to be put in regulations are very concerning. They could have devastating effects on our communities and on our residents. So let's take the 30 days. Let's not - I'm sorry, I'm at a loss for a word. (Interruption) Precipitous, yes, thank you, that's a great word. Let's not be precipitous. Now that's a word that we can all take to the bank, and I'm pretty sure that would be a great word in Scrabble.

[3:45 p.m.]

Let's take the 30 days. Don't put our heads in the sand because I am telling you, I know what's going to happen. If I were on the CBRM council right now, I would be planning the same exact thing that I'm sure they are: protests at the office of every MLA in the CBRM who votes against the hoist motion, and who plans to vote for the bill. I'd be there with my bullhorn. I usually carry it in my car, but I had to get a new one because the other one eroded. But I usually have it, and I would be protesting at these MLAs' offices . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, order. Let's get back to the advantages and the disadvantages within the bill for 30 days within the motion.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm almost done, Speaker. Actually, that is a disadvantage of not voting for this hoist - that the members for the CBRM are going to end up with protests at their doors because people are not going to be happy. They're not happy with this bill and they will protest. They've been known to do it. That's very much a disadvantage to the members because it's happened before. It's never been fun.

What I will say in closing is, again, let's take a pause. Let's take a breather. Everyone back to their corners, and let's come to an agreement that we can count on - an agreement that everyone is happy with, and an agreement where everybody is a winner.

I know we can do it in 30 days if the political will is there. With that, Speaker, I take my seat.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I know it's unusual to stand and speak about why a dilatory motion is a bad idea, but I will speak for a few minutes on why a 30-day pause is a terrible idea for this bill. I know there are people watching who may wonder what on Earth is going on here. I can assure them that there is often, from Opposition benches, a

considerable amount of misinformation or misunderstanding. I will just clarify a few points right now for the sake of those people, and for the sake of my colleagues.

First of all, there has been an enormous amount of work put into this for more than a year with a committee called SERMGAR, which was really headed up by Murray Scott and Carolyn Bolivar-Getson. If there are any councillors out there and municipal people who want to know more about this, call them or call Brenda Chisholm Beaton or Juanita Spencer - the amount of work that has been put into this SERMGAR or this Municipal Reform Act.

There are a number of reasons why it would be a poor idea to change the bill or delay the bill. One of the things I want to address is the information about the 16 who are offside. Near as I can tell, that is a reference to the fact that there were two parts to the roads proposed in the original document, which everyone saw. By the way, we did extensive consultations once the agreement was reached in draft in the middle of the Summer, including two specifically for CBRM - including sending my staff to CBRM. I apologize that I didn't get there myself later, but it was really a little bit late, and we did communicate back with them.

I do want to point out that we did, in a written letter, offer CBRM the opportunity to opt out of this and have their own charter. I want to point out that we are the first government in a long time to say that - and if we said it, we would do it. We just said, If you want to be out, you let us know and you can be out, and we will offer you a charter. We didn't get a positive reply back on that.

There are lots of reasons why this should go ahead. There are too many things I want to say, so I am just losing track here. The reality is that this new Municipal Service Exchange Agreement - the first one since 1995 - will offer every single one of the 48 municipalities more money in their pocket. What they do with that is up to them.

Each of our municipalities collects taxes. Some of that tax money has been sent into the province for corrections and for the net operating losses on public housing in each municipality. It changes a little bit every year. Most of our municipal councillors will know about that. I just want to read some numbers.

For the Town of Amherst, if this deal doesn't go through, it will mean that they lose \$528,000. For a small town, that is a big amount of money if we don't do it. For the Town of Annapolis Royal, this deal, if it doesn't go through, means \$78,000 less in their pockets. For the Town of Middleton, if this deal doesn't go through, it means \$121,000 less in their pocket. The Town of Wolfville will lose \$423,000. The Town of Yarmouth, \$584,000. The County of Annapolis, \$457,000. The County of Colchester, \$682,000.

The reality is, when we talk about this being to the betterment of the municipalities by about \$40 million, this is what we are referring to. This is every one of the 48

municipalities. Cape Breton Regional Municipality stands out as the outlier in that this stands to their benefit to almost \$4.6 million.

That is real money. I know they are not happy. I am aware of that. The reality is that they collect money in taxes, and they remit money for corrections and the net operating losses. Whether they give a tax reduction or spend that money on badly needed infrastructure for citizens - that is the choice of every single municipality on this list. That is the simple reality.

If we were to delay this bill for 30 days, we would probably push it into the next session of the Legislature - the Spring Session - and that means all this money would be delayed a year. This will be \$40 million that the Province would receive but the municipalities would not receive. I think it would be a very significant loss to my municipalities and - it's like I said, every one of these - the District of Clare will gain \$238,000 from this deal.

If we take your advice and delay it, that means that's a year lost on that deal. I don't know if - and I am looking at the member who represents the District of Clare - I'm not sure that's really what he wants for his municipality. This is an extraordinarily generous first step for us. That being said, we recognize there are still controversial things.

Just to get back to the roads, there were two parts to the road plan. One of the most pressing issues on roads was how roads were handled for towns, and that is in Part A. That is still in there. There is also an infrastructure fund program to allow municipalities to apply for, so we can deal with that. That's another part of it not included in the \$40 million we were talking about.

Another part of it, which my colleague from Glace Bay referenced, was the extraordinary cost of these obsolete schools. The reason they're expensive is tearing down a large building that has asbestos in it can cost anywhere from \$300,000 to \$1 million. It's incredibly expensive to tear them down. When they go to the municipality, the municipality is left with the bill. We're saying we recognize that that's a burden on municipalities. We're willing to take that on.

The deal is an incredibly good deal for our municipalities. I feel as a government that we can take some pride in that this is quite a generous deal in reality. Is any deal perfect? No, nothing's perfect. The only way you could avoid criticism is to do nothing, I guess, and then you'll be criticized for doing nothing. That's what we have. We have two previous governments who took swings at this and didn't do it. No criticism there, but we're taking a swing at this. We're doing it.

I realize that some of the criticism from CBRM comes from the fact that they wanted more. This is the deal, this is where we arrived at. The Municipal Financial Capacity and Town Foundation Grant, which they receive, will remain the same for five

years. We made that commitment to all our municipalities. Meanwhile, I will say that - as I know the former member, who is a former Municipal Affairs Minister, would know - the Municipal Financial Capacity and Town Foundation Grant is absolutely based on the formula we received from NSFM a number of years ago. It's not our formula, it's their formula. It's what we use, and it's a complicated formula. We're willing to work with that.

We have a commitment as a government to renegotiate this MOU that, if you think about 1995, the internet didn't even exist in 1995. We're not looking back, we're looking forward. That being said, there's still a lot more work to do. There's what we call Schedule A, which is things that are difficult. Fire service is a difficult question. Policing, which will be largely led by the Department of Justice, is a difficult issue, and complicated and incredibly important to our province. We will address that.

The roads issue, which I know you've quoted 16 are not happy with, as far as I can understand - you're just referring to that Schedule B in this, which we pulled out. There were people who had problems with that road issue. The reality is, this is a tremendously good deal for our municipalities, and I think the idea that we would delay it would simply mean, at the end of the day, there's \$40 million more in the government's coffers this year than there would be, because it won't happen until next year. If we do it now, it will mean there's \$40 million in the next fiscal year in all our municipalities' pockets, spread out. These are real numbers. This is a real impact.

I'm a little bit shocked at the vociferous debate on the issue, because we all have municipal friends and partners. Every one of my municipalities will benefit too. Kings County will benefit a fair bit. The benefit is all related to the numbers of citizens, if you understand what I'm saying.

It's all relative to the numbers, and also relative, actually, to the density of public housing. Some areas have way more public housing than others. That's the reality. CBRM and HRM have a lot of public housing. There's quite a bit of public housing in the Annapolis Valley, but not to the numbers that there are in CBRM.

With that, again, I reiterate, I think it would be a good idea that we not pass the 30-day delay.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: I am also happy to get up and talk about why we need to hoist this motion. First thing we need to do is hoist this motion to prevent the Tory tax heist on the residents of the CBRM. That's what is going to happen here when this motion goes through - it's going to be a tax hike.

The minister just spoke and he said a lot of numbers - numbers here, numbers there. He has learned very well from the lead illusionist of this government. All they do is present

an illusion of action, an illusion of action that says, “We’re doing this, we’re doing that. We can’t hoist the bill because we’re going to do this, we’re going to give all this money.”

In actual fact, the \$4.5 million that we’re talking about for the CBRM is flow-through money. It’s money that is being charged to the residents and being sent to the Province. What the minister is suggesting that these municipalities do is keep that money, keep taxing the residents of that money, and I have to tell you that’s fundamentally wrong.

The CBRM does the right thing. Imagine the seniors in Cape Breton who are losing out on the Seniors Care Grant because they’re just over the edge.

[4:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. Let’s stick to the advantages and disadvantages of the hoist. The honourable member for Northside-Westmount, who I am sure is getting to it.

FRED TILLEY: I am absolutely getting to why we need to hoist this bill. It’s because the residents of the CBRM are missing out on their Seniors Care Grant because they are over. They are missing out on their HARP grant because it’s over. They reduced the amount to \$75,000 and they reduced the amount.

Now why is it important that we hoist this bill? It’s for a second look at the bill because this is going to further raise taxes on the seniors of the CBRM, on the working poor of the CBRM, on everybody in the CBRM. Their taxes are going to go up by 16 per cent.

If I was a sitting CBRM member of the government, I would be telling the Premier, “You can’t do this. If you do this, I am going to sit as an Independent, because I am here to represent my constituents.” I can say that because I already spoke out about my party about something I didn’t agree with because I am there to represent my constituents first - I would hope everybody in this room is there.

We need to hoist this motion so that the members can go back and rethink their position. The members of the CBRM on the government side really need to look at this bill and what it’s going to do to their residents.

There’s no choice for the CBRM. There’s no choice for the other 16 municipalities that have indicated that they are not in favour of this bill. The choice that they are given by this government is to tax their residents for something they are not paying for, in an area that already has the highest taxes in Nova Scotia and the lowest income levels - the average family income levels are the lowest in Nova Scotia. Without taking 30 days to think about this, we’re now going to push this motion through. The second-largest municipality in the province with the second-largest police force is being lumped into a deal that they don’t need. The member for Glace Bay talked about the charter, the Minister talked about the

charter, but was it, “We will negotiate a charter” or, “We will negotiate a charter with you if you agree to this?” There are always conditions. Again, it’s the illusion of action, Speaker.

We need to hoist this bill - as the member for Sydney-Membertou said, it’s not for six months. It could be up to six months that we’re asking - we’re only asking for 30 days - 30 days to hoist this bill. It’s not about the municipal government, it’s not about the provincial government, it’s about the residents of Sydney Mines. It’s about the residents of North Sydney, Alder Point, Florence, Westmount, Coxheath, Point Edward, and all points in between. It’s about the residents of Glace Bay, it’s about the residents of Cape Breton East.

We owe it to them to work through this deal so that they get a break with their taxes. And the proper amount of equalization goes to the municipalities that deserve it. We look at the amount that was reduced in equalization, from \$15 million to \$13 million for CBRM. From \$30 million to \$15 million to \$13 million. That doesn’t sound like a government that understands the issues at the municipal level to me - a grant that’s mostly paid for by Nova Scotia power.

Use some of the surplus to provide the like services that equalization provides for in our communities. Speaker, with that I move to adjourn debate on this hoist motion.

THE SPEAKER: We have a motion on the floor to adjourn debate on the hoist motion.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[4:08 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. We have reached the time of adjournment. We stand adjourned until Tuesday, October 24th between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m.

We are adjourned.

[The House rose at 5:00 p.m.]