



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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First Session

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
SPEAKER'S RULINGS:	
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was not required to table a document quoting the Official Opposition Leader (Point of Order by the Leader of the Official Opposition [Hansard p.6622, Oct. 25, 2023])	6669
PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES	
Private and Local Bills - Bill No. 348, J.A. MacDonald	6670
GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION:	
Res. 739, Seaside A Cappella: Comp. Partic. - Recog., The Premier.....	6671
Vote - Affirmative.....	6672
Res. 740, MacLeod, Finlay: Gaelic Teaching Efforts - Recog., Hon. A. MacMaster.....	6672
Vote - Affirmative.....	6673
Res. 741, Doucet-Boudreau, Glenda: Cert. of Merit Recip. - Congrats., Hon. C. LeBlanc	6673

Vote - Affirmative.....	6675
Res. 742, Paul, Daniel N.: Death of - Tribute, Hon. T. Boudreau.....	6675
Vote - Affirmative.....	6675
Res. 743, Muise, Leo: Retirement - Congrats., Hon. K. Smith.....	6676
Vote - Affirmative.....	6676
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:	
No. 377, Wood Chip Heating Systems in Public Buildings Act, Hon. Z. Churchill.....	6676
No. 378, Children’s Rights Impact Assessments Act, L. Lachance.....	6676
No. 379, Forests Act (amended), Hon. Z. Churchill.....	6676
No. 380, Medically at-Risk Registry Act, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	6677
No. 381, Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act (amended), R. LeBlanc.....	6677
No. 382, Volunteer Fire and Ground Search and Rescue Services Act (amended), R. LeBlanc.....	6677
No. 383, Forestry Industry Carbon Pricing Exemption Act, R. LeBlanc.....	6677
[TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS:]	
Vacancies in Provincial Correctional Facilities, Hon. B. Johns.....	6677
Maintenance Enforcement Statistics as of September 2023, Hon. B. Johns.....	6677
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:	
Seaside A Cappella: Comp. Partic. - Recog., Hon. B. Druhan.....	6678
Patient Safety Week: SKIP Network - Recog., Hon. Z. Churchill.....	6678
Powley, Jen: Death of - Tribute, C. Chender.....	6679
Burbine, David: Music Career - Congrats., N. Young.....	6680
Flynn, Jamie: The Medicine Shoppe - Recog., Hon. P. Arab.....	6680
Powley, Jen: Death of - Tribute, L. Lachance.....	6681
Ledwidge Lumber: 80th Anniv. - Congrats., L. Harrison.....	6681
Graceful Soaps: Bus. Success - Recog., A. Duale.....	6682
Powley, Jen: Death of - Tribute, G. Burrill.....	6682

Moment of Silence.....	6683
Darku, Stacy: Esinam Couns. Inc. - Congrats., Hon. S. Craig.....	6683
Bedford South Fest.: Businesses - Recog., B. Clark.....	6683
Grandmothers Campaign: Quilt Creation - Congrats., S. Leblanc	6684
Scott, Murray & Linda: 50th Anniv. - Congrats., Hon. T. Rushton.....	6684
Hockey Helps Homeless: Fundraiser - Recog., Hon. B. Jessome.....	6685
Legion Branch 128: 75 th Anniv. - Recog., K. Coombes.....	6685
North. Links Golf Course: Donation - Recog., E. Smith-McCrossin.....	6686
Noack, L./Hayes, M.: SPCA Fundraiser - Thanks, Hon. B. Wong.....	6686
Fillmore, Louis: Chess Accomplishments - Recog., L. Nicoll	6687
Alliance Française: 120th Anniv. - Congrats., S. Hansen	6687
Johnson, Wayne: Com. Serv. - Recog., Hon. T. Boudreau.....	6688
Const. Assts.: Work for Constituents - Thanks, Hon. T. Ince	6688
Atlantic News: 50th Anniv. - Congrats., L. Lachance.....	6688
Valade, Jean-François: Com. Serv. - Recog., Hon. T. Halman.....	6689
Fennell, Patrick: Death of - Tribute, F. Tilley.....	6690
Worth, Kendall: Hourglass Awd. Recip. - Congrats., G. Burrill.....	6690
Lake Echo Terry Fox Run: Success - Recog., Hon. T. Grosse	6691
ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:	
No. 1,219, Prem.: Seniors Care Grant - Explain, Hon. Z. Churchill	6691
No. 1,220, Prem.: Housing Strategy - Improve, C. Chender	6693
No. 1,221, MAH: Doubling of Population - Plan, Hon. Z. Churchill	6695
No. 1,222, DAE: Student Housing - Create, Hon. Z. Churchill	6696
No. 1,223, MAH: Rent Supplement Cut - Explain, B. Clark.....	6697

No. 1,224, DAE: Student Housing - Assist, L. Lachance.....	6698
No. 1,225, DFA: Access to Capital for Fishers - Assure, R. LeBlanc	6700
No. 1,226, DFA: Proactive Fisheries Enforcement - Implement, R. LeBlanc	6701
No. 1,227, DOA: Improve Cell Service - Commit, C. Kerr.....	6702
No. 1,228, MAH: Municipalities Treatment - Apologize, K. Coombes.....	6703
No. 1,229, NRR: Coal Transition - Fund, Hon. D. Mombourquette	6704
No. 1,230, DPW: Infrastructure Deficit - Define, Hon. K. Regan.....	6705
No. 1,231, DPW: Seal Island Bridge Plans - Explain, F. Tilley.....	6706
No. 1,232, EECD: Child Care Wait-List Fees - Stop, S. Hansen	6707
No. 1,233, NRR: Wood Heat Initiative - Update, R. LeBlanc	6708
POINT OF ORDER	6709
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:	
PRIVATE AND LOCAL BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	
No. 369, Riverport Electric Light Act for Polling District No. 2, In the County of Lunenburg, The (amended), Hon. S. Corkum-Greek	6711
Vote - Affirmative.....	6712
No. 351, Bethel Presbyterian Church, Sydney Act (amended), Hon. D. Mombourquette	6712
Vote - Affirmative.....	6712
PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	
No. 340, Municipal Reform (2023) Act, Motion to Hoist, F. Tilley.....	6713
J. White	6718
Hon. Z. Churchill	6723
Hon. P. Arab	6728
Hon. J. Lohr	6731
Vote - Affirmative.....	6732
HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CWH ON BILLS AT 7:22 P.M.	6733
HOUSE RECONVENED AT 10:47 P.M.	6733
ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Friday, Oct. 27 th at 9:00 a.m.....	6734



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2023

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Before we begin the daily routine, I will speak on a point of order from yesterday: whether a minister must table a document quoting the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Yesterday, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition stood on a point of order to allege that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing misquoted him without tabling a document to substantiate the quotation.

I have reviewed the transcript of the exchange and determined that the minister was not purporting the quote of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition; he was merely characterizing the Leader's remarks.

While a member must table the quotation when a member quotes an individual in debate in this House, there is no requirement to table a substantiating document if the member is paraphrasing, characterizing or otherwise alluding to an individual's remarks, so accordingly, the point of order is dismissed.

We will begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Speaker, as Chair of the Committee on Private and Local Bills, I am directed to report that the committee has met and considered the following bill:

Bill No. 348 - An Act to Amend Chapter 72 of the Acts of 1897, the Lunenburg Common Lands Act.

The committee recommends the bill to the favourable consideration of the House, without any amendments.

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

Are there any further reports for Presenting Reports of Committees?

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: Shortly before this House reconvened, Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and all of Nova Scotia experienced the profound loss of Jen Powley. Today in the House, several members will be providing honour to her through members' statements.

At this point, I would like to welcome her family, who are sitting in your gallery today. May I please beg leave to make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, the member may.

LISA LACHANCE: We have Thomas Elliott, who's Jen's partner; Barbara Morris, who's Jen's mom - if you want to stand or give a little wave, you can - and William Powley, who's Jen's dad; Candice Laws, Jen's sister; Matt Laws, Candice's husband; Joseph Moyneur, Barbara's partner; Ian Elliott; Jack Elliott; Farzan Hedayat; and Norman Tropak. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: We welcome you to the House. It's a pleasure to have you.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Speaker, before I read my government notice of motion, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

THE PREMIER: Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce some very special guests who are with us today. Sitting in the East Gallery and in your gallery, the Speaker's Gallery, with us today are members of Seaside A Cappella, the South Shore's all-female a cappella show chorus. We were honoured to hear them perform earlier today in this building, and they are incredible. It was a very moving little show they put on for us.

In the Speaker's Gallery is Judy Comeau, music director and founder. Thank you, Judy. Judy brings to Seaside A Cappella over five decades of experience directing choruses in Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes. She has had numerous successes in leading choruses to become champions at regional and international competitions. Accompanying her - and of course other members of the chorus - is Yvonne Rafuse, chapter president.

If the whole chorus could rise and receive the warm welcome of the House, please. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 739

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

Whereas Seaside A Cappella is an educational organization that supports women in developing vocal and performance skills, with approximately 44 members, the group brings together women from Nova Scotia's South Shore, Annapolis Valley, Cape Breton, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island; and

Whereas previous music experience is not a requirement to join the chorus, but music is a common thread that brings chorus members together, often resulting in lifelong friendships; and

Whereas the chorus will be travelling once again to Grand Rapids, Michigan, for an international convention and contest, Pure Harmony, in November 2023;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Legislature join me in wishing Seaside A Cappella the very best of luck in their upcoming international competition. We thank them for sharing their dedication, passion, and tremendous vocal skills with us.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

RESOLUTION NO. 740

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, the English will follow.

Seach gura b'e gaisgeach dan a'Ghàidhlig is dh'a cultur a bh'ann am Fionnlagh MacLeòid - 's e Fionnlagh na Stri a bh'againn air - nach maireann, agus do ghléidheadh mhion-chànanan eile, an cuid cultur an is an luach air feadh an t-saoghail; agus

Seach gun do chruthaich is gun do bhrosnaich Fionnlagh ceàrd - eòlasan sònraichte, thro'n iomairt aige Total Immersion Plus (TIP) gus a' Ghàidhlig a thogail is e a chompartich iad thar dheicheadan còmhla ri buill na coimhearsnachd Ghàidhealaich; agus

Seach mar a bhios iomadh taoitear 's a' choimhearsnachd Ghàidhealaich a' cur gu feum a' mhodh, Gàidhlig aig Baile (GaB), stéidhichte gu mòr air TIP, gus luchd-ionnsachaidh a chuideachadh gu bhi a'togail na Gàidhlig is gu bhi a'tighinn gu fileantas a thaobh a cultuir, thro mhodhan coltach ri bhi: a' fuireach 's a' Ghàidhlig a-mhàin, a' cur gu feum phropachan, a' cur prìomhachas air na ciadfathan, ri ath-aithris, a' cur gu feum cainnt na bodhaige, agus a' gabhail pàirt ann an gnìomhan làthail na dachaidh;

Mar sin, biodh e 'na rùn gun aithnich a' Phàrlamaid Bheag Fionnlagh MacLeòid, Fionnladh na Stri, airson na h-obrach gun stad is gun sgair a bh'aige A rinn diofar dha na gaidheil an albainn nuaidh, agus gun cuir gach duine again clach air a chàrn. A Labhraiche Urramaich, tha mi a' guidhe gun téid brath-glusad an darna taobh agus gun téid a' chùis air adhart as aonais deasbaid.

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

Whereas the late Finlay MacLeod of Scotland, known as Fionnladh na Stri - Finlay of the Struggle - was a champion for Gaelic language and its cultural expression and the value of maintaining other minority languages and cultures throughout the world; and

Whereas Finlay, through his Total Immersion Plus (TIP) initiative, created and promoted unique techniques to acquire and use Gaelic language, and personally shared them over decades with members of the Nova Scotia Gaelic community; and

Whereas many Gaelic community instructors today use the Gàidhlig aig Baile ((GaB) Gaelic in the Community) methodology, heavily based on TIP, to assist learners in Gaelic language acquisition and cultural fluency through techniques such as staying only in Gaelic, the utilization of props, focussing on the use of the five senses, repetition, utilizing body language, and participating in Gaelic activities based in the home;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly recognize Finlay MacLeod Fionnladh na Stri for his relentless work in Gaelic, which has made a difference for Nova Scotia Gaels, and that each of us place a stone on his cairn.

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.

RESOLUTION NO. 741

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

Attendu que le certificat de mérite Denise Samson de la Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse est décerné à une francophone pour son engagement envers la promotion des droits des filles et des femmes acadiennes en Nouvelle-Écosse; et

Attendu que Glenda Doucet-Boudreau, originaire de la Baie Sainte-Marie, a reçu le certificat de mérite en 2023 dans le cadre des célébrations du 40^{ème} anniversaire de la Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse; et

Attendu que Glenda Doucet-Boudreau incarne les valeurs de l'équité, de l'égalité, et de l'inclusion dans sa participation passée et continue à de nombreux organismes acadiens et francophones;

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que tous les membres de l'Assemblée législative félicitent Glenda Doucet-Boudreau pour son engagement communautaire et ses contributions inestimables à la promotion du statut de la femme.

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

[1:15 p.m.]

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

Whereas the Denise Samson Certificate of Merit from the Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse is awarded to a French-speaking woman for her dedication to the advancement of Acadian girls' and women's rights in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Glenda Doucet-Boudreau of Baie Sainte-Marie was awarded the 2023 Certificate of Merit during the Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse's 40th anniversary celebration; and

Whereas Glenda Doucet-Boudreau embodies the values of equality, equity, and inclusiveness through her past and continued involvement with many Acadian and Francophone organizations;

Therefore, be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate Glenda Doucet-Boudreau for her community involvement and invaluable contributions to the advancement of the status of women.

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 of the motion? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of L'nu Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 742

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

Whereas Elder Daniel N. Paul of Millbrook First Nation, who passed away on June 27th, was a knowledge keeper and historian who worked tirelessly to build greater understanding of Mi'kmaw culture and the history we all share in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Elder Paul, who was born in Sipekne'katik First Nation, used his writing and activism to give a voice to L'nu and create awareness of the experience of Mi'kmaw in Nova Scotia during colonization; and

Whereas through the in-depth knowledge and research he shared, we are all learning the difference between erasing history and commemorating events and people that continue to represent trauma and do not exemplify the ethical standards of today;

Therefore, be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in honouring the life and legacy of Daniel N. Paul and recognize his lifetime of service to identify areas where we can move forward together with meaningful action towards reconciliation.

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 of the motion? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 743

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

Whereas Leo Muise has been Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance since 2016, and during his tenure the organization has built its brand and increased membership; and

Whereas under Leo's leadership, the Alliance secured the Atlantic Fisheries Fund program that has supported members in building a strong future for the sector with investments in new equipment, innovative technologies, and improved productivity; and

Whereas Leo recently retired from the Alliance after a career that included many years working at the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture and Fisheries and Oceans Canada;

Therefore, be it resolved that all members of this House join me in congratulating Leo Muise on his retirement and expressing our sincere gratitude for his commitment and many lasting contributions to advancing our seafood industry.

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 of the motion? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 377 - An Act Respecting the Installation of Wood Chip Heating Systems in New Public Buildings. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

Bill No. 378 - An Act to Require Children's Rights Impact Assessments. (Lisa Lachance)

Bill No. 379 - An Act to Amend Chapter 179 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, The Forests Act, Respecting Forestry Cleanups After Natural Disasters. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

Bill No. 380 - An Act to Create a Medically at-Risk Registry. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 381 - An Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 1996, The Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act. (Ronnie LeBlanc)

Bill No. 382 - An Act to Amend Chapter 13 of the Acts of 2002, The Volunteer Fire and Ground Search and Rescue Services Act Respecting the Provision of Emergency Health Services. (Ronnie LeBlanc)

Bill No. 383 - An Act to Exempt the Forestry Industry from Carbon Pricing. (Ronnie LeBlanc)

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

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: I beg the indulgence of the House to revert to Tabling Reports, Regulations and Other Papers.

THE SPEAKER: Is it is agreed that we can revert back to Tabling Reports, Regulations and Other Papers? It is agreed.

[TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, during the Question Period this past Tuesday, October 24th, there were a number of questions from Opposition members to the Minister of Justice, who said that they would report them back to the House. I would like to table those for the benefit of House members.

One was in regard to the vacancies in provincial correctional facilities. Currently, there are no correctional officer positions in provincial correctional facilities that are vacant. Maintenance enforcement - there was a request on that. There has been a decrease of 12.6 per cent to \$55.3 million. I'll table both of those for the benefit of the members.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

SEASIDE A CAPPELLA: COMP. PARTIC. - RECOG.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, following the Premier's introduction, I rise today to recognize Seaside A Cappella, an award-winning not-for-profit show chorus consisting of talented women from the South Shore area and beyond.

Founded in 2017 by lead director Judy Comeau, Seaside A Cappella empowers women through performance, education, and friendship. They unite as a group, and encourage women of all ages to join, learn, and grow, no matter what their musical experience might be. Most recently, Seaside A Cappella participated in Harmony International Area 1 competition, where the chorus as well as their quartet, the Four Shore, qualified for a second time to compete at an international level in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in November of this year - an amazing achievement.

Speaker, please join me in celebrating this incredible group of women, who unite and inspire each other through music and song. Seaside A Cella is a found family of soul sisters who deliver joy, optimism, and harmony to our community and beyond.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I would like to the House to please provide their attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined by some very special guests. We have Dr. Ellen T. Crumley, SKIP executive director; Tonya Darlington, executive assistant to Dr. Christine Chambers; Dr. Louise Tunnah, SKIP project coordinator; Dr. Jennifer Parker, SKIP grant writer and research associate with the Centre for Pediatric Pain Research, and her daughter Madelyn, who is in Grade 7; Megan Cook, SKIP operations lead; Anna Lieber, SKIP communications coordinator; and Pars Atasoy, SKIP engagement and impact coordinator. I ask the House to provide a warm welcome to our guests. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

PATIENT SAFETY WEEK: SKIP NETWORK - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I rise today to recognize Patient Safety Week and the many health care professionals who provide top care and treatment to Nova Scotians.

Today in the Legislature, we have guests from Solutions for Kids in Pain - SKIP - based out of Dalhousie University and co-directed by Children's Healthcare Canada. The SKIP network spans Canada, allowing them to work with many people and organizations to support children and families where they are. SKIP provides the best available research

and evidence about treating kids who are experiencing pain to all types of providers who deliver health care to children and youth.

SKIP has achieved remarkable results in improving the quality of care, both here at the IWK and all across Atlantic Canada, and indeed the country. They are supporting a high standard of care to child and youth patients when they are exposed to pain because of their need for a treatment procedure or diagnostic test that is painful and distributes these evidence-based practices through five knowledge hubs located across the country. SKIP worked with a wide range of groups to develop more resources than ever before, including information from Indigenous and Francophone communities, and were able to get information and tools in the hands of millions thanks to features in major national and international media outlets, participation in public awareness campaigns, pop-up conferences, and virtual public talks.

Please join me in welcoming and recognizing the leadership of this tremendous program that we are so fortunate to have located here in our own backyard. (Applause).

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

POWLEY, JEN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise today to honour the life and the fight of Jen Powley, who passed away recently due to complications of a lifelong degenerative disease. Throughout her life, Jen made it her mission to ensure that disabled people had the right to live in the home of their choosing instead of the outdated and inhumane practice of mass institutionalization.

Powley authored two books, with her most recent sharing her journey of finding and sustaining accessible housing as a disabled person, in hope that it helps others to do the same. In recent years, Jen worked on a pilot project that demonstrated how, with appropriate assistance, people with severe disabilities could live independently in homes tailored to their own lives and desires. Powley fought not just for equal rights for people with disabilities but to make clear the need for all people to thrive and have their social, psychological, and emotional needs met.

Please join me in recognizing the incredible achievements and legacy of Jen Powley. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

BURBINE, DAVID: MUSIC CAREER - CONGRATS.

NOLAN YOUNG: Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate David Burbine of Shelburne, who is a recent inductee in the Nova Scotia Country Music Hall of Fame. David is well-known for his love of traditional country, and for mentoring young performers to keep the tradition alive. David is also a regular at many country events and throughout the province and volunteers for residents at several seniors' homes and numerous community events.

In 2014, David won first place in the Nova Scotia amateur country singing competition and second place at provincials.

In 2019, he represented Nova Scotia in the North American Country Music Association (NACMAI) International Music Competition in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, winning International Male Vocalist of the Year and Most Promising Entertainer in the over 50 years traditional country music category.

This past Spring, David won NACMAI's 50+ Horizon Male Vocalist and 50+ Horizon Male Entertainer awards.

I respectfully ask that all members join me in congratulating David Burbine on his tremendous musical career. (Applause)

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

FLYNN, JAMIE: THE MEDICINE SHOPPE - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Today I rise to extend my sincere congratulations to Jamie Flynn, the pharmacist/owner of The Medicine Shoppe Pharmacy located in Fairview-Clayton Park as they celebrated their 15th anniversary on June 21st.

For a decade and a half, Jamie has been a pillar of dedication and commitment to our community and his customers. His unwavering service has touched the lives of many, providing not just health care but a sense of trust and reliability in times of need. The 15th anniversary of The Medicine Shoppe Pharmacy is a testament to Jamie's enduring dedication and to the deep bond he has formed within the community.

In an industry that demands care, precision, and empathy, Jamie has excelled and become an integral part of the health care support system for the residents of Fairview-Clayton Park.

I invite all members to join me in congratulating Jamie Flynn and The Medicine Shoppe Pharmacy on their 15th anniversary. Their dedication and service are a testament to

the strength of community and the importance of access to health care in our daily lives. Thank you, Jamie, for your unwavering commitment to our community. (Applause)

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

POWLEY, JEN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, it is my deepest honour to rise today to recognize Jen Powley. Jen was one of my fiercest and most community-minded constituents and advocates. She was an outspoken activist for so many causes: the environment, local politics, disability rights, queer and trans refugees, and equity for all. She left her mark on so many Nova Scotian lives. She was a decorated academic, holding four degrees in four different disciplines, and she published two books: *Just Jen* and *Making a Home: Assisted Living in the Community for Young Disabled People*, wherein she wrote about her life with multiple sclerosis, and the fight to ensure young, disabled people's rights to live independently and outside of institutions.

While we take time to celebrate Jen's full and incredible life now, her efforts and advocacy will be felt for generations to come. Nova Scotia would not be the province it is today for the disability community, the environment, and so much more without her tireless work.

I ask my fellow members to commemorate Jen Powley's life and work and commit to see her causes through. Halifax, Nova Scotia and the world need it. (Applause)

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

LEDWIDGE LUMBER: 80TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

LARRY HARRISON: Speaker, I stand to recognize the incredible achievement of Ledwidge Lumber in Enfield. Ledwidge Lumber is a family-owned business which has been striving to be a good corporate citizen in the management of forest resources for an incredible 80 years.

Established as a shingle mill in 1943 by Laurie Ledwidge, it has grown 100 times its size, and has supported three generations of the Ledwidge family and dozens of families in Colchester and Hants Counties.

They are quick to adopt technological advances and, more importantly, are supportive of their many loyal and productive employees. They produce over 70 million FBM annually, while remaining a family-oriented organization.

I ask the members of the House to join me in congratulating Ledwidge Lumber on achieving the incredible milestone of 80 years in business, and best wishes and prosperity for the next 80 years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

GRACEFUL SOAPS: BUS. SUCCESS - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Today, I would like to recognize Graceful Soaps, a new business that is taking Nova Scotia by storm. A craft with artistic reflection and always using all-natural ingredients, Graceful Soaps is a great gift for any special person you may have in your life.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

POWLEY, JEN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, the members for Dartmouth South and Halifax Citadel-Sable Island have spoken about the passing of our friend Jen Powley. I would like to add to what they have said, that earlier this year, shortly before Jen's passing, Jen read the text of a member's statement I had prepared, extending the congratulations of the Assembly to her on the publication of her new book, *Making a Home: Assisted Living in the Community for Young Disabled People*. Jen said that she was, and I quote, "honoured at this thought."

In her memory I would like to read that statement now, written, as I say, before her passing. Because I have taken a moment to introduce it, I would ask for the indulgence of the House if I may take perhaps an extra few seconds beyond the limits of a member's statement's time, as follows:

"Madam Speaker, the congratulations of this House are extended to Jen Powley on the recent publication of *Making a Home*. *Making a Home* tells the story of Powley's multi-year struggle to address the inappropriateness of young disabled persons being forced to live in nursing homes, through the development of a shared attendant services system for adults with severe physical disabilities, such as her own. The book comes at a landmark moment in the fight for the rights of people living with disabilities in Nova Scotia. Recent legal victories of the Disability Rights Coalition have established a court-mandated process through which people with disabilities living in large institutions must be provided with in-community living options within the next five years. *Making a Home* is a frontal attack on ableism, and in Nova Scotia, the province with the highest rates of disability in the country, it is a particularly important contribution."

Speaker, may I ask for a moment of silence in memory of Jen Powley?

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for a moment of silence. Please stand.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

DARKU, STACY: ESINAM COUNS. INC. - CONGRATS.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Stacy Darku of Esinam Counselling Inc. in Lower Sackville. Stacy is a registered counselling therapist candidate with the Nova Scotia College of Counselling Therapists, and has been working in the mental health field for over 12 years in various capacities.

Stacy specializes in working with individuals - some as young as 4 years old - who have experienced sexualized trauma, domestic violence, addictions, grief, sexual difficulties and racial injustice.

I would ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating Stacy and her staff at Esinam Counselling Inc. for their compassion and dedication to those who are struggling to find themselves and want to heal from their trauma.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BEDFORD SOUTH FEST.: BUSINESSES - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: On September 9th of this year, I was happy to host the Second Annual Bedford South End-of-Summer Fest. It was a great opportunity at Tyler Samson Park in West Bedford to bring together hundreds of families from around the constituency to have a good time at the end of Summer and the beginning of the school year.

One of the great things about Bedford South is the huge range in diversity of small businesses and restaurants, many of which helped contribute to the success of the event. I just wanted to recognize those businesses here today: Beanville Coffee Roastery, Dejan's European Bakery, Dhaba 2 Bedford Restaurant, Nayya Pizza, Tinápe Artisan Breads and Cakes, Turkuaz Restaurant, Umai Sushi, Wing'n It Restaurant, Sobeys Bedford South, and, of course, Hatfield Farm for providing the goats and donkeys, which were a big hit as always.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, may I make a quick introduction. I'd like to draw the members' attention today to the gallery opposite, where we have two fine residents of Dartmouth North. We have Joanne Lamey and Rita MacLean.

Joanne and Rita are great community members. Joanne's been a long-time supporter and employee of the NDP until recently. More to the point today, Joanne is involved with the Stephen Lewis Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign. I'm going to do a member statement about that.

I'll ask the House to welcome them warmly. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

GRANDMOTHERS CAMPAIGN: QUILT CREATION - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, most in this House will be familiar with human rights activist and diplomat Stephen Lewis and his foundation, which is committed to supporting community-led organizations working to eliminate HIV/AIDS in countries across sub-Saharan Africa.

The foundation's Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign is a community of kindred spirits across Canada, the U.K., and Australia who have raised over \$40 million in solidarity with African grandmothers and children in communities affected by HIV.

Earlier this October, the Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign was proud to bring a very special quilt to Nova Scotia to honour the Stephen Lewis Foundation's 20th anniversary. Entitled "Nurturing Generations Under the Canopy of Sisterhood," this multi-coloured quilt is a symbol of solidarity stitched together with contributions from over 300 grandmothers from across Canada and six sub-Saharan countries.

The quilt is a beautiful example of what is possible when women gather, share resources, creativity, and compassion. Each piece was deliberate and meaningful, and represented the experience of the grandmother who created it.

I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating the Nova Scotia grandmothers, and all the grandmothers from around the world, who contributed to this quilt and to work every day to end AIDS in Africa. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

SCOTT, MURRAY & LINDA: 50TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, I would ask all to join me in congratulating a wonderful couple who many know throughout this House. Murray and Linda Scott celebrated their 50th anniversary this past July.

Murray and Linda are not only well-known and respected for their many years of involvement in local and provincial politics, but also for many a year's volunteering in all

of our communities throughout Cumberland. Linda is a retired school teacher and has made a difference in the lives of countless children, and during her career as a volunteer.

Murray was a police officer for many years until he dove into the political world and held many positions in government including Cabinet Minister and Speaker of the House. He is now the first elected official mayor for the County of Cumberland.

I would ask all in this House to congratulate Murray and Linda on their 50th anniversary celebration.

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

[1:45 p.m.]

HOCKEY HELPS HOMELESS: FUNDRAISER - RECOG.

HON. BEN JESSOME: I'd like to recognize that November 9th and 10th of this year marks the fourth annual Hockey Helps the Homeless fundraiser here in Halifax. It'll be held this year once again at the RBC Centre in Dartmouth.

The cause raised \$140,000 last year for beneficiaries Adsum House and Vets Canada. I'd like to note that 24 MLAs from all parties supported that cause. I want to wish congratulations to local committee Chair, Don Murray, thank all of the teams of volunteers that have come out in droves to support this event, and the team at Hockey Helps the Homeless, nationally.

I look forward to participating, raising some money, meeting some pros, and having some fun, all in the nature of a good cause.

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

LEGION BRANCH 128: 75TH ANNIV. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, it has been an eventful year for Royal Canadian Legion Branch 128. On October 7th, Branch 128, Whitney Pier celebrated its 75th anniversary. It was a beautiful day as we marched from Neville Park to the Legion, where we laid wreaths. It was an honour and a privilege to be part of the celebration to honour the members of this Legion. The members of the Whitney Pier Legion work hard to support veterans, their families, and the community.

Branch 128 also hosted Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command's convention in May. It was an honour to welcome all delegates, and I also had the honour to have the member for Sydney-Membertou with us.

Congratulations to the members on a successful convention and 75th anniversary, and I do hope to see them on Remembrance Day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

NORTH. LINKS GOLF COURSE: DONATION - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and recognize the members, staff, and guests of Northumberland Links Golf Club for their commitment to helping those in our community who rely on the local food bank.

Earlier this Summer, Northumberland Links donated \$7,675 to the Open Hamper Food Bank, located outside of the village of Pugwash. A donation of that amount is very significant to a small food bank like the Open Hamper, which operates completely on a volunteer basis.

Previously, the Open Hamper was housed in the basement of North Cumberland Memorial Hospital. However, thanks to the generosity of the team at Cross Roads Cycle Sales, led by owner Lee Weir, a few months ago they moved to larger, more accessible quarters.

Please join me in thanking both Northumberland Links and Cross Roads Cycle Sales for supporting the less fortunate in their community.

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

NOACK, L./HAYES, M.: SPCA FUNDRAISER - THANKS

HON. BRIAN WONG: As many of us remember the tragedy of the wildfires in Barrington, Tantallon, and Hammonds Plains, I want to recognize two Grade 4 students from Waverley Memorial elementary school who spent their ninth birthday in an unconventional yet heartwarming way.

Liv Noack and Melanie Hayes held a joint birthday party at the LWF Community Hall in Fall River. Instead of gifts for themselves, they asked for donations to support the SPCA and the many fur friends injured and affected by the fires. The selfless act of these animal lovers helped them raise \$1,000.

Speaker, I ask you to please join me in thanking and congratulating Liv and Melanie on their incredible fundraiser. We are lucky to have these best friends in our community. I suspect we'll be hearing more from these two amazing young citizens.

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

FILLMORE, LOUIS: CHESS ACCOMPLISHMENTS - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Louis Fillmore from Dartmouth. Louis is 12 years old and has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to chess through his regular participation in multiple local chess clubs as well as tournaments hosted by the Nova Scotia Scholastic Chess Association - the NSSCA - and Chess Nova Scotia.

Recently, Louis achieved a personal best performance by achieving four out of five points in a rapid tournament at the Maritime Chess Festival in Summerside. This is a testament to his dedication and perseverance and the countless hours he has invested in honing his chess skills.

Louis is also interested in raising awareness about the importance of recognizing chess as a sport in Canada. Chess is not only a game of strategy but also an inclusive sport that fosters critical thinking, concentration, and sportsmanship - qualities that are invaluable for the development of our youth. Louis and his parents are grateful for the Nova Scotia government grant funding that both the NSSCA and Chess Nova Scotia have received over the years. This support is instrumental in nurturing the talents of chess enthusiasts of all ages and backgrounds.

Speaker, I would like to extend our collective best wishes to Louis and the entire chess community of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE: 120TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a pillar in our community, Alliance Française. Alliance Française Halifax is celebrating 120 years, a huge milestone to indeed be celebrating.

Founded in 1903, Alliance Française Halifax is a Canadian non-profit association dedicated to promotion of the French language and of French-speaking cultures. Located in the historic Hydrostone district, the centre is one of nine Alliance Françaises present in Canada.

The French Alliance Network provides training to over 12,000 students annually, and the Halifax location is considered the best French as a second language school in the province. Alliance Française Halifax truly represents a vibrant cultural force promoting inter-cultural exchange and communication between people of all ages and backgrounds.

I would like all members of this House to help me in congratulating Alliance Française and wishing them continued success on their 120th anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

JOHNSON, WAYNE: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Today I would like to recognize Wayne Johnson of Potlotek First Nation. He was recently chosen as one of the province's volunteers of the year for the 49th annual celebration last month.

Wayne has volunteered as the Potlotek Fire Chief for more than 25 years, a role that is greatly respected in his community. He also actively volunteers as a first responder, bus driver, and gravedigger for the local parish.

Wayne operates an automotive shop out of his garage and is known to help people at all hours of the day. Besides his dedication to his community, he is very well-respected within his own family, and is always willing to offer help when needed.

Wayne is the type of person every community dreams of having. Please join me in honouring Wayne Johnson and his great contribution to Potlotek.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

CONST. ASSTS.: WORK FOR CONSTITUENTS - THANKS

HON. TONY INCE: We all have an individual, or individuals, who help us navigate this world. They also help our constituents navigate this world. I have two such individuals in my office: Jennifer Robbins and Colleen Walsh. Both have great compassion and concern for the constituents who walk into my office.

I really appreciate the work that they do in navigating this world that we live in, and also in trying to help those constituents understand and navigate this world with us. Thank you both for the work that you do, your compassion, and your understanding for all the needs of those who come into our office.

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

ATLANTIC NEWS: 50TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

LISA LACHANCE: I rise to recognize a business in my constituency that can get you whichever magazine or newspaper you need, and has just celebrated being open for 50 years: Atlantic News on Morris Street, just a few blocks from my office.

Pat Doherty first opened Atlantic News in 1973. Now the last true newsstand left in Halifax, the store is as busy as ever, with folks looking for the latest editions of their favourites under the helpful eyes of Michele and Stephen Gerard, who took over in 1998.

They have kept up to date with the print media trends to best serve their diverse clientele, including on-demand prints of papers from around the world.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating the entire Atlantic News team for 50 years in business.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

VALADE, JEAN-FRANÇOIS: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. TIM HALMAN: Madame la présidente, je prends la parole aujourd'hui pour reconnaître Jean-François Valade, enseignant de l'éducation physique à l'École du Carrefour.

Jean-François enseigne non seulement une mode de vie saine à ses élèves, il est également très impliqué dans les sports organisés pendant et en dehors des heures de classe. Il entraîne de nombreuses équipes de sport tout au long de l'année et est impliqué dans les Jeux de l'Acadie.

Jean-François a la capacité de rendre l'activité physique amusante pour tous ses élèves. Il est gentil et drôle, et ses élèves sont toujours heureux de le voir.

Jean-François est un enseignant exemplaire qui est non seulement une source d'inspiration pour ses élèves, mais aussi pour ses collègues.

I rise today to recognize Jean-François Valade, a gym teacher at École du Carrefour in Dartmouth.

J.F. not only teaches a healthy lifestyle to his students, he is also very involved in organized sports in and out of school. He coaches numerous teams, and he's been involved with the Jeux de l'Acadie. He's also a great coach and mentor to my oldest child, Sophie Halman.

J.F. has the ability to make physical activity fun for all of his students. He is a kind, funny individual, and his students absolutely adore him.

J.F. is an exemplary teacher who is not only a source of inspiration to his students, but also to his colleagues.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FENNELL, PATRICK: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

FRED TILLEY: It has been a rough couple of months for my friend group. Last month we lost another close friend, Patrick “Pat” Fennell, at the age of 54. Pat was a son, a brother, a husband, and a really great uncle to Olivia and Owen. Pat was also a great friend. Pat will be missed by everyone who knew him. Pat and his identical twin brother, in our high school days, were known to pull the odd prank on teachers and others, because they truly were identical and best friends.

Pat was always there for his friends and family to do whatever needed to be done and help them in any way he could. Pat will be sorely missed by his wife, Anna; best friend and brother, Bill; and all of the friend group that knew him and loved him so much. My condolences to everyone who knew Pat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

HON. TONY INCE: I’d like to introduce, in the West Gallery, two beautiful women who are here from Dartmouth, Barbara Henderson and Debbie Gill. They are both here to visit us today to witness political debate. I welcome them and I ask the members to help me in welcoming them to this House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. I hope it’ll be the best entertainment you’ve ever seen.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

WORTH, KENDALL: HOURGLASS AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

GARY BURRLL: Congratulations to Kendall Worth on being presented with the Mel Hebb Hourglass Encore Award in a ceremony in May on the Grand Parade in recognition of his long-term advocacy for the community of people living in poverty, marginalization or facing other challenges.

The Mel Hebb Hourglass Awards were established in 1992 in connection with Access Awareness Week Nova Scotia, with the hourglass symbolizing the importance of timely action. The Encore Award recognizes a person with a disability who has significantly contributed to the community. Kendall Worth has been writing about the direct experience of living in poverty in Halifax for many years, first with the street newspaper *Street Feat*; later with the online Media Co-op and the *Nova Scotia Advocate*, and now in his blog *Journalism for What Matters*.

Kendall’s writing brings the concrete daily details of living with inadequate income into full public view. He’s an executive member of the NDP in Halifax Chebucto, and I invite the House to join the NDP and congratulate him on this recognition of his contributions.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

[2:00p.m.]

LAKE ECHO TERRY FOX RUN: SUCCESS - RECOG.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: I rise today to recognize the organizers and volunteers of the 43rd Lake Echo Terry Fox Run. I also wish to acknowledge the late MaryAnne (Beaver) Bailey, who was a key organizer of this event for 41 years prior to her death from cancer.

The Lake Echo community has raised thousands of dollars in support of cancer research and has continued to carry on the spirit that Terry Fox exemplified. I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature, please join me in congratulating the Lake Echo Terry Fox Run organizers, volunteers and the late MaryAnne (Beaver) Bailey, who have made this event such a success for 43 years.

In MaryAnne's memory I recite the words of a poem by Robert L. Lynn: "cancer is so limited --- It cannot cripple love. It cannot shatter hope. It cannot corrode faith. It cannot eat away peace. It cannot destroy confidence. It cannot kill friendship. It cannot shut out memories. It cannot silence courage. It cannot invade the soul."

THE SPEAKER: Order. Just a reminder to members that you are not to recite poems during statements. Order. The time is now 2:00. We will finish Questions Put By Members to Ministers at 2:50.

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM: SENIORS CARE GRANT - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Yesterday in the media, the Premier said he wasn't familiar with the fact that the Seniors Care Grant is being marked as a pillar in his housing plan. He went as far as saying, "We hear lots of numbers from the Opposition in that Chamber. A lot of times, they're not exactly accurate."

Those numbers actually came from his own housing strategy. Now that 24 hours have gone by, I would like to know if the Premier had time to read his own housing plan, and if he could tell us if he thinks that a Seniors Care Grant - a once a year, \$750 grant that can be used for groceries, lawn-mowing, drives, telephone bills - should really be a major pillar in his housing plan.

THE PREMIER: Obviously, the major pillars of the housing plan are the generational investments in affordable housing, the generational investments in moving

projects forward. We're focused on housing. We're committed to making sure that more housing gets built. There are a couple of bills before the Legislature - maybe the members opposite will support them - that should speed up the construction of housing. The Seniors Care Grant is an incredibly useful tool. Many seniors have benefited from that. It's an innovative program here in Nova Scotia. We'll continue to support seniors every way we can, and we'll continue to push for more homes - safer, affordable, more affordable housing - for Nova Scotians.

ZACH CHURCHILL: It also can't be used to pay for rent or mortgage payments when we have the highest interest rates and the highest rent increases in the country.

Nova Scotians cannot have confidence in this - 90 per cent of the announcements made are not new money, and 80 per cent of the programs expressed in this report are going to do nothing for affordable housing. The government can't even get their numbers straight when it comes to how much this is going to cost. In fact, the Premier said previously that it's his analytical skills that he's learned as a CPA that can get him the most effective outcomes in spending taxpayers' money. Yet a day after the housing announcement was released, the number went up by \$700 million. I wonder if that's because this strategy hasn't been in place since last Spring, like we were told - if, in fact, it's because, as the minister said yesterday to the press, the Premier told him to put it together last week.

Is that why the government can't get their stories straight on this housing plan - because it was cobbled together in a week?

THE PREMIER: I'm not sure about the member's use of the term "not new money," but what I will confirm is that we didn't wait for a strategy. We got to work supporting Nova Scotians. We pushed forward, making sure that we were moving forward in a way that supports Nova Scotians. There's a strategy there. Yes, lots of the strategy has been done for the very reason that we are a government of action, and we are moving forward. I asked the minister to get going - get going on the things that we know that people are talking about that will be in the strategy when the glossy document comes out. Don't wait for that. Get going on behalf of Nova Scotians. I'm proud that the minister got to work and did exactly that.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Since the Premier told the minister to get going, what has happened? We have the highest rental increases in the whole country. We have housing starts down 50 per cent year over year, and we cannot trust the government's housing plan. We have a Premier who says we're going to double the population. When you look at the housing plan, however, it's built around a decrease and slow-down in population growth.

If the Premier is going to double the population, why is his housing plan only planning for a slow-down in population growth?

THE PREMIER: We do believe that more Nova Scotians is a good thing. We do believe that a million Nova Scotians is fantastic. Two million, even better. I believe that and will continue to push for that. There's lots of opportunity in this province for growth. We stand for a growing province, and the member opposite - we know from looking at their health care plans, we know from looking at every single plan they did while they were in government, that they always planned for a decreasing population in this province. I will never plan for a smaller, less-productive Nova Scotia. I will always push for this province realizing its incredible potential. I believe in this province. The member opposite has a chance to as well.

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

PREM: HOUSING STRATEGY - IMPROVE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The government has finally released their housing strategy, after months of excuses and delay. Almost one-third of the funding in that strategy is a no-strings-attached tax cut that may or may not create more units or more affordability. Other funding includes more modest pre-existing programs like the Seniors Care Grant, not designed for housing.

When the minister was asked how the plan will magically result in more housing, beyond what was already coming, he named "robotics printed housing and many other innovations" - not in the plan, not sure what that means.

My question to the Premier is: Why produce a plan if it won't help families afford housing?

THE PREMIER: I'm sorry to the honorable member, with what she characterizes as excuses and delays. The honourable member may know that during that time Nova Scotia suffered historic forest fires, incredible loss of property, and incredible turmoil in people's lives. The honourable member may know that what she characterizes as inconvenient excuses and delays - we lost four souls in flooding - there was a lot happening in the province. What hasn't stopped is our commitment to make sure Nova Scotians have safe, affordable housing. We will continue to push forward on that. I apologize for these inconvenient excuses and delays that the member is so upset about.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Two weeks ago, the Premier said the plan wasn't coming. Two weeks ago, the minister said he didn't really know about a plan. It didn't seem like they were going to release it. Those are the excuses and delays to which I am referring.

The Premier keeps repeating that his government is making the first investment in affordable housing in 30 years. They aren't. The reason he keeps emphasizing the 222 units of public housing is because there is nothing else in his plan that will meet the vast need for

affordable housing - experts say 33,000 units. This is certainly not a generational investment.

My question to the Premier is: When is the Premier going to have a plan that will actually build affordable housing?

THE PREMIER: I ask the member to table my comments and the minister's comments. What I would say, will say, and will continue to say repeatedly is that we don't wait for glossy plans - we get going.

The member can be disappointed that there are only 222 units that we've announced so far, but I will remind the member that's 222 more units than her government did and 222 more units than that former government did. We will keep going because that's what Nova Scotians have a right to expect from this government.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: When I was elected long after our government was in power, the wait-list for public housing was months. Now it is four to five years. It is a different universe.

This plan uses population projections that are out of date - I will table that. It has no requirement that the vast majority of units are affordable. It has no definition of affordability. It has no plan for people sleeping outside this Winter, no new protections for renters, and as Hannah Wood, the Chair of Halifax ACORN, has said it takes credit for housing that was already in the process of being built by municipalities and not-for-profits.

When the minister was asked about these housing projects that he is taking credit for, he named an organization that doesn't exist - the North End Community Housing Organization.

My question to the Premier is: When is the Premier going to stop with the fantasies, come up with a housing plan, and get families into homes they can afford?

THE PREMIER: The fantasies stopped two years ago when Nova Scotians elected a PC government and when they started to get into action.

The member has said we haven't done anything. I can remind the member of certain developments that are happening, where approval times have been shaved by about a year or more in some cases. There is one, certainly in Eisner Cove - I know the member definitely doesn't want houses built there - just build them somewhere, just not there. We will build houses. We are moving forward.

There are bills before this House right now - the HRM bill that is before it to increase density and to get more safe, affordable housing for Nova Scotians. That's a government that couldn't even get - that's a party, help us if it ever becomes the

government - that's a party that couldn't even get behind the Patient Access to Care Act. Now they . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

MAH: DOUBLING OF POPULATION - PLAN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The Premier said yesterday to the media that he doesn't govern based on the election cycle and I think he is right. I think it is actually worse than that. I think the Premier and this government govern on the news cycle, which isn't every four years - it's every single day. That's why the Premier gets up and says things like he is going double the population or triple it without a plan to actually do that.

Here's what happens when you double the population without having the infrastructure. More and more people go homeless. More and more seniors can't downgrade and find an affordable place to live, rents go up. We've got a generation of young people who don't know if they will be able to build and grow their family here. That is what happens when you try to double the population without a plan.

The Premier's Housing Plan says it is based on decreasing - on immigration.
(Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Question.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Please square this circle for us, Mr. Premier.

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

JOHN LOHR: I categorically reject the suggestions from the Opposition. The reality is that member stood in this House and said that we already had too many people in Nova Scotia earlier in this session, and I will table that.

We have more than enough. Not enough room for everyone we have now. We want this province to grow. Why do we want this province to grow? We want this province to grow so that our children and our grandchildren don't have to go to another province to work. That is the reality that we've had for multiple years - a generation. That is why we are absolutely committed to solving this housing crisis.

We will do every good idea that comes along, including good ideas that you looked at and turned down, like the Regent Park model for public housing, including a once-in-a-generation investment in public housing.

ZACH CHURCHILL: We want the province to grow. What this government doesn't understand, when you try to grow it without a plan to increase capacity, you are

going to hit a wall and the young people who are growing up here who can't find a place to live are going to go elsewhere. Does the minister understand that?

Here's what happens when you try to grow without a plan: Homelessness doubles in two years under this government; seniors can't downgrade and find places to rent; rent goes up more than anywhere else in the province; our health care system is collapsing under the current weight of our population and the minister stands up here and says they've got a plan for growth. It is not true. We want the province to grow. When are we going to see a plan that will actually accommodate that and ensure we can do it sustainably?

JOHN LOHR: I reject the negativity that I hear coming from that side of the House. We will continue - we are at a historic moment of actual change in Nova Scotia when we went through nearly 100 years of increasing population . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. There is a lot of chatter when questions are being asked and when answers are being answered. The honourable Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing has the floor.

JOHN LOHR: For the first time in 102 years, last year our median age went down. I cannot tell you how important that is. There's lots of gray hair in this Assembly, mine's gray too, but we are all getting older. We need young people so badly. We need our young people to stay here and work here. This is a plan for affordability, our plan going forward. We will not turn down any good idea. We will try things. When we took government we had eight years of inactivity, of no action. That is the reality.

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

DAE: STUDENT HOUSING - CREATE

ZACH CHURCHILL: Just to clarify, the median age went down in Nova Scotia in 2019. I wonder if the minister can remember who was in government then, if he cares about the facts.

We are seeing what happens when you try to grow without having housing. We are seeing that in our post-secondary sector. Students who are moving here with a promise of great education who are then going back home because they can't find a place to live, and yet this government has still not released a housing strategy. This is what happens when you try to grow without a plan. People come and people leave because they can't find a place to live.

My question to the Minister of Advanced Education: When will we see the housing strategy so that when post-secondary students come here that we recruit and spend a lot of money recruiting, they can actually stay and go to school here?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister for Advance Education.

HON. BRIAN WONG: Our government doesn't waste. We do know that students are exceptionally important to Nova Scotia. We understand that bringing students from other countries - from other areas of Canada - to Nova Scotia is vitally important to our growth, to our businesses. We need young people to stay here. We need young people to have jobs, raise their families. We didn't wait. We announced three Nova Scotia Community College Student Housing Programs right off the bat. If we were to wait for a plan, those student housing projects that are almost complete at Akerley and in Stellarton wouldn't even be started yet.

[2:15 p.m.]

ZACH CHURCHILL: The minister's plan is really based around Happipad. I think he mentioned that yesterday in the Chamber and in media events probably 10 times.

Here's what's interesting about Happipad: There are fewer than 10 units being advertised right now in HRM for students through Happipad. There is one on all of Cape Breton Island. There is one in all of the South Shore. This is the great innovation from the government. Happipad has saved the day for Nova Scotia post-secondary students. They can live anywhere now. He's mentioned it more times than there are people who are actually using the program.

My question to the minister is: Does he really think that Happipad has been that great of a success when people can't use it to actually find places to live?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Small things that work are better than big things that don't work. The reality is that every unit counts. What that program needs is more public awareness, so I appreciate the member even mentioning it.

I will say that we also recently announced the secondary suites. We've gotten tremendous interest in that. We know that will make a difference. We'll do more things.

In the last year, for example, we invested \$43 million in 17 projects that will create 335 units. Two hundred forty-five of them will be affordable units, and nearly half of them in the community housing sector. Our government has lifted the boat of community housing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

MAH: RENT SUPPLEMENT CUT - EXPLAIN

BRAEDON CLARK: Speaker, in response to the first question today, the Premier said that this government is making a generational investment in affordable housing.

I will note a major program that helps with affordable housing is the Rent Supplement Program, which this government gutted a year ago by changing the income threshold from 30 to 50 per cent of income.

I would ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Is that an example of a big idea that's not working under this government?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'm very happy to talk about the Rent Supplement Program. The reality is that this was a federal-provincial cost-shared program started by the federal government. It's a great program.

The cost-sharing was soon left behind, but now we are putting in \$42 million to the federal government's \$10 million. I have asked two federal ministers now to step up and help us with that ratio.

The reality is that we now have almost 8,000 people on it, and we continue to invest in it. We're putting another \$21 million this year in the Rent Supplement Program. We're very proud of what we're doing there.

BRAEDON CLARK: Here's what I don't understand when it comes to the minister's argument on this: On Monday, the government said they were going to spend a billion dollars on housing. The next day, 24 hours later, they said they were going to spend \$1.7 billion. They had miraculously found - hold your applause - \$700 million overnight. Yet the minister stands here in the House and says, Oh, jeez, we can't do anything further on rent supplements, it cost us \$20 million this year.

How does that make any sense? I would ask the minister to explain that flaw in the logic here.

JOHN LOHR: We understand the challenges of people out there, and we care about every one of them. I can tell you that another difference in the program that we've offered that they didn't offer is that our rent supplements are portable. Theirs were tied to a certain location. We're offering portable rent supplements.

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

DAE: STUDENT HOUSING - ASSIST

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Advanced Education.

Between tuition costs and housing costs, Nova Scotian students just can't make ends meet. Our students pay an average of \$9,328 annually, which is the highest in Canada

and is rising at the highest rate. One student recently remarked, “No matter how hard you work, you still can’t afford housing, and tuition on top of that, it’s nearly impossible.”

Nearly 10 per cent of student respondents to the recent housing survey identified as being unhoused. When is the minister going to help students?

HON. BRIAN WONG: Students are at the forefront of everything that we do. Students do find themselves in sometimes challenging housing situations, which we never want. We continue to offer the best student assistance package right across this country. Right off the top, for tuition, students from Nova Scotia go into a Nova Scotia university and get \$1,283 taken right off the top of their tuition. We continue to look for ways in order to help students.

We have loan forgiveness programs. We have bursary programs for students. We will continue to do what we need to do in order to make sure that students get the best education they can right here in Nova Scotia.

LISA LACHANCE: If students could better afford their tuition, we wouldn’t need a better student assistance program. What we’re offering people is more debt. Also, bursaries? You can’t plan on a bursary.

Yesterday, when asked how his government was addressing the student housing crisis, the minister pointed to Happipad as a solution that was “going to make a difference for students.” I’ll table that. I looked into this, and in my district - which is home to five universities - there are zero Happipad listings available. I’ll table that. Also, the Secondary and Backyard Suite Incentive Program is not designed for student housing.

Students don’t have housing, and in some cases are going without food to pay their rent. They’re five people deep in apartments that are meant for two people. How is the minister still refusing to release the student housing strategy?

BRIAN WONG: I reject the premise of making a mockery of the student housing crisis. We need innovative solutions. We need all levels of government. We need all sectors to step up. We continue to look for ways.

Happipad, by the way, is a program that you don’t need to plan. It doesn’t take years to plan or build. There is occupancy in people’s homes that is available. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. This is going too far. We know that we are to try to do our best to remain quiet. After this, I’m going to have to start acting on people speaking up - those who are speaking up several times.

The honourable Minister of Advanced Education.

BRIAN WONG: Thank you, Speaker. It appears that Happipad doesn't make the Opposition happy, but it is something that they certainly didn't have. It is something that we're continuing to work with and look for other solutions. It is one part of the solution. It is one part, and we will continue to add more parts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

DFA: ACCESS TO CAPITAL FOR FISHERS - ASSURE

RONNIE LEBLANC: Last Spring, we witnessed a significant decline in lobster landings in District Nos. 33 and 34. In addition to the escalating cost of fuel and bait the industry has faced in the legal Summer fishery in St. Mary's Bay - which has persisted for several years, undermining the sustainability of the fishery - I am hearing reports that at least 140 fishers were unable to meet their financial obligations this Spring to the Fisheries and Aquaculture Loan Board. This raised substantial financial concerns within the industry.

Can the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture provide the House with an update on the actual number of fishers who were unable to meet their obligations?

HON. KENT SMITH: Details regarding the Fisheries and Aquaculture Loan Board aren't readily available to my department. They're an arm's-length organization. I can certainly inquire and see what information they're able to share with me that I can share with the member opposite.

This does actually, though, give me the opportunity to say that the Fisheries and Aquaculture Loan Board is an incredible tool for fishers in our province who have taken advantage of the fact that the lending terms are quite flexible and quite favourable. In fact, almost 40 per cent of the people who are taking advantage of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Loan Board to get into the fishing industry are young folks between the ages of 19 and 35. That's an incredible way to sustain our fishing industry as we move forward.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Speaker, considering these challenges, the Fisheries and Aquaculture Loan Board risk assessment for Districts 33 and 34 has gone up. This means new entrants into the fishery may now require higher equity or larger down payments, potentially making it more challenging for them to secure loans.

Can the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture assure us that new aspiring fishers seeking to purchase their own lobster boats and licences will have reliable access to capital from the loan board despite these increased risk factors?

KENT SMITH: As I referenced in my first answer, the loan board is an arm's-length organization, so direct purview does not fall within the department.

What I know about the loan board is incredibly favourable. They are very flexible with terms. We are here to help them support industry and support our largest industry in growing. That includes succession planning to make sure those young folks who are in the industry have access to capital funds to stay in the industry and continue to grow what is our largest industry in the province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare on a new question.

DFA: PROACTIVE FISHERIES ENFORCEMENT - IMPLEMENT

RONNIE LEBLANC: Under the Nova Scotia Fish Buyers' Licence and Enforcement Regulations, buyers are clearly prohibited from buying fish caught by individuals without a valid commercial fishing licence issued by DFO.

One of this government's first actions was the transfer of enforcement officers responsible for this regulation from the Department of Environment and Climate Change to the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. Given the significant increase in lobster poaching, especially in District 34, can the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture inform this House whether this transfer has produced results? Does the department believe it has sufficient human resources on the ground to effectively enforce this crucial regulation and protect our fishing industry in Nova Scotia?

HON. KENT SMITH: I thank the member opposite for Fisheries Day. This is fantastic.

Not to make light of the important troubles that we're seeing down in southwest Nova Scotia, the fact of the matter is that the federal government has a lot more responsibility when it comes to enforcement. Our responsibility, as the member referenced, does lie with the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. They have a full complement of compliance officers whom we've taken the advantage of talking to early on in my mandate, which is only five weeks old.

We do recognize the importance of enforcing potential illegal activity, as it is a huge detriment to our largest industry.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Last week during Question Period, the minister indicated that he encouraged people seeing illegal activity to report it to the proper authority. Seeing the increase in the amount of illegal activity and the importance of the fishery to our rural communities, does the minister agree that we need to take a more proactive approach to enforcement, as opposed to the current complaint-based system, to better safeguard our fisheries and support our rural community?

KENT SMITH: I'm not sure how many ways I can say how important this industry is to our province. Everyone here would recognize \$2.6 billion as a significant number -

three and a quarter times the next largest export. Enforcing potential illegal activity is incredibly important to us and to me personally, as minister.

I will personally make sure that I follow up with the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables. We will speak about compliance efforts on the ground. That doesn't take away from the fact that we still encourage folks who see potential illegal activity to ensure they report it to the proper authorities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

[2:30 p.m.]

DOA: IMPROVE CELL SERVICE - COMMIT

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, farmers in my riding have told me they're extremely frustrated with the lack of cell service in rural Nova Scotia. Not having cell service limits their ability to effectively farm and, in turn, feed Nova Scotians.

Despite this urgency, the government wouldn't release the cell gap study for well over a year, despite several requests by our team, and we're now only hearing blame on the federal government instead of action. My question to the Minister of Agriculture is: Where is this government's commitment to improving cell service for our farmers?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

HON. GREG MORROW: Our government is, in fact, taking action to make sure that all Nova Scotians, including farmers, have access to cellular service no matter where they live or where we travel. That's why we are investing - and I don't want to steal the thunder from the Minister of Public Works - in the best interests of everyone in this House. We don't want to see her fired up either.

I can tell the member opposite that as a government we are investing \$47.3 million to start the new Cellular for Nova Scotia program that will expand telecommunications infrastructure and communication networks throughout the province. We are not waiting for the federal government, we are taking action.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: I should be asking more questions in this House if I'm going to get answers with \$47 million attached. I appreciate the minister announcing that. The lack of cell coverage is a major safety issue, as he would appreciate. The job of a farmer is inherently and extremely dangerous. We've had serious accidents on our own farm. It happens way too often across the province.

I've heard the announcement just now, so have we. What we're looking for is more information. Would the Minister please provide more information on this announcement, as farmers need immediate medical help, and they deserve this help as well?

GREG MORROW: Farm safety is so important. Safety for farmers is of utmost importance and we know that agriculture work can be dangerous. I hear these concerns every day when I'm on a farm. I had the chance to visit my good friend, the member for Digby-Annapolis, a couple of weeks ago. I love visiting farms, love hearing their concerns and finding out how we can help them.

This cellular plan to make sure that all Nova Scotians are connected will address a lot of these concerns. With \$47.3 million, Speaker, we are taking action, and don't just take it from me. We have a quote from Bill Murphy of the Inverness Country Connectivity Committee, and I'll table this: "We applaud this program to increase cell coverage. Problems are being solved."

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

MAH: MUNICIPALITIES TREATMENT - APOLOGIZE

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Recently the minister sent a letter that asked all municipal CAOs, except the CBRM, to lobby CBRM to accept the raw deal this government has put on the table.

The CBRM CAO said, "They are trying to, I guess, divide and conquer, to get municipalities against other municipalities. I've never seen a government, a minister, reach out to the administrative staff. It's just not protocol. It's disrespectful. It's unprofessional." When is this government going to stop pitting communities against each other, and get to work for all Nova Scotians?

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'm happy to talk about Bill No. 340 here in Question Period, as well, and the fact that it is an incredible deal for all our municipalities. I know the Opposition doesn't support it. They've spoken very aggressively against...

THE SPEAKER: Order. I just want to remind everyone that you cannot speak about bills that are . . . (Interruption) I am speaking to The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. A friendly reminder not to speak about bills that are on the Order Paper.

JOHN LOHR: What I can say, Speaker, is we sent letters directly to many people, and we make no apologies for the content of those letters. We stand behind them.

KENDRA COOMBES: Letters were sent, except for the CBRM. Theirs must have gotten lost in the mail. These are challenging times, and we need to work together for people in Cape Breton. The Minister's approach is exactly what we don't need, which is why the mayor said, "I will be asking for an apology from the minister towards my CAO. That letter was unacceptable, beyond unprofessional and really just so manipulative."

My question to the minister is: Will the minister apologize to the CAO and to all residents of the CBRM who are disrespected and disadvantaged by his underhanded and petty conduct?

THE SPEAKER: I would ask the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier to retract the word "petty."

KENDRA COOMBES: I will retract it and I will rephrase to say "his profound disrespect to the CBRM."

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

NRR: COAL TRANSITION - FUND

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: In order for this government to meet its legislative targets to get off coal by 2030, many workers in the industry, particularly in Cape Breton, will need to transition. In the energy announcement from the government earlier this month, there was no mention of funding for these workers in Trenton or Cape Breton. My question to the minister is: Can the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables assure the House that every worker will be looked after?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, it finally gives me an opportunity to table this great plan, entitled *Nova Scotia's 2030 Clean Power Plan*. I'd like to table that.

More specifically to the question the member asked, certainly, absolutely, this is a conversation that is taking place with government - with outside government, with industry. Just for the transition alone into green hydrogen, we will need 2,500 tradespeople for that transition.

It's our plan that for people who need to transition from coal or coal aspects to green careers, we're here to assist them in that. We're here to have the conversation with Nova Scotia Power, the workers who are involved, and the good help with my colleague at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration as well. This is very important to Nova Scotia, and it's very important to the careers of Nova Scotians.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate the comments from the minister, because it is very important. Many of us were at committee with Nova Scotia Power, where we talked about how important it is for many of the workers who are working at these

plants, and there have been a lot of questions that have been asked by workers on the Island about what that transition strategy looks like.

Folks are excited about what's happening in the green energy sector, and we're all living the transition. But again, the sooner we can give information to these workers and set that transition strategy in place, the better.

My question to the minister is: Can he give us a definitive timeline on what strategy these workers can see?

TORY RUSHTON: Can I give a definitive timeline? This is a two-week-old announcement, to be very specific, although we have been having this conversation for two years now - the 80 per cent renewables, off coal by 2030. This is a conversation I know Nova Scotia Power has had very deeply with some of their employees. They certainly fill us in.

The fact of the matter is some of those stations are going to be transitioned to different technologies. As those technologies pop up, there could be other opportunities as well.

It's an ongoing conversation. I respect the fact that there's concern for those workers. We're on top of this concern as well. We share that concern to make sure all Nova Scotians are working with the green transition.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

DPW: INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICIT - DEFINE

HON. KELLY REGAN: We all know how important roads are in rural Nova Scotia, especially to our rural economy. However, we know that all throughout this province there are many roads that have washed out from the floods and the other natural disasters that have been visited upon our province, in places like the South Shore, the Valley, and Antigonish County. Before these natural disasters, we already knew the province had an infrastructure deficit.

My question is to the Minister of Public Works is: How big is our infrastructure deficit now, after all these natural disasters?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Certainly, I've driven on pretty much all of these roads in the province since I've taken over as Minister of Public Works, and certainly understand the deficit that was left behind to clean up. You know why? Our first announcement we made was to double the Gravel Road Capital program, \$20 million to \$40 million. We

almost tripled, \$11 million to \$22 million to \$36 million for the Rural Impact Mitigation program. We doubled the bridge infrastructure. We have one of the largest capital programs in this province for road infrastructure, and I'm darn proud of it.

KELLY REGAN: I'll take from that answer that the minister doesn't have the exact figure. We know that we're in a labour shortage, but these roads are vital to our rural economy. We also need climate-resistant roads to ensure that we're prepared for the climate crisis that is coming our way to mitigate the impact on the rural economy. My question is to the Minister of Public Works: How much more will the government commit to our huge infrastructure deficit, and will they also ensure that any new roads are climate-resilient?

KIM MASLAND: Absolutely. The climatic events that we've experienced just this last year - the July flooding - it was unbelievable the infrastructure damage that was done. Over \$70 million worth of damage done to our infrastructure. We lost over 27 bridges in this province. Any type of infrastructure that we are building now is being built with a climate lens. We're building our bridges higher. We're building them longer. We're putting in bigger culverts to handle the amount of water flow going through.

We understand. We're also applying for - through DMAF for the federal government and have been successful in receiving funding for doing coastal shoreline erosion on some of our roads. We absolutely know we're a coastal province, we've got a lot of work to do, and I'm up for the job.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DPW: SEAL ISLAND BRIDGE PLANS - EXPLAIN

FRED TILLEY: The Seal Island Bridge is a vital link for the people of Cape Breton, those travelling for commerce and those travelling for pleasure. It's actually a vital link because of the hospital situation as well. We don't know what this government's plans are for the Seal Island Bridge. Those of you who drive across this bridge on a daily basis, a weekly basis, notice the deterioration of the bridge. Can we please find out what the plans are to deal with the Seal Island Bridge?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: We know there are about 5,000 vehicles that cross the Seal Island Bridge every day. In January 2021, the department engaged a consultant, which the member I'm sure is aware of, to complete several investigations on the condition of the Seal Island Bridge to help identify short-term repair. We are looking at that. There is a cost analysis that's being done on the bridge right now. It has not been finalized, but certainly once that's finalized, I can share those details with the member.

FRED TILLEY: The people of Cape Breton will be very interested to see what's going to happen with the bridge, because it is a vital link for us.

There was a report that was issued. In March it was reported the report from COWI is expected in coming weeks. I'll table that. The report that was issued indicated some serious shortcomings with the bridge. We still don't know what the serious nature is or what repairs are required, so when will the government release the report on the Seal Island Bridge so people can rest assured that they're traveling across safe infrastructure?

[2:45 p.m.]

KIM MASLAND: I want to reassure all who travel that bridge that the Seal Island Bridge is safe. That's right, you're going to be okay. If it was unsafe, we would close it. Some of our bridges are inspected on a monthly basis, some on a yearly basis, but I want to assure everyone Seal Island Bridge is safe. We are working through the benefit-cost analysis on that bridge project. Again, once that is finalized, I certainly would have a conversation with the member.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: CHILD CARE WAIT-LIST FEES - STOP

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Yesterday I asked the minister about the issue of child care wait-list fees, to which she responded: "I have directed the department to look into this practice and provide options for what we can do to prevent it."

Speaker, I want to know: What did the minister hear from her department? When is she going to put a stop to wait-list fees?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: As we transform child care in Nova Scotia, as we make it more affordable for families, as we increase spaces across the province, as we work to build our workforce to make a Nova Scotia child care system that meets Nova Scotia needs, we have a number of steps that we're taking. I have directed the department to look into the question of wait-list fees because the wait-list fees are not consistent with building affordable child care in Nova Scotia. I'm looking forward to receiving a report and update from the department on what those options may be. We'll be taking steps following that.

SUZY HANSEN: Well, the minister has heard from me for months now. There was lots of time to consider. I just want to say that steps are not enough. Folks are on wait-lists spending lots and lots of money that they cannot afford to be on a list and will not have a spot.

Now that we have all finally agreed that parents shouldn't be asked to pay hundreds of dollars in fees to be placed on a waiting list, what other information does the minister need to act on this? Every day that she dilly-dallies is another day that families . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. "Dilly-dally" is unparliamentary. I ask the honourable member for Halifax Needham to retract "dilly-dally."

SUZY HANSEN: I will retract "dilly-dally" and say "delay." Every day that the minister delays is another day that families are charged unfair fees. The centres charging these fees are licensed for over 1,000 child care spaces in the HRM. This is not a small issue. There's a simple solution: ban the fees.

Will the minister commit today to banning these unfair fees?

BECKY DRUHAN: We have taken swift and immediate action to work on child care in Nova Scotia, and we have taken tremendous steps. We have created thousands of child care spaces across the province to meet Nova Scotian needs. In advance of the requirement under the agreement, we reduced fees by half for Nova Scotians. That's hundreds and thousands of dollars remaining in the pockets of families at a time when affordability is incredibly important. That money goes to groceries. That money goes to housing. That money goes to transportation.

We have increased wages for ECEs. We are continuing to take steps daily to transform child care in Nova Scotia, and I look forward to the department reporting on options for wait-list fees as we continue to take those important steps.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

NRR: WOOD HEAT INITIATIVE - UPDATE

RONNIE LEBLANC: In 2020, as part of Phase 1 of the wood heat initiative, the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables announced that six public buildings had been chosen for conversion from oil-based heating systems to more energy-efficient wood chip heating systems, creating a new market for low-grade wood. As part of Phase 2, 100 public buildings were to be identified for similar conversions, where existing buildings would be converted from oil to wood-burning heat as well as the installation of wood-chip heating systems in new public buildings.

As the forestry sector struggles with rising cost and lack of market for low-grade wood, can the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables give us an update on Phase 2 of this initiative?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: This is a topic that was announced in 2020. Only sitting on the desk were those six projects when we came to government. We are working with

members of the Department of Public Works to establish the next phases of that project. Other departments, as new builds come on - this is an option for them to utilize.

More importantly, the private sector is also getting into this aspect and having conversations. The funding doesn't come from our department. Those are decisions made in each individual department now that there has been indication of things. But also something that I'm very proud of with the department is that with the loss of the main market of low-grade wood fibre, we as a government found the initiative to work with the sector to try to develop new options for low-grade wood fibre.

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

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on a Point of Order.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing today alleged that I said that we already had too many people in Nova Scotia. He then proceeded to table my quote where I said, verbatim, "How is he going to double the population when we don't have enough houses for people to live in now?" I know the minister understands the difference between saying we have too many people and saying we don't have enough houses. I also believe the minister to be a person of integrity, and I would ask him to retract his comment, please.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I would ask that the honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing either table a document to substantiate what was said or take this moment to retract.

The honourable minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I retract the statement, Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. (Applause)

AN HON. MEMBER: Good guy.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Pursuant to Rule 5(c), I move that on Friday, October 27th, the time of adjournment be not 5:00 p.m. but 11:59 p.m., and on Monday, October 30th, the hours of the House be 4:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: There is a request for a change in hours of the House by the honourable Government House Leader.

Is everyone in agreement? (Interruptions)

There has been a request for a recorded vote.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[2:52 p.m.]

[The division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The Clerk will now conduct a recorded vote, and I ask for everyone's silence, except for when they have to speak.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[3:52 p.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
Hon. Keith Bain
Chris Palmer

NAYS

Hon. Patricia Arab
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Kelly Regan
Susan Leblanc
Claudia Chender
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Lisa Lachance
Lorelei Nicoll
Hon. Ben Jessome
Braedon Clark
Ali Duale
Carman Kerr
Ronnie LeBlanc
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin

Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Nolan Young
Hon. Steve Craig

THE CLERK: For, 28. Against, 17.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PRIVATE AND LOCAL BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Would you please call Bill No. 369.

Bill No. 369 - The Riverport Electric Light Act for Polling District No. 2, in the County of Lunenburg (amended).

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

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Thank you. That's more like it! Speaker, I rise to speak to second reading of this bill. The Riverport Electric Light Commission is an independent, community-owned, democratic, electric distribution utility and is the only independent utility in the province that is not run by a municipal government.

They serve 860 customers in the Lunenburg County communities of Riverport, Kingsburg, Rose Bay, East LaHave, Middle LaHave and Bayport. The utility is governed under a five-volunteer commissioner board who are elected by the community.

The utility was established by statute in 1920. The chief amendment of this Act relates to the fact that being established in 1920, their borrowing is restricted to \$15,000. I think all of us can understand that in the world of the devices and infrastructure that you may need for an electric utility, that is no longer sufficient. Chiefly, they want to ensure that the grid is resilient and also there are mandated outcomes in terms of bringing transformers and other infrastructure up to date.

I have been asked, on behalf of the community, to bring this matter forward.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable member for Lunenburg, it is to close debate on Bill No. 369.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I rise to close the reading on this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 369.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

[4:00 p.m.]

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 351.

Bill No. 351 - Bethel Presbyterian Church, Sydney Act (amended).

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: There is a long history with the Bethel Church, which we'll tell another day, but this is just administrative for them, so I'll close second reading.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable member for Sydney-Membertou, it is to close debate on second reading.

The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 351.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Would you please call Public Bills for Second Reading?

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

HON. KIM MASLAND: Would you please call Bill No. 340.

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount, with approximately 52 minutes. As a reminder to everyone, this is speaking to the hoist motion. If we could just make sure the clock is at 52 minutes.

FRED TILLEY: To go back to where I was the other night, we really support this bill, but we feel there's an issue with a particular municipality, and others have come forward since then. The fact that we need the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, CBRM, to be taken out of Bill No. 340 and negotiate a separate agreement with them - that's the whole reason for the hoist. The hoist is simply for 30 days, which should be plenty of time to readjust the bill and pull CBRM out, get that negotiation done, and move forward with the bill for those municipalities that feel it's important for them to do.

Bill No. 340 - and I will come back to why we're hoisting it - is just too confining for CBRM at this juncture. They don't fit the mould. If this were a ceramics class, and we had moulds - everybody had a mould - not all municipalities are fitting this mould. The idea behind a 30-day hoist is to basically produce a new mould for CBRM.

We have one municipality with an agreement, and that's the Halifax Regional Municipality. We have the second largest municipality in the province - CBRM - at over 100,000 population, and they absolutely need their own deal. I'm sure when the Law Amendments Committee takes place, the folks from CBRM will have time to reiterate their position as to why Bill No. 340 does not fit their needs at this moment in time - the present.

Speaker, actually pulling this bill off the papers for 30 days gives the Province and the municipality time to sit down and - it's been a very public debate. It gives that time for cooler heads to prevail and for the provincial government to take a second look, to allow the members from CBRM a chance to change things within the government structure so that CBRM can be pulled from this bill.

Just today, we see that Richmond municipal council has some concerns with Bill No. 340 as well. They want assurances from the provincial government that it won't mean that municipalities will end up paying for transportation infrastructure. I can table that. They want assurances from the provincial government that Bill No. 340 won't cause them extra costs at their level.

As municipalities start to dig into the details of the bill, they're starting to pick up on things that may or may not benefit them. I think this 30-day hoist of the bill will give each municipality an opportunity to go into the details of the bill further, and really make sure that they're not forced or coerced into signing a bill that may or may not be good for their municipality. It may be great for some municipalities, and those should move forward right away, because if the municipality thinks it's a good idea and the Province thinks it's a

good idea, that's what this is all about. It's about mutual benefit, and about benefit for the citizens of Nova Scotia.

CBRM has indicated that this is not a good bill for its citizens. Who knows any better than the local government of what's good for their citizens? Citizens in CBRM pay the highest taxes property-wise. The indication is that they'll save \$4.5 million, but if they come out of the deal right now, they're going to have to pay \$4.5 million. When we heard that there are choices for CBRM, there's really no choice here. If there are choices, a 30-day hoist will allow the time to explain to CBRM what those choices mean for them and let them determine if those choices are actually viable.

I don't think that saying in the public that they didn't respond, and then CBRM saying, We did respond, is helpful for anyone. The pressure that everyone's under right now to get this bill through the Legislature may or may not make for good decisions. A 30-day hoist just gives that opportunity to re-look at the bill.

We all live within five hours of the city. If we take 30 days to look at it, I'm sure we can call a one-day sitting of the Legislature when everything's ironed out to get this bill passed. I'd be willing to come up for that. I'm sure everyone else would be willing to come up for that. We're not looking to stall. We're not looking to delay.

What we're looking for here is a legitimate amount of time for the Province - the minister - to meet with the council and hammer out a deal. Thirty days. We could have asked for six months if we were trying to delay. We could have asked for longer, but we didn't. We asked for 30 days to allow cooler heads to prevail so a negotiation can take place. The only mechanism that we have with which to do that is through a hoist motion. At the end of the day, I think it's the right thing to do.

The nature of the bill makes sense. We want to have service agreements for our municipalities - those that are on board with this - and it's going to affect them right away. We want to get that done as soon as possible, which is why we only asked for 30 days on the hoist motion - unless the government was able to do something right away, and sit down and talk with CBRM and some of the other municipalities that have raised concerns, like Richmond. Provide the assurances that Richmond needs. Who knows what other municipalities are going to come up with over the next few days, to see the fine details of this bill. There's a lot that needs to be done.

For CBRM, if they were able to pass on this \$4.5 million in savings for corrections and for housing to the residents of the community, it would be an absolute win-win. Hoisting this bill for 30 days gives you the time to do that.

Residents of CBRM pay more taxes on less value than residents of HRM. How does that make sense? The services are so much different. The ability of each municipality - the tax base they have - is so different. It can't be a cookie-cutter approach. There is no

way 48 municipalities can be similar enough for one bill, especially when you have a municipality that's 10 times greater than the next biggest municipality that's lumped in.

A 30-day pause, hoist, or break - whatever we want to call it - I think is important. We want to make sure - whenever we do things, we want to make sure we do them right. Clearly, there's a disagreement between what the minister's office feels is right for CBRM and what the administration and council feel is right for the municipality.

This has been an ongoing issue that this government recognized early on by doubling the grant from \$15 million to \$30 million for that first year. The agreement was that would continue until the MOU was negotiated. It appears the MOU is not yet negotiated, yet the \$15 million was stopped in this year.

[4:15 p.m.]

Not only was the \$15 million stopped, as we talked about already, but this MOU calls for a further reduction from \$15 million to \$13 million. That's a further reduction of \$2 million. We talk about an increase of \$4.5 million, which is corrections and housing, which is really only a \$2.5 million increase if you take the \$2 million that's reduced. But instead of a \$4.5 million increase that we hear about, it's actually a \$2 million loss for CBRM, because CBRM can't continue to charge residents for things that they're not paying for. It's just wrong. They can't do it. They could do it. They could just say they're not paying this to the government any more and change their tax rate. They would have to change their tax rate because those of us who live in CBRM, we see it on our tax bill every time it comes out. I think they're coming out soon. We see it - housing, corrections, education.

I would propose that the government eliminate all those provincially funded things anyway. They're paying for it out of their tax revenues. We know the capacity is there because we've seen great surpluses over the last number of years. The fact that we're asking to hoist this motion for 30 days, I think, is fairly reasonable.

We're talking millions and millions and millions of dollars for around 10 per cent of the province's population. That's not an insignificant number - 100,000 people in a population of a province that's a little over a million. Somewhere around 10 per cent is a significant chunk. It's a big reason that we get some of the large amounts of equalization that we get every year from the feds. We know, through the looks at the budget this year, that there was an increase in federal equalization payments of \$2.8 million.

Hoisting this bill for 30 days allows the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board to come together and see how they can come up with a better deal for CBRM - and for all municipalities. It sounded like we're on a game show: \$4 million for you, \$2 million for you, \$400,000 for you.

But if all of that revenue is coming from the fact that we're no longer charging for housing and corrections, then that's not real revenue for those municipalities, because they can't push that through. Or they can, but they probably shouldn't push that through to their residents. The residents of CBRM - and I can only speak really well for those residents, because that's where I'm from. I get my tax bill every year, and I look at the services I received for the tax bill, and I shake my head. But I don't have a choice as a taxpayer. I love my community. I'm not moving. We pay more because we don't have a choice, because we can't let our municipality go bankrupt.

The thing we have to remember when we talk about equality or equalization or fairness - it doesn't mean the same. Fairness doesn't mean the same or equality doesn't mean the same - it means that a certain group gets what they need to have an equal quality of life - in this case, equal services for the same amount. In the CBRM, that amount could be here. In another municipality, it could be here or it could be here.

I think we need to stop looking at equality and fairness meaning the same - we treat every municipality the same. That's not what we should do. We should treat every municipality equally in this province, including the HRM - everybody should be treated equally. In other words, what that means to me, and I stand to be corrected, is that every community, every municipal unit would get what they need to make sure they are viable. Hoisting this motion for 30 days allows the CBRM and the government to build that trust back because let's face it, I'm sure there has been trust lost on both sides.

Whenever we have an argument or whenever we have something public, we lose trust in each other. There's an opportunity here to take 30 days - let's go with 28 because two days - well, no, it's still going to be a 30-day hoist, but a two day cooling-off period. You know, we always hear that - take 24 hours before you respond to that email, or take 24 hours before you call, let's take two days and let's get the minister and the finance minister and the Premier down to Cape Breton. We'll have some tea and scones and work through this thing, because that's really all it would take - 28 days. I'm sure it could be done in a couple.

If it's less than 30 days and an agreement is made, call us back. Call us back to the Legislature. We'll make sure - we've got a great Whip on our side, he'll make sure we are all here, and I'm sure the other parties have the same. We'll all come in for one day, and what a day that would be, because that would mean that democracy worked in Nova Scotia. Parties come together, negotiate terms, form agreements, and then we move on and everybody is better. That's all we really want for Nova Scotia and for the CBRM. All we want is - in a negotiation, we know that everybody doesn't always get what they want. That's not what this is about. This is about coming up with a mutual agreement.

I firmly believe that 30 days - 28 after the cooling-off period - is plenty of time. I'm sure the municipality doesn't disagree with the whole MOU, and I'm sure the Province is able to move a little bit on certain parts of that MOU. First things first, in any negotiation,

is let's pick off those things we both agree to. We'll put those aside. We'll sign off on those. I have been part of negotiations several times in my career, and that's what really happens. There's common ground, and then there are areas where we disagree. At the end of the day, there may be areas where we can't come to terms. I personally feel those would be few and far between in this case. If both parties are willing to work together, anything can happen.

Those 30 days could start while we're still in the Legislature. Members of the minister's team could be down in Cape Breton. Heck, I think they're all coming here for the Law Amendments Committee when this thing comes through. We could start the negotiation time then and get everybody in a room.

At the end of the day, the government recognized there's a problem. During the election campaign, the Premier said, "I'm going to double the grant to the municipalities until the MOU is signed." That didn't happen in Year 2. In Year 1, to the credit of the Premier and of the government, they did what they said they would do and doubled that grant to \$30 million; Year 2 - nothing, nada, zero, zilch.

It left the municipality - when we talk about that trust factor and talk about the good faith piece to any agreement - that was broken. That was a promise that was broken, but it's not too late to fix it.

If we can take those 30 days to go back, recircle, and think about - you know, when you were a kid and you did something wrong, and you didn't apologize right away, your mom, your dad, your teacher, your grandparent, or somebody said to you, "I want you to go back and think about that. I want you to come back to me" - in this case 30 days later - "and tell me if your position has changed." Most times, we can look at that and say, "Yes, you know what? Maybe I was a little bit too stubborn on that piece, and maybe upon rethinking it, I can move a little bit." I think 30 days is fair and reasonable.

It's not like - 30 days will still be before Christmas. We might even still be here then. If we're not, in 30 days we can come back and we can vote on the bill. At least then we can say we gave every municipality in the province an equitable chance, because they would have an opportunity - another 30 days - to really go through it. If they're adamant, then maybe we can do separate agreements. Pull those out if there's 15 or 10 or 20 or 30 or 48 or 47 that are ready to go. Let's do what we have to do.

It gives time for that chat with Richmond to talk to the minister and say, are you sure we're not going to have to pay for these things? It's not really clear in here - can you just spell that out for us? I'm sure the minister would put that in the agreement and say, No, you are right, it's not going to do that, or, Yes, it is. Then they can make an informed decision as to whether or not they sign off.

I think hoisting it is the right thing to do, I really do. I think pulling it back and allowing that conversation to take place just makes so much sense. Talking to the councillors and some of the staff at the CBRM, we know that they have major concerns about this bill. We don't want to tie it up for the rest of the municipalities that want to move through, so that's why it's just 30 days to pull that together, unless the minister pulled them out right now and said we're going to renegotiate with the CBRM.

[4:30 p.m.]

I guess at the end of the day we don't want to see anybody punished for sticking up for their respective areas because that's what the people in the small communities of the CBRM, District 1, District 2, all the way up to the highest district - the biggest number district - they've elected their representatives to stand up for their rights, which is what they're doing. We were elected by a broader, bigger base of people from our respective areas. Those of us from the CBRM are doing what we need to do to represent our constituents in this case because we don't think it's a good deal for the CBRM.

I could go for another 20 minutes but okay, in fairness to my other colleagues, I want to let the others speak. What I do want to say before I finish off is hoist this bill for 30 days. It's the right thing to do. There's no lose-lose. It's a win-win for municipalities, for the government, and for the people of Nova Scotia. With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat.

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

JOHN WHITE: I'm going to speak against the hoist but I'm actually going to support a lot of what the member for Northside-Westmount has said, and the other members in the Opposition as well, because I really don't want to be playing politics with this. This is my hometown - it's your hometown, you guys across the way - and it matters.

A lot of what the member across the floor has been talking about I'm going to table here for you because I'm going to support what you're saying. A lot of it is true but there are a lot of mistruths in there as well and I'm going to correct those in a minute.

I'll tell you right off the bat that the reason I am speaking against the hoist is because there has been a lot of damage done. I'm seeing article after article all over the media. I will table these. It's only been a week, and the waters are getting pretty muddy. The reality is this is a debate that should be taking place in the Council Chambers, not here and certainly not in the public.

I have Council meetings here that go back to 2012. If you want me to read from them, I'll read from them and table them - I will, not a problem. I'm prepared to, but I want to be fair. I really don't want to hold this whole thing up. I want to be honest and fair. I'll table the ones I read from. The people who know Cape Breton best are the people who live

in Cape Breton. They know the situation better than anyone in Halifax does and better than the provincial government.

Some of what the member talked about is the size of Cape Breton Regional Municipality. We are 100,000 strong. With 10,000 being the closest town to us, we receive almost that many international students annually, and they use the bus services and stuff like that. It's a heavy draw on the municipality; it absolutely is. The sheer geographical size of the municipality creates more roads to look after, maintenance and garbage collection, and everything else - the cost is a lot. It truly is.

A charter is the way we need to go. Hoisting this any longer is only going to muddy the waters more and, further, to divide people. We have the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities coming out saying they're in favour of this now, as of last night. We really are dividing and isolating ourselves, and I am seriously and gravely concerned for my municipality. I want the members across the floor to know I stand beside you, shoulder to shoulder, for Cape Breton. I mean that wholeheartedly.

Why is a charter important? I don't think hoisting it is the answer, because there's been too much work done in Cape Breton, by Cape Bretoners, to support otherwise. That decision should not be made here, and I don't want to be part of a decision to prolong this any longer.

I have a Council meeting here - and I'll read from a couple things. It's 2018. In this, the mayor of the day advised that there had been several items that had precipitated the process for a CBRM charter, including an initial reorganization plan for the positive change, which Council unanimously approved. That included a charter for the municipality. The public debate and the consultation that go into this are what is missing in this Chamber. That's why it needs to take place at home, in Cape Breton.

In this, Cape Breton Voices said the charter should be broad, encompassing more than just economic development. It should include taxes, immigration, elections, community well-being, and the provincial-municipal relationship, which is the reason this thing shouldn't be hoisted any longer. Business Cape Breton were concerned. They thought a charter would allow for the adoption of planning bylaws that are more specific to the needs of our community. That's exactly what the member is saying - not overly restrictive, and that the consideration be applied to other regulations.

The Cape Breton Partnership said a CBRM charter should be an investment-ready tool to help grow the economy. Isn't that what we all want for Cape Breton? I think members on both sides of the floor - I certainly hope you're shaking your head and saying yes, because we want Cape Breton strong. It is the second-largest city in this province, and we need to be standing on two cities, absolutely.

They said a focus on strategies to grow business and attract new business to the region - that's important in a charter. Membertou First Nation said that for corporations to have the opportunity to do business on a fair playing field, make it easier for companies to say yes to doing business in Cape Breton - that is a conversation for home, not for this House of Assembly.

They also said autonomy, the power to make our own decisions. I know I have support on that side of the floor for that. I know I do, and it's not on a 30-day hoist. I simply can't agree with a hoist, because that is not where any of these things are going to be recognized.

Speaker, I'll just read a quick section of this, *Shaping our Future in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality: A Reorganization Plan for Positive Change*. These are powerful words, and I think it's what everybody in here wants:

“It is vitally important that the CBRM respond directly to our own challenges and opportunities in a timely and flexible way. A Charter Act will allow us to function more effectively and efficiently by giving us the tools that we need, legislatively and financially, to address economic shifts and to take full advantage of opportunities as they arise.”

I think that's what we want for all people, not just Cape Breton.

“A Charter will allow us to address the public works, planning, economic development and needs of our urban and rural communities. In short, a Charter will allow us to once again be the economic engine of Eastern Nova Scotia.”

Do you all remember the days of coal mines and steel plants? We were shipping money up here. I should table that.

That proposal was voted for on December 15, 2016, by the CBRM council. It was voted 11-2 in favour. The current mayor, Amanda McDougall, was one of the councillors at the time. A couple of councillors - Eldon MacDonald, Steve Gillespie, and Darren Bruckschwaiger - have been around the table a long time and understand this stuff. They all voted in favour of a charter at that time.

Speaker, why is it important? Why is all this important? Without getting too detailed into this - I really don't feel the need to table every document - but there's more than enough support here. I say we don't want to hoist this legislation. I say it because, who are we? We are provincial legislators. I have a viability study here for Cape Breton Regional Municipality. It was done in August of 2019, and speaks highly of a charter. I'll table that one if you want.

I have another one from 2000, “The fiscal distribution of the provincial-municipal service exchange in Nova Scotia”, again supporting a charter for Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. And I have “A Question of Balance - An Assessment of the State of Local Government in Nova Scotia.” This was April 2005.

Those documents are from Cape Breton. They are speaking of the urgent need for a charter. It has been decades - decades. Please, if CBRM is listening to me, please - I’m pleading with you - go back to the research. Go back to the academic research that tells us this is the way to go forward. This is the direction we’ve been travelling in for decades, and we’re held up.

This was the direction on August 14th of this year. Two months ago - two months ago - when I, Minister Comer, and Speaker Bain at the time (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Just a friendly reminder to not use names.

JOHN WHITE: Sorry, Speaker. Other government-side MLAs and I met in Sydney with some councillors. That was the one and only meeting that I was invited to with the CBRM to discuss this negotiation process. In that meeting, we weren’t there very long when I was challenged with making this political. I guess that happens. We were challenged with the decision to come back to the government and request more time for CBRM. CBRM took part in 29.5 hours of negotiations and were given two separate negotiation times of their own. They had time to negotiate, and they did negotiate. I can assure you that the CBRM, two months ago, were asking for a charter.

I will table this email from Mayor Amanda McDougall-Merrill on August 14, 2023. It says:

“I want to again express my gratitude on behalf of CBRM Council and staff for making the time to sit down with us and discuss the proposed Provincial/Municipal MOU. As promised, see below for suggested changes put forward by the Cape Breton Regional Municipality regarding the proposed Provincial/Municipal MOU.”

The mayor has three highlights here. One is: “We are asking that Education taxation be removed as well.” Unfortunately, that wasn’t done - that wasn’t offered - but it is in negotiation. As the member for Northside-Westmount mentioned, neither side walks away with everything in negotiations. They didn’t get that ask. The other thing asked for was honouring the doubling of the Municipal Financial Capacity and Town Foundation Grant, which is a whole other conversation that I am not going in or out on right now. There is debate whether it was or wasn’t - I’m not going there. The big thing here, and the reason I tabled this document, is that we asked that the CBRM be offered the same opportunity as the HRM to negotiate an agreement outside of the general MOU process that reflects these exceptionalities.

[4:45 p.m.]

In August - two months ago - the CBRM wanted to do a charter. What followed? September 15, 2023 - one month later - the mayor received this letter by email, as I understand. I don't know if it was tabled for the Council to read. I question that because I've heard councillors asking about the option to charter. I heard opposition MLAs saying here last when we started that they needed a charter and needed to be recognized as being different. I question if this was tabled. That doesn't matter. The conversation should be happening at home anyway.

On the bottom of this page, all alone, is: "The Province is also willing to work with you as part of negotiations, to develop a separate CBRM Charter." I tabled this document the other night, but I would be happy to table it again. I question what is going on. I do not want this to be political, and I do not want to be making this decision, because I am a provincial representative. I am not municipal.

We have lots of municipal experience in here; plenty who have talked about this - repeatedly - the need to do a charter. My question is: What has happened since August when the CBRM asked for a charter, a month later when they were granted a charter, and now another month later when they don't want the charter? I don't know what happened, and I am not making this political. I just question what is going on. What is going on at home that there is a media blitz and a mailout coming to houses, as I understand, and I sincerely question what it's about.

I know the opposition are with this, and I will table this document just because. This came out last week: "Cape Breton, N.S., mayor says new legislation will reduce funding for municipality." In this document - I am quoting Kyle Moore here, I guess - sorry, media. The opposition says the CBRM charter - the CBRM should be looked at differently because of the size of the population.

I think we held a vote. This House is unanimous. I think we all want a charter, but I don't know why we need to hoist it and talk here for 30 days, because in the meantime the damage is being done. I don't see - when it comes to my hometown, I don't want damage being done. I want to end this bleeding now, and I want my town to be prosperous. I want my community - I want my students - to have choices. I want economic development. I want my tax rate lower too. Yes, I do. I want the seniors to have options. I want parks. I want things at home. I want recreation. That's what a charter offers.

I do not support a hoist. I simply want the CBRM mayor and council to have a vote and decide if they want to go to charter or not, as they have been requested by the minister. If we are moving in a different direction in the last two months since the request for a charter came in, I will ask this: Where's the viability study? Where is the strategic plan? Where is the academic research to support going outside of a charter when we have over two decades of requesting that we do a charter?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: There are a few comments I want to make in relation to the motion to hoist. I do see value in this. It's not because we don't support the overall intent of this bill. I think it's very important to state that and reaffirm that, as I've done previously in second reading, and as members have done. We know many municipalities - probably the vast majority, along with the NSF - support this.

The position we've taken, though, is that there are some amongst our municipal leadership - particularly in rural Nova Scotia and primarily the CBRM - who don't, and have concerns about the impact to their finances. The CBRM has a very unique request here: that a hoist will allow them to pursue a charter in a separate agreement, the rationale of which would be their size. They are 10 times larger than the next-largest town, and the unique pressures they have related to growth and being another urban centre here in Nova Scotia.

Again, the government says: Well, this is so urgent, we have to get this passed right away or else it will never get passed again. I'll quote from a letter that the minister sent out to CAOs recently where he says it has been more than 25 years that people have been waiting to have this new MOU signed. We've only been in the House for nine days. Certainly, a piece of legislation of this complexity, of this importance, that will reshape the relationship between our municipal units and the province, does deserve some debate and consideration in the House.

We feel, on this side of the House, that the concerns that have been raised in a very real way from the CBRM and from other small municipal units should be heard, should be discussed, and should be considered.

I do want to put this on the record, though. I did speak on this in second reading. I presented a number of concerns that were expressed, I believe, by Kings County, around roads and the potential impact to various classifications of roads that are shared between municipalities and the Province. Since those comments, I have learned - and I do want to clarify for the record in the Chamber, that that portion of the MOU has been removed because it was so contentious. That does give me more confidence in the legislation as well, because that was something that I found very concerning with municipalities informing us that they didn't know if they would be able to maintain these roads.

I do want to put myself on the record there. I have been informed that negotiations with the NSF and the steering group on this that those roads - because of the contentious nature of them because of the issues related to finance - have been removed. I do want to recognize that as I did speak, probably ad nauseum for the members opposite, about that particular issue. I want to clarify the record on that, and again reiterate that my confidence in the bill has increased as a result of that.

Since speaking on second reading, I have also heard from various municipal leaders, particularly on the board of the NSFM, who are very supportive of the bill, including two incredible municipal representatives down in my neck of the woods, Mayor Mood and Councillor Durkee, who both serve on the board of the NSFM.

As members and I have mentioned previously, we know that there's broad-based support for this. The hoist motion would allow us to deal specifically with the CBRM question, which I think is very troubling for CBRM and for its citizens. It would also give the government a chance to consult further with the municipalities which have expressed fear of financial impact as a result of this as well.

I think a hoist would also give us more time to evaluate some of the discrepancies between what we've seen in terms of messaging and communication from the minister, the department, and the government, and what we've seen in terms of letters and communication from the Municipality of CBRM.

We did get a copy of a letter that was sent out to every single CAO from the minister that expressed serious urgency about the passage of this bill. I will say that a hoist would also allow us to evaluate the contents of this. I am concerned about some of the contents here.

I've been in this Chamber - I served in both Opposition and in government for over 13 years now, I believe. I've never seen public service resources used in such an obviously partisan way in those 13 years. I see that in this letter that was sent out by the minister and his department. Again, a hoist would allow us to further evaluate this and its contents.

We've also seen that partisanship expressed through Elections Nova Scotia in very obvious ways. Public resources are being used for partisan purposes. Again, we've had a culture and tradition in the public service of this province to not engage in that sort of partisan rhetoric - particularly when we are on the side of government and have access to all of these public service resources that are paid for by the taxpayers, and that aren't paid for by the PC Party.

Certainly, I think that this letter is a breach of trust as a result of that. Moving on the hoist motion would allow us to further evaluate this even more than some of the comments I want to make here today. That is something that I think we do need to put on the record.

There has been a weaponizing of the public service in a way that we probably haven't seen since the 1980s. This is something that I think should be a concern for citizens and for municipal leaders.

The hoist motion would allow us, in this particular case, to evaluate the partisan language in a letter from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that came from his department to CAOs who aren't even elected officials. This didn't go to council. This

didn't go to politicians. This went to CAOs - the top bureaucrats of our municipal government.

I think this letter was in bad taste. I think that it's a breach in decorum and of the culture, tradition, and trust that we have with the public service of Nova Scotia. The hoist would allow us to further take some time to evaluate major discrepancies between this letter from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and what we've actually seen with dated correspondence from CBRM.

I will say that I do not think that CBRM was treated fairly here. The government has said that they told them they would be willing to negotiate a separate Charter or agreement; however, that did come with threats in relation to financing. CBRM felt that in a very real way.

I will also add that CBRM doesn't seem, based on the evidence that we have at hand here from correspondence between the Mayor of CBRM and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing - there wasn't enough appropriate time given to CBRM to even consider this or vote on it.

I will quote from the letter from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on this. Again, a hoist delaying this, even if it's for a number of days, would help us get to the bottom of some of these discrepancies. I will table this.

“Since CBRM has consistently asked for its own Charter, we believed that was something they wanted. We wrote to them on September 15th advising them of the option to be a part of the same agreement that 47 other municipalities support or exempt themselves from this arrangement, in which case the province would work collaboratively with them to start the process of finally negotiating a CBRM Charter.”

Again, we were told that came with a threat of financial repercussions. Perhaps the minister can clarify whether that happened or not, if he's able to, because I know the minister wasn't at that meeting. It was the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Deputy Minister LaFleche.

Again, this is all CAOs except for the CAO of CBRM. Our only ask of them was that whatever decision they make, Option A or B, be supported by a vote of council. We felt this was “a reasonable ask - to ensure the decision represented the will of the majority of the council - particularly given CBRM's recent history of division.” It's in very poor taste, I think, to be taking these sorts of political shots through a public service letter written by, I'm sure, CNS staff or policy staff in the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and sent out to CAOs - not elected officials, but to other public servants. Again, in poor taste.

[5:00 p.m.]

Here's where I'm most deeply concerned, and again, a hoist motion would give us more time to evaluate these discrepancies. "We didn't actually receive a response," says the minister. "Their silence is hard to reconcile in the face of being offered exactly what they had asked for." I will table this when I'm done with the letter.

This certainly flies in the face of correspondence that we've seen from CBRM that actually is dated October 3rd. This would be before the minister sent out this email to every single CAO.

I'll quote from this letter from the minister. "While I'm grateful the department recognizes the importance of moving forward with the proposed" - this writing's a little smaller - "While I am grateful the department recognizes the importance of moving forward with the proposed municipal-provincial MOU, your deadline of providing a council motion to enter into this agreement by noon today is logistically impossible."

This letter was received by the minister's office.

"It's impossible," the letter continues, "because a motion of council requires a public meeting and debate. I welcome you and your staff to attend an upcoming meeting of CBRM council to provide the necessary detail and policy associated with the proposed MOU for council to decide upon. As you can appreciate, voting on something as significant as the MOU requires significant thought and preparation, and answers to the many questions staff and council continue to have regarding the proposal that the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing has put forward to all municipalities, and additionally a suggestion of a possible separate agreement specific to CBRM.

"CBRM has two regional council meetings scheduled for the month: October 10th at 6:00 p.m. and October 24th at 9:30 a.m. Should neither of these dates work in your schedule, we can call an emergency meeting of council on a date that is more accommodating."

This is an official letter that was sent to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and to the minister specifically, on October 3rd before the minister sent out this email targeting CBRM and asking all other CAOs and municipalities to also target and lobby CBRM - again, in poor taste, and I think unprofessional.

Again, I'll repeat what the minister said in this letter: "We didn't actually receive a response. Their silence is hard to reconcile in the face of being offered exactly what they had asked for."

A hoist, if passed, would allow us to actually get to the bottom of this discrepancy, between the minister saying that he did not receive a response from CBRM and the fact that

we have a dated letter from the mayor of CBRM telling him why they couldn't accommodate the short timeline they were given, and actually offering to work with the minister on a future date. There are even proposed dates in here. This is a serious discrepancy, and potentially a breach of trust.

Other concerns I have with this letter, which again, a hoist motion would allow us to further investigate before we vote on Bill No. 340 - a bill of serious significance that will shape the relationship between the Province and our municipalities probably for another generation. It would allow us to investigate this further before we do that.

Another potshot is taken at CBRM: "As a government, we can't in good conscience allow the residents of CBRM to be disadvantaged simply because their own council wouldn't make a decision."

Again, we've got evidence in a letter dated from the mayor, signed with the mayor's hand, that they were willing to work with the minister and the department on that - again, a minister who did not go himself, a Premier who did not go himself - to meet with the elected officials of CBRM or their staff. They sent the deputy in their place. I do think we also need to point this out, because this should be a concern to the House.

However, given the amount of opposition to this bill, and the assertions of the Liberal Party that it is more than the CBRM that is discontented with this agreement, we are listening carefully. If it appears that this bill is, in fact, not the will of the municipalities, then letting the current MOU continue unamended is an option.

The government has a majority. There's no way that the Opposition party can stop them from passing this bill. The most we can do is debate it and prolong its passage by mere days. The fact that this letter was sent out to scare municipalities and purposely lists the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia and the other Opposition party, I think, is a real breach of decorum, not to mention taste.

This is weaponizing public service resources, because again, the PC caucus name is not on this letterhead. It's the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The hoist motion would allow us to further investigate these serious discrepancies, and I think breach of trust that the minister has shown with sending this letter.

The minister continues: "If you feel it is important that this bill pass, perhaps you could contact your colleagues in the CBRM and the opposition, to help them understand what value you see in the bill and encourage them to make a decision noted above that has been on an offer for over a month."

So again, we have a very clear indication that not only has CBRM, as they have asserted, not been treated fairly through this process, but they have actually been targeted politically by the minister who is supposed to serve that municipality. They are not the only

municipality that has been targeted by the minister in this government. We have seen that with HRM as well.

These are issues that should be a matter of concern and debate of this bill. They certainly need to be addressed in the House, and there are questions here that I believe need to be answered by the minister and/or the Premier. Again, we support the overall intention of the bill. Particularly myself, knowing the road issue has been resolved - I have more confidence in the bill. I've also spoken to municipal leaders, including those in my area, who are supportive of this and believe our municipalities will benefit from it, and I know that's the case with others.

I also do believe CBRM has been disadvantaged here. They have a unique position as an urban centre and being 10 times larger than the next biggest town, they have rationale to pursue a charter, and based on the evidence we have at hand, the Province - the minister - has not engaged in a fair process to achieve that charter in a fair negotiation. Instead, what the minister has engaged in is political rhetoric that is not reflective of the reality - not reflective of the correspondence that has happened between his department and the municipality. Therefore, that creates some mistrust around this bill with CBRM and, in part, with members of this caucus. Which is why we have stood in our spots - in our seats - to debate this.

Again, we will support the intention of this bill. We will urge the government to take time to actually engage in a meaningful process with CBRM, where they are not threatened with financial reprisals if they don't sign this. Where the minister engages in honest dialogue about what his conversations with CBRM are - where he actually acknowledges that they themselves have offered to be a part of this process and haven't remained silent.

I think at the end of the day, if the government can achieve that, this will be a better bill as a result. We'll have a stronger relationship between the Province and our municipal units. We'll have a better piece of legislation, and the citizens of all of our municipalities, including those of CBRM, will be better served.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I appreciate just a few minutes. I have no intention of delaying or holding up. I actually wanted to speak in relation to the debate that's been happening back and forth.

I'm not an expert on municipalities, and I'm not an expert on Cape Breton. I am an expert on the Legislature, though - self-proclaimed expert on the Legislature - so as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, when we're talking about an Opposition who are delaying a bill, or delaying the passing of a bill - we've been here for nine days. We're

introducing a hoist motion that is a 30-day addition that's going to be defeated once we vote on it, because we have a majority government.

This isn't about trying to prolong the inevitable or pull things out. It's also not about politics, because there are two truths that I can say wholeheartedly: I believe wholeheartedly that the member for Glace Bay-Dominion cares about the area that he comes from and that he represents. I believe wholeheartedly that he wants what's in the best interests of his municipality. Hands down, no question, 100 per cent.

I also understand, as an MLA who was approached by the CBRM, who was able to speak to municipal councillors and hear concerns, that there is a disconnect. Our amendments and our talking on Bill No. 340 isn't Liberals or NDP thinking, "How are we going to get at the government? How are we going to cause trouble?" This is something that was brought to our attention by the people whom it directly impacts, and I trust them to be experts. I trust them to know that what is happening - what's presented in front of them - is not something that is working.

Where we have one side that thinks this is going to work for CBRM - and I'm only going to speak to CBRM, because they're the only ones whom I actually had the opportunity to sit down and talk to. When they're saying, as experts, is that this does not help them, but the government is saying, as experts, that this is here to help them, and it will help them - there is clearly a disconnect. There are clearly some messages that are crossed. What this hoist does is allow for those channels to be cleared.

It's a 30-day pause that's going to be defeated. We know that. But it's a 30-day pause as a suggestion to maybe take a step back and say that both sides want what's in the best interest of this municipality, so how do we get to a point where we do that, where we make that happen? What does that look like? We're limited in what we can introduce through Committee of the Whole House on Bills or what we can introduce on second reading or third reading of a bill. But the department and the municipalities have an opportunity to take what they're hearing here and actually do the work themselves, outside of this Chamber, outside of the headlines, outside of anybody or anyone who might think that this is what playing politics looks like.

Trust me, I know what playing politics looks like. I enjoy playing politics. This is not it. This is a sincere disconnect between two organizations that really, really want what's in the best interest for all the municipalities in the province.

As has been brought out, it's not a one-size-fits-all. Our municipalities are all different. They're different sizes, they have different needs, they have different responsibilities. You can't say that what's good for one is going to be good for all of them. I live in a municipality that is a living example of that. We have a charter, and it doesn't always work in our best interest, either. We'll talk more about that as the days go by. It is

something that absolutely needs to be looked at because the CBRM is unique, and it is different than the other municipalities that it is currently looped in with.

Like I said, this is something that we will vote on in a matter of minutes, and the 30 days won't ever happen. It will be the last time that we talk about it. But I really do encourage the members of the government - and all of the members who represent the CBRM who sit in this House - to find a way to bring a connection back between these two parties. There is a glaring issue that is happening. I don't think any of us sitting here wants any more turmoil or wants anything that is going to hurt our second-largest municipality in the province.

THE SPEAKER: Seeing no more speakers, is the House ready for the question? The hoist motion is to delay this bill by 30 days.

A recorded vote has been called for.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[5:14 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

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

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[6:15 p.m.]

YEAS

Hon. Patricia Arab
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Kelly Regan
Susan Leblanc
Claudia Chender
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Lisa Lachance
Lorelei Nicoll
Hon. Ben Jessome
Braedon Clark
Ali Duale

NAYS

Hon. Brad Johns
Hon. Tory Rushton
Hon. Barbara Adams
Hon. Kim Masland
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

Carman Kerr	Hon. Colton LeBlanc
Ronnie LeBlanc	Hon. Jill Balsler
Fred Tilley	Hon. Pat Dunn
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin	Hon. Greg Morrow
	Hon. Becky Druhan
	Larry Harrison
	John White
	John A. MacDonald
	Hon. Keith Bain
	Chris Palmer
	Melissa Sheehy-Richard
	Hon. Steve Craig

THE CLERK: For, 18. Against, 26.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

If I am to recognize the honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, it will be to close debate.

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I was only planning to say very few words here to close debate on second reading and that's what I'll do.

I move to close second reading of this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to close second reading on Bill No. 340, the Municipal Reform (2023) Act.

There has been a request for a recorded vote.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[6:19 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. Are the Whips satisfied?

The Clerk will conduct the recorded vote.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[7:18 p.m.]

YEAS

Hon. Brad Johns
Hon. Tory Rushton
Hon. Barbara Adams
Hon. Kim Masland
Hon. Allan MacMaster
Twila Gross
Hon. John Lohr
Hon. Trevor Boudreau
Hon. Timothy Halman
Hon. Kent Smith
Dave Ritcey
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
Hon. Steve Craig
Hon. Patricia Arab
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Hon. Kelly Regan
Hon. Ben Jessome
Braedon Clark
Carman Kerr
Ronnie LeBlanc

NAYS

Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Claudia Chender
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Lisa Lachance
Fred Tilley
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin

THE CLERK: For, 33. Against, 8.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I move that you do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

We'll have a short recess as the committee sets up.

[7:22 p.m. The House resolved into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

[10:47 p.m. The CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance resumed the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on Bills reports:

THE CLERK: That the committee has met and considered the following bill:

Bill No. 334 - Heath Services and Insurance Act (amended).

and the Chair has been instructed to recommend this bill to the favourable consideration of the House. The Chair also reports some progress on:

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

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that Bill 334 be read for a third time on a future day.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes government's business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Friday, October 27th between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 11:59 p.m. Government business will include Committee of the Whole House on Bills and third reading of Bills No. 321 and 327.

THE SPEAKER: There's a motion for the House to adjourn to meet again tomorrow starting at 9:00 a.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 10:48 p.m.]