



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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

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

First Session

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS:	
2022 Annual Report of the Fish Harvesters Registration and Cert. Board, Hon. K. Smith	7126
STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS:	
Recipients: 2023 Medal of Bravery - Congrats., Hon. B. Johns	7126
Hon. Z. Churchill	7127
C. Chender	7127
GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION:	
Res. 808, Allied Health Care Professionals Recog. Wk.: Contribs. - Recog., Hon. B. Adams	7128
Vote - Affirmative	7128
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:	
No. 402, Coastal Protection Act (amended), Hon. I. Rankin	7128
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:	
Legere, E./Donkin, B.: Family Rescue - Thanks,	

T. Taggart.....	7129
Indig. Vets: Mil. Serv. - Recog., Hon. Z. Churchill	7130
Peters, Juanita: Portia White Prize - Congrats., C. Chender	7130
Perry Rand Transp.: 60 th Anniv. - Congrats., C. Palmer.....	7131
Regan, C./MacDonald, K.: Daughter - Birth Congrats., Hon. P. Arab	7132
Northern Lights Dancers: Culture Sharing - Thanks, L. Lachance.....	7132
Partics.: Terry Fox Run - Thanks, Hon. B. Johns.....	7133
LeBlanc-Tidd: Alum. of Yr. Awd. - Congrats., R. LeBlanc	7133
Planning Team: Dart. North Health Nbhd. - Thanks, S. Leblanc	7134
Turnbull, Blayre: Hockey Contract - Recog., Hon. P. Dunn.....	7134
WWII Vets: Mil. Service - Recog., K. Coombes.....	7135
Trenholm, J./Leal, W.: Newsletter Prod. - Thanks, Hon. K. Bain	7135
Robicheau, Colette: 100+ Women Who Care - Recog., Hon. K. Regan.....	7136
Viola Desmond Day: Civil Rights Prom. - Recog., S. Hansen	7136
Spencer, Terra: Song Contest Win - Congrats., M. Sheehy-Richard	7137
Britten, Dr. Alan: Sport Commitment - Thanks, Hon. D. Mombourquette.....	7137
Cornerstone: Housing Efforts - Recog., E. Smith-McCrossin.....	7138
Nat'l Indig. Vets. Day: Mil. Serv. - Recog., L. Lachance.....	7138
Local Heroes: Com. Serv. - Thanks, The Premier.....	7139
Maguire, Rena: Support - Recog., Hon. B. Maguire	7140
Wennberg, Megan: <i>Unsyncable</i> Film - Congrats., S. Leblanc	7140
The Dining Room at Main & Mersey: Opening - Thanks, Hon. K. Masland.....	7141
West, Kevin: Vol. Awd. Recip. - Congrats., Hon. K. Irving.....	7141
Legion Branches: Rem. Day Ceremonies - Recog.,	

K. Coombes.....	7142
MacDonald, Daniel: Com. Serv. - Recog., Hon. B. Druhan.....	7142
Sailing Pgm.: Fundraising Dinner - Recog., A. Duale.....	7143
Simmonds, Colter: Com. Serv. - Thanks, S. Hansen.....	7143
Carter, Doris: Com. Serv. - Recog., Hon. T. Boudreau.....	7144
World Town Planning Day: Com. Devt. - Recog., L. Nicoll.....	7144
Forestry: Contrib. to Economy - Recog., E. Smith-McCrossin.....	7145
Woodlawn Panthers: Ch'ship Win - Congrats., Hon. T. Grosse.....	7146
Ryan, Troy: Hockey Career - Recog., Hon. B. Maguire.....	7146
Vols.: Digby Ground SAR - Thanks, Hon. J. Balsler.....	7146
Hfx. U11 Baseball Team: Medal Win - Congrats., R. DiCostanzo.....	7147
Diwali: Hindu Celeb. - Recog., Hon. B. Jessome.....	7147
ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:	
No. 1,329, Prem.: Youth Homelessness - Prevent, Hon. Z. Churchill.....	7147
No. 1,330, Prem.: Housing Project Delay - Explain, C. Chender.....	7149
No. 1,331, DAE: Student Housing Report - Table, Hon. Z. Churchill.....	7151
No. 1,332, EECD: Child Care Spaces - Provide, Hon. I. Rankin.....	7152
No. 1,333, EECD: Child Care Workers - Support, Hon. I. Rankin.....	7153
No. 1,334, MAH: HRM Housing - Expedite, S. Hansen.....	7155
No. 1,335, EECD: Child Care Wait-List Fees - Ban, Hon. P. Arab.....	7156
No. 1,336, EECD: New Child Care Spaces - Create, Hon. D. Mombourquette.....	7157
No. 1,337, EECD: New HRM Schools - Announce, B. Clark.....	7158
No. 1,338, EECD: Violence in Schools - Address, L. Lachance.....	7159
No. 1,339, EECD: Lack of Child Care - Address, L. Nicoll.....	7160

No. 1,340, EECD: Universal Lunch Program - Implement, Hon. D. Mombourquette	7161
No. 1,341, DHW: Family Physicians - Recruit, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	7162
No. 1,342, ECC: Coastal Protection Act - Implement, L. Lachance.....	7163
No. 1,343, FTB: Seniors Income Benefit - Create, R. DiCostanzo.....	7164
OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS:	
PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	
No. 401, Early Learning and Child Care Act (amended), Hon. I. Rankin.....	7166
S. Hansen	7170
Hon. B. Druhan.....	7172
Hon. D. Mombourquette.....	7177
No. 306, Serious Illness Leave Act, Hon. Z. Churchill	7181
G. Burrill.....	7185
Hon. B. Adams.....	7188
Hon. K. Regan.....	7192
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:	
PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	
No. 119, Endometriosis Awareness Month Act, S. Leblanc	7197
Hon. K. Masland.....	7201
Hon. K. Regan.....	7203
C. Chender	7204
S. Leblanc	7205
Vote - Affirmative.....	7205
PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING:	
No. 119, Endometriosis Awareness Month Act, S. Leblanc	7206
L. Lachance.....	7206
Vote - Affirmative.....	7207
[PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:]	
No. 396, Sickle Cell Awareness Day Act, Hon. B. Jessome.....	7208
S. Hansen	7209
Hon. T. Grosse	7209
Hon. B. Jessome.....	7210
Vote - Affirmative.....	7211
HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CWH ON BILLS AT 5:32 P.M.	7211
HOUSE RECONVENED AT 7:05 P.M.	7211
PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING:	
No. 321, Conseil scolaire provincial acadien provincial Act, Hon. B. Druhan.....	7212

R. LeBlanc	7214
L. Lachance.....	7215
Hon. C. LeBlanc	7216
Hon. B. Druhan.....	7219
Vote - Affirmative.....	7219
No. 322, Opioid Damages and Health-care Costs Recovery Act,	
Hon. M. Thompson.....	7219
Hon. K. Regan.....	7220
Hon. B. Maguire	7220
L. Lachance.....	7221
Hon. K. Smith	7223
N. Young.....	7223
Hon. K. Masland.....	7223
J. White	7224
A. Duale	7226
Hon. M. Thompson.....	7227
Vote - Affirmative.....	7228
No. 327, Motor Vehicle Act (amended),	
Hon. K. Masland.....	7228
Hon. B. Jessome.....	7229
K. Coombes.....	7229
Hon. K. Masland.....	7229
Vote - Affirmative.....	7230
No. 334, Health Services and Insurance Act (amended),	
Hon. B. Comer	7230
R. DiCostanzo	7233
L. Lachance.....	7235
Hon. M. Thompson.....	7240
Hon. B. Comer	7241
Vote - Affirmative.....	7243
ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Thursday, Nov. 9 th at 1:00 p.m.	7243
NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3):	
Res. 809, Bethany Turpin Music Studio: CoC Awd. Recip. - Congrats.,	
Hon. Z. Churchill	7244
Res. 810, Deep Sky Eye Observatory: CoC Awd. Recip. - Congrats.,	
Hon. Z. Churchill	7244
Res. 811, Dogwood Lodge Pet Retreat: CoC Awd. Recip. - Congrats.,	
Hon. Z. Churchill	7245
Res. 812, Heritage Brewing: CoC Awd. Recip. - Congrats.,	
Hon. Z. Churchill	7245
Res. 813, d'Entremont, Logan: CoC Awd. Recip. - Congrats.,	
Hon. Z. Churchill	7246
Res. 814, Novatec Braids: CoC Awd. Recip. - Congrats.,	
Hon. Z. Churchill	7246
Res. 815, Rotary Club of Yarmouth: CoC Awd. Recip. - Congrats.,	
Hon. Z. Churchill	7247

Res. 816, Cleveland, Wade: CoC Awd. Recip. - Congrats., Hon. Z. Churchill	7247
Res. 817, Robicheau, Alvina: Vol. of Yr. Awd. Recip. - Congrats., Hon. Z. Churchill	7248
Res. 818, Eldridge, Mary: Vol. of Yr. Awd. Recip. - Congrats., Hon. Z. Churchill	7248



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2023

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

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

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party on an introduction.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'd like to draw the attention of the members to the gallery opposite, where we're joined today by James Dinn - the MHA for St. John's Centre and the Leader of the New Democratic Party of Newfoundland and Labrador - who has come to visit us today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Enjoy your visit.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. KENT SMITH: Speaker, I beg leave to table the 2022 annual report from the Fish Harvesters Registration and Certification Board.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the bravery of four extraordinary Nova Scotians. I had the privilege to take part this morning in the 2023 Medal of Bravery ceremony, where Scott Buchanan of Baddeck, Robert McGregor of Economy, Talbot Boyer of Dartmouth, and Adam Lefort of Grand Étang were recognized for their quick and selfless action in the face of danger.

These four individuals didn't hesitate to place themselves in danger to protect others, and I think it's important that all members of the House be aware of their historic actions. On February 17, 2020, Scott Buchanan saved two individuals who fell through the ice at a waterfall near Baddeck. Jumping into seven-foot-deep water, Scott shielded the individuals from the force of the waterfall and held on to them for 20 minutes until help could arrive.

On June 11, 2020, Robert McGregor noticed flames in a window of a house near Truro. Seeing someone in the house unconscious, Robert made multiple attempts to pull the individual to safety. Despite Mr. McGregor's quick effort and heroic actions, the victim's injuries were fatal.

On January 29, 2021, Talbot Boyer was operating a Halifax Transit bus when he noticed a vehicle on its roof and on fire on Upper Water Street. Talbot pulled the occupant from the burning vehicle, used snow to douse the flames, and was able to pull the person away moments before the vehicle exploded.

On June 22, 2021, Adam Lefort was tubing down the Margaree River when a woman fell out of her tube and became trapped in the deep water, unable to swim. Adam dove into the water, brought the woman to the surface, and held on to her and a tree until help arrived. She did not drown.

Speaker, if I'm ever in danger, I hope someone like these four recipients is nearby to help. Their heroic actions make us proud to be Nova Scotians.

This morning's ceremony was special, and I know it meant a lot to their families and friends of Scott, Robert, Talbot, and Adam, who were so proud of them. I also want to thank the Premier for coming and recognizing the heroes in our community during today's

ceremony. It was a true honour to acknowledge the four individuals - heroes in the true sense of the word.

On behalf of our grateful province, I congratulate this year's Medal of Bravery recipients and thank everyone who puts themselves in danger to help fellow Nova Scotians. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I'd like to thank the minister and Attorney General for his comments. It was very moving, during the Medal of Bravery ceremony, hearing the incredible acts of not just heroism, but also sacrifice, and acts that really required these individuals to put the fear for their own safety and well-being aside to protect and save others.

I do want to recognize Scott Buchanan of Baddeck, Robert McGregor of Economy, Talbot Boyer of Dartmouth, and Adam Lefort of Grand Étang, who literally faced fire, water, smoke, and ice in attempts to save people's lives, and most of these guys were successful in doing that. I just want to commend them for their incredible acts, and I'm proud to mention their names here in the House. I know that all of these gentlemen will be thought of fondly, not just by their own family members - who I know must be very proud of them - but also the family members of those whom they helped survive.

I want to thank them again on behalf of the House and on behalf of those individuals and those family members who still have people alive today because of the heroism of these gentlemen. (Applause)

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I think this morning was a good reminder of the good things that we can do in this House.

I walked in and smelled the smudge from Elder Companion. We saw the open hearts and a couple of tears as we discussed the truly incredible actions of these four men who, as has been said, showed incredible - maybe ordinary to them but extraordinary to us - acts of courage.

It was very moving and very fitting that we paused the operations of this House to take a moment and remember how it is that Nova Scotians show up for each other.

I echo the comments of my colleagues. I thank, on behalf of our caucus, Scott Buchanan, Robert McGregor, Talbot Boyer - who has a very adorable baby - and Adam Lefort for those acts of courage, for those moments of bravery, and for reminding us what

a wonderful and special place we come from and the ways in which Nova Scotians and our communities show up for each other. (Applause)

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 808

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

Whereas thousands of allied health care professionals are involved with the delivery of care to Nova Scotians every day; and

Whereas Nova Scotian allied professionals are working in 140 occupations and bring invaluable information and skills to ensure timely and proper treatment; and

Whereas Allied Healthcare Professionals Recognition Week provides an opportunity for us all to thank our allied health professional heroes for the work they do to deliver quality care to Nova Scotians every day;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature join me in recognizing the tremendous contributions of all allied health care workers in our province.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 402 - An Act to Amend Chapter 3 of the Acts of 2019, the Coastal Protection Act. (Hon. Iain Rankin)

[1:15 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

TOM TAGGART: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

TOM TAGGART: In your gallery - the Speaker's Gallery - I am honoured to introduce a true hero: Ella Legere. Ella and Ben Donkin - who unfortunately wasn't able to join us here today - put their own lives at risk to save a mother and three young children who were in serious jeopardy.

Ella is joined today by her own daughter, Dakota. I would ask Ella and Dakota to stand and accept the warm welcome from the members of the Nova Scotia Legislature. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly.

The honourable member for Colchester North.

LEGERE, E./DONKIN, B.: FAMILY RESCUE - THANKS

TOM TAGGART: Many of us who have lived along the Bay of Fundy are well aware of its beauty. We are also very well aware of the dangers associated with the highest tides in the world.

Early this Summer, Ella Legere and Ben Donkin heard a cry for help. Upon racing to the shoreline, they saw a woman on her hands and knees screaming for help and three young children at a distance out on the mudflats. Ella and Ben realized that if the children became stuck, they would be overcome by the rising water.

In Ella's words, the mud was past their knees and would almost suction their legs. Ben was first to get to the children and start to get them back towards the shore. Ella reached the woman, who she believed was in shock, as she continued to scream even after being told her children were safe. The woman continued to struggle and soon collapsed in exhaustion.

Ella then noticed that the three-year-old was again wandering back towards the rising water. By this time, exhausted from fighting the mud, Ella crawled on her hands and

knees to the child. She was unable to physically lift her, so she distracted the child by asking her to help her find snails and they made their way back to her mother and then to the shore, with the water closing in. Ella stayed in the mud with the mother and child until the local first responders arrived.

This story would have led to a very tragic outcome. I ask that all members of this House of Assembly thank Ella and Ben Donkin for their quick thinking, heroic actions, and for putting their lives at risk to save a family in serious distress. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

INDIG. VETS: MIL. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I rise today to recognize and honour Indigenous veterans who have served in our military, fighting for peace and freedom here in Canada and around the world. We remember the great sacrifices of Indigenous peoples who have put their lives in the line of service to our country.

Thousands of Indigenous soldiers paid the ultimate sacrifice for this nation. As we enter the season of remembrance, it is worth paying extra attention to the sacrifices of our Indigenous soldiers. Today and every day, we need to reflect on their service and redouble our efforts to strengthen our nation-to-nation relations as we move toward Remembrance Day and as we continue on a path of reconciliation and strengthening our country.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'll draw the members' attention to the gallery opposite, where we are joined by two extremely accomplished artists and creators here in Nova Scotia. I will read a statement about them, but first I would ask that you give Juanita Peters and Andre Fenton the warm welcome of the Legislature. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: It's a pleasure to have you. Welcome.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

PETERS, JUANITA: PORTIA WHITE PRIZE - CONGRATS.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Today I rise to recognize Dartmouth South's Juanita Peters. This past weekend, Juanita received the prestigious Portia White Prize from Arts Nova Scotia. The award recognizes an outstanding professional Nova Scotia artist who has

attained mastery and recognition in their discipline and has made a significant contribution to the province's cultural life over a sustained career. She's also of Weymouth Falls, she would probably want me to say.

Juanita's list of achievements is long and varied: actor, journalist, executive director of the Africville Museum, and founding member of Women in Film and Television Atlantic are just a few of her contributions to this province. I'd also add her deep kindness, sense of stewardship, and community leadership to that list.

Juanita selected Andre Fenton, another accomplished writer, poet, mentor, and community member, as her protégé for the prize. Andre's work has already made huge waves with his writing, and I'm excited to watch his career flourish. Please join me in congratulating Juanita and Andre on their hard-earned recognition. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

PERRY RAND TRANSP.: 60TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

CHRIS PALMER: Speaker, today I would like to recognize a local business in Kings West that is celebrating its 60th anniversary. Perry Rand Transportation was formed in 1963 and is a second-generation family-owned business in the Valley focused on transportation. Gerry Buchan bought the business in 1970, and his son Shane took over as president in 2004 upon Gerry's passing.

Over the years, they provided transportation services for students to and from school, and Shane - along with his brother, Shawn - have been expanding their businesses ever since, with a focus now on repairs for school buses and selling parts for buses. This family business continues to adapt.

Another one of the Buchan's businesses, Bluenose Transit, has provided busing to vocational schools in the past throughout Nova Scotia, and now provides charter bus services to all of the province and beyond. You can identify their buses by their unique blue and white colours.

Gerry and Marion Buchan probably couldn't have imagined the longevity of their business in 1970, and it's a testimony to the hard work ethic and ability of the next generation. I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating the Buchan family on over 50 years of business serving those in the Annapolis Valley, and indeed, all of Nova Scotia.

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

REGAN, C./MACDONALD, K.: DAUGHTER - BIRTH CONGRATS.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, I'm delighted to inform the House that our Liberal family has increased in size. On the weekend, Kelly Viola Regan MacDonald made a long-awaited and yet surprising entrance more than five weeks early. She weighed in at four pounds, 11 ounces, but is working to make sure that she grows big and strong already. Mom, Caitlin Regan and dad, Kevin MacDonald, have taken to their new roles like ducks to water. They are grateful to the birthing teams and the NICU staff for the excellent care.

This means that the member for Bedford Basin has a new role: glamma. We want to congratulate her, along with the grandparents, the Honourable Geoff Regan, and Kelly and Lois MacDonald of Mulgrave. I have known Cait Regan since she was a young girl, and saw her be raised with love, empowerment, and grace. I know she will raise little Kelly in a similar way, and I'm so excited to get to watch her do so.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Sure. Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Joining us in the West Gallery today are members of the Northern Lights Dancers. From this side to the next side, we are joined by Aselis Palliser-Nicholas, Frances Palliser, and Dora Tukulak, who are members of the Northern Lights Dancers and also cultural and administrative staff at the Atelihai Community Centre for Inuit in the Maritimes. We extend our warm welcome from the House.

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

NORTHERN LIGHTS DANCERS: CULTURE SHARING - THANKS

LISA LACHANCE: I rise today to honour the Northern Lights Dancers. The Northern Lights Dancers started in 2021 through the Atelihai Inuit Centre at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre. Since then, Inuit across the Maritimes have learned and performed traditional Inuit drumming, dancing, and throat singing.

Learning and sharing traditional practices is a key part of well-being. They can't show you what they do today in the gallery, so I'm going to give you a bit of a description. The Inuit drum, or the qilaut, is made from bending narrow strips of wood into a large circular frame with a handle. Drummers hit the frame, creating a deep echoing sound. The songs that accompany drumming tell stories of the land, hunting, and traditional legends that guide Inuit communities.

The Northern Lights Dancers also perform throat singing, which was a form of entertainment among Inuit women while men were away on hunting trips. Inuit throat singing can also imitate wind, water, animal sounds, and other everyday sounds. I thank the Northern Lights Dancers for sharing their culture and traditions with all of us in Nova Scotia. Nakkumek.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

PARTICS.: TERRY FOX RUN - THANKS

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the annual Terry Fox Run that is held in all the schools of Sackville and Uniacke area every September. Terry Fox, of course, ran the Marathon of Hope, a journey that began to raise money and awareness for cancer research, and ended up being so much more.

In April of 1980, Terry dipped his foot in the Atlantic Ocean while he was still able to complete a run across Canada, and 43 years later his journey continues across this country. Terry's goal was to raise one dollar from each Canadian, but just over four decades later, over \$850 million has been raised.

I want to recognize and thank the organizers, volunteers, and students who have all participated in the Terry Fox Run at schools in my area and wish them continued success with future runs.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

LEBLANC-TIDD: ALUM. OF YR. AWD. - CONGRATS.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I rise in my place to recognize Jocelyne LeBlanc-Tidd, who was recently recognized as Alumna of the Year of Université Sainte-Anne's Association des Alumni. After graduating from Sainte-Anne and earning a master's degree in Moncton, Jocelyne began her teaching career in our local schools. Throughout her professional journey, she actively participated in various organizations, and even served as president of the Association des Enseignants Acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Jocelyne's commitment to her community is truly remarkable, and she volunteers with multiple groups and serves on numerous boards. Notably, she made history by becoming the first female president of this alumni organization that now celebrates her achievements.

I ask that all members join me in offering our congratulations to Jocelyne Leblanc-Tidd for her well-deserved honour bestowed upon her by her alma mater's alumni association.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

PLANNING TEAM: DART. NORTH HEALTH NBHD. - THANKS

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, people in my community are happy to hear about the Dartmouth North Health Neighbourhood, which will open sometime in 2024, hopefully. This collaborative health home will include a primary care clinic, urgent care centre, and a recruitment and residents teaching centre. It will also include blood collection, rehab services, a diabetes centre, the Nova Scotia Brotherhood and Sisterhood initiatives, and more.

The push to make this a reality was a very grassroots community effort that was born out of frustration around Dartmouth North being an area with many complex needs and not enough services. The early conversations included residents Linda Rowe, Robyne Gorman, Diana Quinn, Sabina Walker, among others, and pharmacist Irene Glinsky. The team, which is now known as the Dartmouth North Community Health Planning Team, grew and evolved and since 2016 has met monthly. Resident voices are still at the core - I joined in 2017 - and people working in the community and folks from Nova Scotia Health primary care are also invaluable members of the team.

There are so many great things about our community, and there's a lot of need in terms of health care. I ask the House to join me in thanking the entire Dartmouth North community health planning team for recognizing this need and working so hard to make this health neighbourhood a reality.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

TURNBULL, BLAYRE: HOCKEY CONTRACT - RECOG.

HON. PAT DUNN: Speaker, one of our favourite Pictou County female hockey players has signed a contract with the Toronto franchise in the newly formed Professional Women's Hockey League.

Canadian Olympian Blayre Turnbull from Stellarton has agreed to terms on a three-year contract through the 2025-26 season. The league opens its inaugural season in January, with teams in Ottawa, Indianapolis-St. Paul, New York City, Boston, Montreal, and Toronto.

The PWHL will feature a number of the world's top female players, including Blayre. She was with Team Canada's gold medal run at the 2022 Beijing Olympics and the silver medal victory in 2018 in Korea. She was also a member of the Calgary Inferno of the Canadian Women's Hockey League when it won the Clarkson Cup in 2016 and 2019. I ask all members to join me as we wish Blayre Turnbull and this new league great success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare on an introduction.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I would like to introduce two individuals in the West Gallery. You can stand as I name you. Warden Yvon LeBlanc is the warden of the Municipality of Clare, a business owner, and a community leader. I can honestly say he's doing a better job than I did as warden, so congratulations.

[1:30 p.m.]

I would also like to introduce Councillor Carl Deveau. Carl is a veteran and a former volunteer firefighter, and I would like to congratulate him on his retirement November 1st as a paramedic after 23 years of service. He's dedicated to his community and is a great community advocate. (Applause)

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

WWII VETS: MIL. SERVICE - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I rise to pay respect to all veterans of World War II, Korea, the Gulf War, Afghanistan, and all international peacekeeping missions. We honour the individuals who served in war and peacekeeping missions and who came home with wounds visible and invisible. In honour of our veterans and loved ones who did not come home, we continue to work toward a peaceful future. We are also reminded of just how precious our democracy is.

I want to acknowledge and honour the families who waited with bated breath for their loved ones to come home. I want to pay them respect for supporting their veterans as they transition back to home life. Lest We Forget.

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

TRENHOLM, J./LEAL, W.: NEWSLETTER PROD. - THANKS

HON. KEITH BAIN: Fifteen years ago, a small, two-page, double-sided newsletter called *Swing Over the Mountain* was born to inform Boularderie Island residents, and people across Canada and the United States, with a Boularderie Island connection of local news and history.

None of this would have been possible were it not for the hard work and dedication of two Boularderie residents, Joyce Trenholm and Wayne Leal. Both of these individuals have looked after producing and distributing the newsletter over those years. After those 15 years, both Joyce and Wayne have figured it's time to pass on the job and are hopeful that some volunteers will come forward to ensure it continues.

Speaker, I ask all members of the Legislature to please join me in recognizing these two wonderful individuals and thank Joyce and Wayne for keeping the residents both updated and educated.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

ROBICHEAU, COLETTE: 100+ WOMEN WHO CARE - RECOG.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I'd like to recognize a woman in our province who has leveraged the power of women to create real change. Colette Robicheau co-founded 100+ Women Who Care Halifax a decade ago. To date, they have raised nearly \$700,000 to support organizations in the community that are already making a difference. Colette's dedication did not end there. As an entrepreneur, she recognized the hurdles and challenges facing women - particularly women from diverse communities. Thus was born the Diversity Marketplace. More than 100 women benefit from a free online business directory as a result.

From established businesses to side hustles, Colette's vision gives women an opportunity to shine. I encourage anyone who wants to purchase with purpose to check it out. I would just note that I worked with Colette back in broadcasting - not recently, it was several decades ago - and I watched and was deeply impressed as she began her businesses, Organize Anything and Colette Coaches. I am so delighted to see her success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

VIOLA DESMOND DAY: CIVIL RIGHTS PROM. - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Ms. Viola Desmond. Today is Viola Desmond Day, which is a day to recognize an amazing person who, through her actions - actions of courage and defiance - and her fight for her rights as a human being, inspired the pursuit of equality, and the fight against racial discrimination throughout this country.

She took a stand against the injustice of segregation. She helped to advance the Civil Rights Movement across Canada and laid the foundation for the movement to fight anti-Black racism. As we know, the struggle is real - as real today as it was during Viola's time. Many Black communities continue to face discrimination, racism, and lack of equal opportunity every day.

On this day - Viola Desmond Day - I hope Viola's story and her quest for equality, justice, and freedom for all will inspire others to work hard toward ending racism, when all of us Nova Scotians can live together, free of racism and discrimination.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

SPENCER, TERRA: SONG CONTEST WIN - CONGRATS.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Hants County native Terra Spencer and celebrate her tremendous success as the winner of the 2022-23 Commonwealth Song Contest. The international contest consists of 20,000 entries from the 56 Commonwealth countries around the globe.

Her winning song, “Brick and Mortar,” was written about the old textile mill, the remains of which sit adjacent to Highway No. 101 in Windsor and which holds a special connection to her.

Terra was not always a musician. She was formerly a funeral director in her hometown of Summerville, Hants County. Her ability to connect with families and hear their stories attribute to her success in songwriting. Five years ago, when she took a leap of faith and began her career as a solo musician, she did not know she would stand today as the winner of an international song contest.

I ask that all members of the Legislature join me in congratulating Terra for writing and performing a beautiful, sweet song.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

BRITTEN, DR. ALAN: SPORT COMMITMENT - THANKS

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, this weekend, Cape Breton University is hosting the 2023 Men’s Soccer Championship. It’s an exciting time in the community.

I rise in my place to recognize their Honorary Chair, Dr. Allen Britten, who is a professor of chemistry, and is a former Dean of the School of Science and Technology at Cape Breton University. Throughout his career that spans over 30 years at Cape Breton University, Dr. Britten has been not only a mentor in the classroom but a mentor to many of the student athletes who come to the university.

Personally, I can say that during my basketball years when I was in school, Allen was a big part of that with me and his sons.

I do want to rise in my place to recognize Dr. Allen Britten for being the Honorary Chair for this weekend’s soccer championships at Cape Breton University. I want to wish the Capers all the best, but I want to thank Allen for his commitment to his students over 30 years, and his commitment to sport at Cape Breton University.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

CORNERSTONE: HOUSING EFFORTS - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to thank the executive director and board members of Cumberland Homelessness & Housing Support Association, better known locally as Cornerstone.

The amazing work of this group, supported by the Town of Amherst and many other community-minded individuals and organizations, is helping to meet the needs of those in Cumberland and area facing challenges, including those who are struggling to find a safe and warm place to sleep.

Not only did Cornerstone support the opening of last Winter's emergency temporary shelter, they have also recently begun construction of a more permanent building that will house six affordable and supportive housing units, a community resource hub, and an overnight emergency shelter. As the team says, it is much more than just housing support and homelessness, it's about community.

On behalf of our community, I would like to thank Executive Director Ashley Legere and all members of the Cornerstone team for their dedication to those in need in our community.

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

NAT'L INDIG. VETS. DAY: MIL. SERV. - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, today I rise to mark National Indigenous Veterans Day. This day started in 1994 to recognize the contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis veterans. It is estimated that 12,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis served in the conflicts over the last 100 years.

Indigenous veterans overcame barriers of language, distance, and culture to join the Canadian effort. Their communities faced many challenges while supporting their friends and family in active service. First Nations saw thousands of acres expropriated in the war effort. As well, land was also taken from Indigenous communities to give to returning soldiers for farmland, but not to Indigenous veterans.

For most of the last century, Indigenous veterans faced reduced benefits and lacked access to many services. Throughout all of that, Indigenous communities have always honoured their veterans, and hold them up in community gatherings.

I ask that all members express their gratitude to these special veterans.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction before I do my member's statement.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

THE PREMIER: I am honoured today to introduce several people from Pictou East who are joining us in your gallery. With us today are three people, their spouses, and support networks who are being recognized as heroes for their significant contributions to our communities in absolute times of need when our province faced extraordinary natural disasters, specifically with respect to Hurricane Fiona, but others as well. Hurricane Fiona meant that thousands of people needed help and it required people to step up in different ways.

Today it is my honour to introduce three of those people who stepped up to help their friends and neighbours and really went above and beyond. I ask them to stand as I call their names, and then receive the warm welcome of the House afterwards. We have John Davison with us, Seymour Dewtie and Dan MacDonald.

I ask the House to please give them a warm welcome. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: It is a pleasure to have you here. Each are community leaders and friends to me, so thank you for being with us today.

The honourable Premier.

LOCAL HEROES: COM. SERV. - THANKS

THE PREMIER: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate local heroes. So many people in our province can claim title to the word "hero," but these people in particular went above and beyond to help their neighbours, their communities, and complete strangers in the aftermath of some devastating natural disasters in our province and in our community.

Seymour Dewtie, who works for a local excavation company, worked an extraordinary number of hours helping Nova Scotia Power get power poles back into the ground so people could have their power turned back on following Hurricane Fiona. In the few spare hours that he did have, Seymour took his own wood chipper to help community members remove trees that were blown over.

John Davidson and Dan MacDonald both worked on the ground with the Regional Emergency Management Organization. Day and night, they could be found at the Pictou County Wellness Centre doing all they could to help residents who were dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona. There were even times when John took his own tractor to remove debris on the main road, which helped residents and Nova Scotia Power employees get where they needed to go.

I ask all members of this House to thank Seymour, John, Dan, and their families, and all the heroes around our province for their dedication to our communities. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

MAGUIRE, RENA: SUPPORT - RECOG.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Tomorrow is Rena Maguire's birthday - my better half, my partner, my best friend. She's going to kill me for doing this, but I want to take a moment to thank her.

Sometimes I am loud. Sometimes I am a complete mess. Sometimes I don't make sense, but she is there for me. There are times when my obsession and my drive overwhelm me. You bring me back to Earth. There are times when my anxiety and depression make me single-minded, and you stop me and show me that life is beautiful.

You remind me all the time why I do this: people before politics, and this province before parties. If I could, I would give you the world for your birthday. Instead, you will get hugs, kisses, smiles, a couple of presents, and of course, sushi.

Have a beautiful day, my love, my best friend. Thank you. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth on an introduction.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'll just say that that is the most beautiful thing that the member for Halifax Atlantic has ever said in the Chamber.

I want to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery, where we're joined by the Councillor of District No. 1 in Cheticamp, Claude Poirier, who is a great friend of this Chamber, and a great friend to many in his community and beyond.

Claude, thank you so much for joining us. I'd like all the House to join me in welcoming Councillor Poirier to today's events. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

WENBERG, MEGAN: UNSYNCABLE FILM - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: This past Spring, a documentary created by Dartmouth North resident Megan Wennberg debuted at the Toronto Hot Docs film festival. *Unsyncable* - spelled S-Y-N-C - is a film about six senior former artistic synchronized swimmers preparing for the U.S. Artistic Swimming Masters Championship.

The athletes range in age from 63 to 82 years old. The film has also been featured in the Lunenburg Doc Fest, where it won the Best Atlantic Filmmaker award, and the Calgary International Film Festival.

Unsyncable is produced by Tell Tale Productions, with Edward Peill and Erin Oakes. Megan, whose previous works include films *Drag Kids* and *The Killing of Phillip Boudreau*, hopes that *Unsyncable* will inspire audiences to see aging in a new light.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating Megan on *Unsyncable*'s success and thank her for challenging society's view on what it means to age.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

THE DINING ROOM AT MAIN & MERSEY: OPENING - THANKS

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I rise today to highlight a wonderful new facility and addition to the Main Street in Liverpool. In August, The Dining Room at Main & Mersey officially opened its doors, offering fine dining and Japanese fusion cuisine to those who enter the doors.

Main & Mersey is a well-established coffee shop and a popular community hub where residents and tourists alike meet in a very relaxed and jovial environment. Now, thanks to the vision of owners Andreas Arnmar and Shani Beadle, they have extended the business with their new restaurant which offers folks a comfortable atmosphere and a creatively delicious menu.

I sincerely thank Andreas and Shani for choosing Liverpool in which to operate their business. I wish them a successful future as they cater to the foodies in Queens and beyond.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

WEST, KEVIN: VOL. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Volunteerism is an important contributor to our vibrant rural communities. At the recent provincial Volunteer Awards, Kevin West of West Brooklyn was recognized for his more than 30 years as an active volunteer in Kings County.

Kevin's commitment to supporting community was evident during his working career at the Flower Cart and with him taking on many volunteer roles during his working life and now in his retirement. He currently serves on the Deep Roots Music Festival board and volunteers for the West Brooklyn Hall SpeakEasy. He played a key role in starting Nova Scotia's first memory café. Kevin also volunteers for beach cleanups along the Bay

of Fundy, helps out at the Wolfville Farmers' Market, and enjoys the Full Circle Festival in Avondale, where he buys a pass and then volunteers with the setup and teardown.

[1:45 p.m.]

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in thanking Kevin West for his many years of volunteering in our community and congratulating him on receiving a well-deserved provincial volunteer award.

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

LEGION BRANCHES: REM. DAY CEREMONIES - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise today to pay tribute to the three Legions in my constituency of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, all of which will be hosting a Remembrance Day ceremony on Saturday: New Waterford Branch No. 15, the Allan MacDonald Memorial Legion; Whitney Pier Branch No. 128, also servicing South Bar and the Lingan Road; and Branch No. 78, servicing Dominion, Reserve Mines, and Grand Lake Road.

These legions are dedicated to supporting veterans and their families. They're also committed to Remembrance Day education in the various schools that they serve. I also want to pay tribute to ANAVETS Unit No. 217 in New Waterford, comprised of ex-service members. ANAVETS plays an active role in our Remembrance Day ceremony in New Waterford, including hosting the evening dinner.

Thank you to all of the legions and ANAVETS for all your work all year round for our veterans and families. Lest we forget.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

MACDONALD, DANIEL: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I rise today to recognize retired schoolteacher Daniel MacDonald from Bakers Settlement.

Daniel was a beloved teacher at Hebbville Academy. Since his retirement, he has continued to contribute to the education of our next generation, tutoring hundreds of students in math, offering services to those needing his help, regardless of their financial needs. He even rose to the challenge during COVID-19 and continued tutoring virtually.

Stella Bowles, a former student, says: Danny is one of the kindest, smartest, best humans I have ever had the privilege of knowing. Every student who sees him, and there are many, enjoy him tremendously and over the many years of his dedication he has built

up an incredible wall of fame of his graduates. Danny is also a dedicated member of his church and community.

I call on Members of the House of Assembly to join me in extending our gratitude to Daniel MacDonald for his guidance, kindness, and support of our students in our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

SAILING PGM.: FUNDRAISING DINNER - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Last night, I attended a fundraising dinner in my constituency at the Armdale Yacht Club. This fundraising was very worthwhile to attend. This program was intended to introduce Nova Scotians, whether they're newcomers or residents of this province, to the sailing program on our beautiful water and ocean.

I really enjoyed attending last Summer, and I also was surprised to see the amount of difference in terms of diverse people who attended this program. We, as elected officials, have people who have an impact on our communities in many different ways. Today, I would like to recognize Anthony Rosborough for his work with the Armdale Yacht Club. Anthony runs the Broader Reach and Sailing School programs, getting the community members involved and teaching them to sail. Earlier this year, I visited the club and I was inspired by the work he does in the community.

I ask members of this House to join me and to congratulate Anthony for his contribution to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SIMMONDS, COLTER: COM. SERV. - THANKS

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize Colter Simmonds. Colter Simmonds is a well-known community advocate, basketball coach, mentor, an organizer, and a friend whose passion for community and youth allowed us to have a strong connection.

This Summer, Colter was our candidate for the Preston by-election, and it was filled with lots of campaigning and long hours of time, getting to know and sparking new and old relationships in the Preston community. Colter was in the forefront of it all. He is someone who truly understands his community and the issues surrounding his area. Colter is connected to youth and community through family ties, and his work with basketball and mentorship also gives him an understanding that our young people represent a generation of people who are tired of the status quo. That is why I wanted to recognize Colter today and thank him for his hard work and fight and for standing up always for our communities and our youth in the Preston area.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

CARTER, DORIS: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: I would like to recognize one of the tireless volunteers in Richmond County. Doris Carter is 81 years young and has spent countless hours volunteering in our community. Doris is a retired teacher and a mother of two. She is the proud grandmother of four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Doris has volunteered with the MacAskill House Museum; the local 4-H club; the Festival of Trees; St. Peter's Parish, where she still teaches religion classes; and the Richmond Villa, where she has spent many hours visiting with residents.

For many years, Doris was the president of the Lakeside Community Hall, where she organized many events for young and old. Recently she has stepped down as president after many successful years.

Doris will still keep busy, as she is an avid knitter, seamstress, and baker. She also keeps busy during tax season as she completes income tax returns for many local residents.

Speaker, I ask all members to join me in honouring Doris Carter, who is a perfect example of a community volunteer.

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

WORLD TOWN PLANNING DAY: COM. DEVT. - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, today is World Town Planning Day. November 8th has been set aside to annually commemorate the important role that planning plays in establishing our communities. Planning is an important process that goes into developing any urban, suburban, or rural area. Town planning refers to applying technical processes focusing on the design, development, and use of infrastructure that is put in place when creating complete communities, with a focus on accessibility, transportation, and availability of common spaces.

November 8th is globally recognized by over 30 countries on four continents. It commemorates the work of planners in communities across the globe as they come together to celebrate how good planning improves the lives of people and benefits for society at large through creating sustainable places to work, live, and play together.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle on an introduction.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I'm really pleased to welcome to the House some friends from home. In the East Gallery we have my councillor from District 5, who's

also a deputy warden, Nicole Albright. She's also joined by Kathy Bourque, who's the municipal councillor for District 7, as well as our warden in Argyle, Dan Muise, who's councillor for District 1. Chris Frotten, who's a constituent of mine as well, who's the CAO for the Municipality of Barrington, is also here.

I'd also like to acknowledge some friends from Clare. We have the warden, Yvon LeBlanc, as well as our good friend Carl Deveau, who's a candidate of record for our party.

I ask all members of the House to join me in welcoming them. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. I hope you enjoy your visit.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

FORESTRY: CONTRIB. TO ECONOMY - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I rise to draw the attention of the House to the importance of forestry and forestry operations to communities across the province. In these inflationary times, the overall contribution of the forestry industry to the economy of our province cannot be overstated. In Cumberland North, and in fact across all of Nova Scotia, forestry is a major employer that supports many businesses, individuals, and families.

In addition to the jobs created, we must also recognize how access to this natural resource can and should be utilized to address the current housing crisis. As projects like the recently announced public housing units move forward, I would hope that tender documents will request that as much as possible, made-in-Nova-Scotia products will be required. I also encourage all builders and contractors to ask for and use Nova Scotia wood products whenever possible. All of those efforts will support our foresters.

Our beautiful forests are also important for their contribution to our environment. Our Nova Scotia air is clean and fresh, and yes, much of that is thanks to our trees.

Speaker, please join me in thanking our foresters for their commitment to managing their industry and our forests so that we can protect this valuable natural resource now and into the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

WOODLAWN PANTHERS: CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: I rise today to recognize and congratulate the Woodlawn High School football team. The Woodlawn Panthers won the High School Football Championship game for the 2022-2023 school year.

Congratulations to all 37 players and the coaches - namely Robert Tink, Glenn States, Louis Clements, Barry Greer, Chris Melanson, Brady Hayes, John McCabe, and Nathaniel Skeete - for volunteering their time to help the team achieve this honour.

Speaker, I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to please join me in congratulating the Woodlawn Panthers for another successful year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

RYAN, TROY: HOCKEY CAREER - RECOG.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, I would like to introduce everybody to someone whom a lot of people in this Chamber know, Troy Ryan from Spryfield. Troy played minor hockey in Chebucto, then AAA midget with Halifax McDonald's Major Midget Hockey Club. Then he played in the Maritime Junior Hockey League (MHL) and with the Halifax Mooseheads. In the early- and mid-1990s, Troy played university hockey with the University of New Brunswick and Saint Mary's University. He then became a coach. In 2021, he coached the Acadia Axemen. Then he went on to coach the Antigonish Bulldogs and the Pictou County Weeks Crushers. In 2021, Troy was named head coach of the Canadian women's hockey team, who competed in the 2022 Winter Olympics, and led them to a gold medal. I'm glad to announce that he's back behind the bench. Hockey Canada announced a couple days ago that Spryfield's own Troy Ryan will be the head coach of the national hockey team leading into the 2026 Winter Olympics. Good luck, and let's go get that gold.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

VOLS.: DIGBY GROUND SAR - THANKS

HON. JILL BALSER: Speaker, I rise today to honour the members of Digby Ground Search and Rescue.

Incorporated in 1973, for the last 50 years this organization has, in times of need, provided much-needed support to the residents of our area. I know their work is greatly appreciated. Digby Ground Search and Rescue is a volunteer organization that has been there to provide support whenever they are needed. They do their best work in the most difficult of times. Whether the circumstance be a lost child or hunter, fires or floods, or so much more, the Digby Ground Search and Rescue members are always there to help.

Nova Scotia is recognized as a province where the phrase “help your neighbours” is more than just words. The members of Digby Ground Search and Rescue represent that statement. On behalf of the residents of Digby-Annapolis, I want to say thank you to all the volunteers. Your hard work and dedication over the past 50 years is truly appreciated.

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

HFX. U11 BASEBALL TEAM: MEDAL WIN - CONGRATS.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Halifax U11 AAA Mets baseball team on their silver medal win recently in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador. I was very proud to support the players on this very important trip. Despite the impending weather that threatened our region due to Hurricane Lee, the team ventured to Corner Brook safely, and I’m told they had a lot of fun. I would like to give a special shout-out to the four players from Clayton Park West: Cameron, Jax, Keaton, and Peyton. I also would like to acknowledge the head coach, Gregor McPherson, and the rest of the coaching team, as well as Danielle Melanson as the best baseball mom fundraiser. This was the second win for this team, as they captured the 2023 provincial championship.

I would like the House to join me in congratulating the Halifax U11 AAA Mets baseball team on their dedication and well-deserved win.

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

DIWALI: HINDU CELEB. - RECOG.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, I just wanted to take 15 seconds to wish everybody a happy Diwali, starting on November 10th.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time is now two o’clock. We will now begin with Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. We will finish at 2:50 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: YOUTH HOMELESSNESS - PREVENT

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, when a child is unable to remain in the custody of their parents, they go into the custody of the Province. When these children turn

18, they no longer qualify for supports from the government, and many of those youth are now finding themselves out on the street. In fact, a study funded by HRM and the Province surveyed people in Halifax who are experiencing homelessness. The results were extremely troubling, Speaker: 10 per cent of those experiencing homelessness are youth. My question to the Premier is: Can the Premier please tell us what plans he has in place to ensure that these most vulnerable folks, who are young people just coming out of provincial care and custody, have supports right now so they can get off the streets?

[2:00 p.m.]

THE PREMIER: I thank the member for this important question. This is something that we're deeply concerned about as a government, but certainly Nova Scotians are concerned about this as well. Homelessness in general is having a big impact on our society. We're making significant investments in trying to make sure people have safe, affordable housing. Homelessness amongst our youth is particularly heartbreaking, so it is an issue that the government is very focused on. We'll continue to make investments to support Nova Scotians.

ZACH CHURCHILL: There has not been a specific mention of youth homelessness in the government's housing strategy. We have not heard of any specific initiatives that are being led anywhere across the board, I think, from either the Minister of Community Services, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, or the Premier.

This is leading to a very dangerous and precarious situation. We've heard from Kimm Kent, co-founder of Peer Outreach Support Services and Education, who says that young people are now being sexually exploited for housing in Nova Scotia because of this very dangerous situation. I know the government can understand the severity and scariness of the situation. My question to the Premier is: Can the Premier please commit to addressing this issue with all expediency?

THE PREMIER: I know the government works with a number of not-for-profit organizations, community organizations, trying to support Nova Scotians and making those investments. We'll continue to make investments in new public housing, new affordable housing. I know the minister is working hard with municipalities on programs like Pallet housing as emergency shelter for people. We'll continue to do what we can, as a government, to support those organizations that are helping Nova Scotians, and directly help them where we can as well.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, the Premier has actually cut funding to a lot of these groups through the HRM bill that is before the House. A lot of the not-for-profits that do this critical work - wraparound services, emergency housing - may no longer get funding for this. Furthermore, it goes beyond these organizations. The Province has a role here, and can play a very key role.

I'm worried that the government's policies are actually making the situation worse: freezing income assistance for two years; allowing Nova Scotia to become the only province in Canada to fail on poverty and food insecurity; refusing to hire more Crown prosecutors, and having more hard-nosed criminals back out on the street; not banning the use of NDAs for sexual assault. All of these issues, I think, really impact our youth.

My question to the Premier is: He has previously committed to bringing in a youth advocate to this province. Will he follow through on that commitment today, and promise a youth advocate for these young people who are experiencing these dangers?

THE PREMIER: The member listed off a litany of issues on which I disagree with his assessment. We're investing over \$300 million in affordable housing. The minister has talked before about how the government has made FTE positions available. Sometimes they're difficult to fill, but the funding is there. We'll work with organizations on those.

In terms of the process that government looks at to find which organizations they can fund and which they can't, the need is always much larger than the ability. We do what we can. We always wish we could do a little more, but we do what we can and then some, for sure.

I would just say to the member if there are any organizations that have had their funding cut that he is particularly troubled by, he can come to us and we can talk about that and see if we can work on a solution.

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

PREM.: HOUSING PROJECT DELAY - EXPLAIN

CLAUDIA CHENDER: While the Premier has spent a great deal of time recently blaming municipalities for slowing down housing development, his own government is refusing to put housing on a plot of land that has been earmarked for housing for years. Build Nova Scotia, formerly Develop Nova Scotia, has had a plan complete with zoning at Dartmouth Cove since 2012 on provincial land that is serviced, has complete plans, community buy-in and could yield as much as 1,000 housing units. When is the Premier going to stop blaming others for the housing crisis and get his own house in order?

THE PREMIER: As a government we're moving very quickly on a number of files, there's no question about that. Particularly on the housing file, where we are working with a number of organizations, working with the federal government, trying to work with municipalities, changing legislation where it's deemed necessary to go faster.

In this particular example, I believe the member is referring to a specific example that was put out for tender. Somebody was awarded that tender and then on their side are

having a few delays getting going. We are certainly not happy about those delays but we understand they happen and we're working with that organization to try to move forward.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: If the Premier was following the housing file, he would know that that is not the site I'm talking about. I'm talking about the Dartmouth Cove site adjacent to the ferry, connected to Alderney Drive, where private development is rising all around. But the Minister of Public Works said the other day that it's on the back burner because she didn't think that we were going to build by the coast.

That's interesting because yesterday, the Premier said that the Coastal Protection Act might not come into force at all, so we're content for people to build by the coast, except for at Dartmouth Cove, on provincial land. Can the Premier see how ridiculous it is to hold a plot like this, to not build on it - there are no bidders - when housing is so badly needed?

THE PREMIER: I ask the member to table the comments of the minister, because I'm certainly not familiar with those comments and I have a hard time believing that they're accurate or accurately quoted. What I would say is I would assure the member that as a government we are moving as quickly as we can on a number of housing initiatives, as evidenced by the over \$300 million we've invested in housing this year.

We will continue to make investments. We will continue to work with developers, not-for-profits, municipalities. We will work with anyone who wants to help us get more housing for Nova Scotians, including the member opposite if she chooses to try to work with us.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'll happily table the article. It's from *allNovaScotia*. I'll print it out, I'll table it. I didn't quote from an article - I paraphrased. I am not required to table it, but I will, Mr. Premier.

The Premier seems - I am addressing the Premier because he is addressing me.

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order. There's a lot of chatter. Let's let her - everyone just tame down here and we will go back to the question with the Leader of the New Democratic Party, through me, please.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The Dartmouth Cove land which the Province owns and refuses to build on because it's close to the coast is sitting there, ready for 1,000 units, serviced.

Sandy Lake, which is a special planning area, has recently been accelerated. This is an unserviced site with environmental features such as old growth forest, species at risk, wetlands, streams, and the government is pushing to develop this site, despite a coalition

of dozens of community groups trying to protect it. Make it make sense, Speaker. Government-held site, Dartmouth Cove, ready to build, community buy-in . . .

THE SPEAKER: Question.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: . . . but an environmentally sensitive area with private interests rammed through. When will the Premier . . .

THE SPEAKER: Question.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: . . . start building housing where communities know it is wanted and needed?

THE PREMIER: Just as quickly as we can, Speaker, for sure. I don't think there can be any question that this government is moving fast on housing. In fact, I think the member, in her preamble, quoted a few situations where we're moving so fast, it's too fast for her liking. We will continue to move fast and I'd ask again for the member to table the comments, which I'll be curious to see the interpretation of context that was displayed on the floor here.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

DAE: STUDENT HOUSING REPORT - TABLE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Today post-secondary students from across HRM and the province came together to protest outside here in Province House. Top of their concerns is affordability in housing. The cost of living is rising in Halifax faster than anywhere else in the country due to rental increases and overall inflation outpacing every other single province.

We've seen in this Chamber for the last four weeks that the Province did not step up and support students who are dealing with cost of living challenges and housing challenges. My question to the Premier is: Will he please table his student housing report so that we know what this government's plan is to help our post-secondary students?

HON. BRIAN WONG: We know that students right across Nova Scotia are important to Nova Scotia. We look to students in order to be the next generation that's going to move Nova Scotia forward and we appreciate everything that they're here for.

I appreciate that students take their time to come down and protest things that are important to them, but we do a lot for students. We have the most generous student assistance program right across this country. We have a number of programs that will assist students. We have the Nova Scotia bursary program for university students that takes

\$1,283 right off of their tuition. We will continue to look for ways to support students of Nova Scotia because they are important.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, international students particularly are facing significant challenges with double the fees in Nova Scotia and they're also having an impossible time finding places to live. According to students, they're saying they are promised the world, they are promised a job, a good place to live, opportunities galore, and that's obviously not the case, and I'll table that.

International students are driving from Truro and even as far as Halifax every day to attend classes in Sydney, and I'll table that. My question to the Premier is: The fact that our international students are not able to find housing here - this is the canary in the coal mine when it comes to immigration and housing. If we are not able to accommodate our international students, how does the Premier plan - and what is his plan - to actually double the population and make sure people in this province have housing?

BRIAN WONG: We are experiencing unprecedented growth here in Nova Scotia. International students have a choice. They can go anywhere in the world and they choose Nova Scotia. They choose Nova Scotia because of the way of life. They choose Nova Scotia for world-class institutions.

We are planning for population growth, whereas the former government, when they designed the wonderful Nova Scotia Community College, which is going to really enhance Cape Breton - without a housing plan. Unbelievable.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

EECD: CHILD CARE SPACES - PROVIDE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Our caucus is a big believer in universal child care, as one of the first provinces that negotiated a deal with bringing \$10 a day child care to Nova Scotia. The success of a universal child care system requires sufficient and continued supply of ECEs to meet the rising demand; however, the current state of increasing wait-lists and lack of expected staff entering the system means that unless we make some serious changes, we will not be able to realize truly universal child care for everyone, and these long wait-lists will continue to become the norm in our province. My question to the minister is: Does the minister not believe that unless they bring in more incentives or investments soon, they will not be able to provide the number of spaces promised in the plan?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the opportunity to speak about the incredible investments that we are making in child care in Nova Scotia.

We've known for decades that child care needs investments. We are not creating wait-lists now. Those wait-lists have existed for decades. I was on wait-lists 15 years ago when I was looking for child care, but we are taking the opportunity now with the incredible investment of our federal partners, the investment that our government is making, to do the things that we need to do to build up the child care system that doesn't have wait-lists, that has spaces available across the province where all Nova Scotians need them.

That's why we've reduced child care fees already by half. That's why we've invested in our ECEs with 14 per cent to 46 per cent wage increases. That's why we've built out over 2,000 spaces, and that's why we are going to continue working.

IAIN RANKIN: All those things are easy to do when they start on Day 1 with \$605 million to spend in the sector. I am going to table a national study which reveals that if the current trend under this government continues, it will take Nova Scotia longer than any other province - approximately 35 years - to graduate the number of new ECEs required to meet the promised new spaces. This compares with at least five other provinces that will take less than 10.

For the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, or even perhaps the Minister of Advanced Education: What will they do to create the new spaces required in post-secondary to change this trajectory to ensure that we have \$10-a-day child care for everyone in this province?

BECKY DRUHAN: Absolutely, we do need more ECEs. That's why the department is working closely on the advice of our minister's advisory table to understand what the needs of the sector are, to make sure that we do provide those courses and available training for ECEs.

I can say that we've already taken steps in that direction. We are already providing cohorts for ECEs for folks who've previously not had access to training. We have training available in rural areas. We have virtual training. We have cohorts for African Nova Scotian ECEs to ensure that they have access.

We have to do all of these things together. We can't focus on one thing at a time, because all of this needs to be in lockstep to build the full system out to meet all of Nova Scotia's needs.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect on a new question.

EECD: CHILD CARE WORKERS - SUPPORT

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Obviously, it's not enough. We have a number of provinces that are named as leaders in a separate report recently. It says that we should follow the

examples of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, P.E.I., New Brunswick, B.C., and Nunavut. We're behind virtually every other Atlantic Province. Nova Scotia was the only one not mentioned there.

[2:15 p.m.]

Child care workers require more support, including higher wages and other benefits, but they also need to be paid more than they have in the past to retain them. We have proposed one idea that would actually help retain child care workers.

The study shows that the workforce is predominantly composed of women - the majority of whom are older than the age of 25, and are parents to at least one child themselves. What will the Province do to support the workers who have their own child care needs in this sector?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: There are two elements to that question. I first want to speak to the question around what we're going to do to support our ECEs in relation to child care. I would just like to observe that the whole premise of the child care transformation that we're doing is universal access to child care. The whole point of this is to make sure all Nova Scotians everywhere have access to child care.

We know that our ECEs need access to child care, but if the skilled trades worker who is building the centre down the road doesn't have access to child care, that's not going to help that ECE. If the doctor whom the ECE needs to see when they're sick doesn't have access to child care, that's not going to help our child care system either.

Universal child care means child care for everyone across Nova Scotia who needs it, not just one individual area.

IAIN RANKIN: I believe the minister is making my point. Now we have fewer and fewer people actually accessing child care in the province. I have never seen the number of people calling my office who are on wait-lists, who are actually paying deposits on places, and they can't even get access to wait-lists.

We now have the most expensive child care in all of Atlantic Canada. The national study goes on to say given the majority of early childhood education workers are parents with earnings that barely outweigh the average cost of child care, early childhood education professionals with children may be forced to weigh the cost of working against child care costs, which could cause some professionals to leave the market.

Has the Province considered offering this incentive that we're proposing - or any other formal incentive - to areas that have the most need of child care that have wait-lists that are getting out of hand?

BECKY DRUHAN: I heard a lot of speculation there around what might happen as a result of something we may or may not do.

What I can say is that we have invested in our ECEs. We have provided raises of 14 per cent to 46 per cent for this sector. Not only that, we have connected our ECE wages to our civil service wage increases so they don't have to speculate about whether they will get an increase. They've already received an increase since we provided the 14 per cent to 46 per cent. When we get civil service wage increases, they'll continue to get those increases.

What I can say is that the feedback I'm hearing from operators is that those steps we've already taken are making a difference. More ECEs are coming into the system. They're interested in participating. It is already making a difference. We're going to continue to do this work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MAH: HRM HOUSING - EXPEDITE

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Premier. People in my community are beyond frustrated by the state of the old Bloomfield School. Fire officials are warning that first responders may not be able to enter and that someone could die at that site. The building is an eyesore, a fire risk, a safety risk, and its owners are refusing to do anything about it. On top of that, it's zoned and approved to be badly needed housing on the peninsula. We are in a crisis. Will the Premier give municipalities stronger powers to make developers move on badly needed approved housing?

HON. JOHN LOHR: What I can say to the member is - thank you for the question - we're certainly aware of the Bloomfield site. The Official Opposition may have more to say on the Bloomfield site, because this is wrapped up in history of their actions as government. It's in the hands of a private developer now, and at the moment, that is where it stands. We respect that, but I do appreciate the member advocating for greater powers for the minister. I appreciate that.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I will say that I want to also make a correction. I said, "make developers." Give the powers to the municipality to do that work. As well, we are in this government. Who is the government? You are responsible to do that work.

Fire inspectors have noted that another abandoned building, presumably St. Pat's Alexandra, is facing similar issues. There are no municipal delays at this site, and no reason to railroad municipal partners. Will the Premier stop distracting with municipal blame tactics - which we've just seen - and do something that will actually work to make sure housing gets built on these lots as soon as possible, quick and fast?

JOHN LOHR: What I can say to the member is that I have walked by or driven by that site too. I'm aware of how terrible a sight it is. It is in the hands of a private developer. I will ask my staff to look at what options there are for us, and I'm sure the municipality is aware of it as well.

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

EECD: CHILD CARE WAIT-LIST FEES - BAN

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, there is a pattern with this government that we find deeply concerning. They acknowledge a problem, but they won't do anything to fix it. With NDAs, they had once acknowledged that there is an issue, but they won't do anything to fix that. With fixed-term leases, they once acknowledged there was a problem, but they wouldn't do anything to fix that. When we first brought up the issue of child care wait-list fees during this House session, they acknowledged that there is an issue, but they won't do anything to fix it. My question through you to the minister: Why won't the minister take action and ban the child care wait-list fees?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Child care wait-list fees are inconsistent with our goal - our shared goal with the federal government - of affordable, accessible, quality, inclusive child care. As I think I've indicated previously, I've directed the department to provide me with options and steps that we can take in relation to these fees. I look forward to the department providing a report on that.

PATRICIA ARAB: The fact of the matter is that families don't have options. We have a number of families in our province - in my riding and many other areas - who are struggling, and they're desperately in need of support. When they're told that they'll get a spot if they pay hundreds of dollars to put a hold on it, they're going to do so - in an act of desperation. We know that this actually impacts mostly women who are trying to get back into the workforce. My question to the minister is: Why won't they do more than just acknowledging that the practice is wrong, and outright ban it from happening?

BECKY DRUHAN: The reality is that we are going full steam ahead with the transformation of child care, and it is so much more than one issue. With the transformation of child care, we need to build additional spaces. We've already built over 2,000 spaces, or we had as of the last quarter. I look forward to a significant update in this most recent quarter.

We've already increased our ECE wages by 14 per cent to 46 per cent. We've reduced child care fees by half already. This is one small element of the many steps that we need to take, and we will be taking action, as we're going to do with every other thing that needs to be done to create a child care system that provides child care to all Nova Scotians where they need it, regardless of where they live, when they work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

EECD: NEW CHILD CARE SPACES - CREATE

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, we know that before- and after-school child care is a good thing, but what we are hearing is the dire situation that families are going through trying to find child care for their infants to four-year-olds. This government only has a net gain of 28 child care seats, and people all over the province are struggling with finding child care. This government is not taking the issue seriously enough. They cannot even get their homework done on time to get \$123 million from the feds. My question to the minister is: When will families across the province see the promised 1,500 net gain of child care spots, excluding before- and after-school care?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: We have created over 2,000. As of the last quarter, we've created over 2,000 new spaces. That was a net gain of over 1,700 new spaces. I know that we will be reporting in the very near future on the most recent quarter, and there's been a significant increase since that time.

We've taken incredible steps to create spaces: affordable, inclusive, quality child care spaces across the province. The reality is this is something that has been neglected for decades. If I could do it like this, and create those spaces overnight, I would, but that's not how significant, foundational transformation works. This is a five-year journey, over \$600 million. We are going as fast as we can.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: As someone who was involved with that \$605 million deal, the government was given it on a platter, and they're not moving fast enough. Families are calling from all over the province telling us that. The government promised 1,500 new daycare spots, and they deliver a net gain of 28, but then brag about the number of child care spots they have in before- and after-school child care. It just doesn't add up. My question to the minister is: Will this government have the promised 1,500 net new child care spots by the end of this year?

BECKY DRUHAN: I don't know how many more times I can say that we've had a net gain of over 1,700 spaces. We've created over 2,000 spaces. I'm not sure which small date range and which small geographic location the member opposite is looking at to talk about that 28, but it doesn't reflect the reality across Nova Scotia.

I do look forward to continuing to update Nova Scotians on the incredible progress that we are making. I know the urgency of this. I know that for any individual family out there right now waiting for child care, it doesn't matter how many hundreds or thousands of spaces we create - if they don't have access, they feel an urgency. I get that. I feel that urgency too.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

EECD: NEW HRM SCHOOLS - ANNOUNCE

BRAEDON CLARK: Earlier this year, the government announced its school capital plan - announced four schools in government-held ridings, and four to be announced at some undetermined later date in the HRM, where all of our schools are full and bursting at the seams. I would ask the minister: When will the four schools promised for HRM be announced, and where will they be?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Thanks to the member opposite to talk about our capital plan, which I am so incredibly proud of. For the first time ever, our government has a capital plan that is comprehensive and long-term and addresses the needs all across the province.

We did announce four specific schools that are outside of HRM. We have announced four schools inside of HRM. We haven't identified those locations yet, but that's because our capital plan is comprehensive and strategic. It involves not just the announcement of individual schools, but also includes a Public Works funding package that allows for proactive purchase of lands, which is key to determining where those schools will go. It also includes a proactive package of modulars that allows us to be quickly responsive to growing needs of communities.

BRAEDON CLARK: I'm glad that the minister ended her response talking about modulars, because you cannot drive past a school in Halifax and suburban Halifax without finding modulars that are full to the brim. I don't know if we should be happy. Not too long ago, being in a modular classroom was an exception. Now it is the norm. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order. The member for Bedford South has the floor.

BRAEDON CLARK: Thank you, Speaker. Not too long ago, it was an exception to be in a modular classroom, and now it is absolutely the case that it is the norm. I will also remind the House that I asked the minister where the four schools promised for HRM will be, and she spent 45 seconds talking about everything but. I would ask the minister: When will those schools be announced, and where will they be so that students can actually get back into classrooms in schools?

BECKY DRUHAN: Modulars are modern, beautiful learning spaces that students and teachers are happy to have access to. Modulars are the future. One of the future things that we're going to do and continue to do is ensure that we have a responsive capital plan, so that we can build classroom spaces and educational spaces in a matter of months instead of a matter of years. I would think the member opposite would know this, because his government actually introduced modulars. There wasn't a strategic proactive plan, though, Speaker, and that's what we've created.

[2:30 p.m.]

Public Works, I know, is working on the securing of lands that will support the addition of schools in addition to modulars, and I look forward to making those announcements when the time comes.

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

EECD: VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS - ADDRESS

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Earlier this year, I met with the minister to discuss the rising homophobic and transphobic hate and violence in our schools. At the time, the minister recognized that the 2SLGBTQIA+ students are among the most vulnerable students in our schools. Since that meeting, there have been numerous more instances of this violence, and no update on how the government plans to address this. My question to the minister is: Will the minister commit to tabling a plan in the House to address violence in schools?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: We are always, always upset when there are incidents that happen in schools, and every student deserves access to a safe and inclusive welcoming space where they are seen, where they are understood, and where they belong. Our 2SLGBTQIA+ students absolutely deserve access to those safe and inclusive spaces. Speaker, our government embraces this fundamental philosophy, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and all of our schools are working to ensure that our 2SLGBTQIA+ students do feel that safety, do feel that welcome, and are embraced. There are a number of initiatives under way in the schools to ensure that happens, including GSAs, including access to mental health supports.

LISA LACHANCE: This year, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Student Success Survey showed that 42 per cent of 2SLGBTQIA+ students had reported feeling unsafe or threatened in the past month. That's up 8 per cent since 2019. These numbers will be no surprise to many Nova Scotian children and families. Raven MacLean, after experiencing a violent attack in a Cape Breton school this past September, said, "I just don't want to go back there, and now I'm going to become homeschooled. I'm just scared now, and just really sad that this happened." I'll table that. My question to the minister is: What does the minister have to say to 2SLGBTQIA+ students who are missing out on their education because of this government's inaction?

BECKY DRUHAN: That particular story, and the story of any student who is harmed in school, is heartbreaking to me, and I know it's heartbreaking to all of the adults and educators who are involved. Speaker, that's why it's so important that we continue to do the work that's required to ensure that we build and maintain safe and inclusive school spaces. What does that mean for our 2SLGBTQIA+ students? That means that they see

themselves in school, and that they're embraced by the people in school. It means that they see themselves in the resources that are available and in books that are in schools. It means that we have inclusive supports and staff. It means that our educators are also receiving anti-discrimination training, education, and knowledge about supports that they can offer these students. All of those things are happening.

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

EECD: LACK OF CHILD CARE - ADDRESS

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, last week on *Maritime Noon*, workers, operators, and families called in to talk about their stories when it comes to the lack of child care. As one person put it, families in Nova Scotia have it rough. There are high rates of child poverty, and people need to work, but they're stuck in precarious situations, relying on scattered family supports. These stories are all too familiar, and it puts into perspective the impact the lack of child care spaces is having on Nova Scotians. Families are being forced to choose between working and child care. Not being able to work results in high amounts of child poverty in this province.

My question to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is: Does the minister agree with the callers to *Maritime Noon* that having to choose between child care and working impacts the rate of child poverty in this province?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, my colleagues here in the government, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and I absolutely agree and believe in the importance of early childhood education, the importance of access to child care all across the province, for every family who needs it. It's fundamental to the well-being and security of our children and our future. Every dollar that we invest in this pays dividends down the road. That is why we are working so hard to build a child care system that meets Nova Scotia's needs.

This is a sector that has been neglected for decades. We have had wait-lists for decades. We have had child care deserts for decades. Our ECEs have been underpaid for decades. We are taking the steps to rectify those wrongs and I am looking forward to continuing this important work.

LORELEI NICOLL: The government says they are listening but during their consultations, many could not come to the meetings because of the lack of child care. The government also announced that they did a survey from September 18th to October 25th. My question to the minister is: Can the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development tell us when we will see the results from these surveys? Can she update us on how many Nova Scotians took part in these surveys?

BECKY DRUHAN: It is so fundamentally important that we have feedback and input and understand the perspectives of Nova Scotians as we build out this system. I would like to indicate that in fact we did have family-friendly sessions available, in-person sessions available across Nova Scotia, as we did the in-person consultations. Between the in-person consultations and the online consultations, we had over 1,000 people provide input and feedback. That information is being collated now and I look forward to receiving a report on that and reporting back to Nova Scotians about what we heard.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

EECD: UNIVERSAL LUNCH PROGRAM - IMPLEMENT

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, everybody forgets the thousands of seats that pre-Primary brought into this province over the last number of years that this government didn't support.

Another option that this government has to help kids in our province is to introduce a universal lunch program. This is an equitable approach to ensure that all kids in this province are fed both breakfast and lunch. Our neighbours in P.E.I. introduced the universal lunch program, along with school supplies, without waiting on anyone - they just did the right thing.

I will give the minister an opportunity to answer this question: When will the kids in Nova Scotia get their universal lunch program?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: We do know how incredibly important it is that students have access to nutritious, available food. It's important not only for their education so that they have full bellies and aren't distracted as they are learning, but we know it's also important for their health and for their well-being.

Speaker, that is why we do invest millions of dollars in school food - our government invests millions of dollars in school food. That is to provide the universal breakfast program, that is to provide a variety of other food programs, like the pilots we've introduced this year - with food baskets, with food carts.

We look forward to the federal government following up on their commitment to provide support for us to build out a universal lunch program and we encourage our Liberal colleagues across the way to influence their colleagues to make that happen.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I will actually say this: I look forward to my meeting with the minister and representatives of the federal government that I initiated myself, and I hope that the minister gets her meeting about the lunch program for kids as well. It's important and this government over the last two years has seen billions of dollars come in and we've made the argument that if you had the extra money coming in, let's

help our kids. Let's feed them lunch and let's get them school supplies and let's take that cost away from families.

Speaker, introducing a universal lunch program is the right thing to do. The government can talk about pilots at certain schools but that doesn't meet the needs of kids in every school in this province. My question to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development: Will she commit that by January 2024 there will be a universal lunch program for every kid in this province?

BECKY DRUHAN: We are doing the work to ensure that our schools are ready to go with a universal lunch program. We are hopeful that our federal colleagues will come along and support us in that. We are doing the work and we are not waiting for them. That is why we are introducing pilots. That's why we're expanding access to food in a variety of ways all across our province. We know how important it is that students have access to healthy and nutritious food in schools, and that's why we're doing the work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DHW: FAMILY PHYSICIANS - RECRUIT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCROSSIN: This government's election platform was focused on improving - actually, no, transforming - health care, with a focus on recruitment of health care professionals, but this has not happened. There has been some limited success; however, when that is balanced against how many family physicians have either retired or simply worked themselves to death, the numbers just don't add up.

For my constituents in Cumberland North alone, the situation remains critical, with only one full-time and one part-time family physician coming, with a total of seven family physicians discontinuing their practices. Can the Minister of the Department of Health and Wellness please share with the House when the people of Pugwash and the town of Amherst can see real progress with actual recruitment of family physicians?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We are very focused on recruitment of physicians, and I know the member for Cumberland South and I were able to attend an opening of a new collaborative care centre in Amherst several months ago. We are looking forward. We recently negotiated a new physician contract, which is very good. We say it's a good deal for physicians; it's a great deal for Nova Scotians.

There are a number of things that are under way. We are looking at quality practice environments, we have innovative programs across this province, and we know that recruitment is top of mind, and we will continue to do so.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCROSSIN: I want to say how proud I am that six business people actually came together to offer turnkey medical office space. Nova Scotia

Health later said, Oh, we'll do that and we'll subsidize 50 per cent. I want to thank the minister for doing that, but it actually came from the lead of six business people in our community.

I must admit it is difficult to be objective when so many people in Cumberland, and across all Nova Scotia, are without a primary care provider. As we see government taxpayer ads, one would lead to believe that the money being spent on recruitment is actually yielding great benefits, when that is simply not the case.

Can the Minister of Health and Wellness please tell us here in the House the total amount of money that has been spent in fiscal 2022 and 2023 on physician recruitment - including both the Department of Health and Wellness and Nova Scotia Health totals - and how many doctors actually set up practice in the province in the same time frame? What is the benefit?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I certainly feel that in order to recruit physicians, we are going to need all levels of government. We work with the municipalities; we work with on-the-ground recruiters in the municipal units; we work with physicians. There are two physician leads in the Northern Zone that do that.

It's very difficult to quantify, but \$6.5 billion has been spent on transforming health care in this province. We are looking at a variety of options. We just recently announced a new community fund for people to help recruit. We want to do this with communities, and I encourage anyone who has an idea or an opportunity to help us recruit a physician to their community - we are open to hear that idea.

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

ECC: COASTAL PROTECTION ACT - IMPLEMENT

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. This week Bridgewater, Clark's Harbour, Digby, Kentville, Lunenburg, New Glasgow, Trenton, the District of Chester, Kings County, West Hants Regional Municipality, the Region of Queens Municipality and Pictou County all added their voices to the call for the implementation of the Coastal Protection Act. Despite all of this support, this government continues to delay the protection of our coast. Why won't this government listen to the loud majority of Nova Scotians?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: I have no doubt tomorrow, when I attend a meeting with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, I'll have an opportunity to engage in discussion with those municipalities. Their perspective I certainly appreciate. I also appreciate the perspective of 40,000 Nova Scotians, Speaker - 40,000 Nova Scotians whom this government has engaged with since September 29th. We look forward to diving in and

analyzing the feedback that those coastal property owners have provided to the government of Nova Scotia.

[2:45 p.m.]

LISA LACHANCE: Last year, the minister stated that the Coastal Protection Act regulations would be in place in the first half of 2023 - this year. Then we were told they weren't coming until 2025. Finally, in the scrum yesterday, the Premier walked back his commitment again, saying he might not implement the Act at all.

As was stated in the municipalities' joint letter: "This delay breaks your promise to communities and represents a failure to protect Nova Scotians." I will table that. Now the deadline for the third and latest round of consultation has passed. My question to the minister is: Will the minister be very clear about when the Coastal Protection Act will be enforced?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: The Premier was clear yesterday. We are going to now analyze the feedback from coastal property owners. We have just completed a very important consultation. We appreciate the feedback from folks in the two previous consultations. Now is the time to analyze and look at this feedback to determine the best path forward for coastal protection.

Speaker, there is enormous action on climate change in this province. You see that in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, you see that in our climate plan, and you see that in our Clean Power Plan that we just recently announced. There are a multitude of things that are happening, and coastal protection will be one component of that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West joining us virtually. Please go ahead.

FTB: SENIORS INCOME BENEFIT - CREATE

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, we know that families right across Nova Scotia and seniors on fixed incomes are facing significant challenges in the cost of living crisis. Last week, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board said he is open to working with the Canada Revenue Agency to create a seniors income benefit. My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: Will he follow the lead of eight other provinces and commit today that he will create a seniors income benefit to help all seniors in Nova Scotia?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I have been watching the news stories coming out of that scrum. What I did say was that the Seniors Care Grant is something new that our government started. It put money - and continues to put money - in the pockets of seniors in the province. It is targeted for seniors who are living at home and who have costs

that other seniors - who might be living in a nursing home - wouldn't have. We are trying to help. We are using targeted supports, and we feel that's one that Nova Scotians have smiled upon that we have started.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for the reply, but I was asking to create a seniors income benefit. We have another ask - that they allow the Seniors Care Grant to be used for both rent and mortgage payments. He was just talking about that. We know many seniors are renting or wanting to rent when they downsize. However, the Seniors Care Grant does not allow those funds to be used for rent or mortgage. My question to the minister is: Will the minister commit to expanding the criteria so more seniors can pay their rent and mortgage using the Seniors Care Grant?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, whenever we can, we try to work with the Canada Revenue Agency if we are distributing benefits, because it is easier. We don't need to have the people power to administrate it. Often, if we can do something the federal government is doing - maybe match it in a way - that is a way we can do things. It is just easier for us to do, and it is more efficient.

In the case of the Seniors Care Grant, we must be able to identify if the person is actually living in their home. We can't do that through the income tax system. We also can't ensure - if there are two seniors living in a home - that we are providing the benefit to one household. That is why we have the Seniors Care Grant set up the way we have it set up.

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

Before we go on, I do want to let everyone know that I see those who are on phones. In fact, yesterday someone had their phone up talking. I don't like to point out names, but again, I will start if I have to. This is another warning. It's disrespectful, and another thing I've noticed is that there's a lot of movement during Question Period. It's only for 50 minutes. Really think before you have to be in and out of the doors a number of times. Again, there was a lot of chatter. When you're sitting right beside your colleague who's speaking, there's no need for that. We can all do better, and I expect better. Just to say, I am going to start pointing out who's on their phone, and unfortunately, I will take the phone.

Anyway, moving on, I believe we will move on now to Opposition Business. The honourable House Leader of the Official Opposition.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, we're going to start off Opposition business by calling Bill No. 401.

Bill No. 401 - Early Learning and Child Care Act (amended).

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: It's a pleasure to speak to this bill. This is a bill that our caucus brought forward to help move the child care agreement along, the \$10-a-day child care agreement that we signed back in 2021, my colleague from Sydney-Membertou and I.

What have we seen in the last couple of years? Although the investments are going forward, the analysis on the pay for child care workers was completed and adjustments have been made, we think that there needs to be continued work to attract more early childhood educators, especially given that we have seen studies that have proven that we are behind virtually every other province and territory in this country, and to ensure that the pipeline includes more and more ECEs being graduated from our sole university that has the program in the province, Mount Saint Vincent University, and the community college, given that a majority of the ECEs actually come from central Canada, when it comes to a national perspective.

First, I forgot to table this during Question Period. There is a study from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that has pointed to seven other jurisdictions that are ahead of us already in implementing \$10-a-day child care. That includes all the Atlantic Canadian jurisdictions. The challenge that we have here is how to figure out a way to use provincial funds within the scope of the agreement to ensure that we're both recruiting and, perhaps more importantly, retaining workers who are in the system. We know that the majority of workers in childhood education are women, and we know that the majority of those women are of an age that have children, but whether it's a woman or a man or non-binary, we know that many of them do have children and that this bill will actually provide that child care free of charge to these workers.

This is by no means the solution to the shortage in labour, but it is a creative idea, and it's also an idea where we can show that we support and that we appreciate those who are working in the sector for relatively low wages. We know that ECEs have been underpaid for some time. I think they're underpaid right now. I think they were underpaid under our government. I think they were underpaid under previous governments before that. I can remember when Minister Karen Casey lifted the wage floor and they became the highest-paid in Atlantic Canada. That still wasn't enough at the time.

I think that all governments of all stripes in this House are complicit in undervaluing the work that early childhood educators do. I think it was evident how much they are needed during the pandemic, when they were one of the only sectors that remained open because we needed people to get to work and we needed people to have access to care for their children. I think that this is also a way that we can show how much value they were during difficult, challenging times like a global pandemic.

There's precedent across the country on looking at ways that we can attract and retain more ECEs. We know that we're not hitting our targets for spaces being created. Places like Ontario are taking the lead and creating some 40 new centres. Ontario also spent \$1 billion to create 30,000 spaces in school, and in that province, the majority of the new spaces are actually created in the schools. There are other strategies being looked at in terms of purpose-built buildings for child care. We don't see any kind of creative new initiatives coming out of the government, other than implementing the plan and raising some of the wages corresponding with the public sector agreements that have been in place, that they're committed to ensuring that there are annual increases.

The challenge is when ECEs have opportunities to, perhaps, go into pre-Primary teaching. Some of the current ECEs, whether they're just graduating or already in the sector, are moving toward employment that provides benefits, and benefits are an important tool for retaining and recruiting.

I think this is another way where we can compete with pre-Primary as a sector and provide free child care for our ECEs so that they have a place - and, also, recruiting can help because the actual hours of child care would align perfectly with the workday for a new ECE coming in and ensuring that they have that period of time that they're obligated to be at work, from the beginning of the workday to the end - where their child will actually be looked after. That is a savings right now - I happen to know because I'm in child care - of about \$500 a month. That is challenging for some ECEs who don't get paid a lot of money to actually come up with every month.

I think that it's important that we look at the evidence on the fact that most of the new supply of early childhood educators to staff child care expansion in Canada will have to come from new graduates. These graduates are young and looking to have new families. As I said in Question Period, a lot of people are looking at whether or not they can stay in the sector or if they can raise that family. We know that challenge provides that drag on the economy if we don't have some economic perspective, we don't have participation from as many people - young people especially, graduating from school and participating in the workforce.

I tabled the document that showed that there are wide variances of how far along and how prepared provinces are across the country in ensuring we have the labour for the child care agreement. The variance shows from one to three years in New Brunswick nearby, P.E.I., and Ontario - the leaders - to Nova Scotia - which is the laggard - quantified as 35 years to train enough ECE graduates to fill the promised spaces. That's a far cry from just three years away in 2026, when we're supposed to have 11,900 spaces for child care - for accessible \$10-a-day child care.

I note the reference to the different professions that also need access to child care and the fact that it's a universal program. That's why we endorsed the program. We want to see universal access, but it's a program that fails when we have that low fee drop and

we have, it was mentioned, doctors and other high-paying professions accessing these spaces. Then low-to-moderate income families not being able to access spaces.

[3:00 p.m.]

I can tell you the people who are calling my office are not high-income. When you pull into a child care centre and you see BMWs leave the place, you've got to question why are they able to access \$10-a-day child care - well, it's not \$10-a-day yet, but it's cut in half, as the minister said, and I appreciate that child care fees are going down. When you have people driving BMWs who are getting high-paying jobs accessing \$10-a-day child care and then you have people making minimum wage who have no child care space at all, when we aren't meeting our obligations under the agreement itself to meet the criteria to increase our spaces.

The minister can brag about the sheer number of spaces being created, but when you have the amount of population growth, especially in HRM, I think that's what the disconnect could be. If we're not building for the type of population growth that is happening and that is being forecasted, then the 28 net new spaces mentioned in HRM is not enough - in fact, we have less space corresponding with the amount of child care access than we had before the agreement was in place.

There are a number of provinces doing creative things, and this idea that we brought forward in this bill is not happening anywhere in Canada. It's only happening in a couple of jurisdictions in the southern states. I can tell you whenever the topic comes up, whether it's energy or other important economic issues, child care is on the agenda. That's why other jurisdictions are looking at ways that they can both retain and recruit workers. You can't create space unless you have the workers and you're adequately paying those workers to retain them in the sector.

This national study shows that women are actually 95 per cent of the sector - again, speaking to the need to ensure that they have their own child care needs met - and two-thirds of graduates are parents with at least one child by the first year after graduation. It's actually interesting, the large number of multiple-job holders in this occupation. That was one highlight out of the report that I'll table again. That speaks to me of the need that we have to pay more attention to how we're remunerating these jobs, how we're looking at giving them support and benefits.

Again, we're competing with pre-Primary, and having access to that program that provides benefits. I think when we look at the data, and we look at how we can provide that kind of support that doesn't cost a ton more money, this is a way that we can look at supporting it from a provincial perspective. Maybe the federal government will support it as well, but certainly provincially, we have the tools right here to do it right away. I'll bet there will be a number of ECEs who would think twice about leaving the sector, especially if they have children already but are maybe planning on having children in the near future.

Sixty per cent of ECEs transition into the child care sector right now, after graduation, and the rest enter into what is known as education services or other industries. With an incentive like this or other incentives, there are lots of good ideas that could be brought forward to improve the benefits for child care workers. That percentage of ECE graduates that we have now can increase above 60 per cent, because it's more attractive. It's simple math that if you provide that kind of support for workers, they will either stay or be more tempted to enter in the first place.

College ECEs might initially find work in a child care sector right after graduation, but may later exit the sector in favour of the education service industry. This speaks to retention. In recent studies, retention has been noted as being even more important than recruitment, and I would say especially in jurisdictions that have a program like pre-Primary, where virtually every community has another option for an ECE worker to enter into the system and access pensions and things like that - all for pensions, if that's an idea the government wants to bring forward for our ECE workers.

Social assistance careers appear to be the most lucrative directly after completing studies, surpassing educational services. That's a national statement. However, the earnings appear to change this advantage over time, and graduates who remain in the child care sector for the entire five-year period see their earnings growth for the first three years level off after dropping between Years 3 and 5. The evidence shows that, although sometimes it could be advantageous to start in what they call the social assistance sector - which is child care - by the time you enter three years into the sector, or Year 5, the workers start to leave. This is a national study, including provinces that don't even have pre-Primary. Ontario is the only other province that does. Obviously, Quebec is an anomaly as the absolute leader in the country, having had universal child care for so long.

The need to retain workers is something that is not focused on enough. I believe that it will be the single most important thing that shows whether this government moves the needle or if they fail to have a truly universal program in place by 2026. We have a number of provinces that have already reached \$10-a-day child care. We are not there yet in this province. Even though we have reduced our fees by half, we have incrementally fewer net new spaces given our population growth. We have longer wait-lists in HRM.

I can't speak to other parts of the province, but I would submit that, if there's population growth in those areas, they have higher wait-lists too. We might have others who speak to the bill who can speak to that. If we had a centralized annual report, like Ontario does, we would be able to see that data, but we don't have that in this province. It's hard to get to segregated data in this province on the child care sector.

This bill, if passed, I guarantee will help retain workers and help move the needle with a modest investment. If the bill is not accepted, I would encourage the government to look at other incentives that could be brought up through consultation. There are many other ways that we can support it, whether it's even more increased wages, a pension plan,

or other ways we can support a predominantly female workforce with kids - two thirds have kids. It's the right thing to do. Child care workers should not pay for their own child care in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm very glad to rise to speak to this bill. I completely agree. Absolutely. Early Childhood Educators need access to child care. This is a sector of workers who are badly undervalued by society and by this government. I have a lot to say, but I'm going to try to stick to the script because I want to make sure I get it into 15 minutes.

We know that ECEs also need fair wages and benefits. We know that ECEs don't make enough to make ends meet. Most ECEs, if you spoke to them, would tell you they have another job or they have another business on the side because they are literally just getting by. As ECEs across the province have advocated, Nova Scotia's ECE wage grid is insufficient to attract enough new ECEs to this sector. The minister talked about transformation and the patchwork quilt. We also need to take into consideration the words of the folks who are on the ground doing the work, and those are our ECEs.

We also risk losing experienced ECEs unless the province offers them more generous wages, along with pensions, leaves, and other benefits. Those are key pieces that were talked about on many of the strike lines and at many of the rallies that folks have been to. They say, We love our jobs, we love our kids, and we love the work we do. We have been doing it for 30 years. We got paid more 30 years ago than we do now because of the cost of living.

We know we need to pay them what they're worth. The recruitment and retention of ECEs will not be successful unless their value, education, training, and experience are recognized as central to child care expansion.

As my colleague mentioned, we do need to make sure they have child care. They are the foundation of our economy and of the work we do. The reason why we can work is because ECEs are a foundational part of our patchwork in Nova Scotia.

We know the benefits of this framework are still outstanding when the minister speaks about the patchwork quilt. These are core pieces to make sure - they need to be addressed, and they are a priority. We have heard that what is being proposed is not good enough. This means they don't have pensions or benefits, which is retiring them into poverty. Most ECEs still aren't making a living wage, and some are working multiple jobs. The government is committed to having a retirement and benefits solution by the end of 2023, but it is nowhere in sight. We are in the 11th month of the year, yet there's no indication of this.

As my colleague mentioned, ECEs deserve to have child care. It is key. Enough child care spaces - while we know, just by looking at the data, reading the newspaper, and hearing from folks in our offices - there are not enough child care spaces in any of our areas.

One in three children in Nova Scotia lives in a child care desert. In order to take advantage of something like free child care, there would have to be child care spaces for them to use.

We know that there are wait-lists. We know there are years of folks who are waiting to have child care. It's nearly impossible to find a child care space in Halifax, let alone smaller communities across the province. We have spoken to parents and operators alike, and they continue to tell us that there are no spaces and that people are waiting to be on these lists.

Last year we saw the province open up a net of 28 new spaces and that is nearly not enough. We know that the way this government rolled out changes to the child care system caused the closure of many existing centres, some of them in my own riding.

Growth in this sector has been limited to school-age programs which are needed but are not addressing the dire shortage of infant and toddler spaces. We know that we need to reach the \$10 a day benchmark statistic, and Halifax toddler and infant fees haven't even reached the 50 per cent reduction target. This is unacceptable and the government needs to be very clear about the path to \$10 a day.

Affordable child care isn't just an issue for women or families, it's an issue for our economy. If we want mothers and parents to fully participate in our economy, with all the benefits that brings, we need a child care program that families can afford and ones that ECEs can actually be proud of to be part of that sector.

I will note that this proposal comes from the party that described the often-invisible work that mostly women do as organic child care, but if we don't even recognize this work as work, don't value it and invest in it - surprise, it's not going to be plentiful. So absolutely, ECEs should not be faced with unfair wait-list fees when they are searching for a child care space, let alone child care spaces should be available to them when they need it as their work is very important. They are the sector that we need to help boost our economy.

I was shocked that when presented with this practice, the minister's first response was that she would not commit to banning these wait-list fees. The most recent numbers from 2019 found that 92 per cent of Halifax daycares maintained a wait-list and 16 per cent charged a wait-list fee. The national average for wait-list fees back then was \$50 to \$100. When I'm bringing up wait-list fees, I am saying this because there are not enough spaces for everyday people to be able to have child care, and ECEs are not excluded from that.

We do need to prioritize where these spots would possibly be available for folks that are actually in that sector.

The situation has only worsened, and inaction by the Liberal government after a Progressive Conservative government has created a crisis point. Families are forced to spend hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars while already stretched on something that may or may not end in a child care space.

The minister admits that she agrees the practice of charging non-refundable wait-list fees shouldn't be happening, and after weeks of having conversations, the minister finally acknowledged that it is happening, so why won't the minister ban the practice of charging these fees? Which also brings me back to: Why do ECEs have to be on a wait-list? Why do ECEs not automatically have spots set aside for them so that they can get into the sector and do the work that is necessary?

There is so much work to do and this government is moving very slowly on this issue. This is why our party committed to free before- and after-school care in the last election. I see that the numbers that the minister has brought forward are numbers that include all of those - the before- and after-school and child care spaces which, in turn, is that large number but is not actually daycare spaces specifically.

Should ECEs have free child care? Absolutely, they deserve it. They are working in the sector, they are doing the work that we need that is necessary for folks to get back to work to maintain their lives, but there is so much more work to do in every other corner of this sector. I know that our party and I will not stop pushing until every family in this province has access to safe and affordable child care, staffed by fairly-compensated and fairly-treated professionals.

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

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I really do appreciate the opportunity to talk about the work that we are doing in child care in something more than 45-second increments, because that typically is the only chance I get in this space to talk about the work. A 5-year historic transformation that is going to cost well over \$600 million - you can't do justice to that in 45-second increments, so I do appreciate the opportunity to have this conversation now.

I think there are a couple of things that I'd like to start out by talking about, because the context of this is so important. We get questions that are really focused on very specific issues. All of those issues are really important issues. The question of wait-list fees - that's an important issue. The question of how we support our ECEs and what benefits we provide for them - that's an incredibly important question. It is really important to understand the context of this transformation as we think about those individual issues. I just want to paint that picture before we get into talking about the specific issues.

[3:15 p.m.]

If we just talk about what our starting point is or what our starting point was and where we are going, I think that's a really helpful frame. You've probably heard me refer to our child care sector as a patchwork quilt in the past. I think that is really a good way of understanding what we had. We have incredibly passionate, educated, devoted, caring care providers, operators, and ECEs all across the province, but historically, I would say, this has not been a system. We have not had what one can truly think of as a system. We have had over 300 individual operators, and those are business owners. Those are mothers or parents who've decided to bring kids into their homes.

Some are ECEs. There's been a wide range of training in a wide range of circumstances. Those folks operate their own individual businesses or non-profits, and they've really created their own individual terms of operation. That means they have created their own terms of employment with the employees that they hire, with the wages that they set. They've created their own arrangements in terms of hours that they provide to the families that they serve. They've created their own arrangements in terms of facilities and size of the operations.

In every way, these are individual operators who've really done their own thing based on the needs of the families that they serve, based on their own skills, based on their own capacity, based on the availability of the workforce that was at hand. That's what we dealt with historically.

How were those folks funded? Predominantly, those operators were funded by parent fees, so out of the pockets of Nova Scotians. The primary way that all of our operators across the province were funded previously was through fees paid by parents. There were some individual - and this is where the patchwork initially came from - some types of grants that existed for those operators, but the vast majority of the funding for the operators was through parent fees.

That's what we had previously, and we know it didn't meet Nova Scotians' needs. We know that as a result of that unfolding the way that it did, we didn't have ECEs supported with wages that were professional, fair wages. We know that evolution of individual operators did not allow Nova Scotians all across our province to have access to licensed child care. Through that prior patchwork quilt, Nova Scotia evolved deserts of child care where there was no licensed child care anywhere for people to access. We know that there were not enough spaces available.

It was in that landscape, or it was as a result of that landscape and that need that has existed for decades - I felt that need when my children were young. When I was pregnant, expecting, and looking for child care so that I could go back to work, I was on multiple wait-lists because that wasn't a system that provided access to me and to many of my family and friends who were looking for child care.

Out of that need, out of that landscape, has evolved the federal commitment and our provincial commitment to transform child care. What does that look like? That means we need to truly build a system. We need to take that patchwork quilt of individual operators, and we need to support them to create enough spaces to meet all of the needs across Nova Scotia. We need to provide them with the funding to support fair and professionalized ECE wages, not just right now, not just in this snapshot in time, but in a way that will support the growth of those wages and support the growth of that sector. We need to provide the training and education opportunities, not just in the centres where they're currently available, but also in other areas, in rural areas, for folks who maybe historically haven't been represented in this sector.

We need to provide funding so that parents no longer have to pay the majority of those fees - that we support affordable child care. That's the journey that we're taking, and it's a journey that is at least five years in the making, and it's a journey that's going to cost over \$600 million. That's the landscape; that's the trajectory that we're on.

The other thing that's really important to understand about the journey that we're on is the snapshot in time that we're taking these steps. In addition to this sector being historically underserved, underfunded, and neglected, we're also doing this work at an unprecedented time when we have affordability issues everywhere.

Every sector is challenged by the cost of building right now - not child care alone. This is something that is every sector's challenge. Every sector right now is grappling with a workforce of more and more people retiring, so that's not exclusive to child care. That has nothing to do with the work that we're doing in child care. People are leaving the workforce because they are hitting the age where they want to retire, and they are retiring. That is not because of the transformation we are doing. That is because of the demographic reality we are facing. We can talk to anybody in this Chamber relating to any other sector. If we look at skilled trades, we see people retiring. If we look at health care, we see people retiring. If we look at agriculture, people are retiring.

Our child care operators are - we see them leaving the sector, but we are not seeing them leave the sector in droves because of the transformation work we're doing. They're leaving the sector because they're retiring. That's the age of our workforce right now. So, that's a challenge that we in this sector are facing, but so is every Nova Scotian. So is every Canadian. That's just a demographic reality.

The rising cost of property is not an issue that is specific to child care. That is an issue that we are facing in Halifax; that is an issue that we're facing across the province; that is an issue that we're facing across the country. These are all things that will impact our operators.

As our operators get to retirement age, as they see their predominant asset, which may be the building that they have provided their care in, as they see the cost or the value

of that rise, some operators are making decisions to retire. And you know what? What we have in child care right now is a fantastic opportunity, because those challenges - the historic challenges in this sector, the unprecedented challenges that every sector is facing right now because of the rising costs, because of the retiring demographic - right now, our government is investing historic amounts of money, and spending unprecedented time, effort, and energy into transforming the sector.

We have, in child care, an opportunity with this investment, with the focus that we're putting on it, to overcome not only the historic disadvantage and the historic neglect, but also the challenges that every sector is facing around a retiring demographic, around increasing property values. The work that we're doing right now is helping us mitigate those challenges that are beyond Nova Scotian challenges, challenges beyond this government. These are national challenges, and in many cases international challenges.

For child care, we're doing the work that mitigates that. We're doing the work that is protective of that, and we're doing the work that will take us from that patchwork quilt of child care centres that I described to a system that is truly a system, that is funded in a way that is sustainable, and that supports all of our incredible operators - our private and our not-for-profit operators - and the ECEs who work in those centres to be able to deliver the spaces where we need them.

Child care at the times that it's needed - so, child care early in the morning if your shift starts then, child care late at night if that happens, and child care everywhere that it's needed.

Speaker, I think it's really important, and I wanted to take that time to really talk about that context, because I don't get to do that in the 45-second increments when questions come at me.

It is really important to understand the breadth of this work as we are talking about any issue, because any issue that comes up needs to be understood in that context. None of these pieces can be done in isolation. None of this work can be done in isolation. It all needs to be in lockstep. What exactly does that lockstep look like? What are the components of the transformation? There are some major components to this work.

The components include work around our ECE workforce. That is ensuring that the workforce - not only do we have enough ECEs, but they are trained in a way that supports them and enables them to do great work - the great work that they love to do. It means that we have to be able to create, physically, the spaces to support the needs of Nova Scotians. It is an entirely separate pillar, but you can't do them separately.

We need to build out the affordability. We need to continue to fund our operators in a way that enables them to provide these services and support affordable child care for

Nova Scotians, and we need to do all of this with a deep understanding of specific Nova Scotian needs.

We have already taken incredible strides in all of these areas and I am really excited about the work that we have done. I want to take a minute quickly to say we could not have done this work in the way that we've done it without the support of the Early Learning and Child Care Engagement Table. We knew early on - when I took this office, it was really clear to me that what we needed was to be informed by the folks who are in this day to day. We needed to have, and now we do have, a table of folks, of operators, of private and not-for-profit operators. We have ECEs at the table, we have experts at that table, we have families at that table, and that has really guided the work.

That also brings me to a couple of things that I want to comment on, because I connect with our provincial and federal colleagues regularly and I will say Nova Scotia is leading the way in the work that we are doing and there are a few ways in which we are doing this. One thing that I want to point out is that the work we are doing around affordability and our reduction in fees in Nova Scotia is universal. That means every single family who has access to licensed child care is getting that fee reduction.

People may not realize that in other provinces, that is not the case. In other provinces there are individual spaces that may be affordable but that doesn't apply everywhere else. We have been lauded nationally for that work to ensure that our universal, affordable child care really, truly is universal.

The second thing that I want to talk about is the innovation, and we are being watched nationally because we are, in fact, innovating. One really great example of this is the work that we are doing with Health Park. Health Park is a centre in Cape Breton and they are now providing as a demo site - as a pilot - extended hours child care for health care providers, and that means that health care providers will be able to access child care in extended hours through the week and on weekends, over nights.

This is a first. There are no centres like this across Canada, and so our provincial colleagues are looking with great interest at the way we have been able to do this and we are leading the way in this innovative step that we are taking. We are, in fact, a leader in the work that we are doing.

Speaker, I have managed to still leave myself only 45 seconds to talk about the variety of ways that we've already taken steps to improve access to child care in Nova Scotia. I'm just going to do the same thing that I've done before and now start talking faster.

We've already increased our ECE wages 14 to 46 per cent. That is a significant, significant improvement in wages for a sector that has been historically underfunded. We have reduced fees by half for families. Families across Nova Scotia are saving hundreds

and thousands of dollars a month. I want to say that again: hundreds and thousands of dollars a month. That is huge for affordability. We are continuing this work and we look forward to doing this work to truly build a Nova Scotia child care system that meets all of our family needs.

[3:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Oh, with 15 minutes, I am just happy to get on my feet and provide a few comments on the bill because that is what we are debating, and I will also talk a bit about child care as well. I always want to recognize the folks in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. As politicians, we play a big part in the policy decision-making, and we make decisions here in the Legislature - or if you are in Cabinet or in caucus you are making decisions.

I was the minister at the time, and we had a heavy negotiation to get the child care deal done, which was a historic deal for the province. It was a \$605 million deal, plus some other money around incentives in training opportunities for folks who wanted to become an ECE, but I always like to give credit to the staff because it was a monumental task. Some of them are in the department, and some of them have moved on to other departments. I hope you are watching because I asked you to do a lot at the time, and they stepped up big-time as a result of it.

I also want to recognize the member for Timberlea-Prospect, a former Premier. Child care meant everything to him as well. We saw the challenges. We heard the challenges. As the minister said at the time, historically there was no kind of universal system in place that represented child care all over Nova Scotia - one kind of system that families could access.

We knew there were gaps all through the system, and we knew that the pay for ECEs was not enough. We knew that more training opportunities and incentives were going to be needed to encourage folks to become ECEs, so we went to work and now Nova Scotia has a \$605 million child care deal.

I do like hearing the stories. The minister is passionate about it, and that's great. She talks about the reduction in fees. Exactly, that was in the contract. You talk about the number of seats that are going to be added. Perfect, that was also in the agreement. This was all negotiated over time.

We have some concerns around how fast it's moving. I will say that we've heard the government say, well, for years there have been wait-lists and all that stuff. Sure, that's fine, that's one of the reasons why we looked at the deal, but I do want to remind folks of pre-Primary. Pre-Primary gave every four-year-old thousands of seats. It gave every four-

year-old in this province the same opportunity. The government back then was adamant that it never came. They fought and fought against the implementation of pre-Primary.

I remember those debates in here. I remember my colleague - the leader of our party who was the Minister of Education and Early Childhood development at the time - championed the cause that he had to deliver pre-Primary for four-year-olds, and he delivered pre-Primary for four-year-olds. So when I hear that comment that for years it has been neglected, there is some validity to that, when it comes around to the system and trying to evolutionize child care for Nova Scotians, but the government was adamant that pre-Primary never came.

There are lots of new faces on that side, but I can say their leader and some of the veterans fought tooth and nail to make sure that pre-Primary never came.

We saw the benefits of pre-Primary, obviously. Every four-year-old, regardless of socio-economics or regardless of where they lived, all had the same start. They all had the same start entering school. This was the goal around the child care deal - that we knew that one in four families were accessing child care. I would argue that in some communities that statistic was probably worse. We knew that the cost was a massive barrier for people. So with the first opportunity we had to start negotiating with the federal government on a new, national-provincial deal, we did, and it was months. It was feedback from the sector, it was feedback from stakeholders as the minister mentions the panel. Those stakeholders have been engaged from the beginning, so that's nothing new.

We went to work. For me, it was a proud moment for us to sign that contract. The federal government worked day and night with us to make sure Nova Scotia could have a deal that would get not only an average of a \$10 a day - because we know that for some families, any cost to child care is a barrier. We wanted every child starting out to have the same.

When you do that, you look at incentives, and why we're here today to talk to the bill - which I feel like nobody, except for the person who tabled the bill, has actually talked to the bill - is around this incentive to support ECEs' child care. I think it's a great bill, and I think it's the continuous evolution of how we try to attract people to the sector.

As we said - and as the minister said, and I agree - over years, there was no set system in place, and as a result, in urban centres you would see more options for child care. Now, mind you, it's gone the other way. There are a lot fewer options for child care. But a lot of areas of rural Nova Scotia were impacted. There was less opportunity for child care. With the new deal, you have increased wages for ECEs. You have a reduction in fees. You have targets set for those reductions in fees, and a system that looks at our three-year-olds and how we can build them in, potentially, to our school system - looking at every option, giving every option we possibly can to ensure that child care is available, but also affordable to everyone.

We looked at a bunch of incentives. You look at the core foundational stuff. We knew wages were an issue. Let's look at that. Now you're starting to see what's being implemented by the government in the deal of the increases in wages for ECEs. Then you're looking at access: How can we utilize and take the money we received in this deal to provide more spaces, whether we're using daycares, or infrastructure of schools, or whatever is necessary to help give all of those kids the same chance?

You're looking at training opportunities. How do we encourage folks who want to become ECEs? How can we help them? At the time, we looked at many training opportunities and money associated with it, so that if someone wanted to become an ECE, we could help pay their way - very similar to some of the other initiatives that government has put around CCAs in some of the other departments. That was kind of the goal for us at the time: what incentive can we put in? We knew we needed more ECEs in the system.

Now we come to this bill, which my good friend the member for Timberlea-Prospect tabled. This is coming from him, and he's out engaging, as I am. We're out engaging, talking to families, talking to operators, and talking to residents who want to become ECEs. One of the barriers - one great incentive, I believe - is, if we can encourage folks to become ECEs, we can do it in a way that not only gives them training opportunities and helps with their tuition, but we know that - and in a lot of cases, as he says, statistics show that there are young families - a lot of folks who want to become ECEs, and statistically there are young families involved. So what an incentive: to say, okay, if you want to support our children, we'll cover the fees for your children.

I think that's a great incentive. I give my friend credit. He's put a lot of thought into this because it mattered to him. It mattered to him when he was Premier. He was passionate about this, and he gave me the honour of negotiating on behalf of the government of the time with staff. He's now a dad, and he's doing this thing, and he's starting to feel the costs of what it is.

I love hearing the stories of families who tell me - and regardless of what government's in place, this was all part of the deal that we signed - you love hearing the stories of people talking to me, saying, My fees were reduced, my family's saving a lot of money. That's fantastic. I love hearing that story. That was the whole point for us, especially. I use Cape Breton as an example. We have some high poverty in communities, and we know that kids would never have the chance to get that start. The new deal is doing that, and that's what pre-Primary did as well. It gave every four-year-old the same playing field. We knew that. We started seeing the results very quickly, and you're going to start to see the results with this because of the deal.

The government has some work to do, mind you. They're having a tough time meeting the targets. I would argue, and others have argued, that they're moving very slowly. They are starting some new initiatives. The initiative that the minister mentioned around Health Park - that's a great organization, great leadership there. I was there the day

the minister was there. I appreciated the minister coming to the Island. This was all stuff we talked about in the deals, like how can we be more flexible around child care options? We talked about health care workers when we were negotiating the deal. We talked about first responders. We talked about all these. The government made an announcement at the Cove Guest Home in Sydney as well, and they put a child care centre in there as well to support the workers there.

This is great. This was all part of the conversation and the eventuality of signing over a \$600 million child care deal for the province. On the bill, this is something that I bet if implemented would be such a huge boost for not only people entering the system, it would be an incentive for people to become an ECE. If you're already in there, it probably would give people more flexibility to work more hours. That's the other side of it as well. People are trying to balance life. Wages are what they are, and they're starting to increase, but there's still some work to do there. At the same time, if you have an ECE worker who maybe is only working part-time because they just can't afford full-time child care costs, if we have this incentive for them to cover the cost of their child entering child care because they're looking after everybody else's children, I think it's something that merits looking into further.

I only have two minutes left here. I'll just finish by saying child care is evolving quickly, not only in this province but across the country. We saw that a few years back. It's funny - I had a conversation with former Prime Minister Paul Martin who talked about child care, trying to implement a child care policy across Canada. There were a few of them involved, and when we signed the deal, I got a phone call. It was from the former Prime Minister congratulating us on something they'd tried to do 20 years ago.

This matters, and as the minister said, it's going to continue to evolve. Wages will always be part of this. That's important. The more incentives that we can provide ECEs to enter the field - not only also enter the field but continue to develop in their career as an early childhood educator. This would give them more flexibility, I believe, to help them along that journey, and this is something I believe that the government can implement. It will come with a price tag, but I'd say what a valuable investment for our kids, for families, and for workers. With that, I'll take my seat.

Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 401.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No 401.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Opposition House Leader.

[3:45 p.m.]

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 306 for second reading?

Bill No. 306 - Serious Illness Leave Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm happy to stand and speak in favour of Bill No. 306. This bill is being brought forward in second reading here. This is a bill that was tabled by the member for Bedford Basin in the last sitting of the Legislature. I want to commend the member for Bedford Basin for being a champion for this, and for bringing it forward again this session. This is certainly something that we as a party fully support. I do think it's important to explain to the House and anybody listening what this would do.

This would bring the employment insurance rules that were brought in federally in December 2022 to allow persons who are suffering from illnesses to access employment insurance for up to 26 weeks. People who are suffering from serious illness like cancer, MS, heart disease, diabetes - anything that can impact their ability to perform work - this bill would bring their rights to collect employment insurance and have work protection in line with the federal law.

Nova Scotia currently doesn't have any of these protections for Nova Scotians. Nova Scotia's labour law currently only guarantees employees working in provincially regulated industries a maximum of three days unpaid leave due to illness, which certainly is insufficient, which I think we can all recognize in this House.

That means people with serious illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, MS, Parkinson' - the list goes on - illnesses that Nova Scotia has very, very high rates of, higher rates than other provinces - risk losing their job after three days' leave, and also don't receive income. The Canadian Cancer Society has been a big proponent of this piece of legislation.

Again, this would ensure that Nova Scotians now with serious illness have access to employment insurance up to 26 weeks. That would change from three days. In Canada there is a wide range. Three days is the lowest. Nova Scotia has the lowest number of days that are covered by employment insurance for a serious illness. We are at the bottom of the pile.

People who get severely sick here in Nova Scotia are at the greatest financial risk. You compare that with a province like Quebec, which actually has gone the full 26 weeks with EI coverage. This is something that we need to make happen in Nova Scotia.

We know that individuals dealing with severe illness are really struggling, not just with the illness itself and with the treatments that come with some of these illnesses, but also with the financial impacts that come with the illness and paying for treatment that might not be covered by insurance or MSI, and travel and potentially losing employment.

The Cancer Society estimates that there are - this was in 2002, the latest numbers I have - that there are 6,800 Nova Scotians who would be diagnosed with cancer. That number may be going up in the province over the last couple of years. We lead the country, in Nova Scotia, with certain types of cancer, in particular GI-related cancers. We have the highest rates of Crohn's disease, colitis, IBS, and the highest rates of GI-related cancers.

There are a lot of Nova Scotians - disproportionately, actually - who are impacted by this sort of cancer, and other illnesses like diabetes and heart disease. We're also leaders in the country with the rates of these illnesses. These are all long-term, serious illnesses that can result in acute symptoms that are debilitating for people, and they can't go to work.

According to the Cancer Society, that means that in this province, an individual who takes times off due to illness risks losing their job after only three days of unpaid leave. These individuals who are getting sick are not protected and they risk losing employment. The average length of treatment and recovery for those dealing with cancer is between 26 and 36 weeks for breast cancer, 37 weeks for colon cancer, two of the most common types of cancer in Canada.

Nova Scotians should not have to choose between receiving cancer treatment and working. This is according to the Canadian Cancer Society. Currently the Nova Scotia Labour Standards Code does not protect the employment of those who have critical illness, like cancer, from termination after three days of unpaid leave.

We know that prior to the sickness benefit extension, it was estimated that 77 per cent of sickness benefit claimants who exhaust the 15 weeks do not return to work immediately. About three quarters of these claimants took at least an additional 26 weeks off. The fact that we have not moved on this, I think, can be viewed as very cruel.

This is a cruel outcome for people who are dealing with the most challenging situations in their lives, oftentimes fighting for their lives, fighting to stay alive to see their families, fighting to provide for their families.

There have been incredible local advocates who have been pushing for this as well: advocates like Kathy MacNaughton, who became an advocate for extending employment insurance, sickness benefits, and job protection for people with critical illness, following the death of her husband, David Fraser. Kathy worked with us in the last session to push the majority PC government to accept this bill, and certainly I know she stands behind us now, as we push the government to look at this again.

Kathy's and David's stories are quite moving. In the final two months of David's life, while battling esophageal cancer - which, again, we have very high rates of here in Nova Scotia; this is very dangerous cancer that metastasizes quickly, and unfortunately, oftentimes more than not, does claim the lives of individuals who get it if it's not caught early - this is what David had. This is a really challenging cancer, and it affects an individual's ability to eat, to breathe - extremely debilitating.

In the final two months of David's life, he took on a job installing floors to pay for insurance on his family truck so that his family could continue to have a vehicle to drive around, presumably to and from health care appointments, but of course to the grocery store and everywhere else they had to go.

Kathy's words were, "To put a person - a sick person - in that situation because of financial reasons is just so wrong, and that's why I said I'm going to change this."

"Money was tight for the family because, at the time" - and I'm reading from an article that I'll table - "federal employment insurance sickness benefits ended after 15 weeks" - again, here in Nova Scotia, these protections are not in place after three days - "despite the fact that Fraser had 45 weeks built up" of EI, he could not make claims beyond the 15 weeks. "MacNaughton and the Canadian Cancer Society successfully lobbied the federal government to change the rules" - I know Minister Sean Fraser was a bit part of that happening federally, because Kathy does come from his area. I believe she comes from the Pictou. The benefit was extended federally to 26 weeks.

"All David did through his sickness was worry about where the next dollars were coming, and that's not what he should have been concentrating on in his last months of his life."

MacNaughton is really focused on job protection, too. "We've got to protect our sick people so that they don't have to worry, they just have to get better." Of course, it was the member for Bedford South who introduced the bill last session that would do just that, by providing 26 weeks of unpaid job protection for someone with a critical illness and create provisions to allow them to return to work based on their own treatment and recovery process.

I will quote the member for Bedford Basin, who has been a great champion for this, as well as the member for Bedford South. But it was the member for Bedford Basin who pushed this.

In her own words:

"It guarantees that people can focus on their recovery, if that's the way their journey goes, and they don't have to worry about their family not having any money coming in and they don't have to worry about losing

their jobs, because that happens, too. Heather Mulligan, manager of advocacy for the Canadian Cancer Society's Atlantic branch, said the issue has been raised with Labour Minister Jill Balsev and officials in her department. Mulligan told reporters that when the federal law was changed, it affected more than 169,000 people across the country. Now they are lobbying provincial governments to adjust their respective job protection legislation to mirror the federal EI changes. Right now, only Quebec provides 26 weeks of leave protection.

Mulligan said they have examples of people who, after undergoing treatment for cancer or other critical illnesses, returned to work to find their job had been re-evaluated or reassessed, and they no longer have the same role.”

This is a big concern. Again, you have people who are literally fighting for their lives, who have some of the most severe and debilitating illness that also come with some of the most severe and debilitating treatments, who now not only have to worry about the health impacts of this, and whether they're going to live and see their families for an extended period of time, but are also worried about whether they get to keep their job or not - whether they lose their income. This is a really, really problematic situation.

The minister, to her credit, did laud Kathy MacNaughton for coming forward, noting it can sometimes take a personal story to understand the impacts of the issue. She drew a parallel between this issue and when the Liberal MLA for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth shared the story of her daughter's pregnancy loss and the need for employment leave in such cases. She said that was a situation that led to change in legislation, and it did. I think Kathy and David's story should lead to changes in legislation today because the minister even said in her own words, I can see this is a very similar piece of action.

The minister did say she also had meetings - this is after the last session - with her provincial and federal colleagues and she said she expects the subject to also be discussed at that time. Unfortunately, since the last session we have not been informed of any progress that has been made on this. We have not had any reports to the House. We have not heard any announcements that have been made by the government. I am concerned that this issue has fallen off the radar. Again, I don't think we can allow it to fall off the radar, as an Opposition party. I think this issue is far too important and affects so many Nova Scotians.

Just looking at the cancer numbers alone, we've got close to 7,000 Nova Scotians yearly who are diagnosed with cancer. I think the numbers are now 1 in 5 people - sorry, 1 in 2 people - 50 per cent of us. I mean, look at this room. This means half of us are going to experience cancer at some point in our lives. We shouldn't have to experience job loss or a loss of EI benefits as a result of that.

Nova Scotia is at the lowest rung of support and protection in this country. We are at three days, folks. Three days. We all know, all of us in this House have been impacted by cancer, either in our family or - some of our members are being impacted currently. We know what chemo and radiation do to the body. We know what continuous surgeries do. Three days is really not sufficient by any measure to help people dealing with this situation. To not have protection in the Labour Standards Code for people who are dealing with serious illness, I think, is a real gap in law in this province and it leaves people in their most vulnerable moment being made to potentially be very vulnerable from an employment and financial perspective.

With no surprise, there is a lot of support for this amongst Nova Scotians. In fact, a Narrative Research poll that was conducted in August of this year found that 86 per cent of Nova Scotians overwhelmingly support the extension of job-protected leave to 26 weeks - that's almost 90 per cent of respondents - a move that would give employees the opportunity to access treatment and heal without worrying whether they will have a job to return to, or even during the time they access treatment or heal, whether they will lose their job.

I certainly do want to urge the government to move forward with this. I do think it's critical. We have to recognize that somebody's struggle with cancer or heart disease or diabetes or MS, Parkinson's, or any other debilitating disease that requires extended treatment, should not also be accompanied by a major financial burden for them and their family. We know that a lot of these treatments, particularly for cancer and some new treatments coming along, aren't even covered by the Province. Not only is the risk that people can lose their job, lose funding, they might not be able to actually pay for the treatments that they require to fight for days, weeks, or extra months, hopefully years, on this Earth.

Considering that we have some of the highest rates of chronic and severe illness in this province, higher than any other province in the country, considering that we are at the lowest when it comes to job protection for individuals who become sick, I urge this government to move on this bill and pass it.

THE SPEAKER: Unfortunately, MLA for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, you spoke on this bill on April 23rd and you can only speak once.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: I think probably the first thing we should say about this bill is to establish the present context in Nova Scotia employment standards law where we are, in category after category, the weakest in the provision of job protections of any province in the country. A jurisdictional scan of labour standards, particularly in these categories that this bill refers to, in job protection, really shows Nova Scotia in an embarrassing and scandalous light.

[4:00 p.m.]

Anything that moves us somewhere closer to the middle of the pack in labour standards job protection is certainly welcome. We can think of the significant number of studies that have been done about this in recent years. The one in my mind is the one from maybe five years ago from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that laid out how clear this is that we are tenth out of 10 in many, many categories.

I think that the Leader of the Liberal Opposition would have to acknowledge that this is an area where - although this initiative from the Liberal Party is certainly welcome - that this is an area where his party did not prove itself extremely energetic in years in which they had an opportunity to address labour standards in the province.

I think in particular, this general bill raises the area - the key area of debate that is in this subject of labour standards, of course, is sick days. The provision of sick days - paid sick days - is a subject that came on the screen of public discourse in Nova Scotia with COVID-19, although in fact it had been a matter that had been discussed and was the subject of legislation that our party had brought forward prior to COVID-19, but it was with the onset of the pandemic that the subject of paid sick leave and improving our labour standards in this area really came to be part of public discourse in the province.

I have been repeatedly disappointed by the present government's failure to realize what an opening - how well paid sick leave worked during the pandemic - it is for them to improve labour standards in this area. I was disappointed previous to that in the years of the McNeil government when similarly many, many calls which come from those who study labour standards in the province, that came from the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, and that came from our party, for a system of paid sick leave, whether it was five, six, or ten paid sick leave days in a year, was never picked up and acted upon.

This is an area - the area that this bill is speaking to, the Serious Illness Leave Act - where Nova Scotia is behind, where the Liberal Party and the Progressive Conservative Party have failed to take the initiatives that would be needed to bring us up to the standard that most Canadians are able to expect in the area of job protections. For these reasons it's a proposed piece of legislation that is particularly needed. It's in an area where forward steps are particularly needed.

This is true for lots of reasons. One of them is, of course, the recent changes that the federal government has made in the EI legislation, which provide these kinds of more extended employment protection provisions. When the country, as a whole, moves forward in an area of job protection, particularly of sickness job protection, we want our labour standards in Nova Scotia not to lag behind that but to be in sync with that and of a piece with that. These provisions proposed here in Bill No. 306 would move us in this direction.

I also think that the gold standard in this kind of proposal is the call and the endorsement of the Canadian Cancer Society. In this case, this is a change that the Canadian Cancer Society, with all of their purview of the lengths of time that people's employment is affected by the range of types of various cancer treatment, on the basis of which they have recommended that these are changes that are needed. I think whenever the Canadian Cancer Society speaks in the area of protections in society and in the province of Nova Scotia that are required as a result of cancer treatments, that's something that we ought to listen to.

I thought that the Leader of the Liberal Opposition was very clear in his remarks about how in Nova Scotia, we have a number of medical conditions that call for extended areas of treatment which are, in their prevalence, quite singular in the number of them that we see in Nova Scotia. This is true for a whole series of types of malignancies, as it is for a series of types of neurological disorders, all of which have in common that the prognosis is serious if left untreated and the treatment of its nature is extended in a way that people could expect to have a potential compromising effect on their employment.

We all know from our own families that when the time comes - as it comes in every family - when our attention must be turned to illness in the family and how it is to be coped with, we all know how important it is to be able to, as a family, look at the Number 1 problem before us and to give it our Number 1 attention and our Number 1 resources, and not to be undermined or kept from giving it that primary attention by our awareness of potential financial implications having to do with whether or not a person is going to be able to keep their job.

It certainly is the case that three unpaid sick days, as we have it presently in our labour standards, is inadequate and stands out in need of improvement. Three unpaid sick days - that doesn't begin to speak to the range of illnesses and treatments that this bill envisages. In fact, it's not adequate to deal with even very common illnesses that can compromise a person's ability to be able to be present on their job in a way that they would wish to be. We know that everyone, when they come into a time of health care crisis, has demands made on their life situation that are unlike any other period.

I had a colleague in the ministry a number of years ago who got a difficult cancer diagnosis and was continuing to do her work while receiving treatments. One day she said to me, actually, one problem is, besides the medical problems, I actually don't have time to be a cancer patient. She spoke about all the many related things that were required from her: appointments other than the appointments you might think about as secondary appointments, different things that had to be organized at home and so on that were all just very time-consuming and demanding. I think we all recognize, from our own immediate and family experiences, that this is really the case.

I think that when we recognize how weak the situation of our employment standards and labour standards is, particularly where the protection of jobs is concerned - when we

recognize that that's the case, and we recognize from our own experience what is required when a person is dealing with a difficult diagnosis that has long-term ramifications in terms of his treatment - when we think about that, and then when we think also about how the whole issue of paid sick leave has come on screen in the last few years in a way that it never had been before, and the door has really been opened to a discussion of this whole area of sick leave and job protections in a way that it never was before, I think we can seriously say that the provision of a 26-week unpaid serious illness leave for medically certified chronic illness of the sort that is envisioned and proposed here in this legislation is in fact something whose time has come and something that commends itself to the attention of the government, and something that should become a part of legislation and regulation in Nova Scotia.

We in the NDP appreciate this proposal having been brought forward. We hope that by its being raised to public attention through this bill today, the pressure will be increased on the government to bring about initiatives for improvement in this area, of the sort that in the first two years of the mandate we haven't yet seen.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to make a few comments on this proposal.

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

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to speak on Opposition Bill No. 306, the Serious Illness Leave Act. As everyone knows here, I'm a physiotherapist who has spent almost 40 years working with those with chronic illness. As someone who actually had a chronic illness myself that took me out of the workforce for seven years, I know how devastating chronic illness can be, so I'm pleased to speak to this legislation today.

One of the things that all members would know is that when legislation is introduced, you don't just take it back to your department and snap your fingers and make it happen. There's a lot of consultation that has to go into it. I know that the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration would like to speak to this, but she's already spoken to it. She did want me to remind the House that after the bill was introduced last session, her department were already looking into the bill and starting the conversations.

Just for those who aren't aware, when you introduce a bill, sometimes it takes a while for it to become law. As an example, on March 14, 2019, I introduced the Adoption Information Act, and on March 12, 2021, the then-government passed the Adoption Records Act. It took two years of good consultation with the community to pass legislation that was extremely important and highly sensitive, and it was done very well. I am very confident that the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration are doing that consultation and taking the opportunity to make sure that they have the conversations with everyone who is involved.

One of the things I want to mention that people may not be aware of is . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. It's getting awfully loud in here. I ask that we respect the person who is speaking.

The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care.

BARBARA ADAMS: One of the things that I want to draw everyone's attention to - because you may not be aware of it, so it's important for all of us to hear it - is when I first had an orientation by the CEO of the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia when I first became an MLA, I asked her, What's the number one reason people call?

Sorry, not the WCB, the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission. I asked the Human Rights Commission, What's the number one reason people call? and it was not at all what I expected. It was failure of employers to accommodate someone's disability in the workplace. Sixty-seven per cent of all phone calls were about an employer who was either unable or unwilling to accommodate illness. I can tell you as somebody who did Functional Capacity Evaluation testing, there are a significant number of us - some are here in this House - who are getting older and who are not able to do the jobs that they originally went to school to do, and did for many years, if not decades.

One of things that we as a government and as a society have to grapple with is that we have a lot of occupations that some of us are going to age out of the capacity to do. As a health professional I have been encouraging every employer and every health care department and educational school that we have to start anticipating that a CCA may not be able to lift somebody out of a bathtub when she's 60 years old.

I use an example of someone I wrote a Capacity Evaluation form for because I was trying to reduce her chronic illness. She worked in a place where she had to climb up a ladder to put a case of rum on the top shelf. Well, there were only two people in the workplace doing that job. For her to be accommodated in the workplace, it would have created undue hardship on the other employee.

There are a lot of things that we need to do, as a government and as employers, to reduce the injury rate, and I'll give you an example. We raised the staffing level in long-term care to 4.1 hours of care. One of the reasons was to provide better care for the seniors, and that is happening, but the other reason is that in long-term care and in home care, we had the highest injury rate of all professions, and that includes a lumberjack who is lifting heavy things.

With the investment of extra staffing, safety equipment, the ability to have somebody there beside you when you're doing things, we have shown two years in a row a reduction in the injury rate in home care by 9 per cent and in long-term care by 14.3 per cent. That has a positive impact on the employer, as well as the employee.

[4:15 p.m.]

While we need to look at the benefits that we give to those who have a chronic illness, we also need to get at the root causes of chronic illness. One of those things is looking at what supports we give to employers so that they can better accommodate people in the workplace. Because we also know that there are those who are not working because of mental health challenges, and there are not a lot of employers who have the knowledge of: How do we support somebody who has those things?

I can tell you, as somebody who was off work for seven years, I was treated like I was a malingerer. Even people in my own profession, who went to school with me, looked down on me because I was injured and off work and they didn't understand the illness that I had. It was a chronic pain, chronic respiratory illness that they did not understand. So, the stigma against those with chronic illness is alive and well.

I understand the purpose of this legislation is to protect those who are chronically ill, and I know that the Department of LSI is doing that consultation work right now. We also have to look at how we, as a society, treat those who are chronically ill. We have to encourage all employers to consider having those accommodations.

One of those accommodations I know full well is those who are looking after elderly parents. They're stressed out from trying to look after their elderly parent and their children at the same time. If they happen to work in the Legislature, they might be here until midnight some nights.

There are a lot of societal stressors that we didn't have 10, 20, or 30 years ago. We've got cellphones going off at all hours of the night. We've got people who can't get jobs because they don't have the technology, and employers are just struggling to make the bottom line. There are other opportunities to provide employers with supports to help those with a serious illness.

The other thing that we need to do to support those with serious illness is to help them understand where they can get the help that they need. I know we haven't talked about it much in here - and in some cases, people made light of it - but one of the things that I heard over and over again when I was in private practice as a physiotherapist was: Where do I go to get home care? How do I get my mother on the long-term care wait-list?

When I got the MyHealthNS app, I plugged it on, I typed in: Where do I get home care? Boop, there's the answer right there. We're changing the access points for those who have acute illnesses and those who have chronic illnesses, because not knowing where to go get help is almost as big a barrier as getting the actual help itself. We as a society need to be better educated on what we all can do to accommodate those who have chronic illnesses.

I think back to an example when I was a physiotherapy student. I was at the old Infirmary, and they put all four of us physio students in wheelchairs. They made us go up the street in the wheelchairs. Of course, the first thing we did was - we were crossing the street and we all tipped out of the wheelchairs because we were going down a thing and then everybody's cars stopped. They were slamming on the brakes to get out because they thought we were handicapped, and I did feel terrible about that. I went into - and I won't say which store - on Spring Garden Road, and I could not get my wheelchair around because the aisles were too narrow.

I just want to say in terms of this bill, protecting leave for those with serious illness, there is a huge emphasis on our government to try to reduce the injury of serious illness at the same time as we are looking at what more we could do to protect those who do have a serious illness.

One of the other things that I know is important to the minister is making sure that consultation gets done. They're reviewing the issue and they're monitoring what is happening in other jurisdictions. It is always an issue that the minister raises when she is speaking at the interministerial conferences. Their department is also aware that the federal job protection and employment insurance sick leave benefit has changed, and they appreciate the Canadian Cancer Society for taking the time to meet with the Labour, Skills and Immigration Department to discuss this important issue. We know that the Canadian Cancer Society has advocated for job protection which aligns with the federal government's employee insurance sick leave benefits which increased in December of 2022 from 15 weeks to 26 weeks.

As always, all of our departments are impacted by any legislation that protects injured workers. You'll recall that last year we passed legislation regarding the end of pregnancy leave, and as members would know, it took a year to do proper consultation. That issue had been raised by another member of this House. The Labour, Skills and Immigration Department took the time to review it, understand what other jurisdictions were doing, consult on the topic, and they brought forward a strong, conclusive, and inclusive piece of legislation.

Serious illnesses such as cancer affect the lives of Nova Scotians and their families. It literally affects every one of us. The minister wants you all to know that she is listening and looking into the issue. She wants to hear from all Nova Scotians as well as employers, because any time you bring in legislation that impacts employers, you impact their bottom line, the cost of goods and services, so it is not something that you can just do lightly. There has to be an impact analysis done, both the pros and the cons, and everyone needs to have the opportunity to weigh in. We are encouraging all Nova Scotians who have feedback on this to reach out to the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration to provide that feedback.

We also know that we want to talk to the Human Rights Commission in terms of what they are doing to help employers accommodate people in the workplace because WCB will tell you that the longer an employee is off work, the less chance they have of going back to work. I think it's two years - I broke the standard after being off for seven years, which were the worst seven years of my life. Being able to keep people in the workplace is the ultimate goal. Sometimes accommodation needs to be made, and the more we're willing to accommodate, the better.

I want to encourage all employers who may be looking at this legislation as something to be of concern - to consider it an opportunity to look at what you are doing to welcome your employees back in the workplace after they have been injured, or to anticipate - and even have prevention programs that you could put in place to anticipate that as someone ages in place - that they are given a job that has the functional capacity for them to complete. There is an opportunity for employers to even provide rehabilitation and prevention-style programs, like fitness programs, to help their employees stay in as good a shape as possible, as well as the mental resilience they need in the workplace.

In conclusion, Speaker, I know that all of our departments are impacted by anyone with a serious illness. We understand the importance of this issue and that we are doing our due diligence across all our government departments to look at any changes that might come to the Labour Standards Code. We're going to talk to all the employers and employee groups to better understand their perspectives and if we move forward, how we would define a serious illness.

I want to thank the member for bringing forward this bill and I look forward to hearing the closing remarks from the member.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the member, it will be to adjourn the debate.

HON. KELLY REGAN: As we have heard from my colleagues here previously, this really is resulting from concerns that have come forward from the community and also from actions that the federal government has taken.

They changed the employment insurance rules back in December 2022 to allow people who were suffering from illness to access employment insurance for up to 26 weeks. Of course, what we have heard is that Nova Scotia labour law only guarantees employees working in provincially regulated industries a maximum of three days unpaid leave, due to illness. That is not adequate for a lot of people suffering from serious illnesses.

What we do know is that according to a Narrative Research poll conducted in August 2023, 86 per cent of Nova Scotians would actually like to see the extension of job protected leave to 26 weeks. That has already been done in industries that are governed by federal jurisdiction - things like transportation, communications, the federal government,

et cetera. In those federally governed industries they have this ability already but those of us, and most of the population, in fact does work in provincially regulated jobs.

This is what we're talking about, that vast majority of the population that currently doesn't have the ability to get job-protected leave to be able to go off on EI. Some people can go off on EI but they don't know if they are going to have a job there when they come back. Not every employer is going to want their employee to go away and then come back.

We have heard throughout this process about people who would come back to very different jobs because while they were gone their employer had changed what their job was.

One of my colleagues has noted that well, you know, the Liberal government before didn't do anything about this. The fact of the matter is that neither did the NDP government. We all need to do better. We all need to do better for Nova Scotians to give them the support they need when they are fighting serious illness - period, final, full stop. All parties in this House need to do better for Nova Scotians.

There's a variety of things that have come forward over the last while but one of the really interesting things is actually what happened today. Something happened today that should make us all sit up and take notice. Ontario, with a Progressive Conservative government, came out with a news release that says, and I'm just going to quote from it here:

“To help workers dealing with a critical illness, the government will be launching consultations on a new job-protected leave to match the length of federal employment insurance sickness benefits, which is 26 weeks. A job-protected leave could ensure employees who receive a diagnosis of cancer or other diseases will have the peace of mind that their job will be waiting for them while they seek treatment.

‘Ontarians should be able to focus on their cancer treatment without worrying about what it means for their job or how their family will pay their bills,’ said Hillary Buchan-Terrell, Advocacy Manager for the Canadian Cancer Society. ‘We look forward to engaging with the government during this consultation to ensure the perspectives and concerns of cancer patients in Ontario are heard.’”

I also found it was interesting that the Government of Ontario indicated it would also soon introduce legislation that would have required employers to disclose salary ranges along with consultations to restrict the use of non-disclosure agreements in cases of workplace sexual misconduct. They're moving ahead on a number of items that the Opposition parties have, in fact, raised here in the House of concern to Nova Scotians.

Clearly, they are of concern to Ontarians too, and they are, in fact, moving on these, and that is Ontario. I will table that.

[4:30 p.m.]

We have these concerns that have been raised. It is true that it does take time to consult, and the honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care noted the particular instance of the Adoption Information Act, which took a long time to consult. But one of the things that actually happened during that consultation period was that people knew we were consulting. We didn't just say, hey, we're going to consult, or we're going to talk, or we're going to think about it, we're going to take that back - and then did nothing. We began consulting. We did interviews about it. I believe there were news releases about it. People knew we were consulting. They knew this process was happening while it was going on.

Since introducing this bill last Spring, which had positive comments from the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration - and I would note, positive comments from the Premier - we have heard nothing. It's been crickets. We have no idea if they're consulting, because we haven't heard anything. That's why we've been asking questions about it, and why we had a resolution come forward about it last week, I think it was. That's why we've been pushing it: because people who are fighting serious illness need help. It's not just good enough to say, yes, that's a good idea, we've got to ask about it, and then do nothing. Indeed, if in fact consultation is going on, we'd love to know about it, but we haven't heard anything about that. That is why we have been pushing this.

We've heard some important stories. Again, my colleague, the leader of our party, talked about Kathy MacNaughton. This woman from Pictou, Nova Scotia, put this issue on the national map. She got the federal government to move on this front. That's a pretty amazing thing for anyone from anywhere to do. This woman raised it, and raised it because she saw what her husband went through. During his battle with cancer, he was actually working to pay his family's bills.

When you're going through cancer treatment, to have to go out and get a job so your family can live, I found that heartbreaking. As my colleague, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition noted, Nova Scotia is really at the bottom of the heap in terms of the number of days of job-protected leave that provinces give across the country. There's a range of between three days, and then there's 26 weeks, which is Quebec. Now we have Ontario moving to consult on this.

If the Province of Nova Scotia is, in fact, going to consult, it would be really great if they issued a press release because we do see a lot of press releases come out of this government about a lot of things, and usually they're about - if there's a program, it gets announced several times. So it would be really great if they did, in fact, share a press release so people know that this is actually being worked on. For people, it could give them some

hope that they will have this job-protected leave and the ability to collect E.I. while they are fighting cancer. That would be really nice - and we could join Quebec.

When I introduced the bill in the Spring, I was really excited. I thought Nova Scotia could be one of the first in the country. Quebec already has it. Then today, there's Ontario out the door. They're consulting on it - and we have not been.

Back in April, the minister said that she and department officials are reviewing the legislation and intend to consult with the public, and business operators. We have heard nothing about that consultation. The minister was right - it is an important issue for Nova Scotians.

Everyone in this House - my honourable colleague, the leader, talked about the statistics - 6,800 Nova Scotians would be diagnosed with cancer in 2022, the Canadian Cancer Society said. For every person who's diagnosed with cancer, there may be a spouse, there may be children, there may be parents - their friends, loved ones. It's like a spiderweb - it goes out from there. So we believe that this is of critical importance to people who are suffering from cancer as well as their friends and loved ones. We think that this is an idea whose time has come.

The Canadian Cancer Society has been advocating for this for quite a long time over and over in various jurisdictions across the country. Other advocacy groups are advocating for it as well. I do note that in one of their bulletins that they did put out on this particular issue, they noted that by the year 2030, projected cancer cases in Nova Scotia will increase significantly. As a result, Nova Scotia must be prepared to increase supports for people living with cancer in order for them to receive the treatment they need to recover, be healthy and adjust to a new normal. Nova Scotians should not have to choose between receiving cancer treatment and working.

Really, that's what we're here talking about. We want to make sure that when people are in the fight of their lives, they have as much support as we can possibly offer them. Does it seem right that if you're working in a federally regulated industry, you get better benefits than you do if you're in a provincially regulated industry? This is not just talking about civil servants. These are talking about industries. Transportation - I was talking about that. It's all set out in Sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act - which jurisdiction governs which industry.

It does seem to me that there's something that's patently unfair. If you work in a federally regulated industry, you get job-protected leave, 26 weeks, but if you work in a provincial one, you get three days. That doesn't seem fair to me. So Nova Scotia has a chance to join Quebec in consulting on this and then moving on this. It has a chance to join Ontario in consulting on this. I hope that they will move on this.

My family doesn't have a history of cancer, so this hasn't touched my family, but it has touched my constituents' families. It has touched my friends' families. All of us in here have constituents who suffer from cancer and other serious illnesses.

I think it makes sense to consult in a vigorous way, to let people know you're consulting, and to actually move on this particular bill.

I think I told this story, but I'm not exactly sure whether I did or not. I remember one of my mom's best friends when I was growing up. Her husband was an accountant, and he got cancer. They declared bankruptcy.

While some protections have improved since that time, many have not. I do believe that Nova Scotia has the opportunity to move on this, to make things better for our constituents, which is why we're in this House, sitting long hours in some cases, and not sitting long hours in other cases.

Speaker, I now move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 306.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I just want to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery. We're joined by some municipal dignitaries. We have Warden Amanda Mombourquette, Councillor Michael Diggdon, and CAO Troy MacCulloch. They have come to watch tonight's proceedings. I ask the House to join me in recognizing our visiting guests and thank them for coming down to Province House.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House. I hope you enjoy your time here.
The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: That concludes Opposition business for the day. I'll pass the floor back over to the Government House Leader to continue with government business.

THE SPEAKER: As there is no adjournment debate for tonight, we will not interrupt proceedings at the moment of interruption.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I will be calling Bill No. 119 and Bill No. 396 for second reading. Bill No. 119 is the Endometriosis Awareness Month Act. Bill No. 396 is the Sickle Cell Awareness Day Act. The government will be supporting these bills. To permit that to happen swiftly, I request unanimous consent to permit these bills, if they pass second reading today, to bypass the Standing Committee on Law Amendments and the Committee of the Whole House on Bills, and to be permitted to call today for third reading.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for unanimous consent to permit Bill No. 119 and Bill No. 396, if they pass second reading today, to bypass the Standing Committee on Law Amendments and Committee of the Whole House on Bills, and to be permitted to be called today for third reading.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 119.

Bill No. 119 - Endometriosis Awareness Month Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes, endometriosis awareness - we should all practice saying it, and that will help us with our awareness of this very important bill and this very debilitating condition.

First of all, I want to thank the government for calling this bill for debate. It is an issue that affects many people with uteruses in our province and in our country and around the world. First, I would just like to remind members exactly what the Act says, because it gives you a very good sense of what endometriosis is, and the pain and debilitation it can cause:

[4:45 p.m.]

“An Act to provide for the designation of Endometriosis Awareness Month.

Whereas endometriosis is a common condition experienced by one in 10 women, trans and non-binary people of reproductive age, and can cause debilitating conditions, including chronic pelvic pain, and is sometimes associated with infertility; and

Whereas there is no cause yet known for the disease, and diagnostics and treatment can often be severely delayed from the onset of symptoms; and

Whereas in many cases, people can go up to eight years or longer without a diagnosis; and

Whereas research shows that youth with endometriosis symptoms are more likely to miss one or two days of school per month, causing them to fall behind in their studies and lead to adverse effects on their grades and self-confidence, and adults with endometriosis can lose 10 hours of productivity per week, costing the Canadian economy an estimated \$1.8 billion per year; and

Whereas increasing public awareness of endometriosis is imperative as many people spend years unaware their symptoms are abnormal; and

Whereas delays in diagnosis and treatment can negatively impact education, work and quality of life for those with endometriosis; and

Whereas this is an opportunity to educate the public about this common yet misunderstood disease and to encourage conversations and education around what is a ‘normal’ period;

Therefore be it enacted by the Governor and Assembly as follows:

1. This Act may be cited as the Endometriosis Awareness Month Act.

2. Throughout the Province, in each and every year, March shall be kept and observed under the name Endometriosis Awareness Month.”

I'm going to go over that a little bit again. Essentially, endometriosis affects one in 10 people with uteruses - and don't forget that people with uteruses make up 51 per cent of the population of the planet - yet this condition is hardly talked about. There's a taboo around it. We don't like to talk about uteruses, we don't like to talk about periods, we don't like to talk about painful periods - God forbid - and we don't like to talk about menstrual cramps.

Endometriosis is a lot more than menstrual cramps, and that is why we need a month to be able to educate the public, educate ourselves, educate politicians, educate physicians, and educate health care professionals about this.

Endometriosis is an inflammatory disease that affects people with uteruses, as I've said, mostly during reproductive years. It means that there is tissue, similar to the lining of the uterus, growing outside the uterus. The clumps of tissue that grow outside the uterus are called implants. Implants usually grow on ovaries, the fallopian tubes, the outer wall of the uterus, the intestines, or other organs in the abdomen, and in rare cases they can even spread to further areas.

There is no known cure for endometriosis. As I said, it affects 1 in 10 people with uteruses, and the symptoms and conditions include chronic pelvic pain, nausea, excessive menstrual pain, and infertility. Because the condition affects mostly women, trans, and gender non-binary people, and because of the stigma and social silence around menstruation, it's poorly researched and understood. Misdiagnosis and lack of treatment support are common experiences for people living with endometriosis. Not all medical professionals take pelvic pain seriously, dismissing it as a bad period, a baked-in womanly pain, and prescribing birth control or painkillers.

Some people will go to family doctors or walk-in clinics dozens of times before anyone takes their concern seriously, and there are even stories of people travelling to other countries to receive care. For those who do receive a referral for specialized care, wait times can exceed years.

Research has found that women identified as people of colour are the least likely to have accounts of pain taken seriously by medical professionals. Research shows that endometriosis has cost the Canadian economy \$1.8 billion a year, with adult sufferers forced to miss work due to pain, and youth sufferers often falling behind in their studies at school.

Tracey Lindeman is an advocate for people with endometriosis and she says, “What ends up happening is a lot of people with endometriosis end up feeling like failures in life. You can't do the basic things that everyone else seems able to do.” I'll table that afterwards.

Many people have gone public with stories about lack of access to their OB/GYN carer for endometriosis. *The Coast* magazine conducted a survey that found that of the respondents, 64 per cent said their pain was dismissed by a medical professional while seeking care. The survey also found that the average wait time for an OB/GYN among the respondents was 14 months, and some people waited three and a half years.

There is a new IWK clinic that has opened, happily. The IWK has opened Atlantic Canada's first clinic devoted to endometriosis and pelvic pain, which is amazing. Billed as the first dedicated multidisciplinary endometriosis and chronic pain clinic in Atlantic Canada, it will offer gynecology, anesthesiology, and physiotherapy, and will serve the entire region.

But - there's always a but - the wait to get into the clinic is 18 months, and even getting a referral can be challenging in provinces where thousands of people have no family doctor. The clinic will help, but we need to do more, and awareness is part of the puzzle.

Endometriosis Awareness Month began in March 1993, and it is now observed worldwide through activities such as education, fundraising, and marches. The Endometriosis Association is a self-help organization including women and families with endometriosis, doctors, scientists, and others interested in exchanging information about the endometriosis disease. These are some of the reasons why our caucus introduced this bill that would recognize the month of March as Endometriosis Awareness Month. Increasing public awareness of endometriosis is very important, as many menstruators spend years unaware that their symptoms are abnormal.

I just want to take a moment here and just quickly talk about the fact that our Legislature now has more people with uteruses than ever before - or actually, that's not true - in 2017 it was more than ever before. We're slightly below that now. But there are a lot of uteruses in this room. That wasn't the case say, 10 years ago. It certainly wasn't the case longer ago than that.

I will say, as I've said before, that that is a good reason to make sure we are electing people with uteruses. We should be making it a goal to have 50 per cent of this room women or non-binary people. This is exactly the reason. Because we can stand up and we can talk about endometriosis as an actual important and debilitating disease that many people suffer from, and we can pass laws that will help the issue and ultimately bring comfort - literally physical comfort, one day - to the people who have endometriosis.

I said before, to the Speaker at the time, that as health and wellness critic for the NDP, I want to be talking about women's health, people with uteruses' health more and more. I think I made the Speaker at the time blush a little bit, because I said a lot of things like periods, and uteruses, and vaginas, and menopause, and those kinds of words that we don't like to talk about.

I am here today on my feet talking about them because we need to. Because if you don't talk about them, then people have endometriosis for eight years undiagnosed, and live with debilitating pain.

When I was young, pre-child-bearing - well no, child-bearing years, but pre-child-bearing - I had terribly painful periods. There were times - it was unpredictable, but there were times - when I would be at work, and thank God I worked in a situation where I could go off and do stretches in the corner, because I was an actor and that's kind of what we did anyway - and I would leave the rehearsal and go over and cry in the corner. I would stretch until somehow the drugs kicked in. It was brutal. There were days when I couldn't get out of bed. I didn't even have that bad a situation.

I know that in the situation that I was in - where I would have to leave the workspace and take time to get control of the pain I was having - if it had been any worse, I wouldn't have been there and wouldn't have been able to work. I know that for people with endometriosis, the pain is much worse than that - it lasts for many days, and it's with every period. This idea that it's just normal that periods hurt shouldn't be the way it is.

I want everyone to contemplate that for a minute. I want to reiterate that I am very pleased the government is looking at this bill and we will pass this bill.

I would also like to thank Maggie Archibald and the coalition of people who suffer with endometriosis who have brought this situation to light with their constant advocacy on social media, to government, and to politicians, and thank them for their hard work. I hope they will get to see the benefits and the result of their advocacy with this bill being proclaimed.

I will also say, in closing, that an awareness month is important, but what's more important is real training, research, and advocacy into medications, surgeries, and treatments that will address this condition so endometriosis can become something that people used to suffer with but don't anymore.

With those words, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I'm pleased to rise for a moment here this afternoon to speak on Bill No. 119, brought forward by the member for Dartmouth North.

This bill designates March as Endometriosis Awareness Month. March is observed globally as Endometriosis Awareness Month, with formal recognition by several regional governments within Canada, including most recently the Province of Ontario.

As the bill outlines, endometriosis is a common condition experienced by 1 in 10 women, trans, and non-binary people of reproductive age. That means the odds are that we all know someone who suffers with endometriosis.

[5:00 p.m.]

The disease can be debilitating. Conditions include chronic pelvic pain, and it is sometimes associated with infertility. Research shows that youth with endometriosis symptoms are more likely to miss one or more days of school - which my colleague just talked about - causing them to fall behind in their studies and leading to adverse effects on their grades and self-confidence.

For adults with endometriosis, this can translate to a loss of 10 hours of productivity per week. It is estimated that endometriosis costs the Canadian economy \$1.8 billion per year.

The IWK Health Centre is home to Atlantic Canada's first clinic dedicated to endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain. We are proud of the wonderful work being done at the clinic that serves the entire region. It's a multi-disciplinary approach with several services in one place.

Increasing public awareness of endometriosis is crucial to helping people understand that the symptoms they are experiencing are abnormal. I wanted to speak to this bill because I do want to talk about the importance of awareness.

My daughter's best friend, Laura, was one of the most beautiful girls I'd ever met. She spent a lot of time at my house. She became one of my other daughters. It always felt like I had three daughters with Laura.

Laura suffered from endometriosis. She suffered for a long time. In the end, Laura passed away from a surgery while she was trying to find some type of relief for this chronic condition.

I can tell you, because I thought I was her mother, I watched her suffer. I watched her miss so many things, and my daughter would miss those special times too, so that she could be with Laura. When we lost Laura, I always said that it was something that I would champion. So I just want to say, thank you so much to the NDP for bringing this bill forward. When I saw it, it touched my heart. I know it's touching my daughter's heart right now in P.E.I., because I'm pretty sure she's listening to me. And Laura, I hope you're listening, too, because this is for you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I do find it interesting that all of the speakers on this particular issue have been people who have, or have had - I shouldn't make assumptions - uteruses. The point that my colleague from Dartmouth North made - that these conversations didn't happen before we had sort of a critical mass in this House of women, or people with uteruses - it's been something that I've spoken about previously, because quite frankly, a lot of the things that we talk about in here would be different from what they were even when I was first elected 14 years ago.

Not long ago, I was working on a bill that had something to do with periods, and Legislative Counsel - God bless them - wanted to say "menstruation." I said, No, I want to say "periods," because that's what everybody calls them. Let's use plain language in here. Let's not use the Latin term for whatever, and cloak it in mystery. Fifty per cent of us have or have had uteruses, so let's call them what we call them.

To me, that's important. Making the concerns of women become an everyday topic that we discuss in the House is important. Now, I never suffered from endometriosis, but I had friends who did, and it was excruciating. They missed work. They would be in emergency rooms writhing in pain. They had growths outside their uterus on other organs. It is not just a minor "women's problem." It is not just a bad period.

The other thing that goes along with this is the tendency, and I hope it's less now, for some health care professionals - I want to be very careful how I say this, because not everybody is like this - to dismiss the concerns of women because they don't understand it, or they don't know how to relieve it or how to diagnose it. All too often, women's health concerns are dismissed or shunted aside. They're told they're crazy.

That's why I think it's important that we have Endometriosis Awareness Month. People need to understand that this is a real condition. It is not just a bad period. It can be debilitating. It can affect fertility, and a woman's overall health. If you have growths on organs outside your uterus, that is going to affect your overall health. It is not just a once-a-month or a few-days-a-month kind of thing. It can affect you in very serious ways. That is why I am pleased to see that we are debating this bill today. It's an important bill for women and people with uteruses, and it's important for the people who love them, who may, in fact, have uteruses, or may not.

Women's health is Nova Scotians' health. The more information we can get out to people so that conditions like endometriosis are better understood and accepted, that means - my one friend who had it was a television anchor. I remember she had her TV makeup on, and she had an episode. So she goes into ER, and she said, I had black everywhere - she was mortified by the way she looked. She thought that they might think she was in a stage play. She was like, I'm a television anchor and I'm here to tell you I have this terrible, terrible pain. She wanted to be taken seriously, and she was worried that if she went in with all this makeup and it's running everywhere they wouldn't take her seriously. I think bills like this, days like this, months like this, they help to ensure that the concerns of women

are taken seriously when they go to ERs, when they go to see their family doctor. If they can't get in to see their family doctor, it's another thing. That makes it difficult for anyone who has any condition to progress through their treatment.

I do want to note that the more we do this, the more we make people aware of conditions that have previously been shrouded in secrecy and sometimes shame, the better off all of us are going to be. I want to thank my colleague for bringing this bill forward and thank the government for calling it today.

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, go ahead, please.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: In the gallery opposite is Maggie Archibald. Maggie is the force behind this month. I'd like all members to give her the warm welcome of the House. (Standing ovation)

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Maggie is no stranger to this place. I remember driving on a highway in Cape Breton in a blizzard with my colleagues, and the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island saying, We've got to call Maggie Archibald. I said, Are you kidding? It's a whiteout and there's no service. She said, No, we said we'd call Maggie. She's got to talk to us about this bill.

We called Maggie and miraculously the cell service held and we didn't go off the road, and she shared with us some of the reasons that we have heard already tonight about why this bill is so important. I think it's really important to acknowledge that, and I want to thank you, Maggie, for doing that. I think also there is a cautionary tale in this story. I think that Maggie and other advocates have had to move mountains to convince not just politicians but the medical establishment that their pain is real. As the member for Bedford Basin said, it is women and non-binary folks who, so far, are speaking to this bill or are slated to.

We talk a lot about the challenges and triumphs faced predominantly by men in this Chamber, frankly, but I think it's also important that we acknowledge the pain and the silence that is so often experienced by women and non-binary folks in our society. That can be physical pain, as in the case of endometriosis, or all kinds of other pain. I think that that speaks to, as has been said, the need to really acknowledge this and to ground it in people's real experience. I thank the minister so much for her comments because those kinds of stories remind us why we're here. They remind us why we pass legislation like this.

Things touch us. They touch us in our personal life and they touch us in our professional life, and occasionally, if our better angels are on the right side and the stars align, we can turn that into legislation that can help people. I do believe that this can help people. I also have friends and family who have suffered with this disease and let me tell you something: Every single person in this Chamber has friends and family who have suffered with this disease. It's really important to think about that.

Imagine, for those of you who haven't had this experience, going into an emergency room and saying, I have debilitating pain; going to your family doctor and saying, I can't work, my pain is so bad - and having someone tell you to take a couple of Advil, lie down, and you'll feel better. This is what routinely happens.

I think we often talk - those of us who have given birth - about the pain of childbirth and the ways in which people who haven't had that experience don't understand that pain, but I think the same is true for lots of other conditions, and this is one of them.

I really have always believed that the most important thing we can do in this Chamber and in these jobs is to do our best to be empathetic to the concerns of Nova Scotians - to the concerns of constituents. I think this bill is really a display of that empathy. What we're trying to do with this bill is to say to people who are experiencing this pain, are challenged to find treatment, or are challenged to be believed, We hear you, we see you, and we believe you. We acknowledge your pain. We know it's bad, and we will be a continuing part of the drive to ensure that everyone can get up-to-date effective treatment for endometriosis.

Thank you, Maggie. Thank you to the other members for supporting this bill. With those few words, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the honourable member for Dartmouth North, it will be to close debate.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you very much to everyone who offered their words to this debate. With those few words, I move to close debate on second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to close debate on second reading of Bill No. 119.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried, and the bill will be read a third time on a future day, which could be today.

The honourable Government House Leader.

[5:15 p.m.]

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Private Members' Public Bills for Third Reading.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, please call Bill No. 119

Bill No. 119 - Endometriosis Awareness Month Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, I move third reading of Bill No. 119, the Endometriosis Awareness Month Act. I'm going to take my seat, and my colleague will say a few words.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I want to start by acknowledging Maggie's presence in this House. Maggie was good at getting in contact with her MLA and her MLA's office. In seriousness, this is the work we do. This is how we understand how these systems do or don't work. Here was a young person in Nova Scotia who could not get access to care and was in pain. It took a lot of shaking and Maggie's persistence to make that system work a little better. I know it's not perfect, Maggie. We're going to keep on working on it.

The other side is also that - Maggie, you're so active on social media and in the public. This is really the heart of the bill. My colleagues have talked about the need to talk about lots of different types of health, including for folks with uteruses. Endometriosis is such an important issue.

I would agree that 10 or 20 years ago, we didn't talk about this. I had never heard of it until I was in my mid-20s. My friend started to confide in me and said, No, I don't think I'm going to be able - they told me I can't have children by birth because I have endometriosis. That's why you don't see me sometimes in classes, and that's why sometimes I have to miss work.

I had never heard of this condition for all the other friends I've had who had been sick in various different ways. I think about that friend who patiently described the condition and bravely explained it to me in my mid-20s, and that bookends with Maggie's advocacy right now in Nova Scotia.

I think it's really important to note that women's health and women's pain and people's uterus are often really dismissed, particularly when it's the more difficult concerns. I know in the U.S. that African-American women are 50 per cent less likely to be diagnosed with endometriosis, because we're not only dealing with misogyny and sexism at that point, but also the impact of racism in the health system that creates enormous barriers to health care.

I think there are also ongoing barriers for 2SLGBTQIA+ folks - especially, I will say, around sexual health and reproductive health. People often just don't quite know what to do with you, so it is so important to create awareness. People have spoken to the barriers that it creates for people in their education, the barriers it creates for people in their employment, loss of income, and often with very limited social and societal supports. This is not a predictable cycle of debilitating pain and it's really hard to try to talk to your teachers, try to talk to your profs, try to talk to your employers and explain why you seem actually a little flaky and unreliable but actually you're dealing with a really serious, chronic health issue that in Nova Scotia still takes years to get a diagnosis, years to get treatment. Even once you move through your primary health care provider - if you have one - the wait at the IWK Health Centre is long and really the only way to fully diagnose endometriosis is through laparoscopic surgery, so you have to line up for that.

This is a very serious, chronic issue and often has longer-term effects around irritable bowel syndrome, chronic fatigue, anxiety and depression, so awareness is a great start. We obviously need to do more in terms of service access. We need to treat chronic pain as the real issue that it is and not dismiss people. I'm very happy that we have the chance to pass this bill to start that journey in endometriosis in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable member for Dartmouth North, it will be to close third reading on Bill No. 119.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I do move to close third reading on Bill No. 119, the Endometriosis Awareness Month Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to close third reading on Bill No. 119, the Endometriosis Awareness Month Act.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

[PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 396, Sickle Cell Awareness Day Act.

Bill No. 396 - Sickle Cell Awareness Day Act.

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: Through you to the House, I move second reading of Bill No. 396, an Act to Establish a Sickle Cell Awareness Day. This was initially brought forward by the member for Cole Harbour, who has been an advocate throughout his life but certainly since he became elected, so I want to thank him primarily for his focus on this subject.

Sickle cell is an inherited condition most commonly affecting people of African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, and South Asian ancestry. It requires blood transfusions and bone marrow transplants to treat or cure it. The disease causes strokes, organ damage, and increases the risk of complicated infections. It is up to us to take part in trying to fight the disease and bring awareness to it, and establishing a Sickle Cell Awareness Day scheduled for June 19th is one simple way that we can demonstrate our thoughtfulness towards fighting this disease.

I will say that I recognize that blood donors are few and far between, it seems like, generally speaking, and even more so with respect to the aforementioned communities - the members of the African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, and South Asian folks who identify from those communities and we need to work hard to break down barriers associated with connecting with members of those communities in the interest of providing better access to health care, to blood donations, blood availability. We need to work hard to build more trust with these communities and meet them where their needs are, where they physically are, and where they are perhaps mentally. It is up to us to make sure we demonstrate a conscious effort to meet patients - meet those Nova Scotians where they are.

I will also note that the Canadian government, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations also recognized June 19th as Sickle Cell Awareness Day, and so I think it is certainly a great gesture to join suit, become a province that is joined in that effort.

To wrap up my remarks, I want to thank the folks who are working at Canadian Blood Services, the folks working at the Nova Scotia Brotherhood Initiative and Nova Scotia Sisterhood. I want to thank the government for partnering with the Liberal caucus to advance this recognition day. Last, but certainly not least, I'd like to thank the member for Cole Harbour for bringing this forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to say a few words on Bill No. 396. Similar to the bill that was just passed here in the House, it has a number of hidden things that happen when folks have sickle cell anemia. I want to take you back to a time when I had a close friend who had sickle cell anemia, but we never knew for many years because he hid it. We just had no idea why our friend would miss school, he wouldn't be in high school, he'd miss classes. An amazing kid - he wasn't a kid, but an amazing teenager - an amazing, fun-loving person who would light up a room and you would never know that he was sick. He constantly had a number of appointments, a number of times out of school and we were always wondering, Where is our friend? His name is Lawrence Njoku. Where's our friend at? Getting closer to his passing, we were like, What's going on? Where's Lawrence? How come he's not at school? When we went to go visit him, we were like, Why didn't you tell us? It was because he was such a bright light and things like this are hidden because we don't have enough information on that.

I think, just to point out the fact that these are really important diseases and illnesses that people need to be made aware of. It affects the African Nova Scotian and the Caribbean community a lot more because of the nature of the disease.

I stand here in tribute to my friend who passed away as a teenager. I wasn't thinking I was going to be upset. The whole while, he didn't let us know he was sick because he didn't want us to worry about him. He was very strong; he was a great person. His family - God love them - they continue on in the awareness vein. His brother is constantly talking at schools about sickle cell anemia, about giving blood and getting yourself checked and tested to make sure that you have the right tools in order to protect yourself if that's the case.

I will say that I'm grateful to be able to stand here today and talk about an awareness day for sickle cell anemia because we know that a lot of folks are affected by that. We want to make sure that we can do as much as we can to help folks who need this information and teach people about how to take care of themselves and what to look out for..

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

HON. TWILA GROSSE: I am pleased today to rise to speak to this important bill that recognizes June 19th as Sickle Cell Awareness Day. I am acquainted with sickle cell, as I have a cousin who has this disease. I note that June 19, 2024, is World Sickle Cell Day.

I am pleased that Nova Scotia will join with other jurisdictions around the world to raise awareness.

[5:30 p.m.]

According to the Reproductive Care Program of Nova Scotia, about one in every 6,200 babies born in the Maritimes has sickle cell disease. It is estimated that 5,000 Canadians have this disease. That number is projected to grow in coming years.

What is sickle cell? Well, it's a genetic disease that causes red blood cells to become sickle-shaped. Cells with sickle cell hemoglobin are stiff and sticky. When they lose oxygen, they form into this shape of a sickle or crescent, like the letter C. In Canada, sickle cell disease is most common in people who come from or whose ancestors came from Africa, Central America, especially Panama, South America, Caribbean nations, Mediterranean countries, India, or Near East countries.

This disease has significant impact on patient quality of life and impacts daily life. Blocked blood flow can lead to serious problems, including stroke, organ damage, eye problems, infections, and episodes of pain. Sickle cell disease is a lifelong illness. Bone marrow transplant is currently the only cure.

In Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, sickle cell disease is screened in newborns by the Maritime Newborn Screening Program. Early diagnosis for sickle cell disease through newborn screening allows for immediate intervention and treatment. Early interventions have been shown to prevent early mortality and severe illness in children born with this life-threatening disease. It may reduce hospitalizations and increase life expectancies.

Ultimately, newborn screening can lead to longer, healthier lives. Without newborn screening, newborns may suffer irreversible damage to health. Without newborn screening, affected individuals may suffer recurring infection, debilitating pain, anemia, and chronic organ damage, which includes stroke, kidney, and respiratory failure.

That's why awareness of this disease and why this bill is so important. Proactive measures are essential in providing the most effective treatments for those with sickle cell disease.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, it will be to close debate on second reading.

The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

HON. BEN JESSOME: I'd like to thank the minister and the member for Halifax Needham for adding a personal touch to the remarks expressed in the House today.

I move to close second reading of Bill No. 396.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 396.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried. Ordered that this bill be read a third time on a future day. Perhaps today.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

THE SPEAKER: We will take a short recess to set up for the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

[5:32 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance in the Chair.]

[7:05 p.m. The CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Nolan Young resumed the Chair.]

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

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole House on Bills has met and considered the following bills:

Bill No. 339 - Financial Measures (Fall 2023) Act.

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

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

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

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

without amendments, and

Bill No. 323 - Regulated Health Professions Act.

with certain amendments, and the Chair has been instructed to recommend these bills to the favourable consideration of the House.

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

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Third Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 321.

Bill No. 321 - Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act - Loi sur le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.

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

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 321 now be read a third time and do pass.

I'm pleased to stand here today to briefly reiterate the importance of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act. I want to begin by thanking my colleagues across the floor for their support of this legislation. The Leader of the Official Opposition noted that they were pleased to see this bill being introduced. It speaks strongly to the merits of the legislation and our strong partnership between CSAP, Acadian Affairs and Francophonie, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Many of us in this Chamber have Acadian or Francophone communities in our constituencies. We all know how important it is to our French-speaking constituents to have French first language schools that preserve and promote this vibrant culture. I was honoured to be able to introduce this piece of legislation - the first piece of legislation I've introduced as Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The goal of the bill is simple: to support the achievement, well-being, and success of Acadian and Francophone students in Nova Scotia by providing a world-class education and ensuring children see themselves and their culture reflected in our schools.

In 2018, this legislation was promised by the previous government. When I became Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development in 2021, no movement on this commitment had yet been made, despite the hard work of the department and the passionate advocacy of the CSAP. Valuing the Acadian and Francophone culture and language, it was a priority of mine to build a constructive and collaborative relationship with CSAP as an important educational partner. CSAP showed a willingness to engage and work together, and this bill is the result of the collaborative efforts of CSAP and our Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, under the direction of our government.

I want to reiterate my appreciation to both Marcel Cottreau, the former board chair of CSAP, and Michel Collette, the superintendent of CSAP, who have been very vocal about their support of this bill. Marcel recently finished serving his term as board chair, and I want to thank him for his support and his collaboration. I look forward to working with Diane Racette, the new board chair this year.

Marcel and Michel joined me in the House when I first introduced the bill, and more recently, they attended at Law Amendments to show their support of the bill. Within this legislation, we have clarified the roles and responsibilities of the CSAP board and removed duplication in existing education legislation.

This bill reaffirms the current duties and powers of the CSAP and ensures consultation on policies and regulations related to French first language education, empowering the voices of Acadian and francophone communities. The Act also includes a Memorandum of Understanding between the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, the CSAP, and me.

As I shared in my second reading, the MOU signifies our shared commitment to collaboration in responding to the needs of Nova Scotia's Acadian and francophone students and their families. We will be hiring a Director of French first-language within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to support this important work.

I'd like to take this opportunity to address a few questions that were raised about the bill. First, the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act and the Education Act work together; they are complementary. CSAP will continue to deliver the provincial curriculum and be guided by important policies, like the Provincial School Code of Conduct Policy and the Inclusive Education Policy, while continuing to promote Acadian and francophone culture and language.

I am proud that Nova Scotia will be the first jurisdiction in Canada to have a dedicated French first-language education act. This is about recognizing the role the CSAP plays in upholding minority language rights and our government's unwavering commitment to preserve and promote the French language in Nova Scotia.

I'd like to thank the CSAP, the Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie, Nova Scotia's Acadian and francophone communities, and members opposite for their support of this legislation. Thank you, and I look forward to hearing closing remarks from other members.

[7:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC : Monsieur le président, je vais dire quelques mots en français pour penser à approprier que je vais discuter la Loi N°. 321, Loi sur le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial. J'aimerais dire que je suis en support de la loi. Je suis content de voir que le ministre l'a introduit.

J'aimerais prendre cette occasion-ci pour reconnaître le travail du CSAP, surtout Michel Collette, le directeur général, et Marcel Cottreau, le président du CSAP. J'aimerais aussi reconnaître le travail qu'a été fait auparavant avec Kenneth Gaudet qui était le président du CSAP pour plusieurs années et Michel Comeau, l'ancien directeur général, qui ont fait beaucoup de travail sur cette loi-ci.

Certainement c'est une bonne loi. C'est la première au pays, et pour la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Ecosse, c'est certainement de quoi être fier. Ça va renforcer la langue et la culture acadienne et je suis certainement en faveur.

I'll try to repeat as much as I can in English. I am happy to stand in support of Bill No. 341, the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act. It's an important Act for the Acadian and francophone communities across the province. As was mentioned, it was the first in the country, and I think we must recognize that.

I also want to thank the hard work of the CSAP, especially Michel Collette, the Director General, and Marcel Cottreau, the President of the CSAP. I also think it's important to recognize the work of the last few years when Kenneth Gaudet, who was a strong advocate for the Acadian and French communities in this province, was President of the CSAP, and Michel Comeau, the former Director General, did a lot of work to try to fight for this bill. Again, I want to recognize their role in this; it has been many years of advocating on their behalf.

I believe it will have an impact on protecting and promoting the French language in our communities. The CSAP plays a big role in preserving our language and our culture. I don't want to talk too long about the impacts it does have. We've seen how our communities - especially the youth prior to the CSAP and the introduction of CSAP schools - and now we see many students taking an extra step and going to university in French in Moncton or at Université Sainte-Anne.

I guess the three points or pillars the CSAP was looking for when I worked in advocating - and we did put a bill forward. The three pillars of that bill were essentially a separate and independent law, that it would be Charter-compliant, and it would give the ability for the CSAP to govern themselves with a little bit more control.

This Act - and I did speak to a number of elected members of the CSAP - it is a good base: a good, solid law that they feel they can continue to work on and try to build, as you always do - you try to improve, and you try to build.

The only concerns, and I hope they don't become a realization, is that a lot will be in policy and regulations, rather than in the bill itself. I mean, that's always a concern with almost any bill, when you have to trust that some of those regulations and policies will be put in place with the appropriate consultation.

Again, we do support this bill. I think it is a good bill for the Acadian and francophone communities. Again, I want to congratulate the CSAP and everybody who did work on that. With that, I'll take my seat.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Monsieur le président, ça me donne énormément de plaisir de me lever afin de donner l'appui de notre caucus pour ce projet de loi. Comme mes collègues ont commenté déjà, il faut absolument commencer par reconnaître le rôle primordial de la communauté dans ces affaires. C'est toujours le cas avec les occasions de la langue et de la culture acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Chaque pas en avant, chaque projet de loi, c'est à cause de l'engagement de la communauté. C'est à cause des affaires pendant plusieurs années. Donc, il s'agit de les désigner.

Pendant l'année prochaine, il y aura quelques moments importants pour la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse. On a l'éducation en tant que base, mais après ça, on s'attend que le gouvernement dépose un projet de loi sur la livraison des services en français ainsi qu'avoir accueilli tout le monde pour le congrès mondial acadien.

I will just do a quick translation and then continue. I just wanted to say that I'm happy to support this on behalf of our caucus. As other colleagues have noted, so much of this work is the result of community efforts. Every project, every bill, every step it had in terms of language and culture of the Acadian and francophone communities, is because community is there to build that and to work on that.

I think it is significant that we have this bill on education, which is the base. We understand that there will be another bill brought forward on the delivery of French-language services, and of course the Congrès mondial acadien that is coming next Summer.

It's an important year; this is an important base. I think it's an important step. We have a commitment to growing our francophone population, we have a commitment and plan around francophone immigration and education, and having access to schools is so important. I'm part of the Francophones à Halifax Facebook group, or whatever. So many times, people drop in there to say, I found this group, we're moving from France, we're moving from Quebec, or we're a francophone family from wherever, but we need to know what schools - where can our kids go to school? Immediately, the community responds and says, It's okay, because we have the CSAP.

I think this is a really important piece to build on. I think I would echo my colleague's notes on concerns about leaving so much to regulation - that's certainly not in the spirit of making transparent and accountable law-making, and it is always a concern when the actual implementation is left to regulation.

I think the other thing I really want to emphasize is, as I said and as we all recognize, this happens because of the work of people in communities. Having this incredible resource reflects what happens when community is engaged in education. This government was elected with a commitment to restore school boards. We haven't heard anything about a revised commitment - some walk-back to some sort of community structure - but we still don't hear anything about that.

I think that if we support this bill and we support this structure, and we all recognize what makes it good and special, then we need to support and consider how we welcome community into all of our education system.

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

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, I am really pleased and honoured to be able to provide a few comments en anglais et en français, in English and in French. En Français, yes, we'll see how Hansard transcribes that one, en français. Bill No. 321, Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act, la Loi sur le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.

Madame la présidente, la communauté acadienne et francophone de notre province est en pleine croissance. Our Acadian and francophone community here in Nova Scotia is growing. With that growth certainly comes some challenges, but more so opportunities. As a government, we recognize those opportunities. We recognize of course also the importance of supporting our Acadian and francophone community. That's why I note a couple of examples that our government has initiated and supported. My honourable colleague the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration and I had the opportunity last November - I think perhaps to this day - to present our government's francophone action plan on immigration.

Il y a environ un an, Madame la présidente, que moi et la ministre du Travail, des

Compétences, et de l'Immigration ont eu l'occasion de présenter notre plan d'action sur l'immigration francophone. C'est cela - une des initiatives, je note, vraiment visées sur le système d'éducation, l'engagement de notre gouvernement pour appuyer une nouvelle école acadienne, une nouvelle école du CSAP, dans la région acadienne de Tor Bay, un moment historique pour cette région qui vient d'être reconnue il n'y a pas si longtemps que ça comme une nouvelle région acadienne en Nouvelle-Écosse.

Speaker, I also note our government's commitment to supporting a new francophone school, a new school for the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial in the newest Acadian region of Tor Bay, an historic moment for that region that has been a long time coming. We recognize that the language is the foundation of our culture.

La langue est la fondation de notre culture. Si on perd notre langue, on est sous la mauvaise voie qu'on va certainement perdre notre culture.

L'autre engagement qu'on a fait comme gouvernement, comme ma collègue a certainement mentionné, c'est certainement accueillir le monde acadien, le monde francophone l'année prochaine.

We will be welcoming next year thousands, tens of thousands, of Acadians and francophones from around the world for the Congrès mondial acadien in my constituency of Argyle and in Clare as well. As a government, we supported that world-class event with \$2.5 million. We're very excited to be able to showcase the birthplace of Acadie, le berceau de l'Acadie, right here, and hopefully we look at also the opportunities in the future for the Acadian and francophone community.

Finalemment, Madame la présidente, je note également une annonce récente qui est une demande de la communauté. Au mois d'août, le premier ministre et moi ont eu l'occasion de proclamer, de faire la déclaration, que le mois d'août, commençant en 2024, sera maintenant connu comme le mois du patrimoine acadien.

Last August - actually, it was August 15th, National Acadian Day - the Premier and I had the opportunity in my constituency to proclaim that starting in 2024, in August of 2024, that August will now be known as Acadian Heritage Month. It's symbolic for a number of reasons, because National Acadian Day already takes place in August, but also the significance that we'll be welcoming tens of thousands from around the world to Nova Scotia next year for the Congrès.

Nous avons plusieurs communautés acadiennes et francophones ici dans la province, de ma circonscription d'Argyle, dans le sud-ouest de la Nouvelle-Écosse, à Chéticamp et comme j'ai mentionné à Tor Bay. Ce projet de loi que la ministre de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance a présenté dans la chambre marque un moment historique - un moment historique ici en Nouvelle-Écosse et un moment historique pour le pays - qui va certainement appuyer la qualité de la langue et

l'enseignement du français comme langue première ici en Nouvelle-Écosse pour les étudiants, les enseignants, et puis certainement nos communautés acadiennes.

Ce projet de loi va avoir des répercussions positives et durables sur l'avenir des étudiants, j'ose dire. La section 23 de la Charte des libertés et des droits du Canada reconnaît l'importance pour s'assurer que nos enfants aient l'accès à l'éducation en langue minoritaire partout à travers le Canada.

Speaker, Section 23 of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms recognizes the significance of ensuring that our children have access to education in minority linguistic communities across Canada.

Il n'est pas nécessaire de répéter ce que ma collègue la ministre de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance a dit. Certainement, ce projet de loi respecte le rôle du CSAP pour s'assurer qu'ils veillent à l'enseignement de la langue française ici en Nouvelle-Écosse.

Madame la présidente, en terminant, j'aimerais vraiment souligner et reconnaître le travail de collaboration, le travail de collaboration qui a vraiment pu mener à cette réalisation aujourd'hui entre mon équipe à l'Office des affaires acadiennes et de la francophonie, l'équipe au ministère de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance, l'équipe du Conseil scolaire acadien provincial - je note Marcel Cottreau ainsi que Michel Collette. Certainement je remercie Marcel pour tout son travail et lui souhaite du bon succès dans l'avenir et félicite publiquement Diane Racette, la nouvelle présidente du CSAP, ainsi que Clyde deViller, le nouveau vice-président qui représente le CSAP de mon coin.

Speaker, remember what I said there in French, I'll repeat quickly. I just want to acknowledge and really recognize the collaborative efforts that have been put into this piece of work, into this piece of legislation. It has been a long time coming, but truly what we are debating and what we'll be passing this evening is the result of a lot of collaboration between the CSAP. I want to recognize Marcel Cottreau and Michel Collette. Marcel is no longer the President of the CSAP but now Diane Racette from the South Shore area and of course Clyde deViller, who is the new vice-president from my neck of the woods, so I want to congratulate them as well as Michel Collette and of course the staff at Acadian Affairs and Francophonie and the minister's staff at Education and Early Childhood Development.

En conclusion, Madame la présidente, je ne peux pas souligner assez l'importance de ce projet de loi pour assurer la protection des droits linguistiques et francophones ici dans notre province. Je suis très fier de pouvoir participer dans cette étape très marquante pour notre population acadienne et francophone.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development it will be to close debate on third reading.

[7:30 p.m.]

The honourable Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: As I rise to move closing third reading on this bill, I do want to comment. Members opposite observed that this kind of legislation happens because of the work of communities, and it happens because of the advocacy of the CSAP. I couldn't agree more with that, but I think it's also important to point out that those two things alone are not sufficient; you also need a government that is willing to collaborate in good faith with communities and with organizations. We are that government.

With that being said, I move to close third reading on Bill No. 321, an Act Respecting the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to close debate on third reading, Bill No. 321, Conseil scolaire acadien provincial Act.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 322.

Bill No. 322 - Opioid Damages and Health-care Costs Recovery Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I rise today on third reading of amendments to Bill No. 322. The proposed changes are being made so that we can hold opioid companies accountable for the impacts and damages caused by their actions. As one of the members opposite said, these damaging impacts have and continue to be felt broadly in our society by people struggling with addictions to opioids, by their families and their friends, and by communities all across our province. These impacts are deep, far-reaching, heartbreaking, and often tragic.

Many Nova Scotians have experienced the impacts of the opioid crisis first-hand, whether they are dealing with a substance use issue themselves, they know someone who is or has had their lives impacted by it, or they work in a profession that helps and responds to people struggling with these issues.

Hundreds of people in our province are dealing with opioid use disorder and dozens die each year from overdose - all genders, all races, people across all socio-economic status. Opioid addiction does not discriminate. Thirty-five Nova Scotians have died this year alone due to opioid overdose. These people are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, spouses, and friends. Their tragic and preventable deaths are something that these families will never fully recover from.

We are making these amendments to help protect Nova Scotians and prevent other families from having to experience this loss. With these amendments, we can try to recover past and future health care costs due to opioid-related diseases, injuries, and illnesses, and we can hold opioid manufacturers, distributors, and their consultants accountable for their deceptive practices - practices that have directly contributed to opioid addiction and overdose in Nova Scotia and across Canada.

British Columbia is leading this lawsuit against more than 40 opioid manufacturers and distributors on behalf of all jurisdictions in Canada, including Nova Scotia. Amendments to this legislation will allow Nova Scotia to support the class action process. They will make consultants subject to potential legal action, and align definitions and formulas in our legislation with those in other provinces and territories. By working with other provinces and territories, we are helping to address a significant health issue that affects our province and country, and ultimately improve the health outcomes of Nova Scotians.

In closing, I want to thank the members opposite for their support for these amendments, and for the many Nova Scotians who are, and who have been impacted by opioid addiction.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I do want to say that this caucus does support the Opioid Damages and Health-care Costs Recovery Act (amended). I do just want to note that there were some people who seemed to be under the impression that this was delaying treatment of people who have issues with opioids, or delaying a settlement. I just want to be really clear that this bill has effect on and after March 10, 2020. Although we are making changes here, this bill is already in affect, and the changes we're making here today will enable Nova Scotia to join a class action across the country being led by British Columbia. These amendments were requested or suggested by British Columbia, and we support them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm going to be quick on this one. I wholeheartedly support this bill and what is happening here today. I have lost friends and family members to addiction. I have had friends and family members and community members who have

gone to jail and served - and continue to serve - time because of opioid addiction. What I would say to the minister is: I hope you take them for every red cent they have, and I hope they burn in hell.

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

LISA LACHANCE: We obviously support this bill, but I also think it's an important opportunity to consider together what else we can be doing to respond to the poisoned drug crisis and to the opioid crisis in our province. Since we have been sitting, there have been several reported overdoses amongst young people in HRM, with at least one fatal overdose in Cole Harbour.

I also hold my friend Adam Richardson in my heart when I think about these issues. I've spoken about Adam before in this House. Adam was failed by our health system, our mental health system, and our education system, and he died of an accidental overdose before he turned 15. He was also my neighbour and friend, a scooter expert, a daring snowboarder, and very smart.

We need to hold these young people with us as we consider where we are with this crisis in Nova Scotia. In 2022, we had an official number of 62 deaths from opioid overdoses in Nova Scotia, and Nova Scotia Health is reporting 35 deaths to date. However, many health professionals and community service providers feel this is an underestimate because some of these deaths are determined to be of different causes. As others have said, the cost of opioids is measured not only in deaths but in other struggles.

There are some things we're doing well in this province, in terms of our naloxone program, but we need increased support for more safe consumption sites. The evidence is there: safe consumption sites cut down on people using alone; you can provide testing kits and clean gear; you can respond in the case of an overdose; and people can connect to other services.

I spent some time as a volunteer doing the needle exchange program at the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center in New York City. What I can tell you is that if people have a job and a place to live, using opioids doesn't always have a particularly negative effect on their lives. People can be quite functional employees, parents, and spouses, but they can't do that if they're not well-supported. Being able to connect with the community is important.

We really need to think about our commitment to harm reduction in this area. Nova Scotia does have a commitment to harm reduction principles in substance use issues, but we all need to consider how we can reaffirm that in the different programs we offer and how we consider this issue going forward. A couple of areas where we could really learn from harm reduction principles and enhance our work is the engagement of folks with lived and living experience in the policies and programs we develop.

It's also important to take harm reduction into consideration when we think about the evolving substance use trends in Nova Scotia. I'm sorry I don't have this right here to table, but I will table it before the end of the night, perhaps, if I can get the things and the story printed. Halifax had the highest proportional usage of cocaine tested in our wastewater of any Canadian city that was being tested over the Summer, and we're seeing more deaths linked to stimulants. These principles we have around substance use, including the principles embodied in this bill - we need to turn them toward the evolution of what we see coming.

We also want to talk about safe supply. The principles around safe supply are to make sure we get substances out of the hands of illegal elements and that folks are able to know what they're doing when they choose to use substances.

We have a good start on testing in Nova Scotia. We do have fentanyl strips available, and again, these are the types of things that people will find on a supervised consumption site. Those are things we can have in our MLAs' offices, for instance. We can make sure that our libraries have them. I also know that we're looking at building on a model from B.C. - and again, I will table this article before the end of the night as well - that would expand our ability to test substances, so it wouldn't just be about fentanyl. It would be about looking at things like tainted cocaine and other substances.

Again, this is the evolution - this polysubstance use, greater use of stimulants. We need to be ready to respond with respect and with care across different types of substance use. We need to be thinking about that.

I mentioned naloxone kits, which have also seen a great Nova Scotia success rate. Again, I hope everyone has them. I hope you have them in your constituency office. I hope your kids have them in their backpacks when they go to school. I hope that you have them in your car - although you can't leave them in the car, because of extreme temperatures, but you get the idea. However you travel, take care of them and pick up new ones every year so that your kids are current.

Then just thinking about the social determinants of health, it's very hard to seek treatment for substance use issues when you don't have a safe home - when you don't have a home - when the child welfare system has let you down, when you're facing a number of these issues. This bill is a great law-and-order approach to things, but actual change comes with addressing the social determinants of health. Like I said, I've certainly seen over the years - and at Dal Law working with Stepping Stone as well - that folks can use substances and be okay when they have all the other parts of their life in ways that are safe and respectful.

Those are some of the things that we wanted to put on the table about this issue. There is a lot more that we need to do. I think if you look at the proportion of opioid deaths across Canada, we actually have been relatively isolated from a lot of the poisoned drug

supply. This is actually a problem that's just going to grow, so we need to be thinking about it and responding to it in ways that are effective, right-spaced, and based on harm-reduction principles.

[7:45p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

HON. KENT SMITH: Speaker, I don't often take the time to stand up and share my thoughts and feelings. There have been probably five or six times since I've been here that I really wanted to get up and say something, and I just couldn't pull the trigger - couldn't get up and say it, for one reason or another. When it comes to this bill, I felt like I really had to just share a little bit of the story and the impact, and how much I support the work that we're doing to bring this legislation forward.

Some members here would remember last Summer, during our emergency session, I did a member's statement on my sister, who had just passed away. My 46-year-old sister passed away on June 22nd of last year, and I told the House that she passed away from Crohn's disease and chronic illness, which is true. But the crux of the issue, and the real story behind her death, was years and years of opioid addiction. She fought it for a long time, and it was incredibly challenging on our family, and of course on her. She lost everything that she had in life. She lost her friends. She lost family. She lost everything, and ultimately, it took her life.

I won't go on and on. I don't want to stand here and be emotional, but I do want to make sure that I took the time to stand here and say that I'm so proud of this minister, and I'm so proud of this government for bringing this legislation forward that can take these opioid manufacturers to task. Hopefully, other families will get at least some restitution at the end of the day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

NOLAN YOUNG: Just a couple of short words to add to the conversation. I remember going back to the maiden speeches here, Speaker, thinking about the opioid issue, and substances in the province, and I just wanted to say that it's a drug that doesn't discriminate. It does not at all, like anything. I'm thinking of the people I lost who were close to me who went down the path and stuff.

I just want to be on the record saying that I'm really proud to support this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honorable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I was not going to rise tonight, either, so I really have just been scribbling a couple of notes down here. I think it's really important for me to rise here

tonight, because I am the mother of a beautiful daughter - athletic, brilliant, intelligent, kind, genuine, and innocent.

When the member from Shelburne says that opioids do not discriminate, he's right. We're not a wealthy family, but we're a good family. The day that I found out that my daughter was addicted to opioids, I was floored - couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that it would actually happen to us.

I'm the mother who knows what it's like to lie awake at night and know that she's not in her bed. Where is she? I'm the mother who would get up in the middle of the night, at 4:00 a.m., rainstorms, snowstorms, get in my car by myself, driving on back dirt roads, driving to houses where I thought she might be, wondering when I went around the turn, what was I going to find?

There was not a night that went by that I didn't think: This is probably going to be the night that I'm going to lose her. It didn't matter how much I tried and she tried - they had her. The monsters and opioids had her.

I know what it's like to look in my daughter's eyes and see there's nothing there. I know what it's like, because I was the mother who lay on my daughter's bedroom floor, on her little body, when she finally made the decision: Enough's enough, Mom, I'm not doing this anymore. She laid on that floor and withdrew.

I will never forget that night, watching her body literally almost convulsing as these unbelievable, powerful drugs were coming out of her system. But she is now the person, she is now the daughter of the mother who is so frigging proud, because she made the decision herself to go to that hospital, to sit in that waiting room for 13 hours, because she was not going to leave until someone helped her. Thank the God above for Andy Blackadar and the opioid replacement clinic at Queens General, because if it were not for them, I would not have this beautiful, kind, gentle, very smart, brilliant girl whom I absolutely adore. I cannot imagine my life without her.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness, thank you, thank you, thank you, from a mother who has been through hell, and I echo the comments of my colleague across: I hope they all burn in hell.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to - oh, I am so very sorry.

The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion.

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, I may wish that you did miss me when I'm done. Coming from a community that is destroyed, devastated by drug overdoses and addictions, I am not immune to that. Growing up in junior high school with my best friends, I'm the only one who survived. I think I carry a lot of survivor's guilt over that. My best friend died in

Vancouver after his drug addiction led to selling drugs and he was shot to death - nine shots. He was my best friend growing up. His cousins both died. My best - another one of our friends died of IV drug use.

Many of you know of the story of *Cottonland*, the movie that was shot in Glace Bay. It was real. It devastated our community, and it continues to this day. It really does. A lot of people who have come by - who have beaten the addiction are still - their lives are still not the same and not great. As the member from Queens has talked about, the addiction goes on. It's a beast. It continues, as the member from Eastern Shore mentioned.

None of us - I believe our lives are like a river leading to an ocean, and everything you do along the way, you change. It changes who you are. Seeing that when I was growing up and the water being dirty - kind of thinking like that. It becomes part of who you are. It normalizes it. It really does, but it changes you as well because when you come to - same analogy - a dam in a river, it almost filters the water as it goes through, and you come out on the other side a different person.

I was saved as a kid by people in the community and the love of my girlfriend at the time - my wife today. I think I got away. I did until July 28, 2005, when I was hit by a guy drinking and driving; my wife was with me. Of course, when you have injuries, the first thing they do is prescribe medication. At one point, I was taking 10 or so Percocet a day and probably 15 Tylenol 3. I was in my own world. I'd rub my face, and it felt like somebody else's face. It was - nothing around me mattered to me. It changed who I am. If I call that the dam in the river, then so be it. When I came out the other side - it took probably seven years and the strength of an amazing woman who stood by me the whole way.

When I finally told my doctor I didn't want any more, I remember lying in bed in a fetal position, and I didn't know if I was going to see the morning. I can remember hearing my eyes move like hydraulic pressure, and my eyes just swishing back and forth although my eyes were closed. I remember hearing my fingers move like hydraulic pistons; it was an awful feeling. I remember I didn't know if I wanted to throw up or just shoot myself - I don't know. Anyway.

It changes who you are. You folks in this House - see me on the good days and the bad days, and it is what it is. I make no apologies for who I am; it is what it is. I come from a place of doing the best I can to try to keep those things from other people and try to help people. I know - as the member across the floor mentioned - naloxone kits. I tried to bring them to Glace Bay High, and I wasn't allowed; I was the only one in the school with one. My youth group had them; we were all trained on them. They're an amazing tool to have. My daughter saved a person's life here on Gottingen Street in January with naloxone. She's a pharmacist; she knew what she was doing with it.

If I go back to the analogy of a river, we walk through here today at each other's

throats - I don't know if I'm allowed to say that but fighting with each other - and sitting in this House until midnight. I was saying to my caucus that I think it was good for us to spend time together. Nonetheless, it wasn't good in this House. We all know that. We walked in here today different than we are walking out tonight. We're listening to stories. We're passing around a box of Kleenex - it's not a prop, it's a box of Kleenex. It is what it is, but we are different because we share and because we realize we're all human. This piece of legislation we're passing is a game-changer.

Ironically enough, the minister was one of the ones who told me to stop taking pills, because we were doing a Master of Counselling together, and here she is saving my life again, I guess. When we come to work, we come in here and our interactions with each other change. It changes who we are. That's why I didn't mind being out with our staff and our caucus the last couple nights, because I was hearing their stories of who they are, what they're here for, and what makes them good, bad, and all the ugly that is being human. Our rivers collide. Every day we come in here and could walk out different. We do. We walk out changed. Sometimes it's turbulent, sometimes it's slow, sometimes it puddles, and sometimes it pools - we do that.

Here we are today, uniting like Niagara Falls. Look at what we can do when we unite. Just look at what we can do - all these little rivers.

I do want to say this before I sit down. I can't say much more because I'm going to make a mess of myself. I do want to say there are a lot of people in Glace Bay, in Dominion, and across the province who are still struggling. I want them to know that I will do everything I can to help each one of them. If it means contact in the middle of the night, I have no problem with that. That's why I took the training I took, so I could help those in need. I have a caring heart - believe it or not, I do. I do want people to know that I will help a total stranger. I'll help anybody.

I realize my story is different from anybody else's. I don't know what they're going through. We never know what each other is going through. You think you walk the same road. It's not the same road, because all the twists, turns, and dams we've crossed and passed in the past are how we make sense of the present situation. That is how we survive, how we live, and how we make sense of what's in front of us.

With that, I will sit down.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ALI DUALE: Speaker, I just want to say a few words. My message is for this House as well as the Nova Scotians who are watching this tonight. We've been here into late hours, debating and having very strong differences. I really believe that's the reason we've been elected to be here. I want to remind everybody - this House and the public - we're one of you, and you can see the tears, the heartfelt compassion, and the caring. We're one of

you. If you're out there and you're suffering, you're not alone.

[8:00 p.m.]

If you think those of us wearing these jackets and showing up in these spaces - we're not immune to what's happening in our neighbourhoods and to our people. I really believe, sometimes, when we look eye to eye and share our pain, our concerns, and our difficulties, we show the best of us. This is the testimony of tonight here. I really believe we, as members of this House - that is when we do our best.

I salute you, and I admire those who shared their personal stories in the public space, which is not easy to do - specifically when it comes to your loved ones, but when we do that, it changes the ball game. It changes the perspective.

We all have our own times and challenges, but I encourage members of this House: We need to look eye to eye sometimes, and look at the human side, rather than the politics. My message for this House and the public is: You're not alone.

We do the best when we're united. I'll take my seat.

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

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I do want to thank my colleagues for sharing their personal stories and their experiences, and to thank everyone here for their compassion - not only for each other, but for our loved ones in our communities.

I do want to acknowledge the work that's happening in the Office of Addictions and Mental Health under the member for Cape Breton East, our Minister of Addictions and Mental Health. I know his commitment, and certainly the Premier's commitment, to really making a difference in terms of access to universal mental health care, as well as other treatment programs and options, and improving access across the province is essential as we move forward.

I always want to give a shout-out for Solution Six. So often we sit and we talk about the really important access to care that people need - primary care, surgical care, and all of the important services people need - but what's really going to change the trajectory of health, prosperity, and well-being in Nova Scotia is Solution Six. Solution Six is addressing the factors that affect our health and well-being in this province. We do need a cross-government approach.

I know my Cabinet colleagues will say that when I talk about Solution Six that I am, in fact, the minister of a health care system, and they are all the ministers of health.

Those of you who have served as ministers in other portfolios, you know that what happens in all those other ministries is really what is going to lead to the health of Nova Scotians.

We need to continue to do that work together, and work across government, and across partisan lines in order to really understand what's happening in communities, so that we can lean in in a way that's responsive to the needs of the people we represent.

I move to close third reading of Bill No. 322.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 322.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 327, amendments to the Motor Vehicle Act, be read a third time and do pass.

I want to thank the members opposite for their comments during second reading debate. When it comes to Nova Scotians' roads and highways, there is nothing more important than safety. I think all members of this House can agree on that.

I, like many of my colleagues in the House of Assembly, commute often from our constituencies to Halifax. The construction season has seen significant work done on our provincial roads. I'm sure we've all seen this first-hand and can appreciate the hard work that is being done by the construction crews across our province.

In April 2023, we updated the Temporary Workplace Traffic Control Manual to recognize automatic flagger assistance devices. These devices provide benefits to the industry such as improved safety and not requiring as many workers on site, which is important as the construction industry, like many others, is facing labour challenges.

Speaker, I've heard from a number of our local construction companies, and they

have welcomed the addition of automated flaggers but have faced challenges with the requirement to submit a plan and have it approved every time they want to move it. For example, when a road crew is working on a section of road cleaning up debris after a storm, they would need to submit a new plan and have it approved every time they were to move to a different section of the road. We are now removing this requirement, which will cut the red tape and help get the job done faster.

As always, safety will remain our first priority, and those using flaggers will continue to follow requirements set out in the manual. With our busy and ambitious construction plans for the province, this amendment will make a big difference. We have made significant investments, such as more than doubling the gravel road program and more than tripling the Rural Impact Mitigation fund, and this is only the beginning.

We've also completed the twinning of Highway No. 104 to Antigonish, and very soon, Highway No. 103 will be twinned to Hubbards.

I look forward to what the future holds for the Department of Public Works and the province of Nova Scotia as a whole. With that, I will take my seat and look forward to hearing from my colleagues from across the aisle.

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, we in the Liberal caucus would agree safety is paramount. This protects people who are commuting through construction zones. It helps to protect construction workers and remove red tape associated with having to update, approve, or reapprove plans every time they want to move around. That seems pretty straightforward. Good work, team. Next up, the NDP.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: I think I'll be the quickest I have been in several days and say that we look forward to these changes and we do support them.

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

The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I rise to close third reading on Bill No. 327, the Motor Vehicle Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 327.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 334.

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

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

HON. BRIAN COMER: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 334, an Act to Amend Chapter 197 of the Revised Statutes of 1989, the Health Services and Insurance Act, be now read a third time and do pass.

I'd like to start by saying thank you to my colleagues opposite for the thoughtful comments during the debate on this bill. We certainly don't agree on everything in this Chamber at times, but I think when it comes to providing universal mental health and addictions care, we've found some common ground.

I think we can all agree that for many years, and for many different reasons, Nova Scotians have faced barriers to accessing the care that they need. We agree that we can't wait any longer to close that gap to make mental health and addictions services available to everyone as part of a publicly funded health care system.

This could have been done 5 years ago or 10 years ago, but this right now is our best available option. I want to take a moment to clarify some points raised during debate on the bill. The first is about the definition of universal mental health and addictions care. Our vision for universal access is one where every Nova Scotian gets the mental health and addictions services and supports that they need when they need them, regardless of where they live, their ability to pay, if they have private insurance, or whatever issue they may face that is unique to them. They shouldn't have to travel five or six hours, they shouldn't have to pay hundreds or even thousands of dollars, and they shouldn't have to wait.

The way we do that is by ensuring we have a range of services available, from a range of different providers, and scaled to meet the unique needs of Nova Scotians. Bill No. 334 is enabling legislation - it allows government to create insured service programs to support the delivery of some mental health and addictions care.

Treating mental illness and addictions is certainly complex work. Anyone who has worked in health care - as I did in psychiatry - certainly knows there's no one size fits all

when it comes to mental health and addictions. What works for one person might not work for another. What works for one person right now, today, might not work for them next week, next month, or next year. That's why when we talk about universal mental health and addictions care, we say: The right service from the right provider at the right time. The needs of a person managing an illness like schizophrenia may be different from a person experiencing anxiety or depression, which means the services and supports they need may be different as well.

In a universal system of care, everyone is supported. For Nova Scotians with severe and persistent mental illness, the right service is probably going to be clinical care, and the right provider might be a team of providers - doctors, nurses, psychologists, occupational therapists, and many more - some working in an in-patient setting and some in an out-patient setting, a day hospital program, or a community-based organization. These are clinical specialists delivering care in a clinical setting.

We are always going to need those services from those providers in those settings. It is a key part of universal mental health and addictions care but is certainly not a silver bullet, because hospital-based clinical care is not the right fit for everyone. For someone experiencing mild to moderate anxiety or depression, the right service and the right provider might look like peer support, self-directed cognitive behavioural therapy, or maybe therapeutic counselling. All these services and many more are available to Nova Scotians right now, free of charge.

We need a range of services from a range of providers to meet a range of needs. We need self-directed CBT people can do from an app on their phone. We need peer support counselling services. We need counselling therapy. We need wellness programs offered within the community. We need crisis response, and we need around-the-clock psychiatric care. We need all those things and many more in a universal mental health and addictions system.

The question is: How do we do it? We do it by investing in our public health care system, expanding programs, offering new services, and recruiting clinicians and many others, by trying new things, new apps, new platforms, new pilots, and new ideas, and by partnering with and funding community-based organizations whose goals are aligned with ours.

We do it through initiatives like the Centre for Psychological Health at Dalhousie, where we have clinical psychology Ph.D. students getting hand-on experience providing care to Nova Scotians - care they so desperately need and deserve. We do it by bringing the expertise we have in our private sector into our public system.

One of the ways government works with private sector health care providers is through insured service programs, and that is what Bill No. 334 enables.

I know during the debate there was a desire for more details, such as what services are going to be available and covered under MSI. At what rate will they be covered? Who is going to deliver them? Will there be constraints on what a provider can offer or a person can access? How does private insurance fit in? All very good questions.

[8:15p.m.]

These are not details that would be embedded in amendments to the Health Services and Insurance Act; these are details that will be part of the programs we put in place through authority granted within the Act. I will share these details with members of this House and with all Nova Scotians as we put new programs in place - programs we build together with our partners, including the providers who deliver these services.

We worked with our health system partners at the IWK, Nova Scotia Health, and many others to understand the needs of Nova Scotians. Together with our partners, we designed a program that helps address long-standing needs in our health care system.

Certainly, with pilots, they are limited in scope and bound by time. Collecting evidence is part of that process, and a way of trying something new - something that has never been done before anywhere in Canada - to learn what works and what doesn't, and to carry those learnings forward as we work with our partners to build insured service programs to deliver mental health and addictions care to Nova Scotians.

It is not happening in isolation, either. It is happening along with the expansion of our provincial pre-school autism program, as an example, along with grant funding to community-based organizations to provide critical supports to families all across Nova Scotia, along with recruitment of psychologists and other health care practitioners into our public health care system. It is these actions, and many more together, that have gotten us from where we were two years ago to where we are today, and it is more actions like these together that will get us where we're going: universal mental health and addictions care.

Speaker, if there's a road map out there showing the best way to do this step by step, turn by turn, I would certainly use it, but there is no road map. There's not even a road. That could be overwhelming at times, but we didn't let that overwhelm us. We came together with whatever tools we could find to clear ourselves a path. That's what we've been doing for the last two years, alongside many partners: partners in the health care system, in the private sector, in our communities, in our universities, our colleges, and many more. The work is being led by an incredible team at the Office of Addictions and Mental Health. They are passionate, they are thoughtful, and they care deeply about our province and our people.

One of the members opposite suggested during debate that our team lacks an understanding of mental health and addictions. Speaker, that is simply untrue. The team knows this space, not just as policy makers and government, but as people who worked in

the system. They know the space from the inside, from the front lines of service delivery.

They come from our communities, our community-based organizations, our public health care system - as doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and many more. Some are from the private sector. Their work over the last few years speaks for itself. They've consulted with more than 200 stakeholder groups, including health system partners, post-secondary institutions, community organizations, regulators, colleges, professional associations, unions, Indigenous communities, and many, many more.

The team has overseen expansions in our public health care system from hospital-based services to e-mental health tools, and everything in between along the spectrum. They provided funding and guidance to community-based organizations, and built brand new, innovative pilot projects from scratch - both of which are connecting Nova Scotians to care right now, today. They're building all of that together to one integrated system, one that prioritizes Nova Scotians so that when someone needs help, they don't have to figure out where to go or where to get it. They make one call, and the clinical experts will take it from there.

Building a universal mental health and addictions care system is a significant undertaking, certainly not one for the faint of heart, but this team has never wavered. Our government has never wavered, and we are not going to start now. We're going to invest in our public system and try some new things. We'll use the best available evidence as we design and build, and we'll keep learning and adjusting as we go. We'll stay focused on the bigger picture, on universal mental health and addictions care, without losing sight of why we're doing this in the first place and who we're doing it for: our families, our friends, our neighbours, each other, all Nova Scotians, every Nova Scotian.

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

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I'm happy to rise to provide my comments about Bill No. 334. We want to be clear that our party supports universal mental health care. We are happy that the minister is moving in that direction with Bill No. 334, to provide billing codes so that services for mental health providers will be paid by the provincial government.

We know there are long wait times for those currently seeking mental help. The wait time for the Bayers Lake Clinic in my riding, for example, is four months. The wait time at Lower Sackville Clinic is five months, Spryfield is three months, and there are many others. There are even longer wait times for those who cannot afford private care or insurance to cover these costs.

Dr. Erica Baker recently spoke at the Law Amendments Committee on behalf of the Council of Psychology Practice Owners. Dr. Baker stated that psychologists currently

practising in the private sector do not, she emphasized, have the capacity to meet the stated intent of this bill. She stated that it would appear the ship is sailing before it is fully built. I will table that via email.

We also had Dr. Simon Sherry, who presented virtually at the Law Amendments Committee, and he said there is no unused capacity. In fact, he said we are at crisis point, and this bill will increase the number of clients by 300,000. He actually said this bill is a masquerade for a solution. I can also table that. These are the two doctors who spoke at the Law Amendments Committee.

We know all private psychologists have waiting lists and are working long hours to a point of burnout. We know that the United Kingdom made a similar change to offer universal mental health care, but they had a 10-year plan to increase the capacity that was needed to implement it.

I'm just asking: Does this government have a plan to increase capacity to go along with this legislation? I would love for the minister to answer that one. I'm really hoping that there is a plan to increase the capacity for psychologists and other mental health doctors.

We do need universal access to mental health and addiction. However, I still don't have many answers on how we are going to get there. The minister was just speaking - they don't have anything to follow, and they're trying their best. I appreciate that.

The bill states that the government will determine which services will be publicly funded and what level of remuneration will be used. This is a key detail that is missing from this bill. Who are these providers? Who decides which level of treatment is best for the client? Who decides which assessment level is necessary that determines whether it's a psychologist or a therapist or a psychiatrist? How many hours will be needed for the treatment? Is the minister going to decide on all these?

All these are critical questions. We heard from three experts at the Law Amendments Committee who are very concerned about these vital questions. I hope the minister can address these questions as well.

To my surprise, on October 24th I read an article in *allNovaScotia* where the psychologist stated that Bill No. 334 claims to give Nova Scotians two hours of publicly funded care. I don't think the minister has ever mentioned two hours. I don't know where that information came from. I hope that the minister has read that article. I don't think I can table it. I actually took a photo of the article because it's in *allNovaScotia*. I can't email it, I can't print it, so I just took a copy of it on my phone. I was very, very surprised to see that.

The minister knows the issue I had with the one-hour virtual. The minister knows

how disappointed I was to hear that the government invested \$23 million in virtual mental health care that provided only one hour. I know the minister knows that one hour or two hours will never be sufficient to give proper mental health care.

I will also be interested to hear about evaluation. Is there going to be an evaluation report on the outcomes of the \$23 million invested in that one-hour virtual care? Who has the information that they collected from this one-hour session? Where is it stored? These are investments made, but we don't have any evaluation for the money we spent.

I'd like to know from the minister if he can assure me that we are not once again putting time limits on care. Do we limit the visits to our family doctors? No. So why are we limiting mental health care and saying one hour or two hours? It is the doctors who decide. It is the psychologists who decide on the assessment method, and on the amount of care that the patient needs.

We do know that this bill will give the government the ability to decide which services will be publicly funded, and the level of remuneration. Nova Scotians need to know how these decisions will be made by the government. Mental health providers need to be consulted. I will continue with questions for the minister as I search for answers on how this government will achieve a universal mental health system. I ask the minister in the second reading - I want to ask him if he is prepared to spend as much as it takes to get to universal mental health for all Nova Scotians. What is the investment he is willing to make? We would love to know that. I'm not sure if he can reply to that before the end of the night tonight.

Lastly, I again want to say that when I read the minister's mandate letter, and it committed to universal mental health for all, I was so thrilled to see that. I do believe the minister is committed to it. It is most crucial that Nova Scotians have access to mental health care providers. What is urgent is shortening the wait-times, and having more in-patient services to prevent the escalating number of suicides, of addictions, and mental health for patients.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I would like to rise and make a few comments on this bill. Just to start again by reiterating of course, I actually think that everybody in this House supports access to universal mental health care. I don't think there's a question around that, but I think there are still questions related to this bill.

The minister talked about there not being a road to universal mental health care. Actually, in the notes that I made for myself was that the road to mental health policy and services across Canada and around the world is actually littered with attempts and initiatives that weren't successful.

Mental health policies and services have really struggled to take advantage of the evidence, to implement things in ways that make sense. The comments I have around this bill are really from that perspective: there is a large danger of not doing it right. When we don't do it right, we waste time and money, but we also make people wait.

[8:30 p.m.]

I think one of the major problems with this bill, clearly, has been the lack of predictable and ongoing engagement and consultation with key stakeholders, including private-practicing psychologists and other mental health professionals. With the limited time folks were given, the Council of Psychology Practice Owners, as well as the regulating council, submitted letters saying that they had no idea what was being proposed, and perhaps more importantly from their perspective, there isn't capacity in the private system to fulfill these aims. There is a real danger of trying to move forward without the key team members.

The Council of Psychology Practice Owners was invited to a last-minute meeting with this government. They were promised they would be engaged in next steps, yet this government refuses to support amendments to the bill to ensure this consultation.

We did hear - as the member for Clayton Park West also talked about - at Law Amendments Committee from providers with extensive wait-lists, but honestly, pick up the phone and try to call a dozen psychologists and see when you can get in. The answer is: not very soon. For folks who need assessments for kids and that sort of stuff, the wait can be months if not years.

We've heard it directly from hundreds of professionals. The Council of Psychology Practice Owners represents 150 folks, and the regulator obviously represents all of the regulated psychologists in this province. Everyone is saying, Of course we want to provide mental health care to all Nova Scotians who need it, but we can't. We need a map. Affiliated mental health care professionals were also really left out of the conversation, have no idea if they're included or if not, and how they are included.

So implementation is really unclear. It's unclear how people in need are going to connect with the clinician they need. The minister talked about the right service at the right time in the right place, or from the right provider, as the government says. But that takes a system. That actually takes a plan.

One of the initiatives that is being implemented in this province now is the integrated youth service model. We are almost the last Canadian jurisdiction to do that. The reason why integrated youth service models work is that there is an evidence-based, evaluated assessment process that has been developed over time, and in numerous jurisdictions like Australia, the U.S., and the U.K., but also across Canada. We're actually using that whole piece. How a young person connects and gets to the right service at the

right time is the key piece of how those work, and we don't have any information in this bill about how that is going to work. Are people calling private psychologists? Are private psychologists supposed to be updating some government body about their availability, the services they offer, who they want to treat? It's really unclear.

Like I said, there have been lots of attempts in this province and across the country to build mental health care systems that have failed. They've failed because we haven't paid enough attention to mental health. We actually have never had a national mental health strategy in Canada. There was one released by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, but that's not actually released by the Government of Canada.

I am glad to hear that the Official Opposition cares about mental health now, because I can tell you that when they came into government in 2013, the Together We Can plan had just been released. It built on lived experience, built on the evidence, and had an 18-month consultation process with 1,200 Nova Scotians. Essentially, the government of the day, the Liberal government, let this plan die and disregarded it. The Liberal government decimated the mental health and addictions division of the Department of Health and Wellness.

Why are we one of the jurisdictions to be the last in Canada to implement integrated youth services? Because there was literally no one from the Government of Nova Scotia for eight years showing up at national mental health meetings. Basically, it was folks like me from Dalhousie who were at these national mental health meetings, and we didn't have government there. So I'm glad to hear that you've discovered it.

Herein lies a great example of how tricky it is to actually ensure that universal mental health care works. We do need the plan. We need to understand how this is going to happen, because what's presented so far doesn't make a lot of sense to a lot of folks in the system.

The minister and the office have been announcing a number of initiatives, which are great. I've heard the commitment to data collection, I've heard the commitment to evaluation, yet none of that is being shared publicly. None of that's being shared and shown how it's actually informing the development of this bill. In the past budget, which I'll remind folks was 6 months ago, I think there were \$200,000 to \$300,000 . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. There's a little too much chatter going on.

I would ask that the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island continue.

LISA LACHANCE: I can't comment on people's presence, but I think I can comment on people's attention. If you're not interested, don't worry about it, but you can go in the antechamber.

Some of the things that I think are important to note - like I was saying, there are some great initiatives out there that are collecting data. There are some great evaluations. They're not being presented, and we have a lot of gaps in our understanding of mental health in Nova Scotia, so we actually don't have a good sense of what the mental health is of Nova Scotians. We really only work from a few data points like wait times, and I do have a couple that I just want to sort of talk through.

I will say that I have reached out to the office to talk about the data, because there's some weird stuff happening with the IWK data - I'm just going to say this - where the wait times are going up and down from 75 days to 8 days to 11 days to 93 days to 11 days to 84 days. I think there's probably a bit of an error here, but just to say that since this government has come in, we haven't actually seen access to mental health services improve.

I'll also look at the data available for mental health and addictions child and adolescent services for the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. In the period between April to June 2021, the average wait time for your first appointment for 50 per cent of the people waiting was 96 days, and for 90 per cent of the people waiting it was 125 days. That's a really long time, right? It's worse now. The last reported period, for April to June 2023, the wait time for 50 per cent of folks is 122 days and the wait time for 90 per cent of children and youth to have their first appointment - this is not to receive treatment; this is not to receive assessment; this is to get in the door - is 144 days. So it's actually increased in the past couple of years. I will say there have been some heights - 211 days, October to December 2022.

On the child and youth side, we're not seeing increased access to services. There are lots of reasons why, and one of them is that there aren't enough practitioners available in this province to provide service. By putting forward this bill without a plan, you're making promises that I frankly don't think we can keep right now in Nova Scotia, unless we have a model something like integrated youth services that makes use of the available people we have within a jurisdiction.

I'm just going to talk about mental health and addictions adult services wait times for the Halifax Bayers Road clinic. Again, from April to June 2021, in that reporting period, 50 per cent of people waited 50 days for their first appointment and 90 per cent of people waited 75 days. It also has not gotten any better. In fact, it's gotten worse.

April to June 2023: 50 per cent of folks waited 104 days and 90 per cent of people waited 127 days. Again, that's just to get your foot in the door. That is not treatment. I will tell you that on the other end, there's often a lot of wait times then too, like what about the CBT group, or we can put you on the list for counselling. It will take a long time to get there, and you certainly won't be seeing a psychologist straight off.

Maybe wait times seem boring. They are literally one of the only measures we have - one of the only public - so I cannot tell you, actually, the rate of mental illness among

Nova Scotian children and youth. I can't tell you the rate of mental illness among Nova Scotian adults. We use national data, so we have a range and we have a sense of where it is but we actually don't know, and we collect little to no data about how our programs work. Say someone gets a diagnosis and they receive the treatment. We don't do very much to know if their outcome's improved.

One more: wait-times for mental health and addictions adult services in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality in April-June 2021 - 50 per cent of folks were waiting 62 days and 90 per cent of folks were waiting 85 days. In October-December 2022, that went up to 153 days. In the most recent reporting period of April-June 2023, 50 per cent of people waited 77 days and 90 per cent of people waited 134 days.

I know that so many of us have either struggled with mental health issues - or our families, our children, our parents, our siblings - so we know what those days mean. Those days mean so many things in terms of ill health, family conflict, inability to go to work, and inability to go to school. We know what those feel like. We all want to change that, that's absolutely clear. We all want better access to mental health care, and we want this to work, but in the absence of any information, it's hard to know that this alone is going to make a difference.

At the beginning of this sitting, I introduced a bill for a suicide prevention strategy, which has been called for by several community organizations and folks working in the field. We are seeing our highest rates, proportionally, of suicide in the province, and it's only increasing. This is a serious public health issue. It's not the best data - we can't tell what works, and we can't tell what services people have received, but it's not a good sign. This is what's on the line when we're talking about mental health services.

There are other challenges if you don't treat mental health. First, it costs a lot of money to the economy. Basically, the cumulative cost of mental health issues in Canada over the next 30 years is expected to exceed \$2.5 trillion. That was an estimate in 2017 from the Mental Health Commission of Canada. I would argue that things have changed a lot - the updated impact is probably greater. Because we don't have mental health services that are working - that people can't get to - unmet need is resulting in growing services demands in other areas.

Emergency room visits for mental health issues are increasing radically for children and youth across Canada but also here in Nova Scotia. We've spent a lot of time talking about the ER crisis being part of the system, but this is a great example. If anyone has gone with somebody or gone themselves to the ER in a mental health crisis - it's not the right place. Anybody who's in crisis knows that. It's not a place to get help, but it is a place to maybe stay alive for the night.

What's the plan? I would return to the fact that we are implementing Integrated Youth Services Nova Scotia. There is a structure and a program that make sense and that

have the evidence-based - that's the type of thing that we should be seeing when we're thinking about how to build capacity to offer universal mental health care. There is lots to add into the discussion in terms of how lived experience and living experience will be integrated. The best evidence shows that, for mental health services, having the engagement of folks with lived and living experience is a key indicator of success. Integrated Youth Services is doing that, and they're doing that here in Nova Scotia.

[8:45 p.m.]

The IWK, which is running and implementing this program, is currently recruiting for its youth council and for its family and caregiver council. Again, we have this little pocket of our mental health system that is building on the evidence that has been learned around the world in the last couple decades. Right now, we really need to see that expand to the entire mental health system.

I think it's clear. We heard at Law Amendments Committee that there is very little capacity in the system right now, so we need a different approach. I would love to hear what happened with the small pilot that was funded in the last budget and how that informed the development of this bill. Folks who spoke at the Law Amendments Committee made a couple of other comments that I think are really important to keep in mind, one of which is: No amount of therapy helps when you are homeless and hungry.

Again, paying attention to the social and structural determinants of health is key. The Integrated Youth Services model builds on that, actually recognizes that. The Integrated Youth Services model, where they have a base in mental health services, also allows quick and easy referrals through agreements with our service providers.

If a young person arrives and they might have a mental health concern but they also don't know where they are going to sleep that night, thinking about the youth and their whole experience is taken into account. This is the type of thinking - this is the plan that we need for universal mental health care in this province.

I was going to say that maybe there's no one in this House who wants this to work more. I was the child of a parent who struggled with severe mental illness her entire life in this province and never received the right care. We did somersaults to try to access what we could. Certainly, my experience as a parent is what has motivated me to seek elected office - it is what motivated me to do my studies.

I am completely committed to this idea, but I am not convinced that we are going to get there with this bill. With that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I feel that I want to stand as a registered nurse

and someone who has worked in mental health for a number of years in a variety of places to talk about the importance of this enabling legislation and the options that it is going to provide - not only health care providers but Nova Scotians in the system. It is enabling legislation - it is not a full plan, nor is it intended to be. It will have a significant impact on well-being and treatment.

What I really want to say is that by changing these billing codes, this will be a trauma-informed approach. This will allow people across our communities to have choice in terms of where and how they seek care. There's a variety of options across the severity of illness, whether you have mental health distress, whether you live with a mental health problem or you are experiencing a mental health disorder, you now have a broader range of clinicians and opportunities in order to address the needs that you are experiencing.

I just want to say to the staff whom I know are totally dedicated to this work, who are working incredibly hard, who live and breathe this every day, whether you are in the department or whether you are on the front lines or whether you are the minister, I just want all of you to know that it is going to be a monumental and historic change that we are actually witnessing here today.

I want to signal to Nova Scotians that this government takes your mental health as seriously as your physical health. We have our own minister, we are now looking at how we can actually bill MSI, increase the number of insurable services. That has never happened in the history of this province, and I actually believe it is country-leading. I want to thank the minister for that.

I think it's courageous, I think it's progressive, and I think it's compassionate, and I think it's very bold. The last thing I want to say to all of you who are watching, the 25 in the department, I want you all to know that it's not the critic who counts; the credit goes to the person who is actually in the arena who will fail but will fail doing the absolute best that they can and I believe that.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable Minister for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health it will be to close third reading.

The honourable Minister for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health.

HON. BRIAN COMER: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you everyone for their thoughtful comments this evening. I was taking some notes here to try to address some of the questions that were raised during debate.

Certainly, in my previous life, I would often work with people on a daily basis in acute psychiatric distress. I often thought to myself, I wish they had the chance to get help sooner. Hospital-based acute care is one of the options that you would have seen our government investing in increasing services, whether it's acute mental health day hospitals

or recovery support centres in the communities for substance-use disorder. That's certainly one suite of services that we're really expanding and working on. When I think of mental health care myself, I think of communities and the power that communities have to support the individuals who live there. There's a lot of great community-based organizations across the province that do incredible work for those with mild to moderate issues.

One of the members asked about who decides on treatment time frames and stuff like that. I think that's clinical guidelines. That's a practitioner who would decide those sorts of issues.

Virtual care is offered in variety of ways across the province, from rural emergency departments to psychiatrists. Access Wellness I think was one of the points brought up, which was for mild to moderate issues. Certainly, everything we're doing does have evaluation and outcomes embedded in it, whether you're looking at the mental health acute day hospitals and the impact that has had on our in-patient bed capacity - most importantly, patient experience. Patients have really had positive feedback about a number of new services offered across the province.

I would certainly agree with the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island on the importance of integrated youth services. Quite frankly, it would have been something I would have liked to see a long time ago in Nova Scotia. We do have a province-wide rollout happening over the next couple of years, which will be for youth and families right across the province. I think that's a really important thing.

I would agree with the lack of a national strategy with mental health. I think this is the Province of Nova Scotia trying to take a leadership role for other provinces and territories, and certainly for the federal government. I think mental health services should be publicly funded, to be quite frank. We're the first province in the country to do that.

It's not easy when you're the first jurisdiction doing something this complex, but I certainly don't think you can be afraid of the risk and afraid of failing, because it's too important for Nova Scotians, to be quite frank.

I just want to acknowledge the Premier for seeing the value of appointing a Minister responsible for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health for the first time in the history of the province. I certainly thank my caucus colleagues for being so supportive. For the voice of mental health, I think we have come a long way. There's certainly a long way to go. As we've heard tonight, some of the stories of addiction have impacted members on both sides of the House. I don't think any of us don't have a loved one that has experienced an addictions or mental health issue. I think that really speaks volumes.

In terms of what this legislation will do, it is enabling legislation. If you live in a rural part of the province, or if you live in an area where you have a private practitioner that lives down the street and you can't afford to see them, maybe you should see them

now. The government is going to pay for it.

That's just a very straightforward way that this is going to help Nova Scotians living within their community. We'll certainly be collecting the outcomes and evidence to how this is improving health care for Nova Scotians.

I just want to acknowledge the staff in the department. This caused a lot of people a lot of stress, a lot of pressure. They worked extremely hard. There was extensive consultation with stakeholders from one end of the province to the next. I'm very proud of the work that you've done, and I'm certainly very proud to be able to do this tonight.

With those few words, I move to close third reading of Bill No. 334.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 334.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, that concludes government business for the day. I move that the House now rise to meet again tomorrow, November 9th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m. Government business will include third reading of Bill Nos. 320, 329, 332, 337, and third reading of Private Member's Public Bill No. 336.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Thursday, November 9th, from 1:00 p.m. until 11:59 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Have a good night, and sleep well.

[The House rose at 8:56 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 809**

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce recently held its Business Awards; and

Whereas Bethany Turpin Music Studio won the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advancement Award; and

Whereas this award goes to a business that demonstrates a commitment to advancing principles of equity, diversity, and/or inclusion throughout their organization. The focus of this award is on the work of a business to become more diverse, equitable, and/or inclusive of all people;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Bethany Turpin Music Studio on winning the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advancement Award and wish her much continued success.

RESOLUTION NO. 810

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce recently held its Business Awards; and

Whereas Deep Sky Eye Observatory won the Tourism Business of the Year Award; and

Whereas this award goes to a business that supports the tourism industry of Yarmouth and Acadian Shores and improves the allure of the community for tourists who visit the area, supports the community, has shown growth and innovation in its business, and has had a positive impact on the local economy;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Deep Sky Eye Observatory on winning the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce Tourism Business of the Year Award and wish them continued success.

RESOLUTION NO. 811

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce recently held its Business Awards; and

Whereas Dogwood Lodge Pet Retreat won the Rising Star of the Year award; and

Whereas this award goes to a business that is three years old or less, or has had a new owner within the past three years, and has shown innovation, and/or growth and success within our business community;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dogwood Lodge Pet Retreat on winning the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce Rising Star of the Year award.

RESOLUTION NO. 812

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce recently held its Business Awards; and

Whereas Heritage Brewing won the Business of the Year Award (less than 10 employees); and

Whereas this award recognizes a small business that supports the community, has shown growth and innovation in its business area, and has had a positive impact on the local economy;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate

Heritage Brewing on winning the Business of the Year Award (less than 10 employees) and wish them continued success.

RESOLUTION NO. 813

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce recently held its Business Awards; and

Whereas Logan d'Entremont won the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award; and

Whereas this award recognizes a young entrepreneur who is 35 years old or younger, supports the community, has shown growth and innovation in their business area, and has had a positive impact on the local economy;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Logan d'Entremont on winning the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award and wish him continued success.

RESOLUTION NO. 814

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce recently held its Business Awards; and

Whereas the Business of the Year (more than 10 employees) Award went to Novatec Braids; and

Whereas the Business of the Year (more than 10 employees) Award recognizes a business that supports the community, has shown growth and innovation in its business area, and has had a positive impact on the local economy;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Novatec Braids on winning the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce's Business of

the Year (more than 10 employees) Award and wish them continued success.

RESOLUTION NO. 815

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce recently held its Business Awards; and

Whereas the Rotary Club of Yarmouth won the Non-Profit Organization of the Year Award; and

Whereas this award goes to a non-profit who supports the community, has seen growth and innovation in its operations, and has had a positive impact on the region;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Rotary Club of Yarmouth on winning the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce Non-Profit Organization of the Year Award and thank them for their service and dedication to our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 816

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce recently held its Business Awards; and

Whereas Wade Cleveland won the Community Impact Award; and

Whereas this award honours someone who has demonstrated exceptional public spirit through active staff participation in our community and has shown support for our community through sponsorships and charitable initiatives or by monetary and/or in-kind contributions;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Wade Cleveland on winning the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce Community Impact Award and thank him for his dedication to our community.

RESOLUTION NO. 817

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 49th Provincial Volunteer Awards were recently held; and

Whereas Alvina Robicheau was named Volunteer of the Year for the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth; and

Whereas Alvina Robicheau willingly takes on any role that enhances the community or aids individuals in need. For over five years, including during the unpredictable COVID era, Alvina has led the Yarmouth Garden Club as both its president and the most consistent volunteer at the Brown Street parking lot, the club's community project, whether it's picking up garbage along the airport stretch, clearing stubborn weeds from the cracks in the Brown Street parking lot, providing house cleaning services for seniors, or cooking meals for drivers and crew at the Greenfields Motor Speedway during race weekends. Alvina also finds the time to help out with Communities in Bloom;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Alvina Robicheau on being named the Volunteer of the Year for the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth and thank her for her many years of hard work and dedication to making our community a better place.

RESOLUTION NO. 818

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 49th Provincial Volunteer Awards were recently held; and

Whereas the Volunteer of the Year for the Town of Yarmouth was Mary Eldridge;
and

Whereas Mary Eldridge's dedication to volunteering is truly exceptional, as evidenced by her involvement in a wide array of organizations spanning several decades. Her contributions have significantly impacted various sectors of the Yarmouth community and beyond. Her volunteer work includes the Yarmouth County Historical Society, the Yarmouth Public Library, the Old Ladies Home Society, the Community Foundation NS,

and Investment Chair She is also a Founder/Co-Chair of the Yarmouth Area Community Fund and holds positions on the Archdiocese Halifax-Yarmouth Finance Council and the St. Ambrose Parish Finance Council. Mary also volunteered for many other organizations throughout the years;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Mary Eldridge on being named the Town of Yarmouth's Volunteer of the Year and thank her for her decades of unwavering and inspiring service to her community.