



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS**

**Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane**

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**First Session**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024**

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024**

**Sixty-fourth General Assembly**

**First Session**

**1:00 P.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: As with the tradition on Budget Day in this House, with the unanimous consent of the House we will commence with the motion for Resolution No. 912, respecting the Estimates under Orders of the Day. This means that the Daily Routine will be deferred until after the response to the Budget Speech is adjourned. Question Period will then begin one hour after the start of the Daily Routine.

Is it all agreed?

It is agreed.

**[ORDERS OF THE DAY]**

**[GOVERNMENT BUSINESS]**

**[GOVERNMENT MOTIONS]**

[Res. No. 912, re Estimates - CW on Supply: Referred - notice given February 27, 2024 - (Hon. Allan MacMaster)]

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

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, pursuant to the notice of motion given by me on February 27, 2024, and the Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly, I have the honour, by command, to present a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Nova Scotia relating to the Estimates of sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, which is:

I hereby transmit Estimates of Sums required for the Public Service of the Province for the year ending March 31, 2025, and in accordance with the Constitution Act of 1867, recommend them, together with the Budget Address of my Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and any resolutions or bills necessary or advisable to approve the Estimates and implement the budget measures to the House of Assembly.

That is signed by Arthur J. LeBlanc, Lieutenant Governor, February 29, 2024.

Speaker, at this time I wish to:

(1) table the message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Nova Scotia transmitting the Estimates for the consideration of this House;

(2) table the Estimate Books;

(3) table the government business plan;

(4) table the Estimate resolutions;

(5) deliver my Budget Speech; and

(6) move that the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the Province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, being Supply to be granted to His Majesty, be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

THE SPEAKER: The Estimates are tabled.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, as I begin today, I want to wish a happy birthday to a friend of mine in Inverness by the name of Jimmy Copley. Jimmy always has his finger on the pulse. Jimmy is a leap year baby, and so is this budget. (Laughter)

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## INTRODUCTION

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Today I rise to table Budget 2024-25, the third budget of the government Nova Scotians elected in 2021.

This budget comes at a time when our economic landscape is shifting. Nova Scotia's economy and population have grown much more quickly than expected coming out of the pandemic. In 2023, we estimate that Nova Scotia's economy was 20 per cent larger than it was in 2019. That led to higher-than-expected revenues for the provincial government.

But do you know who else that surprised? The people who agreed with our economic estimates: Canada's largest financial institutions and leading academics here in Atlantic Canada.

Like many other provinces, the government ended up with more revenue than expected. The unexpected revenues gave us the opportunity to make investments:

- To get Nova Scotians access to the health care they need, faster;
- To increase the supply of housing for people struggling to find it;
- To be responsive to Nova Scotians experiencing wildfires, floods, and other extreme weather events;
- To help those most in need with the cost of living at a time when many have been finding it hard to make ends meet;
- To help volunteers and community organizations provide sport, recreation, arts, and cultural experiences after a pandemic when they had no ability to fundraise.

We did this while ending the last two years with a budget surplus and preventing the net debt from rising by almost half a billion dollars.

We continue to receive solid credit ratings:

- Moody's Investors Service's long-term rating of Aa2 stable continues to reflect confidence in the Province's fiscal management and noted: "Strong management policies support sound financial planning and debt management."
- DBRS Limited confirmed our credit ratings at A (high) in November, noting that Nova Scotia has been a perennially strong fiscal performer.
- S&P Global confirmed our stable outlook and expressed confidence that our government will keep its focus on long-term fiscal sustainability while also addressing the needs of the population.

Budget 2024-25 reflects our fiscal capacity, builds on the work we have already started, and sets a path for the year ahead.



**SUPPORTING NOVA SCOTIANS AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES**

Cost of living has become top of mind for people as we experience some of the highest increases in inflation in 30 years. The number one ask by Nova Scotians in this year's budget consultation was for tax relief. Speaker, they are going to get it.

Starting January 1, 2025, Nova Scotians will feel income tax relief when they see less money coming off their paycheques so more of it can land in their pockets. Provincial income tax brackets will be indexed, but we're going to do something more than the Opposition said - we're also going to index the basic personal amount we're going to index various non-refundable tax, all to lower the income taxes people pay.

We appreciate that not everyone experiences the same challenges in the same way, so over the past two and a half years, we have provided a number of programs to help people make ends meet. This budget does more.

Five hundred more renters will get help with the cost of their housing through the Canada-Nova Scotia Targeted Housing Benefit. The number of rent supplements has more than doubled from 4,000 two and a half years ago to 8,500 with this budget.

Two thousand, two hundred and fifty homeowners will get help with urgent, emergency repairs or disability-related modifications in their homes with more funding for the Home Repair and Adaptation Program.

No one will pay higher premiums for the Seniors' or Family Pharmacare Program.

Sixty per cent or 15,000 recipients of the Employment Support and Income Assistance program who have disabilities will receive \$300 dollars more per month.

People who are connected to the labour market and receive Income Assistance will be able to keep more of the wages they earn. We will be increasing the income exemption threshold so they will continue to feel supported as they pursue employment opportunities.

This budget continues to invest in community-based organizations to help with food security programs and give people a source of local, healthy food in their communities. Speaker, we know that good nutrition is foundational for a child's learning and well-being, and that the rising cost of food is placing additional pressure on many families.

This year, we will launch the first-ever province-wide school lunch program. Speaker, by all the people standing in here, I think we might get a unanimous vote in favour of this budget. (Laughter) Building on the existing breakfast programs, the school lunch program will ensure that all children have access to healthy, nutritious food leading to a

better learning environment. This program will be phased in over four years, beginning with \$18.8 million this year.

Nova Scotia children deserve to have a strong start in life. This budget invests in several approaches to get them the care they need and to help address childhood poverty.

Efforts continue to expand the resources available to foster families and the children in their care. More support will be available to young people leaving the Minister's care at the age of 19 who face major life decisions and require additional help during this transition. The EDGE program, which helps prepare youth at risk for the next steps of their education and employment, is also expanding.

This budget continues to deliver the increased Nova Scotia Child Benefit, a tax-free monthly payment for more than 22,000 families to give their children more of what they need. In the past two years, the annual amount they received has increased by \$600 per child to \$1,525.

Access to specialized services for preschoolers can be difficult. More families waiting for Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech services will be helped this year and we'll see important changes being made to provincial autism services for children.

Our growing province needs more child care spaces, Early Childhood Educators, teachers, and more resources for classrooms, and we continue to respond. With the help of our federal partners, we have invested \$200 million more in our child care system over the past three years to lower fees for families, create more spaces, and enhance after-school care.

We are seeing growth in our school population. Since we took office, investments in the public education system have increased over 14 per cent to nearly \$1.7 billion. This year's Capital Plan includes \$208.5 million to build, renovate, and repair schools and install more modular learning spaces to help with student enrolment growth. This continued expansion is creating more career opportunities for those interested in early childhood education and teaching.

We will continue to do everything we can to help those who need it most.

Unfortunately, there are some Nova Scotians who find themselves without a home and they need our support urgently. We are working with community partners to provide more options as quickly as we can, including additional supportive housing units, shelter spaces, daytime drop-in centres, and other temporary lodging.

While we know these are not permanent solutions, we will continue to work hard at addressing homelessness and putting the right kind of support in place to help people deal with their individual circumstances.

[1:15 p.m.]

Speaker, to honour our commitment following the Human Rights Remedy, government is transforming support for people living with disabilities. Significant changes are under way within the Disability Support Program and more resources than ever before are being made available to people with disabilities so they can make their own decisions and access funding to better meet their needs.

Over the next few years, people will continue to be moved from large institutions and be supported in the community, and they will have easier access to clinical programs and mental health supports.

Our focus on equity and anti-racism acknowledges the need for change and further investment. The needs vary, and so do the solutions. The Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives is moving forward with its strategic action plan to help break down barriers for diverse communities.

Important investments are being made to address the recommendations of the final report of the Mass Casualty Commission to help make it easier for people to access mental health and grief supports.

Transition houses and women's shelters across the province deliver essential programs for women in need, and they will receive more funding this year.

### **ACTION FOR HEALTH CARE**

Health care continues to be the single largest area of provincial investment, because everyone in this province deserves to know that it is there for them when they or a loved one need it. The previous government left us with piecemeal approaches that resulted in an outdated system for the care that our rapidly growing population requires. This year, a total of \$7.3 billion will be spent on health care - a 36 per cent increase over the past three years.

This increased funding ensures Nova Scotia Health Authority, IWK Health, and other health care providers can deliver programs and services to a province whose population has grown almost 10 per cent in just a few years, while at the same time transforming the system for a healthier future.

The health care system is interconnected. Often, challenges in one area have root causes in another. For example, one of the root causes of delays in ambulance off-load times and emergency department care is the availability of hospital beds. In many cases, Nova Scotians who need a long-term care placement are waiting in a hospital bed, because they can't go home or are waiting for a nursing home bed. The thousands of long-term care beds being built and renovated across the province today not only provide our seniors with

new places to call home, but they are also investments in the overall efficiency of the health care system.

The introduction of the new LifeFlight plane is another success, ensuring better, faster care. Since it went into service, it has saved nearly 5,200 hours of ground ambulance time. That means more ambulances and paramedics can stay in their communities to respond to local calls instead of driving patients over longer distances for appointments.

When someone needs health care in Nova Scotia, they now have more options in their community and at their fingertips. They can access many more services in pharmacy clinics, mobile care clinics, urgent treatment centres, and online. These services were not available three years ago, and they may actually be better options for people who didn't have anywhere to go but a hospital emergency department. I think we can all agree that preventing unnecessary trips to the emergency department is best for everyone.

This year, \$184.3 million more makes way for continued progress on the Action for Health plan, and improvements that will have a lasting positive impact system-wide. More emergency care initiatives. More actions to move patients through the health system more quickly, and reduce wait times for surgeries and diagnostic tests. More primary health care options and more digital solutions.

We are seeing results. Last year alone:

- 2,600 more surgeries;
- the surgical waitlist was reduced by 27 per cent;
- over 25,000 more CT scans and ultrasounds;
- 60,000 more primary care appointments available to Nova Scotians.

Many people suffer from chronic illness. One of the most common is diabetes. This budget will help many Nova Scotians living with diabetes better manage their disease and save them money. With \$7.2 million this year, Nova Scotia will help cover the cost of sensor-based glucose monitors and remove the age cap on the insulin pump program. Considering a person with diabetes pays up to \$4,000 per year for a sensor-based glucose monitor, over \$6,000 for an insulin pump, and \$4,000 for supplies, this is an important investment in the health of more than 4,000 Nova Scotians.

Nova Scotia's cancer rates are among the highest in Canada. However, with critical investments in cancer research, better methods of detection, and more effective treatments in recent years, Nova Scotians are living longer with cancer than ever before. This year, our investment in the battle against cancer continues. With \$61.1 million more, cancer patients will experience new digital imaging technology and equipment that provides adaptive radiation treatment, new precision medicine improvements, and an "at home" cancer care program.

Our government has been a strong advocate for investment in mental health. This year, more people will be able to connect to the mental health services they need with \$36.2 million more funding, and the Province will make progress on its commitment to offer universal mental health and addictions care for all Nova Scotians.

We are well into our multi-year plan to build modern health care facilities, with significant redevelopment projects in Halifax and Cape Breton Regional Municipality, and several other projects to upgrade and expand local health care facilities across the province.

The digital backbone of the health care system needs attention too, and work is under way to build the One Person One Record system and other IT projects.

We will continue to make progress this year on expanding transitional care options and building 5,700 new and replacement long-term care spaces by 2032. That's good news because three years ago, there were 500 long-term care beds closed due to staffing shortages. Now every bed is in use and making a positive impact on the entire system.

I'm pleased to say this budget provides more funding for long-term care facilities to deliver improved care to their residents. A \$10.7 million increase will be provided to help them move closer to the new standard of providing 4.1 hours of care to each person every day. This is on top of the significant investments made in safety equipment in the long-term care sector.

Although we are building more capacity in long-term care homes, we know that many seniors would prefer to stay longer in their own homes, which relieves pressure in the health care system. We are continuing to invest in programs that help them do just that, including:

- The Seniors Care Grant
- The Home Repair and Adaptation Program
- Home care and home support
- Heating Assistance Rebate
- The Seniors Provincial Tax Rebate
- The Property Tax Rebate

People who deliver care are vital to the success of the system - doctors, nurses, paramedics, continuing care assistants, lab techs - and we need more of them. We want to encourage more Nova Scotians to work in health care, and we're making it easier than ever for them to answer the call.

Bursaries, financial incentives, and other efforts will continue under this budget, building on the tremendous work already started to recruit, retain, and train more health care professionals.

The Premier has offered jobs for nursing graduates and has been working with his counterparts across the country to ensure we do not take each other's health care workers because we all need them.

We are excited to continue to work with the post-secondary sector and other partners to expand training seats and train more people in health care professions.

### **BUILDING A SKILLED WORKFORCE FOR MORE HOUSING AND A STRONGER ECONOMY**

When I was growing up, seasonal employment was common and so were high rates of unemployment. When I graduated from university, there were two graduates for every job.

Things have changed. Today, Nova Scotia does not have the people to fill all the jobs available. We want to help Nova Scotians to position themselves to realize these opportunities, and we want to help Nova Scotian business owners to have access to the people they need to grow their businesses.

With a \$100-million investment over three years - \$46.4 million this year - and changes being made in the apprenticeship system, people will find it easier to enter the skilled trades and get into the job market.

The solutions have come directly from the sectors, including:

- More training seats and training some trades faster;
- Grants for tools and technology supports;
- Eliminating certification exam fees for experienced trades professionals;
- Attracting more women and people from diverse backgrounds;
- Incentives for employers to hire and advance apprentices;
- Creating more pathways for newcomers to enter the skilled trades.

Once they make that first step, once they are on the job, they can earn a very good income and build a strong future for themselves.

We're putting more money in the pockets of people under the age of 30 in the skilled trades and film and video occupations through a one-of-a-kind provincial income tax refund. The More Opportunity for Skilled Trades program, or MOST, can help them get their start because we need them to work with us to build our province.

Nurses are now eligible to apply. When they complete their 2023 tax return and receive their notice of assessment, they can apply for MOST to get their provincial taxes back.

Post-secondary students can gain hands-on experience, build their resumes, and pay their bills with co-op jobs and internships, and this budget continues to invest in our partnership with Mitacs to support 3,200 paid internships.

We need a strong workforce to build the housing our province desperately needs. It's not surprising that housing was one of the top areas of interest from the budget consultation. Our Action for Housing plan is a forward-looking, five-year housing plan released a few months ago along with a \$1-billion commitment to create the conditions for more than 40,000 new housing units. Those units will come in many forms, and we are going to leverage every dollar we can to build the housing people need.

For the first time in more than 20 years, that will include new public housing - a critical step in the right direction. The Capital Plan includes \$35.3 million to build new public housing units and to repair and maintain existing public housing, and 25 new modular housing units will expand affordable public housing options in 10 communities, for up to 88 new tenants. They will be in place by the end of March.

The private sector can take advantage of our decision to rebate 10 per cent of the provincial HST paid on new construction of purpose-built, multi-unit apartments. That's an investment that could reach \$80 to \$100 million.

Three new NSCC student housing projects are under development, including two that will open this Fall in Dartmouth and Pictou. The projects announced to date could create up to 620 spaces for NSCC students, easing the pressure on local housing markets.

Private developers and community housing developers have access to the Affordable Housing Development Program, which provides forgivable loans to help fund the construction of new housing or the conversion of non-residential buildings. Starting this year, the \$28.6 million program will be expanded to accept proposals from universities that want to take action on student housing.

Budget 2024-25 invests in strategic infrastructure for a growing economy to build our communities and connect people to the programs and services they rely on.

A new Cellular for Nova Scotia Program will improve cell coverage in HRM and across the province. Phase 1 will focus on existing infrastructure to keep costs down and Phase 2 will close gaps in the system with new infrastructure.

Our government is maintaining increased investment in local roads:

- With 130 per cent more for local paved roads.
- We have nearly tripled funding for gravel roads.
- We have more than tripled the funding for local road maintenance.

When it comes to driving Nova Scotia's economic growth, we're focusing on growing strategic sectors. Nova Scotia is poised to be a world leader in the production and export of green hydrogen, which will help us and our global partners transition to cleaner economies.

[1:30 p.m.]

The Climate Change Plan for Clean Growth, with \$36.7 million this year, will create more opportunities for businesses and community organizations to do their part. This year's funding will encourage farmers, fishers, and their sectors to adopt clean technologies and reduce their energy consumption.

Our rural economy depends on crops, livestock, and food production. Work continues to upgrade the dike land system that supports the agricultural sector, and government is funding pilot projects that bring locally grown food into publicly funded institutions.

As Nova Scotia continues to implement forestry practices to protect ecosystems and biodiversity, \$1.8 million will be provided to help industry adapt to these changes.

Before I close, I would like to extend a personal thank you to the team at the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. They are always prudent, always thoughtful, and respectful of the decisions governments make in trying to meet the needs of citizens. I would like to thank PC MLAs for the ideas they have shared to create this budget; and for the important role opposition members play in asking questions about this budget; to the Premier for his willingness to be decisive and take action, and for the energy he shows us each day as he reaches out to Nova Scotians to listen to them; and to my family: to Lucie for understanding why this work is important and requires sacrifice; to Owen and Ben for all they do to help out at home; and to Ivy, Willow, and Lochlan, who may one day better understand why Daddy went to Halifax again.

### CLOSING

Speaker, our province has changed so much in the last few years. Our population has grown and so have the needs that go with that, but our capacity to respond has also grown.

Our government has been investing in our future. Much of the focus has been on fixing health care and responding to the housing and infrastructure needs of a place more people want to call home. Along the way we have helped people with higher costs of living.

This budget brings something new: tax relief.



The wish of this government, and the aim of this budget, is to assure Nova Scotians that their government is taking action so that everyone can realize the opportunity to live in a province with a future that is better for them.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: I am very pleased to be able to stand here today and give some brief comments about this budget. I want to thank the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board for his sacrifices and his family because I know it is not easy to spend all the time putting all this together. Congratulations on bringing your budget forward today.

That being said, we're very pleased to see a few items in this budget that were ideas brought forward by this Opposition. That's okay. We're glad to see those items in this budget because they're good for Nova Scotians. I want the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board to know that it's okay, because we have lots more good ideas we'd like to see in future budgets.

First of all, I want to start with tax relief for Nova Scotians. This is a great start. Our Party has tabled legislation in this regard twice. We have been pushing for it since we were all elected in 2021. It's wonderful to see that Nova Scotians will benefit, and that we've joined the rest of Canada in indexing income tax brackets.

The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board referenced taking it a little step farther. That's what good government is all about. It's taking ideas from others, expanding on them, and improving things for Nova Scotians - so good on you. Indexing the basic personal amount and some of the other pieces in the Income Tax Act will benefit Nova Scotians. What I would have liked to have seen there is, if we were going to go after those amounts, to increase them to an acceptable level first and then begin indexing on those items.

Speaker, the devil is always in the details when we look at budgets and planned spending. That's all this is: a plan. We have seen, over the course of this government, appropriations outside of the budget of at least a billion dollars this year and more than that last year. At the end of the day, we really don't know what's going to be spent by this government. I'm sure they don't know, because they spent a billion dollars outside of the Legislature in the last year.

The second piece that we are very happy to see in this budget is the implementation of a school lunch program. It was tabled at least three times by this Opposition over the last 2.5 years. This is something that is so important. Poverty and food insecurity amongst our youth - we debated this last night - food security is such a major issue in our communities. To have kids get a second solid meal at school is going to be nothing short of miraculous when it comes to their learning and their ability to thrive.

We're very pleased to see that in this budget. However, phasing it in over four years with \$18 million in the first year means we'll be watching this item very closely. The devil will be in the details. We will be asking those questions during Estimates. It's important to know that we're on our way. It's a good start.

The implementation of continuous glucose monitors - again, this is something this Opposition has tabled numerous times during the sitting of this Legislature over the last number of years. It's a step in the right direction. It's going to help a lot of Nova Scotians. I would like to see - and maybe we could see this in a future budget - this program expanded. Currently this program is only valid for those who are insulin-dependent.

There are so many people suffering from this chronic illness who are not at the stage of insulin dependence yet but are taking medication. The ability to monitor their blood sugar on a daily basis would go a long way to preventing them from getting to this stage, but they can't afford it. Again, the devil is in the details, and I would like to see this program expanded.

Those are some items that we think are very positive with regard to Budget 2024-25. However, we do have some concerns with this budget, namely on the housing side. In a time when we're seeing historic rent increases, historic vacancy rates - less than 1 per cent - historic homelessness, we're cutting the overall budget from what we spent this year by over 4 per cent.

We believe that more needs to be done in this area to improve the situation that Nova Scotians are currently facing with regard to homelessness and housing insecurity. I think there's a lot more work to be done there. We will ask some of those questions and provide some of those solutions as we go forward.

Another issue: While we're talking about tax relief, there are some items which we see in this budget, like the indexing of the brackets, indexing of the personal amounts. However, we feel as a caucus that this could go further. A reduction of two percentage points of HST would make a big difference.

The other evening, we heard members of the government talk about: Where will we find this money? Where will we find this money? It's \$125 million. Well, they found the money, clearly, in their budget. They also found it in their over-a-billion-dollars increase in revenue that has come in to this government unexpectedly. There's room to do more, and hopefully we'll see that in the next budget. We're going to continue to advocate for that and push this government forward on more tax relief for Nova Scotians.

Now we need to take a quick look at poverty in this province. We've done a little bit to combat that by introducing the school lunch program - but indexing. We're doing a lot of indexing, but we did not index assistance payments to those who are most vulnerable. That would go a long way to improving the lives of those who need it the most.

A \$150 one-time payment - we don't even know if this is going to continue - equates to a little over 40 cents per day. What can a person expect? How is that going to help with their situation at 40 cents per day? We need to do better. We need to do more. We expected more out of this budget regarding community services. We didn't see it. Let's hope, in the appropriations outside of the budget, that this government will see fit to make some changes there. We have a new minister who is very adamant about improving the lives of those most vulnerable, so let's see if we can move that needle forward.

We talk about the increases in health spending over the last number of years since this government has taken place. Historic increases in health spending, but we don't see those same historic increases in the metrics that are important to Nova Scotians. We don't see improvements in the doctor wait-list. As a matter of fact, it's doubled. We don't see improvements to off-load times for ambulances; in fact, they've gotten way worse.

[1:45 p.m.]

Surgeries: We talk about more surgeries than last year, but I don't believe we've met our targets that we put in place to be at the national average for surgeries. We need to get there, and we need to surpass the national average. The national average is not good enough. We need to be better.

Longer waits in emergency rooms: Speaker, I had a call from a constituent this week who was flown from Sydney to Halifax to have a special test. They had a heart attack. They were discharged from the hospital in Halifax and told to find their own way home. We're talking seniors.

When we look at the increases in health care spending, the majority - a large chunk - of those increases are in salaries and bonuses, not in getting down and improving the system where it needs to be improved. Yes, we need to appreciate people and pay them what they're worth, but we can't talk about the wonderful things we're spending in health care when the majority of that is on salaries and bonuses.

We've seen this government, in their communication and their work with municipalities, talk about improving communication, improving finances. Yet they cut \$15 million to CBRM, while equalization has grown to \$3.3 billion this year. Federal equalization to Nova Scotia has grown by 17 per cent.

Economic development - we have scrapped the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee. Nowhere in this budget do we see improvements or growth or implementation of Nova Scotia Loyal. Nothing to grow the economy, we're just going on hope that it continues - and hydrogen.

The Public Service has grown by over 10 per cent. Our net debt continues to grow.

We talk about the MOST program. The MOST program has only had a 50 per cent uptake. We need to expand that program. We need to increase the ages. We need to get people to utilize this program and to attract people. It's not doing its job, Speaker.

The Heating Assistance Rebate Program, the Seniors Care Grant - all of these items that we talk about that are wonderful for seniors, except a lot of them can't access them. We need to increase the income limits so that they can get to appreciate and get this money so that they can live a better life in their own homes.

While there are some good things in this budget, there are some improvements that need to be made. We need to take what we have here, and we need to go a step further.

At this time, with these few comments, I move that we adjourn debate on this topic for today, and we'll come back at a later date to further discuss it.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn the debate on the Budget Address.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We will now move on with the daily routine. It's 1:48 p.m., and Question Period will begin in one hour.

The honourable member for Antigonish.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I see in the gallery I have two people from my constituency here today: Coline Morrow and Anne-Marie Long, members of the Let Antigonish Decide group. I would like to offer them the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

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

We will now begin the daily routine.

### **PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition which reads as follows:

Whereas over a quarter of those who are homeless for the first time are over the age of 60; and

Whereas nearly 6,000 people are on the waitlist for public housing, with an average wait time of two years;

Therefore be it resolved that the provincial government ban evictions of seniors whose incomes would qualify them for public housing until there is a place in public housing for them to go.

This petition has been signed by a number of residents of Bloomingdale Terrace in the constituency of Halifax Chebucto, and I have also signed it.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

#### **PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

#### **TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

#### **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

#### **GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

#### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

#### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

#### **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

#### **AFRICAN HER. MO.: CELEB. OF CULTURE - RECOG.**

HON. PAT DUNN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the importance of February as African Heritage Month. In Pictou County, celebrations of the contributions, culture, history, and resilience of people of African descent began with a proclamation ceremony at Glasgow Square. At this ceremony, Isobel Izzard was honoured as the oldest living member of our town's Black community. At 97, Isobel was recognized for her years of contributions to our community.

This month has been an opportunity for all Nova Scotians to take the time to learn and grow as we work together to create a more diverse and inclusive province. We must

continue to honour and recognize the important contributions of African Nova Scotians, not just today or this month, but every day and all year round.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: May I make two introductions before I give my member's statement?

THE SPEAKER: Certainly.

ZACH CHURCHILL: First, I'd like to introduce the House to two good, kind folks from Antigonish County, Jack and Val Sullivan, who are here to watch today's proceedings. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

I'd also like to introduce the House to friends of ours from the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute who are here with us as well: Mr. Randy Headley, who is the board chair; Ms. Melinda Daye and Ms. Sheila Lucas-Cole, both of whom were founding members of the Institute, and lifelong advocates for Afrocentric education; and Ms. Sylvia Parris Drummond, CEO of the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute.

I'd like to welcome these folks today, in recognition of African Heritage Month. These are individuals who have been extraordinary community leaders, who have had an impact on the lives of many in our province, and whom I know will continue to have an impact on the lives of many.

THE SPEAKER: It's a real pleasure to have all of you here. Thank you for joining us.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

#### **DAYE LEARNING INST.: PROM. OF AFRIC. CULTURE - RECOG.**

ZACH CHURCHILL: February is designated in Nova Scotia as African Heritage Month. Today we are celebrating the roles these influential community leaders have played in establishing and sustaining the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute: again, Mr. Headley, Ms. Melinda Daye, Ms. Sheila Lucas-Cole, and Ms. Sylvia Parris Drummond. Through their efforts and those of others, the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute is advancing educational change and genuine opportunities that support learners in communities of African ancestry to reach their full potential here in the province.

Educational research is vital to the mission of the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute. The Institute creates compelling evidence to propel improvements to educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes for Nova Scotian learners of African ancestry. The Institute works directly with many national and provincial organizations, communities,

and educational institutions to build capacity for a deeper understanding of the contributions of African Nova Scotian culture to the history of our province. We acknowledge the efforts these folks have initiated, which have effectively led to societal transformation in our province.

I'll end by thanking you all very much for the leadership, and wish you continued success in the efforts to advance Afrocentric education in Nova Scotia.

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

### **STEPPING STONE: HOLIDAY CELEB. - CONGRATS.**

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, it's never too late to recognize the many people and organizations who work collectively in Nova Scotia each year to support their communities during the December holiday season. Stepping Stone is the only non-profit organization in the Maritimes that supports sex workers of all genders, aged 16 and above, by contributing to their health, safety, and well-being.

Stepping Stone works from a harm reduction model and supports the full decriminalization of sex work as the first step in addressing violence and discrimination against sex workers. Stepping Stone members and staff look forward to the annual holiday party all year long. It's a chance for the whole Stepping Stone community to get together and share a meal. Supporters and volunteers work hard to ensure an amazing holiday meal is provided to all. The volunteers source gifts for the whole family, and hairstyle and makeup artists are on hand to make everyone feel their best.

Speaker, on behalf of all members I congratulate the Stepping Stone community on another successful holiday celebration.

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member for Argyle.

### **MUISE, CHARLIE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I rise today to play homage to Charlie Muise of Tusket, who passed away on January 23<sup>rd</sup> at the age of 102. I've spoken about Charlie before in this House and his many accomplishments and milestones. He was a remarkable man - kind, honest, a man of faith, and a proud World War II veteran, having served in England and in the battlefields of Italy, Belgium, and Holland.

Charlie had a love for gardening, cars, music, and was quite the singer. On behalf of this House, I extend sincere condolences to Charlie's wife of 81 years, Annie; their eight children: Ronnie, Andrea, Nancy, Diane, Kathleen, Cleve, Elaine, and Brian; as well as his entire extended family. Rest in peace, my friend. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

HON. TONY INCE: Speaker, may I make a comment before I read my statement?

THE SPEAKER: A comment or an introduction?

TONY INCE: A comment and read my statement, if I may.

THE SPEAKER: You may make an introduction.

TONY INCE: Okay, an introduction, then. I'd like to introduce the fact that the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute was also named after our very first Sergeant-at-Arms.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

#### **VOLUNTEERS: UNHOUSED CLOTHING DRIVE - THANKS**

HON. TONY INCE: I rise today to express my gratitude and admiration for the constituents of Cole Harbour. This Winter, my office put out a call for clothing, sleeping bags, and supplies to provide for those who are unhoused. Many constituents stepped up in a big way. We had several boxes of clothing, food, boots, sleeping bags, and various necessities. Thanks to their donations, we were able to put food in the Cole Harbour community fridge, provide coats for a single mother of two daughters, provide new boots to another constituent, and made three visits to encampments with sleeping bags, hats, and mittens. In fact, they were so generous that I still have coats, hats, and stuff to provide for people.

Speaker, I'd like to ask my colleagues to join me in thanking the residents and Cole Harbour for their generosity and care for their neighbours.

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member for Halifax Chebucto.

#### **SEIU LOCAL 2: JAVA BLEND UNION RALLY - RECOG.**

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, I wish to add my voice to those congratulating the Service Employees International Union Local 2 for the strong and encouraging rally the union held February 10<sup>th</sup> at North and King Streets in Halifax in support of the workers at Java Blend, whose termination in the midst of a unionization drive is the subject of a current unfair labour practices complaint at the Nova Scotia Labour Board.

Java Blend workers held a unionizing vote in June, but the ballots have not yet been counted because of objections of the ownership group.



In January, nine workers were terminated at Java Blend, representing 25 per cent of the workforce but 100 per cent of the union's organizing committee. Speakers at the rally from the recently organized union at Pete's Frootique, from Justice for Workers, the Workers' Action Centre, and from the Java Blend workers themselves, all pointed to how the owner's conduct has every appearance of an orchestrated campaign of anti-union retaliation.

[2:00 p.m.]

The leader of the Nova Scotia NDP drew on her own years of experience as a barista and spoke compellingly to the rally about the necessity of workers in the sector having the protections that come from a union. Everything about the rally was participatory and powerful.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

**DILL, ANDREW: CHEF DILLY'S - RECOG.**

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: In 2021, Andrew Dill of Windsor opened Chef Dilly's at Howard Dill's pumpkin farm. Andrew is an interprovincial Red Seal chef who creates his very own signature dishes that highlight the history of Windsor, as well as members of the community and his late father's pumpkin farm.

Through the food truck, Andrew raises money for local sports teams, community members, and, most importantly, for his son Adam's future care.

Andrew has three children, but his youngest son, Adam, was born with a rare disease called Coffin-Lowry Syndrome, which has affected Adam both physically and intellectually. CLS is so rare that it affects only about one in 100,000 children.

So today, Speaker, in recognition of International Rare Disease Day, people at home are wearing "Jeans for Adam Dill," and buddy, if the rules of the House allowed, I would have my jeans on, too, for you.

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

**CROSBY, MARY: SOCKS FOR SHELTERS - CONGRATS.**

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, I stand today to recognize Mary Crosby, who created a community group called Socks for Shelters. Mary has made it her mission to provide socks to as many people as possible who are living in shelters or tent encampments. Sometimes socks are worn for days or even weeks, created medical issues for those who are unable to access fresh, clean laundry.

Mary created this Facebook group in 2021 with a goal of collecting 100 pairs. In the three years since, they have collected and distributed over 22,500 pairs of beautiful socks thanks to the many people willing to help. Mary states that if she's sitting, then she is knitting. By the end of this year, the socks will be distributed to Bryony House, Souls Harbour Rescue Mission, and Shelter Nova Scotia for distribution.

Please join me in recognizing Mary Crosby and her fellow knitters for their kind contributions to those in need.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**ORGANIZERS: AFRIC. HER. MO. - THANKS**

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, as we all know, February is African Heritage Month. But for Black Canadians, it is 365 - in this case, 366 - days of the year. I wasn't able to make every event this month, but I wanted to shout out some of the events I was invited to and able to attend.

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of African Heritage Month in Halifax was presented by the Black History Month Association and HRM's Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Then off to Cape Breton for the 16<sup>th</sup> annual African Heritage Month Gala in Membertou on January 27<sup>th</sup>.

I want to say thank you to Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard and the African Canadian Senate group for the invitation to Ottawa to celebrate Black History Month on February 6<sup>th</sup>, where I was pleasantly surprised to meet with fellow Nova Scotians and the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute staff at the federal government Black History Month on February 7<sup>th</sup>.

On February 9<sup>th</sup>, I sat on a panel at Dalhousie to discuss inclusion and diversity in the workplace, and I was happy to be able to talk about some of the experiences we have here. I just want to say thank you to the organizers and continue doing your work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

**FEITH, JOEY: PROV. VOL. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Kentville resident Joey Feith as a 2023 Town of Kentville Provincial Volunteer Award recipient. Joey is the Chair of the Kings County Academy Student Advisory Council and actively participates in the KCA parent-teacher association.

An exemplary volunteer at the Kings County Academy, Joey is involved in numerous programs promoting an active, healthy lifestyle for youth and parents. Joey's

volunteer CV includes the Taste the Rainbow program, which encourages youth to explore new culinary experiences, and the Take Me Outside Day Animal Quest event, and he spearheaded the 2023 KCA Rock & Roll to School Week, which promotes active transportation for commuting. As a dedicated volunteer coach, Joey contributes to the under-5 soccer program and arranges a Family PhysEd session for parents and their children.

Please join me today in congratulating Joey Feith, Kentville's Provincial Volunteer Award recipient.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

### **COOPER, DR. AFUA: CONTRIBS. TO N.S. - THANKS**

ALI DUALE: Speaker, I would like to recognize Dr. Afua Cooper, a professor at Dalhousie University. She is an author, a poet, a historian, and a political consciousness professor. She is also the founder of the Black Canadian Studies Association, of which she is currently the chair.

I would like to ask the members of this House to thank Dr. Cooper for her contribution to our province.

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

### **MACLEOD, CARL: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I rise to recognize the passing of Carl MacLeod at the age of 88 on February 21<sup>st</sup>. He was a testament to love, community, and a yielding spirit. Carl was a strong advocate for finding a cure for multiple sclerosis. Carl lost his wife and soulmate, Shirley, to MS. Shirley's diagnosis and eventual passing sent Carl on a mission of advocacy and support for people with MS. Through initiatives like the MS Canada's carnation campaign and the MS Christmas Cake Campaign, for which he has become locally known as the "Cake Man," Carl raised significant funds for MS research and brought the community closer together in the fight for a cure.

During my first year as a councillor, Carl presented me with an MS pin and a teddy bear that was once Shirley's, and one I cherish. He was a beautiful soul. My condolences to his family. Rest easy, Carl. You have earned that rest.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

### **EVANS, TODD: PARRSBORO CREATIVE ED - CONGRATS.**

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I rise today and wish to thank and congratulate Todd

Evans of Parrsboro on being welcomed as the new executive director for Parrsboro Creative. Todd and his family have a very long history and roots in the Parrsboro area and are a welcome addition to the Parrsboro Creative team. He is already looking forward to further development in the organization, and I'd just like to stand here and congratulate Todd and his family on this new endeavour.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

### **BIRDLAND REC. SOC.: OUTDOOR RINK - THANKS**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I rise today to recognize Birdland Rec, the Rockingham Recreation Society, an active community group in one of the most beautiful neighbourhoods of Clayton Park West. Rockingham Recreation Society, led by constituent Alesha MacIntyre, builds a community skating rink every winter in the D.J. Butler Park.

This community outdoor rink, which is built by volunteers, is a wonderful way for skaters of all ages to enjoy the outdoors, while participating in healthy exercise. The rink has lights in the evening, and they are even starting an equipment exchange for skates and gear. I ask the House to join me in celebrating the exemplary community spirit of the volunteers of Rockingham Recreation Society and thank them for providing a great neighbourhood winter experience.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **RENNER, MICHELLE: 13<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

SUSAN LEBLANC: For people who have a birthday today, it's pretty special, as it only happens every four years. Today I'm happy to have the chance to wish Dartmouth North resident Michelle Renner a very happy birthday. I met Michelle when I was a little kid in Prospect Bay, as she was cousins with my next-door neighbours, the Durham family. Several years later we found ourselves living in the same neighbourhood in Dartmouth.

When I ran for office in 2017, Michelle was a dedicated member of my campaign team. Little did I know then that she came from deep NDP roots. Her mom Serena was a provincial secretary for many years, and Michelle had many great stories about knocking on doors for Alexa McDonough and others as a kid.

Michelle is a dedicated federal public servant and advocate for animals, a devoted foster parent to dogs and a great baker. If you attend an event put on by the Dartmouth North NDP, and I hope you will, Speaker, one day, and there are cookies there, Michelle has likely baked them.

Though she's about my age, I ask all members of the House to join me in wishing Michelle Renner a very happy 13<sup>th</sup> birthday.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

**CONWAY, S./PATRIQUIN, E.: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

TOM TAGGART: I rise to recognize two ladies from the small community of Londonderry. Susan Conway and Evelyn Patriquin have been working very hard to keep the Londonderry Station Community Church, Thirsty Church, open and useful to the community. One of their main goals is to keep Sunday church services alive.

Susan and Evelyn also run the Food Cupboard, which not only provides food but also has clothing and toys available. This is kept open thanks to their hard work and kindness, but also because of the contributions from community-minded members.

Evelyn and Susan will also provide lunch and a movie for our seniors, giving them an opportunity to get out of the house and chat with their neighbours.

Speaker, I would like to commend Evelyn and Susan for their innovative ideas, their hard work and their countless hours spent creating an inviting environment for the Londonderry residents.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

**METEGHAN LIONS CLUB: COM. LUNCHESES - RECOG.**

RONNIE LEBLANC: I rise today to recognize what has become a community tradition: the monthly community lunch, graciously hosted by the Meteghan Lions Club. On every third Sunday, locals gather for a shared meal and companionship. These lunches hold special significance for those living alone, offering a chance to socialize over a comforting meal.

None of this would be possible without the dedicated volunteers of the Meteghan Lions Club, who tirelessly organize and prepare each meal, supported by the invaluable partnership of Comeau's Farm Market. Adding to the festive atmosphere is the monthly musical performance by Jacques Deveau & Friends, enhancing the experience for all.

I ask that all members join me in showing appreciation to the Meteghan Lions Club for their monthly hospitality and providing our community with a delightful meal.

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

**YWCA: RELAUNCH EMPLOYMENT PGM. - THANKS**

LISA LACHANCE: I would like to honour the tremendous work done by the ReLaunch Atlantic program at the YWCA Halifax.

This program has done a great job of helping women and gender-diverse folks recognize their potential and rebuild their hopes in different fields. The program empowers participants to get ready to join the working environment in a way that they are motivated, with life skills and training like first aid, how to be assertive, how to communicate while at work, and how to deal with negative influence and burnout, as well as providing them with digital skills.

After the queer development sessions, participants are encouraged to apply for jobs of their interest, and the YWCA gives subsidies to the employer during the internship program. This enables participants to gain practical skills for the job.

Speaker, I would like to thank the YWCA for this program that enabled Aminah Basirika to join my office and draft this statement for you all.

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

#### **GLACE BAY GEN. HOSP.: RENOVATIONS - RECOG.**

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge that the residents of Glace Bay, Dominion, Reserve Mines, Donkin, Port Morien, and surrounding areas will see improved access to health care with the upcoming renovations to the Glace Bay Hospital.

The renovation and addition to Glace Bay Hospital includes a new and expanded emergency department that will provide improved flow for staff, physicians, and patients. As well, surgical suite renovations are designed to improve programming and to ensure they will meet current and future demands.

This major project will provide a modern, state-of-the-art facility with advanced equipment and technology. This means obvious advantages in recruiting and retaining health care professionals. It will also be a green project, with reduced greenhouse gas emissions and efficient use of energy and water.

After years of uncertainty, with frequent and long closures for the Glace Bay Hospital, these renovations serve as a statement of support for access to health care in our region.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

#### **ANNAP. ROYAL FIREFIGHTERS: AWD. RECIPS. - CONGRATS.**

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, in communities across our province, volunteer firefighters sacrifice so much to help their fellow citizens. I'm always pleased to celebrate their efforts.

Last Fall I had the honour of attending the Annapolis Royal Volunteer Fire Department awards banquet. I would like to take a moment to recognize the award recipients: Zach Cromwell, 10 Years Service; David Wright, 10 Years Service; and Andy Sharpe, 15 Years Service.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating these award recipients and in thanking all members of the Annapolis Royal Volunteer Fire Department for all they do to make our community safe and great places to live and work in.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**SUNSET COM.: AFFORDABLE HOMES PROJECT - CONGRATS.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I'm pleased to rise to recognize the Sunset Community in Pugwash, who are embarking on an innovative project to create affordable and accessible homes in a new inclusive community known as Sunrise Landing.

The project, being planned in three phases, will see the development of 30 acres of scenic property that's within walking distance of all amenities in Pugwash. In collaboration with a local builder, Cross Roads Cycle Sales, the project will see construction of 16 homes as the first phase of the development.

The homes will provide a mix of affordable units and market-ready units that will meet all accessibility and environmental standards. The project is intended to be a diverse community with accessible outdoor spaces that inspire a sense of community. The initial goal is to provide quality housing options for persons transitioning into community-based settings from Sunset's adult residential centre.

The housing project will ultimately provide homes for members of the general public, including the local workforce. Please help me congratulate the board of directors of Sunset Community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**ORGANIZERS: AFRIC. HER. MO. GALA - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: As we close off African Heritage Month, I want to thank all the organizers from one end of the province to the other.

As we know, there's a lot of work that goes on during the big day or the big weekend of African Heritage Month. I want to extend my appreciation for all their continued hard work in making sure that we, as Black Canadians, never forget our roots.

I want to go back to February 10<sup>th</sup>, when I was at an African Heritage Month Gala that I was grateful to attend. The gala organizer from Afrifest put together a presentation recognizing all of us sitting Black MLAs that evening on the 10<sup>th</sup>. It was beautiful.

[2:15 p.m.]

I also did my favourite thing and visited Joseph Howe School on February 12<sup>th</sup> and engaged the youth in political talks. Boy, are our young people brilliant. I'm always inspired to hear from our future.

On February 17<sup>th</sup>, I was honoured to attend the annual southwest African Heritage Month gala in Digby, and I had a ball.

I could go on and on because there were so many events, but I want to encourage everyone to get out, support our Black businesses, and be attentive.

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

**GAUDRY, ABBI: DAL. ATHLETE OF WEEK - CONGRATS.**

HON. BRIAN WONG: Today I rise to congratulate Windsor Junction's very own Abbi Gaudry, who was named Dalhousie Tigers Athlete of the Week in January 2024.

Abbi impressed everyone when she finished fourth at the McGill Team Challenge with a time of 8.84 seconds in the 60-metre hurdle. Just last year, Abbi won silver at the Atlantic University Sport Championships after recovering from COVID-19 just the week before.

Speaker, please join me in congratulating Abbi Gaudry, a brilliant young woman with an incredibly bright future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**EMT VOLUNTEERS: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, today I want to recognize William Pelrine, Doug Henry, Keith Helper, and Charles Manthorne, who are outstanding volunteers in my community. These gentlemen are members of the Western Region Joint Emergency Management team and have logged over 150 hours of volunteer time at comfort centres. The effects of climate change are producing devastating and severe weather events such as hurricanes, fires, and floods. These events necessitate support, comfort, and a safe place for people who are displaced from their homes.

The Western Region Joint Emergency Management team is a volunteer group



working under the direction of Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency Services. The organization provides services to the communities from Goodwood, along Highway No. 333 to Hubbards and through to Tantallon and Timberlea. They provide support to Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency Services when issues arise in our areas and work collaboratively with them to help increase the comfort and safety of our residents.

The work is done through the operation of comfort centres during power outages, and they offer information and community educational preparedness. The newest project the group is undertaking will be working with communities to develop evacuation plans in the event of an emergency.

I would like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking Bill, Doug, Keith, and Charles for their generosity and compassion to comfort and help others during difficult and challenging times.

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

#### **LOCAL SKATERS: CH'SHIP PARTIC. - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm rising today to recognize four New Waterford skating club members competing at the Nova Scotia provincial figure skating championships over the weekend. The provincials will take place in Amherst. Congratulations to Taylor Petrie, Bhreagh MacDougall, Neely Rae Pheifer, and Kiana MacDonald on all your accomplishments this season. I want them to know an entire community is cheering them on and wishing them luck, success, and a fantastic experience at provincials.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

#### **MACKINNON, J./STEWART, R.: IIHF HOCKEY - CONGRATS.**

NOLAN YOUNG: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Jessica MacKinnon of Clark's Harbour and Rhyah Stewart of Antigonish, who recently competed in the IIHF Ice Hockey U18 Women's World Championship in Switzerland.

These two ladies played excellent hockey throughout the tournament. I know this is not the last time that we will see or hear of them as they advance in their careers on the ice.

I respectfully ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating Jessica and Rhyah on games well played, and their team's strong 8-1 win over Finland to bring home the bronze medal to Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**BEDFORD LIONS: SHADE SHELTER - THANKS**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Bedford Lions on some new initiatives to make life better for their fellow Bedford residents. After the city was forced to remove trees from DeWolf Park due to an emerald ash borer infestation, our Bedford Lions stepped up to create a shade shelter in the park. Now that so many fellow citizens are struggling with the cost of food and necessities during this affordability crisis, the Bedford Lions have installed a community food pantry outside the Bedford Lions' den. In addition to packaged food, the pantry contains necessities like toothpaste and other toiletries, sanitary products, and more. Various local organizations and individuals have stepped up to support the Lions in this effort, and I want to thank them for their support. I really appreciate everyone coming together to help other residents in what is a tough time for so many.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**SKINNER, JASON: NEW MURAL - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, if you walk or roll near the Schultz Memorial Ball Diamond on Howe Street in North Dartmouth - as I often have done with my dog, Gregory Jack - you will see a beautiful new mural, *Home Team 2023*, painted last Summer by Jason Skinner. The mural is bright and brilliant, and portrays a strong sense of community through the depiction of a children's local baseball team. It's really beautiful, and is a wonderful addition to our community.

Jason Skinner lives in Dartmouth North and is a multi-disciplinary artist who creates murals, illustrations, oil paintings, and chalk art. He's been creating public art for over 20 years. You may have seen his installation called *42 Seagulls* at the new entrance to the Alderney Gate Public Library in downtown Dartmouth. Another one of Jason's raised murals adorns a building on Blowers Street, and features various Haligonians walking, chatting, playing guitar, and more.

Public art like Jason's simply makes our communities better. Dartmouth North is home to many talented artists, and I'm really glad that Jason is one of them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

**AKOMA HOLDINGS: AFFORDABLE HOMES - CONGRATS.**

HON. TWILA GROSSE: I rise today to recognize Akoma Holdings Incorporated at the site of approximately 320 acres of land in Westphal, near the Preston township. On October 22, 2023, Akoma Holdings Incorporated unveiled four duplexes with eight affordable housing units. This cluster is called the Fairfax Home, named for Reverend Donald E. Fairfax, a former teacher at the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children.

These houses were built with funding provided by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation under the Rapid Housing Initiative Cities Stream, in partnership with HRM. The Province of Nova Scotia, through Housing Nova Scotia, also contributed as part of a tri-lateral contribution agreement.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to please join me in congratulating and thanking Akoma Holdings Incorporated for that new, affordable housing, and best wishes to the families who will occupy them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**ADVOCATES: SCHOOL LUNCH PGM. - RECOG.**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I want to rise on my feet for a second, based on the announcement that we heard earlier about a universal school lunch program for our kids. I do want to say this: Regardless of political stripe, this is a huge win for our children and their families. It is.

We have our debates in the House, and we talk about it. Whether you are in Opposition or in government or not, you're always advocating for it, but everybody wanted the same thing. There were also a lot of advocates out in the community who were actually advocating for this. Speaker, you'd remember being on some of these committees where these organizations would come in. They'd be child advocates, they'd be certain advocates when it came to poverty, and all of them said the same thing - that the one thing we could do was go to our kids, make sure we could do whatever we could. It was one of the most tangible things that we could do.

We've debated this in the House since 2021. I can tell you that I've been in this place for almost nine years now, and I can say that this is one of the happiest days that I've had because we did something really special for our kids.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

**LONG, THOMAS EDWARD: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. GREG MORROW: Speaker, I rise today to speak in memory of Thomas Edward Long of Lesterdale, who passed away in January. Tommy, as he was known to family and friends, was a forester and a blueberry farmer. He was a dedicated worker, and Tommy and his wife of 52 years, Bernadette, passed this work ethic on to their four children.

He loved the outdoors, be it harvesting pulpwood, working in his blueberry fields, or grooming his Christmas trees. In 2001, Tommy was proud to receive the Nova Scotia Eastern Region Woodlot Owner of the Year Award. Tommy enjoyed making a living off

the land in Guysborough County until he was no longer able to do what he so loved.

He was a Blue Jays fan and a Leafs fan, and Tom never lost hope for the Leafs to win the Stanley Cup. He found joy in playing sports, trying to skunk anyone who challenged him to crib, listening to music, singing, dancing, and walking through the woods. However, his ultimate joy was spending quality time with his family.

I ask the House to think of Tommy Long's wife, Bernadette, his adored children, Donovan, Sheila, Krista, and Karen, and their children. May they find peace in the cherished memories of a beloved husband, father and Papa.

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

### **BROWN, NATALIE & SON: CGM ADVOCACY - THANKS**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I just want to do a quick statement giving a big shout-out and thank you and congratulations to Natalie Brown of Fairview-Clayton Park and her son, Dylan St. Hilaire. Both have been tremendous advocates for a continuous glucose monitor program. With the announcement made yesterday, I know that funding is going to severely impact their lives in a better way, and will do so for many residents of my constituency. A big thank you to them, and I look forward to seeing what cause they champion next.

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

### **EMPLOYEES: SNOWMAGEDDON RELIEF - RECOG.**

HON. KEITH BAIN: Speaker, the snow event from February 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> that was facetiously referred by some Cape Bretoners as "White G'Wan," "Fidget Fiona," or "Snowmageddon" has dumped over 100 centimetres of snow in many areas of Cape Breton and Victoria-The Lakes, which left residents grounded in their homes, feeling isolated and in need of assistance.

Nature has its ways of bringing us as a community together. When our residents are impacted in a ground-halting event such as Snowmageddon, assistance within the community comes immediately into action. The efforts put forth by the employees of the Municipality of Victoria County, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, EMO, the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, and the Department of Public Works coordinated together the best they could in these extreme conditions.

I ask all members of the House of Assembly to please join me in applauding and recognizing the many hours of coordination, volunteer time, and work hours that have been completed during and after the event to keep our community safe.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

**MACKINLEY, RONALD: 100<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

BRAEDON CLARK: On New Year's Day this year, I was happy to attend a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for Mr. Ronald McKinley, who lives in my riding of Bedford South.

Ronald was born on New Year's Day, 1924, and it was wonderful to meet Ron, to meet his family, his children, his grandchildren, and his great-grandchildren. So many cousins and friends showed up for Ron. He is an amazing man, as sharp as can be. Given all the certificates and plaques and well-wishes that I saw at the building that day, he has certainly lived his 100 years very well. I just want to wish a happy 100<sup>th</sup> birthday to Mr. Ronald McKinley.

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

**ST. MARG. BAY RFTA: TRAIL MAINT. - THANKS**

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Neil Mooy and the volunteers of the St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails Association.

The association holds a letter of authority from the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables to maintain the trail that runs 300 kilometers from Hubley to Hubbards. It is managed by a small board of volunteers.

Due to the rain disaster of July 2023, the trail suffered significant damage along the entire corridor, and had to be closed. At one location, the entire trail was washed away in two places, and usage would be forced onto Highway No. 3. The closure lasted all Summer and into part of the Fall, until a significant section was finished, inspected, and approved for re-opening. For a small volunteer-run trail, this was no easy feat.

For the coming year, they are continuing with repairs along other sections, and are doing infrastructure repairs to ensure the trail stays in great shape for the coming generations and for all of the users.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in thanking the volunteers of the St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails Association for their tremendous work.

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

**NIECE, ISABEL: BIRTH - CONGRATS.**

HON. BEN JESSOME: I'd just like take a quick moment to welcome my baby

niece to the world. Little Millie Isabelle Jessome was born on Monday. John and Callie, my brother and sister-in-law, are doing well, and the baby is doing well. Grandpa D. and Nan are over the Moon and can't wait to meet her.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

**MT. CALVARY LUTH. CHURCH: FOOD PGM. - RECOG.**

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Speaker, I rise today to applaud the efforts of Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in Upper Northfield for ensuring that our community is fed and nourished. In fact, that's the name of the monthly meals the church has been hosting for the past two years, and they've really taken off.

Each month, the church invites one and all to join them for comfort and connection over a hot meal. Prepared and served by volunteers, it could be a roast beef dinner, chowder and a roll, or a Summertime barbecue, and it is for everyone. As their posters say: whether you want the night off from cooking, whether you hate cooking - like myself - or the pantry is a little low, just join them.

There is a suggested donation of \$3 a meal, but with no need for anyone to pay. In fact, the group's most sincere ask is that folks consider taking a meal to a neighbour who couldn't get out to join them. Speaker, I hope colleagues will join me in commending this extraordinary local initiative.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**MERRYFIELD, VERONICA: RIGHTS AWD. RECIP. - RECOG.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I rise today with immense pride to recognize an incredible Nova Scotian woman who has dedicated her life to advocating for transgender rights and mental health: Veronica Merryfield. Veronica was recently honoured by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission for her work. Veronica's commitment to making a positive impact extends to her role as the chair of the board for Transition House, Every Woman's Centre, the Cape Breton Centre for Sexual Health, and Conversion Therapy Survivors Connect. She also sits on the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Veronica played a pivotal role in campaigning for amendments to the Nova Scotia Children and Family Services Act to better support the 2SLGBTQIA+ and children in challenging home environments. She was also involved in the federal conversion therapy ban.

I ask the House to join me in honouring Veronica as we celebrate her commitment to creating a more just and inclusive society for all.

[2:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

**PORT OF SYDNEY: CRUISE SHIP SEASON - BEST WISHES**

HON. BRIAN COMER: Speaker, I rise in my place today to send best wishes to the team at the Port of Sydney, and to everyone else involved in ensuring a successful 2024 cruise season in Cape Breton. This year's season kicks off on April 7<sup>th</sup> with the arrival of the MSC Poesia. This year is set to be yet another record year for the port, with more than 115 ships to Sydney carrying up to 220,000 passengers and 100,000 crew. Operators from Ingonish to Iona to Eskasoni and beyond will benefit from this thriving industry, and visitors are treated to an unforgettable experience. The Port of Louisbourg will receive 10 cruise ships this year, with the first arrival on April 11<sup>th</sup>.

I wish for calm waters and fair seas for all those ships sailing to Cape Breton, and a prosperous season. Thank you.

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

**CONSTITUENCY OFFICE: MOVING - RECOG.**

HON. BEN JESSOME: I'd just like to mention through you, Speaker - through this Legislative TV for the purposes of the community - I am, after 10 years, moving my constituency office to the St. Margaret's Centre at 12 Westwood Boulevard. I want to especially thank the team at Hammonds Plains Pharmacy, Hammonds Plains Physiotherapy, Hammonds Plains Family Practice, and, in particular, Martin Langille, who has been a tremendous asset and very accommodating over the last 10 years.

I hope that the new space at St. Margaret's Centre will prove to be an accessible, inviting, and wonderful new opportunity for me to better serve the needs of constituents in Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. I just wanted to promote that and let everybody know that I won't be far. I'll be available as much as I've always been.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

**CLARE SHARE FRIDGE COM.: CHRISTMAS EVENT - RECOG.**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Clare Share Fridge Communautaire and its dedicated volunteers for organizing Clare for the Holidays, our community Christmas meal, held for the second year at the Sacred Heart Parish Hall in Saulnierville on December 24<sup>th</sup>. The event witnessed over 550 meals served, a remarkable increase from the previous year.

Volunteers laboured tirelessly to cultivate a warm atmosphere, offering a delectable turkey dinner with all of the fixings, accompanied by festive music from Jacques Deveau and Friends. With options for both dine-in and delivery, accessibility was prioritized to ensure inclusivity for all.

I extend my sincere appreciation to Clare Share Fridge Communautaire for their outstanding dedication. I ask that all members join me in thanking them for hosting such a successful Christmas event.

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

**MATTHEWS, CRAIG: NEW TRURO FIRE CAPTAIN - CONGRATS.**

DAVE RITCEY: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Craig Matthews on his well-deserved promotion to the position of captain for the Truro Fire Service. Craig's dedication, expertise, and unwavering commitment to public safety have undoubtedly earned him this honour.

As a firefighter, he has proven bravery and leadership, demonstrating exceptional skills in emergency response and community service. Craig's promotion not only recognizes his individual accomplishments but also inspires his colleagues and the community at large.

We have no doubt that Craig will continue to serve with distinction in his new role, guiding and protecting Truro with the same passion and professionalism that he has shown throughout his career. Well done, Captain Matthews.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

**RECIPS.: FIREFIGHTING AWARDS - CONGRATS.**

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, recently I had the honour of attending the Lawrencetown and District Volunteer Fire Department awards banquet. I would like to take a moment to recognize the award recipients: Jim Wood, 35 years of service; Brian Sturney, 30 years of service; Mike Lockett, 20 years of service; and Ethan Stultz, 10 years of service.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating these award recipients and in thanking all the members of the Lawrencetown and District Volunteer Fire Department for all they do to make our communities a great place to live.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.



**TORN SOULS BIKE CLUB: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Speaker, I rise today to thank the members of the Torn Souls Motorcycle Riding Club for their hard work in giving back to our community. There are three local food pantries within the Eastern Passage constituency that are visited by local community members. The Torn Souls Motorcycle group keeps those shelves and pantries stocked all year long and will hold a local fundraising pancake breakfast this coming Saturday to offset some of their costs. They are always grateful to accept food donations.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in thanking the Torn Souls Motorcycle Riding Club members for their compassion and understanding while always giving back to their community on this initiative and many others.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**RICHARDS, LYNETTE: STAINED GLASS WORK - CONGRATS.**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, I rise to recognize Lynette Richards of Terrance Bay. Lynette is owner of Rose Window Stained Glass, a professional stained glass studio, and is an experienced tradesperson and fine artist. Lynette approaches stained glass through art and architecture, rather than as a hobby.

Over 20 years ago, a European master glazer took her on as an apprentice. This intensive three-year education involved learning a thousand years of stained glass history and method as it evolved alongside architecture. Lynette is uniquely qualified to design and build stained glass windows rugged enough to outlive us and beautiful enough to be worthy of longevity. She designs for clients to suit their specific needs and works closely with homeowners, interior designers, builders, and community representatives.

Lynette prepared the set of nine large windows of Our Lady of Lebanon parish in Halifax. A stunning collection, the windows tell the life of Mary in the Lebanese Maronite tradition. The first four are her life on Earth, and the last four are her afterlife. The first piece of glass was cut in April 2022, leaving Lynette barely 10 months to create nine incredibly beautiful stained glass windows.

I'd like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Lynette Richards on her talent as an artist and to thank her for sharing the beauty of her work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

**MANETTE, DONALD: 95<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

HON. KENT SMITH: Speaker, I rise today to bring best wishes to Eastern Shore

resident Donald Manette of West Chezzetcook. In January, Donnie celebrated his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Donnie does not let his age define his ability to participate in community events. He remains a very active member of the Eastern Shore Progressive Conservative Association. During my campaign in 2021, Donnie led the charge on sign construction and placement throughout the district. In fact, every one of my signs was either built by Donnie or installed by Donnie.

I look forward to his visits to the constituency office, and I enjoy listening to his stories and advice. He is highly respected in our community and has his ear to the ground. He never hesitates to pass along concerns or issues that he hears along his travels.

I ask that all members of the Legislative Assembly join me in wishing Donnie a happy 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, and may he enjoy continued good health.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

#### **GENETIC THREADS: CDN. CHOICE AWD. - CONGRATS.**

HON. KELLY REGAN: I want to congratulate a Nova Scotia small business on winning a Canadian Choice Award for 2024. Genetic Threads won best in the baby clothing category, competing against businesses from all across Canada.

The company is run by a mother-daughter team, Ashley and Heather Francis. They design and sew beautiful creations for infants, toddlers, and children. You should see their adorable bunny rompers. They're all sold out for this year, though.

Ashley and Heather have also been the movers and shakers behind some local makers markets, organizing the ones that have taken place at DeWolf Park on the Bedford waterfront, for example. I love that in addition to making beautiful clothing for children, they've also looked out for opportunities for their fellow makers, and ensured they've had places to sell their wares too. Make sure to keep an eye out for their new brand, Coastal Makers Market, this Summer.

I want to commend Ashley and Heather and wish them both many more years of creating beautiful clothing for children and promoting local small business. Brava.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

#### **SPRYFIELD MEMORIAL LEGION: 65<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - RECOG.**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: This year the Earl Francis Spryfield Memorial Legion will celebrate its 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Speaker, I have spent many days and nights at the Legion, from community parties, dances, and their amazing Remembrance Day celebrations. I want to thank the staff - past, present and future - for everything they do. It truly is a Spryfield experience.

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

**DEAL, NICK: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I rise today to honour Nick Deal, the 2023 recipient of MSVU's esteemed President's Award for Volunteer Service to the Extended Community. Nick's commitment to serving both the university and the greater Halifax area is truly commendable.

At the Mount, Nick has played a pivotal role in reviving Enactus, guiding students to impactful community initiatives. He also provides invaluable coaching and advice to students for case competitions, academic advising, and career development.

Beyond the university, Nick serves on various committees and non-profit boards throughout Fairview-Clayton Park and beyond. Nick's unwavering dedication embodies the spirit of volunteerism, and he uplifts our community. His contributions have left a lasting and positive impact, and he is a true inspiration to all who meet him.

Let us commend Nicholous Deal for his outstanding service and express our gratitude for his invaluable contributions to our community. With individuals like Nick, our community continues to grow stronger and more resilient each day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

**ROBINSON, TAYLOR: CA WORK - RECOG.**

HON. JILL BALSER: I rise today in recognition of the exceptional contributions of someone who has made a significant impact on me and for the community over the past few years: my former constituency assistant Taylor Robinson. Taylor has done so much for me, my office, and the constituents of Digby-Annapolis. She has consistently exceeded expectations and I cannot thank her enough. Her problem-solving skills and her dedication to constituents' welfare has been exceptional, from helping constituents fill out forms to finding the right resources and solutions to different matters that are brought up by our residents. Taylor represents a new generation of voters, and her passion to make a difference and a positive impact is evident throughout her time at my office.

Taylor has moved on to a position with the Municipality of Digby. Where her departure has been a loss for my office, I am confident that her experience will benefit the municipality, and I extend my congratulations to them. On behalf of everyone who has benefited from Taylor's unwavering support, I wish her the best in her new position as an

executive assistant and tax clerk with the municipality. Taylor, you have truly made a difference, and I look forward to watching your future success.

[2:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**SEGUIN, PAUL: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

HON. STEVE CRAIG: I rise today to applaud Paul Seguin from Lower Sackville. Paul was recently honoured at the Lions Club of Sackville for his 67 years of service with the Lions, all the while celebrating his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday - two very incredible milestones. What an outstanding example of a lifelong commitment to one's community. Volunteers such as Paul are vital to the spirit and growth of the community. Although they do not volunteer for recognition, they willingly dedicate their time and heart to make our world and community a better place.

Speaker, I would ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in applauding Paul Seguin for his dedication and commitment to our community, and to the Lions Club of Sackville.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

**VOLUNTEERS: SACKVILLE SNOW DAYS FESTIVAL - CONGRATS.**

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the Sackville Business Association, as well as all the local businesses and community organizations, on another successful Sackville Snow Days Festival. This year, the festival ran from February 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> and included fun events for all ages and interests, including a snow sculpture contest, a scavenger hunt, a teen snowball fight, and a public skate, among many other things. Unfortunately, even though this was our 10<sup>th</sup> year, the parade had to be postponed because of the weather, but other than that, everyone had a wonderful time.

I'd like to take an opportunity to thank all those who worked so tirelessly to lift the spirits of those people in Sackville and the surrounding communities. It's almost like Christmas in February.

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

**THOMAS, JUNE: SKATING INSTRUCTION - RECOG.**

LORELEI NICOLL: If you learned how to skate in Cole Harbour during the past 35 years, there's a very good chance you learned from June Thomas, Cole Harbour's first skating instructor. June, a resident of Cole Harbour for over 54 years, recognized the need

for skating instructors in the community, and through Ringette Canada she completed the requirements to become a certified instructor.

In 2015, June was featured in an article by Sportsnet, where she told the story of her love of teaching children the skills to become skaters, and how strongly she felt that every Canadian child should have the opportunity to learn.

June remembers a very shy, quiet five-year-old boy named Sidney in one of her classes. When the session was over, she took him by the hand, led him to his mother, and said, “He’s it. He’s the next Great One.” A few years later, another student named Nathan joined her class. He called her “The Boss Lady.” She said that he could overskate everyone. June always referred to the rink as her “happy place.”

Speaker, please join me in recognizing the efforts of June Thomas for the last 35 years, for her many years of dedication, and for instilling passion for skating to the children in the community - and becoming great ones.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Oral Questions Put By Members to Ministers will now begin at 2:48 p.m., for the next 50 minutes. We’ll be finished at, of course, 3:38 p.m.

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

### **ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM.: HST REDUCTION - IMPLEMENT**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you, Speaker. For all the attacks the Premier has levelled at the Opposition, I’d like to say, he sure does like a lot of our ideas that we see showing up in today’s budget. In fact, the three headline pieces listed in the press release were all ideas that this caucus had been championing for over two years now. I am happy to see them in the budget.

However, the tax relief plan that this government has does not go far enough. We’ve got working families that are struggling to make ends meet, and the government’s plan to save between \$69 and \$259 a year is certainly not enough to relieve the high tax pressure on Nova Scotians. Considering that this Premier is also taking an additional billion dollars in taxes that was unexpected, and is seeing another historic year in revenues from taxes, will the Premier please actually bring in real tax relief and cut the HST by two points?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Of course, the budget that we tabled today is a significant budget, a historic budget in spending investments in Nova Scotians across the spectrum. I’ll say to the member that the budget is what we expect to happen this year.

We're going to invest in Nova Scotians. If we have an opportunity during the year to invest more, well, we'll do that too. We'll do it to invest in Nova Scotians.

I was always very clear with Nova Scotians during the 2021 campaign - members opposite may remember that 2021 campaign - but I was always very clear that there were investments to be made in Nova Scotians. We're making those investments. I was clear that tax relief was a long way away, but I am very proud of this team, this government, this minister right here who was able to deliver on tax relief in this budget.

ZACH CHURCHILL: It's very clear that \$69 to \$259 a year in savings for Nova Scotians is not going to be enough to deal with the increased level of inflation and costs that Nova Scotians are experiencing, whether they're paying the highest rent increases in the country, some of the highest power increases, and some of the highest taxes. While this is welcome, it's certainly not enough, and the Premier actually has enough money to move on this. I'm also concerned about the housing budget. We have seen a drastic reduction in funding to housing at a time when the Premier is trying aggressively to double the population, when we have a homelessness crisis, and when we have a housing crisis across the spectrum.

At a time when the Premier said he's going to have a plan for housing, can he explain why he is cutting back the housing budget by almost 20 per cent?

THE PREMIER: We delivered on a housing plan. It involves over 40,000 new units over five years. We're investing in the people to build those homes through the MOST program. We're investing in the people to build those homes through an incredible investment in the apprentice program. We're investing in housing across the spectrum: community college housing, campus housing, and affordable housing - first one in a generation - investments in affordable housing. We'll continue to do that.

To the member's comments on tax relief, of course we want to do more. Somebody asked me about the members' HST cut and whether I thought that was a real thing. I said, That party themselves, according to the Auditor General's Report, has a no-trust policy, so take that as you will. I don't think you can trust this party on what they say. We are investing in Nova Scotians, and we will continue to do that.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I love when we see the pettiness of this Premier when he slings mud because he can't stand on the merit of his own record. When we have poverty increasing in this province . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. "Slinging mud" is unparliamentary, so I ask the Leader of the Official Opposition if he could retract that.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I will retract those comments.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

ZACH CHURCHILL: We see the Premier focus more on levelling attacks against the Opposition than on standing on his own record. We see that in the members opposite in the Cabinet who stand up and read cheap statements from a script like they're auditioning for community theatre instead of dealing with real issues that are affecting people, like the rising rates of poverty . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order. My goodness. Order.

Please ask your question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: At a time when these issues are going on, we see what the government's focused on. When poverty rates are increasing and people are getting poorer by the week, why did the Premier freeze income assistance for another year, only giving people an additional \$0.41 a day? That's not enough.

THE PREMIER: Speaker, if only they were reading from a cheap community theatre script. They're actually reading from the comments of the Auditor General. It's hard to believe the actions of this government. We're standing up and reading from the Auditor General report. It is shameful - the actions of that government. When taxpayer money was misappropriated, they looked the other way. The Auditor General caught them, and we're reading their comments.

I'll leave the member with this: The income assistance rates in this province are absolutely not being frozen. That's another statement from the Liberal no-trust policy. Sixty per cent of Nova Scotians on income assistance are receiving a \$300 per month increase. That is not frozen.

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

#### **PREM.: AFFORDABLE HOUSING SHORTAGE - EXPLAIN**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, the Premier mentioned yesterday that he and I have an ideological disagreement over housing, and he's right. We believe that all people have a right to housing, and he doesn't. We believe that in this budget, we see a complete absence of actually dealing with the issue of the affordable housing that is needed in this province. In this budget, we see precious little investment in creating affordable housing at all or in strengthening the non-market housing sector. Does the Premier think that the housing in this province is affordable enough?

THE PREMIER: This government is the first government in decades to invest in

public housing. This government. The investments in affordable housing that this government is making would dwarf anything that the prior two governments could have even contemplated. We are investing in housing across the spectrum.

I will tell the member this: I agree that there is more to be done. I agree that when you think about public housing - affordable housing - it is important that we as leaders collectively preserve that precious stock for those who truly need it, and not allow it to be used by others.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: It certainly is. Unfortunately, the Premier believes in trickle-down housing, but we know that this approach has failed. We have record-high rental completions, and yet according to the government's own *Housing Needs Assessment Report*, 41,000 Nova Scotians are living in unaffordable situations, and the number is projected to grow.

The report states: "Even a well-functioning market will not be able to adequately address the needs of individuals or households earning lower incomes." Nova Scotians can't wait any longer. We need real investment in housing that families and seniors and young people can actually afford. Why does the Premier refuse to accept that while we do need a huge amount of housing supply, it must include dedicated and truly affordable housing?

THE PREMIER: It does include dedicated affordable housing, and that's why it's particularly important that leaders, particularly in this Chamber, preserve that stock for those who truly need it. That is really important. The investments that we're making in housing are significant by any measure, and we need people to build housing. That's why we've invested \$100 million over three years in the Apprenticeship Program to get the housing built.

That's why we're investing in the MOST program - More Opportunities for Skilled Trades. I can tell you, the number of young Nova Scotians who are trying to put their roots down who are benefiting from that program, the MOST in particular, they are happy. I know the member pooh-poohed that program, but it is money in the pockets of those Nova Scotians, and they like it, and we like it too.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: By the government's metrics, that program has been a failure, so I'm not the pooh-pooher. The numbers speak for themselves.

Shelter investments in this climate are necessary and important, and there are some in this budget, but they are not sufficient. Shelters are, by definition, short-term emergency facilities from which people must transition to permanent housing quickly. That permanent affordable housing, and I'm going to say it again and again, does not exist. We don't see anything in this budget that puts it on the horizon, and 200 units over several years is a drop in the bucket for the over 41,000 Nova Scotians who are in core housing need.



Does the Premier have any long-term plan for the people he thinks are too comfortable outside, or the thousands of others who are struggling to afford housing? His words.

THE PREMIER: We put forward a housing plan. I'd encourage the member to read it. It calls for 40,000 units. We put forward an apprenticeship program to get people, to encourage people to be here in the program. I just want to make one thing absolutely clear: That MOST program is a significant, innovative program, and it is not a failure even if one Nova Scotian, let alone the thousands that avail themselves - we want young Nova Scotians to make their lives in this province, and that's a part of this issue.

That member can call investments in young Nova Scotians a failure, but I assure you, Speaker, I will never do that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **LSI: POPULATION DOUBLING PLAN - EXPLAIN**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: We are in a housing crisis. We have literally run out of housing stock. Even the government's own commitment for 40,000 new units isn't going to be enough when CMHC tells us we need 75,000 just to keep up with current demand. We are running out of civic infrastructure in communities like Bridgewater and Antigonish. There is no plan to increase that. We have a health care system that is collapsing under the weight of the current population. Despite this, the Premier says that he is going to double the population in this province.

My question to the Premier is: Could he please tell us how he is going to do that when we've run out of houses, when our government services can't keep up, and when civic infrastructure is collapsing under the weight of the current population?

HON. JILL BALSER: I want to thank the member opposite for the important question, but to recognize that Nova Scotia is a province on the move, and this budget shows how we are investing in young people, making sure they can see themselves in careers like the skilled trades. That \$100 million investment is going to draw young people back to our province to build the houses, schools, hospitals, and everything else we need to just continue to make this province a better place.

We also know that, through immigration, we are going to continue to welcome new families and new people into our communities, because that is what we need. People are a part of the solution, and we have to invest in people.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, when we grow at an unsustainable rate and bring more people than we can accommodate, here is what happens to people: You have families in Halifax that are hotel-hopping with their kids for months because they can't find a place

to live. You have communities like Bridgewater and Antigonish that have run out of civic infrastructure. You have tent villages in almost every single community across this province. You have lineups to get into emergency rooms. You have twice as many people without a family doctor. We have run out of housing, and the fact that the Premier can't get up and answer a simple question on one of his biggest commitments to the population I think is shameful. He must be at his thousand-hour-per-year workload or whatever - the part-time work that he said he does.

[3:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Question?

ZACH CHURCHILL: My question to the Premier is: Why won't he answer more than one question a day in Question Period? I've never seen that before in my life . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. We are early into Question Period. This is the second warning. At the third warning, we start kicking you out.

The honourable Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, when we came to government in 2021, we had faced eight years of absolute deferred maintenance, where the government would not work on anything and where the Department of Housing had been in three different departments in six years and shunted around. We had a budget of \$321 million for the combined Municipal Affairs-Department of Housing. That budget today is \$680 million.

We are investing in the future and the growth of Nova Scotia. Yes, we are in a housing crisis. We do not deny that. We recognize that. We recognize that it is hard. A crisis is an unparalleled opportunity, too, for us to invest and realize the growth potential of Nova Scotia, and we are investing in that across multiple departments to solve the housing crisis.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

### **MAH: HOUSING SPENDING REDUCTION - EXPLAIN**

BRAEDON CLARK: I am glad the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing brought that up because you know what we didn't have during eight years of Liberal government on housing? We didn't have the highest rental increases in the country. We didn't have 11 per cent rental increases in Halifax year over year. We didn't have a thousand people living on the streets of Halifax alone. I am glad he brought up overall budgets, because he will know that in this budget, despite the fact that housing is the number one or number two issue in this province, his government is planning to spend less

on housing this year than it did last. My question to the minister is: Can he explain why?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, when we came to government, we had taken over from a government that was projecting decline and was going to build a hospital with fewer beds and fewer ERs, and we had to fix that. As far as the budget goes, we are looking at actual versus forecast. I know there are some accountants on that side, and I'm sure they can explain that. We are projecting more spending this year than we projected last year.

If there is an opportunity at the end of this fiscal coming to do more - like the \$70 million we put into the Municipal Capital Growth Fund, which we initiated - we will do that. Our municipalities appreciate us stepping up and investing in infrastructure for housing across this province. It is an unparalleled and unprecedented investment we are making on that front. We will continue to invest.

BRAEDON CLARK: Despite what the minister has just said, the fact of the matter is that this government, this year, will spend less on housing programs than they did last year. (Applause) We can talk about accounting all we want. I'm not an accountant, but it's black and white. That's the wonderful thing about a budget: You can talk about investments, you can talk about dollars and cents, you can put all the rhetoric in the world you want, and at the end of the day, this government is cutting housing by \$20 million. I would like to know why.

JOHN LOHR: I'm very pleased that the Opposition is interested in our budget. What I can tell them is that this year we are projecting a \$125 million increase over last year's budget, which is a 22.7 increase, which is an incredible amount that shows our willingness as a government to continue to invest in things that other governments never did, like building public housing. We're building 222 new public housing units, plus we repositioned the modular housing we bought for wildfires. We've repositioned that, because we had pre-booked that. That becomes another 25 public housing units almost immediately.

We're moving very quickly. We will continue to move quickly.

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

#### **MAH: COMMUNITY HOUSING FUNDING - PROVIDE**

BRAEDON CLARK: Speaker, if the minister wants to make the argument that the housing situation is better now than it was before this government took office, I'm happy to make that argument all day long, because there is a litany of evidence to the contrary.

What we do know is that we need to focus on spending more money, particularly in the not-for-profit sector. Not-for-profits in this province are doing an incredible job at managing the properties they own, but often these organizations are run by volunteers on

shoestring budgets and simply are not supported to the degree they need to be.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Why has this government not made the significant new investments that are needed to support our not-for-profit and community housing sector?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, when we came to government, one of the things that we addressed was the May 2021 *Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission Report*, which said that Nova Scotia had a community housing sector that needed boosting. We have done that. We've invested millions and millions of dollars in community housing through a nationally recognized program called the Community Housing Acquisition Program, which other provinces are imitating. We have invested in community housing in numerous locations, and I can provide a list - it's actually too many for me to remember - in many of your constituencies. We've invested in community housing right across the province. We will continue to do so.

BRAEDON CLARK: British Columbia, in fact, is doing a great job this month alone in working with not-for-profits, private developers, community groups, and First Nations groups as well - an independent housing authority and all orders of government to work with all of them to fund more housing. In fact, just this past week, the British Columbia government received \$2 billion from the federal government in low-cost financing to build non-profit and community housing over the next number of years in British Columbia.

I would like to ask the minister: Why do we not have that kind of system here in Nova Scotia so that we can actually get people into homes they can afford?

JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I don't know what the Liberal Party does with their funds, but maybe they could be giving an allNovaScotia account to the member, because just a couple days ago, Minister Sean Fraser was quoted saying that he was working very closely with our government on doing a similar program. We haven't got the details yet. We're working very closely with them.

I will say that just yesterday, British Columbia announced a program in which they cited our leadership in Nova Scotia to make land available for public housing that government owns. British Columbia is looking at what Nova Scotia is doing and doing the same. I suggest the member read allNovaScotia.

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

#### **DCS: REFUSAL TO INDEX IA RATE - EXPLAIN**

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Community Services. As the minister has recognized, a refusal to index the income assistance rate

ultimately results in a decrease in the spending power of recipients. Can the minister please explain why he is choosing to continue the pattern of decreasing the spending power of those on income assistance?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What I will say is that year over year, indexing is usually about \$10, \$15, \$20. This is what people are getting in their pockets. What we decided was it was better to put a lump sum in people's pockets alone. We put \$150 in everyone's pockets as of next month.

The other thing I will say, Speaker, is that in the five years that the NDP were in power, they put \$15 - that's how much they increased: \$15 over five years, which is \$3 a year, which is one cent a day. I did more in 24 hours than they did in five years. (Applause)

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, a \$150 one-time payment for income assistance clients will not go far. One recent report found that for the average family, monthly grocery costs went up by \$130 last year alone. Yesterday's announcement barely covers the one-month cost increase that families are facing, and I will table that. Does the minister really think \$150 is enough?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I understand the confusion, Speaker, for somebody making \$89,000 a year. She may not think \$150 is much, but for people on income assistance it is a sizeable amount of money. And what I will say to the people on income assistance is we are going to continue to work, we're going to continue to work with our stakeholders and all levels of government, and more is on the way. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

### **DHW: HPV SELF-SWAB TESTING - IMPLEMENT**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Cervical cancer is now the fastest-increasing cancer for women in Canada, and I'll table that. Our Maritime neighbours have led the charge against it, replacing traditional Pap tests with home HPV testing. No wonder self-swabs for HPV could significantly boost early detection, and doctors say at-home screening for HPV could be an opportunity to "eliminate a cancer." And I'll table that. We should follow their lead and implement self-swabbing HPV testing in this province.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will Nova Scotia join the ranks of British Columbia, New Brunswick, and P.E.I. and implement self-swabbing HPV testing in Nova Scotia?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I thank the member for raising this question in the House. As the member will see, over the last number of years we have invested heavily in cancer treatment, and screening and prevention is an important part of the cancer continuum of care.

We are aware of the screening programs that are available in other provinces. We've looked at what they are offering and how. There is some work that's happening around that program itself, but we're also looking at what the possibility is for people to self-screen for sexually transmitted infections as well. There is work under way. I have nothing to offer today in terms of a timeline, but we are certainly looking and are very interested in the success of other jurisdictions.

**KELLY REGAN:** Last year we were happy the government listened to us and implemented a lung cancer screening program. Finding cancer early saves lives. It also saves Nova Scotians money. Even super-conservative Alberta has recognized the merits of HPV self-screening. They're running a pilot project.

My question to the Minister: Will the Province commit to expanding the HPV program and introduce self-swabbing this year?

**MICHELLE THOMPSON:** I don't take any clinical advice on health care from the opposition party, but I do take it from clinical experts. We certainly are looking at other jurisdictions, as I said previously. I was very happy to be at the announcement for that early cancer screening detection, which was based on the voices of clinicians, as is Action for Health, as is so much of the work that we do. I know it's refreshing for health care workers to finally be heard in this province, after at least a dozen years of not being heard.

**THE SPEAKER:** The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

### **DHW: SUPPORT FOR MIDWIVES - INCREASE**

**HON. IAIN RANKIN:** My question is also for the Minister of Health. Unless I'm missing something, looking at a 36 percent increase in health spending, I don't see any increased support for access to midwives. They haven't had an increase since the previous government, despite increasing demand. On record in the last eight years, there have been roughly 3,300 people requesting care and only 1,400 being accepted into care. That is nearly 2,000 women who haven't been able to access the care that they feel is best for them.

My question to the minister is: What does the department need to see beyond the proven positive health outcomes, fewer medical interventions and shorter hospital stays, which are clearly recognized in other provinces, especially in Ontario and British Columbia, who came out with a target of 30 per cent of births by midwives?

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: What is our target? What is the percentage of births she would like to see done by midwives in our province?

**HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON:** I thank the member for the question. I know this is something that is quite dear to his heart; he has asked about it at every sitting.

[3:15 p.m.]

We are looking at how we can support midwives throughout this province. We do know that it is difficult. There is a workforce gap. It is difficult to stabilize the positions that we currently have, so we do work closely with that.

Midwives work within labour and delivery teams. We need to make sure that we have primary care providers, physicians, who also do labour and delivery services, particularly in the rural parts of Nova Scotia. We know there are midwives who work at the IWK Health Centre but also in rural communities as well. We also need to make sure that there are obstetricians and gynecologists, so it has to be a team approach. We continue to look at how and where we can stabilize these services throughout the province.

IAIN RANKIN: It is near and dear to my heart. I just had another baby two months ago, delivered by midwives. (Applause) A big shout-out to the midwives for doing that work.

Their workforce needs more support. There is only one vacancy, so that old message of needing to stabilize that workforce, I would submit, is inaccurate. We have only three regions that actually offer the service but one vacancy. They need more support. We have only 5 per cent of the births happening here by midwives.

I think we need to double the number of workers who are working in this profession. With costly, high-risk specialists who are providing the majority of low-risk, routine perinatal care in Nova Scotia, this is an anomaly not only in Canada but globally. We are limiting choice for women's health care.

There have been over 500 people, that I know of, who have written the Minister of Health and Wellness in the last 24 hours, and more coming.

My question to the minister is: Will she consider recruiting a provincial chief midwife to develop a strategy for this underresourced . . . (Applause)

MICHELLE THOMPSON: To the member opposite's point, we are looking at midwifery services across the province. As I said, there are a number of different environments where midwives can work. The practice of a midwife in an urban centre is very different from the practice of a midwife who works in a more rural environment.

We are also looking at the role of midwifery, with Tajikeimik, which is a First Nations health authority, to help us understand how and where we can support our First Nations communities as well. There are a lot of ongoing conversations around the role of midwifery in the province.

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

**EMO: EMERG. MANAGEMENT CAPACITY - INCREASE**

HON. BEN JESSOME: Nova Scotians demand and expect and deserve an appropriate and determined response from our Office of Emergency Management. Last year - I think it goes without saying, but I will say it - we experienced unprecedented catastrophes throughout the province. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister responsible for the Office of Emergency Management: What is being done to proactively address our emergency management capacity in the province?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, the member is correct, we've had a brutal year, and the Emergency Management Office EMO has been stood up. Our Provincial Coordination Centre stood up a number of times. It has been a tough year on Nova Scotians.

We are conducting a review of emergency alerts; we've said that. The other reality is that we continue to work with our municipal partners who are incredibly important at the municipal - the EMO is really at the centre of that, where all the firefighting resources are and many of those resources, the search and rescue resources, we use.

Our training with them, our work with them through the EMO continues. There will be more to come on lessons learned from all that we've gone through. We're still working through that process but we're certainly very aware that this is a very big issue. We hope that we'll have a better season and a better Summer coming up. Last year it was a very tough Summer for Nova Scotia.

BEN JESSOME: I hope the minister will commit to tabling that review when it is finished. A top priority, something that will be focused on, is around communications. It was certainly something that was a little suspect. I'll use an example: in a subdivision called Highland Park back home, people were evacuating themselves before they even got 911 calls. We know it needs to be a top priority. It's a big concern not limited to my community. The Mass Casualty Commission called for it to be a top priority, and I know the government has committed to address that report in full. I will ask: When does the minister expect the implementation of the recommendations in the Mass Casualty Commission Report?

JOHN LOHR: I appreciate the question, because as the member may know, the Mass Casualty Commission Report recommendations, I believe C.4 and C.5, related directly to emergency alerting. The focus of those two recommendations were the federal government. The federal government owns the emergency alert system, delivers it through a private company named Pelmorex - you may know that as the Weather Channel. That's the name of the company.

The federal government - their review of that, we are awaiting that. I understand it's under way, but we have had no indication of when we will receive their review. That layer is in, if you can understand what I'm saying, so it's their system, and we will react to



that review when we get that review. Meanwhile, we are doing a review ourselves.

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

### **ECC: COASTLINE PROTECTION ACT ABANDONMENT - EXPLAIN**

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. We heard this week that this government has forged a terrific relationship with our municipalities. I'll table that. This doesn't line up with the deep frustration and confusion municipalities have expressed about the abandonment of the Coastal Protection Act.

The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg had devoted extensive time and resources toward developing their own reports and by-laws to protect their coastline because they were tired of waiting. The day before these by-laws went to first reading, the Coastal Action map and app came out. It was released, leaving these reports and by-laws to an uncertain future.

The government said that they see this as a partnership. Can the minister explain why they've left their partners in the dark?

HON. JOHN LOHR: We recognize that the municipalities play an incredibly important role in land use planning and municipal planning strategy, and we respect that. We want to work with them. What we will be providing for them will be tools on coastal protection and on flooding and projected flooding. We'll be providing those to homeowners as well - property owners.

The reality is, the municipalities know their own areas best, and for us to provide one rule for the entire province doesn't recognize that the reality is in some places we're going to have to advance against the ocean, in some places we're going to have to hold fast, and in some places we're going to have to retreat. That's the reality. We can't make a one-size-fits-all rule for the entire province. It's very granular.

LISA LACHANCE: In their hours and hours of work, municipal staff relied on a wide array of data sources and expert opinion to determine the safe flood elevation for Lunenburg. Imagine their surprise when the Province's new coastal hazard map suggests substantially different and less stringent numbers with no indication or scientific source of how this was calculated.

I think we and the municipalities are now scrambling to understand and make sense of this mapping app. We want to know: Where does this data come from? Has the minister published a coastal hazard map that downplays coastal hazards?

HON. TIM HALMAN: The data that we utilize comes from the Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change. I'm certainly aware of that situation, and my staff, my coastal protection lead, has been engaging with the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg.

The Coastal Action Plan is coming to life. We are now seeing our government working with municipalities. Next week Minister Lohr and I will be engaging with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, bringing the Coastal Action Plan alive.

THE SPEAKER: Just a friendly reminder to everyone that you are not to use personal names in the Chamber. The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

### **FTB: MOST PROGRAM QUALIFICATIONS - EXPAND**

LORELEI NICOLL: In the last year, the government budgeted over \$21 million for the MOST Program. We've heard a lot about it here today. However, we learned today that there were only \$12 million impacted and a 57 per cent uptake on the program since it was implemented.

We've heard from people across the province that they have recently graduated, but because of the age restrictions they are unable to qualify. We've been advocating for a change in the age qualifications so more people can utilize the funds.

My question to the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration: Is there a plan to look at the age qualification so that more people can qualify for the MOST program?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: The MOST program is a fairly new program, and it's unique right across the country. The average rebate to people who qualify - to Nova Scotians who qualify - has actually been in excess of \$3,500 per year, so it's very significant. I know at that rate, it's worth a lot to the people who are receiving it. I know more and more people are receiving it. Nurses are now eligible for the year that's just ended in 2023.

It is a new program. It's something that this government started, and we will be looking at it in the future to make sure it's successful and to make sure it's doing what it's meant to do, which is to keep young people in our province.

LORELEI NICOLL: I've long been a supporter of youth retention in Nova Scotia, but it's very difficult telling a 31-year-old that they're too old. We know that the labour shortage is having a huge impact on the housing sector, the health care sector, and other essential services.

We should encourage people to go back to school and get a trade. My question to the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration: Is there a plan to encourage more people to go back to school and go into the trades by changing the qualifications to being able to receive their relief 10 years after graduation?

ALLAN MACMASTER: As I said, this program is very new. The word is getting out, and the word is good. It's helping people. It's doing what it's intended to do. There's no question.

I still feel young myself. I wouldn't mind getting some of my provincial taxes back. But the purpose of this program as it was designed from the outset was to focus on people under the age of 30, because they are making choices every day. They can choose to move to another province. We don't want them to choose that. We want them to choose to stay here. We want them to choose to establish here, to lay down roots here, and once they do, we hope that they'll stay for the long run.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

### **DFA: DEPT. CUTS - EXPLAIN**

RONNIE LEBLANC: One issue of concern for my community and many communities across the province is the level of illegal fishing taking place. It's very disappointing to see that both the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture and the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables are getting funding reductions.

Can the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture please explain the government's decision to cut from the Fisheries and Aquaculture department when other departments are seeing an increase?

HON. KENT SMITH: We know that the potential illegal activity in our province is rampant in the fisheries, and we would love for the federal government to do their part to increase the enforcement. For our part, we know that there are compliance officers on the ground who are doing their job. We're in discussions with the department to make sure that some of the compliance officers have some dedicated training to work with our department. We're going to continue to make sure that we protect our most valuable industry.

RONNIE LEBLANC: As a former fisherman, I'll be the last person to defend the DFO. But in saying that, since taking my seat I've been advocating for increased enforcement, as has the industry, to stop the sale and purchase of illegal seafood such as lobster. We currently have few enforcement officers in the province, and I'm worried that these cuts will provide even less enforcement.

Given these cuts, can the minister ensure Nova Scotians that current enforcement won't be diminished?

KENT SMITH: I share the member's sentiments toward the DFO. In my department, we have several files that we work with them, and to say I'm frustrated would be an understatement.

[3:30 p.m.]

With respect to enforcement, I have tabled these in the past in the Legislature. In October, we sent a letter to the federal minister asking for increased enforcement, to the Public Prosecution Service asking for increased enforcement, and to the Minister of Justice asking for increased enforcement. We sent a letter to the Members of Parliament for the Liberal caucus asking for member help and on the elver fishery, asking for increased enforcement.

Perhaps, Speaker, once the RCMP is done investigating the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia, they can turn their attention to the fisheries. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Cumberland North.

### **EECD: SCHOOL STAFFING - INCREASE**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Most people in Cumberland North support the idea of the inclusion policy in our schools. On paper it looks good, but in reality, it's not working right now in our schools for students, families, or teachers. It's simply because the resources are not there to adequately support students.

One of the reasons, I believe, is that the allocation of staffing is tied to student numbers and not to student needs. The medical and learning needs of our students are not being taken into consideration when staffing is planned, and many positions are not filled. For example, just four weeks ago, the parents of Spring Street Academy received a letter advising that both the school counsellor and the child and youth counsellor were on leave. I'll table that document.

Can the minister acknowledge that our public schools are not staffed adequately in Cumberland North and let us know when changes will be made?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: A principle of fundamental importance in our school system is inclusive education. It is vitally important that every single student in Nova Scotia feels welcomed and supported - and is welcomed and supported - in all our schools.

Speaker, we have continued to increase our investments in inclusive education. We have added over 1,000 positions to address that over the last number of years, but those positions have rolled out over the course of a very tumultuous time, when we were experiencing COVID in schools. These are new positions that our system is still getting used to working with. I have spoken with many teachers and many staff across the province. Yes, we talk about the opportunities for adding resources, but we also talk about and inform what we can do with the existing resources that we have.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Many teachers are reporting high rates of violence in the classrooms, leading to teacher burnout, sick leave, and stress leave. Violence in schools is not being addressed, and it's leading to unsafe conditions for teachers and students alike. I actually believe that if parents knew what was happening inside our elementary schools, they would not send their children to school.

Earlier this month, I received a letter from a teacher. I'll table that and ask the minister if she could read it.

In Cumberland, we actually have a unique situation where many of our substitute teachers and educational assistants work in New Brunswick, only minutes away, because the wages are so much higher. In fact, substitute teachers can make up to \$100 more every day.

Will the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development commit to looking at the wages of EAs and substitute teachers and increase them right away so we're more competitive?

BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, I send my children to our public education system. I am proud to do that. I know every single teacher, support staff, and other staff across the province are working hard every day to make sure our schools are safe and inclusive spaces for our students.

That being said, the safety of our students and our staff is of every importance, and we can always work to improve that. That is why I'm working with a leadership table - with PSAANS and NSTU - to continue to improve safety culture in schools. That work is never done. That is a cultural shift. That is something we do every day.

Speaker, we are reviewing the school code of conduct. We will be updating that code of conduct. We're working with teachers and we're working with staff to improve our school safety culture. I'm proud to send my kids there, and I have no hesitation about that.

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

### **LAE: NSCC FACULTY WAGES - INCREASE**

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Advanced Education. Just two weeks ago, this government announced a new CCA training program that relies on NSCC faculty and staff to respond to the pressing health care challenges facing this province. The fact of the matter is, NSCC faculty and staff are giving their all to ensure residents of Nova Scotia are taken care of. Why, then, is this government not ensuring that NSCC faculty and staff can take care of themselves with wages that keep up with inflation?

HON. BRIAN WONG: We need CCAs across the province. We have a record number of CCAs who have gone through the program. We know that NSCC instructors are also part of the solution. NSCC right now - I certainly respect the collective bargaining process, and they're in the middle of that. It would certainly be inappropriate for me to comment on that.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm happy that the minister brought up the collective bargaining process, and that he doesn't want to get involved in it, because we've heard concerning reports that NSCC received direction from this government to not adjust pay scales for half of these workers, despite the fact that their wages are nearly 14 per cent behind inflation, and they haven't seen collective wage increases in over a decade.

Can the minister explain why this government issued this direction and denied fair wages for these workers?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, is the member asking us to collectively bargain on the floor of the Legislature? I don't think that's appropriate.

People who respect collective bargaining do it at the collective bargaining table. We're not going to collective bargain on this floor today. That should happen at the table. That's where listening also happens. That's where communication happens. It's quite ironic. How many times have we heard, "You should not be trying to collectively negotiate away from the bargaining table?" We're trying to respect the parties that we're dealing with at the negotiating table.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

### **DOA: FOOD AND BEVERAGE STRATEGY - RELEASE**

CARMAN KERR: The agriculture industry has been told to wait since 2022 for the release of the Food and Beverage Strategy. The government has promised this time and time again. Where is it?

HON. GREG MORROW: We received 1,900 responses to the Food and Beverage Strategy to our consultation, and we want to make sure we take the time to get it right. When we have an update, we will provide it.

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

### **[GOVERNMENT BUSINESS]**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

### **PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 404.

#### **Bill No. 404 - Energy Reform (2024) Act.**

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Thank you, Speaker. I move that Bill No. 404 be now read a second time.

I've had the privilege of tabling many pieces of legislation in every sitting since sitting here as the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables. Most of those pieces of legislation have focused on advancing our clean energy priorities and paving the way to reach our climate change goals while protecting ratepayers of Nova Scotia.

I think Bill No. 404 is one for the history books. It has taken a big leap to modernize our electricity system, changing how it is structured and regulated. For the first time, it ties those changes to the climate change goals to regulation and the energy sector. This is a bold change to make our ratepayers have clean, reliable, and affordable energy.

I want to thank the Clean Electricity Solutions Task Force for helping us get here. We asked them to give us recommendations to help modernize our system and to make sure it has the capacity we need to reach our climate change goals. This legislation is based on their first and largest recommendation. I also want to thank everyone who participated. That includes Nova Scotia Power, the UARB, many industrial users, and others who have reached out to the task force team. They all provided valuable insight and feedback that helped us reach this point today. I know they will be with us every step of the way as we implement this legislation.

Speaker, there is a lot in that bill. I think everyone saw the stack of it when I tabled it two days ago. I will stick to two main changes today in my remarks though. First, the bill will create an Energy and Regulatory Boards Act. It will split the UARB into two new boards. Under this Act, we're halving regulatory responsibility for the energy sector into the Nova Scotia Energy Board. The remaining duties of the UARB will be covered by the new Regulatory and Appeals Board.

I want to be very clear that we do have full confidence in the UARB, but its mandate is broad and we listened to them. We want to bring more focus and expertise to the

regulation of the energy sector through one dedicated board. Further, we're giving the Energy Board a mandate to consider climate change goals in their decision-making. That is a first, and it's a requirement that we are hard-baking into this legislation.

The other major change is through the More Access to Energy Act. It will pull the system operator function out of Nova Scotia Power and make it the new Nova Scotia Independent Energy System Operator. The new System Operator will still manage the grid. We're adding responsibility for the system planning and procuring new energy sources, but it will be independent from both Nova Scotia Power and government. This move will encourage new investors and more competition in the sector. That will help make sure that ratepayers get clean, reliable and affordable electricity.

There will be no job losses in this transition. Everyone currently doing their job will be offered the new job in the new program. This legislation sets us up for transformational change - and our province needs it. It creates more opportunities for clean, reliable energy. It creates transparency and accountability. It helps us reach our climate change goals. It encourages competition to help us protect ratepayers with the lowest-cost power possible.

This is an important, historic and legislative change. It will help secure a bright, sustainable future for all Nova Scotians. With that I will take my seat.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I'd like to thank the minister for introducing this bill and for his remarks. The minister starts by listing the positives that will come from this bill, which I don't doubt. I'm sure that is the intention of this bill, and I want to acknowledge that.

There are some things that I do feel are unknown, and they do relate to the ratepayer and what the costs on the ratepayer will be from the changes that are implemented here or that are set to be implemented here.

I do want to start off by saying that I appreciate the work of the task force. The time and the level of commitment and energy - no pun intended - that they put into this area is noted and appreciated. Particularly one - they know who they are. When I look at the bill, I feel uneasy. I feel that there might be some unintended consequences that come from this.

Like I said, many of the things seem positive, but it feels like the steps that are lined up to open up the grid are going to require a lot of money, a lot of assets to be purchased, a lot of debt to be acquired. Then how does that get paid for? If the infrastructure that we already have is unreliable - as we know, we have seen that - there are going to be major upgrades needed to the structure. That's going to cost money. Is that money going to be off-loaded to the ratepayer?



[3:45 p.m.]

I have far too many people in my riding who suffer from energy poverty. It's phone calls, it's emails, it's conversations at the grocery store where people don't know how they're heating their homes, how they're going to pay their bills - seniors in particular. While I want to support this wholeheartedly, I had hoped that maybe there would be something that would maybe offset the unknown costs that would come from some of these changes.

The opening up of the grid, the accessibility to more forms of clean energy like solar and wind - these are actions that I applaud. They're the work of our former Premier, the member for Timberlea-Prospect, which tie into climate change goals. These are all things that I am so much in support of, and again, I see the intention of those recommendations. The intention of this bill is so positive, but I do want to make sure that there aren't any unintended consequences when it comes to the ratepayer.

Something that could have been done that I wish I had seen is with the cutting of the HARP - if there could be some universal program that is implemented, which makes sure that any costs that are going to be incurred because of these changes are going to be protected from the ratepayer themselves.

This is going to be a long process. This isn't something that automatically we're going to proclaim this piece of legislation, and then all of a sudden, we're going to have all these new forms of energy that we can pull from. This is something that will take time, as it should, but in the interim, what does that mean for Nova Scotians?

I'm excited and I'm looking forward to hearing what comes from the Law Amendments Committee. I think that stakeholders have been generally pleased by this, and I'm looking forward to hearing what they have to say. I'm looking forward to working with the minister, if possible, to see what sort of protections we can keep in place to make sure that this good piece of legislation moves forward, but doesn't have anything that will impact Nova Scotians who are already struggling.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, just before the member for Dartmouth North speaks to this bill on our behalf, could I say a word of introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, of course.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you. I just want members to know that we're joined in the West Gallery this afternoon by Matthew Dubois, who was the NDP candidate in West Nova in the 2019 election. It's great to have Matthew here with us this afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Thank you for joining us.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I will just offer a few remarks today in second reading on this bill. It's a massive bill, as we have seen and heard. It's going to make big changes in our province, and so I'll reserve most of my remarks for third reading or Committee of the Whole House after we have heard from stakeholders at the Law Amendments Committee, but I do want to say a few things.

In the minister's opening comments in today's debate, he mentioned that this is one for the history books, which is probably true. He also mentioned that it will provide Nova Scotians with clean and affordable energy, and that is where I want to spend most of my time in today's remarks - but I'll get to them in a second.

I will say that this bill seems positive in many ways. Expanding the mandate of the Nova Scotia Energy Board to allow consideration of climate goals and sustainability - our caucus has been advocating for that sustainability mandate for many years. We introduced amendments in legislation through Bill No. 98 in Spring of 2022, but I do wish that this bill went further to include a sustainability advocate, similar to the existing consumer advocate and small business advocate that represent their respective interests formally at the UARB hearings, and soon to be at different regulator hearings.

We need someone who is going to make sure that the changes being brought to the regulator get some review by someone who is making sure that we're on track in terms of sustainability. It's really disappointing that while we are tabling this massive piece of legislation, we're not considering that.

I'm also disappointed - and this is what I said in my introduction - that this legislation does not at all address energy poverty and affordability, even though the minister spoke about it in his opening. I'd like to know from the minister: How does this piece of legislation address affordability in Nova Scotia? Recommendation 12 from the recent Clean Electricity Solutions Task Force report specifically calls to address this and help Nova Scotians facing rising energy costs.

For years, we've been calling for the government to address energy poverty. We've put in pieces of legislation that would change the way the NSUARB regulates Nova Scotia Power. Now we're looking at a whole different way of doing things, which is probably fine, yet why are we not taking the opportunity to ensure affordability while we open this up?

There's a recent article authored by someone at Efficiency Nova Scotia which states that 43 per cent of Nova Scotians are now living in energy poverty. Cape Breton has the highest number of people living in energy poverty, and Eskasoni in Cape Breton is the

community with the highest amount of energy poverty. Roger Colton from the energy poverty task force says that he's never seen it so bad in 40 years, so why aren't we doing something about it?

Bill No. 98, which we tabled in April 2022, also called for the implementation of a low-income power rate, and to expand the mandate of the review board to allow for that. So now, when this government is taking on a massive transformation of the energy system and regulation of it, and contemplating the future of the energy industry, doesn't it seem like a perfect time for this government to take on meaningful action on energy poverty?

In the words of the great Tracy Chapman: "If not now, then when? If not today, then why make your promises? A love declared for days to come is as good as none." It's shocking, mystifying to me, that we are not - when we are opening up and we are changing the way we do things, that we are not contemplating an affordability rate for Nova Scotia energy ratepayers. I look forward to hearing why the government has chosen to ignore this recommendation, and I'll have more to say in third reading.

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Just a few quick comments. Yes, to the Liberal Party and the NDP, thank you for your support. I do recognize that there are some questions, and certainly some concerns. It is a big bill, and this is going to transform a lot to do with our energy sector here in Nova Scotia, but also how we relate to our energy sector with our neighbour in New Brunswick and our partnerships with the federal government.

I believe the member opposite in the Liberal Party was here, and I believe - I don't want to misquote her, but I believe she appreciated our 2030 Clean Power Plan that we tabled last sitting. Our federal partners are at the table with us, negotiating some assistance with that 2030 Clean Power Plan. How does the new infrastructure, such as the intertie into New Brunswick, get paid for? There's a partnership and a discussion that's happening with the utilities and our government. That's one of the major infrastructures that we need to see to 2030: 80 per cent renewables; off coal by 2030; our targets for 2035. I don't think they will debate that.

I do appreciate the concern about other infrastructure going into our system, but quite frankly, most of the infrastructure that's coming into our system is from outside agencies, such as wind development, that right now taxpayers are not paying for. They're getting a return on the Power Purchase Agreement, which is the lowest-cost energy that we have coming on our system now. We need to build our system with the grid-sized batteries that this government supported. I believe the Opposition supported this in the last session as well to ensure that we put more renewables into the system.

I will make a comment about the opening-up of the system, though. It actually wasn't the previous premier who started this. It actually started in 2001, with Premier John

Hamm. It got carried on into the NDP government, when we saw the first windmill projects actually get really scaled up, and then it was carried on by the previous government. We carried it on. My point isn't to take Liberal shots, or NDP shots, or PC shots. This has been an ongoing concern. I guess what I want to close that point off with is we've heard time and time again from many people on this floor that we're going to break the monopoly. Well, quite frankly, in 2001, when John Hamm started this process, 98.5 per cent of our energy was generated by Nova Scotia Power. This year, 98.5 per cent of our energy is generated by Nova Scotia Power. Nothing's changed in the last 30 years.

This is the legislation that will allow us as a government - as a province - to finally prosper on the ideas that we can have a competitive market on our energy system. With the build-outs of many other things - as offshore wind comes on, as more solar comes on, and as we see more tidal developed and get expertise in that - we are opening up a market in which Nova Scotia can actually be an energy exporter rather than an importer. There are many options here. I don't think I'll get any debate on that.

The final - sustainability. I'll talk about the NDP just quickly. The sustainability - the energy board now will have the opportunity to look at any application under the lens that meets our climate change goals and also on our sustainability goal. It's going to be enshrined with them, that they have to make those decisions in that.

The other recommendation that I just want to touch on quickly was Recommendation 12. I spoke to media about this. Recommendation 12 was to look at what the Ontario model was doing. We've committed that we're looking at what the Ontario model is doing. We've committed to that. It's an affordability thing, but I also want to point out something that was recognized by many of the affordability advocates and recognized what this government has done. This government has actually invested \$257 million in the last two years on energy affordability.

It leveraged another \$144 million because of those partnerships that I have with Natural Resources Canada. They came on board with some of our programs. They believe what this government's doing. It's a partnership to make energy affordable all across for all ratepayers - all ratepayers - in Nova Scotia. Minister Wilkinson has done a fantastic job. We have a great relationship. I look forward to building on that relationship as we look at how we do the intertie. There's a great amount of respect from this side of the House for Minister Wilkinson.

The only thing we don't agree on - the only thing I don't agree on - I think the Leader of the Official Opposition won't be surprised - is the federal carbon tax. I had to get that in there.

My point is that there's a lot of work going on with not just the energy side of things. This is the first major step in this process that the task force has put to this government. Affordability is being looked at. We are looking at that model that the task

force recommended to us. We've worked with other advocates about affordability.

It's not that this government has not done anything about affordability for all ratepayers of Nova Scotia. I don't have to go too far back in this calendar year - \$117 million that we invested in the ratepayers to make sure there was not 7 per cent for residential rates and 13 per cent for business rates. We invested \$117 million into the ratepayers of Nova Scotia.

With that, I move to close second reading of Bill No. 404.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 404.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 407.

**Bill No. 407 - Antigonish Consolidation Act.**

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: I now move that Bill No. 407, An Act to Consolidate the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, be read for a second time.

This legislation will allow the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish to take the next steps toward consolidation. On Thursday, October 20, 2022, the council members of both the Town of Antigonish and the County of Antigonish passed a motion agreeing to consolidate the two municipalities into one unit through the dissolution of the town. The town and the county wrote to me, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, requesting special legislation be developed to complete that dissolution.

The desire to consolidate through special legislation was confirmed again by both councils on January 30, 2024. I agree with this decision, as it will allow these historic municipalities to work together in new and innovative ways to support the long-term viability and growth of their communities.

When this bill was introduced on Tuesday, the mayor of the town, Laurie Boucher, and county warden Owen McCarron joined us in the House and spoke of their support of

this legislation. Both councils for these communities have realized the benefits of coming together and using their collective resources to respond to opportunities that are in the best interests of their residents.

[4:00 p.m.]

This legislation will address transitional matters and will allow for the consolidation of these communities. It outlines the appointment of a transition coordinator and the establishment of a transition coordinating committee and the responsibilities of the coordinator and the coordinating committee. The committee will consist of the transition coordinator, the mayor and deputy mayor of the town, and the warden and deputy warden of the county.

The transition coordinator will lead the committee and will be responsible for applying to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board to determine the number of councillors within the consolidated municipality and the location of polling districts. This will be done in time for residents to participate in the October 2024 municipal elections, like everyone else in the province. The consolidation will be complete by November 1, 2024.

Between now and then, the councils for both have committed to communicating regularly with the communities so that citizens are engaged throughout this process. My department will be there to support the transition.

I understand this may be an emotional topic for some residents. Change will always have its challenges. I want to commend the leadership shown by the councils of the town and county. They want the best for their citizens. They see the opportunities and have shown tremendous resolve as they embark on the consolidation process. They have earned the respect of municipal leaders throughout the province.

In closing, the decision to consolidate rests with the elected councils, but I believe that the people of the area will be very well served under one consolidated government. There's a very strong and optimistic future ahead for the united Municipality of the County of Antigonish. With that, I look forward to hearing my colleagues' comments.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm happy to stand and register some concerns that I've heard from the community on this piece of legislation. Most fundamentally for me, I think it's about the Premier's words. I think this is one of the most applicable issues for this Chamber as we consider this piece of legislation and debate it. I am speaking as a former Minister of Municipal Affairs, certainly as a member who believes we do have to take a serious, systemic look at municipal government reform in this province. We have to be open-minded about how we approach that, but it does need to be strategic. It does need

to answer questions around impacts to taxation rates, infrastructure, growth and sustainability, and, of course, democratic elections, and ensuring that the voice of citizens and community members are fully included and involved in this process.

In fact, I don't think I could say it better than the Premier when he was Leader of the Opposition. I have a quote here from the Premier, which I know has been shared around the community of Antigonish and the Guysborough area. Again, I was minister overseeing a potential amalgamation of the Pictou municipal units - five. Probably a lot better rationale too, economically for individuals in that area than I believe has been presented for this particular case.

Here's a quote from the Premier:

I'd ask the minister again and, hopefully, he will apologize this time . . . the heart of the problem is amalgamation itself. In a 2016 plebiscite the people of Pictou County made their feelings very clear, Mr. Speaker - two-thirds of the voters rejected a proposal for municipal amalgamation in the county. Any change to our governance structure should start with the people - what the people want. It shouldn't finish there.

I heard the minister say that he won't force amalgamation, but I'd ask him two things in this. Maybe he'll apologize . . . and just reiterate that he will not dictate terms or force amalgamation on Pictou County or any jurisdiction in this province.

These are the quotes of our Premier.

I, for one, think the words of our leaders, of every single member in the Legislature, should mean something. Unfortunately, we have had to point out a number of times where the Premier's words in Opposition have actually not been followed through now that power has been assumed by the member for Pictou East.

These are very clear words here, very clear commitments to the people of his community and to the community of the Pictous - East, West, Centre. All of them were impacted by this. "Just reiterate that he will not dictate the terms or force amalgamation on Pictou County or any jurisdiction in this province." I'll table those comments. Here we are where a very large number of people in Antigonish feel that this very same situation is happening to them.

My vantage point on this is with the provincial government's approach. I have not been involved in the municipal process, municipal consultations. I can only speak for my previous involvement as minister and what the words and actions were of the Premier at that time when he was - I believe - Leader of the Opposition. I do think there's validity to

some of the concerns that have been brought forward by members of the community.

I drove from Yarmouth to Antigonish County on Sunday. There was a public meeting that had - I believe - over 250 people there. Members locally were invited to attend as well as members from the other two opposition parties. The only two members who showed up to discuss the issue with that large group of people were myself and the member for Pictou Centre. There are very important questions that the community has about this that the minister, at least in his opening arguments here, has not answered at all.

One, what is the impact going to be on the cost of living as a result of this? Will there be an impact to taxation rates? We are living in a period of time where Nova Scotia has gone from being one of the most affordable places to live in just two and a half short years ago to one of the most expensive places to live in in the country. We have seen cost increases in housing in particular with assessment values shooting through the roof, tax rates going up to the max that they can, but also assessments going up to a point for anybody who's new coming into the housing market - young people who are graduating from university or high school and starting work - aren't able to afford.

We are at a point in this province where there is going to be a very big, growing gap in wealth in Nova Scotia, with those who have purchased housing, who own physical assets and property, and those who don't. That's our young people who are going to be impacted the most.

No information today from the minister on what the impacted tax rates are going to be, whether it's business tax rates or property tax rates. This is a critical question that needs to be answered for the people of that area. Again, we're all experiencing - all of us who are homeowners - the increase in those property assessments.

Nova Scotians are being taxed to death right now. We have some of the highest taxes in the country - on housing, sales tax, and on income. We still have some of the highest taxes on income, even with the government's new bracket creep commitment in the budget.

The other thing the Premier committed to was that, so long as this issue was being addressed in the courts, there would not be a piece of provincial legislation that would be brought forward. Another promise that was made by the Premier that's not being followed through on. He made that promise when he was Premier. There's still an appeal going on related to the challenge to this piece of legislation. This issue has not gotten out of the courts today, and yet the government is still moving forward with this.

There's evidence to suggest - again, back to the Premier's initial position of believing that the voice of the people is what matters most when it comes to governance changes like this. Again, not my words but his.



Members of the community have been so concerned about this issue and its implications, not feeling that they received answers to their questions from the minister or local members, that they put their own money on the line for a court challenge, and also to conduct a survey of residents in the area, done by Mainstreet Research. This is a well-known polling firm, one of Canada's top public opinion and market research firms. I know the folks who run Mainstreet Research. I've met with them. They are one of the top polling and research firms in the country - certainly one of the ones that are used the most.

The methodology seems to be very strong on this. The margin of error is consistent with any public polling that happens with narrative research or other research firms. The findings are pretty stark on this one: "Should the residents of the Town and County of Antigonish be given a vote on consolidation before a merger is considered?" Over 75 per cent, close to 76 per cent of community members in that area, said yes.

Again, not all these folks are against amalgamation, or reforming the municipal government, or merging them. I've spoken with a lot of these folks. It's not about taking a hard position on doing this or not. It's about having a say in the future of their community - again, as the Premier previously committed that he would ensure happened in every single municipality in the province. Close to 76 per cent of people just want to have a say in this.

There's other data in here around voting intentions and around the level of consultation that people believe they received, and I'll table this data for the House's consideration. A wide range of age groups have been polled here, consistent from 18 years to 50, 50 to 64, 65-plus - similar sample sizes and consistent findings as well.

There certainly is a sense of frustration over this issue. Again, it's not often that you have 250 people show up to a public meeting. That is a great opportunity for the minister or the proponents of the legislation to actually be there and answer these important questions, because there are other questions that need to be answered. Antigonish is one of those areas that is set for growth, that I think has seen really impressive development over the last number of years, as have other areas in rural Nova Scotia.

Again, I know the government thinks the growth only started two years ago, but it's been over 13 years that we've been seeing growth. Again, before the last two years it was sustainable growth - you're at a point of unsustainable growth right now.

There's no plan that I've seen presented from the minister, and I stand to be corrected if there's different information coming, to support infrastructure that's needed in that area. Again, when this was looked at for the Pictou and the five units that were looking at amalgamation there, there was a plan for investment in infrastructure. There was a very clear, detailed plan on the impact to municipal business taxes and property taxes. All this information in Pictou is shared very clearly and articulated very clearly to the municipal units and the public. If we remember what happened in the Pictou, the public did have a vote in the plebiscite. They voted no, and the government of the day did not move to

amalgamate those units because the will of the people was articulated so very clearly in a plebiscite.

[4:15 p.m.]

Now we also oversaw the amalgamation of West Hants and the Town of Windsor - again, a situation that was handled very differently from a provincial perspective. First and foremost, the folks were elected - the councillors and the representatives were elected in Windsor and West Hants on a mandate to amalgamate, so the voice of the people was reflected in that municipal election. There was no public mandate to do this, which is something that people take issue with, and I do think there is legitimacy to people feeling frustrated in that their voices weren't heard.

I'm not saying that municipal reform doesn't need to happen. In fact, I do think it does, but the voice of community members should play a very heavy role in terms of how that happens, because what I'm hearing from folks there is they just want a say. There are a lot of pro-amalgamation folks there who just want to have a say in here. They feel that it is their right to have that say, and they feel that the provincial government - particularly because of the commitment and words of the Premier when this happened in his community - that they would be given the same level of respect and treatment.

I don't know that I'm satisfied with how the provincial government has handled this file overall. It's been very herky-jerky; it's been unclear. What has happened here is this: first the word was given to the municipal leadership of the Town of Antigonish and of the County. We're going to do this if you move forward with a vote. We're going to do it, you have our word. The word is given to the municipal units.

I've talked about this before on the record in the Chamber. As soon as there's political disturbance or political pressure that arises from the community, the government quickly pulls their horns. As soon as there's a court challenge, the government says, "No. We're not touching this." Okay. "We're not going to touch it until the court ruling is over and the court proceedings have been concluded." Court proceedings are not concluded, and the government's still moving forward with this.

I feel this has not been part of a broad strategy to deal with cost of living pressures, infrastructure needs, or taxation in the area. From the provincial perspective, it's been very much about the politics of the day, where the pressure is coming from, and responding to that pressure. That certainly is one thing this government is very good at: moving with the political winds and not really being anchored to any specific strategy, agenda, vision, or plan, but surviving politics day to day and week to week. I think that's the name of the game with this government: to survive as long as they can. I think holding power is more important to this government than what they do with it.

We hope, as debate continues on this bill, that some of these critical answers for

the people are provided by the minister, because it's not entirely true that the people of Antigonish and Antigonish County don't have a vote. The reality is that just two members of that community have a vote: the member for Antigonish and the member for Guysborough-Tracadie. There will be votes from that community, but just two, and the minister has said that the decision on all this has rested with the municipalities. That's clearly not true.

If the decision rested solely with the municipalities, the minister wouldn't be bringing forward special legislation and we wouldn't be debating this here in the Chamber. The fact is that this decision rests with the minister - it does not rest with the municipal units. It rests in this Chamber. This is where the law will be passed. The minister can't have his cake and eat it, too, and say, "Well, the responsibility for this rests with the municipality." It does not.

This legislation goes above and beyond the Municipal Government Act. It presents a different process than the Municipal Government Act. There's been precedent for that. That's happened before. It happened in West Hants; I was part of the government that did that. That process was very different, and the public mandate for that amalgamation was very clear. There was a public mandate for that. There was a vote for that in an election.

At the heart of this, for me, is the commitment and the words of our elected officials. I wish I could say this was the first time that the word of the Premier has not held true now that he holds power. We've seen it with school boards. There was a commitment to bring school boards back. That hasn't happened.

We've seen it with respect to local decision-making, where the Premier promised to respect local decision-making. The opposite has happened, where independent boards have been consolidated and power has been concentrated. Where the local decision-making of municipal units that haven't been onside with the government, like HRM and CBRM, have been overridden.

We've seen it with the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee, which has not been followed through on. That was a promise in the platform by the government. We see it in the pension that was promised to family doctors that hasn't showed up anywhere. We see it in the Nova Scotia Loyal program that hasn't been executed on.

Time and time again promises were made, commitments were made, public positions were made and not kept. We saw it recently with the Coastal Protection Act. Again, a law that was passed with support of all three parties in this Chamber. What's happened now that the Progressive Conservatives have power? Now there's an app to save us from coastal erosion and coastal damage.

It's frustrating, to say the least. I share the frustration of the people of Antigonish on this particular matter, where they thought they were getting something when they voted

for the Premier and they're getting the opposite.

I do think that there are very important questions that need to be answered by the Minister since this is his piece of legislation on the impacts of taxation rates, on the funding that's going to accompany this Act, for infrastructure to accommodate growth, and how the governance and elections are going to play out.

Also, as what happened in West Hants, the election date was legislated. There's not a legislated election date in this Act. People are going to have to trust the Minister on his word because it's not in the Act itself.

Why not at least legislate that, so people know that they're going to get a say next time there is a municipal election? They're going to have the vote at the same time that every other municipal unit does. That's a very legitimate concern that people can have on this.

I will table a list of other questions that I know have gone into PC members and the Minister's office. I don't believe that there have been answers given to these yet, based on what I've heard from community members. I'll certainly table that for the Minister's benefit. I certainly hope that when we debate this bill further in the Standing Committee on Law Amendments, Committee of the Whole House on Bills and third reading, we do get some answers to these really critical questions that are being asked by members of that community.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: I intend these remarks to be brief, as it is second reading.

I don't think that it's any surprise here to anyone that I am a big fan of following the democratic process in this House. I think that processes are really important. Best practices are completely important.

It is unclear to me, and I think to a lot of others, whether the process of getting to the point of this legislation being introduced to consolidate Antigonish has been guided by the democratic best processes.

There have been reports of consultation with residents of Antigonish, but many residents are concerned that their voices have not been heard. This worry continues as this government presents this legislation today.

Those involved with the advocacy group Let Antigonish Decide are feeling underrepresented. The government is moving forward, ahead of an appeal hearing of the previous decision made by the Nova Scotia Supreme Court judge that gave the legal green light for this consolidation.

What many residents of Antigonish - and I learned this through speaking with them and listening to them. I believe the Leader of the Official Opposition said Pictou Centre when I think he really meant Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier. I have not moved, just so everyone knows. What the people truly expressed to all of us in that room was the want and the need for a plebiscite. That was the key matter. It wasn't pro- or anti-consolidation or amalgamation; it was the process and the want and need for a plebiscite. As they expressed to us, this wasn't a matter that was being discussed on the doorsteps during the last municipal election. This was not something that was discussed on the doorsteps. The first time they heard of it was about two years into a government's mandate, so they wanted that plebiscite.

The Municipal Government Act states that the formation of a regional municipality should be backed up by a study on whether the formation would be in the interest of people in the county, and a plebiscite resulting in a majority of voters supporting the move. The way we're not here talking about amalgamation is because a consolidation doesn't require it, but best practices would state that it should require a plebiscite or some way for communities, the residents, to fully express their support or their not-support for it.

The former Liberal government encouraged municipalities to amalgamate under similar circumstances, where democratic processes were not always prioritized. At this time, the Premier fought for a plebiscite when multiple towns in Pictou County riding considered amalgamating. It was unclear why different democratic standards - that is, weaker democratic standards - are being accepted in this case.

Coming from the CBRM, where we were forcibly amalgamated - the Speaker will remember this quite well - that it's 30-some years on, and the pain of that forced amalgamation is still very raw in the CBRM. It's brought up in almost every other conversation that you will have when talking about municipal government and issues within the municipality: that forced amalgamation that was done to us by the provincial government - if it wasn't for that.

I bring up the CBRM's example because, although the town and the council are in support of it, it's only by one-vote majority that the two councils seemed to be in support, by one vote each. That doesn't really give a clear mandate. A plebiscite, going through that process, would provide a clearer mandate for the two governments, moving forward, to potentially turn into one. With that, I fear that building a consolidated municipality atop of shaky democratic grounds will cause growing pains that will remain for a very long time.

Talking about that process, again I want to make clear: We are neither for nor against consolidation or amalgamation. We are about the process and ensuring the best democratic processes are used when making these changes to how municipal units and residents interact with their government. I look forward to hearing from community in Law Amendments Committee, and with that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

[4:30 p.m.]

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I want to stand and make a few comments on this bill. The only reason I'm doing so is I've had several emails from residents of the Antigonish area. They communicated to me their frustration, that they felt that their voices were not being heard. When I received the emails, I encouraged them to contact their own MLA from their area, and they sent back saying that they were not getting a response from their own MLA.

On behalf of those residents, I'm just going to stand and share with them some of their concerns, which have already been shared by the other two members that have just spoken.

People are feeling like their voices are not being heard, and that is not reflective of true grassroots democracy. This House is called the People's House for a reason - that is, as elected representatives for each of our areas, we are supposed to bring the voices of all the people from our area - not just the ones of the people that we agree with - and that is true democracy.

I do want to stand and make sure that the people of Antigonish who reached out to me know that I want to hold true to my word that I stood here in the Legislature and made sure that their voices were heard, that they want a plebiscite. They want a vote, and that should be considered.

Certainly the current Premier, when he was in Opposition, spoke in favour of local decision-making. However, now that he is in government, we are not seeing that, and I don't think that's fair to the people who elected him. Certainly it is easier to make top-down decisions, but that is not true democracy - and here in Nova Scotia, people deserve a government that listens to them.

I do want to speak to amalgamation and to dissolution. Many people in this Chamber know that we've experienced both in Cumberland County, and I do want to share that I would say it's been fairly successful. The people of Springhill were not happy when this was first announced - for the most part, it was forced due to financial reasons - and also the town of Parrsboro. I think most people would agree now, in those areas, that some of their fears did not come to fruition.

I think one of the fears when people hear the words "amalgamation" or "dissolution" of their municipal governments is that people worry that the identity of their community is going to be lost. There's a lot of emotion in small villages, small municipalities, and small communities. People love their identity, they love their communities, and that matters. That's important here in Nova Scotia, and it's important to

recognize. I do think, when the processes are done properly and people's voices are heard, and we see true grassroots democracy where change comes from the people, then that's when we see success.

I do think we have many examples of success here in Nova Scotia, specifically when the Town of Liverpool and the County of Queens amalgamated. They have been very, very successful. So I do think there are a lot of great examples. The Town of Antigonish and the County of Antigonish, I think they will likely be successful too. I think that it's very important that the people's voices are heard, and there's many people from that community that are feeling that their voices have not been heard.

With those few comments, I will take my seat. I would like to have the minister speak at some point to some of the concerns around costs of policing. What are people going to expect when it comes to their services? Will they see a decrease in their services, the municipal services? Will they see an increase? And what will the financial impacts be on their tax rates? With those few words, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, it is to move a second reading of Bill No. 407, the Antigonish Consolidation Act, and it will be to close debate.

The honourable Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I will make a few comments. I know that there will be Committee of the Whole House on Bills, there will be third reading, there will be other opportunities to address some of these things, and maybe more of my colleagues will speak as well. I'll maybe just work my way backward through some of the comments.

In terms of policing, the way this consolidation is happening is really being informed by what happened in Windsor-West Hants, where the way the consolidation took place actually led to an increase in costs of policing. The reason that this is - the town being consolidated into the county - is primarily to alleviate what would certainly be a policing increased cost. I've seen the number - I don't have it right in front of me, but it's in the order of three-quarters of a million dollars annually. That would be a big, added burden and a big disincentive to this consolidation if it happened in any other way, but the way it is happening has been informed by that.

I just want to address a few of the comments by the Leader of the Official Opposition. I have to say that one thing we've learned in this House in the last session was that municipal leaders around the province do pay attention to what's happening in here, more so than the ordinary public. These types of debates - we know that most people don't hear them, but we do know that our municipal leaders around the province can hear this stuff.

I am very disappointed at the comments by the Leader of the Official Opposition, which have gone so far from where his government was when it was run by previous leaders, in terms of encouraging and working to make amalgamations happen. Really, this is being patterned somewhat on the West Hants-Windsor amalgamation, and certainly being informed by it. It's not a forced consolidation by us. It's a legitimate and a twice-given vote by municipal councils, both from the town and the county, to double down.

I do have a document I want to table, which is written by two previous and very respected municipal leaders: Herb Delorey, former Warden of the County of Antigonish, and Carl Chisholm, former Mayor of the Town of Antigonish. It was recently a letter to the editor, which speaks very forcefully on the need to do this consolidation, on the importance of the town and the county working together, on how integrated they have become, how the reality is that the citizens of both the town and the county are doing business. You are a resident in the county, but you're doing your banking in the town. It's really become one community.

I have a great deal of respect for the mayor and the warden of the town and the county and the position they've taken. I can suggest to the Leader of the Official Opposition that this is a debate which is being closely watched by our municipalities across the province. We certainly realize that change is difficult. I know there is some loyalty to the municipal structures that are there. They have been there for more than a hundred years.

A lot of things have changed in a hundred years, and the way that we interact in our communities has dramatically changed. The convenience of driving around our children - the children in these two municipalities are, in fact, going to school together. They are on the same hockey teams. It's really one community, and this consolidation will reflect that.

With that, I move to close second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 407.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, that concludes the government's business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup> between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Following the daily routine and Question Period, business will include Committee



of the Whole House on Supply in the main Chamber to begin the review of Estimates on the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Of course, as we discussed earlier today, due to the flooding concerns at One Government Place, and the Red Room not being ready yet, the subcommittee will probably be looked at for Monday - but I'll announce that later.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn for today, returning tomorrow, Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup> between the hours of 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. After daily routine, we will move into Committee of the Whole House on Supply here in the Chamber.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

[The House rose at 4:40 p.m.]