



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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First Session

TUESDAY, MARCH 5, 2024

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MARCH 5, 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: I will begin with orders of the day.

**PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

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

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 2 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 has been signed by a number of residents of Churchill Drive, Roosevelt Drive and Philip Street in the constituency of Halifax Chebucto and I have also signed it.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

Any further petitions?

## **PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: In consideration of something that I will quote in a member's statement later, I beg leave to present a document entitled "N.S. political class's flawed view on housing disregards human rights," an essay written by Alec Stratford and published in the *Chronicle Herald*.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

I too would like to present with regard to - pursuant to Section 18, Subclause 4 of the Auditor General Act, I am tabling the following reports of the Auditor General to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly: *2023 Financial Report*; *Value for Money: Development of Transitional Care Facilities*; *Value for Money of Over-Budget Spending*; and *Report on Misuse of Public Funds at the Liberal Association of Nova Scotia*.

THE SPEAKER: The reports are tabled.

## **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

### **GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KIM MASLAND: Speaker, in your gallery, I am very happy to welcome members of the Nova Scotia Road Builders Association executive. As Minister of Public Works, I am so pleased to work with the Road Builders Association. They are such an important partner in our government's goal to build a better Nova Scotia.

I would ask them to rise as I say their names. Grant Feltmate, executive director; Mark Underhill, president; Bruce Wood, vice president; and Jeff Sullivan, past president.

I am proudly wearing my tie today, which Grant had given to me as a gift. I wanted to be sure I wore that.

I also want to recognize Don Maillet, who's here today. Don is the executive director of Highway Engineering and Construction at the department. He previously served with Road Builders in 2007, and I know he works very closely with the Road Builders.

I ask my colleagues to please join me in welcoming the members of Nova Scotia Road Builders. Thank you so much for joining us today.

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

The honourable Minister of Public Works.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 931**

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

Whereas the Nova Scotia Road Builders Association and its members play an important role in connecting our communities by building quality, safe, and efficient roads; and

Whereas the Association has represented the industry since 1947, and for the last 77 years has held their annual general meeting to learn from one another and discuss shared opportunities and challenges; and

Whereas the association holds fundraisers each year to raise money for community organizations across the province, and to date has donated over a million dollars to community organizations;

Therefore be it resolved that this Legislature thank the Nova Scotia Road Builders Association for helping to pave the way for our province and for providing significant support to community organizations through their fundraising efforts.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.



Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 932**

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

Whereas critical minerals are important for renewable energy technologies like wind turbines, electric vehicles, batteries, and solar panels, as well as food production and health care; and

Whereas global demand for critical minerals that we have here in Nova Scotia, such as lithium, graphite, and copper, are expected to increase significantly as countries work to reach net zero emissions by 2050; and

Whereas the department released our Critical Minerals Strategy yesterday and our staff are sharing it today with potential investors at a major mining conference in Toronto, with a focus on Nova Scotia's commitment to environmental stewardship and economic prosperity;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize Nova Scotia's potential to use our vast resources of critical minerals to support a global transition to net zero while creating a more resilient and prosperous economy for generations of Nova Scotians to come.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 419 - An Act Respecting Certain Financial and Other Government Measures. (Hon. Allan MacMaster)**

**Bill No. 420 - An Act to Amend Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2021, the Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act. (Braedon Clark)**

**Bill No. 421 - An Act to Establish a Nova Scotia Housing Corporation. (Braedon Clark)**

**Bill No. 422 - An Act to Amend Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2010, the Finance Act, Respecting Accountable Appropriations. (Lisa Lachance)**

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

### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

### **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

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

In the gallery today, I'm honoured to introduce Don O'Connor. Don was an important member of our team for more than a decade at the Department of Health and Wellness before he moved to the Department of Community Services, where I know they will appreciate him as much as we did, but I don't know if they'll love him as much as we do. If he would please rise and get the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Enjoy your visit.

The honourable member for Antigonish.

### **O'CONNOR, DON: DHW WORK - RECOG.**

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I rise in my place today to acknowledge a loyal and dedicated colleague: Don O'Connor.

For the past 12 years, Don was the first face visitors saw as they got off the elevator at the Department of Health and Wellness. He managed various responsibilities at the security desk with grace and integrity and helped countless individuals navigate their way through that big department. Don ran a tight ship and always did so with such a pleasant demeanour.

[1:15 p.m.]

At the beginning of February, Don moved on from his post at the Department of Health and Wellness and joined the team in Dartmouth with the Department of Community Services. We wish Don the very best and hope he knows the value he added and how much we miss him. Please join me in thanking Don for his ongoing dedication and service to the people and Province of Nova Scotia.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Today we are joined in the gallery by the team from the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia, which is soon to be renamed, so stay tuned for that. I'd like to welcome Hanley Smith, Olivia Kerr, Michael Davies-Cole, and Chris Aucoin. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Thank you for joining us today.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

#### **AIDS COALITION OF N.S.: TEST DELIVERY - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: I rise to recognize the work of the soon-to-be-renamed AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia for their delivery of more than 4,000 HIV self-tests in Nova Scotia over the past 16 months. As Chris Aucoin, their executive director, said: "Access to sexual health testing services is abysmal in Nova Scotia, with long wait times for basic tests and a lack of readily available treatment options outside of specialized care settings. Just to be seen can take weeks for some people, both symptomatic and asymptomatic."

Program data show that many people in the program were first-time testers between 18 and 25 years of age. Youth are a priority population to reach in public health. They often have had limited agency over their own health, and they are going through this important transitional period. In the program, staff led peer support sessions and could share more health-related information, such as information about PEP, PrEP, condoms, and more.

Their Public Health Agency of Canada funding for staff ends on March 31<sup>st</sup>, but they will continue to have free self-testing kits. I ask all members to help the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia in improving sexual health in Nova Scotia by spreading the word about these kits, and I have some available for everyone to take home.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**KNIGHT, BRYAN: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

HON. PAT DUNN: Bryan Knight, a Stellarton municipal politician, epitomizes dedication and selflessness in serving his community. With unwavering commitment, he tirelessly devotes himself to the betterment of his constituents, leaving no stone unturned in addressing their needs.

Whether he's spearheading initiatives for infrastructure development, advocating for improved public services or championing social assistance programs, Bryan's proactive approach ensures that the community's concerns are not just heard but promptly acted upon.

His tireless efforts extend beyond the confines of his office, as he can often be found at local gatherings, lending a compassionate ear to residents' issues and offering practical solutions. A beacon of accessibility and empathy, Knight's desire to assist others knows no bounds. Whether assisting a struggling family with navigating bureaucratic hurdles or mobilizing resources for disaster-relief efforts, Bryan's selflessness shines through in every endeavour.

His open-door policy and willingness to engage with constituents on a personal level have cemented his reputation as a true leader.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I beg leave to make an introduction before my statement.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, of course.

ZACH CHURCHILL: If I could bring the members' attention to the gallery, I'd like to direct everyone's attention there so I can introduce Kevin Penny, who is in this House as we recognize International Wheelchair Day. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

**PENNY, KEVIN: DISABLED ADVOCACY - THANKS**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Kevin Penny grew up in Hants Border, a small town located in the Annapolis Valley. However, one day in 1991 there was an incident that changed Kevin's life forever. A catastrophic accident resulted in a severe spinal cord injury. Overnight, Kevin went from an active 15-year-old teenager to becoming a lifelong wheelchair user.

Kevin describes himself as an eternal optimist. It is this unwavering attitude that enables him to pursue living his life as fully as he can, participating fully as a member of Nova Scotia society. He is actively employed, enjoys competitive and recreational sailing as a member of Sail Able, and is an intrepid adventurer.

I want to recognize that it is because of Kevin's attitude he has the courage and strength in advocating for improvements to the living conditions of Nova Scotians with disabilities, which there's still a lot more we need to do in this province to support. We thank him for the passion he brings as our province continues to make accessibility advancements in moving towards 2030. We await to see how the resulting changes will enhance greater participation of disabled Nova Scotians of all ages across our province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**STRATFORD, ALEC: HOUSING ESSAY - CONGRATS.**

GARY BURRILL: I would like to congratulate Alec Stratford on the publication of his insightful essay, Housing requires a rights-based approach, in the *Chronicle Herald* on February 20, which I have tabled.

In the essay, Stratford, Chair of the Nova Scotia Action Coalition for Community Well-Being, effectively argues that the government's current approach to housing and homelessness inadequately incorporates an understanding of housing and shelter as basic human rights. A truly human rights-based approach, he outlines, would regulate the entire rental market and not exempt new tenancies, as was done with Nova Scotia's own rent control until the 1990s. A rights-based approach, he explains, would follow the lead of British Columbia and limit the use of fixed-term leases so as to prevent them, as takes place here at the moment, from undermining the rent cap.

Stratford takes issue with what he calls the government's "false narrative of balance" about housing. The right of a property investor to a satisfactory ROI is not to be balanced with, but is rather trumped by, the right to warmth, dignity, and health.

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

**SHUB. WILDLIFE PARK: 70<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

LARRY HARRISON: Good to be back, folks.

March 3<sup>rd</sup> was World Wildlife Day, and today I'd like to take time to recognize the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. The park, which began in the late 1940s as a sanctuary for orphaned deer, continued to expand and officially opened as a wildlife park in 1954. That means 70 years of working with injured and orphaned animals. It is also 70 years of teaching our students through active learning and hands-on activities.

The Shubenacadie Wildlife Park has continued to expand over the years and now includes the Greenwing Legacy Project. This centre is a collaboration between Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. Of course, the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park may be best known for Shubenacadie Sam. Every Groundhog Day, Sam lets us know whether or not we're going to be in for a long Winter or an early Spring.

If you have never been to the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, I would encourage you to come this year. I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in thanking the staff and volunteers of the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park for all their excellent work and congratulate them on 70 years of success in our province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**RINK REPURPOSING: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I rise in my place today to recognize an important announcement that was made yesterday by the federal government.

But I also want to recognize Bill Kachafanas and a number of dedicated volunteers and community leaders who, yesterday in Sydney, announced the repurposing of the old Centennial Arena hockey rink, which many folks would remember. That was a big part of Sydney history. It was the first solar-powered sports complex for youth.

This is a huge step for the community. It's going to provide vital space for court sports for kids of all ages. A lot of work went into it. A lot of time went into it. This has been a conversation for years. I rise in my place to congratulate Bill Kachafanas of Sydney. Bill's a great guy. This has been a dream of his. I want to send thanks to the federal government which made a significant contribution yesterday towards that facility. I hope that this government takes a look at it as well. It's important infrastructure for kids in the greater CBRM.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**GIRLS BASK. TEAM: CH'SHIP PERF. - CONGRATS.**

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize the Community YMCA Panthers U12 Girls basketball team. This weekend, they played their championship game against Bedford. They have played these girls during the season, and boy, are they a good team to play. The girls put their heart out on the floor Saturday, and they played hard. They left it all out there, and that's all that you can ask for.

The game was close for a while, but the shots by Bedford pulled them ahead. The U12 girls played an amazing game that morning, and I am proud of all the work that they did this season. I would like all the members to help me thank coach Jazzy Cain, all the parents, community, and families that have supported these girls throughout the season. I would also like you to congratulate the U12 community YMCA Girls basketball team for a great season. Go, Panthers, go!

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

**REINDEER RUN: FUNDRAISING EVENT - CONGRATS.**

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I rise today to congratulate organizers of the 5th Annual Mahone Bay Reindeer Fun Run held as part of the Season of Father Christmas Festival in Mahone Bay this past December.

On the evening of Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 420 participants donned their funky festive best, including antlers and flashing red noses, to join a three-kilometre run past beautifully decorated homes and businesses. There were carol singers, a band, shantymen, and a 20-foot inflatable reindeer at points along the route, and there were treats for all at the finish line.

It was magical and it raised \$6,000, which was donated to two charities: the Mahone Bay & District Fire Department and Shoes for Kids.

No one in this chamber is going to believe I ran this event, and they'd be right. I was one of the walkers, and I'm not going to say I'll be ready for 2024, but I will be back.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**POIRIER, HELENA: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise today to acknowledge the sad news that former county councillor for District 2 Helena Poirier passed away on February 23<sup>rd</sup> at the age of 96. I attended the service this morning.

Helena moved to Timberlea in 1937 at the age of 10, when her parents purchased a large farm on the shores of Governor's Lake. She attended a one-room schoolhouse and made lifelong friends in Timberlea. She also enjoyed going to Prospect Village and visiting friends.

She was convinced to run for municipal council and spent 15 years as the councillor for the Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea area for the former County of Halifax from 1976 to 1991. She worked hard for her constituents and was a force to be reckoned with. She was responsible for bringing the Lakeside Fire Hall to our community, and her singular achievement was bringing water and sewer to the community, which really transformed the BLT community for generations.

She actually ran for the Liberal Party in 1981 unsuccessfully, but she continued on with her life and contributing to her community. She had a real zest for life and enjoyed a healthy lifestyle. You could see her walking well into her nineties on St. Margarets Bay Road. She was diagnosed with ALS the week of her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday but remained at her home for many months after her diagnosis. In my last visit, I recall going to see her, and she used a whiteboard and a marker to communicate, but she definitely had her wits about her.

I would like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in remembering Helena as a strong, vibrant woman who had a long-lasting impact on the people she touched and all that she did for Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, may I welcome a guest?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

GARY BURRILL: I was not aware a few moments ago when I was speaking to the writing of Alec Stratford that in fact, Alec is visiting us in the House today. Alec is here in the East Gallery. Alec is the chair of the Nova Scotia Action Coalition for Community Well-Being. He is also the Registrar and Executive Director of the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers. I invite everybody to welcome Alec Stratford. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **COLLINS, ALAN: FILM RETROSPECTIVE - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, Alan Collins is an established filmmaker living in Dartmouth North whose work explores themes of identity, culture, and art. Alan's films have recently been the subject of a retrospective held at Christ Church in downtown Dartmouth on the last Friday of every month, followed by a question-and-answer with the director himself. Featured so far in this roundup of Collins's work is 1989's *One Warm*



*Line: The Legacy of Stan Rogers; The Beauty of My People; and Drowning in Colour: The Art of Wayne Boucher*, about Nova Scotia abstract artist Wayne Boucher.

[1:30 p.m.]

Coming up in the series is *My Life So Far*, about Alan and his wife Violet's daughter, Cassandre, whom they adopted in Haiti, followed by a very Dartmouth film, *Terminal*, which documents a day in the life of the Dartmouth bridge bus terminal in 2014. The retrospective will wrap up with the documentary *Searching for God in India*, and then *Relative Happiness*, based on the novel by best-selling Cape Breton novelist Lesley Crewe.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating Alan Collins on this rich retrospective and thanking him for his contribution to Nova Scotia through film.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

### **RIVERSIDE ELEM. SCHOOL: 2<sup>ND</sup> OUTDOOR RINK - RECOG.**

HON. BRIAN COMER: Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge Riverside Elementary School on their latest project to get students into the great outdoors and foster a love of physical activity among our youth.

This year, Riverside opened the second outdoor rink in the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education. Skating is now being incorporated into the physical education program. It is also open to the community when the school is closed. For many students this is the first time they've ever been on the ice. This addition to the school will mean many students who've never learned how to skate will get the opportunity to learn to love this activity.

I would like to thank the school principal, Suzanne Brown, and the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education for their work on this great project. I would also like to recognize the Riverside Home and School Committee for their overwhelming support. The committee spearheaded the fundraising campaign through pancake breakfasts and donations. A group of parents built the rink on New Year's Day and the Albert Bridge Volunteer Fire Department has been generously flooding it.

This project demonstrates what can happen when a community comes together to accomplish something great. I hope that other schools will follow Riverside.

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

**CUVILIER, AUDREY: FROM SEA TO YOU - RECOG.**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, today I rise to shine a spotlight on entrepreneur and community volunteer Audrey Cuvilier, owner of From SEA to You sea glass jewellery. Audrey's beautiful creations, including jewellery, lanterns, and framed art, showcase her talent and passion for handmade craftsmanship.

Audrey's creations can be found at the Fairview Clayton Park Farmers' Market, seasonal craft markets around Halifax, and online. Each piece is meticulously hand-picked and handmade, reflecting Audrey's commitment to quality and authenticity.

Beyond her entrepreneurial endeavours, Audrey is deeply involved in our community, generously donating her creations to organizations like the Fairview Food Pantry and the Parkinson Society. Additionally, Audrey dedicates her time to volunteering with Square Roots Fairview/Clayton Park, continuing to enhance the lives of those in need in our community.

Notably, Audrey recently reached a milestone last year with Canadian Blood Services, making her 50<sup>th</sup> donation, further demonstrating her dedication to helping others in need.

Let us applaud Audrey Cuvilier for her entrepreneurial spirit, her creativity, and her commitment to serving others. Her contributions enrich our community and inspire us all.

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

**HARDY, JACKIE: ELVIS TRIBUTE ACT - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, Jackie Hardy of New Waterford unveiled his tribute to the King of Rock and Roll, Elvis Presley, several months ago during a karaoke night at the New Waterford Legion Branch 15. Jackie has autism spectrum disorder and hopes to inspire people with his Elvis tribute act. He told the media: "If you're on the spectrum and if you like what you're doing, go out there and show them what you can do."

In addition to his regular Tuesday night appearances at the Legion, Jackie hopes to perform at birthday parties, weddings, and community events to show that people with autism can follow their dreams.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

**S. SHORE SOCCER TEAM: CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.**

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the South Shore United Under 15AA Boys soccer team, who took the Nova Scotia Soccer League Indoor

Championship on Saturday in Halifax, winning in a dramatic shootout after a nail-biting nil/nil game against Halifax County.

I'd like to give a shout-out to the teammates: Aaden Mason; Parker Jarvis; Jackson Jones; Luca Caceres Montgomery; Ben Hughes; Cullen Druhan; Ashe Kennedy; Liam Henley; Riley Smith; Ethan Naugler; Vincent Mossman; Collin Robar; Mowat Knowles; Ethan Kew; Isac MacDonald; Conor Rafuse; Josh Rawdon; and the coach, Deniz Yurtsever.

This proud mom asks you to invite members of the Legislature to join me in applauding the South Shore United Under 15AA Boys team on their incredible win.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

**CPA BOYS BASK. TEAM: CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.**

BRAEDON CLARK: Thank you, Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize the achievements of the CPA boys' basketball team that, this past Sunday, beat Citadel 84 to 68 in the final of the Division One provincial championships to win their third straight provincial title. A fantastic achievement for the team. It's a long season from October to early March - a lot of games, a lot of work. To win three years in a row is something that hasn't happened in many, many years.

I want to congratulate all the members of the team, head coach Steve Harris - who I know well - who is a fantastic coach and an even better person.

Again, I want to congratulate the CPA boys basketball team on three titles in a row, and hopefully I'll be here doing this again next year with number four.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**ZONTA CLUB: ADVOCACY & EDUC. - THANKS**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I rise today to recognize the invaluable contributions of the Zonta Club of Amherst Area in Cumberland County. Their efforts in supporting women, men and families affected by sexual assault and family violence are very important. Through advocacy, education, and direct assistance, they have been very supportive to our community, providing vital resources and empowering survivors to reclaim their lives.

The Zonta Club's dedication to ending gender-based violence - by bringing awareness, but also facilitating tangible change and creating a more inclusive and secure environment for everyone - is so valuable.

Let us extend our deepest gratitude to the Zonta Club of Amherst Area for their dedication and compassion towards those in need. Together, we can strive for a future free from violence and discrimination.

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

**PrEP: NEED TO INCREASE ACCESS - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise to speak on an important health issue. Many folks in the community use pre-exposure prophylactics, or PrEP, to all but eliminate their risk of contracting HIV. It is also used to treat HIV and AIDS for people who have the virus, often with great success.

PrEP has an astronomical out-of-pocket cost - in the hundreds of dollars monthly. In Nova Scotia, it is covered under the Family Pharmacare Program only after submitting an Exception Status request and a burdensome amount of physician documentation. I also hear from a family doctor - or nurse practitioner - who struggled to even get a prescription. Wait times for sexual health providers are long, and staff are underresourced.

I ask that my colleagues in the House resolve to increase access to and education around PrEP. As this government continues to address inequity in our health system, we should all keep this issue in mind.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

**ROVERS, TYSON: PROV. VOL. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Village of Port Williams resident Tyson Rovers as the Provincial Volunteer Award recipient. Over the last 10 years, Tyson Rovers has been actively engaged in two significant projects: the preservation of the Farnham Marsh Body, a 192-acre marsh located in Port Williams, and the Tides Project, focusing on enhancing Nova Scotia's dike system.

Tyson Rovers has raised more than \$35,000 for our community. Benefit sharings include the Port Williams Elementary School Nutrition for Health Committee, local sports teams, the Annapolis Valley Honour Choir, the Port Williams Lions Club, Christmas hampers, and winter clothing for children of Kings County.

Please join me today to congratulate Tyson Rovers as the 2023 Port Williams Provincial Volunteer Award recipient.

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

**MACPHEE, AL: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, I rise today to speak about a notable community business leader, Al MacPhee. Al has been in the auto industry since the early 1960s, and believe it or not, when he turned 80 he was still putting in 60 hours a week at his dealership. He was the owner of MacPhee Chevrolet Cadillac GMC Limited, the largest General Motors dealership in Nova Scotia and the third largest dealership in Canada, located on Portland Street, Dartmouth.

Al had a celebrated career in the car business as the past chair of the Canadian Automobile Dealers Association, past president of the Nova Scotia Automobile Dealers Association, the Halifax/Dartmouth Automobile Dealers Association. During his career, he served on almost every General Motors advisory board and communications team. He is also known for his philanthropy, donating all he earns on a yearly basis to charity.

He and his wife, Mary, are involved in the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning. He has been a huge supporter and a board member of the Dartmouth General Hospital Foundation. Al's employees, friends, family, and Nova Scotians have all benefited from his infectious optimism, love of Dartmouth, and unwavering commitment to his community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I beg leave to make an introduction.

I draw the members' attention to the gallery opposite, where we are joined by Christian Vachon, whom I will ask to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

Christian is in Dalhousie University's Department of Political Science and is currently interning with the New Democratic Party office. We said that he could see the two hours that give him the two sides of this place. He'll be here for daily routine and also for Question Period. Welcome to the House, Christian.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome.

The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**PROVO, QUENTREL: STOP THE VIOLENCE - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize Quentrel Provo, founder and CEO of the Stop the Violence brand and movement.

The movement started after the tragic death of his cousin, Kaylin Diggs, in 2012. In 2015, he started the Stop the Violence clothing brand, geared towards spreading a message of love and standing against violence. Through this work, he became known for his Stop the Violence message in Nova Scotia and propelled the movement across the country.

In June 2016, June 10<sup>th</sup> was declared Stop the Violence Day in the Province of Nova Scotia and proclaimed by the Premier. Quentrel continues to spread the message of love over violence and raises awareness throughout Nova Scotia, Canada, and the world.

I would like all members to join me in thanking Quentrel Provo for all his steadfast work to stop the violence and spread the love.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

### **PAR-EN-BAS SHARKS: CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: We know the impact that sporting events have on our communities. They bring people together, stimulate local economies, and promote a sense of pride for our home teams.

This past weekend, I was pleased to attend the Division 2 Boys' Provincial Hockey Championship at the Mariners Centre in Yarmouth. Of course, I was cheering on my former high school team, the Par-en-Bas Sharks. For the second year in a row, the Sharks captured the championship banner after a 3-1 win against West Kings. Way to go, boys. I'm very proud of your accomplishment.

I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating the Par-en-Bas Sharks on their championship win, as well as all teams that participated in this year's championship tournament.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

### **FRIENDS OF BLUE MTN.: WINTER HIKES - RECOG.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the outstanding efforts of the dedicated local group of volunteers, the Board of Friends of Blue Mountain/Birch Cove Lakes: Mary Ann McGrath, Eleanor Humphries, Diana Whalen, Dale Smith, Carol Ann Roberts, Mary Ellen Donovan, Nick Buxton, Mel Earley, Ray Plourde, Catherine McKellar, Debbie MacKinnon, and John Bignell. It's a long list. This pristine wilderness area at the edge of HRM is 1,782 hectares, extending along four provincial ridings in Halifax West area.

Throughout the Winter months, the Friends of Blue Mountain/Birch Cove Lakes have continued to work hard in getting residents of HRM to enjoy the beauty and serenity of these protected lands. The cold weather does not stop them from enjoying the park. They are holding free guided Winter hikes.

I ask the House to join me in recognizing this dedicated group of volunteers who are the driving force behind ongoing efforts to establish the area as one of Canada's largest urban wilderness parks.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **BANOOK CANOE CLUB: FUNDRAISING - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Banook Canoe Club is a beloved institution in Dartmouth and has been for generations of athletes, families, and community members.

If you've been along the shores of Lake Banook lately, you'll notice that the canoe club is currently hoisted in the air and undergoing major renovations. The iconic red buildings have been showing signs of aging, are at risk of sliding into its namesake lake, and are not physically accessible to many with disabilities.

To fund these ambitious and much-needed alterations, the canoe club launched the Paddles Up Capital Campaign, a \$5 million capital campaign to breathe new life into BCC while respecting the building's heritage. At this very moment, the Paddles Up campaign is running a raffle, which closes on March 8<sup>th</sup> for a \$10,000 Micmac Mall shopping spree.

I encourage everyone to support Banook Canoe Club's revitalization efforts through the Paddles Up Capital Campaign and hope these efforts help ensure Banook Canoe Club is a vibrant part of our community for another 100 years and more.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

### **KINGS WEST TEAMS: CH'SHIP PERF. - CONGRATS.**

CHRIS PALMER: It's a great day when a high school has a varsity team playing for a provincial championship, but this past Sunday, West Kings District High School had not just one but three teams playing for Division 2 gold all over Nova Scotia.

It started with the boys' hockey team earning a silver medal in Yarmouth against Par-en-Bas after a final, hard-fought game, but it got better. The boys' basketball team won the gold medal in Halifax, defeating Forest Heights in a thrilling 72-69 final. Last but not least, the girls' basketball team defeated the Amherst Vikings 64-56 in Amherst to earn the title of provincial champions. The team was led by its seniors: Amelia and Hellie Blatch, Gab Lauxamana, Marissa Smith, and Chloe "Clutch" Palmer.

[1:45 p.m.]

It was the end of 12 straight years of three Palmer girls wearing the black, red, and white, and it couldn't have ended any better. I want to thank all coaches, parents, and volunteers who worked to make high school athletics a rewarding time for all our children. It's been one heck of a ride. Go Wolverines.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**MACMILLAN, MAX: FOOD BANK FUNDRAISER - THANKS**

FRED TILLEY: I would like to take this opportunity to thank a young man from Ferrisview Elementary, Max MacMillan, who raised \$400 for the North Sydney Community Food Bank by selling his original drawings.

For a young person to take this initiative on and raise money, knowing that there is a cause out there that can benefit many people - I want to commend Max for his hard work and dedication to the community and look forward to the future that Max and his classmates will provide for Northside-Westmount.

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

**WHITNEY PIER RINK: FUNDRAISER - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise to recognize the organizers of the Whitney Pier Community Hockey Fundraiser, which was created to help save the Whitney Pier Community Rink. Two of the organizers, Rory MacDonald and Kyle Mollons, are fighting to keep the Whitney Pier Community Rink open to ensure present and future generations can continue to make new memories.

The residents of the Pier began their fight to save the rink last year when they organized a tournament in March 2023, an auction, and a GoFundMe campaign. In January, the adult tournament organized by the Pier Community Hockey Fundraiser raised \$99,847.45. I hope the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage is listening to that and they get some moolah. Thank you to all the organizers and participants for such a great event.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

**EAVIS, BLAIR: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

HON. BRAD JOHNS: I rise to congratulate Blair Eavis of Sackville on his recent appointment to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.



Blair has been a very active member in many of the community organizations in Sackville, involving CIOE 97.5 FM community radio, the Sackville Rivers Association, and the Sackville Community Development Association. In December 2022, Blair was officially acknowledged for his time spent volunteering within the community as a recipient of the late Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Blair, an avid community supporter who is now able to advocate on behalf of all Nova Scotians. I want to wish him the best in all future endeavours and congratulate him on the appointment.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

### **LES PROD. LE MOULIN: 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - RECOG.**

RONNIE LEBLANC: I rise today to recognize Les Productions Le Moulin as they celebrate 20 years of bringing exceptional musical talent to our community. Founded in 2005 by Paul-Émile Comeau, a dedicated educator and music enthusiast, this organization was born from a desire to present a high-quality musical experience.

Les Productions Le Moulin has curated 113 performances, ranging from renowned bluegrass bands to emerging classical virtuosos. Their efforts have brought joy and cultural enrichment to our community while supporting the larger artistic community.

I ask that all members join me in expressing our gratitude to Paul-Émile Comeau and Les Productions Le Moulin for their dedication and contributions to our community. Let us wish them continued success as they embark on their 20<sup>th</sup> year of delivering exceptional concerts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

### **HUSBAND, JAMES - BIRTHDAY WISHES**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, today I rise to bring honour to my husband on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, James Murray McCrossin was born to Rita Robichaud Lapadula. She was 41 years old and made the difficult but brave decision to give him to another family to raise. When he was only a week old, he was adopted by Bill and Mariette McCrossin of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, who raised him with much love. His mother, Mariette, is 86 years old now, and when she talks about the day that she brought him home, she still cries and weeps.

He has made his parents so proud and has earned the respect of our four children and myself, of course. He works tirelessly for his patients, often helping people through the most difficult times in their lives.

Today I want to wish him a happy birthday and let him know how much I love and respect him. Happy birthday.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

**EMERALD LIGHT TEAM: LOBST. ROLL-OFF WIN - CONGRATS.**

NOLAN YOUNG: I rise today to congratulate owner Brendan Pippy and the staff of one of Shelburne's newest restaurants, the Emerald Light. This team won the 6<sup>th</sup> annual 2024 Lobster Roll-Off competition, with the best lobster roll, against some very worthy competitors.

Since coming back home, Brendan has worked diligently to guarantee his customers an exceptional dining experience. He has also introduced local competitions, working with restaurants throughout the county, starting with a burger competition in which each participating restaurant donated a portion of the money raised to a charity of their choice.

Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking Brendan for his dedication to our community. We will be watching and waiting for the next big event.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**ALL SAINTS ANGL. CHURCH: CHARITY EVENTS - RECOG.**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I'd like to thank the congregation of All Saints Anglican Church in Bedford for their recent actions to help those in our community experiencing food insecurity and poverty. As we know, homelessness and hunger are on the rise in our province. This past weekend, members of the congregation came together to provide shepherd's pie to 149 guests at the soup kitchen at Saint George's Anglican Church in Halifax. Members of the All Saints congregation came together in a variety of ways to donate, shop, prepare, deliver and serve the meal.

As well, the previous Sunday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, was Undie Sunday at All Saints. That's when a representative of Shelter Nova Scotia attended a church service to receive the men's undergarments and personal care items that the congregation had gathered during the months of January and February. The donations were then provided to the guests of Metro Turning Point Centre shelter for men.

I want to thank the leadership and members of All Saints Anglican Church for their thoughtfulness and action at this critical time for so many.

THE SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by members?

The honourable member for Preston.

**COFFEE AND CHAT GROUP: SOCIAL INTERACTION - RECOG.**

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Coffee and Chat Group. The goal of the group is to provide people in the Preston township communities of East Preston, North Preston, Cherry Brook and Loon Lake a place to interact and take in activities that help support social and emotional interactions. There have been presentations on topics such as healthy eating, identity-theft protection, personal budgeting and investing, and government services and programs.

This group started in 2021 and is open to all ages. One of the highlights is the annual Christmas social, where groups from all of the communities come together for a time of sharing, fellowship and fun.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join with me in congratulating the organizers of this group for this great initiative and its continued success.

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

**SACK.-COB. MLA - BIRTHDAY WISHES**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish the member for Sackville-Cobequid a very happy birthday today. He has strong ties to the Fairview-Clayton Park community with his partner, Deb MacKinnon, who is one of our best community volunteers and advocates. It's always nice to see him pop his face into the community and show that cross-partisanship and party politics don't always have to cause strife. It can actually merge and make some really good movement forward for different communities.

On his birthday, I hope that today is a wonderful day for him and that he is showered with love.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

**SEAWIND LANDING COUNTRY INN: EXPANSION - CONGRATS.**

HON. GREG MORROW: I rise today to congratulate Ann Marie Bagnall and David Dejongh, the innkeepers of Seawind Landing Country Inn, on the recent expansion of their business.

Seawind Landing is located in Charlos Cove, and since they purchased the business 16 years ago, Ann Marie and David have been welcoming visitors from around the world

to their beautiful seaside resort. Tourists and locals alike come to relax at this pristine country inn and enjoy its second-to-none hospitality, not to mention its incredible food.

This past Fall, they completed a 1,000-square-foot extension which is now home to a new dining area, where they will be able to hold larger events such as receptions, celebrations, and meetings year-round. The focal point of the extension is a huge porthole window which frames the backdrop of Charlos Cove. Tourism is an important part of Guysborough County, and this inn is certainly a gem along Marine Drive.

Ann Marie and David are committed to their community as they provide employment to local residents. They're active on the Tourism Guysborough County Association and Guysborough District Business Partnership boards, and are advocates for rural Nova Scotia tourism.

Speaker, I ask that members of the House join me in congratulating Ann Marie and David.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

#### **VOLUNTEERS: NORTHSIDE BREAKFAST - THANKS**

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, I would like to take a moment to recognize the Good Samaritans, the Knights of Columbus, the Northside Gals, Holy Family Parish volunteers, and the families from Nigeria for cooking an amazing breakfast last Sunday for the residents of the Northside. It was great to show the fellowship and have everyone together to share a wonderful breakfast.

Thank you for providing breakfast for the residents of the Northside, and I look forward to attending future events.

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

#### **DONOVAN, LYLE: EMS MEDAL RECIP. - RECOG.**

HON. KEITH BAIN: Speaker, I am once again honoured to rise in my place to recognize another deserving resident of Victoria-The Lakes, Lyle Donovan.

At an event held on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Lyle was one of 18 current and former paramedics who were present to receive the Emergency Medical Services Exemplary Service Medal from His Honour Lieutenant Governor Arthur J. LeBlanc.

Lyle has served as a paramedic for more than 30 years and continues to do so. He is also the Emergency Management Office coordinator for Victoria County.

I respectfully ask all members of the Assembly to join me in recognizing Lyle Donovan for his continuing contributions to our community and thank him for his many years of service.

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

### **RAVENS: SEMI-FINALS WINS - CONGRATS.**

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Speaker, last weekend was busy for our Ravens' Nest: U11-B played West Hants, U13-A played the Western Valley Spartans, and U15-A played West Hants again. All three teams won the semi-finals - all of them. The Ravens' Nest rocked it right out of the park. Congratulations to the U11-B, the U13-A, and the U15-A for advancing to Scotia Minor Day of Champions. They'll all play in Queens Place on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Congratulations to all the players, the coaches, and the parents who are there dedicated to their children learning this wonderful sport. Yay, Ravens! My Sebby's on one of those teams, so I'll be there at Queens Place. I'm hoping the Minister of Public Works might visit.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

### **YOUNG, KEENAN & ROSA - GREETINGS**

NOLAN YOUNG: I just wanted to say hi to Keenan and Rosa Young and staycation politics.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time is now 2:00 p.m., and we will begin Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers.

[2:00 p.m.]

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honorable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **PREM.: GRAPE JUICE SUBSIDY - EXPLAIN**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, this Premier ran on an election platform commitment to increase support for buying things locally here in Nova Scotia. However, the Premier is now going to use taxpayers' money - Nova Scotians' money - to subsidize the importation of cheap grape juice from other jurisdictions across the country and the world, which according to our wine sector, our grape-growing sector, will have

catastrophic effects on that sector, which contributes \$250 million a year to our economy and employs over 1,100 people.

My question to the Premier: Why is he using taxpayer money to subsidize the importation of cheap grape juice to compete against those who are actually growing grapes and putting money, blood, and sweat in the soil here in Nova Scotia?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Speaker, we have great respect for our wine industry, for our grape growers. As a province, as taxpayers, we've invested significant amounts of money in supporting them. They produce a great product. I believe in that product. I speak about that product in pretty much every speech I give.

The reality is that Australia raised a trade issue at the World Trade Organization and said we can't keep doing things the way we were doing them. So under the settlement agreement, things have to change - the markup process has to change. There are huge opportunities for all sectors of our economy, but certainly for all segments of the wine industry. We're believers in them, and that's why we're trying to help them through this change in process.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, that's the issue: the Premier says one thing and then does another. This is not a trade issue. Other provinces in this country - British Columbia, Ontario - provide subsidies to those who are putting their money in the ground, their capital in their province, that are growing goods, that are employing people in their own provinces. B.C. and Ontario do that. There's no trade disagreement there. There are no rules in the trade agreement that say you have to subsidize with your taxpayers' money imported juice from other parts of your country. There's no other province that's doing that. This is a precedent-setting event.

My question is: Why is the Premier throwing aside the incredible work that's happened in the wine sector - something we're all proud of, something that's contributing hundreds of millions of dollars here - to use taxpayers' money to subsidize the importation of grape juice from other jurisdictions that are already subsidizing the production of that juice? It does not make any sense.

THE PREMIER: As interested as I am in the learned member's advice on international trade compliance, I think I'll go with the international trade lawyers on their advice on making sure that Nova Scotia, as a province, is trade-compliant. We were found to not be in compliance with the trade regulations. That was a policy, of course, that his government developed, and now we're trying to clean it up.

We'll work with the industry. We support the industry. We want to help the industry. There's lots we can do to support them. We'll be here to support Nova Scotians through this process, but we have to respect the international trade laws.

I know this party - the Auditor General told me last week, they're not interested in the law. We are on this side.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, this government is pretending this is a trade issue. They've tried to make it a trade issue by moving the subsidy from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. This was done on purpose and we want to know why.

The other provinces, where there are no trade-compliant issues with their subsidy to their grape growers, like Ontario, Quebec, and B.C., do it through their agriculture department. We want to know why this government moved this subsidy program from the Department of Agriculture, which could be in line with trade agreements, to the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, where they are making this more of a trade issue. It doesn't have to be one.

The Premier said he's consulted with the industry. We heard from the industry that that's not true. He urged his Minister of Finance and Treasury Board to meet with grape growers three days after he was seen and photographed with Carl Sparkes at an event hosted by Carl Sparkes.

My question to the Premier: Is this coming from one person whom he's closely associated with and who has done fundraising for him?

THE PREMIER: It's an absolutely ridiculous assertion, Speaker. The member might be interested to know that I get photographed probably 100 times a week with Nova Scotians, and I'm proud to do it as their Premier.

The reality is that in June, Australia will get to have a say on whether or not they believe Nova Scotia has come into compliance. Everything that member just said is in support of Australia, against the Nova Scotia industry. It's an absolutely ridiculous position for the member to take and to bring that to the floor of the Legislature and harm the entire sector - it says a lot about that member. In fact, it confirms what the Auditor General said last week, when the Auditor General said: "It concerns me the lack of integrity in that party right there, in full display."

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

### **PREM.: COASTAL PROTECTION - ACT**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Let's talk about integrity. Let's talk about doing what you said you would do. I have a list of organizations and municipalities voicing deep concern about this government's refusal to act on the coastal protection that we so badly need in this province. The list continues to grow: we now have the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia; we have the Ecology Action Centre; we have the Atlantic Coastal Action

Program; we have the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, in addition to towns and municipalities, not limited to Clark's Harbour, Lunenburg, Digby, Bridgewater, Kentville.

This is, of course, on top of the countless Nova Scotians - including the ones who mysteriously got lost - who have spoken against this act. Why is the government not taking these concerns seriously? Why won't the Premier listen to Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: We're taking this issue very seriously. This is an issue that is near and dear to all Nova Scotians. We have 13,000 kilometres of coastline. Nova Scotians love their coastline, the beaches, the cliffs, the hiking trails. It is something that defines us as a people. We love our coastline.

I also love and believe in Nova Scotians and their ability to do the right thing when they have appropriate information. That's why we are not giving up on protecting our coast. We will never give up on protecting our coast, but we will put faith in Nova Scotians. If we provide them the information, they'll make the right decisions. I believe in Nova Scotians. Maybe that member can tell me who she believes in.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I only wish the Premier would tell us who he believes in, because it's not all the Nova Scotians who support this act, including every member of this Chamber, including the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, who were in the Chamber at the time and supported this act.

The Minister's explanation that a map and an app will take the place of a legal framework doesn't cut it. People have apps for budgeting, but it doesn't mean that they use them. It's worth pointing out that coastal developments like seawalls aren't individual decisions. They are things that can have harmful eroding impacts on neighbouring properties, on the beloved coastline of Nova Scotians.

Governance of coastal protection doesn't work like an app. You don't just download it like this government has done. If this government loves our coastline so much, why do they insist on leaving Nova Scotians and that coastline vulnerable to that reckless development?

THE PREMIER: I completely disagree. It might be okay from downtown Halifax to dictate what Nova Scotians should do on their property across the rural parts, across the rest of this province. I don't believe that a blunt instrument, like dictating what somebody can do on their land, is necessary to get people to do the right thing.

I support Nova Scotians and I will work with them to help them have the power to do the right thing. I know the crew that wants to force the blunt instrument on Nova Scotians is very loud in the Chamber right now, but they're not loud out in the real world and with Nova Scotians whom I talk to.



CLAUDIA CHENDER: Again, Clark's Harbour, Lunenburg, Digby, Bridgewater, Kentville - that's not HRM. That's not people in urban municipalities dictating coastlines. These are municipalities who are begging for a legal framework that this government refuses to give them. In the newspapers, on the call-in shows, in the 800 letters that sat in junk mail, public opinion is roundly in favour of this act.

People want comprehensive political legislation. It is not a sledgehammer - it is a framework. The reason why all these consultations have happened - the hundreds of thousands of dollars of consultations - is to figure out what goes in the regulations, how they are sensitive to each jurisdiction. So these hundreds of thousands of dollars that this government has spent most recently a few months ago, have been spent.

THE SPEAKER: Question.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The act has been denied and the government will not tell us what people said. So will the Premier commit to releasing the results of the consultations he did with his beloved Nova Scotians about their beloved coastline?

THE PREMIER: The money that the member says was spent on consultation was actually an investment in hearing from the voices of Nova Scotians. We listened to those Nova Scotians very intently . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Premier has the floor.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Thank you, Speaker. We listened to those Nova Scotian voices. They're across the spectrum, for sure. It's our coastline. It's something that people care deeply about, so there are deeply entrenched positions on both sides of this. There's no question about that.

We as a government are looking for the most reasonable, common-sense outcome that supports Nova Scotians and supports the protection of our coastline. I'm very proud of the work that the minister and the team at the department have done on this process, and I believe that we have found the right balance that protects our coastline.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM.: GRAPE JUICE SUBSIDY - CLARIFY**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, it's not just our party and I who don't think this is a trade issue. Folks from the wine sector know it's not a trade issue. We've had those folks say that there's no trade issue here. This, in fact, is not true at all. This issue isn't related to the Australian complaint.

We've also had members of the wine sector, who are all very connected, who have said that this is happening - again, these aren't my words, but coming from the wine sector - because of the Premier's personal relationship with one individual who has fundraised money for the Premier and who is a close associate.

My question to the Premier: If he wants to brag about putting Nova Scotia businesses first and supporting Nova Scotia's local development, why is he making a decision to use taxpayers' money to subsidize the importation of grape juice from across the world, just so he can then call it a Nova Scotia wine?

THE PREMIER: This is a trade issue. The member might not accept that, but I'll just provide a little information for the member.

Of the wines that are currently sold on the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation's shelves today, 3 per cent are local craft Nova Scotia wines; 65 per cent of those wines are bottled outside of the province - most of them in Quebec. That's an incredible opportunity for our province.

I believe that wine should be bottled here. It's already for sale on the shelves. We're going to find a way to help the industry protect the growers. We want those grapes from Nova Scotia in wines, for sure. That's why we're looking for ways around the wine authority and stuff.

For the member to make the types of assertions he makes, and to endanger the trade relationship internationally, is absolutely ridiculous. It's reckless on the part of that member.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm sorry, Speaker, but it's not reckless to defend an industry that creates \$250 million a year in economic revenue. It's not reckless to defend an industry that puts their capital, their blood, sweat, and tears in the soil here in Nova Scotia, that employs 1,100 people from one end of the province to the other.

What's reckless is putting that entire sector in jeopardy to help out a friend. That's what's reckless.

The Premier knows that if he looks at B.C., Ontario, or even the federal government, there are no trade compliance issues with subsidies to agriculture programs, because it's run through the agriculture department, not through the finance department.

Can the Premier please tell us, in his statesmanship all glory: Why has he moved that subsidy program from agriculture to the finance department, reining in this trade issue that he says exists?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: What the member is speaking about is all rooted in a trade challenge that Australia made against Canada.

[2:15 p.m.]

I think what a lot of people need to realize is that when trade disputes are brought forward, they're very serious. They can actually affect the export of lobster and other goods from our province.

It is critical that we comply, and that we satisfy the trade complaint to ensure that the complainant - Australia, in this case - feels that we have eliminated the policy that they raised as unfair and not compliant with the trade laws that our country has agreed to.

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

#### **FTB: TRADE ISSUE - EXPLAIN**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: There are provinces that subsidize their local grape growers. In fact, there are jurisdictions that subsidize those grape growers that now are going to double subsidize with the importation of that juice that are trade-compliant.

The federal government's program is trade-compliant. B.C.'s program is trade-compliant. Ontario's program is trade-compliant. Quebec's program is trade-compliant. They are providing agriculture subsidy, not providing subsidy through the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. This is how it used to happen.

My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: Why have we created a larger trade issue here, if there even is one, by moving that subsidy program from the Department of Agriculture - again, where it would be compliant by all other evidence in the country, in every single other jurisdiction that does it - into the minister's own department?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, this is not a complicated issue. This issue was noticed by Australia because we have the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation - a Crown corporation of the government, which is unique compared to other provinces in the country in that the government is selling alcohol, and there is only one way to sell alcohol, and that is through the government, by way of the NSLC.

The complaint was raised that there were margin preferences given to Nova Scotia alcohol producers, and we must address that. There is no getting around that. Nova Scotia had been allowing Nova Scotia producers to get preferential markups. That cannot exist anymore because it is not trade-compliant.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, what happened was that there were subsidies given to local farmers to grow and build an industry that is now worth \$250 million from one end of the province to the other, that employs 1,100 people from one part of this province to the other. It was to subsidize people who were putting their capital in the ground here in Nova Scotia, who were building vineyards and wineries that are now the envy of the world, that are bringing tourism here.

This minister is justifying the indefensible here. My question to the minister is: Did this direction come from the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation board? Is he moving on a direction from them?

ALLAN MACMASTER: I'm not justifying the indefensible. What was in place was indefensible, and that's why we lost the trade challenge. Australia made this complaint. It was not something done through the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. It was a pricing - it was a margin preference through the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation. It was not trade-compliant. We don't get to decide that. We also didn't get to decide what was in the free trade agreement that involved both Canada and Australia. But we have to respond to the complaint. Otherwise, it could affect other exports in the province - things like lobster and anything else, really, that's exported. A country that's put up a dispute can start to take actions against other products that we might export.

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

#### **FTB: NSLC VIEW OF TRADE ISSUE - PROVIDE**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, there are other provinces in Canada - and there's the federal government as well - that provide an agriculture subsidy to those who are putting capital in the ground, who are building jobs locally, who are growing vineyards, and who are producing grapes. That's a different issue than pricing markups.

Why is this minister now providing that same level of subsidy, Nova Scotia's money, toward companies that are importing juice that's produced in other jurisdictions from where that jurisdiction is actually subsidizing that production? Does this actually make sense to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board? Can he please answer my question? What's the Liquor Commission's viewpoint on this? Did they tell the minister that he had to do this to be compliant with trade rules? Can he please tell us?

THE SPEAKER: Just a gentle reminder to, when asking questions, speak through the Speaker and not directly to ministers.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, the member is speaking of agricultural subsidies. That was not the issue at question here. The issue at question here was preferential markups at the NSLC, not agricultural subsidies.

As I've said already, Nova Scotia is somewhat unique. Not every jurisdiction sells alcohol entirely through a government-run store system, but in this province we do. That's why it was noticed: because the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation was a large buyer of wines.

This problem has nothing to do with agricultural subsidies. It has everything to do with margin preferences that were not trade-compliant.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Right, we're unique that we have a provincial liquor corporation. Clearly, the minister has never heard of the LCBO in Ontario. Clearly, he's never heard of that. Ontario is trade-compliant. We are the only province that is putting tax dollars on the line to subsidize the importation of juice produced in other provinces. No other province does that. This is precedent-setting.

The reason why it's dangerous is because we're going to put a wine sector out of work, potentially, where there is a \$77 return on every single dollar invested in it, and promote a model where there is a \$7 return on every dollar that's invested. This is going to be an economic disaster for this province. I think we've got to get better answers from the Minister of Finance and the Premier than just saying it's a trade issue, when obviously there's a serious disagreement here that it's not.

ALLAN MACMASTER: The member has put a lot of theories on the floor of the House today. I don't know if he's been following the news, but Ontario made a monumental decision in the way it retails alcohol in that province not so long ago - very much a different system than one we have here in Nova Scotia.

If the member wants to put other theories on the floor, he can, but I'm going to tell Nova Scotians that we had a trade issue because we have what's called the NSLC. I know most people in Nova Scotia are very familiar with the NSLC. They can't buy their alcohol through any other sales channel than the NSLC. That's what the trade complaint was about - a margin preference for alcohol and wine in Nova Scotia, and . . . I'm out of time.

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

### **FTB: OUT-OF-BUDGET SPENDING - EXPLAIN**

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Finance. For two years, the Auditor General has been calling attention to the massive amount of taxpayer dollars being spent outside of the budget process without oversight. For two years now, this government has ignored her recommendations and refused to do anything about it. Eighty-six per cent

of last year's overbudget spending remains unspent by recipients. That means there was plenty of time to go through official democratic channels.

Past governments have spent out-of-budget but never at these vast amounts and never against the recommendation of the Auditor General. Why is this government so closed to transparency?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: A simple answer: Because the model of transparency was one the NDP put in in 2010. It's the exact same model that was put in in 2010, when I actually sat, I think, in the very chair that member is sitting in. The difference between that member and me is that I didn't have a problem with it, because I knew that it is transparent. I knew that I would have the chance to raise issues in the House, and I knew I would have the chance as the finance critic to raise them at the news conferences government would have when introducing the additional appropriations they were making.

LISA LACHANCE: We've been through this before. So 2010 was a long time ago. We've been told to do better, we know how to do better, and we should do better. We can do better, but this government doesn't want to. This government continues to spend with less oversight and only results in money wasted. Funding agreements are being rushed through, and in this rush, the government doesn't have answers for questions like: How will this money be spent? What happens with unused funds?

Like the Auditor General, I'm curious: What does the government see as the downside of increasing accountability and transparency about how they spend Nova Scotia's money?

ALLAN MACMASTER: The answer to that is because there is another element of accountability, and that's in the ministries that are responsible for the groups that are receiving funding. (Interruptions) I'll answer the question, Speaker, if they'll let me answer. Ministries are responsible for these groups. At the end of the day, there are many organizations in Nova Scotia. It should be no surprise to the members of the Opposition, because they're the very groups that they would have worked with when they were in government.

Good people - Nova Scotians who care about people. Things like helping people with the cost of energy. Academic institutions that we are trying to get focused around health care, because we need more health care workers. Ministries have a layer of accountability.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**DOA: LOCAL WINE PRODUCERS - SUPPORT**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: This government ran on a plan to build a Nova Scotia Loyal program that would incentivize the purchase of local goods and food - something that we've only seen on decals on a truck driving Tories around in parades from one end of the province to the other. Here we have an example of a government that is willing to subsidize the importation of juice produced in other provinces and other countries - to subsidize that with taxpayers' money at the cost of local producers.

Again, I will table a letter that has been submitted to the ministers and the Premier from Wine Growers Nova Scotia, in which they say this could be catastrophic to their sector. My question to the Minister of Agriculture is: How has he allowed this to happen? How has he allowed taxpayers' money to be used to import juice to compete with local producers here in Nova Scotia? How is that doing a better job for Nova Scotians?

HON. GREG MORROW: We believe in the quality of Nova Scotia grapes. We've been there to support our wine industry through the years - millions of dollars of investment in the last number of years.

We look at the Nova Scotia wine quality standards. That's legislation that this government brought in. We look at polar vortex funding after that devastating cold snap that happened in February last year. The industry asked us to sort out EWRP and come up with a new trade-compliant program. We've done that. We are working with industry, and we'll continue to work with industry.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, that minister is wanting to throw away all that investment to benefit two bottlers in Nova Scotia who aren't producing grapes here, who aren't putting as much money in the ground, where there is a fraction of the return on public investment. One dollar leads to \$77 return when grapes are grown here and wine is produced here. One dollar yields a \$7.00 return, by comparison, on wine that is bottled here.

We've got a Minister of Agriculture who promised Nova Scotians that he would support local production, that he would encourage them to buy local, who's allowing his government to subsidize the importation. Again, the only province in the country that's doing this - of foreign grapes - and we want to know why he's allowing that to happen to our sector here, and putting our sector in jeopardy when it is so valuable.

GREG MORROW: As I mentioned, we're supporting the wine industry and the grape growers of Nova Scotia. I talked about the Nova Scotia Wine Authority. That will incentivize wine growers to use Nova Scotia grapes in their products.

We are working with the wine industry to set up those standards. We are ready to go. The wine industry asked us to hold off while we sorted out EWRP. We've done that.

We're ready to go. We're going to take their input, and we're going to set up a wine authority that incentivizes wine growers to use Nova Scotia grapes in their products.

[2:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

### **FTB: WINE INDUSTRY - MEET**

HON. KEITH IRVING: I'd like to ask a question to the government accountants on why it makes sense to import a dollar's worth of juice to make a bottle of wine and give them a subsidy of \$5.15?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: As I said before, the Opposition has put a lot of theories on the floor of the House this afternoon, and they've put a lot of math on the floor too. What I would say is that the industry is obviously important for the very reasons they've stated. We have until the end of June to work with the industry on a solution that is trade-compliant. That is one thing that it must be: trade-compliant.

KEITH IRVING: Speaker, a question to the government. The government has received two letters from the wine industry: one on January 10<sup>th</sup> and one on January 12<sup>th</sup>. There has been no response and no meetings.

My question to the minister is: When will the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, the Minister of Agriculture, or the Premier sit down with the wine industry that is on the edge of a cliff because of this decision by this government? This will be catastrophic to rural Nova Scotia - and why? For \$6 million in the pocket of one friend of the Premier? Talk to the industry.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I'm not so certain that the last comment is actually parliamentary. Perhaps you'll address that in a moment. What I would say . . .

THE SPEAKER: I kindly ask the member to retract that statement making an assertion that the Premier . . .

The honourable member for Kings South.

KEITH IRVING: I will retract that statement. I would like to hear answers of why they are not talking to the industry.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I would say to the member that we are speaking with the industry. I know there have been phone calls happening as recently as this week. We have sat down and met with them. We do have until the end of June, and the Minister of Agriculture and I certainly aim to be sitting down with them again soon.



THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

### **FTB: WINE COMPANY PAYMENTS - DISCUSS**

HON. KEITH IRVING: My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: Could the minister inform us whether any cheques have been cut to the two companies that will receive money under this program?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: What we put in place, that must be trade-compliant, is to treat all producers of alcohol that are selling through the NSLC the same, whether they are from Australia or whether they are from Nova Scotia.

KEITH IRVING: It seems clear that \$6 million or \$12 million have been spent. My question to the minister is: Is this an additional appropriation this year?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, as I said, we have until the end of June to come up with a solution for this issue, and it is something that Australia is going to have to - they are going to have to review what we've done, what we've changed, to ensure that it falls in line with what is compliant.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **RTA: MISUSE OF FIXED-TERM LEASES - EXPLAIN**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for the Residential Tenancies Act. Last week the final tenant was evicted from a nine-unit Dartmouth North building after the landlord refused to renew a series of fixed-term leases. As a result of having to move, Keely Corrigan saw her rent more than double. It went from \$754 to \$1,525, and I will table that.

Without the abuse of fixed-term leases, Keely could have stayed in her rent-capped unit instead of moving into a unit she will struggle to pay for. My question for the minister is: Does the minister believe that this is the intended and appropriate use of fixed-term leases?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Of course, I recognize that when a tenant does face the end of their lease, it does put them in a very difficult situation. It does cause a lot of stress. Again, I have spoken at length about the intended use of fixed-term leases on the floor of the Legislature. It is the time and place for them, and as a member of this government, I continue to support that intended use.

We know that the low vacancy rate in the province is causing a lot of stress in the housing market. And that is why, as a government, we are focused on the true solution - that is adding more housing stock to the housing market - a \$1 billion investment over five

years to add an additional 40,000 units. And that's why I am proud of the leadership of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, this is not an isolated incident. This story has played out time and time again in my office and surely in many others around the province. Residents are being displaced from affordable units, often into unaffordable or precarious housing or, in fact, into homelessness.

This government seems to think that handing over funding to developers and landlords will result in trickle-down affordability. We've had nearly three years of this philosophy, and all we have to show for it in Dartmouth North is a series of renovated buildings that have doubled in price. My question to the minister is: Why is this government failing to preserve the precious few affordable housing units we have left?

COLTON LEBLANC: I certainly do not want to speak for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing but, again, I go to the true solution. We are focusing on more housing, more places that Nova Scotians can call home. Contrary to what the member opposite is saying, we are making a number of investments in the housing market, whether it be modular or public housing, whether it be new public housing, whether it is supporting student housing projects across the province, whether it is new or affordable housing projects, whether it's removing the provincial HST portion on new construction for purpose-built multi-unit apartments.

We know we need more housing. That is the solution to the housing crisis.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **DOA: WINE DECISION IMPACT - ADDRESS**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: We've done an incredible job over the last 10 years growing our vineyard sector, our winery sector. There has been a compounding impact of that with tourism. It's been so good, the Premier brags about it in the one speech he gives everywhere he goes.

My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. This is an industry that's worth \$250 million a year, that employs 1,100 people. They are telling the public, the government, and us that this decision will be catastrophic to them and their businesses, and that we could see some of these venues shut down, which, again, would have a compounding negative effect. Does the Minister of Agriculture share the economic concerns that the wine sector has?

HON. GREG MORROW: I share the value that the wine sector brings to this province, for sure, and as I mentioned, we've supported them through the years through a number of ways.

One that I neglected to mention earlier, through our new policy that replaced the Emerging Wine Regions Policy, is green box funding that's designed specifically for the wine sector - \$700,000 in this budget to help the wine industry move forward. They can help develop the programs, and it is there to support them. That's just another way that we're supporting them.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Again, and here's the issue, the Minister of Agriculture brags about \$700,000 - that's for the whole sector, over 55 wineries - and yet this one decision is going to give two companies in that sector \$6 million to \$12 million. Clearly there's something wrong here.

This is not the time for the government to be patting themselves on the back for supporting a sector that is telling us they are on the verge of collapse as a result of how this government has handled the situation. Is the minister concerned about the economic impact to rural Nova Scotia, to tourism, to the same level that the sector is concerned about the economic impact? Can you please answer?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I am concerned about the wine sector in Nova Scotia, and that they are in compliance with trade agreements because they cannot move forward successfully without being trade-compliant. That is the goal. We have to be trade-compliant. We want to get them there, but we also want to see them flourish.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

#### **DOA: LACK OF WINE IND. MEETINGS - EXPLAIN**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: It's been a lively discussion today about the wine industry. The wine industry has reached out to us and to others to advocate on their behalf. It's an important industry for this province. My question to the Minister of Agriculture is: He had two letters - why wouldn't he meet with the wine industry?

HON. GREG MORROW: There were, in fact, three meetings that took place. One with Finance and Treasury Board officials with the wine industry. I believe that was in early January. The Minister of Finance and I met with them on two separate occasions in the middle of January. And I've been back and forth with the chair of the Wine Growers Nova Scotia board on a weekly basis.

I understand their concerns. We're listening and we're working and we're going to continue to work with them towards a solution.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: When we hear that there are letters not responded to, whether it's the Minister of Agriculture, or any ministry for that matter, it's a concern for us. Stakeholders count on their ministers when they need them, when they have concerns. We know there were letters that were sent, there were letters that weren't

responded to, and it's a concern for me that the wine industry wanted to meet with their minister, and they couldn't.

Will the minister commit to meeting with the wine industry as soon as possible so they can have a voice?

GREG MORROW: Letters are certainly one way to communicate. They've sent letters to us; we've sent letters to them. The chair of the Wine Growers Nova Scotia board knows he can contact me directly. He's texted; we've called. The Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia, same thing. We talk at events. We're open to dialogue. Yes, we will meet with the Wine Growers Nova Scotia again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

### **DED: NEW WINE POLICY EFFECT ON TOURISM - ADDRESS**

HON. KEITH IRVING: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development. I'm wondering if the minister is concerned with this decision and its economic impact on the Annapolis Valley. I talked just the other day with a restaurant owner who was raving about how his Summers were completely different than 10 years ago, 20 years ago. It's completely flipped, and unprompted, he said: It's because of our wine industry and the vision of Hanspeter Stutz. This decision will affect the tourism sector significantly.

Is the Minister of Economic Development concerned about this decision?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: It is the absolute foundation of the Department of Economic Development, and my belief as minister, that I am communicating with businesses across this province. Absolutely, when there are concerns, I have a concern that these are dealt with. However, I am very aware that my colleagues across government - notably, the Minister of Agriculture - are on this. Through the journey of Nova Scotia Loyal, I am very aware of the pitfalls that relate to transgressions in trade law and what has been explained today is absolutely legitimate.

KEITH IRVING: Will the minister commit to meeting immediately with the wine industry to learn about the importance of this industry to the Annapolis Valley? The Minister of Economic Development and the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage should be completely concerned about this decision, and the minister should meet with the industry as soon as possible. Will she commit to that?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I'm rising in my capacity as Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. It actually gives me a unique perspective because I am responsible, as Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, for the NSLC, but I also know how important the wine sector is for tourism and the experiences people have

when they come here. One of the great experiences you can have when you come to Nova Scotia is you can visit a winery, and you can enjoy the experience of knowing the product you're consuming was made right here. We want to be supportive of Nova Scotia wineries. We need to be compliant, but I also want to ensure we're supportive of them.

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

### **DCS: INCOME ASSISTANCE FREEZE - EXPLAIN**

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Community Services, who has consistently minimized this budget's freeze on income assistance for recipients without disability. There is nothing to minimize in the fact that single parents are having their income assistance frozen in this budget for the third year in a row. We are not asking about what the government might do in the future. We are talking about what they're doing right now. Why did the minister agree to freezing single-parent incomes for the third year in a row?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: This question gives me an opportunity to talk about what we are doing right now, which is a lunch program. I want to thank the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. It's something that's going to help - I see members shaking their heads. It is going to help families right across this province, including families that are on income assistance. The only people minimizing anything are the members across who are minimizing the \$150 that is being put in the pockets of Nova Scotians right now.

KENDRA COOMBES: That's not what we asked. May 2021 was the last increase in single parents' income assistance rates in Nova Scotia. Since that time, food and shelter costs have gone up by 20 per cent, which means single parents are being forced to try to provide for their children on one-fifth less the income they had the last time the assistance rate was adjusted. Will the minister explain why he agrees with inflicting this pain on the single parents of Nova Scotia?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. What I do agree with is the investment in diabetes for Nova Scotians that is going to save Nova Scotians thousands of dollars. What I do agree with is more rent supplements that are coming out because of this budget. What I do agree with is that \$150 is a lot of money that's going to help Nova Scotians right now. There's more to come. Buckle up.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

### **DED: NOVA SCOTIA LOYAL - UPDATE**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: It's a strange place sometimes, Speaker. My question - and the Minister of Economic Development mentioned it, so I guess it would be

nice to get an update on it, because it isn't here yet - that is Nova Scotia Loyal. I make the joke that the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee is in the back of one of those decaled trucks going to the dump, because these were both staple commitments by the government. Now we're into the end of Year 3 and Nova Scotia Loyal is still in development.

[2:45 p.m.]

My question to the Minister of Economic Development: Will we ever see the Nova Scotia Loyal program?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Speaker, genuinely, thank you to the member opposite. To this point, remarks have been dropped about trucks in parades. In fact, Nova Scotia Loyal is out there. We have done a ton of work with our growers, our makers, our manufacturers, our vendors, and our consumers.

I don't know about the members opposite, but our Premier tells this side of the House that we should be out on the weekends in our communities, and if you were, you would be attending some of the events - the 57 strategic events that we've been out in communities, two dozen just since Christmas, in places like Wolfville and Sydney.

There's lots of work taking place, and much more to come.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Sydney - that's news to me. The only thing that the people in Sydney saw from this government was to be insulted when 200 centimetres of snow hit the ground. There's no loyalty in Sydney right now from the government.

THE SPEAKER: Order. We're coming to the end, everyone. Let's try to make it.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: This has been my concern with Nova Scotia Loyal from Day 1: a lot of money's been spent, a lot of promotion's been spent, and there's been no direct benefit to any of the businesses that are here locally in Nova Scotia. We don't see any of it on Cape Breton Island. We don't see any promotion of the program. I don't think we've even seen a truck on the island. We might have seen it in a parade.

My question to the minister is: After three years, one of the major political staples for them is not done. When will it be finished?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Well, again, thank you for a gift of a question. Nova Scotia Loyal, in a sense, will never be done, because the whole idea is to begin a movement that will lift people up. At this very moment in time, we have an online discount program taking place with Cape Breton Food Hub, The Station Food Hub, and the Wolfville Farmers' Market. We have been in stores this past month with the Nova Scotia Fruit

Growers' Association promoting Nova Scotia apples, and now that we're in March it's maple month. We have been working in the pre-Christmas marketplace, where we went to 10 events and encouraged Nova Scotians to think local as they were buying for Christmas. With about \$100,000 in vouchers, we . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **FTB: NSLC POSITION - CLARIFY**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Being loyal to Nova Scotian fruit growers would be to actually support them, and not import juice produced in other provinces and other countries.

My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board: We've referenced the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission - it's an independent board. Could he please articulate what their position is on the changes he made that we believe will have a catastrophic impact on grape growers in Nova Scotia?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I want to be loyal to every industry in Nova Scotia, and to ensure that we are trade-compliant, and that we don't cause problems for other exporters in this province. That's what I'll be loyal to.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Just a point of clarification at the end of Question Period. I'm just curious why the member for Kings South was asked to retract in his statement, what was unparliamentary about it? Was it a procedural thing?

THE SPEAKER: Certainly, I'll get you the exact words on why I asked for him to retract it. We'll get that to you.

### **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Motions.

### **GOVERNMENT MOTIONS**

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

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to resolve into Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: It's an honour to get up and say a few words as we move back into Estimates on the budget - some of the highlights that I thought were good, some of the things that are still a concern for me, and I think some of the challenges that government will still face moving forward.

Estimates is always an interesting exercise, and we're going to go through another number of days of it, and it will give us all an opportunity to ask the various questions about departments. I was interested in hearing the departments so far. I look forward to having some questions around some of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing piece later today and had a chance to ask some questions to the Department of Advanced Education last night.

That's kind of an interesting file, if you look at the Department of Advanced Education, just based on the federal government rules around international student recruitment and how that's going to impact institutions. It's going to be interesting to watch. Really, a lot of that was also intertwined with housing and some of the vacancy rates we're seeing in Sydney now, which are at historic lows, I'll talk to the minister about as we get into Estimates.

I'll start with some of the things that are very positive to me, and I'm very proud of my caucus over the years for advocating for a school lunch program. Everybody in this House, as I said in my member's statement after the announcement was made - it was a very positive step, regardless of what side of the floor you're on. Now schools are excited for that. I think it was years in the making. I'm happy that the government finally decided to do it because there was this argument over the years that we had to wait for the federal government with money. The government finally made the decision on their own, which they could have made a number of years ago. I will give the department a little bit of leeway because I was part of those conversations early on too. Ultimately, governments have to make the decision based on what's in the best interest of our kids. As I said, I'm really proud of our . . . (interruption).

The lunch program is important, absolutely. It's going to help a lot of kids. Similar to child care or some of the other programs, it really puts kids on a level playing field. We all know we get those calls about families that are struggling right now, more so than ever. We have had this conversation here. You never want a child to have to ask for food in school. This gives every child a chance to have a healthy breakfast and a healthy lunch. I think that that's wonderful and something that everybody has been pushing for - not only



here but also the advocates. You always have to thank the folks in the community who have been pushing for this for a very long time. I think that that's good.

Ending bracket creep was something that we pushed for years as well. I'm proud of my colleagues, my friend for Northside-Westmount and others, who saw this. The Premier calls it - and I give the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board credit. He was humbler in his approach to it because it's not really a tax. It's aligning Nova Scotia with the rest of the country.

The savings may grow over time, but politics being what it is, the government wants to call it the biggest tax break ever. We don't think it is. It aligns Nova Scotia with Canada, and we were the last jurisdiction to do it - but the HST also plays into it. You could have cut the HST, you could have done this, and you could have indexed income assistance, and then you're talking about the biggest tax breaks in history. That didn't happen, but advocates, the business community, and folks all over the province asked for the end of bracket creep, and it happened.

There are some of the benefits. I look at Cape Breton, and there's money allocated for projects in Cape Breton which are important. These were all announced years ago. It's wonderful to see the construction that's happening in the community. A lot of those decisions were made way back when, and governments continue to invest in them.

It's exciting to see that the Nova Scotia Community College is going to open this year at some point. It's exciting to see the construction at the hospitals and the construction at the schools that were all announced. There are some long-term care facilities that the minister is working on and that will be built in the greater CBRM area in the coming years, which is wonderful. I'm glad the government continues to invest in them.

As the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board said today, this is an important point, because we get into some pretty heavy debates in here in Question Period. The government will say that we didn't do this, or we did that. Ultimately, there are a lot of people behind the scenes who are doing the work, and those same people are doing the work for this government.

I always say that when we are in Question Period and the government decides to say something along the lines of, Well, this never happened under your mandate - they're working with the same people. So it doesn't insult me. I think it's more insulting for them, to be honest. I've had the privilege of working with lots of folks throughout different departments in government, and they're all wonderful. No matter who's in power, they do what's right to help folks.

In Cape Breton, what I'm seeing is a lot of investment towards a lot of projects that have been ongoing or are under construction. I'm looking for what the next move is for the Island - the government has finally supported all of the hospital redevelopment.

I wish some of the newer members were around back in the day when we actually made those announcements and they absolutely tried to destroy our credibility and the credibility of health care professionals in Cape Breton. I'm happy to see their work continue.

As I said, I'm happy to see the Nova Scotia Community College well on its way to opening, but I'm not seeing new projects. What's new for Cape Breton? There are some announcements around some community facilities, but what I'm looking for is what's going to be the next big move for a community that has declined for years and is now in full growth, and with that growth comes challenges. (Interruptions) I was getting there. It's okay. I always give the government credit.

I think that was an excellent announcement about the medical school, but what's the next move? Our vacancy rate in Sydney is the lowest in the province now. It's at .08. This is the conversation I want to have with the minister later about the plan for the greater Sydney area.

We heard a bit about this last night from the Minister of Advanced Education, who actually changed his message, in my opinion, very much about the state of affairs at Cape Breton University. We have a lot of students who are there. Everybody celebrates that. It's been wonderful for our community. The minister's message in the past was, Well, that's their decision. They make those calls - but last night he was raising some flags around living accommodations and some transportation issues, which is an important conversation. I was happy that he answered some of my questions last night. This is what we are going to be looking for in the budget.

Our community is in a huge growth mode right now. We have thousands and thousands of students and, as I said earlier on in my comments, it will be very interesting to see how the breakdown comes when the number of international students is kind of distributed for roaming through our institutions. There is a lot of strain on infrastructure, and this goes back to the conversation that we've had about sustainable growth. We need growth in this province, there is no question, and the growth in our community has been wonderful.

I grew up there and lived there my entire life and what I saw was two major industries go down and we saw decades of out-migration. Now we are at a point where we are seeing this new entrepreneurial spirit. We are seeing lots of newcomers come in. We are seeing a whole new creative economy come in and it's been wonderful, but CBRM needs help and in this budget, this government, which has had more money than any government in history - and I will get into that list in a minute - they've received even more equalization money, and they didn't distribute it to the municipalities.

What I've also heard is that this government, after saying - negotiating an MOU with everyone, said: We will meet with the Cape Breton Regional Municipality and we

will develop a Charter and we will do all this. Not one meeting has happened since that debate. Not one. Think about that. We are going to go home, and we are going to write a Charter, and we are going to do this, and we're going to do that. Not one meeting happened.

[3:00 p.m.]

Now more equalization money is coming in. More money is coming into the coffers for the government. They told the CBRM they'd meet with them, and they didn't. There has been no new negotiation. There has been no talk about the future. I am hearing this from councillors at home. It's like that debate happened, and this is it, and so be it, and that's what it is.

That is really unfortunate, because now the government has even more equalization money that they could be looking at the CBRM and they'd begin saying: Okay, you know what? Your population is growing again. We have additional resources. Let's look at your transportation system because you are one of the few municipalities that is running a full transportation system. You are a regional municipality. Let's look at some other important infrastructure projects that we can look at that will help support economic growth, community growth.

Like yesterday, for example, that announcement that was made about the youth facility that would be the first one in the province. I don't want to misquote. That's a great group. They have been fighting for this for years. Those are the conversations that I hope the government will have with stakeholders across the community because CBRM is just - it is - I've travelled every municipality here. It was wonderful to be on tour and everybody is unique, but I will always argue that the CBRM was developed and agreed to and it was born at the same time as the HRM under the same umbrella of principles as the HRM - that it was a regional municipality.

You had a huge collection of communities come together. There was no vote. It was just: We're amalgamating. You are amalgamating. You are going to be a supercity and so be it. At the time there was a lot of talk about what resources would come as a result of that, and many would argue that it wasn't treated as such. You have all these other beautiful communities across the province that are a tenth of the size. CBRM is just a different - it's so much bigger and it is so much more complex and is our second regional centre in Nova Scotia.

Part of why I wanted to get up today is really that premise that - see, there has been no follow-up about charters or anything with the regional municipality since all of that debate and everything that was said. There is more equalization money that has come in from the federal government along with all of the other revenues that have been coming in. I'm not seeing any real additional support, whether it's for the local government and/or other projects outside of what the minister has said, which is the medical school. I want to say that I'm always going to fight for the Island and so I want to see more.

You know, 15 minutes goes quick, so here's what I'll say. You know, I look forward to Estimates. We'll have lots of questions. The government tries to say - and I'll go back to the tax break. This is the biggest tax break in the history of the universe. It's like fireworks and all that stuff, but there are other firsts. This is the highest ever, but there are other number ones.

Here's another number one: This is the highest doctor wait-list we've ever had. These are the highest power rates we've ever had. This is the highest level of poverty we've ever had. These are the longest wait times for housing we probably have ever had. There's a list, and the list gets - this is the most money a government has ever had. This is the most equalization that a government has ever had. But these are some of the worst outcomes a government has ever had.

We'll go through the budget. There will be lots of discussion, but I'd be careful saying that tax break - which it's on - it only aligns Nova Scotia with the rest of the jurisdictions that will save Nova Scotians a few bucks - they call that number one. There are lots of other number ones, and they're some of the worst measurements this province has ever seen.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I beg leave to make an introduction before I make my speech into Supply.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Joining us in the gallery - I think perhaps behind me, and I would invite him to stand up - is Liam Colby. Liam is a third-year political science student at Dalhousie University and is completing an internship in my office through the Dalhousie Political Science Society, and also helped me draft this speech.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: This speech into Supply is actually focused on post-secondary education and advanced education. Of course, we had a chance to have a fulsome discussion with the minister last night, but I think we all share - as Nova Scotians, we're all proud to boast that we have one of the highest university-per-capita rates in the country, not even including our provincial network of Nova Scotia Community Colleges. We know our colleges and universities are longstanding, integral pillars, uphold our communities, and they are one of the things that make Nova Scotia such an attractive place. Students from Nova Scotia, from across Canada, and around the world flock to our universities and colleges in search of some of the best education that Canada has to offer.

Our graduates have long provided the know-how upon which our province is built, and they will continue to do so, especially in the face of our generational crises in health, housing, and climate change. Whether they come from Nova Scotia or another continent, they are essential to our communities, and it's our responsibility to make sure that students feel welcomed, cared for, and treated as the crucial members of our province that they are. At the risk of sounding clichéd, they are our future.

As essential as students are to Nova Scotia, they are mired with challenges: facing rising tuition costs, untenable costs of living, and disproportionately low wages. These issues are amplified for the many international students in this province. Domestic tuition costs in Nova Scotia are nearly 40 per cent higher than the rest of the country, and they continue to rise. These tuition rates are not sustainable. In response to the budget, Students Nova Scotia corroborated that the impact of rising tuition is having a negative effect on student experience.

Of course, we also have low wages, and the minimum wage is well below the estimated living wage for someone to live comfortably across this province in many different centres, as well as the challenge of finding a combination. I have, I think, four universities at this point in my riding. When I go door to door, I certainly get a chance to meet lots of students: lots of students from Nova Scotia, from other parts of the Maritimes, and international students. I can attest that students are often living in very poorly maintained units. They're living in units that are overcrowded. In order to be able to afford a place to lay their head, there are actually five or six students in a one-bedroom apartment, for instance.

As well, students are disproportionately affected by fixed-term leases. I believe I've shared previously a letter that I received from a young person who said that they basically regret coming to Nova Scotia to study, that they're going back to Toronto because it was going to be less expensive and easier, and they wouldn't have to move every year. It doesn't seem particularly sustainable.

Nova Scotia students are not receiving the help they need. Increasing costs have a huge effect on students' mental and physical well-being. They are forced to make difficult decisions between living costs and tuition that can impact their personal lives and academic futures, stuck between a rock and a hard place.

The ultimate goal should be to make life easier for students and for our colleges and universities so that they can focus on education. We cannot take them for granted.

When the provincial budget was released, Students Nova Scotia immediately raised concerns with the tuition structure, about concerns that it might appear - although the minister sought to clarify this - that provincial student assistance was being reduced, and no word on a provincial student housing strategy.

I was certainly happy to hear from the minister last night of his commitment to students. In speaking about international students, he talked about how welcoming international students is an important part of the plan to grow the population, that the Province needs to take measures to protect students and needs to make them feel welcome. However, it's hard to see how those kind words and those principles are borne out in the actions of this government.

I am particularly concerned by the fact that we have a minimum tuition increase for international students. In other provinces - in B.C. and Saskatchewan - international student tuition fees are regulated, and even in Ontario the increase was capped at 5 per cent. Instead, in this province we've put the floor at a 9 per cent increase. The minister likes to talk a lot about the true cost of education, but was unable to justify that and was unable to describe the methodology that developed the true cost of education, or in fact offer a number about what that true cost of education was.

As well, the flip side of that is cost, but also the benefit. Again, the minister had nothing to say in terms of what the social return on investment is for having our international students.

There are some solutions to this, too: making sure that the type of information that international students receive before coming to Nova Scotia is standardized; ensuring immediate access to MSI, and not having a wait period; and having a cohort-based approach to tuition. In this way, whether they're international, Nova Scotia, or domestic students, folks know that when they start a university education in Nova Scotia, they know what to expect in Year 1 and going forward.

It's clear that we need to listen to students more. That was clear in what Students Nova Scotia had to say in their reaction to the budget. They want more engagement and consultation. They want the Student Housing Strategy. The minister said it was coming, which is good, but people have been waiting a long time, and the track record of this government in undertaking consultation and actually finishing what they were consulting on and/or being accountable for the results is thin. I think this is another area where students are justifiably skeptical about what they hear. Students Nova Scotia points out that while there are 600 and some units at NSCC campuses, 50,000 students are still waiting for their housing strategy.

The minister also talked about having a generous student assistance program and generous debt relief. What I would suggest is that students would do well not having to take on so much debt, and not having to access so much student assistance. Again, this comes down to tuition fees.

And then on the flip side, a couple of weeks ago before the House sat, universities received the new strategic alignment agreements from the Province. Five common outcomes for universities were identified, but even now their definition remains unclear,

despite the fact that this government has asked universities to develop their answers to those definitions that haven't been developed by the Summer.

[3:15 p.m.]

This seems like a huge data exercise. Universities cannot plan for multiple years, based on ideas and nebulous goals that haven't been clarified, and they were not consulted before these plans were dropped on them. I think I have spoken to just about every university president many times since being elected and being the advanced education critic. Everyone knew that it was in the minister's mandate letter to revisit the governance of universities and that the MOU was coming forward. Universities have been right there, providing the information that is being required of them, in timely fashion. And a lot of that data collection has been quite time-consuming. To make it really easy, the universities' presidents even have a council, so you actually don't even have to contact all of them. You can contact the council, who can provide some representation. Literally, they were not consulted before these plans were dropped on them. Most folks heard about it the day before.

The Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents used words like "devastating" in their press release in response, and folks were certainly surprised. Although as one university president joked, the consultation process was gruelling because there was no consultation process.

It's also hard for students to feel supported when the Province hands down a rushed, inconsiderate new process for university governance. One of the measures there talks a lot about making sure that Research Nova Scotia aligns to Nova Scotia's priorities or research undertaken in Nova Scotia. I think this also raises a really important question. Other outcomes are about workforce attachment and that sort of thing.

I think it's very hard to determine what Nova Scotia's priorities in research are because the goal of research is to explore, discover, evaluate, weigh, debate. I use the example of my own doctoral research on integrated youth services. When I started that, it actually was not a priority. This Liberal government was ignoring what was happening around the world and across the country in youth mental health services. In a sense, at that point the government of the day could have argued that, in fact, that wasn't a government priority to do this research. This government has announced integrated youth services, so I guess that, in that sense, the research became in line with the priorities.

My point is that we can't possibly know what we need to learn. My concern about this very limited view of what research should be is that it's restrictive and it doesn't make the best use of the amazing academic community we have across our universities and colleges. It's also not particularly realistic; it doesn't actually reflect how research is developed and funded, undertaken and shared across this country. It also seems a bit out of touch, which I guess if you haven't done any consultations, then it might be.

We really need to see a clear commitment from this government to the post-secondary education sector. There's a lot of talk about it, but it has been - the stakeholders certainly don't reflect that they feel like they have been engaged. I think that our post-secondary education sector is going to be in crisis over the next couple of years because of the types of decisions that this government is suggesting.

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

JOHN WHITE: I recognize that members on both sides of the floor have a job to do in the House of Assembly, so I understand that this is not personal, it's politics. I get that. We're here criticizing a historic \$16 billion budget. That's a huge investment in Nova Scotia.

Before I get started on that, I'm happy to hear that the CBRM have agreed to move forward with the charter - if that's what we heard from across the floor - because I previously tabled here in the House the minister's letter to the mayor asking to co-operate with them on a charter for Cape Breton. I do believe that's the right thing to do. Cape Breton has a lot of exceptionalities. There's no doubt about that. Our historic investment over the Summer on a bus terminal - I think we gave \$26 million or something to that effect - that's an investment in Cape Breton and an acceptance of the situation they're in.

This is a strange place to echo words that were mentioned today. I have never sat in Opposition, so I just don't know if the light's different on that side. To see a member stand up and talk about all that we should be doing, take credit for the good points in the budget, but criticize what they would like to do and talk about why we should have done it years ago and have been advocating for years - why didn't you do it in the eight years you were in government? I don't get it. I don't understand it. I'm not taking shots here. That's not what I'm trying to do. I do want to point out that this is politics; it's not personal. I guess that's what I have to accept. I'm not that kind of person, so it's hard for me to accept that, and it's taken a while for me to get that understanding.

When I was advocating for housing in Glace Bay-Dominion, I was extremely frustrated in looking at two former schools - large buildings. I actually taught in one of them. I couldn't understand for the life of me how we didn't convert those buildings over. They were closed under the previous government. I do not understand how we let them come to such a dilapidated state that the only option is to tear them down now while I have people sleeping in cars. I just don't get it. I don't understand that.

I'm glad to be part of a government that accepted when I came begging for housing. I'm glad to be part of a government that made historic investment - I think it's forty-some years since any subsidized housing was built in Glace Bay-Dominion. That's an amazing government to be part of, and I'm so proud to be part of it.



I can't sit here and listen to constant criticism of a budget that I've - reviewing and taking parts out of it - I just decided I was going to take the whole thing, and I'm going to read off some points and make them as close to home as I can. So that's what I'm planning on doing. I have to point out some of the life-changing policies. A \$16 billion investment is a historic investment in Nova Scotia. It's an investment not only in today, in what we need and the things that we're looking at now - the challenges we discuss here on the floor - but it's also a testament to the future, and the support that we have in this province has a future. This province is growing, not shrinking. It's not at the state of closing schools and vacant buildings. It's at the state where it needs to grow, obviously. That's what we're trying to do.

Let's talk about helping Nova Scotians with the cost of living. The budget includes the largest tax break in provincial history, an estimated \$150 million to \$160 million per year by 2028. That's \$150 million to \$160 million in spending power that will help local business and small business. When people have money, they spend it. That's the best place money should be, where it circulates. I love the fact that we recognize that. I realize that some Opposition members want to take credit for that. Well, great, I'm glad you're on board. Thank you.

How many times have you heard people say, Every time I get a raise, the government takes more money? This investment will put an end to that. By ending personal income tax brackets in January 2025, our government is protecting our spending power. It protects what you have so your \$20 is still worth \$20 in five years' time. We have heard it here on the floor: The middle class is struggling. Ending income tax brackets is a step towards decreasing the rising cost of living.

If you put it on a continuum, the Liberal carbon tax is on the other side. That's what this is. That is what we're talking about here. We're talking about an extreme difference. We're talking about investing in Nova Scotians. That doesn't mean to be a dig at the Opposition. I realize they're a different order of government. But perhaps they can join us in fighting the punitive Liberal carbon tax.

Speaker, \$7.8 million more for additional actions to reduce child poverty, a topic we hear on this floor constantly. Delivering the increased Nova Scotia Child Benefit. More support for young people leaving care at the age of 19, and expand the EDGE Program, which prepares youth at risk for education and employment access.

As a teacher, I gravitated to the students who were in need. They're the ones I supported most, because the truth is, a large majority of students will finish school without any real support or interventions. I focused on the five or 10 per cent who are struggling.

A student who will remain nameless, I can recall, was put out of his home at a very young age and was put up in a boarding room. This student showed up at school. He was argumentative, he was not typically well-dressed, he was sometimes hungry, and he had

no problem telling people what he thought. But that student was putting in 110 per cent effort just to show up at school every day. That's why I took him under my wing, that's why I supported and praised him, and I'm happy to say that he's now working and doing well.

They are the people whom we need to look after. The 110 per cent that he's putting in every day - that matters. And supporting youth who age out at the age of 19 in the EDGE Program - these are just two resources now available to help a kid like that.

Abbey Ridge in Glace Bay is another option. Abbey Ridge, I think it's for eight children, eight youth up to 24. They're living with social workers. They're getting their education under control, figuring out what they want to do with life. They're getting out and getting to work.

One single intervention with a youth at that age doesn't just change the child's future, or the youth's future. It changes everybody they come in contact with. I know that because I'm standing here as one of them. The Leader of the Opposition called me the "hometown hero" one time. I never did get that t-shirt done, but he's going to wear it with me. But I can tell you, it was the Police Boys Club, the dog catcher, who took an interest in me and helped me through. And I give great credit for that. I speak of it every chance I get.

When we show interest and support when somebody is struggling to stand up on their own two feet - when the whole world seems against them, how you interact with that person, and the things you say to that person, and what you do to help that person just to get them through today, can really have a huge impact on the future. I'm sure Elwin never thought I'd be standing in the House of Assembly delivering a speech, I guarantee that. I hope he's watching me.

Getting back to the cost of living supports. Imagine, \$60.9 million for about 200,000 families through Affordable Living Tax Credits; \$144.2 million for the Your Energy Rebate Program, which eliminates 10 per cent of provincial tax on home heating; \$2.4 million to increase rent supplements to 8,500 homes. That makes it a total of \$69.2 million, and the minister already talked about how that proportion has changed drastically. I would like to see the federal Liberals send some money down to help with that and get back to the 50 per cent. I think that's what we talked about.

Five per cent more for a home repair and adaptation program to help more low-income homeowners. That makes a total of \$23.8 million. I don't think there are any members on either side of this floor who would think those programs are not making a big difference in people's lives, and that's simply what I'm saying. This budget is making a difference in people's lives. That's what I'm calling it. We should have changed the name, I think.

[3:30 p.m.]

Beyond the obvious benefits of physical activity that come from sports, there is a large percentage of youth who are involved in sports who stay away from drug abuse, any kind of thing like that. I spoke about it yesterday with a member's statement on a basketball team, and I just gave you an example of how being involved in a community program really changed the trajectory of my life.

I think that what we are doing with this budget is changing people's lives, and it's as simple as the \$500 tax credit for youth in sports and activities. I think that's an amazing program. I think it matters to people. It is a \$3.2 million investment, and I think it makes a difference in people's lives.

I can't remember the percentage, but when we retire, we lose our spending power within five years. I think we lose about 50 per cent of our spending power. We have \$26.5 million this year to provide the Seniors Care Grant to help older Nova Scotians stay in their homes and in their communities, which is the big part to me. Your home is great, but in the community where they grew up is what matters.

There is \$18.2 million to return provincial income tax paid on more than 10,000 seniors. I don't know if the budget is so big that we lose track of these numbers. I don't know if that's what it is, but I look at these numbers, I look at these programs, and I think of the people who are coming into our office. I think of the seniors who have waited in chairs to see me to bring in cookies to thank us for the Seniors Care Grant. That's heartwarming, but it's life-changing as well - and not just for them but also for me. Then \$1.2 million more for a total of \$10.4 million for the Property Tax Rebate for Seniors - a huge help for eligible seniors paying their own property taxes.

Yes, the budget does invest in children. There is \$18.8 million for a lunch program for public schools, estimated to grow to \$100 million by 2027-28. That is a huge investment in our children. We - some of the people in the House today - talked about some of the people that is going to help. As a teacher, I think this is a major ordeal. I know we all look at the food implementation of it, absolutely, but coming from Glace Bay High School, I can tell you that a lot of students leave the school at lunch. You can bet that at 1:00 p.m., you're going to start hearing the names being called up to the office. This lunch program will probably keep kids in school instead of out in the community where idle hands do the devil's work. They get in trouble, and it's just because they are out in public in groups. That's all it is. They're not bad kids. They're just out in large groups, and that stuff happens.

This program will help keep them in school, where they can also take advantage of some of the clubs and stuff that are happening at lunch because they are in the building. It makes a big difference. It changes lives. It is not about the numbers. Forget about the numbers. We're providing a school lunch program. That's what matters. That's it.

There is \$42.5 million more this year in child care funding, for lower fees for families, creating more spaces, enhanced after-school care. (Interruption) What's that? (Interruption) A minute? My God. I don't know where to go now. Now I'm scurrying. Now I don't know where to go, Speaker. I'm just going to go until you shut me down.

We talk about children, and we immediately think about education. There is \$28 million more for public schools to address growing enrollment. I just mentioned two schools that closed in Glace Bay. We are a growing province. We're not a shrinking province. We need to build for the future because we deserve it today. Our seniors deserve it for the past they had, and our children deserve to be optimistic for the future. That's what this budget shows me most importantly. It gives the students I just left behind at school an opportunity for the future.

I was going to get into the MOST program, which is an amazing opportunity - you know, \$208 million to build and renovate schools. We have so much construction on the go. I'm just so proud to be part of this budget.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: I couldn't help but get up for these last few minutes to address the member for Glace Bay-Dominion and talk about all they got from criticism. As a matter of fact - because the member indicated he never sat in Opposition - the role of Opposition is to do just that: to tell you what's good and tell you how to improve things.

In this budget, we talked about the good things. We really did. We talked about the great ideas that came forward, but we also talked about how to make things better.

The last I want to address is that the member wasn't part of the government, but all of this investment - \$1 billion in Cape Breton - this government voted no against all of it, whereas now they're happy to cut the ribbons. I just had to get that on the record for Cape Breton.

THE SPEAKER: Order. Thank you, everyone who participated in debate going into Supply.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, I just wanted to welcome a very special guest to the Legislature this afternoon, Molly Chender MacLellan. Molly unfortunately lives in Dartmouth South, but we love her anyway. Her mom is pretty cool. Molly is a great dancer, and we love having her visit us in the House. Welcome, Molly.

THE SPEAKER: At this point in time, we've ended the 45 minutes.

The motion to resolve into Committee of the Whole House on Supply is now carried. I will remove myself from the Chair.

[3:46 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CW on Supply with Deputy Speaker Danielle Barkhouse in the Chair.]

[7:56 p.m. CW on Supply rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Danielle Barkhouse in the Chair.]

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

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole on Supply has met and made progress and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Pursuant to Rule 5C, I move that the time for adjournment of the House on Wednesday, March 6<sup>th</sup> be not 5:30 p.m. but 11:00 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: The motion pursuant to Rule 5C is that the hour of adjournment Wednesday, March 6<sup>th</sup> be not 5:30 p.m. but 11:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

THE SPEAKER: Motion carried.

[7:57 p.m. The House resolved into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

[9:00 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Nolan Young resumed the Chair.]

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

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

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considered the following bill, Bill No. 404, and has made some progress in its consideration of that bill.

THE SPEAKER: As we have reached the hour of adjournment, I move that we do now go home. That's it. We meet again tomorrow between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 9:00 p.m.]

**NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)****RESOLUTION NO. 933**

By: Hon. Karla MacFarlane (Pictou West)

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

Whereas a new ocean experience has been developed to offer unforgettable, authentically Nova Scotian experiences on the beautiful Northumberland Strait; and

Whereas at the end of fishing season, lobster fishermen transform their boats into family pleasure crafts, and spend Summer days sailing to sandy coves for swimming, mackerel fishing, sand bar exploring, picnics, and beach walks; and

Whereas four captains go above and beyond to bring these experiences to visitors and tourists: Captain Jamie Craig, Captain Hal Maybe, Captain Amy Ferguson, and recently, Captain Dustan MacKeil;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly thank and support the newest initiative to showcase the Northumberland Strait which is rich in marine life and is home to a thriving commercial fishery, as well as a part of Canada's ocean playground.

**RESOLUTION NO. 934**

By: Hon. Karla MacFarlane (Pictou West)

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

Whereas members of Northumberland Regional High School's Karma Closet, a student-led operation that provides those in need with essential everyday items, including a free lunch program at their high school in Alma, Nova Scotia; although four years in the making, the program served its first meal in the Fall of the 2023-24 school year; and

Whereas on February 26, 2024, the free lunch program served its 10,000<sup>th</sup> free lunch with the support of staff members Paul Heighton and Karen Berezowski; and

Whereas the students have taken the initiative to tackle food insecurity within their own community and their school, and provide free essential items to classmates;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize and congratulate the students at Northumberland Regional High School for establishing, preparing, and serving a free lunch program to their classmates.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 935**

By: Hon. Karla MacFarlane (Pictou West)

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

Whereas the Northumberland Regional High School's Karma Closet is a club that started at the school in 2018 to provide students with essentials they may not have easy access to otherwise; and

Whereas Karma Closet started as shelves that held products like granola bars, juice boxes, and male and female personal hygiene products and now operates a free lunch program to the student population; and

Whereas it now receives public donations and grants and has more than 100 members;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly celebrate the hard work and success of the student-led Karma Closet club at Northumberland Regional High School.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 936**

By: Hon. Karla MacFarlane (Pictou West)

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

Whereas Simon Poirier is a member of Bomberos Voluntarios Tequispan, which was established in 1999 and whose official name is Volunteer Firefighters and Paramedics of the Central Region of the State of Queretaro, southeast of Mexico City; and

Whereas Simon collects personal protective equipment for fellow firefighters, such as safety apparel and breathing apparatus; although generally considered obsolete with changing standards, it is used for training in Mexico rather than the actual firefighting; and

Whereas Simon collects donated equipment from local fire departments, and he



also organizes the shipping from Nova Scotia and the distribution in Mexico for this valuable equipment;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize and celebrate Simon Poirier for his hard work and selfless dedication to helping Mexican firefighters source training material from Nova Scotia.