



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Danielle Barkhouse

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First Session

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2025

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HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2025

Sixty-fifth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Danielle Barkhouse

DEPUTY SPEAKER

John White

THE SPEAKER: Order. As with the tradition of Budget Day in this House, with the unanimous consent of the House, we will commence with the motion for Resolution No. 4, respecting the Estimates under Orders of the Day. This means that the Daily Routine will be deferred until after the response to the Budget Speech is adjourned. Question Period will then begin one hour after the start of the Daily Routine.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

[ORDERS OF THE DAY]

[GOVERNMENT BUSINESS]

[GOVERNMENT MOTIONS]

[Res. No. 4, re Estimates - CW on Supply: Referred - notice given February 14, 2025 - (Hon. John Lohr)]

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, pursuant to the notice of motion given by me on February 14, 2025, and the Rules and Forms of Procedures of the House of Assembly, I have the honour, by command, to present a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Nova Scotia relating to the Estimates of sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026, which is:

I hereby transmit Estimates of Sums required for the Public Service of the Province for the year ending March 31, 2026, and in accordance with the Constitution Act of 1867, recommend them, together with the Budget Address of my Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and any resolutions or bills necessary or advisable to approve the Estimates and implement the budget measures to the House of Assembly.

Signed, Mike Savage
Lieutenant Governor
February 18, 2025

At this time I wish to:

- (1) table the message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia transmitting the Estimates for the consideration of this House;
- (2) table the Estimate Books;
- (3) table the government business plan;
- (4) table the Estimate resolutions;
- (5) deliver my Budget Speech; and
- (6) move that the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the Province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026, being Supply to be granted to His Majesty, be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

I so move.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

The Estimates are tabled.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, it is a privilege and honour to present the 2025-26 budget for the Province of Nova Scotia. I want to thank my colleagues and government staff, who have all worked so hard to deliver this budget.

I am looking to the future with hope and optimism. My main reason for optimism is the people of our great province. Our citizens are dedicated to our families and our communities. With our work ethic and skill, I know we can capitalize on the opportunities before us. Not only do we have many opportunities in this province, our government is actively and energetically pursuing them to help us solve the pressing problems we now face.

I know Nova Scotians will join us in our push to unlock the promise of these opportunities, and we will create a generational economic success story. We will find new sources of growth, wealth, and prosperity in new sectors like critical minerals, wind, and hydrogen.

Our traditional sectors are also filled with promise and potential: farming, forestry, and fishing. Farmers are using new tools and technology to grow more food. Forestry professionals are pushing into new markets for biomass and soon could be helping produce sustainable aviation and other fuels.

Fisheries is one of our most important industries, and we have invested in technology and equipment to help them become more productive while cutting fuel costs.

I'm proud to say this budget will increase funding to crack down on illegal fisheries. Our fishers work hard, risking life and limb to bring their catch ashore. We want them to know we have their back. We are focused on supporting the traditional sectors that built our economy. It's why this budget funds a new trade action plan.

The threat of U.S. tariffs continues to loom over us. We don't know what will come, but we are ready to respond. It is clear we are entering a period of heightened uncertainty and heightened risk. This budget provides a contingency for tariffs as recommended to us. Tariffs will hurt our economy - the Canadian economy and the economy of the United States.

We were the first province to release our retaliatory measures, and we are standing strong with Team Canada against the tariff threats. Our response will not just be focused on retaliation; it will focus on building a more resilient and independent Nova Scotia. That starts by diversifying our markets and finding new, predictable, reliable, and stable trading partners. We must support more businesses here and trade more with our Canadian neighbours.

Finding new markets, both foreign and domestic, means more places to sell our resources and products around the world. We have more resources than crops, trees, and

fish. We have a wealth of undeveloped resources. Critical minerals, wind, hydrogen: these industries are full of potential. If we want our economy to grow, we must encourage new sectors and investment to come here. Outright bans on sectors discourage this investment and therefore stunt economic growth. These bans - outright bans - are lazy policy. The bans we have in place make it impossible to have important but hard conversations.

We need to have conversations about uranium and natural gas too. This means lifting bans and avoiding outright bans in the future. Combined, these sectors present transformative potential. If we get it right, these sectors will add billions of dollars to our economy, new jobs through rural parts of Nova Scotia, and will lift families out of poverty.

Municipalities will benefit too. Many municipalities are looking for more revenue to offer better services or lower taxes. Rural communities will see their population stabilize and even grow, protecting their tax base while improving the quality of life in these communities.

More resource wealth will mean more supports for you, for your families, your neighbours, and your friends. It will mean more wealth, more prosperity, and a brighter future. First, we must unlock this potential. These sectors will bring good-paying jobs to Nova Scotia. No longer will our people have to head west for jobs. The economic potential is massive. That's why this budget makes investments to better prepare us for the opportunities in offshore wind and critical minerals.

Let's start by discussing critical minerals. Our province has lithium deposits and it is critical for batteries in electric vehicles, electronics, clean technology, and electric storage systems. Its demand is forecast to surpass one million metric tons by 2025. In North America specifically, lithium demand is predicted to skyrocket by 2030.

The massive increase in North America is exciting and worrying. It is exciting because it shows a commitment to clean growth, clean technology, and renewable energy. It is concerning because Western countries are not building or approving mines to access our stockpiles of lithium. This leaves us dependent on other countries. Foreign countries are starting to place export bans on lithium; this would put our economy and our clean transition at risk.

Cobalt is something identified in our critical minerals strategy. Its demand is expected to roughly double by 2030, predominantly driven by battery applications, especially for electric vehicles.

The global market for cobalt could double by 2035. Our copper supplies will also be of growing interest around the world. Copper demand is expected to increase from 21.4 million tonnes in 2019 to 39 million tonnes by 2040, according to some projections.

The transition to electric vehicles is driving the demand. Between 80 and 100 kilograms of copper are needed for each electric vehicle. Nova Scotia has a 300-year history of mining. Communities grew up around mines. Our connection to mining is so strong that neighbourhoods are still referred to using the name or number of the historic mines around them.

Today's mines are not the mines of old; nor are the jobs. The average salary in mining is over \$100,000 per year. Just imagine the difference that kind of paycheque could make. Now imagine a home with one person working in a mine and another in a mill. That family's life is infinitely better because of our resources. Empowering families is how we unlock our province's potential.

Forestry, fishing, and farming; mining and critical minerals; sustainable fuels and hydrogen; and our ample supply of wind: These sectors can position us for growth. These sectors will bring jobs, opportunities, and prosperity for our people. The growth and jobs that come from seizing these economic opportunities are how we lift more people out of poverty. Is it any wonder that we have a persistent poverty problem while we ban sectors and chase away business opportunities? Is it any wonder we have a housing problem when, for too long, it was too hard to build quickly?

Is it any wonder we have a housing problem when, for too long, it was too hard to build quickly? Is it any wonder our economy is one of the lowest-performing in North America?

For too long, governments have defaulted to "no." For too long, special interests captured the regulatory and policy process. They did so at the expense of their fellow Nova Scotians. We are here to say the culture will and must change. This government is here for Nova Scotians' interests, not special interests. Embracing a growth mindset will lead to a growing economy. It will allow us not only to provide more tax relief and improve services: It will let us keep making historic investments in infrastructure.

The Capital Plan 2025-26 will invest more than \$2.35 billion in health care facilities, housing projects, roads, and schools, helping to build and sustain communities for generations to come. We invested over \$1 billion in health infrastructure and equipment. Building modern health care facilities with the latest equipment improves health care while making it easier to attract health care workers, like doctors and nurses.

Nova Scotians were clear: They wanted us to invest in affordable housing. This year's Capital Plan delivered. The plan continues to support the More Housing, Faster plan with investments that include \$47.4 million for new public housing units - the first new funding for public housing construction in more than 20 years. This includes \$10.6 million toward an additional 242 units. Another \$31.6 million will go to modernize and repair existing public housing. We want to keep making these types of investments, but we have no interest in taxing you more. That means economic growth must become the mission of

the government. Only by growing our economy can we grow revenues without asking you to pay more.

[1:15 p.m.]

This budget makes our commitment to lowering taxes crystal clear. The sales tax will drop - the first sales tax cut since it was increased in 2010. It means we will have the lowest sales tax in Atlantic Canada. The basic personal amount will increase, and bracket creep comes to an end. These tax changes will return hundreds of millions of dollars to the wallets of hard-working Nova Scotians. It will mean about \$1,000 more in every family's pocket.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation said: "Tax cuts are great news for Nova Scotians." We agree. Other governments talked a big game on tax cuts. This government delivered. This government is doing more than simply cutting taxes to make life more affordable. We are cutting taxes while increasing minimum wages and eliminating the tolls on the A. Murray MacKay and Angus L. Macdonald Bridges. The tolls will come off on April 1, 2025.

We are also continuing the rollout of our school lunch program. This program has already served over two million meals to Nova Scotian students. It will ensure no child needs to focus on both math and their empty stomach.

Our support also extends to small businesses. We are cutting the small business tax rate to ensure they can invest more in their people and businesses. The Opposition opposed our proposed tax cuts. Higher taxes are their policy - not the policy of this government. Our government is bringing in multiple tax cuts and tax changes to help Nova Scotians keep more of their hard-earned money, because that is how we help unlock our province's potential. These are things we can only keep doing if we grow our economy. New programs or further tax cuts cannot be sustained without new sources of revenue - new revenue that doesn't mean taking more out of your wallet.

Failing to grow our economy is also hurting our health. In Nova Scotia, people living in lower-income neighbourhoods live 10 years less on average than their fellow Nova Scotians who live in higher-income areas. Lower-income Nova Scotians suffer from chronic illness at a greater rate than those living in higher-income neighbourhoods.

Allowing special interests to control policy has kept too many Nova Scotian families locked in the cycle of poverty. When we give small groups a veto over development, it costs years off the lives of our fellow Nova Scotians. How can we be okay with that? Better incomes lead to longer and healthier lives. It means more time with grandchildren, more opportunities for the next generation, and less pressure on our health care system.

We dedicated our first term to health care, and we remain committed to improving access to it. We reduced the Need a Family Practice Registry list massively in our first term. That progress will continue. It will continue because of the new medical school at Cape Breton University, a nursing school at Acadia University, and because of the new international assessment clinic. The investments we made in Term 1 and continue to make in Term 2 will drive down wait times and make it easier to get the care you need. More doctors, more nurses, more investment in health technology: These are coming in Term 2.

Also, our government will fund a universal shingles program. This means Nova Scotians 65 years of age and older will get access to the vaccine free of charge. We will continue to support women's health by creating Canada's first Menopause Centre of Excellence.

Programs alone won't solve our health care woes. We also must make it easier for people to be healthy. That starts by getting serious about growing the incomes of Nova Scotians. We will never solve the challenges of our health care system if we don't remove the obstacles to better health, the biggest of which is poverty. We cannot unlock our province's potential if we allow poverty to hold too many fellow Nova Scotians down.

More growth, better jobs, lower taxes, and better services come with a growing economy. Better health and fewer chronic diseases come with a growing economy. When we stop listening to special interests and focus on the interests of Nova Scotians, we can support one another and unlock our province's potential.

I want to address the naysayers head-on: Our government is not afraid to debate these issues. We believe our stance is principled and justified, both economically and morally. First is the idea that export markets are bad. The Opposition and special interests argue we should not export our resources. That would ignore our moral responsibility to help in the global fight against climate change. The world needs more critical minerals to aid in the electrification of heating and transportation, not less.

Second, the Opposition and special interests try to justify bans by arguing companies showed little interest in our resources. This is misguided and short-sighted. Why would anyone come to invest in a province where outright bans on industry exist? Saying lack of demand so far justifies continuing these bans is irrational and illogical. It is also short-sighted, as much of the growth in demand is still to come.

The Opposition says they are serious about the Paris Accord. Well, its pledges will drive massive increases in future demand for Nova Scotia's minerals. If the Opposition and special interests have their way, we will simply watch this opportunity pass us by, and in 10 years, when demand is sky-high, we would have all watched other parts of Canada and the U.S. as they profited. We cannot in good conscience use clean tech while refusing to mine its building blocks. There is hypocrisy at the heart of the Opposition to our plans.

We want lumber, but special interests don't want us harvesting here. We want solar panels and electric vehicles, but special interests don't want us to mine the building blocks of this technology here. This attitude forces us to rely on others, and forces democratic nations to rely on supply chains full of human rights and environmental abuses. When we refuse to mine cobalt here, it is mined elsewhere, and frequently in places with fewer protections for the environment and workers. It happens in places where child labour is widespread and children are exposed to toxic dust. Forced labour, low wages, violence, and environmental damage: When someone says, "Use it but don't mine it," that is the outcome.

I look forward to these debates and discussions over the course of our second term. To the people of this province, I want you to know that we are here for you - for your interests. The outsized weight of special interests and the professional protestor class ends. We are ready to stand up for you, for your families, for the hope that our children can have a better life than ours. We want prosperity for this generation and for every generation that follows. We want a province that is resilient and self-reliant. We want to wake up one day no longer needing equalization payments.

There will be a chorus of voices who try to prevent this from happening. Special interests will say "no." They will try to block opportunities for their fellow Nova Scotians. However, I refuse to give in to the draw of pessimism and cynicism that has taken over in too many corners of our province. A democracy needs both critics and critical thinkers, but at some point, we need to stop criticism for its own sake. Being a perpetual contrarian accomplishes nothing, but expends much oxygen. That's not how we move our province forward.

I'm reminded of a Churchill quote: "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." Despite the many challenges we face, I am someone who sees opportunity in difficult times. I firmly believe, as does our caucus and our Premier, that opportunities outnumber the challenges. We want to open up resource development to unlock our province's potential. We want to open new markets for trade to unlock our province's potential. We must do these things to build a strong economy and a stronger, more independent, and more resilient Nova Scotia. (Standing ovation)

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

LISA LACHANCE: I rise today and offer initial reactions from the Official Opposition on Nova Scotia's 2025-26 Provincial Budget.

It's been difficult since 2020 to find new ways to describe the types of uncertainty that we have collectively faced, from every constituency in Nova Scotia to the global stage. Together we have faced the COVID pandemic, supply chain challenges and inflation,

conflict in Ukraine, Gaza and elsewhere, and now political and economic instability with the U.S.

Nova Scotians are reeling. It's been five years of unexpected global crises, most with direct social and financial impacts for our province. Here, this volatile period has been marked by deep concern about the challenge for many to have access to the bare minimum of shelter, food and housing. I know we've all been on the doorsteps. I know we've all been in public meetings, and we've all heard from folks via email and phone.

We are privileged to have Nova Scotians share their deepest concerns with us. They worry about lack of access to health care for themselves, their children, and their aging parents. There is a palpable fear about whether families can afford or keep their housing. And we all experience rising costs at the grocery store.

It's not just individual experiences. We have seen rising income inequality in our province. The child poverty rate in Nova Scotia increased 16 per cent between 2021 and 2022, representing almost a quarter of Nova Scotia's young people. These aren't just the challenges of the few, but for all of us.

All Nova Scotians certainly want better for all and a period of stability. That's not where we are, so we need to work together. Nova Scotians expect that their government will act in their interests. The presentation of a fiscal plan is one way the government can map out a pathway to social and economic stability.

Citizens look to government budgets to understand how the government will take action through programs and services in ways to ensure all Nova Scotians have their rights to education, health, housing, and more respected and realized. Citizens look at a budget to tell them what the future may look like in terms of population levels, debt management, and more.

Speaking of the promises we need to keep for the future, this budget misses the mark in key areas. As the threat of Trump's tariffs hang over Nova Scotians' heads, this budget is a missed opportunity to ensure everyday people have the support they need with a comprehensive plan to protect jobs, ensure access to primary care, and provide immediate protections for renters.

We will be providing in-depth comments on the budget during this session. At this moment, I will highlight some questions and concerns and gaps in key areas. In health care, we saw the release of a bold Capital Plan, and yet we still don't have a public contract in place or an extended financial plan for the rebuild of the QEII Health Sciences Centre. It sits within my riding, so I either bike past it, walk past it, or drive past it probably every day. I can tell you that this is not just the start of a project; there is major work being undertaken, and it seems like, with a generational investment in health care infrastructure

in Nova Scotia, we all need to know how much it's going to cost, and we all need to know that we're getting value for money.

[1:30 p.m.]

We still don't see the whole plan for increasing primary care attachment. Wouldn't it be bold, for instance, if this budget talked about how many collaborative care centres will open this year in Nova Scotia and attach a price tag to them?

In housing, of course, public housing investments are important and are part of the puzzle, but more can be done. We can keep people in the housing they have through rent control and make entry-level home ownership accessible. We continue to miss the mark in terms of making investment into housing people can afford.

In gender-based violence, we do see the government adopting a whole government approach, yet there doesn't seem to be any additional investment being made to make a transformational difference.

In mental health, Nova Scotians were told that there would be universal mental health care in this province. This meant a lot to people, that they or the people they care for would be able to access the right service at the right time from the right service or clinician. People want to know that whether there is a need to support the onset of anxiety or if they are in suicidal distress, the system will respond, coordinate and accompany people on paths to wellness.

In this year's budget, there is an investment of \$10 million toward the small piece of universal mental health care that is providing public funding for private clinicians. However, while this program is supposed to be operational on April 1st, there are no details. We don't know how much of that \$10 million is going to an RFP for a private sector administrator or how much is being allocated for clinicians to actually see Nova Scotians.

The budget notes our continued commitment as a province to inclusive education and, of course, to addressing violence in schools. However, while the government business plan indicates continued support in these areas, we don't see the investments needed to make a difference.

In natural resources and economic development, all I can say that finally this government is starting to address economic development. We welcome a conversation about the economic health of this province. We have known that we need an economic growth plan for Nova Scotians.

Across the province, people have shared with us their concerns about the lack of rural employment opportunities, opportunities for young people, and stagnant wages and productivity. Imagine if this government had started taking economic development

seriously in 2021 and built on the foundation of population growth rather than take a free ride on the unexpected revenues that the population generated.

Yes, let's talk about economic development. We are going to be asking questions about proposed resource development plans. Economic analyses should weigh the cost and benefits of a proposed project or approach to determine if the resources are being used appropriately to select the best course of action, to evaluate the impact of events on the economy and to analyze market trends; in short, what can make a difference in the lives of Nova Scotians now and what investments can be made going forward. One investment in this budget is an increase in the Nova Scotia Loyal budget, and it's not clear how that will be used without outcome data from its weak implementation to date.

According to this government, only some Nova Scotians seem trusted to take part in those conversations. We will be convening and listening to all Nova Scotians. Mi'kmaw leaders have already made their concerns clear about how these conversations will take place in Mi'kma'ki.

The Speech from the Throne stated: "We have allowed sectors of our economy to become captured by special interests." I am not totally sure who is captured in that characterization, but I don't think it stands up to the type of citizens engagement we all need and we all have a right to. We can't simply ignore the complexity of issues when one choice means that an issue is supported and another may not be, especially when opportunities in different sectors bump up against each other. It's not you and them. It's us together, balancing the questions of equity, sustainability, and prosperity.

This government started out in 2021 with an ambitious piece of legislation setting environmental goals. What do we know now of our progress toward these goals, toward managing climate change, and lessening the negative effects on Nova Scotians?

We are also deeply concerned by this government's ill-informed view of the social and structural determinants of health. To imply that poverty of imagination perpetuates the cycle of poverty is to ignore the effects of centuries of ongoing inequality and disparity on the basis of gender, race, religion, socio-economic status, disability, and more. Indeed, on an individual level, I imagine that many people facing the day-in, day-out grind of trying to provide the best for their families can, in fact, imagine a life with fewer systemic barriers and fewer systemic trials.

Collectively, I believe that we are all working for a province without poverty. We can do this by thinking through what is needed to overcome prejudice and limitation in services and resources so that all Nova Scotians can have a decent life.

An example of where we're missing the mark: To date, this government continues to put forward a vision for economic development in Nova Scotia that is gender-blind. For instance, with increases to the MOST program in this budget, this government continues

to ignore the well-documented barriers to women and gender-diverse folks in many of the targeted industries and maintain the age limit of 30. That includes people who have later entries to professions as well as documented intolerable levels of gender-based violence and harassment in the sectors.

We also need to look at the revenue side of the ledger. During its first mandate, the PC government relied on unexpected population growth and larger-than-forecast federal transfers to bring revenue into the government. This approach did little to put money in the pockets of everyday Nova Scotians or help folks access what they needed in terms of housing, groceries, and other necessities. We need clarity and transparency on where this government will get the money to pay for what we need. Nova Scotians expect stringent financial management.

We have been concerned about this government's inability to budget accurately, leading to overspending outside of the legislative process and away from the democratic process. This is a practice that the government doesn't seem to be concerned to reckon with, despite standing out amongst all other provinces and repeated warnings from the Auditor General.

We also need to look at the ways in which government manages our money. This budget creates a contingency to be ready for tariffs. This, in itself, is a good move in this time of uncertainty. However, what's not clear is how this contingency will be used and how it will be accessed, and it does add a lot to our long-term debt.

As well, public procurement is an important and different process than making decisions in other sectors. Public procurement has developed out of goals to keep people safe and secure in the products and buildings that government develops to make sure that we get value for money and to make sure that the benefits of government spending don't just end up in the hands of friends but are accessible opportunities for all qualified businesses.

Yet, as per the Auditor General's reports, much of the spending done outside the budget and with alternative procurement lacks rigour. Surely, having contracts in place is the bare minimum fiduciary responsibility of government.

We will ask critical questions - and by that I don't mean negative but rather analytical - about proposed investments. We will also listen to and work with all Nova Scotians. This includes scientific leaders building evidence based on research. This includes Mi'kmaw leaders and communities in unceded Mi'kma'ki. This includes public interest groups who consider how to best achieve the goals of our province: sustainability, equity, and accessibility. This includes communities, who have observed and experienced issues as a collective, who want to share that. We need to know the concerns of youth, seniors, and everyone in between. We need to hear from frontline service providers,

medical professionals, educators, entrepreneurs and investors, and more. Of course, municipalities are important partners.

All of these perspectives, these interests - all of us - this is Team Nova Scotia. We believe that this government needs to earn and keep the trust of its citizens, not dismiss Nova Scotians' perspectives.

We will continue to review the government's proposed budget alongside stakeholders - alongside Nova Scotians - to understand how it will help Nova Scotia meet the pressures of today and realize the promises of tomorrow. We believe in the full promise of our name, Nova, meaning new and the birth of a star. It was never about "no." Instead, Nova represents a way forward, of equitable, sustainable existence in Mi'kma'ki. Surely this is the future we should build together as a province.

At this time, I move that we adjourn debate on the Budget Address.

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

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We will now move on to our daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I beg leave to table, pursuant to Section 27(5) of the Finance Act, the Order in Council 2025-38 dated February 14, 2025, detailing the additional appropriations included in the final forecast for the fiscal year 2024-25.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

As Speaker of the House of Assembly and pursuant to Subsection 45(1) of the House of Assembly Act, I am pleased to table the *2025 Member of the Legislature Remuneration Review: Report and Recommendations*.

The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Speaker, I know that Nova Scotians are worried about the effect that American tariffs could have on their families and on our province. I want them to know that for months our government has worked with stakeholders and business owners from across the province. That includes meetings with more than 125 companies and industry organizations.

My staff, staff from Intergovernmental Affairs, the Departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Growth and Development have all made understanding and mitigating the impact of the potential tariffs a key priority. Last month, the Minister of Growth and Development, myself, and other colleagues met with 21 Chambers of Commerce from across Nova Scotia. We asked for their input and received 170 surveys. We established a tariff information hotline that will connect business navigators with Nova Scotians and with businesses. Meetings are ongoing. In fact, in a week, I will host Nova Scotia manufacturers at a round table discussion.

We have, for months, been leading the charge here in Nova Scotia and actively supporting a Team Canada approach. This is why we were the first province to issue a statement, and therefore, the first province to announce retaliatory measures against American tariffs. We stand ready to protect Nova Scotia's interests, both against special interest groups here at home and threats from abroad.

Recently, I travelled to Washington with my fellow premiers, and later this week I will return. I am doing everything in my power to make sure that the decision-makers in Washington understand that tariffs that harm the people in both countries are not necessary.

However, should tariffs escalate, we are ready. This moment is a call to action. It is a call to build a province and an economy that is more independent and more resilient. We will answer this call to action. We are encouraging Nova Scotians to spend more here and to support local businesses more than ever. We will work to diversify our trade and export markets, and that work is already ongoing. We are ready and willing to tear down barriers to trading between provinces.

Finally, we will capitalize on our resource wealth to generate real wealth for Nova Scotians. We are working, and will continue to work, to ensure a strong, resilient and independent Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader for the Official Opposition.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Nova Scotians are living with traumatic uncertainty, and they deserve a comprehensive plan laid out for them in an open and transparent way. When

the stakes are this high, people have the right to know what their government is doing to protect them from financial hardship. Telling people that you have a plan is not the same thing as having a real, viable path forward, and talking about protecting Nova Scotians from the special interests within as a response to tariffs is Orwellian. The looming threat of tariffs and the uncertainty they cause for Nova Scotians is real. Surveys and backroom meetings are not going to cut it.

[1:45 p.m.]

Other provinces have launched task forces where industry leaders and labour have a seat at the table, where meaningful collaboration is taking place, but this government has yet to demonstrate a similar approach. This government has yet to reach out to Unifor, the largest private sector labour union, whose thousands of workers are left in the cold not knowing what comes with a tariff. The Premier can't just call the same people he always speaks to and pretend to be collaborating.

Nova Scotia is a unique province with our own economy and our own specific challenges. We cannot rely on other premiers and the federal government to have our people's best interests informing their approach. While we need to be part of Team Canada, we need a Team Nova Scotia plan.

The Nova Scotians I talk with are worried about their jobs and yet another potential spike to their cost of living. They want to do their part. That includes buying local. We've heard the government announce incentive plans for Nova Scotians to buy local that turn out to be million-dollar giveaways to grocers.

I know all members of this House want to see Nova Scotians thrive. The best way to do that is to come forward with a Nova Scotia First proposal. We want to see the government do everything in its power to protect the Nova Scotians - the workers - who will struggle with the cost of living, and that approach must be given with openness, transparency, and collaboration.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Nova Scotians are rightly concerned about how the looming threat of widespread tariffs from the United States will impact them, and our caucus has been speaking with residents, businesses, and community organizations from across the province, hearing their concerns. We are glad to hear that the government is making this a priority. These tariffs are highlighting the lack of economic stability that we have in our province.

Years of unapproved overbudgeted spending by the government has left us in a tight spot where we are simultaneously facing a cost of living crisis, global economic

threats, and unsurmountable debt. Under the government's leadership, the economy has been neglected, and we can't afford any further delay in taking action.

We appreciate the collaborative approach that the government has displayed working alongside their colleagues from other provinces and the federal government in developing a Team Canada response to these tariffs, and we call upon that same spirit of collaboration within this province. The economic threats we face are real, and they do not know political lines. The stakes are too high for partisanship to stand in the way of our shared responsibility to protect Nova Scotia's future.

As the government focusses on the development of our natural resources sector, we emphasize the extensive history that our team has in holding ministerial portfolios in energy and mines, lands and forestry, and the environment. We are ready to use our knowledge and experience to work alongside the government in developing this response in a safe, effective, and timely way.

As we continue to navigate these uncertain economic times, I continue to form a strength in response to any tariffs that may take effect. The Nova Scotia Liberals urge Premier Houston and the Progressive Conservatives to set aside and work collaboratively to strengthen our economy. Nova Scotians need a government that makes responsible investments and ensures long-term prosperity.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Advanced Education.

RESOLUTION NO. 5

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

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

Be it resolved that the Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly be amended as follows.

1 The rules are amended by adding immediately after Rule
2 the following Rule:

2A A reference in these Rules to the Government House Leader includes the Deputy Government House Leader or another Member representing the Government House Leader.

2 Paragraph (1) of Rule 5C is amended by striking out “or the Leader’s substitute”.

3 Paragraph (5) of Rule 3 is amended by striking out “Law Amendments” and substituting “Public Bills”.

4 Rule 18 is amended by striking out “Minister leading the House at the time” and substituting “Government House Leader”.

5 The Rules are amended by adding immediately after Rule 27 the following Rule:

27A (1) If the Government House Leader, from the Leader’s place in the House, states that there is agreement among the representatives of all recognized parties to allot a specific number of days or hours to the proceedings at one or more stages of any public bill, the Leader may move a motion without notice setting forth the terms of such agreed allocation.

(2) If the Government House Leader, from the Leader’s place in the House, states that agreement could not be reached under the provisions of paragraph (1), in respect of proceedings at one or more stages of a public bill, the Government House Leader may move, without notice, a motion for the purpose of allotting a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at one or more stages of the public bill.

(3) A motion under paragraph (1) or (2) shall be decided forthwith, without amendment or debate and any proceedings interrupted pursuant to this Rule are deemed adjourned.

27B (1) Immediately before the orders of the day for resuming adjourned debate is called, or if the House be in Committee of the Whole, the Government Leader may, upon notice, move the debate not be further adjourned or that the further consideration of any resolution or resolutions, Clause or Clauses, preamble or title be the first business of the Committee and not be further postponed.

(2) A motion under paragraph (1) shall be put forthwith without amendment or debate.

(3) If a motion under paragraph (1) is resolved in the affirmative, (a) no Member may thereafter speak more than once or longer than fifteen minutes in any such adjourned debate or, if in Committee of the Whole, on any resolution, Clause, preamble, or title; and (b) if such adjourned debate or postponed consideration has not been resumed or concluded before the hour of adjournment, no Member may speak after that hour and all such questions as must be decided in order to conclude such adjourned debate or postponed consideration shall be decided forthwith.

6 Rule 31 is amended by adding immediately after paragraph (1) the following paragraph:

(1A) In the absence from the House of a Minister during the Orders of the Day, Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers, the Minister's Ministerial Assistant may reply to a question put to the Minister.

7 Paragraph (2) of Rule 37A is amended by striking out "Law Amendments" and substituting "Public Bills".

8 Paragraph (4) of Rule 38 is amended by striking out "one hour" and substituting "thirty minutes in the case of a debatable motion not in a Committee of the Whole or ten minutes in the case of a non-debatable motion or a motion in the Committee of the Whole".

9 Rule 46 is amended by striking out "Law Amendments" and substituting "Public Bills".

10 (1) Paragraph (1) of Rule 60 is amended by striking out "Law Amendments" and substituting "Public Bills".

(2) Paragraph (2) of Rule 60 is amended by adding immediately after clause (a) the following clause:

(aa) The Public Bills Committee is established only to receive feedback on public bills and may not amend the bills referred to it.

(3) The Terms of Reference in subparagraph (2)(c) of Rule 60 are amended by:

(a) striking out Form “A” attached in the Term of Reference 1. and substituting “the form prescribed by the Clerk of the Executive Council”;

(b) adding “the form prescribed by the Clerk of the Executive Council” immediately after “Committee” in Term of Reference 2.;

(c) striking out “affirmative action concerns” in Term of Reference 3. and substituting “gender and equality”;

(d) striking out “Lotteries Commission” in clause (a) in Term of Reference 5. and substituting “Board of Directors of the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation”;

(e) adding “, including candidates nominated or recommended to a Minister or the Governor in Council in accordance with a legislative or regulatory requirement” immediately after “review” in clause (b) of term of Reference 5.;

(f) striking out “(i.e. Nova Scotia Medical Society)” in clause (c) of Term of Reference 5.;

(g) striking out “Hospitals and Universities” in clause (d) of Term of Reference 5. and substituting “Post-secondary Institutions”;

(h) adding “related to Agency, Board or Commission appointments” immediately after “representations” in Term of Reference 7.;

(i) striking out “Form A” in Term of Reference 13 and substituting “required documents”; and

(j) striking out “Form A”.

(4) Paragraph (5A) of Rule 60 is amended by striking out “Law Amendments” and substituting “Public Bills”.

(5) Paragraph (5E) of Rule 60 is amended by striking out

“Law Amendments” and substituting “Public Bills”.

11 Paragraph (1) of Rule 62D is amended by striking out “Minister leading the House at the time” and substituting “Government House Leader”.

12 Paragraph (1) of Rule 62FA is amended by striking out “Minister leading the House at the time” and substituting “Government House Leader”.

13 Rule 62FC is amended by striking out “Law Amendments” and substituting “Public Bills”.

14 Rule 78 is amended by:

(a) striking out “committee of which the Bill is referred” in subparagraph (e) and substituting “Committee of the Whole House on Bills”; and

(b) adding “Section” immediately before “headers” in subparagraph (h).

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for a waiver.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour?

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: What?

THE SPEAKER: Oh, sorry. Boy. I’m reading my notes here. If anybody agrees, then I can say that.

There are several Noes.

The motion is tabled.

Order.

The honourable Minister of L’nu Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 6

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

Whereas family violence has a profound impact on families, individuals, and communities across Nova Scotia, affecting people of all races, ages, and economic backgrounds;

Whereas ending the cycle of violence requires a collective effort through education, early intervention, and strong support systems to ensure the safety and well-being of those affected; and

Whereas Family Violence Prevention Week - February 9th to 15th - serves as an opportunity to raise awareness, educate, and promote resources and supports available to those experiencing or at risk of violence;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in recognizing the week previous as Family Violence Prevention Week and commit to continuing our work with community organizations to prevent this violence and build a future free from family violence.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Emergency Management.

RESOLUTION NO. 7

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

Whereas two snowmobilers were separated and lost in the Cape Breton Highlands this weekend; and

Whereas the quick and coordinated efforts of community members, Cabot Snowmobile Club, and first responders - including RCMP, ground search and rescue, local fire departments, municipal and provincial emergency management officials, DNR, and the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre - led to the safe rescue of the two snowmobilers despite high winds, heavy snow drifts, and limited visibility; and

Whereas the searchers displayed courage, professionalism, and determination working in dangerous blizzard-like weather conditions;

[2:00 p.m.]

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature recognize the efforts of the community members and first responders who located these men and brought them to safety.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill No. 1 - An Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration.
(The Premier)**

**Bill No. 2 - An Act Respecting Funding for the Prevention of Gender-based
Violence. (Claudia Chender)**

**Bill No. 3 - An Act to Amend Chapter 1 (1992 Supplement) of the Revised
Statutes, 1989, The House of Assembly Act. (Hon. Becky Druhan)**

**Bill No. 4 - An Act to Amend Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2010, the Finance Act.
(Hon. Derek Mombourquette)**

**Bill No. 5 - An Act Respecting Enforcement of the Residential Tenancies Act.
(Susan Leblanc)**

Bill No. 6 - An Act Respecting Agriculture, Energy and Natural Resources. (Hon. Tory Rushton)

Bill No. 7 - An Act Respecting Energy Affordability. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 8 - An Act Respecting an Atlantic Coalition. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 9 - An Act to Reduce Interprovincial Trade Barriers in Atlantic Canada. (Hon. Iain Rankin)

Bill No. 10 - An Act to Provide for the Evaluation of Statutory Programs. (Hon. Iain Rankin)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

RESOLUTION NO. 8

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

Whereas Nova Scotia experienced a health care crisis with the Nova Scotia Health Authority having over 600 vacant positions, health care workers are left to do more while Nova Scotians are left to wait longer for the care they need; and

Whereas neither employees nor patients are adequately supported by the province's health care system, Nova Scotia has a positive employee satisfaction rating of just 42 per cent, while over 100,000 Nova Scotians are without a family doctor; and

Whereas the pressure within health care settings is mounting, resulting in an increase in violence against health care workers and causing our province's largest emergency department to lock down last month to care for workers who were injured while doing their jobs;

Therefore be it resolved that this House shall set aside a period of not fewer than 40 minutes on Wednesday, February 19, 2025, to consider how this government can fix the health care crisis

in Nova Scotia and reduce workplace violence in health care settings because as it stands today, violence is too common in our province.

Speaker, I request waiver of notice.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

RESOLUTION NO. 9

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

Whereas Nova Scotia is currently facing significant external economic pressures, placing pressure on key industries such as forestry, agriculture, fishing, mining, and manufacturing; and

Whereas these economic challenges require a collaborative and co-operative approach from all political leaders, industry leaders, and communities to protect and grow Nova Scotia's economy; and

Whereas the ONE Nova Scotia Coalition demonstrated the importance of co-operation between government and independent groups in addressing economic challenges;

Therefore be it resolved that a formal process is hereby established in the form of a coalition to bring together all major political parties, industry leaders, and community organizations, modelled after the ONE Nova Scotia Coalition, aimed at addressing the province's economic threats and making recommendations for the consideration of the House in relation thereto; and

Therefore be it resolved that this coalition be chaired by the Premier of Nova Scotia, co-chaired by the leaders of the other two political parties in the House of Assembly, and include such private sector and public sector leaders as may be selected by the Premier and the leaders of the other political parties in the House of

Assembly to ensure effective consultation and solutions to protect Nova Scotia's economic future;

Therefore be it resolved that the coalition quickly identify opportunities for economic growth and report back to the House of Assembly within six months with specific goals that the Province can achieve to improve our local economy.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? There are several Noes.

The notice of motion is tabled.

The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

RESOLUTION NO. 10

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

Whereas there is a dire staffing shortage in schools across Nova Scotia that requires greater retention efforts to ensure our students are receiving the education and the supports that they need to thrive; and

Whereas the Auditor General has called for an updated provincial school code of conduct policy to better guide teaching staff, students, and parents due to the fact that school violence in Nova Scotia has increased by 60 per cent over the past seven years, negatively impacting both the learning conditions of students and the working conditions of teachers and support staff; and

Whereas over half of educators and school support staff witness school violence on a weekly basis, and many have indicated they have recently considered quitting because of violence in their workplace;

Therefore be it resolved that this House set aside a period of no less than 40 minutes on Wednesday, February 19, 2025, to consider how this government can work to retain more school staff by

reducing school violence, because as it stands today, violence is too common in the classrooms of our province.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? There are several Noes.

The notice of motion is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

NORA BERNARD: LEGACY - RECOG.

HON. LEAH MARTIN: Yesterday, we celebrated Nova Scotia Heritage Day. This day serves as a yearly reminder of our rich history and a chance to recognize the extraordinary individuals, places, and events that have shaped the province's distinct heritage. This year, we paid tribute to Mi'kmaw activist Nora Bernard, a courageous leader whose legacy continues to inspire us all.

Born in 1935 in Millbrook First Nation, Nora was sent to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School at just nine years of age. In 1987, Nora founded the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School Association, uniting survivors in their shared experiences. Her determination led to the launch of a historic class-action lawsuit against the Government of Canada in 1995. It became the largest of its kind in Canadian history and secured compensation for survivors across the country.

Although Nora passed away in 2007, her legacy lives on. Her bravery paved the way for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which continues to raise awareness about the impacts of the residential school system.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, may I make a quick introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I would like to draw the members' attention to two-thirds of the Dartmouth North dream team visiting us up in the gallery today. We have Constituency Coordinator Rebecca Rose, who is here accompanying the person I'm going to give a

statement about, Sandi Weagle, who has been a caseworker in Dartmouth North for several years and has just retired. I'll tell you all about that in a moment.

Please welcome Sandi and Rebecca to the House. (Applause)

[2:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. We hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

WEAGLE, SANDI: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

SUSAN LEBLANC: I rise today to honour a very special person in Dartmouth North. As the caseworker in my constituency office for the past five years, Sandi Weagle has given her all to the people of our community. A longtime resident of Dartmouth North, Sandi brought a wealth of life and work experience to my office. Before becoming a caseworker extraordinaire, she worked for both the North Dartmouth Boys and Girls Club and the Freedom Foundation of Nova Scotia. She was also a founding member of Dartmouth North's good-news newspaper, the *North Dartmouth Echo*.

In my office, Sandi worked with countless constituents to get and stay housed, to access emergency financial assistance, to get their power reconnected, to apply for thousands of dollars in government grants, and to get the health care they need and deserve. She did all of that with amazing passion, kindness, and humour, and she did right by the people of Dartmouth North.

Our loss is the province's gain. In January, Sandi began a new job at the NDP caucus office. We're so lucky that she's there to keep us organized . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you, Sandi.

THE SPEAKER: I'm letting a couple of seconds go, but not any longer than that this time around.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

MACNEIL, AL: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I rise to recognize a hockey legend that the community lost from Sydney: Al MacNeil, who was originally from Sydney. Many people would know him in the room. He had a 70-year career in hockey. He was actually the first

Atlantic Canadian native to coach an NHL team. He had a 524-game NHL career with the Toronto Maple Leafs, the Montreal Canadiens, the Chicago Blackhawks, and the Pittsburgh Penguins.

After his 524th game, he went on to coach. He coached the Montreal Canadiens to a Stanley Cup championship as a coach. He won again in Calgary as a director with player personnel and assistant general manager.

He's had an illustrious hockey career, and he's had a big impact in Sydney - especially in Calgary, which really became his home. He was a mentor to so many who have come through the game of hockey. He also won the Calder Cup, as well, as a coach and a general manager.

I rise today to recognize a hockey legend, Al MacNeil.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

BLACK HISTORY MO.: LEGACY IN ACTION - RECOG.

ADEGOKE FADARE: I rise today to recognize African Heritage Month. This year's theme, Legacy in Action: Celebrating Black Brilliance, highlights the achievements and resilience of African Nova Scotians who have shaped the province's history for more than 400 years.

Throughout the month of February, there will be events - and there have been events - and activities designed to educate, inspire, and build connections throughout the province. We will also be honouring the leaders and historical moments that have shaped the rich culture and heritage of African Nova Scotian communities.

Speaker, I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in promoting fairness and justice and recognizing people of African descent as we celebrate their strength, achievements, and important legacy that they represent in the province. (Applause)

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

BERNARD, NORA: LEGACY - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: I rise today to honour Nora Bernard, whose legacy was marked yesterday on provincial Heritage Day.

In 1945, Nora was nine when she was forced to attend the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School under threat to her mother to have all of her children taken away if she didn't go. Other survivors tell how Nora often acted as a protector for other children at the

school, defending them, stealing food when they were hungry, and taking the brunt of abuse for five years.

Nora's rights continued to be ignored by government policy. After marrying a non-Native man, she lost her status, and even as a single mother of six, was not allowed to live on the Millbrook First Nation. In response, she found a house 37 feet from where she was born, where she could see her community.

Nora also spent years petitioning the Millbrook Band Administration to reinstate her as a member, and she became an official member of the Band after 38 years. She then began a support group for survivors and founded the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School Association, the genesis for a national class-action suit and a national apology.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: ACTION - REQUEST

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I want to make a statement surrounding the issue of intimate partner violence and all gender-based violence. There have been at least seven instances of this since the last legislature sat. It is important, perhaps even more, for men to speak up to acknowledge the issue and to speak directly to victims of abuse to encourage seeking support.

Abuse is a choice. Whether people have feelings of contempt, hate, or unresolved trauma from being abused themselves, there is a choice to be made, and there is absolutely no excuse or justification. We have a long way to go as a province to prevent this crime against our children, our mothers, and our sisters. We need to better educate about healthy relationships, providing safe spaces, supporting survivors, and their impact to families.

There are too many innocent lives lost and forever harmed. Today I want to speak directly to men to speak up and be part of the solution to stop the femicide.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Can I make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: In your Gallery - the Speaker's Gallery - I'd like to introduce Urai Meesit and Scott Boyd, and if they could rise and take a warm welcome from the House.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House. We all hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Hants East.

MEESIT, URAI: REAL TASTY THAI FOOD - RECOG.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I rise today to recognize Urai Meesit, who arrived in Nova Scotia in April 2024 with her husband, Scott Boyd. The two met in Thailand, where Scott was learning about natural house building. Urai, who holds a master's degree in food technology, has brought her incredible culinary talents to our community.

Together they have established Real Tasty Thai Food in Enfield, offering both hot take-out meals and frozen dishes from their commercial kitchen. Since opening, they've been incredibly busy, and it's no wonder why. Their delicious Thai cuisine has been a hit with the community.

I'd ask all members of the House to join me in celebrating Urai Meesit and Scott Boyd for their hard work, their dedication, and for enriching Enfield with their authentic Thai flavours. We wish them continued success on their culinary journey.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

FIREFIGHTERS: BLOOMFIELD FIRE ACTION - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to acknowledge and show my gratitude for our fire services and firefighters in and around Halifax Needham. This weekend, the Bloomfield School site was ablaze, and the quick reaction and work of these firefighters kept the fire contained and prevented an even more serious situation for the Bloomfield community.

The Bloomfield site sat vacant for over a decade, and last year, fire officials warned that there are serious risks of fire breaking out in vacant lots like this. This weekend's fire is a reminder that when properties like Bloomfield and others remain vacant, things like this can happen. Imagine Bloomfield can happen. All we need is a political will and an amazing community to push for what we need: affordable housing and community spaces.

I'd like to thank all of the Bloomfield community and the firefighters who kept our community safe, because we know that we need each other during these times.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

VOLS.: HELP FOR ALS SUFFERER - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today, I rise to thank a group of caring people in Cumberland North and beyond who have stepped forward to help a local woman who is facing the loss of thousands of dollars.

Bonnie Petton of Amherst has Lou Gehrig's disease and is confined to her home and only able to communicate with an eye-tracking device. Needless to say, her life is challenging, and she relies on others to provide her care. Recently, after some discrepancies - actually, last year - were noted in Bonnie's bank accounts, the Amherst Police Department were alerted, and the subsequent investigation resulted in three of Bonnie's former caregivers being charged with theft.

In true Cumberland County style, the community is stepping up to help Bonnie. Online fundraisers have been organized to attempt to get the money that was stolen. Many people, including Nic Furlong and Holly Martin, recognized the injustice of what's happened to Bonnie and are rallying around her.

I'd like to thank Nic, Holly, and all those who are helping Bonnie.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

GOVT. EMPLOYEES: ROAD CLEARING - RECOG.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I rise on my feet to recognize - and we all recognize - that at this time of year, travel can be a bit difficult around the province. We have a dedicated Department of Transportation. We also have dedicated municipal officials across the province - that do their best to keep our roadways clear and do their best to make sure that people are safe and, as we've seen in the past days, go above and beyond, when people are in distress, to make sure that we do whatever we can to find them and make sure everybody's safe.

I rise in my place, on another Winter day, to recognize all of the staff with TIR, with all the staff from municipal units across the province, and all the people who do their best to keep our roads safe each and every day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

DAVID BOWLBY: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

DAVID BOWLBY: In your Gallery, if I could ask my friend Dan De Swart to stand up, and also his partner beside him, his driver today in this Winter weather, Brent Kerr. Dan is a businessman and a constituent in Annapolis County, and I'd like to present a member statement on his behalf today.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House. We hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Annapolis.

DE SWART, DANIEL: BIOMASS PROD. WORK - RECOG.

DAVID BOWLBY: I rise today to recognize the innovative work of Daniel “Dan” De Swart in the field of biomass production.

Dan’s mill is a shining example of ecological efficiency, providing locally produced, sustainably organized precision lumber and firewood. His commitment to sustainable practices supports our environment and strengthens our local economy by creating jobs, building materials for homes, and reducing our reliance on non-renewable resources.

Dan sets a standard for others in the industry to follow. I ask all members of this House to join me in applauding Dan De Swart for his dedication to his business and his contributions to our province. (Applause)

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

FAIRVIEW FOOD PANTRY PROJECT: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

LINA HAMID: At a time when food insecurity is all too common in Nova Scotia, I rise to celebrate the volunteers of the Fairview Food Pantry Project. For the last four years, this initiative has provided countless residents in the area the opportunity to access a wide variety of food staples and toiletries at no cost. The small-but-mighty dedicated team of volunteers works to keep a variety of essential items available and there are several pantries, which are accessible 24/7, where donations from the public are always welcome.

The group also prioritizes sourcing ingredients from local businesses, provides recipes in multiple languages, and ensures donations are stretched far, while still providing ingredients for a balanced diet. “Give what you can, take what you need”: The ethos found on the pantry doors reflects a community who are willing to look out for one another and show up for their families and their neighbours.

Please join me in applauding the volunteers who dedicated their time and energy to this grassroots effort.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

FRASER, SEAN: WORK FOR N.S. AS MP - RECOG.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise to extend a heartfelt thanks to the Honourable Sean Fraser for his exemplary service to Canada and his outstanding representation of Nova Scotia as a member of parliament for Central Nova. As most of you know, Sean recently announced his resignation as a cabinet minister in his decision to not reoffer in the next election.

Since first being elected in 2015, he has delivered on major projects, like the twinning of Highway No. 104 and Boat Harbour remediation in his area. His tenure in various ministerial roles has been marked by significant contributions that have left an indelible mark on Canada's progress and prosperity. He has served as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, demonstrating compassion and leadership in managing Canada's immigration policies and addressing some of the most pressing issues facing our nation.

In 2023, Mr. Fraser became Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities at a critical time when our nation faced a housing crisis, making significant contributions to address the issue. Through his diligent work, Sean has been an outstanding advocate for the people of Central Nova and all Nova Scotians.

[2:30 p.m.]

His contributions have significantly shaped our nation's policies and positively impacted the lives of many. Thank you, Sean.

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

FATHER, ROBERT: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, it is with a heavy heart I inform members of the passing of Robert Martin White on February 9, 2025, at the age of 97. Bob was a father, a grandfather and a great-grandfather. He was a brother, an uncle, and dear friend to many. He will be greatly missed by those fortunate enough to have those special connections.

However, Speaker, as his son and joined by his family, I will gratefully pay the debt that is grief over and over again for my precious memories. Dad lived a simple life, guided by a strong commitment to family, a loyalty to friends, compassion to all and an incredible worth ethic.

The wonderful principles that guided my father's life will live on through his family and friends. Dad's legacy is his commitment to family. What will be your legacy?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

ORGANIZERS: SACK. SNOW DAYS FEST. - THANKS

PAUL WOZNEY: Speaker, though Winter has proven itself once more to be a punishing season in Nova Scotia, community members in Sackville persevered to bring about the return of a highly anticipated and cherished community event.

The annual Sackville Snow Days Winter festival organized by the Sackville Business Association was held this past long weekend. I rise to thank its organizers for making February a month of connection and community more than just a time of freezing cold.

Now in its 11th year, Sackville Snow Days featured a bevvvy of community events, like skating, swimming, dancing, community meals, and fireworks. I was particularly pleased to see Sackville's creativity flow into lawns and parks as folks participated in the snow sculpture contest under truly trying circumstances.

I invite those in attendance to join me in congratulating and thanking the Sackville Business Association on the fruits of their hard work on another successful Sackville Snow Days festival.

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

VOLUNTEERS: SEARCH FOR SNOWMOBILERS - RECOG.

DIANNE TIMMINS: I rise today to pay tribute to members of our communities who braved the blizzard this weekend in search of snowmobilers in peril - Scott Rafuse, Richard MacPhee, Ryan O'Shea and Michael Jessome were the first in the Highlands to search for their missing friend.

The larger search was conducted by members of the EHS, DNR, the Department of Public Works, the RCMP, the Trunked Mobile Radio Service, the North Shore Volunteer Fire Department, the North East Margaree Volunteer Fire Department, multiple ground search and rescue teams, Cabot Snowmobile Club and the Cape Breton Highlands Snowmobilers, and of course the Department of Emergency Management and the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre station at North River Community Hall.

So many people took action that it is impossible to name them all. It is important that we recognize all their bravery. I am pleased to say that everyone is home safe.

Thank you to our amazing support system and new Pig and Whistle emergency shelter, which opened less than a month ago.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

ORGANIZERS: WOMEN'S HOCKEY EVENT - THANKS

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, I am happy to report that the Women's Team Canada versus U.S. hockey rivalry series game in Halifax last Thursday night could not have been more exciting. Canada was down by one when local "shero" Blayre Turnbull from Stellarton, Nova Scotia scored a goal with less than three minutes left in the game.

The crowd cheered so loud that you could hardly hear *Heave Away* in the background. The game eventually went all the way into a shootout where Canada was defeated. We may have lost Thursday's game but Team Canada won the whole rivalry series in Summerside, P.E.I. on the following Saturday.

Thank you to all the amazing people or groups who made this night possible, including Hockey Nova Scotia - who are in Dartmouth North, by the way - Scotiabank Centre, and the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, who presented special smudging bundles to the players at the game.

As a proud Dartmouth Whalers mom, I was thrilled to be there with my hockey-playing children and several other family members. As the T-shirt famously says, "Everybody watches women's sports", and I look forward to being in the stands for many future girls' and women's hockey games, hopefully . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order.

The honourable member for Antigonish.

MAGINLEY, MEGAN: BOOK PUBLIC. - CONGRATS.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I rise today to congratulate Megan Maginley, who has published her first graphic novel, *The Ballerina Boy*. The book officially launched on Friday, where she celebrated with a book reading at the People's Place, Antigonish Town & County Library. Megan is a cherished member of L'Arche Antigonish. She identifies as "a lovely autistic creative force of Nature." Megan's book focuses on themes of acceptance, diversity, equity, and loving care. Her characters are imaginative and extraordinary. While this is her first publication, I know it will not be her last, as she already has other projects she is working on.

I ask all members of the House to congratulate Megan on her graphic novel *The Ballerina Boy*, and wish her success with this novel and her future endeavours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

ADAMS, PAULA: CAMPAIGN WORK - THANKS

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize an amazing person who has been the backbone to my election campaign and has always been a part of my life - a.k.a. Paula Adams, who is also a community mom.

Mom Paula was the first one on-site to give all of us motivational talks and at times many laughs to get us started. Mom Paula would be with me on every door and her personality and friendliness shone through. She would be the one to either know that person

and spark a great conversation, or she'd get to know someone at the door, leaving with a smile and laugh. Being on the door with Mom Paula was a wonderful way to offset the hard work of the cold days and early dark nights.

I would like to say a huge thank you to Paula Adams, who is also my mom in the community, for her energy on the campaign and her love for me to support me always. Thank you, Mom, and I love you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELECTION TEAM: HARD WORK - THANKS

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: In this new session of the Legislature, I would like to thank my election team, whose hard work allowed me to return here to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. So many people stepped forward to help with tasks large and small, and many of them are not overly political. They simply wanted to help. They put up signs, knocked on doors, and drove many miles around Cumberland North to support me and the vision for our constituency, county, and province. I want to offer special thanks to Alex Wilson and my son Thomas McCrossin, who served as campaign co-chairs. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask that all members of the Gallery not take pictures. Thank you. My apologies. The clock was stopped.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: They worked day and night, and well into the night on many occasions, constantly looking for ideas on how we could get out the vote. As my colleagues here know, this campaign was unique because of the postal strike, and in my very rural constituency with plenty of seniors, we had to get creative in how we got the message out on where to go to vote, and thanks to my team . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The clock was stopped during the interruption of the photographer.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

AFRICAN HER. MO.: LEGACY IN ACTION - RECOG.

HON. GREG MORROW: I rise today to acknowledge African Heritage Month. This year's theme is Legacy in Action: Celebrating Black Brilliance. In my constituency of Guysborough-Tracadie, I am proud to represent the communities of Upper Big Tracadie, Lincolnville, and Sunnyville. Within these communities, there have been several people who have come forward through the years to share their knowledge and educate residents

in the community about their shared history: Mary Desmond, Catherine Hartling, Jennifer Desmond, Alonso Reddick, Patsy Borden, Colleen Pelley, Tonya Pelley, and Nathan Sparks, just to name a few. They have shared their knowledge of the legacy of their communities and beyond. The stories and information that are shared by these change-makers deserve to be celebrated during this month and beyond. Each of these community leaders truly defines Legacy in Action. I encourage all Nova Scotians to get involved in celebrating African Heritage Month. The Afrikan Canadian Heritage and Friendship Centre in Guysborough hosted their second annual GALA Dinner and Dance Saturday. I was honoured to be there.

To truly understand our history, we must learn from it, teach it to others, and use it as a guide to create a better future for all.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

DOREY, ALLEN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

PAUL WOZNEY: Today I rise to share my condolences and to recognize a figure in the Sackville community who not only kept our children safe, but who left behind an incredible legacy of kindness and dedication, which will be difficult for us to forget.

Allen Dorey - also known as Al, Mr. Al, and a host of other names - was born in 1946 in Head of St. Margarets Bay and passed away last month. His life led him to many places and jobs, including as a Canadian Army engineer posted in Germany. Eventually, Al found a love for cross-guarding at Cavalier Drive School, where he spent two decades keeping safe the students whom he referred to as his kids. His time there was dedicated to more than helping students across the street. He memorized the names of kids, parents and pets alike, and always had a smile, high five, fist bump, or hug at the ready.

Speaker, I ask that all of you join me in thinking of Mr. Dorey's family at this time and in thanking him for his many years of service, making Sackville a brighter place to live.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time is now 2:41 p.m. We will finish at 3:31 p.m.

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM: PLAN TO COUNTER TARIFFS - IMPLEMENT

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, Nova Scotians have their eyes glued to the U.S. news. They're worried for their paycheques, for their futures, and for their jobs. The Premier says we're ready with a plan for the potentially debilitating tariffs that will come

in just a few weeks, but we have heard no details - not here, not with Nova Scotians, and not in this budget. Why hasn't the Premier . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Stop the clock. This is the first session that we've sat other than Valentine's Day, but we'll just start it right now. I was firm about it last sitting. I'll be firm about it this sitting. You're to speak to me, through me, to the minister, Premier, or to anyone else. I ask that you speak through me instead of looking at government, if you will. (Interruption)

Order. The rule of the House is whomever is speaking speaks to the Speaker, not the person who's eventually going to answer the question. That's always been the rule, so your clock is stopped. We'll start it back up. (Interruption)

I did not recognize you. I've spent the last 30 seconds with you watching across the room, so I ask that you speak . . . (interruption). We can make this more difficult. I ask that you speak through the Chair.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I have no idea . . .

THE SPEAKER: No, we stopped the clock.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: This is insane. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: You know where you left off. Your microphone's on, so I did recognize you.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Why hasn't the Premier put forward a plan for Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: Obviously, the threat of tariffs is of concern to Nova Scotians, to Canadians, and now across the whole world as the President enacts his policy or talks about his policy. We're all concerned about it. We've had a number of meetings as premiers. I've met with a number of companies and Chambers of Commerce in Nova Scotia to talk about what a potential response could be. The budget today tabled a \$200 million contingency. We're still hopeful as a country that the tariffs will not be put in place, and we'll work toward that end for now, Speaker.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Last I checked, there was no "I" in team, and yet what I hear from the Premier is "I, I, I, I have spoken to." Newfoundland and Labrador has a round table. It includes labour. It includes Unifor, the largest private-sector labour union, the representatives of the everyday people who are the most in fear for their jobs. Why don't

we, here in Nova Scotia, have a table of industry leaders, labour, Mi'kmaq, and elected representatives guiding this important work?

THE PREMIER: The Leader of the Official Opposition claims we need to be united, but the only thing the Leader of the Official Opposition will do is fearmonger on this topic.

As a province - as a team - we met with 21 Chambers, participated in meetings with myself and other ministers and colleagues. We had 170 surveys back from individual companies, with the impact about what the response may be. We will continue to work with stakeholders. We have been doing that for months on end; we will continue to do that. I personally will continue to advocate for Nova Scotians, for Canadians, in Washington with decision-makers there about the importance of the relationship and how the tariffs are not necessary. I think that's the main priority right now.

[2:45 p.m.]

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Nova Scotia is a unique province. We have our own economy and our own specific challenges. We can't rely on other premiers or the federal government - as we have heard over and over - to have our best interest in informing this approach. We need to work with other provinces. We need to be making phone calls. We need a Team Nova Scotia approach. Why does this Premier refuse to address Nova Scotians directly or to convene them? Is this another *Father Knows Best* scenario, when what we really need is a leader who can listen?

THE PREMIER: We're listening. We have met with 21 Chambers of Commerce. We're listening. We have been talking to over 170 companies - my staff, department staff, various departments' staff. We are listening, and we are working with Nova Scotians. I'll tell you what, Speaker. Nova Scotians know that this government listens, and that's the reason that they returned with the biggest majority in the history of this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Liberal Party.

PREM: NOVA SCOTIA GDP - IMPROVE

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, it's good to be back in the Legislature, talking about the issues that matter most to Nova Scotians. Right now, that means our economy. It has been a pleasant surprise to see the Premier suddenly focus on the economy, but after four years of the Premier's leadership, Nova Scotia has the lowest GDP per capita of any province or state in Canada or the U.S. My question to the Premier: What is his plan to improve our GDP?

THE PREMIER: We understand the challenges. We understand the economic turmoil that Nova Scotians are feeling, that Canadians are feeling. That's why we're going

to develop our resources and create good-paying jobs. That's why we are going to attack and demolish the interprovincial trade barriers. That's why we will continue to look for new markets for our incredible Nova Scotian products. We are committed to taking the "no" out of Nova Scotia. I just ask that the Opposition join us.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: The Premier is saying that his plan to fix this is by developing mining and gas, which we support, which currently makes up less than one-half of 1 per cent of the province's GDP. This is not an economic plan. This is a communications plan. Can the Premier inform this House when he will introduce a full economic plan with input from businesses, universities, the public sector, and leaders across Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: The economic potential for developing our natural resources is absolutely staggering. I ask the member to get involved in that and get behind that. Green hydrogen alone could add almost \$7 billion to our economy over the next seven years. When you think of forms of wind - another \$5 billion to \$7 billion. The mining opportunities that we have through lithium and through the other critical minerals - we are rich in resources, and we are rich in people. We have every opportunity to make this an economic powerhouse for generations to come. We're focused on that, and the Opposition has a chance to also join the club and get on board.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I don't disagree with the Premier. I believe that mineral resources are important. They're important to the future of our province and always have been, but if you're going to have those conversations in isolation with stakeholders across the province, in isolation in communities across the province, without consultation from the Mi'kmaq, I can guarantee you're not going to get very far in mineral resource development.

It's not an attack on the government; it's the actual fact. We need to focus on what we can control and a real plan to improve our province. The government must work with Nova Scotian workers and businesses to actually build up our economy. Our province's productivity is one of the lowest in Canada. It has gone down each year since 2020 under the Premier's watch, which I can table. What actions are the Premier taking to increase . . .

THE PREMIER: We will continue to invest in Nova Scotians. We will invest in growing the economy in this province. That's what's necessary at this time. We'll continue to do that. Nova Scotians, I believe, have spoken pretty loudly and clearly about who they think is the party that can move this province forward when they returned 43 PC members and two Liberal members.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

GAD: AFFORDABLE HOME OWNERSHIP PGM. - PROVIDE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: In the Fall, the Deputy Minister Responsible for the Strategic Leadership on Housing said: “We don’t have an affordable home ownership program yet.” I’ll table that. In the Budget tabled today, we see nothing new to create an affordable pathway for home ownership. This despite the fact that last year, home prices in this province were 65 per cent higher than pre-pandemic levels. Nova Scotians need homes they can afford. Why is this government refusing to take action?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I simply want to dismiss the characterization that we’re not taking this seriously. Our government’s actions on housing - groundbreaking investments in housing through our first mandate: more public housing, more supportive housing, more community housing, more student housing, more housing for health care workers, more rent supplements, more backyard suites. We’re helping Nova Scotians buy their first home through the Down Payment Assistance Program. If the members opposite want to support our actions for housing, I encourage them to support this budget.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I wondered who would answer, since we don’t even have a housing department. Nova Scotians are being squeezed by ever-rising rental prices. The average asking price for a two-bedroom in Halifax is now nearly \$2,500 a month. The vacancy rate for affordable apartments priced below \$1,300 is below 1 per cent. The vast majority are fixed-term leases. The investments in this budget do not add up to a plan that protects renters or helps them to afford their homes. Why is this government yet again ignoring the needs of 300,000 renters?

COLTON LEBLANC: I find it quite rude for the member for Dartmouth South to essentially dismiss the work that’s been done under my department, Growth and Development. There is a department responsible for housing, and it is within the Department of Growth and Development. We are taking this issue very seriously. It’s across government. We’re making unprecedented investments across the housing spectrum. We knew coming into government that we needed to address these challenges. That’s why we have an action plan. It is working. We’re not only meeting our target for 2028 - we’re actually exceeding it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

DMA: BLOOMFIELD FIRE - EXPLAIN

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister Responsible for Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency. The fire at the Bloomfield School site this weekend was a serious event that should have never happened. Over a year ago, Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency warned the site owner, developer Alex Halef of BANC Group, that the building was an immediate safety threat because fire crews wouldn’t be able to get in to help if a

fire spread due to obstructed entry points. I'll table that. If the owner had knowledge of this over a year ago, why were they not compelled to act to prevent this dangerous situation?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs.

HON. JOHN LOHR: The question that the member is asking really relates to HRM and their own Fire Prevention & Safety. They have their own fire inspectors. It's their responsibility.

I'll ask the member: If the NDP government in 2008 to 2013 had dealt with Bloomfield, then it wouldn't have been an issue now. They didn't. They sold it, so here we are.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm going to correct the statement in my message here. The site of the old Bloomfield School should be housing that members of the community can afford, but governments have refused to make this happen. After the Province purchased the site for affordable housing back in 2013, the former Liberal government then sold the property to a private developer. Now the current government has done nothing to make the developer build housing on the lot. So a correction. Will the minister responsible for housing admit that this government needs to be doing more to ensure that housing is being built on vacant and underused land?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister for Growth and Development.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I encourage the honourable member to have a look at our action plan. One of the initiatives is actually making provincially owned land available for housing. If the member has a proposal for a plan for a project, we'll certainly entertain that.

Under this government, we're actually investing in the community housing sector - one that was neglected by both previous parties; \$120 million invested in the last two years alone to support - 175 per cent to enable the preservation and building of 1,400 more units. Affordability has improved in 16,200 households, and the five-year target is 17,250. That's progress.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

DHW: TRAVEL NURSE PROG. - IMPLEMENT

ROD WILSON: Speaker, I move my question to the honourable Minister of Health and Wellness. Last year, this government spent on travel nurses - the cost increased from \$95 million to a whopping \$154 million. The NDP has called on this government for years to create a made-in-Nova Scotia provincial travel nurse program. We're glad to see the government has finally listened and moved in the right direction, but I'm curious: Why did

it take so long for the minister to come to this decision while spending valuable Nova Scotia health care dollars and paying out to a private for-profit nursing company while leaving our hard-working Nova Scotian nurses feeling devalued . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order.

ROD WILSON: . . . and underpaid?

THE SPEAKER: When I say “order,” that means stop speaking, please.

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I’m certainly no stranger to feeling like an undervalued nurse under the former Liberal and NDP governments when I worked on the front line. I’m very grateful to be in this position right now. We have invested more in our workforce. They are historic investments. No government has invested what we have in our workforce.

We are building a sustainable workforce. We have increased the number of nursing seats in this province by 400. We have negotiated an incredibly competitive contract. I was at a conference the other day with student nurses. A student nurse from B.C. couldn’t believe the environment that nurses in this province are working in and can’t wait to look for a job here.

ROD WILSON: As the Auditor General recently explained, we’ve grown reliant on travel nurses because our public sector nurses are burning out and facing increased occupational health and safety risk - as we’ve recently seen at the QEII hospital just last week - by nurses who are asked to do more with less. Relying on agency nurses paid double the hourly rate of unionized Nova Scotia nurses is at best a band-aid solution. Can the minister confirm when a made-in-Nova Scotia travel nurse program will be implemented, and will frontline nurses be at the planning table?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: In the last contract that we negotiated with nurses, we recognized that we are willing to do a test-and-try with an internal travel nurse program. We continue to rely on travel nurses. We want to keep our health care institutions open across this province.

We understand that they are a double-edged sword. We’re so grateful for the expertise and the care that they provide Nova Scotians. We also know that this is something we want to phase out over time. There was a ministerial direction a year ago. We continue to work with the providers to make sure this happens. We’re increasing nursing seats. We’re looking at an internal travel nurse unit. There is nothing being left on the table.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

GAD: EXPORTS TO ASIA - INCREASE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: In the face of U.S. tariff threats, there's been a lot of recent discussion about diversifying our trading partners. That's good. Exports to the U.S. were 83 per cent of our exports in 2013. In 2017, that number was brought down to 65 per cent as we diversified our trading partners. As of last October, that number has crept back up to 70 per cent of our exports going to the U.S.

[3:00 pm]

My question to the Minister of Growth and Development is: What was his government doing to open markets for exports outside of the U.S. during their first term? Does he have a target in mind to achieve better diversification, given that we have so much reliance on the U.S. under their watch?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Of course, I appreciate the question during these times of uncertainty, based on the threats of impending tariffs. I think our government's actions to date of coming in with a swift response and counter-tariffs announced by the Premier demonstrate the strong leadership of this government.

What I'd say to the member is that we recognize the importance of diversification of our markets. The Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture was recently over in Europe looking at markets for our important seafood sector - a traditional industry that we need to grow and expand while we look at new opportunities in this province to grow new sectors as well.

IAIN RANKIN: That's the problem: Geopolitical events shouldn't dictate our economic security in this province. The member is referencing what just happened one month ago. This is a protectionist President who has levied tariffs against our country before. Following the Ivany report, there was an all-hands-on-deck approach to growing the economy, especially with export growth. Past diversification efforts were successful and saw business trade grow from \$197 million in 2013 to \$1 billion in 2019 in China alone. That's our second trading partner.

According to the Department of Finance and Treasury Board's latest update in the budget documents today, there continues to be a decline of 10 per cent lower in China. Japan, India and Hong Kong are also going down. Can the Minister of Growth and Development say if the government will revisit the opportunity of increasing exports to Asia?

COLTON LEBLANC: As a government, we are certainly not going to take our marching orders from Donald Trump. No, we're not taking them from Donald Trump. What I'd say is that trade missions aren't new, based on geopolitical events. There are trade missions that happen every year, even when the member opposite was in government. I'd

like to remind the members of this House that there have been, and continue to be, programs through Invest Nova Scotia to support export development to support scaling up through a number of programs. This morning, I had the opportunity to join colleagues or partners at WestJet as they announced a new line - a direct route from Halifax to Amsterdam - opening up the door for Halifax, Nova Scotia for more growth, more tourism and more trade opportunities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DOE: ENERGY AFFORDABILITY SOLUTIONS - DELIVER

SUSAN LEBLANC: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Forty-three per cent of Nova Scotians are struggling to pay their energy bills, the highest proportion in Canada. I will table that. The Nova Scotia Energy Poverty Task Force, which includes government representatives, delivered a four-step solution to address this problem last Spring. I will table that. My question to the Minister of Energy is: Can the minister please explain why we have seen no action to make the changes that Nova Scotians need to be able to afford their energy bills?

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Speaker, our government has taken extraordinary measures to avoid increases in power rates. I can think of a number of different initiatives. I can think of Bill No. 212, which limited the ability of the NSUARB to allow for increases by Nova Scotia Power. I can think of the \$117 million investment that our government made to pay off the fuel adjustment mechanism for making sure that Nova Scotians didn't have a 7 per cent increase in power rates.

We also negotiated a \$500 million agreement with the federal government to make sure that Nova Scotians didn't have a 19 per cent increase in power rates. We're doing what we can, and we'll continue to do what we can.

SUSAN LEBLANC: This government's commitment to keep future increases within the national average will not help Nova Scotians who are already struggling with the current rates. Any increase will simply add to their financial stress. What is really needed is the four-step solution previously put forward that includes bill affordability, arrears management, crisis intervention, and support to make homes more energy-efficient. When will this government deliver the solutions that Nova Scotians deserve?

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Nova Scotians already have access to programs within those four realms that the member is speaking about. But just as an aside, this government has invested in a number of different ways to support Nova Scotians with the cost of living. In particular, with respect to energy, I think of the Heating Assistance Rebate Program - \$600. I think of the HEAT Fund program that is distributed by the Salvation Army that we work on very hard, as well as diversion funding through the Department of Opportunities

and Social Development for people on income assistance. We know that Nova Scotians need support, and we'll be that government to be there for them.

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

ECC: RESOURCE EXTRACTION BANS LIFTED - EXPLAIN

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. This government has revealed a new agenda that prioritizes resource extraction, but we have heard nothing about environmental protections. When asked about the potential for new environmental regulations, the minister responded, "Stay tuned," and I'll table that. Can the minister provide a more precise answer? Why are bans being lifted without the full analysis, without environmental regulations?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Nova Scotia has a very strong regulatory framework to protect the environment and protect human health. You see that in the regulatory role we have with large industry. It's not helpful with questions like this. This is, once again, NDP fearmongering. We have a strong regulatory framework in this province, strong Class I and Class II environmental assessments, and Nova Scotians can be assured that we will continue to protect the environment and build up the economy of Nova Scotia.

LISA LACHANCE: Nova Scotians want to be part of the conversation about the future of this province, its economy, and its environment. Their concerns are not special interests. They want to hear from scientific researchers, industry analysts, and public interest groups about the pros and cons of resource extraction and how to do it safely.

These are not special interest groups. Nova Scotians concerned about the impact on our traditional industries, like fishing and forestry, are also not special interests. Will the minister admit that greater consultation and information-sharing with Nova Scotians is needed? Who will the minister listen to?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: The evidence of who we listen to is here in this Chamber: 43 PC MLAs to talk over the heads of the special interests, who talk over the heads of the NDP, to the people of Nova Scotia. We are a party - we are a government, that builds up Nova Scotia. That is a party that cuts down Nova Scotia. When they were in power, they cut \$65 million in education. They raised taxes. They cut a vital economic link, the Yarmouth ferry, and they cut the protected areas of Clare, Argyle, and Preston. We build up Nova Scotia. That party cuts down Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DHW: WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE - INVEST

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Wow, I hope I can cut through the fearmongering here. There are over 100,000 Nova Scotians on the Need a Family Practice wait-list. That's a fact, but we're short on details. It's unclear how and where attachment is happening and how much of today's budget will be dedicated to getting Nova Scotians attached to primary care. When will all Nova Scotians be attached to ongoing primary care?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: It's certainly a real privilege for me to be back in this chair, having seen the efforts of the last three and a half years come to fruition - all of the work, all of the investment. Over 60,000 people have been attached in the last six months through the efforts, by looking at competitive negotiations with all of our health care workers, by increasing the number of seats through the PACE program that just started to bring internationally educated medical students and graduates to this province to care for Nova Scotians. We are expanding scope of practice. All of these things have come together and worked so that across this province, more and more people are being attached every single month.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: So we don't know when all Nova Scotians will be attached to primary care, and this budget is letting down hundreds of thousands of women and gender-diverse people. There is a lack of clarity on when or if the Menopause Centre for Excellence will be delivered. There is no money for improved diagnostic testing like breast screening and HPV tests. And we've been sitting on federal money available to make birth control free. It isn't free. It isn't in the budget. Why is this government not investing in women's health care?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, that is not an accurate representation of what's happening in this province. I will be happy to tell everybody about all of the investments in Estimates and I'm estimating that I'll be up for quite some time, because I have a fair amount to talk about.

I do want to assure people that we have invested in women's health. We will have a Menopause Centre of Excellence in this province. We have invested in women's care through cystoscopy and in the IWK, we looked at ways in which we can support women's health across this province. We understand that women expect excellent care and we are happy to be the government that will deliver it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DPW: CHEBUCTO ISTHMUS - PROTECT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is for the Minister of Public Works. The Budget was tabled today, and nowhere in the Budget can we find any money allocated to repair and protect the Chignecto Isthmus. The rising tides of the Bay of Fundy

pose risks to the Trans-Canada Highway, road infrastructure, telecommunications infrastructure, as well as utility infrastructure. We are one storm away from destruction to this Atlantic trade corridor, which is included in my constituency of Cumberland North.

I have a quote here from the Minister of Public Works when he was in Opposition, asking the minister at the time when they will have a legitimate plan to protect the Chignecto Isthmus. My question to the new Minister of Public Works is: When will we have a plan to protect the isthmus?

HON. FRED TILLEY: We recognize the importance of the Chignecto Isthmus. There's no question about that. But we also recognize the fact that the federal government needs to step up and do their part and own up to their responsibilities. In the meantime, we're getting the work done. We're preparing, we're working with our partners and the Isthmus will be repaired.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: A \$2 million berm hardly protects the Chignecto Isthmus from the rising tides due to climate change in the Bay of Fundy. It was not tendered, and it was nowhere included in the recommendations done by the engineering study of how to protect the Chignecto Isthmus. I'm not sure where the idea of the berm even came from, other than a pre-election promise.

Over \$30 billion goes through the Atlantic trade corridor every year. How can this government table a budget today that includes zero dollars to protect this important infrastructure? There is unknown risk to the Trump factor, but this is a known risk to all Nova Scotians. How can the minister justify no spending...

FRED TILLEY: There's absolutely money in the budget for looking at the Chignecto Isthmus. As a matter of fact, it's interesting: We want work done there, yet we don't want work done there. There is work being done. The environmental assessment base collection is being done. We're building this berm to protect the town of Amherst, should something happen in the meantime, but it's clear that the federal government needs to step up and own up to their responsibilities and help fix the Chignecto Isthmus.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

DMA: RESOURCE EXTRACTION PLAN - PROVIDE

SUZY HANSEN: I need to set the record straight. I was elected by Halifax Needham, my constituency, by a large margin, and my seat is valued. What I say is always going to be my voice here in this House.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs recently sent a letter to the mayors and wardens across the province asking for support for unnamed projects, merely three paragraphs long. It mentioned resource extraction but offered no indication of a plan or consultation. It did

say, though, that Nova Scotia has to say yes - must say yes. Can the minister tell us where one can find this resource plan that he is asking people to support?

HON. JOHN LOHR: One of the things I will say about our municipal partners is we recognize how important they are, how important their voices are, and we want to hear from them in our plan going forward. We recognize that they represent large parts of rural Nova Scotia. Many of our wardens and mayors are very important to us. We do want their support for resource development.

As I was talking to many of them, there were comments like, We can't afford more taxes. We have a high degree of poverty. The people recognize that our province needs to go forward. I'd like to thank those municipal leaders who are supporting us.

[3:15 p.m.]

SUZY HANSEN: A private woodlot owner in Yarmouth County refused access to an Australian company that wanted to conduct lithium exploration. Completely ignoring the wishes of the landowner, the Minister of Natural Resources used his power to grant surface access. Is the Minister of Municipal Affairs planning to do the same if municipalities say no to resource extraction? I mean, their voices are really important. What is he going to say then?

JOHN LOHR: Our province needs to go forward. We can see the effect of poverty on rural Nova Scotia. We can see communities where people have to go to western Canada for jobs. We have to go forward as a province. We will do all that we can to see that our province goes forward, that we do the resource extraction as other provinces do, like Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, places where people go to work from Nova Scotia to this very day.

We know that we need to go forward as a province. We will do our best to make that happen.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GAD: BUSINESSES STRUGGLING - ACT

KRISTA GALLAGHER: My question is for the Minister of Growth and Development. Businesses are feeling the pressure of slow economic growth and rising inflation. Here in Nova Scotia, businesses are filing for insolvency at an alarming rate of 43 per cent. I'll table that. This is significantly higher than the national increase of 28 per cent. My question is: Why has the government not taken greater action to help our local businesses stay open?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: One of the sentiments that was expressed by members from the Chamber of Commerce when the Premier and myself met with them last month was uncertainty. We recognize as a government that our business community across Nova Scotia has gone through a big period of uncertainty coming out of the pandemic and certainly with the threat of tariffs. I want Nova Scotian businesses to be reassured that as a government we are there listening. We're taking action. There are a number of programs that we continue to support and invest in.

I would remind the honourable member to have a look at today's budget, where we're taking a big tax cut for small businesses in this province.

KRISTA GALLAGHER: This government's narrow tax relief in small businesses is overdue and not enough. A survey conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that 78 per cent of respondents were either not very confident or not confident at all that the government has the backs of small business owners. I'll table that. Local businesses are facing increased pressures with threat of U.S. tariffs looming, and it's time for this government to step up. Will the government do the right thing and commit to an economic task force with representatives from labour, industry, and political leaders to collaborate on a path forward for Nova Scotian . . .

COLTON LEBLANC: Now more than ever do we need to be Nova Scotia Loyal, Speaker. It's time to be Nova Scotia Loyal. I was going to say on this side, but on this side here, we are Nova Scotia Loyal. We're on Team Nova Scotia. Perhaps Team NDP can join Team Nova Scotia. We're doubling down our commitment on Nova Scotia Loyal. We're supporting the growers, the harvesters, the manufacturers, and the producers who support our communities and support our economy. I encourage the NDP to do the same.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

EECD: SCHOOL VIOLENCE - PREVENT

PAUL WOZNEY: Speaker, a recent report prepared by the Nova Scotia School Board Council of Unions found that 65 per cent of school support staff witnessed or experienced violence in schools on a weekly basis. The experience of teaching assistants is even more stark: 52 per cent of teacher assistants reported experiencing violent incidents on a daily basis. Does the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development believe that violence is simply part of the job for school support staff?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Absolutely not. Any incident of violence in our schools is one incident too many. I have three children in school, so it's not just as a Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development but also as a father. I also want to say to the EAs and all the support staff that you have a government that's listening, that you have a government that's here to support you, and we're going to continue to work with them, their membership, and the schools to curb violence.

PAUL WOZNEY: Nova Scotians know the rates of school violence that school support staff are experiencing are deplorable and unacceptable. What's worse is that 50 per cent of them said that when they reported violent incidents, they received no response at all from their employer. As one school support worker put it, "Nothing is ever done to help us. Reports are filled out, yet nothing changes."

Will the minister confirm that the code of conduct currently under development will fully implement the recommendations made by the Auditor General in their report on school violence to increase accountability?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Let me tell our support staff that something is finally being done. The code of conduct has had the input of the NSTU, PSANS, CSAP, Regional Centres for Education, teachers, students, and department staff. Not only is it important to me, but it's also important to all Nova Scotians. I have told the department to expedite the timelines, and we'll have it out this March.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

DFA: TRADE EFFORTS - OUTLINE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, the comprehensive economic and trade agreement between Canada and the European Union reduced tariffs on seafood. I notice this second-term government proudly proclaimed that, earlier this month, the government sent representatives to Europe to find new markets. That was mentioned again today. We didn't hear about trade efforts to Europe, let alone anything about the economy, in their first term. They just reported today in their Budget that EU exports grew by just 1.9 per cent last year.

I want to give the Minister of Growth and Development an opportunity to outline the efforts made before this trade mission just last month - or are they actually only looking to Europe in a serious way now for the first time?

HON. KENT SMITH: Export development and trade missions are not new. They're not in response to Trump tariffs. Each year, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture sends delegations around the world. The member opposite would be aware of that from former missions that his government made to China, which led to increased markets in China.

We're going to look at markets to diversify where our seafood goes. We are reliant on the U.S., but it's not necessarily going to the U.S. Some of it's going through the U.S., so if we can find out where it's going, we will market there and target there as well.

IAIN RANKIN: The ONE Nova Scotia goal of \$2.1 million in exports for agriculture and fisheries was met back in 2018 and is now over \$3 billion. Now that the government has finally looked to Europe to grow exports and they have a new \$200,000

investment to look at those markets, I want to ask either minister: What are the new targets - now that we have exceeded the last one - for export gains in the next, say, five to 10 years, outside of the United States, to Europe and other countries?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: We certainly know that we are rich in resources, and, of course, rich in people. People take pride in the products that they harvest, grow, and export out of this province. That's why announcements like today from WestJet, opening new doors overseas to European destinations - whether it be direct to Paris, Edinburgh, Dublin, London Gatwick, and now Amsterdam - we can have an opportunity to export our products, and also look at tourism as being an export. We're bringing in dollars that would not necessarily be in our province, so everything's on the table right now.

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

OSD: HOMELESSNESS PREV. STRATEGY - UPDATE

LINA HAMID: My question is for the Minister of Opportunities and Social Development. This government's housing plan commits to developing a homelessness prevention strategy. However, a recent FOIPOP found no records within the department about the development of such a strategy. Can the minister provide an update on when the strategy will be developed, released and implemented?

HON. SCOTT ARMSTRONG: I want to thank the member adjacent for her question and congratulate her on her recent election to the Nova Scotia Legislature.

Under the incredible leadership of previous ministers in our department - the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Minister of Energy, and former Speaker Karla MacFarlane - we have increased funding for homelessness in Nova Scotia by 1,300 per cent over the previous government. This is a worldwide challenge. Nova Scotia has shown it is up to this challenge. We're going to work hard and make sure all people in Nova Scotia have a safe place to live.

LINA HAMID: This is an issue that needs urgent action. There are over 1,000 individuals on the By Name List in Halifax and many others unaccounted for across the province. The number of individuals who are homeless in this province will remain high until there is decisive action from this government. My question is to the minister: Is there funding specifically for a homelessness strategy to help the 1,000-plus folks gain access to safe homes?

SCOTT ARMSTRONG: I want to thank the member from the downtown, high-tax NDP for their question. (Laughter) We've created 700 new units for homeless people in Nova Scotia. (Applause) We've increased funding every year we've been in power. We have transitional housing where we can find wraparound services for people who are homeless. We have supportive housing. As we transition people through this continuum,

we are actually giving them a safe place to live. We're reaching out to them and connecting them to employment. We're getting the job done. We invite the Opposition to get on board and support our efforts to make Nova Scotia a safe place and give a safe home for those who are homeless.

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

EARI: 2SLGBTQIA+ ACTION PLAN - IMPLEMENT

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister responsible for the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives. Earlier this month, Venus Envy and Glitter Bean Cafe, two Halifax businesses that are welcoming spaces for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, were graffitied with anti-trans sentiment. I'll table that. The businesses and their supporters have expressed concern that some in the province are feeling emboldened to publicly display their hatred. Can the minister stand and tell us when the much-needed 2SLGBTQIA+ action plan will be delivered?

[3:30 p.m.]

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Incidents of hate like this expressed against any members of the Nova Scotian community - expressed against our 2SLGBTQIA+ community - are completely unacceptable. Our government stands against those actions. In solidarity with those businesses . . .

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

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise on what I think is a point of order, but would definitely welcome direction in that regard.

In the recent response from the Minister of Opportunities and Social Development, I think there were a few terms that were put in there around downtown and high tax. Anyway, I don't even know what it said.

What is non-parliamentary is determined in the reaction that it creates. (Interruption) I'll wait for the Speaker's ruling on this. It's not about the actual words. Any word can become unparliamentary if it incites a reaction on the floor of the House.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I didn't register it as bringing the House under disorder. You can tell when the House is in disorder: There's yelling and screaming and loud noises. I didn't register it as that. If I look back through it, it says "downtown high-tax." I'm sorry, but no. (Interruption) You have the ruling. I said "no."

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Advanced Education.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: During Question Period, when the Minister of Opportunities and Growth was answering a question, the member for Halifax Chebucto actually mouthed the F-word. We could all clearly see that, Speaker. We ask that that member stand in her place and retract that. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order. Order. Unless the member feels like they have something to retract, I'm going to dismiss this, as I did not see it. Unfortunately, there would be no way of telling if that happened, because the camera was on the minister.

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Let me be clear on my point of order. During Question Period today, while the Minister of Growth and Development was answering a supplementary question for the member for Halifax Chebucto, she could be clearly seen in the background rolling her eyes and using profanity. The F-word is clearly not parliamentary.

I know this may be her first time here in experiencing Question Period and she may be unfamiliar with the rules. I request that the member for Halifax Chebucto retract the word and apologize to the House or that the Speaker review the footage.

THE SPEAKER: I am going to take this under advisement. I am going to review the footage. You would be correct that she would be on camera because it was the Minister of Growth and Development in front of her, so we will review that. If we find that she has done that, we will - unless she wants to retract now. Unless the member would like to retract something.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

KRISTA GALLAGHER: I will retract.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you so much. Thank you for your retraction. I expect you not to do it again. The next time it will be a little more than a retraction.

The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

PAUL WOZNEY: A question for clarification: When raising unparliamentary language, my understanding is that you get to make your case once. Are we now in the habit of allowing people to make supplementary applications for unparliamentary behaviour? Is that a change to process in the House that we should all be aware of?

THE SPEAKER: To the honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid, it is important that I get all of the information. The fact is that the first time the honourable member stood up, it was not stated that it was on camera, which gave me more evidence. Thank you for your question. I move on.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, would you please call the order of business Government Motions.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, would you please call Address in Reply.

ADDRESS IN REPLY

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I am honoured to rise and finish my reply to last day's Throne Speech. Early in the speech, we were told that only when we stand with and for one another can we push back the forces that hold us back. That was reiterated today when we heard about - well, what J.D. Vance would call "the enemy from within." This is true; we can only stand with and for one another when we push back the forces that try to hold us back, and it is clear right now that those forces are coming from south of the border. What are we going to do?

Well, together, we need to strengthen and support our local economy in the face of these potential tariffs. We need to support local businesses and workers, and we also need to create a place where people can afford a place to live and access primary care.

We know that housing is the largest driver of the affordability crisis that many Nova Scotians are facing, and yet we heard almost nothing about housing in the Throne Speech. In fact, I think the only place in the Throne Speech that housing is mentioned is in one sentence that couples building housing and building pipelines, which is so strange because we won't see a pipeline built in Nova Scotia, but we must see housing built in Nova Scotia.

Incredibly, prices are out of reach for so many still four years into an apparent effort to work on it. Home ownership - and I know that we've all heard this in our ridings - is a dream that families are literally giving up on. If I talk to the people I know - young professionals - if they don't have family help, frankly, or independent wealth of some kind, they are not looking toward a future where they will own a home, and that is a failure. In

the face of that, in the face of a moment when rents are skyrocketing, and housing is totally unaffordable, we no longer have a Department of Housing.

I want to say this again because it bears repeating and, in fact, when it first happened, the new Department of Growth and Development didn't even list "housing" as part of its mandate. We have no Department of Housing for the first time in history that I can find. This is unfathomable to me and to thousands of Nova Scotians who are struggling to find and keep housing that they can afford. Perhaps the Premier doesn't think that housing is an issue anymore, but I'm certain that the 66 per cent of Nova Scotians who experienced challenges with housing in the last year would disagree.

The housing portfolio, as I mentioned, is now under the Department of Growth and Development. As we've already discussed, growth and development will be crucial to our province's economic future. Housing is certainly a part of that puzzle, but housing needs its own department, and it needs its own minister, and I think what the government is doing here is saying the quiet part out loud.

When this government thinks of housing, they think about it in terms of development, or maybe developers, or they think of it as growth. We think of housing as a home, and we know that it remains incredibly challenging for people across this province to find a home that they can afford.

In my own constituency, in one example of dozens of cases we've had just in the last several months, a man came to us. He was renting a room from a friend. He was on social assistance - or maybe it's called the "opportunity cheque" now; I don't know what it's called - but we would call it social assistance in the past, and so he didn't have very much money. His roommate died, and the next day, his landlord changed the locks, and there wasn't really anything he could do because he wasn't a tenant, because he couldn't be a tenant, because he can't afford a place to live.

So he came to our office, and within two solid weeks of work of my constituency assistant and my incredible staff and dozens of phone calls and lots of engagement with frontline agencies, we were able to secure a promise of something in a few weeks. Meanwhile, he's in a shelter.

This should not be happening. We need housing. We need housing for people like this gentleman, but we also need housing for the hundreds and thousands of young professionals in our province who want to make a life here but can't afford to. They can't find a house they can afford.

There's almost nothing in this budget about this, and this affects our health. It affects our mental health. It affects education and children's ability to learn. It affects recreation, as we've heard. It leads to poor physical and mental health outcomes. And it remains the largest barrier for women fleeing from the epidemic of domestic violence.

[3:45 p.m.]

We've seen an increase in rent supplements, and there is a supplement program that's in the budget. It's not enough, because if there is nowhere to live, these rent supplements don't create housing.

What the frontline organizations - whom I want to take a moment to just give all the biggest shout-outs in the world to, and whom I've been speaking with over the past weeks and months and years, but more intensively - what these frontline organizations that work with survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence tell us is that housing is sometimes the difference between life and death. A lack of housing forces survivors to make impossible decisions. They have to decide between being homeless and facing abuse. That's not a decision anyone can make.

We need more housing. We need a Department of Housing. We need to know that in this large government, there is a person whose sole responsibility is figuring out how we solve this housing crisis. Yet we do not have that. We have a gajillion ministerial assistants, we have lots of Cabinet ministers, and yet we could not dedicate one person - one human being in this government - to actually just deal with housing. We have a Minister of Health and Wellness. She works very hard. We have a Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. I can't speak to the Minister of Education's work ethic - he's new in the role. We don't have a Minister of Housing.

I know I'm repeating myself, and I'm doing it on purpose, because it is still shocking. There's a commitment to building public housing in this budget and in the Throne Speech, but it is a fraction of what is required. The last time we checked, there were 7,700 people on the public housing wait-list. A few hundred units is great. We welcome it, and it's not enough - not by a long shot.

The government has had three-and-a-half, almost four, years to deliver meaningful action. There are good programs in the department - well, I don't know where they are. They were in the Department of Housing. Where are they now? Somewhere. If they still exist, some of those programs were good. However, every housing organization that we have talked to, in particular the folks who are building non-market housing - housing that is immune to the price shocks of the ever-escalating prices for both rental and new homes in this province - have told us that, while the names are good and the ideas are good, they are insufficiently funded. There is not enough money in any of these programs to make a meaningful difference.

Further, many of these programs are agnostic about whether they're accessed by non-profit, non-market, for-profit, or market-based developers. At the beginning, there was some rationale for that, because we had such a small non-market housing sector, but that's not the case anymore. Because of the need, we see a growing non-market housing sector from one end of this province to the other. Through the valley, through the North Shore,

through Pictou County, certainly in Cape Breton - we look at folks like New Dawn Enterprises - Southwest Nova Scotia, and here in HRM, we have these organizations right across our province. However, when they apply for many of these programs, they have to go up against developers - the well-funded developers with lots of expertise.

If I had to pick who would best preserve housing at a cost that Nova Scotians can afford, I'm going to pick non-market housing providers every time because it's their mission. They don't exist to make a profit. They exist to provide housing. There's a space for developers who want to make profit from housing. Lord knows we have lots of them, and they're making really good money. You can read it in AllNovaScotia any day of the week. The profits are going up. I think that has been aided in large part by this government, which has given them lots of land and lots of space. That's great. Yet there are so many Nova Scotians who remain in core housing need.

We need a plan to actually give Nova Scotians homes that they can afford, to strengthen tenant protections. We have a new Minister of Service Nova Scotia. Maybe they'll be willing to have a conversation about what protecting tenants means and what balance means when that balance is someone's balance sheet or someone's ability to be housed. That's the balance we're talking about when we talk about protecting tenants. We need a plan to support municipalities to expedite housing developments, including in places that are underutilized and where developers are land banking.

My colleague the member for Halifax Needham asked about this today in Question Period. I want to take this moment to reiterate that the fire that consumed the Bloomfield School is an absolute tragedy. The fact that no one died is a miracle. Not a kilometre away from the Bloomfield school sits St. Patrick's-Alexandra School, which could house thousands - tens of thousands - of people. It is a giant lot, and it is now being used to very unsafely and illegally house people who have no other option. There are lots of ways that the province themselves - or through delegated powers, the municipality - could force developers who are sitting on prime housing sites in the middle of urban areas - it's not just Halifax. There's a way that they could force developers to build or take the land back and use it for a public purpose.

There was some misunderstanding in Question Period. The Bloomfield site was a school, then it was a thriving community hub, then it was purchased for affordable housing by the NDP government, and then it was sold to private developers by the Liberal government. In the middle of all of that, it actually had been recommended by the school board for a school site, and then it was rejected because we were told that it didn't look like the schools we think about in Nova Scotia. There wasn't enough parking. It could have been a vertical school. Cities have schools that have more than three storeys, but we couldn't imagine that at the time. It has been failure and failure and failure of different orders of government to do something useful with this site.

It's not the only one. I'm talking about Bloomfield because I'm familiar with it, but there are so many sites like this. While we open up ecologically sensitive areas to unbridled private development, we miss these service lots in the centre of neighbourhoods - often the centre of traditionally marginalized neighbourhoods, often the centre of neighbourhoods that don't have the infrastructure that they need. We miss the opportunity to build there, and that is an enormously missed opportunity.

This government was very quick to take power away from municipalities to create Special Planning Areas, to expedite private development. Who were the beneficiaries of that? Developers were the beneficiaries of that. Developers have made and are making lots of money building housing that we need in these Special Planning Areas. Will this province consider taking power from those developers when the beneficiaries would be the public and the frontline organizations that serve us by instituting something like a vacant land tax, by forcing these developers to build or to sell it back?

In the upcoming session, we'll introduce practical solutions to help Nova Scotians in these areas, as we have been doing for years. Real rent control, better protections for tenants, more pathways to real home ownership.

We can't afford to wait while Nova Scotians struggle to find a home that they can afford or put up with living in unsafe conditions. Department or not, commitment or not, my colleagues and I will continue to fight to ensure that all Nova Scotians have a place to call home.

Having a place to live is only part of the equation. True well-being comes from having our health. There is no greater duty of government than ensuring its citizens have access to quality, timely health care, but in every community, the stories are the same: emergency room closures, emergency wait times worsening, patients waiting years for a family doctor, and frontline workers stretched beyond their limits.

Speaker, the Houston government was elected in 2021 on a promise to fix health care. We didn't hear much about it in the recent election campaign. While we have seen some welcome improvements in some areas of our health care system - and I'm sure, as the Minister of Health and Wellness alluded to earlier, we're going to hear a lot more about it in Budget Estimates - the root of the health care crisis, which almost all experts will agree, is that the lack of attachment to primary care has yet to be addressed in a meaningful way. This was the platform of the two Opposition parties in the last election. It's more than hiring doctors. It's opening collaborative care centres from one end of the province to the other and prioritizing the work.

We still have over 100,000 Nova Scotians without access to primary care. Many of those Nova Scotians are seniors. Many of those Nova Scotians have chronic diseases. Many of those Nova Scotians are children. For all the improvements that we've seen so far, from pharmacies to Maple, it's not a substitution for being attached to primary care. We just

haven't seen that. We haven't seen a plan for it. We didn't hear about it in the Speech from the Throne. We are concerned, to say the least.

We are even more concerned, and I can't - I have so much to say about this, but I'm going to keep it somewhat limited, because this government has a tendency to hide information that does not suit their political agenda. We don't have a communications department. We have seen a massive overhaul of the rules of the House of Assembly and of the Act today. We got no notice. We had no engagement. We had no forewarning. This is the kind of work that in the past would have been the work of a committee. We would have brought the parties together to talk about those changes to the rules. We would have contemplated what would have made sense. That is not what happened today. That is not what we see here.

We also, of course, saw the elimination of Communications Nova Scotia. We saw first-hand some of the results of that this morning. Our budget documents were late and incomplete. We had all kinds of challenges in the process. I don't know if that's because people were upset when this supposed non-partisan agency sent out a glossy booklet, paid for by taxpayers, touting the government's accomplishments at the beginning of a campaign, or whether they just want to control the message. The reality is that there was a shutdown of this department, and that does send some chill.

The Premier's years-long campaign to give the Information and Privacy Commissioner order-making powers under the Liberal government now seems laughable. I'm shocked at my relative longevity in this House at this point. So many won't remember that this Premier made his reputation on opposing, on calling out the government, on calling for transparency, on calling for good governance, on listening to the Auditor General, on giving order-making powers to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, on filibustering - he taught lessons in it - and yet we're doing away with all of that today.

We're doing away with all of that today because this majority government is not secure enough in their mandate and in their ability to pass any legislation that they want, so they have to change the rules to limit Nova Scotians' ability to understand what's going on, to reply to what's going on - I don't even know if we have a Law Amendments Committee anymore. I don't think so. It doesn't pass the smell test.

I want to go back to health care. Again, precious little about health care in the Speech from the Throne. There were some discussions of accomplishments, but I couldn't help but notice that there was the note of new MRIs.

One of the things that we don't see in enhanced diagnostics is diagnostics for women at risk of breast cancer. This is something that the former MLA for Clayton Park West spent a lot of time advocating for - advanced screening for women who are not able - or cancers cannot be picked up on regular diagnostic equipment. I count myself as one of those. I know many other women in my life who are, as well.

The good news is we probably won't die because of the lack of advanced diagnostics. The bad news is we are more likely to have cancer diagnosed at Stage 4 than at Stage 1. I guess that's okay on a spreadsheet, but it's not really okay in real life. That's only one of the areas of women's health that this government has been silent on. We have not seen a priority.

I am glad to see a commitment to the Menopause Centre of Excellence, but if it's anything like the Endometriosis and Chronic Pelvic Pain Clinic, it will be not enough and not soon enough. There is still an enormous wait-list. There is still a very challenging path for women who have this debilitating disease.

[4:00 p.m.]

Most investments made by this government, especially the big ones, especially the additional appropriations, have been made not using traditional procurement that is designed to get Nova Scotians the best deal. We saw today a \$657,000 deficit projected, something the now Minister of Public Works would be up here railing against had he not made different choices in his life.

The reality is it's true. If it is true that we need to run this level of deficit in order to meet our responsibilities, then it is also true that this government has a responsibility to Nova Scotians to tell them how they're spending the money and for them to be assured that that money is good value.

We have no such assurance. In some cases, we don't even have contracts. The most glaring example of that, which we've talked about here, is Hogan Court. It's great that we have a transitional care facility, but some people got pretty rich in the process. It was done contrary to expert reports and opinions and contrary to the report of the Auditor General.

This is a pattern. We have unsolicited bids going to companies like Google, companies that have access to our data, companies that are American companies that are loyal to the U.S. administration, which is threatening us with a trade war, and have access to our data.

We need to rethink transparency; we need to rethink the degree to which this government actually cuts Nova Scotians in on the conversation. From what we see so far, it's the exact opposite.

Speaker, as the Official Opposition, it is our duty to hold this government accountable. They should welcome this. We will challenge their assumptions, push for meaningful action and ensure that Nova Scotians' voices are heard.

We are committed to fighting for policies that lift our province up and improve people's lives. In doing so, we demand transparency and accountability from those in

power, especially in the face of bolder and more frightening tactics to limit media, control messaging, spend without accountability, and paint everyday Nova Scotians who dare to disagree as the enemy.

This government is flooding the zone and changing the way we do business. I've outlined a number of them, but there's more. I just want to say it's important to note that today, on Budget Day, a day that is normally reserved for the budget, we also have a report on compensation. We also have a wholesale changing of the rules of the House of Assembly. We also had two bill briefings that took place simultaneously to the Budget Speech. This is ridiculous.

We have a bill introduced that's going to let this government fire people that they may want to fire. The reality is that there is no reason for this. The only reason is to give Nova Scotians less ability to understand what the government is doing.

These bills could roll out over days or weeks or months, and yet they come forward all in one day. Government efficiency, changing the rules, exploration, any of the things that the government has brought forward today, would itself deserve a full debate and ability to comprehend.

I can only be left with the conclusion that this government doesn't want Nova Scotians to know what they're doing. This government doesn't want Nova Scotians to understand. They want to ram through their agenda as quickly as they can. They want to lift bans and talk later.

The challenges that we face are great, but make no mistake, so is our resolve. Nova Scotians are resilient, hard working and full of hope. And what they need is a government that will match their determination with action; a government that will listen, learn, lead, and fight for a better future. We resolve to meet these challenges with kindness and compassion.

The time for excuses is over, and the time for real leadership is now. And so, let's work together to build a stronger, fairer, more secure, and more prosperous Nova Scotia, where no one is left behind and where every citizen has the opportunity to thrive.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Liberal Party.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Thanks for the applause, everyone. I'm honoured to be on my feet in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. I'll start by congratulating you, Speaker, on - "you" is not allowed to be used in here, but congratulations to you, Speaker, on being selected Chair and Speaker of the House.

I do want to recognize and congratulate everyone who has been elected. It's Year 10 for me, which is hard to believe. Believe it or not, I used to sit over in that corner; there

were that many Liberals in here when I came in. True story. It's true. There were that many Liberals when I got elected. I got to sit over in the corner. Some people remember that. We were a big caucus.

To see the changes in 10 years, to see the people who have been here, who have moved on from politics, the new faces that came in and some of the faces that we all know and loved and were family with that aren't here anymore, I recognize them as well.

I prepared a speech to talk about some things that are important. There are things in the Speech from the Throne that I find interesting - also, with some of the stuff that we saw today in the Budget. But I do want to recognize this first, because we're in the oldest House.

This past weekend, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Canadian flag. I think that we all, in our own way, celebrated that this weekend - supported our patriotism. I appreciate the work that your office did to promote the flag here at Province House.

Patriotism is a big thing. What's happening south of the border is scary. It's a very scary conversation and it has been. Comments that we all laughed off a few weeks ago - our conversations that the most senior officials across this country have called very serious. We have seen a lot of unrest and uncertainty in communities across this province about their livelihoods.

We've talked about it in the House here. Some of our biggest employers that employ hundreds of people across this province in traditional industries, and some of our larger suppliers have been having some very difficult and scary conversations when it comes to what the future holds, because we're constantly under this threat of tariffs.

We support the government in looking at ways that we can diversify our economy. We support the Team Canada approach. We've been on the record multiple times, and our caucus is there to support to provide any experience in history about resource development, about what we feel are things that can be important to support businesses across our province and however we can support our colleagues abroad. I have a lot of background and a lot of stories around my time on the energy file, and I know my colleague does as a former premier and minister of multiple departments when it came to our forestry and policy around the environment.

It's important for us, and I think that we need to take an all-party approach to this thing. We've asked to include all parties in that process. I think it's important that we have an all-party committee that looks at this with stakeholders across not only our province but taking an Atlantic Canadian approach around various facets of the economy. Whether it's export, whether it's energy, whether it's our ability to collaborate together, there is lots of opportunity as the four provinces here in the Atlantic region to support one another.

We get into Question Period, it gets pretty heated, and people ask questions, and the government will come back, and they'll respond to our questions. No different than when they were in Opposition, and there's lots of history. We can sit here and have a history lesson for hours I could give to the new members about the filibustering of the Premier for hours at Law Amendments Committee, the only person I've ever seen filibuster for four hours straight.

Now we're not going to be able to do that anymore, but hey, the government's using their supermajority, which is unfortunate in a lot of ways. There was a lot of history around resource development, too, which is going to come out about some of the decisions that the government made that I think have blocked a lot of developments all over the province - yes, this government. I know a few examples off the top of my head that will be very interesting when people start finding that out. So there's going to be a lot of discussion around resource development.

What I would argue is that this idea of the special interest groups - I'm trying to define who they are. I was involved with a number of developments over the years when it came to gold mining, when it came to looking at specific land across the province, when it came to resource development. We did bids in the offshore. We used an analysis that we really did for nothing and gave to the industry to go out and see if we could get bids for parcels in the offshore, so a lot of this work's been done over the years.

I give a lot of credit to the staff. I know many of them are still in those departments, whether it's the Department of Energy and Mines or the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. A lot of good work is done by those people every day to promote Nova Scotia's offshore, or onshore for that matter. I look back at the history of going down to Texas at the time to promote offshore oil and gas development here. We had the Sable Offshore Energy Project. It was very successful: Over \$4 billion in revenue generated to the province that went into roads, that went into schools. It also went into many scholarships for students who became engineers in the sector, so we've seen it done well.

We have the capacity, we have the talent, we have the ability, and we have a lot of history around the idea of developing our resources. We see successful mining across the province. We've seen it in Little Narrows. We've seen it with some of our gold mining. We've seen it in the more traditional mining sector, and we know that there is potential out there for critical resource development, which we're going to have suggestions as a caucus moving forward about how I think you can actually do that in a way that is sustainable and more attractive to private investment. Ultimately, a lot of this stuff is driven by private investment. It's not driven by policies of government per se.

We've put a lot of policy in place. We've heard multiple times in the media that prospectors have said it's actually not government regulation that's in the way, it's just the value of a commodity at the time. You look at the peaks and valleys of natural gas, the peaks and valleys of oil, the peaks and valleys of critical minerals. I think the government

is going to be much better served if they actually engage with the communities that they're developing in.

I can give you a whole pile of examples around municipalities. A letter went out to the municipalities about supporting the resource cause, but the real question becomes: Some of these developments are on municipal-owned land, so what is the provincial government going to make these municipalities do? You send out a letter and say, "Rah-rah, join the cause," but they've got land-use issues. They've got land they have to decide whether they're going to sell or lease to these potential developments. I can tell you the communities have no idea. If you don't engage them first, it becomes very combative very quickly. I've seen this over and over again.

[4:15 p.m.]

We saw this when the Premier was asked the question by the media: Would he drill in Georges Bank? It's an immediate "no." That is a prime, lucrative fishing territory and has been for years. For the Premier to automatically say, "We're going to drill in Georges Bank, everything is on the table," I'm sitting there going, "Who's doing the homework on this stuff?" I'm sitting there going, That is the most lucrative - we've advocated for years to keep that moratorium, and the fishers in those communities did. It was just immediate, because it was more about the message of, We're going to get into resource development, we're going to drill, and we're going to dig, and we're going to do all those things, which are all important. But you've got to do it right.

You have to do it right, because right now, I can tell you, across this province, since this conversation has happened - sure, people may be excited in industry, and that's fine, that's great. Like I said, we're going to bring forward some suggestions that we think can actually help this, that will help developers actually make investments in the province. Obviously, that's up to the government to listen to, but I have hope, because they listened to many things that the Opposition have brought forward in the past.

Actually, some that they haven't - I'll say this on the topic of mineral resources. I was very happy to see the \$10-a-day child care in the Throne Speech. For the new members, the government rallied against that program for three and a half years. They called it a terrible deal, it wasn't the right deal, they signed a bad deal. Daycare fees are going to \$10 a day next year, and it made the Throne Speech. I would encourage everyone to go back and check - you were probably all watching when we were having the debate.

The point is that the government is going to be better served if they just take the time to have the conversations with the municipalities, to have the conversations with the Mi'kmaq, to have the conversations with stakeholders, who are not special interest groups. These are people who love their communities. They're stewards of the land. Right? They are. They've spent their time studying endangered species. They've spent their time looking at the most ecologically sensitive areas of the province. I've met with these people.

They're good people. They're not blocking any development. Nobody has come to me and said, Stop this development for A, B, and C.

You have to be sensitive to the fact that you are going into a community. Development is important. We've seen this successful and social licence is part of it. It has to be part of the conversation.

I won't go too much further down the resource development piece, but I'll say that, ultimately, you need a Team Nova Scotia approach to this. It can't just be through a policy of removing moratoriums or removing bans on certain minerals. Those conversations are important conversations to have. That's part of what the government is trying to do, but the messaging that the government is putting out about these special interest groups, about the fact that there is this divide and we need to stop the opposition and the naysayers and I'm trying to find out who they are . . .

Don't build the narrative, just have the conversation. If you are going to make legislative decisions, make legislative decisions. If you are going to do some work around critical mineral development, do the work and present that to businesses and present that to the community. That's what we did in the offshore. That's why Georges Bank was never, ever on our radar to be somewhere that we would explore for oil and gas because we knew how important it was to the fishers and the fishing community.

I would encourage the government to do some more research before they get out there and they start talking about some of this stuff without understanding. There is actually a lot of history around it and there is actually a lot of support around some of this development. Stop looking for an enemy - there are lots of people who want to help.

I talked a lot about resource development and for us the big focus is the economy. The economy is going to be the driver of all the services and programs that we ultimately provide to Nova Scotians. We are seeing a Budget being tabled right now with a significant deficit. It is significant and probably one of the largest I've seen in my lifetime when it comes to the money that the government wants to spend on programs and services.

In an economy where the population is going to decline, in a federal government landscape where they're in substantial deficit, and where this province says one of three dollars they spend is based on federal transfers, what is going to happen if they decline? We already know the population - there have been some restrictions around immigration and so you are going to see some changes in that. You are ultimately going to see some changes in revenue and you are seeing the operating costs of the province skyrocket.

This is something that is interesting, because the reference was made today that there are 43 seats and two Liberals, but ultimately the government - a big part of their message during the campaign was the mismanagement of the federal Liberal government. It was a big part of the narrative. Probably the biggest part of the narrative - and people can

agree or disagree, and I think that's why there are 43 members of the Progressive Conservative Party here today.

Obviously, I was . . . (interruption). Okay. I thought you were going to cut me off. You might yet. I think I'm being very nice, Speaker. I am. It's certainly Day 1 of how many years, but I just think that the government tabled a Budget today that is alarming, the size of the deficit.

Now understanding that I still don't know completely what the tariff situation is going to look like in the United States, it is something that for us - I talk about the deficit. We also talk about every economic indicator in this province is not great by far. The lowest GDP in the country and in the United States - the worst. There is a big focus on the economy now. There was zero focus on the economy for the last three and a half years. There is now a focus on Europe when it comes to fish - the first time I've heard that in three and a half years, that we are going to Europe to help with fishing.

I hope that stakeholders are going with the government. I hope that they are going out promoting their product and their service and I hope that you always want our folks in traditional industries to be successful, regardless of whether they are travelling with government or not. We need to diversify who we are as an economy, but as I said, the indicators are such that they can't be ignored anymore. I don't see where the government - they are talking about, We have this economic plan, we have this strategy, but I haven't seen it yet. And we want to help with the solution. I think we can actually provide a lot of insight to the government about what we think and our experience and our history.

Ultimately, it comes down to division. We saw a somewhat divisive day on the first day of Question Period. Question Period gets pretty heated and stuff, but this messaging - and I don't think it represents the PC caucus in this room when I hear - I know many of them. I've never heard them use the words "special interest" or "opposition."

These are people who were elected by their communities to hold seats in the Legislature. I hear some of my - I won't call anybody out; I'm not saying that to be negative - but when I hear in speeches this term being used, "special interest," giving the Budget Address, I just find it funny, because I've never heard that from that member in 10 years of being here.

They're trying to build the narrative that I don't think you need to build. You don't need to build this narrative and be negative about special interests and certain individuals or certain groups across the province. You haven't talked about economic development for three and a half years, now all of a sudden you're going to start talking about it. So why don't you talk to everybody about it? Right?

We all want to help. We're all in this. We've talked about this every - all caucuses in this place and all members in this place have talked about a Team Nova Scotia and a

Team Canada approach. Nobody is coming at the government saying, We don't want to help. We're asking questions around, What's the plan? No different than they did when we were in government during the pandemic, during COVID-19, during some major issues around weather.

Nobody's coming out and saying, You're completely wrong and don't do anything. We're saying, Here's what we think you can do. You should give Nova Scotians more of an idea of what's happening. And we're here to provide any support that we can.

So, I think for me, well, as I said, the economy is going to be our focus during the sitting for a whole number of reasons, because the economy will support health care. The economy will support housing. The economy will support the programs and services that Nova Scotians use every day.

And if that is not strong, especially now, especially now after the government - and they've actually recognized it in comments, Speaker - they've recognized it in a lot of their comments that the federal transfers may change, and we can't depend on them anymore. That's been said. They've changed their tone around many things.

In the first term, record transfers have come from the federal government to this government to spend - the same government they rallied against in the last provincial election, regardless of who's at the helm, because this party, I don't think, supports Trudeau or Poilievre. You can't find any communication with the federal Conservatives and the provincial Progressive Conservatives. They distance themselves even in the campaign.

The government that they rallied against so much in the last provincial election was the same government that gave them the largest amount of federal transfers in the history of this province. That's the same government. When it was to fight the carbon tax, they were still getting the record-setting federal transfer dollars.

They're starting to recognize that those dollars may dry up - not completely. But you may see a change in that, and as the minister said in his speech today, the day will come where any government would not want to receive equalization payments. But we're not there yet.

The economy is everything, in the sense that it's going to support health care, which we know is a constant journey for many Nova Scotians. I stand here, as I said, with the Liberal caucus, proud of many of the projects that you see across the province. Whether it's the health care redevelopment, whether it's the cancer centre at home, whether it's the redevelopment in New Waterford, in Glace Bay: I always use Cape Breton as an example. We were proud to bring that forward as a Liberal government. We were proud of our fiscal responsibility as a Liberal government. But also being able to provide many great programs across this province, whether it was pre-Primary or a universal practice program. The list goes on and on.

We're at a pivotal point in this province where the threat of tariffs is real. We all want to help. We have a government now that is going to be working with less revenue. We're seeing the operating costs of this province drastically go up. We're seeing a projected debt in the twenties of billions of dollars now for a population of just over 1 million, so the economy is really going to be key.

With that, I'm going to thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to say a few words in reply. I'm sure that there's going to be lots to discuss moving forward. I would strongly encourage the government to stop the divisiveness. It's not necessary. It's not going to get you any further in the economy. If you're going to be picking fights, if you're going to be labelling people as special interest and people who are against the cause - it's not necessary. I don't understand why you would even want to build that narrative when you want everybody to be part of the process to help support the government, to try to help grow the economy, and give our traditional industries support, which we all want to do regardless of political stripe.

[4:30 p.m.]

Look at our non-traditional industries. We can harness our wind. We can help support the growth of our green economy. We all want to do that as a collective. Mineral resource development - there's lots of experience in the room about engaging communities.

I strongly encourage the government to stop the narrative around enemies. There are no enemies. I don't know who the enemies are. There are advocates. That's fine. Welcome to democracy - well, we're kind of seeing that shift today in here. They're not enemies; they're advocates. They're not people who are blocking projects. They're stewards of the land. They're people who know the land. They know the land. It's not about blocking a project. It's not at all. These people know. They're Nova Scotians. They're people who live in our communities and raise their families in our communities every day.

Let's all be part of it, and let's stop this narrative. I can tell you from experience, it's not going to get the government anywhere.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I forgot, in my closing, that I move to adjourn debate.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Address in Reply.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, would you please call the order of business Government Notices of Motion.

[GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 1.

Res. 1, Deputy Speakers/Chairs of Committees: MLAs for Glace Bay-Dominion, Pictou West & Colchester North - Appt., Hon. K. Masland - notice given December 10, 2024.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, I move that the resolution do carry.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm happy to speak on this resolution for a brief time. We in the NDP caucus do not support this resolution. It is not because we think the people named in it are bad choices to be deputy speakers but rather because we believe that in a fair and even democracy - and might I point out at this point that most parliamentary houses exhibit the deputy speakers in a way that I am about to speak to. We believe that in order to maintain the unbiased nature of the Speaker of the House of Assembly, we need to make sure that there is representation from all parties - or all official parties - represented in the Legislature.

In this case, the resolution speaks to all three deputy speakers being named from the government party. There is a tradition in this House that was briefly breached, but then came back around, thanks to the member for Timberlea-Prospect when he was the Premier of the Province. There is a tradition that the deputy speakers are representative of all the parties in the House. When the member for Timberlea-Prospect became the Premier, he went back to that tradition. We saw representation from all three parties, even when it was the Liberals who were in power.

When the PC government was elected in 2021, they followed suit because again, it is tradition. At that time, it seemed that the government did believe in fairness and democracy and making sure that the Speaker's role was untainted by partisan politics. Now we see we're going backwards from that time.

We see that now, along with all of the other affronts to democracy that we've witnessed today - or that we've seen have been suggested and tabled today - we will now have you, in your esteemed position as Speaker of the House, have deputies who are all from the government caucus. It doesn't seem like that ensures an unbiased nature of the esteemed position of the Speaker of the House, so we will vote against it.

I will also say that in making this change, we are losing some significant diversity in the deputy speaker's role. You may remember that my colleague, the MLA for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, was the first gender non-conforming deputy speaker to be elected in Canada. This is a big thing. Also, the former MLA for Preston, Angela Simmonds, was the first person of African descent to be in a deputy speaker role.

These were milestones and extremely important decisions made for these two folks to be placed in the deputy speaker chair. Now we see with the choices that are coming forward a real lack of diversity. Again, we are going backwards in a way. I think that's important to note and important to vote against.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: As the member mentioned, I think this is another sign that the spirit of collaboration is effectively gone in the Legislature, which is kind of a sad day for democracy.

Following some of the rules that we're going to be debating at some point when the government brings forward future motions, but certainly taking away one of the few roles that Opposition has filled in the past historically. Actually, the member who just spoke filled in as the deputy speaker. I thought that was appropriate and we didn't have anything to be worried about or anything to hide.

I wasn't a Premier who was known to direct Speakers on their rulings - at least I would say at minimum suggest what rulings should be made. We heard it today, and we heard it in past sessions. I think this is just one other indication that this is a government that rules by decree - no mandate letters, taking away the independence of the Auditor General, will be taking away the Law Amendments Committee as we know it, access to media. Now the Premier won't even scrum in the Legislature anymore. The list goes on and we're only on Day 2. Fasten your seatbelts: I think this is just the beginning of the end of a true, responsible democracy in this province.

With those words, I'll be voting against this motion.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the honourable Government House Leader, it will be to close the debate.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I thank the members for their kind words. I would like to close debate on Resolution No. 1.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that Resolution No. 1 do now pass.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Glad to be back. That concludes Government Business for the day. I ask that the House do rise to meet again on Wednesday, February 18th from 1:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Tomorrow is Opposition Day, so I will turn it over to my honourable colleague. Before I do that, I'd advise that Government Business will be Resolution No. 4 and the Cheticamp bill as time permits.

LISA LACHANCE: For Opposition Day tomorrow, we plan to call Bill No. 2, as well as Resolution No. 8, which was tabled by the member for Halifax Armdale today, and Resolution No. 10, which was tabled by the member for Sackville-Cobequid.

THE SPEAKER: Just a quick reminder that you have to have two days' notice for resolutions. Do you have any bills to call?

LISA LACHANCE: Thank you, Speaker, for the clarification. Just to confirm, we will call Bill No. 2 and other bills as time permits.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do rise to meet again February 19th between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

We stand adjourned until February 19th.

[The House adjourned at 4:43 p.m.]