

**DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS****Speaker: Honourable Danielle Barkhouse**

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

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

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**First Session****WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2025**

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**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2025**

**Sixty-fifth General Assembly**

**First Session**

**1:00 P.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Danielle Barkhouse

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

John White, Marco MacLeod, Tom Taggart

THE SPEAKER: Order. We will begin the daily routine.

**PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

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

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: I rise on a point of order. During their reply to the Budget Address, the NDP House Leader referred to the independent country Ukraine as “the Ukraine,” a title they had used before in this House.

For clarity, they said that together we have faced a COVID pandemic, supply chain challenges and inflation, conflict in the Ukraine, Gaza, and elsewhere, and now political and economic instability with the U.S.

That member and all members know that the term “the Ukraine” is used to diminish the autonomy of that country. It also diminishes the importance of the lives lost in the fight for Ukraine’s independence from Russia.

THE SPEAKER: Order. This is not a point of order unless you can identify the rule that she is breaking.

BARBARA ADAMS: Thank you, Speaker.

**PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

**GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

**RESOLUTION NO. 11**

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

Whereas uranium exploration has been banned in Nova Scotia since the NDP government passed the Uranium Exploration and Mining Prohibition Act in 2009, but this government has committed to safe, responsible uranium exploration in the province; and

Whereas completely undoing the NDP mess is a multiple-step process, this government is committed to ensuring completion of the additional required steps within 24 hours of the ban being lifted; and

Whereas media reports this morning suggest the process could take a number of years and cause confusion within the public;

Therefore be it resolved there should be no confusion. Nova Scotia is open for business and committed to unlocking our potential through safe and responsible resource development to overcome the lazy public policy of former governments.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? I hear several Noes.

The notice of motion is tabled.

## **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 11 - An Act Respecting Administrative Efficiency and Accountability in Healthcare. (Hon. Michelle Thompson)**

**Bill No. 12 - An Act Respecting Advanced Education and Research. (Hon. Brendan Maguire)**

**Bill No. 13 - An Act Respecting Non-disclosure Agreements. (Claudia Chender)**

**Bill No. 14 - An Act to Assess Natural Resource Opportunities in Nova Scotia. (Hon. Derek Mombourquette)**

**Bill No. 15 - An Act Prohibiting Non-disclosure Agreements with Political Parties. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 16 - An Act to Provide Protection for Victims Who Disclose Sexual Assault. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 17 - An Act to Amend Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2011, the Medical Act, Respecting Sexual Assault by Medical Practitioners. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 18 - An Act to Support Sexual Assault Victims. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 19 - An Act to Amend Chapter 238 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Provincial Court Act. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 20 - An Act Respecting the Installation of Wood Chip Heating Systems in New Public Buildings. (Hon. Iain Rankin)**

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

## **NOTICES OF MOTION**

## **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Before I begin my member statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: In your Gallery, the Speaker's Gallery, I'm honoured to introduce Greg O'Leary. Greg, along with his wife, Joanne, owns O'Leary's Enviro Depot in Garlands Crossing, and I would ask that everybody give him a warm welcome to the House. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Hants West.

**O'LEARY'S ENVIRO DEPOT: AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I rise today to congratulate Greg and Joanne O'Leary of O'Leary's Enviro Depot in Garlands Crossing for being strong community leaders. This family-owned business got their start in the recycling industry in 1988, eventually transitioning into an Enviro-Depot, and will be celebrating their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

More recently, they were awarded the 2024 Enviro-Depot of the Year for going above and beyond by raising thousands of dollars each year for local organizations and charities. Last year alone, they raised and donated nearly \$17,000 for events like the Hants County Christmas Angels Society, Melissa's MISSION, and countless other small community fundraisers.

We are fortunate to have businesses like Greg and Joanne's, and I ask that all members join me in congratulating O'Leary's Enviro Depot for not only being champions when it comes to all things recycling, but for championing community spirit and fundraising efforts as well.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: In the gallery today, we are joined by friends and family of Anita Martinez, and I'd like them to stand as I say their names: LeeAnne Teal, Kimberley Teal, Lori Teal-Goldammer, and Eric Smith. Welcome to the House. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

[1:15 p.m.]

### **MARTINEZ, ANITA: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

LISA LACHANCE: Today, I rise to honour the life and legacy of Anita Martinez. Anita was a passionate mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, friend, cake decorator, fisherperson, gardener, chef, photographer, designer, and women's rights and queer rights activist.

Anita held a number of degrees ranging from nursing to graphic design, and had a special talent for photography. When she was eight, she won a tiny Brownie camera, for which we should all be grateful.

After coming out at the age of 50, Anita went on to document the work and fun of people and organizations working in the gender justice, queer, and trans rights movements. There doesn't seem to be an organization that she was not involved in in Halifax from the 1980s to the present day, and many of her photographs are now in the Nova Scotia Archives.

Anita intended to keep being an activist as long as she had two feet and a heartbeat. She was an amazing advocate and a model for all who jump in and celebrate their communities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

### **ORGS.: LEB./SYR. HER. HOCKEY GAME - THANKS**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I rise in my place. This past weekend was the annual Lebanese and Syrian Heritage Hockey Game, which happens each year in Sydney. We see families of Lebanese and Syrian descent from the greater CBRM participate. They come from all over the country. A number of former NHLers play in the game, as well as many players who've played at various levels of the game.

I rise in my place to congratulate all of the organizers. There were a few hundred people who attended. The support of the departments here within government have supported it multiple years to support the great Lebanese and Syrian heritage that we have across the CBRM.

Congratulations to Kevin Morrison and Alex Kehoe, two of the big organizers of the event. It's a great event every year. I hope everybody gets a chance to come down, not only to watch the game but also partake in many of the Lebanese and Syrian customs and celebrations.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, before I begin my statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

TWILA GROSSE: In the gallery I am honoured to introduce Preston Evans and his son Andrew from Halifax Concrete Ltd. Preston and Andrew, I would ask you to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Legislature. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Preston.

**EVANS, PRESTON: HFX. CONCRETE LTD. - RECOG.**

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Preston Evans of East Preston, the owner of Halifax Concrete Ltd. Preston has been a concrete contractor for more than 30-plus years. He is the grandson of the late Allan W. Evans, a former county councillor for Preston who served from 1930 until his death in 1960.

Preston's company specializes in many types of concrete work, from driveways to slabs on high-rise office and apartment buildings and almost every type of specialty project. Halifax Concrete is considered an equal opportunity employer with diverse staff and subcontractors.

I ask all members of the Legislature to please join with me in recognizing Mr. Evans, a successful business owner for 30-plus years.

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

LINA HAMID: Speaker, I beg to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LINA HAMID: I ask all the members who can to please rise and join me in welcoming a respected elder of the Sudanese community, Huwaida Medani, who will be the subject of my member statement, as well as the youth accompanying her, Walaa Saad. If you could rise. (Standing ovation)

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

The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

**MEDANI, HUWAIDI: SUDANESE COM. ACTIVITY - RECOG.**

LINA HAMID: I rise today with great honour to celebrate a community matriarch, Ms. Huwaida Medani, lovingly referred to as “Khalto” Huwaida, which means Auntie Huwaida or Mama Huwaida, even by some of the youth. She was born on February 19<sup>th</sup>. Huwaida is an inspiring woman.

For a matriarchal diaspora, she has served the role of our matriarch. She has been supporting Sudanese and East African newcomers navigating the systems of Nova Scotia for what I think is close to 20 years. She is always encouraging our youth to be engaged in the community. A prime example is what she brought with her today: a bright and inspiring youth from the Sudanese community. Huwaida is consistently and actively working to ensure that we don’t just thrive here, but we also remain connected to our roots.

Thank you, Khalto Huwaida.

THE SPEAKER: I think we all owe you a happy birthday. Happy birthday.

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**GALLANT BLACKBURN, LYNN: BOOK RELEASE - THANKS**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise today to recognize Lynn Gallant Blackburn. Lynn is the sister of the late Paula Gallant, a 36-year-old mother and beloved Grade 3 elementary teacher in Timberlea, who was murdered by her intimate partner on December 27, 2005.

As a survivor of this horrific and senseless crime of femicide, she has lived experience and knows first-hand what it feels like to lose someone you love to violence. In fact, she has walked this journey for nearly 20 years, some of those years while the murderer walked the streets not yet charged. Lynn has worked tirelessly to advocate for change, some of which has been implemented. Through her journey, she never stopped educating, advocating, and demanding change, always hoping to have a strong, meaningful systemic change to intimate partner violence.

In December, Lynn released her book, *For the Love of My Sister*, published through generous support of the Women’s Centres Connect of Nova Scotia. This book is seen as an opportunity to put a human face to statistics of domestic violence and its lasting effects on individuals, families, and communities.

Please join me in thanking Lynn for her work on this incredibly important issue.

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

**SNOW, KRISTA: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. BRIAN WONG: Just a few short weeks ago, Fall River lost a remarkable soul. Krista Snow was more than just a resident. Her life was deeply woven into the fabric of our community. When you passed by Miller Lake, you might have noticed Emily the Dragon floating peacefully. Krista and her father, Gordon Snow, placed Emily there to bring joy to children.

Following in her father's footsteps, Krista served as a dedicated municipal councillor, tirelessly advocating for our community. She also gave countless hours to various community organizations, including Halifax Pride, where she served as board co-chair in 2012, helping to build a strong and lasting foundation.

Speaker and colleagues, there will never be enough words to explain everything that Krista has done in her lifetime, so I ask that we take just a moment to honour Krista Snow and her contributions not just in our community but in Nova Scotia as a whole.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**FELLOW NDP MLA: BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

KRISTA GALLAGHER: Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise and recognize the birthday of Lina Hamid, a recently elected MLA for Fairview-Clayton Park. As she assumes this office, she brings profound intellect and expertise. Lina's competence in business, combined with her investment in her community, has prepared her elegantly for this role. Her previous work in the non-profit sector demonstrates her calling to selflessly fight for the rights of others. Her innate empathy allows her to connect easily with her constituents, and to be around her is to feel at ease. As a proud Sudanese Canadian, a vocal community advocate, and a devoted mother, there is no scarcity of distinctions that can be acknowledged on this day.

Lina graces those who surround her with effortless warmth and radiance, and it is a privilege to celebrate with her today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**CHAMBERS, SHERYL: BAKERY EXPANSION - CONGRATS.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today, I rise to congratulate an incredible businesswoman in the Pugwash area named Sheryl Chambers. I congratulate her and her entire team for the expansion of Sheryl's Bakery & Café in Pugwash.

Sheryl began selling her incredibly delicious homemade baked goods at the Pugwash Farmers' Market years ago, could not keep up with the demand, and decided to

open a full-service bakery. After several successful years, the popularity of her meals and baked goods continues to grow and has resulted in a need to expand the building. The construction project is currently under way, which will about double the size of the building, with an opening date tentatively set for late Spring or early Summer.

I wish to congratulate Sheryl Chambers and strongly encourage anyone who's in the Pugwash area to stop by for a sweet treat and a friendly smile from the staff of Sheryl's Bakery & Café.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

HON. LEAH MARTIN: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LEAH MARTIN: I'd like to introduce the Be the Peace Institute, put together with Sue Bookchin, Stacey Godsoe; Stephanie Gill, Can't Buy My Silence; Kristina Fifield, Avalon; and Survivors for Change and Empowerment, Carrie Low and Kiera Blackadar.

These members are a very important part of our service provider organization and provide life-saving supports in our community. We are grateful for the work that they do. We appreciate you being here today. Thank you so much. (Standing ovation)

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

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: This week is Student Advocacy Week. Today in the West Gallery, we are joined by Students Nova Scotia and their Executive Director, G Saleski. Thank you for all you do. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Clare.

### **CBDC DIGBY-CLARE: 40TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

RYAN ROBICHEAU: I would like to take the time to congratulate CBDC Digby-Clare, which is celebrating their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Throughout these four decades,

this non-profit has changed and evolved, but their mandate remains the same: to educate and empower new and existing businesses in our region.

Many businesses in Clare can directly attribute their success to CBDC Digby-Clare. I would like to thank and congratulate my former co-workers - Rebecca LeBlanc, Rose Madden, Jane Hatcher, Josée Dulong - and their Board of Directors for their exceptional work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**PARTICIPANTS: GBV RALLY - RECOG.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise to mark the events that just took place this morning - a rally that was well attended by many of the people who were just introduced in the gallery - to draw attention to the epidemic of gender-based and intimate partner violence.

The folks who have joined us here today have been working hard to make sure that we don't forget the work of the commissions that have been impanelled in the last number of years to mark the tragedies in our province: the Mass Casualty Commission, the Desmond Fatality Inquiry, the National Action Plan, and the Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. They are working in the areas of education, justice, survivor support, and others.

Their work is invaluable, and I rise today to entreat my colleagues to make sure it doesn't go unanswered.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**FORRESTER, EILEEN POTTIE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I rise in my place to remember a Cape Breton icon, Eileen Pottie Forrester, who was the owner of the Forrester School of Dance. She's believed to have opened the first Highland dance school in Cape Breton. So I rise in my place to recognize a wonderful woman who taught Highland dance to thousands and thousands of kids over her career. Those students travelled all over the country. They have travelled all over the world, and the list of awards are endless for Eileen and her dancers.

As I said, she has been a huge part of Celtic culture. I was fortunate because I went to school with her kids, Sean, Shendle, Shara, Shannon. To Wally, her husband whom she loved so much - he supported her through many years of illness, but she always smiled. You'd never know.

I rise in my place to recognize a Cape Breton icon, Eileen Forrester.

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

COLTON LEBLANC: Briefly introducing some friendly, familiar faces: Dana and Abby Harrison, who are some of the family to Peter Harrison, who is a familiar face to this House. I have to say, Dana makes a pretty mean Nanaimo bar cake, so perhaps next time you can bring some for the members of the House. Welcome. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome and thank you for coming.

The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

### **INTERNATIONAL EATERIES: DIVERSITY - WELCOME**

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the vibrant and diverse culinary landscape of our community and recognize the many new international grocers and restaurants that have recently opened in Bridgewater. I extend a warm welcome to Indian Spice Land and Nova Indian Market Grocery, who bring the authentic flavours of India to our doorstep.

Sushi Bay Japanese Cuisine allows customers to experience the artistry of traditional Japanese flavours in a warm, inviting space, while Tacoland transports us to the heart of Mexico with delicious tacos and authentic Mexican cuisine. Mama Joy's is a gateway to Filipino style fast food and flavours right in Bridgewater. South Shore Homestyle Nosh takeout specializes in homestyle meals. Pizza Pizza gives us another option for a quick slice, and we eagerly await the grand opening of Mezza Lebanese Kitchen.

I ask the House to join me in welcoming these businesses to our community. They represent the rich diversity and vibrant spirit of Bridgewater and promote cultural exchange throughout the universal joy of food.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

PAUL WOZNEY: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

PAUL WOZNEY: It is my pleasure to introduce Jen Matthews, owner and operator of To The Root Electrolysis Studio, who joins us in the gallery with her husband here today. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**MATTHEWS, JEN: CDN. CHOICE AWD. - CONGRATS.**

PAUL WOZNEY: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Jen Matthews on receiving the Canadian Choice Award, a well-deserved recognition for outstanding contributions to our community. This award celebrates individuals who show exceptional dedication and leadership, and Jen has demonstrated these qualities through her work and service.

Jen is the owner and operator of To The Root Electrolysis Studio, where she makes a profound impact by providing high-quality electrolysis services with a focus on promoting self-confidence and empowerment. Through her work, Jen has created a welcoming space for clients to feel comfortable and supported, offering more than just professional services. She has built a place of healing and transformation. In addition to her work in the studio, Jen has been actively involved in local initiatives that foster community well-being and inclusivity, further cementing her role as a leader in our area.

I extend my sincere congratulations to Jen Matthews for receiving this recognition. Her ongoing commitment to improving lives and supporting our community is truly inspiring.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**SMITH, CAROL ANNE: NEW YWCA APPT. - CONGRATS.**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise to recognize Terence Bay resident Carol Anne Smith on her new appointment as Director of Fund Development and Communications with the YWCA. After 18 years of dedicated service with Phoenix, Carol Anne brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record of success to her new role.

During her tenure at Phoenix, Carol Anne played a pivotal role in advancing housing, child care, and economic security for women. Her leadership and commitment have contributed to outstanding achievements that have positively impacted countless lives.

Carol Anne is thrilled to join the YWCA, an organization known for its meaningful work in supporting Atlantic Canadians. She is eager to be part of the amazing team that is dedicated to fostering a strong, supportive community. Carol Anne's collaboration with the

YWCA Halifax will be instrumental in continuing to stand strong with women, supporting resiliency of survivors of violence, and championing a more just and equitable society for all. Congratulations, Carol Anne Smith, on this important appointment.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

**OCEAN VIEW CONT. CARE CTR.: CARNIVAL - RECOG.**

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the amazing staff of Ocean View Continuing Care Centre, especially the recreation group, for hosting an amazing carnival for their residents and staff. It was a day full of excitement and fun for all. There was a petting zoo, games played, and prizes won, a dunk tank - of which I was a victim - fun, music, and a wonderful barbecue served for lunch. The event brought huge smiles to the faces of the residents, as well as the staff and family members who attended. We recognize all the hard work that an event like this requires.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in recognizing the amazing staff and volunteers of Ocean View Continuing Care Centre for providing such a wonderful event, and for putting a smile on so many faces.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**PRESCOTT GROUP: HELP FOR DISABLED - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize an amazing group called Prescott Group. Since 1962, Prescott Group has been helping individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities find friendship, community, and success in Halifax.

What they do is provide a safe space for individuals with IDD's so they can feel appreciated and motivated to succeed. With programs, services and business support choices, they create social and economic opportunities and enhanced life skills. They connect individuals with fair-wage jobs and community. Located in Halifax Needham on Prescott Street, they also house the North End Baking Co & Café, and have been providing Halifax with delicious baked goods and food services. They also have a thrift store called Pinkie's Thrift, providing fair-wage employment, paid work experience to help gain essential skills in retail and customer service.

I would like all members to help me congratulate Prescott Group for all their amazing work in our community.

THE SPEAKER: Before I move on - not to be a stickler here - can people, when they're about to talk, please move to the chair they belong in? I can't recognize a different constituency. Basically, they are not going to light up your microphone. When you are about to talk, please move to your actual seat.

The honourable member for Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley.

**BROOKFIELD ATHLETIC ASSOC.: PGMS. - CONGRATS.**

HON. SCOTT ARMSTRONG: I rise today to recognize the Brookfield Athletic Association, an organization of volunteers who have contributed to our community for many, many years. They are responsible for a number of sport and recreation programs, including the Brookfield Elks Softball Teams, the Brookfield Jr. B Elks Hockey Team, minor ball, minor soccer, figure skating, junior golf, Brookfield Elks Bowling League, the Great Community Curling Classic Bonspiel, and the SCA Athletes of the Year awards, just to name a few.

To support the athletes and facilities, the BAA's fundraising efforts are absolutely continuous - they never stop. It includes the Brookfield Whing Ding - I invite you all to come down in July to that - the Elks Hockey Pool, and the famous Brookfield Elks Sports Draw. Also, this is the longest-consecutive-running contest in Nova Scotia. This was their 88<sup>th</sup> annual draw, happening this past November.

Speaker, I wish for you all to join us as we congratulate the Brookfield Athletic Association.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**ORGS.: BANOOK PING-PONG FUNDRAISER - CONGRATS.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Earlier this month, my friend Matt and I attended the greatest ping-pong tournament ever at the Banook Canoe Club. The fundraiser, organized by Olympian Andrew Russell and his friends, raised over \$3,000 for the Banook Paddles Up Capital Campaign. The campaign's goal is to raise \$5 million to fund the club's historic renovations.

The 80-person event was billed as, "an absolute epic contest of will, tactics, grit and hilarity will 100,000 per cent ensure." I am not commenting on the grammar of that, but anyway, that's how it was billed - and it did. At the tournament, I learned two very important things: I am not the best at ping-pong and I'm not the worst, and it's very fun to wear matching Adidas track suits with your pal. I am very happy to report that Matt and I were named the best-dressed at the tournament.

Congratulations to the tournament champion, Chad Isnor, and runner-up Scott Yorke, and thanks to all the organizers and participants for a very fun event for such a good cause.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

**LAZY BEAR BREWING: BUS. SUCCESS - RECOG.**

HON. JILL BALSER: Today, I rise to recognize a popular family-owned business in Smiths Cove. Lazy Bear Brewery is a microbrewery owned and operated by Andy and Erin Norman. They started their business in 2016 with one beer called Gut View Amber, a brown ale that sold out on their very first day at the Annapolis Royal Farmers Market - and they've come a long way since then. Now they offer more than 10 different types, including cider and mead, plus they offer wood-fired pizzas at their brewery, and often host events and pop-up vendors.

Andy is a professional engineer, and specializes in process improvements and operations at Lazy Bear, and Erin earned her Master of Food Sciences and Processing Engineering at Dalhousie University. Together, they welcome visitors and tourists from all around the province and beyond. Thank you, Andy and Erin, for your wonderful local business in the community. Keep up the great work.

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

**CHRYSLIS HOUSE: GBV SUPPORT - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise to recognize 40 years of the transformative work of Chrysalis House in Kentville. Chrysalis House provides support, safety, advocacy, referrals, resources, public education, and community development for those experiencing gender-based violence. These words don't tell enough of their story.

I first felt the peace and power of walking into Chrysalis House in 1989. At that time, I was in high school, and my mother and I sought safety from her partner, something we hadn't found elsewhere in the community or from law enforcement. The folks at Chrysalis House helped to place our experiences in the societal context of misogyny and poverty, and helped us find rest.

I ask all members to recognize everyone at Chrysalis House for 40 years of changing lives.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

**LANDRY, EVELYN & LEON: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: I would like to recognize Evelyn and Leon Landry, two very committed volunteers in Richmond County. Evelyn and Leon are both involved in the St. Louis Parish and the Parish Hall. Leon is a member of both the finance and hall committees, and mentors Summer students hired for groundskeeping.

Evelyn can often be found cooking, cleaning, and helping organize the parish hall community events and funeral luncheons. She also prepares food orders for the local fundraisers and chairs the Catholic Women's League's faith committee. In 2023, Evelyn was a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal.

Leon has been a member of the Louisdale Lions Club for more than 45 years, involved in various committees. Both he and Evelyn volunteer at the club's monthly breakfast. I ask members of this House of Assembly to please join me in thanking Evelyn and Leon for their continued dedication to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**KAISER'S SUBS: 49<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

PAUL WOZNEY: Sackville is home to a diverse array of local businesses, old and new, including one with nearly five decades of highly regarded service to our community. Today, I'm honoured to recognize Sackville landmark and longstanding business, Kaiser's Subs & Sandwich Shoppes, on their 49<sup>th</sup> year of operation.

Originally opened in 1976, this Sackville Drive business is Sackville-famous for their sandwiches, soups, and other meals prepared by a dozen devoted staff. In 2024, owners Rick and Ellisha accepted the Business of the Year award from the Sackville Business Association, and Kaiser's is a fixture winner in the Coast Annual Best Sackville Restaurant category.

Speaker, I wish Rick, Ellisha, and their amazing staff another year of success and accolades, and ask that all present join me in congratulating Kaiser's Subs on another year of service to Sackville and community.

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

**WELDON, JACKSON: MUSIC ACHIEVEMENTS - CONGRATS.**

RICK BURNS: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and congratulate Jackson Weldon of Stillwater Lake on his 2024 achievement in his blossoming music career. Jackson played a personal best 160-plus shows, reached 10,000 listeners online, and 24,000 streams on Spotify.

This achievement is a true testament to Jackson's genuine character and dedication to the art of songwriting, and to building a connection within the Nova Scotia music industry, cracking the lineup of the prestigious Marquee stage at just 19 years old - a feat many musicians don't ever get a chance to achieve. At 20 years old, the sky is the limit for Jackson, and we want to acknowledge the first of many feats for him to come, and encourage his professional growth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**GRANT, WINNIFRED: ANTI-RACISM WORK - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a strong Black woman from our community, Mrs. Winnifred Grant. Mrs. Winnie has worked tirelessly to disrupt anti-Black racism, leading to policy and practice changes, the creation of an Afrocentric Bachelor of Social Work degree program, and an increase in the hiring of African Nova Scotians and people of African descent staff in leadership positions throughout the organization.

[1:45 p.m.]

Her decades of work to transform the systems that impact all Nova Scotians have inspired others to do the same. She has just received the King Charles III Coronation Medal, and I would like to thank her for all of the positive disruption and commitment for leading the change that we would like to see.

I would like to say congratulations and thank you, Ms. Winnie, for all of your hard work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

**ATL. CANADA BULK TERMINAL: AWD. RECIP. - RECOG.**

HON. BRIAN COMER: Today, I rise to acknowledge a forward-thinking business in the Sydney area. The Atlantic Canada Bulk Terminal, located on the site of the former Sydney Steel Plant, provides employment to dozens of Cape Bretoners.

Last year, the business looked towards the future and started attracting customers from around the world in the fast-growing offshore wind industry. Thanks to the team at Atlantic Canada Bulk Terminal and their dedicated promotion of Sydney Harbour, Sydney is now positioned to be a leader as an offshore wind marshalling port.

For the past few months, residents have been in awe of the large supply vessels and cranes coming into our harbour as the port supports offshore wind projects off the coast of Massachusetts. All this hard work led to Atlantic Canada Bulk Terminal winning the 2024 Innovation and Advancement Award at the Cape Breton Regional Chamber of Commerce.

I extend best wishes to Vice-President Richard Morykot and the team at Atlantic Canada Bulk Terminal on their continued success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**PEDESTRIANS: MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: I rise today to acknowledge the many pedestrians who have been killed by cars in this province. In early January of this year, my community of Dartmouth North was shaken by the death of a 72-year-old man who was struck by a vehicle in a marked crosswalk on Victoria Road. My deepest condolences to his family and friends.

As a frequent walker and someone who crosses the busy Victoria Road with my kids or dog daily, I have seen too many near-accidents to count. According to pedestrian safety advocate Martyn Williams, there have been no fewer than 20 pedestrian fatalities since 2018. This is a significant year because it was the year that the Traffic Safety Act was passed, but seven years and multiple fatalities later, it is still not in effect.

I call on everyone in this House to recommit to implementing the Traffic Safety Act and the passing and strengthening of laws to ensure the safety of Nova Scotia pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists alike.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

**THREE CHURCHES FND.: DOODLE AUCTION - CONGRATS.**

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: The Town of Mahone Bay is known for many things: among them, the three churches at the head of the harbour and a creative spirit that is showcased during events like the annual Mahone Bay Scarecrow Festival. Those two assets came together last Fall, when the foundation created to preserve that iconic Edgewater landscape tapped into the Bay's artistic vibe for an all-new fundraiser.

The Celebrity Doodle Auction & Gala in support of the Three Churches Foundation included a silent auction of works donated by local artists, while live bids were taken on doodles by famous folks like singer Anne Murray, actor Dennis Quaid, editorial cartoonist Bruce MacKinnon, and TV personality Mary Berg, whose lobster doodle proudly hangs in my kitchen now.

It was a great evening that helped raise thousands of dollars for the charity. My congratulations to the organizers and everyone who supported the event.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: ACTION NEED - RECOG.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I would like to welcome all those who are in the gallery, especially those who are here advocating on behalf of victims and those injured from domestic assault, violence, gender-based violence, and sexual assault.

This is not easy work, but important. I encourage you to not give up, to continue your fight. You are fighting for victims, people who do not have a voice. I see you today, and I hear you. I encourage everyone in the Chamber to do so as well. Everyone in this Chamber likely knows someone who has been affected by gender-based violence or sexual assault. I assume we all know that the laws need to change. We have the ability in this Chamber. We have the power to give back power to victims and take it away from criminals.

Keep up your good work and thank you for being here today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

### **BROWN, JEFF: CAMPAIGN WORK - THANKS**

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, I rise today to speak about a very good friend of mine, Jeff Brown. Jeff is a retired Halifax Regional Police officer who dedicated his career to serving others and has earned the respect and admiration of everyone he has encountered.

During the last election, Jeff volunteered his time and energy as my campaign manager. Jeff brought strong leadership, unwavering commitment, tireless effort, and dedication. He kept me focused and motivated even in the most challenging moments of the campaign. Politics is a team sport, and it's fair to say we would not be here in this Chamber without our campaign managers.

What makes Jeff truly great is the way he connects with people. Jeff has an incredible ability to befriend everyone he meets, making each person feel welcome, valued, and heard. My family and I are forever grateful for Jeff's support and friendship.

I'd ask all members of the House to acknowledge the great work of our campaign managers in the last election.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

### **YAR. WESLEYAN CHURCH: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

NICK HILTON: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the incredible contributions of the Yarmouth Wesleyan Church and its three campuses. Through their unwavering dedication, they are making tangible differences in the lives of many.

Each week, their We've Got Your BackPacks initiative delivers more than 70 backpacks full of fresh produce and groceries to seven local schools. Their Mac n Cheese Monday program serves more than 200 high school students with a free meal. As well, the

South Pantry food bank provides essential support to families while offering a welcoming space for community connections.

The church also offers Celebrate Recovery programs to Yarmouth and Digby, providing healing and support for those dealing with life challenges. They also provide free children and youth programs to give time for families to be together. Love Week Nova Scotia allows the congregation to engage in meaningful service projects across our community. Each November, they host a Fisherman's Service, offering prayers for the local fishermen as they go out for their lobster season.

Yarmouth Wesleyan Church exemplifies the spirit of generosity and care, and we are truly fortunate . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order.

The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

**KASEY'S BARBERSHOP: FIRST ANNIV. - RECOG.**

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, I rise to welcome business owner Kasey Cormier of Kasey's Barbershop to Middle Sackville. His shop is located just down the street from where my constituency office is. On August 1<sup>st</sup>, the barbershop celebrated its first anniversary. Since opening, Kasey has given back to our community tenfold, including travelling to the hospital with his equipment in order to give patients a haircut.

Despite the trials and tribulations that were brought on by the floods and subsequent location changes, Kasey has overcome them with a smile, still willing to lend a hand to his friends and neighbours. He is the true embodiment of what it means to be a Nova Scotian. I am grateful to have such a kind person offering their services in Middle Sackville.

Speaker, I'd like to wish Kasey the best of luck with his growing business and many more fresh haircuts yet to come.

THE SPEAKER: Anyone can stand, unless you've already read two.

The honourable member for Kings West.

**FREEMAN'S AUTO SALES: 65<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - RECOG.**

CHRIS PALMER: Speaker, today I rise to recognize an extraordinary milestone for a cherished business in Kings West. Freeman's Auto Sales, located in Kingston, celebrated its 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year, an achievement that speaks to its legacy of excellence, resilience, and unwavering dedication to the people of Kings West.

Ralph Freeman Motors Ltd. opened in 1959 as an Esso-branded service station. Since its establishment, this business has been a cornerstone of the community and a steadfast supporter of community events. Generations of families have relied on Freeman's for their automotive needs, drawn by their exceptional service and integrity.

Over the decades, this family-owned business has grown. Now it's operated by Ralph's sons, Scott and Paul, and it includes a full-service gas bar and auto service centre while maintaining the personal touch and commitment to customer satisfaction that has earned them the trust of all their patrons.

I'd like to thank the Freeman family and their dedicated team for their decades of hard work, vision, and community spirit.

Speaker, on behalf of the people of Kings West, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Freeman's Auto Sales on their 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

**AMIRO, GORDON: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Gordon Amiro of Lower West Pubnico for his service as fire chief of the West Pubnico Fire Department for the past 23 years. Gordon joined the West Pubnico Fire Department in October 1978, and in 2001, he became the department's chief. Although he has retired as fire chief, Gordon will remain a member of the fire department, proudly serving our community. Volunteer firefighters are at the heart of our communities, often called upon in our greatest time of need.

I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating Gordon Amiro on his retirement as fire chief of the West Pubnico Fire Department and in recognizing his long-standing service as a volunteer firefighter. Merci, Gordon.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

**WOOD, MICHELLE: POMFRET AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Acadia University women's volleyball head coach Michelle Wood as recipient of the 2024 Marilyn Pomfret Award as the U Sports women's volleyball coach of the year. Michelle Wood has been named the Atlantic University Sport's Coach of the Year for the second consecutive season.

Marilyn Pomfret was the founding president of the Canadian Women's Intercollegiate Athletic Union and was instrumental in the creation of the national

championships. The Marilyn Pomfret Award is the University of British Columbia's most prestigious female athletic award for outstanding contributions to sport. Michelle Wood is only the third AUS coach to receive this prestigious award. She coached the Acadia Axewomen to the program's first AUS championship on March 5<sup>th</sup>, allowing them to compete in the national championship for the first time.

Please join me today in congratulating Michelle Wood, the 2024 Marilyn Pomfret Award recipient.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

**FARMER'S DAUGHTER COUNTRY MKT.: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

KYLE MACQUARRIE: Speaker, today I would like to take time to recognize the Farmer's Daughter Country Market, located in the beautiful village of Whycocomagh. In 1991, dairy farmers Jim and Ferne Austin started the market as a way to increase income and create employment in the community. The Farmer's Daughter has grown and evolved over the years into a very successful small business which has been extremely generous in giving back to our community. Following their retirement in 2015, Jim and Ferne's eldest daughter, Heather, took over as manager and currently employs 27 people in the community.

I ask the members of this Legislature to join me in thanking the awesome family and all the supporters of the Farmer's Daughter Country Market for their outstanding contributions to the local community over the years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**MACGILLIVRAY, JAMIE: BUS. SUCCESS - CONGRATS.**

DANNY MACGILLIVRAY: Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize the remarkable entrepreneurial achievements of my brother, Jamie MacGillivray. His dedication to local business, community well-being, and the preservation of Nova Scotia's heritage is an inspiration to all of us.

Jamie runs MacGillivray Injury and Insurance Law, a top firm that employs 120 full-time staff in Nova Scotia and across Atlantic Canada. At the same time, he owns MacGillivray Properties, which manages more than 160 units and employs six full-time staff. This company took the lead role in renovating the historic Roseland Theatre, best known for its connection to Viola Desmond, adding striking artwork to help observe its cultural importance.

I'm also proud to share that Jamie's daughter, Zoe, has been admitted to Dalhousie University Schulich School of Law for the upcoming year. This accomplishment speaks to her hard work and the strong values instilled by her mother and father.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Jamie for his success and leadership, and to Zoe as she begins her promising journey at Dalhousie.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

### **MACLEAN, LYNN: NEW FWIC PRES. - RECOG.**

MARCO MACLEOD: Speaker, I rise today to recognize an outstanding individual in our community.

Lynn MacLean has been appointed as the new national president for the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada. The FWIC is a national network for women and families to promote leadership and personal development opportunities through education and fellowship. Lynn has been a member of the Women's Institute in Lyons Brook for 43 years, where she previously served as branch president and as a provincial executive officer.

Lynn's mother, Jennie E. McInnes, also served as FWIC national president from 1988 to 1991. Lynn's grandmother Jennie M. served as provincial president in 1929, the very same year the Lyons Brook branch was started. The Lyons Brook branch has 25 registered members, making it the fastest growing and largest branch in the province.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing Lynn MacLean.

[2:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order.

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **PREM.: AUDITOR GENERAL STATUS CHANGE - EXPLAIN**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The Auditor General is an independent officer who provides invaluable reports on issues impacting Nova Scotians and oversight of this government, but now this government is changing the rules for dismissing her. Instead of valuing the work of the independent watchdog of government spending and the independent body who evaluates how policies are working, this government is putting the

Auditor General on notice. So my question is: What does this government stand to gain from this decision?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): I have great respect for the Office of the Auditor General, the Auditor General, and the work they do. It's really important to taxpayers. I have great respect for that office, and I look forward to continuing to work with them.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Unfortunately, that response is not believable. The Auditor General has called this government out for a billion . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. There was some disruption. It wasn't over the line, but it was close to it, so as long as we keep it clean: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The Auditor General has called out this government for \$1 billion of out-of-budget spending each year, the violence in public schools, and the tens of millions of dollars spent on Hogan Court. Is this government so worried about public scrutiny that they are willing to threaten her job?

THE PREMIER: We welcome it. That's the job of the Auditor General. We have great respect for the Office of the Auditor General, and we look forward to their reports. It's what's in the best interest of taxpayers. The member is referring to investments that we make in Nova Scotians, and I will never apologize for investing in Nova Scotians. We will continue to invest in Nova Scotians, as we have with a \$17 billion budget before this House right now. Every single dollar is accounted for. Every single dollar is an investment in Nova Scotians, and I would do it every single day of the week.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: What I am referring to is this government's complete unacceptance of any form of criticism to the extent that they will threaten the job of an independent officer of this Legislature. In a world full of fake news and misinformation, the independent, unbiased work of the Auditor General is more important than ever. Nova Scotians need information they can rely on, not just spin. This government shows time and time again that they do not like transparency, and they do not like criticism. If the Auditor General's job is not in danger, will the Premier explain why he thought it was necessary to change the rules for dismissing her?

THE PREMIER: The changes are just to bring things in line with the way it is across the country. There's a number of provinces that have the exact same provisions. The changes are to bring it closer to the conditions with the FOIPOP commissioner, which has very similar commissions, also an officer of the Legislature. We're just trying to normalize things and make it fair for everyone. I will assure Nova Scotians that this government is not afraid of transparency. In fact, we so much welcomed it that we went to the people and asked them how they think we're doing, and they spoke pretty loudly.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Liberal Party.

**PREM.: AUDITOR GENERAL REMOVAL - EXPLAIN**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: In 2019, in this very House, the member for Pictou East stood in his place and said: "Listen, there can be no doubt the Auditor General does good work on behalf of Nova Scotians." I'll table that quote. Our party agrees that now that the member for Pictou East is Premier and his tune has changed, his government is threatening to remove the Auditor General without cause and giving themselves the power to release or not release reports when they feel like it. My question to the Premier: Does he stand by his words in this Chamber those years ago?

THE PREMIER: One thousand per cent, every single day of the week. It's an absolutely critical role to government, the role of the Auditor General. Incredible respect for the Auditor General. I welcome their reports and I look forward to continuing to work with them. It's in the best interests of the taxpayers. I appreciate the work that the Auditor General does. I certainly won't politicize it on the floor of the Legislature.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I have more quotes. Also in 2019, the now-Premier said: "Any time a government tries to hide information and avoid scrutiny, the taxpayers need to be suspicious. Secret government is incompatible with good government." We'll table that as well.

Over the last few weeks, we've seen the government try to hide information and avoid scrutiny as they try to increase their own power. Taxpayers should be suspicious - 2019 wasn't that long ago, but these quotes sound like they're coming from a completely different person who is now the Premier of this Province. My question to the Premier: What has changed?

THE PREMIER: I'll tell you one thing that changed is in 2019 there was a Liberal government in power. That is the same government that then proceeded to shut down the Legislature for almost an entire year. Everything I said in those quotes I stand by today. What happened in 2021 is Nova Scotians agreed with me on my commentary on the government of the day. They also agreed in 2024 that it's important that as the government - that isn't transparent - that a government that gets things done, a government that makes it happen for Nova Scotians - that's exactly what we do.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: After Public Accounts Committee today, the Auditor General said that she couldn't see how she or her department could continue to do their job under the conditions proposed by the government, because she would no longer be independent or objective. The government is threatening an independent officer of this House and making our democracy weaker. My question to the Premier: What is he afraid of?

THE PREMIER: I have lots of fears, Speaker, but they don't have to do with the Auditor General doing their job. It would be unfortunate if the Auditor General said that because certainly the Auditors General in a number of provinces across this country have had the exact same provisions do their job and they do it very effectively and very efficiently.

I have great confidence in the Auditor General of this province for normalizing some things, for making lots of changes to make this House more accountable to the people. I hope the members opposite get on board with those. We're making lots of investments in Nova Scotians through the budget process. I hope the members opposite support Nova Scotians and get behind that as well. I have great faith in the work of the Auditor General and will continue to support her.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

### **GAD: SAFE & AFFORDABLE HOMES - PRIORITIZE**

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the minister responsible for housing. The housing market is not working for Nova Scotians. Jodi McDavid, the Executive Director of the Cape Breton Transition House Association, has warned that an increased number of women are returning to the person who was causing them harm, because of lack of housing. I'll table that. Speaker, my question is: Can the minister tell us why this government isn't prioritizing safe, affordable homes for Nova Scotia? Why isn't the government making it happen and getting it done?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: As I outlined yesterday in Question Period, our action plan is working. We are actually exceeding our housing targets for 2028. I think we are at 125 per cent of the housing units committed through our Action for Housing plan, Speaker.

We recognize as a government that there are challenges for folks fleeing gender-based violence. That's why we have expanded the Canada-Nova Scotia Targeted Housing Benefit through the Survivors of Gender-based Violence Housing Benefit, a stream of rent supplements. We're also expanding the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency priority access for folks. I'll have more to say in my supplemental.

SUZY HANSEN: An action plan means you have to act. Rent supplements, which enable developers to continue to charge unaffordable rents, are not the same as long-term affordable housing. Women and gender-diverse folks fleeing violence need safe, affordable places to live regardless of when their government-funded supplement ends. When will we see this government build real affordable housing for Nova Scotians?

COLTON LEBLANC: In addition to the initiatives I outlined in my first response, we're also providing funding to non-profits and community housing organizations through

the Affordable Housing Development Program and through the Community Housing Growth Fund to help them create new housing options for survivors. If the member wasn't looking at the news last week, we did actually commit to the largest public housing investment in 30 years, bringing forward our government's commitment to 515 units.

On the topic of rent supplements, when we formed government, the investment was \$11 million in rent supplements. Seven times now, \$73.9 million in this budget. I hope the members opposite get behind that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

### **LSI: MORE PAID GBD LEAVE - IMPLEMENT**

PAUL WOZNEY: We have an epidemic of gender-based violence in this province. Five provinces, three territories, and the federal government, all offer five paid days of domestic violence leave. However, here in Nova Scotia, only three paid days are available. Can the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration explain why this government offers fewer paid days of domestic violence leave than the majority of jurisdictions across Canada?

HON. NOLAN YOUNG: This is a very serious issue that Nova Scotians take seriously, that we take seriously. There's been work under way since the last time we were in the House. I'll have more to say later.

PAUL WOZNEY: We know that the department did a jurisdictional scan of paid domestic leave. In the Fall, we were assured by the former minister that we would have an update on this important topic by the end of 2024. Nova Scotians have waited long enough. Can the minister tell us when the extension of paid domestic leave days will happen here in Nova Scotia?

NOLAN YOUNG: Like I said, this government takes domestic violence very seriously. I'll have more to say later.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

### **ANSA: ENHANCED MENTAL HEALTH CARE - IMPLEMENT**

SUZY HANSEN: Last January, the Desmond Fatality Inquiry final report was released, making 25 recommendations. Many recommendations touch on the need for enhanced access to culturally appropriate mental health care for African Nova Scotian in rural areas, yet we're still hearing that the support being rolled out is not meeting the unique needs of the community. My question is to the Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs: Can you please explain what is holding up the delivery of culturally appropriate mental health care?

HON. TWILA GROSSE: I want to let you know that we continue to work on that. It's a process we are definitely working on, so it's not that it's being ignored, those recommendations. We are working on and through those recommendations.

SUZY HANSEN: Adam Rodgers, a lawyer who represented the estate and some of the Desmond family members during the inquiry, has expressed frustration with this government's lack of transparency on the implementation of the recommendations, stating, "It's hard to see where the work is being done, if anywhere. At this point, 'wait and see' is starting to sound more like, 'maybe never.'"

[2:15 p.m.]

My question is: Can the minister tell us when we will have a clear progress update on these important recommendations?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: This inquiry stands as a firm reminder of why the work that we're doing is important across government to address the issues raised, including needing to access services for African-Nova Scotians.

We have been making progress consistently, and we have updated protocols and training for frontline professionals, including in high risk domestic violence case coordination. There is new training under way supporting our frontline providers as well. A number of the actions are already complete, and others are under way. We do look forward to updating Nova Scotians in the very near future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

### **FTB: REVENUE PROJECTIONS - EXPLAIN**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: The spending by this government has been showing record variances between projections and actuals. It's also on the revenue side. They have shown multi-billion dollar variances over \$1 billion in each of the last three years. For the first time ever in Nova Scotia, this is leading the Auditor General choosing not to sign off on the Department of Finance and Treasury Board's revenue projections this year.

I want to ask the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board if reducing the independence of the Auditor General is something that he raised himself to the Premier, because of refusal of giving assurances on his budget's revenue projections?

HON. JOHN LOHR: The reality is auditors audit things that have actually happened. Revenues are projections going forward. We make those projections based on over 300 different parameters, 18 months before we have the actual information.

Audit rules were changed in 2017, which make it more difficult for the auditor to actually audit a projection going forward. The Auditor General has made that very clear to us, that this is complicated, it's probably more the work of an actuary than an auditor. And this is the reason why we're not looking for that.

IAIN RANKIN: And yet this problem just began three years ago. In the Disclaimer of Conclusion it says, "The AG office is unable to conclude that the revenue presented is reasonable and presented fairly," and states the \$1.3 billion, \$1.9 billion and \$1.3 billion budget to actual variances as the first reason why.

Some of this could be discussed next week at Public Accounts, yet the Conservative members voted today to cancel that very important committee that the Auditor General actually reports to. I want to ask the minister, if all these meetings are now cancelled for the rest of this session, I want to ask the minister directly if he agrees with his colleagues that that committee should be cancelled for the rest of the House session so that the finances are no longer looked at?

JOHN LOHR: I want to point out to the member that the Auditor General did sign off on the approval of the Revenue Estimates for each of the last three years. We did spend additional money. I want to just inform the member that while we projected a deficit for each of those three years, we actually delivered a surplus.

I want to assure Nova Scotians that the spending of the money by us - we are meeting the needs of Nova Scotians, as we have the flexibility to do so. We will continue to do that. It's a process that's been in place since 2010. We'll continue to do that, continue to meet the needs of Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

### **EECD: SCHOOL VIOLENCE TRACKING - CONFIRM**

PAUL WOZNEY: The Auditor General's Report on Violence in Nova Scotia's Public Schools found that there was no method to track repeated instances of violence against the same student or educator. There was also no tracking of the type of violence being perpetrated. I'll table that.

We know that gender-based and sexual violence are occurring in our schools, but what we don't know is how often they are occurring. Can the minister confirm that the updated code of conduct will be accompanied by a mechanism to track gender-based violence in our schools?

THE SPEAKER: May I ask which minister, as there could be potentially three in there?

The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

PAUL WOZNEY: My apologies, Speaker. I should have identified that the question was to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, member. I just wanted to make sure that I was correct in this.

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We are going to continue to do the work that needs to be done to ensure that our children are taught at a young age that gender-based violence is 1,000 per cent unacceptable. We are investing in programs and resources like GuysWork, Kids in the Know, and Roots of Empathy.

We are working on a comprehensive code of conduct, which will be released in March. It is a fluid document, but we are working with the NSTU, we are working with CUPE, we are working with PSAANS, and we are working with every single stakeholder we can to ensure that this encompasses all types of violence in our schools. (Applause)

PAUL WOZNEY: Tracking the problem is needed, but we also need to ensure that we have appropriate responses to gender-based and sexual violence in our schools. If we do not want the epidemic of intimate partner violence to continue for another generation, we must do a better job of addressing these problems with our young people.

Will the minister confirm that the updated code of conduct will include specific language around appropriate responses to gender-based and sexual violence in the soon-to-come code of conduct?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank the member for the question. Yes, I do agree with everything he said, and yes, it will. Not only will it address it now, but we are addressing it - sorry, when the code of conduct comes out - but we are also taking action now with GuysWork, Kids in the Know, Roots of Empathy. We cannot wait for the code of conduct, so we are investing resources. This budget has invested a massive amount of money to combat gender-based violence. It starts in the schools, and we are going to ensure that our kids know that it is wrong. (Applause)

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

### **DOJ: USE OF NDAs - RESTRICT**

LINA HAMID: There is wide and diverse support for restricting the abuse of non-disclosure agreements. Acadia University and the University of King's College have signed a voluntary pledge vowing not to use non-disclosure agreements, and I will table

that. Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan have taken a step further and introduced their own legislation to restrict their use. My question is for the Minister of Justice: Will this government develop a plan to restrict the use of non-disclosure agreements across the province?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Survivors and victims of sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment must be supported with sensitivity and respect, and with trauma-informed approaches, and this includes in relation to the use of NDAs, which are agreements that people may enter into to commit that they will not share certain information, and often that happens in the course of settlements.

I appreciate the advocacy of many organizations, like Can't Buy My Silence and others, that have given voice to the harms that can arise with the misuse of NDAs. This is an incredibly important perspective and a really important consideration in this, and, Speaker, I will continue my remarks. (Applause)

LINA HAMID: According to Halifax lawyer Ron Pink, these things are signed for one purpose - to protect the male harasser, and the male harasser then goes on to do it again, and he can continue to do it because he can buy his way out. That's what's going on, and I will table that. Yet the previous Minister of Justice claimed that there are pros and cons to this issue. Can the minister clarify what the pro of this kind of use of an NDA is?

BECKY DRUHAN: This is a complex issue, and our hearts and minds must be open not only to those folks who do feel and know that they've been harmed and would have been better off without NDAs, but they must also be open to those who feel that they have been protected by NDAs.

I must point out that is the group that is least likely to speak up. I say this not to say that our mind is closed to banning NDAs - it absolutely is not - but we need to consider all these perspectives.

Some jurisdictions have come out to say that they will not be moving forward with bans of NDAs. We are looking forward to the Uniform Law Conference of Canada's recommendations on this. We are hosting them this summer and will continue to consider this important issue.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **DHW: PHARMACARE DEAL - IMPLEMENT**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The Minister of Health and Wellness recognized recently that time was of the essence to get a bilateral pharmacare deal done for Nova Scotians. I'll table that. This money has been on the table for months, and the government has refused to make a deal happen to help more Nova Scotians afford their medications. That includes

birth control. My question to the minister is: Why has this government moved at a glacial pace to get a pharmacare deal with the federal government done?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We are in active negotiations with the federal government. I had an opportunity to speak with Minister Holland last month, and we were able to host a health ministers' meeting.

Nova Scotians expect us to do due diligence around the cost of all the programs we offer. This bilateral agreement is important, but we do know that the money will eventually sunset. It's very important as we move forward with fiscal responsibility that we understand the negotiated terms of a potential deal and that it is sustainable going into the future. More to say, but we are in active negotiations.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I would urge people to look at the Auditor General's opinions on the due diligence we do around financial decisions. The federal funding for Pharmacare that is on the table would substantially reduced costs for Nova Scotians and provide health care that Nova Scotians, especially women, need and deserve. A federal election is approaching, which has the potential to disrupt progress on Pharmacare or even jeopardize it completely. My question to the minister is: Will this government make it happen and act fast to get a Pharmacare deal with the federal government while there's still time?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: It's very interesting to me, how we want due diligence, we don't want due diligence, we want due diligence, we don't want due diligence. We are in active negotiations. We need to make sure that there's a financially sustainable path if these medications are covered. Bilateral agreements are so important, but they sunset. We need to make sure - with the economics of the province, with the coverage that's available - that we can move forward sustainably. We are in active negotiations with the federal government. Minister Holland and I have had wonderful conversations. I'm confident of the team's ability to move forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

### **DOJ: MISUSE OF NDAs - END**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My colleague has already brought forth a question about the misuse of NDAs in cases of sexual assault. I'd like to follow up questioning to the Minister of Justice on this very important topic. It's not really that complex. We know that NDAs are being misused in cases of sexual assault for the sole purpose of silencing victims and empowering criminals. They are criminals: people who are sexually assaulting, harassing, and sexually, violently harming people, in many cases women. Yet this government refuses to change the laws that are empowering criminals. My question to the minister is: Can the minister please bring some justice to this province and change the laws today?

[2:30 p.m.]

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: This is a significant issue. We know that we need to support our survivors in all ways we can. That's not only with respect, with sensitivity, and with trauma-informed approaches but also within the law. This is a complex issue. We have heard the voices, and we appreciate the voices who have spoken out against NDAs. We appreciate that when they are misused, they can cause harm, but it is not as simple as just banning them. We have heard from others that they play an important role, and there's a lot to consider when we make a decision on this issue. We want to do our due diligence and make sure we do the right thing for Nova Scotia.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: It's really not that complicated. We know eventually the laws are going to change here in Nova Scotia, and every day that goes by that this government refuses to change the laws, this government is putting victims continually at risk. When you silence someone - anyone - with an NDA, you are purposely causing them mental illness. It leads to depression. We should not be silencing victims in this province. By not changing the laws, we are doing that. I want to ask the minister: Does she support the Canadian Bar Association, which voted strongly in favour that NDA sexual assault legislation must change? Does the minister support this?

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

BECKY DRUHAN: I do appreciate the member's passion around this, but this issue is not about whether I support the Canadian Bar Association or any other individual association. This is about doing what is right for Nova Scotians, particularly Nova Scotians who are victims of sexual assault, abuse, or harassment. I just want to remind the member opposite that we are awaiting a very carefully considered set of recommendations from the Uniform Law Conference of Canada, which will be providing recommendations around potential use of NDAs. This isn't evasive. Yes, one province has implemented legislation, but other provinces refuse to do so. We look forward to that considered recommendation.

THE SPEAKER: Just a reminder before we move on: I shouldn't have to scream "Order" two or three times. Once I scream "Order," the mic is cut off. I ask that people respect that and respect other people's time so they can get their questions out, and they can get their answers out.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **DHW: BIRTH CONTROL - FUND**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, programs that offer free birth control have been shown to be revenue-positive, even in provinces that are funding these medications

independently. The cost of providing free birth control is considerably lower than the costs associated with unintended pregnancy, and I can table that. Reproductive rights include access to birth control, and at a time when Nova Scotians are struggling financially, eliminating barriers to birth control is key to ensuring equal access and choice.

My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness: Why is there no funding for birth control in the budget tabled yesterday?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, we currently have a number of programs in Nova Scotia. We offer support through the Family Pharmacare Program. Also, for those who have financial challenges, through the Department of Opportunities and Social Development, there is opportunity to cover birth control, as well as a variety of other ways. We appreciate the question. There has been a lot of advocacy done in regard to birth control. We continue to look at the program available through the federal government and negotiate our deals. Perhaps, there will be more to say in the future.

SUSAN LEBLANC: We need barrier-free access to birth control now. Another initiative that is good for women's health and good for our health care system is take-home HPV test kits. But again, there was no money in the budget for this. This is despite the fact that Nova Scotia Health Authority has said, "We are actively planning the introduction of HPV cell screening, but I understand that this program has not been funded yet by the government." I'll table that. My question for the minister is: Where is the funding for the take-home HPV test kits?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, we are looking at a program for take-home HPV kits. We're working with clinicians to understand how best to roll out that program. There's nothing being held back. That program is not fully realized yet. We are working with the clinicians, who will look at that program and understand how it's best suited to the Nova Scotian environment.

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

### **OSD: CHILD AND YOUTH COMMISSION - IMPLEMENT**

LINA HAMID: The Premier committed to a Child and Youth Commission back in 2021 while addressing the Restorative Inquiry into the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children - and I will table that. Unfortunately, four years later, this government has almost nothing to show for this. My question for the Minister of Opportunities and Social Development is: How much longer is this government planning to make young people wait to have their voices heard and their needs met?

HON. SCOTT ARMSTRONG: I want to congratulate the member with her question on her birthday. We want Nova Scotia to be the best place for children and families. That's why we passed legislation enabling the creation of Nova Scotia's first

Office of Children and Youth. That process is in the midst of making regulations. We're also looking at starting to do some staffing.

We're getting the job done. Just be patient. We're going to have the best one in the entire country, because we've learned from other jurisdictions that when you move too fast, that job will not be done effectively. We're going to put a strong office in place, and it will do the best job across Canada for children in this country.

LINA HAMID: A year ago, this government announced a Child and Youth Advocacy Office but provided few specifics and no budget. Despite the vague nature of this commitment, we were hopeful that we were finally making progress down the pathway that this province needs to go. A year later and still no details. Our hope is fading. Can the minister explain why funding for the promised Child and Youth Advocacy Office was not included in yesterday's budget?

SCOTT ARMSTRONG: All three official parties in this House passed legislation or brought forward legislation that this office should have been created when they were in Opposition. It was only done under the leadership of our Premier and the previous ministers. We actually passed that legislation, and an office will be in place. The creation of that office is being worked on by officials in the department. The regulations are being put forward. We're working on staffing, so stay tuned. We'll have more information on this as we finish this process because we want to make sure we do it right.

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

#### **DNR: CONSULTATION ON EXTRACTION - COMMIT**

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. It is a fact that any successful resource extraction project in the history of our country has received the social licence to do so. It is crucial because no matter how big a potential windfall may be, it cannot be successful if people don't want it. Will the minister commit to a robust consultation plan with Nova Scotians before they go forward with any developments?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: We are at a critical point here in Nova Scotia. Last year, we introduced our Critical Minerals Strategy. There are many minerals in that strategy - many minerals that the world's looking for to meet the 2050 targets for a climate change battle. We have the ability to meet the environmental standards. We have the ability to meet the labour standards that many countries can't offer for these critical minerals to go into the renewable energy spectrum that we're talking about here as well in Nova Scotia.

Every project that comes here has to meet an environmental standard. Through those projects, there has to be community consultation and consultation with our Mi'kmaq

partners when it's called for. There's consultation that will happen. We just had one in November.

LISA LACHANCE: We've already seen the "More, faster" PC approach to this when the government prioritized the interests of an Australian mining company over a Nova Scotia property owner by giving access to land against the wishes of the owner. Over 70 per cent of Nova Scotia land is privately owned. People need assurance that the government is not going to let corporations destroy their land. Will the minister commit to protecting the rights of Nova Scotia property owners, or does the minister intend to bend to the will of mining companies?

TORY RUSHTON: I thank the member for the question because it allows us to put the facts on the floor. The facts on the floor: It's not a small woodlot owner in Nova Scotia. They were actually both foreign ownerships. They had a discussion over nine months. In nine months, they did not come to an agreement. In order to enact Section 26 of that Act, both parties have to be in agreement - which is what we did as a department. Both parties asked for this mediation to take place, and the decision would be based on their collaboration with that. Both parties agreed to Section 26.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Liberal Party.

#### **ECC: LAND AND WATER PROTECTION - COMMIT**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: We recently learned that St Barbara Gold - a major mining company - is pulling out of Nova Scotia. In an interview last year, the CEO of the company said, "The only difficulty that we've really encountered in Nova Scotia is dealing with the Department of Environment." I'll table that quote. My question to the Minister of Environment is: Is he worried that his department is one of those "special interest groups" that the Premier has recently rallied against?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: The case that the honourable member cited is a matter before the courts, and I won't be commenting.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I know a little bit of the history there, so I'll semi-accept that. The real question I have is around land protection. This is going to be one of the ultimate questions that government is going to have when it comes to resource development. We all support resource development, but it's also about land protection as well, and the government has committed to protecting 20 per cent of land and water in this province by 2030. My question to the minister is: As the government goes down the journey of resource development, can he commit on the floor today that he's going to keep that commitment of 20 per cent protection for land and water in the province by 2030?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Nova Scotians absolutely love the protected areas that we have. We are great stewards of the land and water in Nova Scotia. That is why, two years

ago, our government was pleased to bring forward the Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy. There's about 13.67 per cent of Nova Scotia that's currently protected. We have the interim goal of 15 per cent protected by the end of 2026, and then our long-term goal, which is legislated. Nova Scotia is a recognized leader in land and water conservation. That's why the federal government signed the Canada-Nova Scotia Nature Agreement with us a year ago: \$28.5 million to help us protect more land and water.

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

### **DMA: EMERGENCY EGRESS - IMPLEMENT**

LINA HAMID: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. All residents in Upper Tantallon need an accessible emergency egress before the start of wildfire season. This has long been known, but residents and city councillors are worried that it's not going to happen. I will table that. When will the minister assure the residents that this government will take action alongside the municipality to get an emergency egress in place?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'd like to thank the member for the question and recognize the fires of 2023 were devastating. They changed our understanding of our world. They changed our understanding of the suburban forest and the risks that are associated with that. These subdivisions were built in the beginning with the approval of the municipality and the residents, with one way in and out simply because these subdivisions - the residents like that, with less traffic. We all understand now that we need two ways out. We've worked with HRM already on that. We will continue to work with HRM. This is fundamentally a municipal planning issue.

LINA HAMID: Upper Tantallon also has a longstanding issue of unusable fire hydrants. As one resident summed up this issue: "I don't feel the urgency we need. They're talking about a timeline of two years before pipes are upgraded and before the majority of the community gets proper fire protection. That's far too long." Will the minister commit to responding to this issue with the urgency that the residents deserve?

JOHN LOHR: We recognize the issues in Upper Hammonds Plains with water. We are working with HRM on the water pressure issue directly. I will remind the member this is HRM infrastructure. We have many programs. We've had an unprecedented level of funding, which the member would not know, not having been here the last three - just being newly elected. We've increased funding dramatically for water and sewer across the province. We look forward to continuing to do more of that in the future. These are always municipally identified priorities that we work with.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

[2:45 p.m.]

### **SNS: AFFORDABLE HOUSING - PROVIDE**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: According to the most recent Canadian Social Survey, 66 per cent of Nova Scotians experienced a housing challenge related to affordability, suitability, condition, or discrimination in the past year. Fixed-term leases have resulted in tenants losing their housing when the landlords do not renew those leases and increase the rent on the unit, thereby driving up the rents overall. My question to the Minister of Service Nova Scotia is: What measures will she take to ensure that the current supply of rental housing remains relatively affordable?

HON. JILL BALSER: We want to see all Nova Scotians be able to thrive in this province, and that means to be able to find a home and a place that they love and care for. We want to make sure that we're still focusing on the growth of our province in terms of supply. We've heard the Minister of Growth and Development continue to talk about the investments that have been made in housing. We have to continue to do that work. We want Nova Scotians to have choice, so that they have the ability to be able to move and find that place that they deserve to live in and love and care for, as I mentioned before.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We need supply that people can actually afford. Despite this government's great joy and exuberance in celebrating their own accomplishments, the same survey found that 41 per cent of people in this province are very concerned about their ability to afford housing because of the rising costs of their housing or rising rent.

Also, a report from Royal LePage shows that in the beginning of 2025, the housing market shows high demand and predicts continued increasing housing prices. My question to the minister in charge of housing is: What is the government's plan to ensure young Nova Scotians can find a home they can actually afford?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I'll remind again the honourable member that we do have an action plan for housing. It's a five-year plan that has groundbreaking investments. We have done those investments. We'll continue to make those investments. We've cut miles of red tape, perhaps orange tape in the Opposition's case, but we know there's more work to be done. We have created the conditions and committed to over 51,000 new units in the first 18 months of our housing plan. That's 125 per cent of our 2028 goal. We are expanding and increasing the budget for our backyard suite program. We supported 663 first-time home buyers in their efforts to buy their first home. We know there is more to be done, and we'll continue to do that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**DPW: LANCASTER INTERSECTION - UPDATE**

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm wondering if the Minister of Public Works can give me and the residents of Dartmouth North an update on the Lancaster intersection.

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

**OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

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

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

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

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

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 2.

**Bill No. 2 - Gender-based Violence Prevention Funding Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 2, the Gender-based Violence Prevention Funding Act be read a second time.

It gives me no pleasure to speak to this bill. I wish I wasn't doing it. I wish that this was not a bill that we needed in our province. I wish gender-based violence wasn't a thing. But it is a thing. It's a terrible, big thing. Gender-based violence and intimate partner violence are taking place every day in Nova Scotia, in the most rural communities and the most bustling city centres.

The lady who sits in front of us at church, the one who sings loudly and beautifully - there's a very good chance that she could be a survivor. The guy in front of us at the grocery store, after work and a couple of drinks - he could be an abuser. The kid who plays with our kid in the playground after school - maybe they witness or experience violence when they get home. Gender-based violence is insidious, and it is everywhere.

When we debated Bill No. 482, the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, the leader of our party spoke on the bill and eloquently said, and I quote:

By passing this legislation today, declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic, we are enshrining the findings of the Mass Casualty Commission in law in this House. We are coming together as legislators to acknowledge the depth of this issue - the fact that 30 per cent of women report being victims of physical or sexual violence at the hands of their partner. That means that many of us in this Chamber have experienced that - our friends, our families.

And I'll table that quote.

In September of 2024, this province declared intimate partner violence an epidemic. We celebrated that day because it was a step, a first step, in ending this terrible scourge. We talked that day, and in the days to follow, that now what was needed was epidemic-level funding to go along with this acknowledgement.

Since we passed that bill, there have been seven deaths, that we know of, because of intimate partner or gender-based violence. We don't know how many people have experienced and survived violence since September 12, 2024, because those numbers are very hard to enumerate and evaluate. This is because so many people stay silent or because people try to report violence, and their reports are miscategorized or ignored.

Like on September 12, 2024, and for eons before that - like on April 21 and 22, 2020, during the mass casualty that prompted the *Turning the Tide Together* report; and like on December 31, 2024, when a woman and her father were killed by her partner; and like other epidemics that cause illness in body and mind for survivors and witnesses, and death in the others, intimate partner violence is an epidemic, and this government must provide the money needed to address the epidemic and bring it to eradication.

The Mass Casualty Commission Report states in Recommendation V.13 the following:

Epidemic-level funding for gender-based violence prevention and interventions.

I'm reading - I'm quoting now:

The Commission recommends that federal, provincial, and territorial funding to end gender-based violence be commensurate with the scale of the problem. It should prioritize prevention and provide women survivors with paths to safety.

Funding should be adequate and include stable core funding for services that have been demonstrably effective in meeting the needs of women survivors of gender-based violence and that

contribute to preventing gender-based violence, including interventions with perpetrators.

These services should be funded over the long term and should not be discontinued until it has been demonstrated that the services are no longer required or an equally effective alternative has been established.

Priority should be placed on providing adequate and stable core funding to organizations in the gender-based violence advocacy and support sector.

A further priority should be funding community-based resources and services, particularly in communities where marginalized women are located.

I will table that.

What would that money be used for in this endeavour to eradicate intimate partner violence and gender-based violence? Speaker, there are countless experts working in the field of intimate partner violence prevention, care and advocacy. Many are in the Chamber today. Many were outside marching in the streets earlier this morning. They are the experts, and they know how much money is needed and how the money ought to be spent.

I will offer up a few ideas, based on what I have heard from these advocates and experts. We need to fund women's centres and transition houses. These centres, like the Second Story Women's Centre in Lunenburg or the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre & Sexual Assault Services Association, or Bryony House in Halifax, these centres are the heart of care and advocacy for survivors of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence and their children and their families.

They are intimately aware of the nuances of the communities they are in, the complexities of gender-based violence in specific areas of the province. They work in trauma-informed, feminist ways. These centres and organizations like them all around Nova Scotia need stable, dependable, and increased core funding; that is funding for their operations and not for specific programs.

We need investment in second-stage and transitional housing for survivors. This must be a priority. This is housing where survivors can get a new start - safe, adequate housing that accommodates family members, that is affordable for the person staying there.

We know we have a terrible lack of affordable housing in this province all across the province. If the government is not going to adequately address all people who live in core housing need, then it must prioritize survivors of gender-based violence and intimate

partner violence. If someone sees no place to go, then they cannot leave an abusive situation, and violence and the cycle of violence will be continued.

We also need investment in prevention and early intervention of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence. We need changes to school curriculum from Grades Primary to 12. The minister earlier agreed with this assertion, but we need more than we have now, because right now we have an epidemic.

What we're doing is not enough; we need to do more. We need investment in services for the perpetrators of violence. We are hearing more and more about survivors of intimate partner violence who don't want to end their relationships but want their partners who are inflicting the violence on them to get help for their own trauma which is leading to the violence.

I find this piece of the puzzle profoundly moving and important. First, it shows tremendous courage and generosity on the part of survivors, and it also shows courage and hope for perpetrators. What if behaviours could change and violence and fear could be replaced by love and compassion?

Aside from epidemic-level funding for all the initiatives above, we also need to look beyond the immediate to see much-needed systemic change in our province that will contribute to ending this violence. We need real child care options. We need better wages for jobs that are traditionally performed by women, like in long-term care and child care and service jobs. We need to expand and simplify the MOST program, especially in the trades that are dominated by women. We need investment in centres and programs that support social inclusion, especially in rural areas. We need investment in access to sexual and reproductive health care options, including birth control and abortion, especially in rural areas. We need - and this is largely up to the men and allies in the room and in our lives - to call out misogyny and sexism when we witness it. Sometimes misogyny and sexism are casual, and sometimes they're pointed and purposeful. It's all violence and it has to stop.

I want to remind everyone in this House that where there are women, there is violence against women. Gender-based violence: It is everywhere, right in front of us, and right behind closed doors. Its social and financial costs are immeasurable, but they are extremely high. That is why we must treat this issue like the epidemic it is and provide adequate funding to end it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: This is one of those bills that's a no-brainer to support, so I'm happy to put my voice behind the efforts of the NDP on Opposition Day. Great job to my colleague for expressing all the reasons why we should be looking at a more sustained

model of funding for organizations that do such great work on the front lines in all areas that we represent in this House.

[3:00 p.m.]

I think that all of us know someone or are connected to someone - whether it's in our family or friend group - who has been impacted in some way by gender-based violence. We just sat in the Legislature last time, and between the time I mentioned this at Committee until now, we've had no less than seven instances of confirmed gender-based violence. I'm sure there's more, as we know that a lot of this does not go reported.

I've met with a number of organizations - my colleague, the member from Sydney-Membertou, and I - and we'll continue to do what we can as men. I mention, as well, how important it is for us to speak out, given the facts around this issue - given that the vast majority of instances of violence are perpetrated by men against women or gender-diverse people. It is important for all of us to speak out and support the efforts around prevention and intervention.

We have myriad reports and commissions that have been appointed and come out with basically the same recommendations and the need for these organizations that often compete for different funding line items and budgets. That's one of the issues - that they all should have predictable funding that they can count on. It's an issue across non-profits and organizations that have to fight for funding each year and that have to look for staff each year. They don't know if the next budget will have that funding in it for the next year to take on these issues when nobody else will. This cuts across many departments, and I look forward to some of these organizations coming forward at Committee so we can have in-depth conversations on how we can help them, whether it's Bryony House or it's Adsum for Women and Children.

Adsum for Women and Children has one of their shelters in my area in Lakeside - the Sunflower - with 25 units, so I represent many people who have been victims. We're looking to expand that project. I hope to see support from all three levels of government to add to the capacity so that we can house more victims.

The education component was mentioned. Of course, we want to see more curriculum-based initiatives around educating about healthy relationships - particularly with young boys. I think there's a lot of literature out there that people of all ages can educate themselves with. We are not experts by any means in this House but take it upon yourself to read some of the stuff.

I just read a book by the person I recognized today - written by Lynn Gallant Blackburn, who's a sister of Paula Gallant. That's a touching story for anyone who grew up in Timberlea, especially the students in that Grade 3 class who came to school the next

day. Imagine at that age, going to school the next day to learn that your teacher was found in the trunk of her car and the trauma impacted on that whole school.

I do want to thank the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, who did step up to repair a wrong that was enacted to that family. There was a room dedicated to Paula called Paula's Place that was for some reason dismantled and some of the items were moved around, but the minister did intervene. I want to thank him for doing that so that we will have Paula's Place back. It's a symbol. It's an important piece for the community so that there's that enduring legacy.

The family really wants the legacy of Paula to live on for advocates and to see change in the system. It's amazing what Lynn just herself has done. I encourage all members to read the book. I'm going to try to get the library to get it.

Many would know about the rewards program when there's crime in this province. I credit Lynn for the creation of that program. She demanded that a reward be put out for the murderer of that case, and when the police and the Department of Justice refused, she said she was going to do it herself. She was prepared to put up \$50,000 that she didn't have, but she knew she could raise it from the mothers in the community of Timberlea. At the last minute, the Department of Justice changed their views and put out the reward.

It's a fascinating case, how they eventually, after five years, charged the partner with this crime - amazing that it took that long. That speaks to the ways we could look at preventing this from happening and understanding the connection between partners and relationships and what needs to change in our law enforcement too.

I look forward to Lynn and others coming forward at committee to have more suggestions. There are more suggestions around what we can do - with the Department of Justice, of course, but also the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Health and Wellness, and the Department of Opportunities and Social Development.

For that reason, I think it's important that we all support the bill. It's a practical bill. It's a Budget sitting. It's a money bill. I don't see any reason why the government won't support that today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

NICK HILTON: Speaker, it's a privilege to stand with you here today. As the member for Yarmouth, this hits very close to home. Living in a small town, there's a good chance that if something happens, you know that person. I pay tribute to a friend and a colleague we lost. For me, it was a friend; for many, it was a family member - a daughter or a parent.

I'm pleased to offer this response on behalf of the government. To begin, I'd like to say that our thoughts are with all victims and their loved ones and all those affected by the recent tragedies in our province. These tragedies underscore the urgent need for collaborative, decisive action.

Our government is committed to working with communities to prevent violence, support survivors, and implement solutions to address its root causes. We are delivering on the recommendations of the Desmond Fatality Inquiry and the Mass Casualty Commission, informed by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; ensuring that these reports result in tangible change; working together to develop and support community-wide strategies to prevent violence, including sustainable funding for organizations on the front lines; and strengthening connections with victims, advocates, and experts to ensure that our response reflects the needs and realities of those affected by intimate partner violence and gender-based violence.

Together, with our dedicated community partners, we will continue working to build a safer and more just Nova Scotia where everyone can live free from the threat of violence. Yesterday, this government introduced a budget for the coming year that includes an investment of more than \$100 million to address intimate partner violence. I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about some of the significant impactful work that's happening across our government.

Through the Office of the Status of Women and through the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and Standing Together, the provincial action plan to prevent domestic violence, we have invested approximately \$8 million this fiscal year in organizations for programs, projects, and initiatives related to gender-based violence, with a focus on prevention, early intervention, and crisis response. Our agreement with the federal government to implement the gender-based violence NAP will result in additional investments of \$18.3 million over four years.

In the 2024-25 budget, annual core funding was increased by \$7 million to transition houses and women's centres, the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and nominee society. The goal is to stabilize this sector, better enabling them to provide services to individuals experiencing gender-based violence. This was the first significant increase to this centre in more than 20 years.

With support from government in August 2024, Lilac Place and Outreach Centre for Women opened in Cumberland County. The December 6<sup>th</sup> fund offered by the YWCA is helping women and gender-diverse people experiencing violence. Bridges Institute in Truro has increased services, reaching over 125 men since January 2024. The Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre's Living Well program supported 61 youth, aged 12 to 30, to participate in programming aimed at healthy relationships, cultural heritage, and safe places. The Atlantic Muslim Resource Centre is providing prevention programming for men and boys in the Islamic faith-based community.

The Men's Helpline, Women's Helpline, and All Genders Helpline are offering information, navigation, referrals, and brief interventions counselling for those who have concerns about their well-being, safety, and/or the safety of others. Over 30,000 calls have been received since the helpline's launch in 2020. The Safe Outside Our Systems Project, run by Cloverdale Justice Society, is offering services and support such as case management for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals affected by violence. The Nova Scotia Native Women's Association is delivering an emergency assistance fund to provide immediate financial access to families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre is providing programs to support urban Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Through the Department of Growth and Development, Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada implemented an enhancement to the Canada Housing Benefit to provide rental assistance to survivors of gender-based violence. This enhancement to the CHB will help survivors of gender-based violence - including women, children, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people - find safe and affordable places to live. It is expected to support nearly 400 individuals.

Through the Department of Justice, a pilot Family Justice Navigation Program is helping improve responses to intimate partner violence for those interacting with the family court system by offering individuals support, better information, and more outreach to help create a support network and continuity of support for people navigating the system. Work is also under way to ensure police and service providers get regular training related to gender-based violence involving people living with visible and/or invisible disabilities. The first module of this training has been delivered.

The Department of Justice is also enhancing supports through the Victim Services program, Domestic Violence Court program, and a new gender-based violence division which is currently being established.

Through the Department of Health and Wellness and the Nova Scotia Health Authority, Nova Scotia Health has developed a violence prevention, intervention and response program that includes sexual assault nurse examiners and a team of domestic violence consultants to strengthen identification and mitigation in response to domestic violence and improve education across the health sector. Nova Scotia Health has also rolled out training for the Jacqueline Campbell Danger Assessment Screening Tool for over 400 front-line staff, including health care and social workers to promote earlier identification and support victims of violence. Further expansion of the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program to include domestic violence is under way.

Last year, Public Health set up the Nurse-Family Partnership program in Nova Scotia's Eastern Zone - which includes Antigonish, Guysborough, Cape Breton, Inverness, Richmond, and Victoria Counties - to provide parents in these largely rural areas with a strong support system during pregnancy and in the crucial days after a new baby arrives.

[3:15 p.m.]

Through Labour, Skills and Immigration, government is expanding the number of days of paid domestic violence leave from the currently available three days. The department is working with ECOs, SWs, and the gender-based violence sector to develop additional resources for employers. Through Education and Early Childhood Development, the Kids in the Know program is engaging students to build skills that increase their personal safety and reduce the risk of victimization online and offline. All Nova Scotia teachers have had access to this program and its resources to support their students.

Collaborative work is under way to develop a gender-based violence curriculum and bystander intervention training in the public school system, Primary to Grade 12 - post-secondary institutions and public sector workplaces as well. Fundamentally, the approach aims to integrate efforts across Nova Scotia's education and work-life with age-appropriate, consistent, and coherent gender-based violence messaging supports and resources.

GuysWork, a school-based program for male and male-identifying students in Grades 6 to 9, promotes healthy masculinity, normalizes help-seeking, and allows participants to have conversations about health, wellness, and identity.

In the Fall 2024, GuysWork had expanded to over 60 schools, which means that at least 600 students will participate in the program this year. Government has also funded and supports Waves of Change, an education program developed by the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association. It's designed to address sexual violence on university and college campuses in Nova Scotia.

To sum it up, this government is delivering a robust response. To be clear, this isn't an exhaustive list of all the ways we are supporting the work. We also know there's more to do and that we need an all-government, whole-society response. For our part, we will continue to listen, collaborate, and take action to prevent violence and help those it affects.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: First, I would like to thank the NDP caucus for tabling this bill today here in the Nova Scotia Legislature. The advocates who marked today did so to send us all a message to the lawmakers here in Nova Scotia that more must be done in our province to support and end gender-based violence.

Simply saying there is an epidemic is not enough. Each of us in this Chamber has a responsibility to stand strong. Each of us in our province, and nation for that matter, has a responsibility to stand strong and speak up when we see intimate partner violence or sexual assault, as my colleague from Dartmouth North already mentioned.

It is difficult to stand when we know something is happening, but it is essential if we are to stop the cycle of abuse. Each one of us has a responsibility to help end gender-based violence in this province.

I'll be honest, I did not understand the severity of this problem until I became an MLA. Even as a nurse I did not see it directly. When I was knocking on doors, I met so many victims. They told me about their experiences, and they told me that laws must change in this province. They told me about their experience after being beaten, often by their husband or male partner, and what their experience was when they called law enforcement.

Too often, the woman was encouraged to leave, with her children, to give the person time to sober up or give them space. Why was the woman told to leave when her partner was the criminal? Why has this been the pattern of law enforcement?

Back in 2022, I met with the then-Minister of Justice. He was gracious, met with me, and I shared with him what I am seeing in my constituency - this definite epidemic of gender-based violence. I was hopeful, and some of his department staff met with one of the women I had been meeting with who had suffered at the hands of her spouse. But I have not seen very much change since then.

What are the policies of law enforcement when they get a call or a report of gender-based violence? Are there policies in place in our police departments and RCMP detachments?

Today, I want to mention a Canadian woman who has used her pain and suffering to change the laws in Canada in an attempt to prevent what happened so tragically in her life. Jennifer Kagan has been advocating for judges across the country to be educated on intimate partner violence, coercive control and sexual assault. Her daughter was tragically killed at the age of two by her partner.

She has been successful in changing the laws federally so that federal judges now have to be educated on this. We're asking that the same happens here in Nova Scotia. Recently, laws were passed in Manitoba where provincial judges there are to be educated on this. The same should happen here in Nova Scotia. Our provincial judges should have to go through education on coercive control, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault.

Lastly, I want to mention one of the glaring deficiencies here in Nova Scotia: the lack of access to mental health supports. If we are to decrease intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and coercive control in this province, we have to ensure that the supports are in place when people try to access them.

In late 2023, a beloved woman in Amherst was killed by her husband. She was dismembered. She was so loved. She worked at the local theatre, and she will never be

forgotten - Marlene Crossman. Her husband had a known long history of mental illness. Marlene, God love her, she tried for years, as well as many of his family members, to get him the help that he needed and were never able to. Why do we have to wait until someone does something so tragic - ends an innocent life that did not deserve that?

I call upon the government in relation to this bill that our NDP caucus has tabled to increase mental health supports that are so desperately needed, to provide support for underlying causes that may be contributing to intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and coercive control. I support this bill and encourage the government to pass it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act.

HON. LEAH MARTIN: I want to first acknowledge that our thoughts are always with the victims, survivors, and their families. I do find it a little endearing almost to hear that it took until the member was an MLA to be more closely connected to this issue. As somebody who grew up in a community with friends and family members who were really closely connected to this issue, I can say from first-hand experience how encouraged and hopeful I am since coming to government on how much has changed since I was really young. I'm grateful.

I'll get into some of the details specifically about what that looks like, but it is a huge issue. We all agree on that, and we're very passionate about it. We share that amongst our entire team here with this government. I really wanted to acknowledge that as well.

Nova Scotia is committed to a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to addressing the recommendations from the Mass Casualty Commission and the DFI. Many of the recommendations identify ways to prevent and address gender-based violence within Nova Scotia, and we are working collaboratively with our partners to ensure meaningful progress continues. We have come light years from the days where women suffered in complete silence and just talked about it over tea with their friends or in private. Now there are actual supports and places where people can reach out to communicate and have help.

The 211 line is a helpline for all genders to connect with to help them navigate the systems and find the supports and services they need. Last year alone, in the 2024-25 budget, there was a historic investment in this sector, the largest in almost 20 years. With that investment, over \$7.1 million was infused into the sector to help transition houses with their operating costs. That's a significant investment to these critically important services. We value the life-saving work that these organizations do, which is why we'll continue to work in collaboration with them to hear the voices from the perspectives of the professionals who work on the ground.

From my experience in the non-profit sector, I was grateful to come into this position and be able to work with organizations such as Bryony House, which is doing

great work in the community, along with the rest of the transition houses, women's shelters, and multiple other organizations in support of this work.

This is bigger than a budget line item, and it spans across our entire government. Not only does it span the entire government, but it also requires an all-of-society approach that goes along with that. As a government, we are walking toward this work. We are grateful to do it, but it takes everyone, and has to be bred through every single department. That's exactly what we are seeing, which is why I find it so encouraging. To say that it sits in one place, and we can just put money towards it, and it will go away is an unrealistic expectation.

We value the life-saving work that all these organizations do. I'll say it once, and I'll say it over and over again because it can't be said too many times. For example, the Tearmann Society is a transition house located in Pictou County. They shared with us how increased funding has allowed them to address staffing concerns to improve services so that they can now provide double staffing where they couldn't before. This funding has also allowed them to offer ongoing support and services for the gaslighting recovery group, women's inspiring group, and groups for women who have children in care. In only one month, these programs had more than 200 visits.

Engaging and supporting men and boys is critical in preventing gender-based violence. The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women supports a number of prevention programs and services for men and boys to promote healthy masculinity and help-seeking, and provide safe spaces for them to talk about their health and wellness.

The Status of Women office has also supported an organization through the Bridges Institute in Truro, like my colleague was just talking about. Bridges Institute uses activities like skating parties, bowling, fishing derbies, and library visits as a way of creating safe spaces for fathers to comfortably seek help. As a result, the Bridges Institute has reached over 125 men since January.

One participant in this group said: "I was in crisis with my kids. I yelled all the time, and I felt ashamed, but the Bridges staff showed great empathy and compassion and common sense. I never felt stupid or judged. They were just so encouraging, and they gave great suggestions and problem-solving."

Gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, is an epidemic, one that this government recognized as such - the first in the nation - and it requires us to work with community organizations, advocates, and experts across government to ensure that we are addressing the factors that contribute to this violence.

Through the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence in 2024-25, there was \$5.1 million in funding to community organizations to support projects aimed at prevention, and reaching underserved populations in culturally appropriate ways. One of

these organizations is called POSSE. POSSE is the Peer Outreach and Support Services Education Program. We provided \$1 million in support for POSSE for prevention and peer-led support programming for youth in rural Nova Scotia.

The funding has increased POSSE's ability to respond to the needs of youth who access its training and outreach, helping support them to live stronger, healthier lives and feel empowered to become change agents within their communities.

Impacting women's economic security is another very important piece to the puzzle of solving intimate partner violence and gender-based violence. We are committed to strengthening women's economic security. To do this, we go through a number of different initiatives that promote women's leadership and participation in science, technology, engineering, and math - also called the STEM Program - and help support those experiencing gender-based violence.

Once again, through the National Action Plan for Ending Gender-based Violence, we provided support to get everyone online through GEO Nova Scotia. This program distributed free cellphones and data plans to over 200 women leaving situations of gender-based violence. A transition house counsellor shared the story of a woman who received a cellphone through this program. Thanks to that phone, she was able to get calls for interviews and last-minute shifts at her job, allowing her to make more money to help her get back on her feet and become more financially independent. The service also gave her a greater sense of independence, confidence, and safety.

We continue to work across government on various programs and initiatives to help improve access to employment and support for women. Women make up half of our province's population, and they deserve to have the same access to economic security and safety as men do. Ensuring women have the confidence and skills they need to pursue opportunities in leadership is important for ensuring their voices are heard at the decision-making tables.

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women has partnered with Equal Voice Nova Scotia this Spring to run a hybrid campaign school for women and gender-diverse individuals. The feedback from the program included testimonials from one participant who said she originally signed up to be a better campaign volunteer. However, she was so inspired by what she learned in the program that it gave her the confidence and skills that she needed to give a speech at a nomination contest for a candidate position in a provincial by-election. We know there's more work to be done in this area, and we will continue to work to ensure potential candidates have the skills and resources they need to run for office and that barriers are reduced for underrepresented groups.

In terms of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, we are definitely committed to eliminating violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. We know that we cannot do

this work on our own, and the complexity of the calls for action through the justice - through the national inquiry - requires collaboration, coordination, and creativity. In response, we continue to work with key Mi'kmaw women leaders as well as provincial, territorial, and federal partners.

[3:30 p.m.]

We are proud to support the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association - a Resilience Centre in Millbrook First Nation - through various funding pathways led by Indigenous women. The centre is open to all Indigenous people, including women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. Some of the key data points in terms of the funding surrounding the national inquiry responses include: \$250,000 in core funding to the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association; \$419,000 in funding to the Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Resource Centre; \$1.2 million in short-term funding to the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association; \$700,000 in funding to the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre; \$500,000 annually to Creating Communities of Care through the customary law approach; and \$1 million for the Peer Outreach Support Services & Education - the POSSE program, that I referenced before - to provide prevention and peer-led support programming for youth in rural Nova Scotia.

On September 9, 2024, the NSNWA, or the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, hosted their grand opening of the Resilience Centre in Millbrook. This centre is one of the first of its kind in Atlantic Canada and has a chance to write a new chapter with Indigenous women and children in our province - one that promotes healing, strength, and resilience. The Resilience Centre provides a safe space for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people in our province, where they can receive culturally appropriate supports and programs they need to live happier, healthier lives. The Province - through the Status of Women Office and Office of L'nu Affairs - is a dedicated partner in this project. In July 2022, the Province announced that it would provide \$1.4 million to support the construction of the building, and in the 2024-25 fiscal year, NSNWA received \$325,000 from the Status of Women Office to provide programming at the Resilience Centre from the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

The Office of L'nu Affairs is the government lead on the province's response with support from the Status of Women Office. NSNWA leads the response to the calls of justice by the Mi'kmaq and works closely with families, communities, and organizations.

The Status of Women Office is the Province's lead on the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. This recognizes that gender-based violence disproportionately affects Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and as one of its pillars - implementing Indigenous-led approaches - gender-based violence was intentionally aligned with MMIWG2S or missing and murdered Indigenous women and two-spirit people.

Status of Women provides two streams of core funding to the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, one for the administration and two for the Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Resource Centre. The purpose of this core funding is to enhance operational stability and better meet clients' needs; enable adequate staffing levels and ensure quality of service; meet the complexity level of the need for services to address gender-based violence; and ensure staff and participant safety, and work towards funding equity for rural areas. NSNWA annual core funding is \$250,000. The Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Resource Centre is \$419,495 increased from \$150,000 in the previous year's budget.

The Status of Women provides short-term project funding to the NSNWA for a multitude of different projects and the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre is a partner with this government. The Status of Women is providing the following funding to the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre: \$500,000 over 2023 to 2027, to develop these new programs and to support urban Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and \$200,000 to develop a cross-Atlantic urban human trafficking strategy, starting in 2024-2025 fiscal.

Briefly, I want to touch on the response to human trafficking as it relates to the Status of Women and protecting against gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. I won't have time to get into all of the details of all of the work that's going on, but some of the key messages I think are really important to share.

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation are devastating for people, families, and communities. We are working with our community-based partners to ensure victims and survivors have the access and support services they need to heal. We work closely with the YWCA Halifax and other experts through the Nova Scotia Trafficking and Exploitation Services System, also called TESS, to provide guidance and advice to government on how to strengthen prevention through policies and programs.

The government funds programs that provide direct support for victims and survivors, as well as initiatives that help raise awareness to support prevention with a focus on Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian communities. I'll say at a recent FPT meeting, Nova Scotia was recognized as a leader in the area around missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, with support of a potential red dress alert system. So, we were recognized for prioritizing this as an initiative, but also for planning for the future success of this, especially being in Nova Scotia and it being a very important issue here.

The Status of Women Office currently funds \$400,000 annually for the Safer Spaces program through the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. From April 1, 2023, to March 24, 2024, six individuals resided at these Safer Spaces.

Lastly, in closing, the TESS partnership has three key priorities which I'll touch on before I wrap up: a coordinated provincial strategy, community as a practice, and capacity building. Its activities include convening provincial partnership for action communities,

increasing community awareness and mobilization, as well as research and knowledge dissemination.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I am very pleased to rise and speak to Bill No. 2, the Gender-based Violence Prevention Funding Act. We've heard a great deal about the programs that are ongoing through government over a number of years, and yet I think it's really important to acknowledge at the outset that since October, six women, and one of their fathers, have died in confirmed cases of intimate partner homicide in this province - six women.

I would submit that if six Nova Scotians had died at sea, if six Nova Scotians had been lost in a fire, if six Nova Scotians had been lost in any other number of ways, we would have marked those deaths very differently. And so I'd like to take a moment and read their names, and with your indulgence, I would like us to take a moment of silence after that to acknowledge the passing of these women:

Brenda Tatlock-Burke, age 59, of Enfield  
Nicole Murphy, age 49, of Yarmouth  
An unidentified woman from Cole Harbour, age 71  
Corelee Alisha Smith, 40  
Her father, Bradford "Coy" Downey  
Elaine Mosher, 60, of Mahone Bay  
and Paiyton Pick, 22, of Centreville

I ask that the members rise and observe a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The fact that we've lost this many lives in our province is awful. We know that across our province and behind closed doors many more Nova Scotians are suffering from intimate partner and gender-based violence.

The epidemic of gender-based violence and the lives of these victims were marked earlier today in a march. All parties were invited. Unfortunately, the government was not there. I think it's important that we acknowledge in this House that we aren't doing enough. It's not that we're not doing anything, we're just not doing enough, because people are dying.

This bill is our effort to start doing enough. When we brought forward the bill declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic, which I know my colleague spoke to

briefly in her remarks, we were told that we didn't need that legislation, that it was only symbolic. That symbol is so important. Without that legislation, and the work of the advocates who pushed to make sure that it became law, I don't think we would have been able to call those six deaths what they are: intimate partner homicides.

It's changed the way that media reports. It's changed the way we can have the conversation in this space, in our homes, in our communities. That's what we need: culture change. That's what *Turning the Tide Together* tells us. That's what the Desmond Fatality Inquiry tells us. That's what these reports tell us. We need culture change.

One of the suggestions - recommendations - of *Turning the Tide Together* was epidemic-level funding to meet the epidemic before us. While there are commitments in this budget, almost none of them are new, and they are not enough.

Double staffing is great. Increases in funding to transition houses is great, but those organizations also need money for outreach. We also need to be providing stable, consistent funding to organizations that help men with unprocessed trauma who become the perpetrators of gender-based violence. The organizations we have that are doing that are doing heroic work with very little funding and very little attention.

We need epidemic-level funding for gender-based violence prevention and intervention. That is the language of *Turning the Tide Together*, and that's at the core of the bill that we are debating today. We shouldn't have to debate it; we should have it.

Last year, the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia provided services for 4,500 women and children. This is up by about 500 from the previous year. I'll table that. What we hear when we talk to these frontline providers is that there is a lot that is not actually captured in these statistics, that there are a number of people whom they hear about or whom they speak to, who then can't engage with their programming or, because they don't want to become involved with the justice system, don't engage with their programming. This is why things like outreach are so important.

In 2018, nearly one-third of Nova Scotian women and more than one-fifth of men reported experiencing physical and sexual assault committed by an intimate partner. Those statistics don't capture gender non-binary folks, but I'm sure they're high up in there. We know those statistics. This is the highest rate of all provinces in Canada.

I was talking to someone this morning who's new to the province and said to me, "Why is it that Nova Scotia has the highest numbers in the country?" Honestly, I couldn't answer that question. I can point to some things. I can point to the ways in which the social determinants of health impact this epidemic. I can point to the role that poverty plays. I can point to the role that insecure housing plays. I can point to the role that the inability to make ends meet for your family, unprocessed trauma - all of that - but we are not unique in any of that.

[3:45 p.m.]

We are, unfortunately, unique in having been the province that suffered the worst mass casualty event in our nation. After that happened, I was proud to join with a number of advocates and people on all sides of this House to ensure we had a full and robust inquiry that included a gender lens - because we know the perpetrator had a history of violence in his home - to make sure it never happened again. Four years later - in the last few months, seven lives - and this is still happening.

The good news is we have a road map. We have the work of *Turning the Tide Together*. We have some of the folks who worked on that report with us in the gallery today. That's not easy work. That's work that creates a lot of secondary trauma. Thank you to the people who have put their voices and their lives into this work.

What we know now is that the funding to date has been piecemeal. Many of the programs that my colleagues in the government listed during their remarks are one-time grants to different organizations. Those grants are so challenging to administer. You have to hire people, make relationships, and build trust, and then you don't know if the money is going to be there next time. This is why the stable core funding piece is so important, and that's why it's at the centre of our bill.

Part of our legislation would see the Minister of Health and Wellness establish a fund to support organizations with a mandate to address gender-based violence. We know we need the minister in charge of the Status of Women to be at the centre of this work. The Department of Justice is important, but I will tell you, when we talk to the frontline organizations, they say the Department of Justice is the most difficult department - not the staff, but the most difficult site of engagement - for victims, organizations, and everyone. Nobody wants to get there. Let's put the funding upstream. Let's keep people out of that space.

Our fund would be based on a formula that ensures that organizations will have continuous core funding. That means that the organizations doing this work won't have to worry about where the money's coming from for next year or if they can continue doing that work. Imagine: These folks are doing work with deeply traumatized folks. Trust is at the core of that work, yet so often, the conversation has to happen: "I might not see you next month. I might not have the capacity for that next year." We can do better than that.

Our legislation would also mandate the minister to establish a community-based advisory body on gender-based violence to provide consultation and oversight on funding amounts. First voices. We hear that there is consultation. We hear that there is conversation, but it's not yet happening in a robust and co-ordinated way. We have so many organizations and survivors who are coming to us to say, "We want a meeting with government. We want government to come and speak at our rally. We want government to have us at the table."

We do our best. We write letters. We use our space here in the House to recommend it, but it's not happening yet. We don't need more studies, Speaker. We don't need more back and forth. We know the problem and we know what needs to be done. The recommendations from the Mass Casualty Commission . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time allotted for debate on this bill has expired. Pursuant to Rule 20(2), the debate is deemed to be adjourned.

Order. The hour is up. It started at 2:50 p.m.

The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, that concludes Opposition Business for the day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank everybody who stood here today and spoke on this extremely important issue.

Speaker, with Opposition Business done, I'd like unanimous consent for a moment of interruption of late debate before we begin Government Business.

THE SPEAKER: There has been an ask for unanimous consent.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We have now reached the moment of interruption. The notice of the topic for the adjournment debate was submitted by the honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid, and reads as follows:

Whereas the Auditor General's report from June highlights the growing need to take urgent action to address violence in our schools; and

Whereas the report showed that violence in schools increased by 60 percent over the past seven years; and

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

Therefore be it resolved this government has not done enough to protect the working conditions of school staff and the learning conditions of students.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)**

The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

### **VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS: NEED FOR ACTION - RECOG.**

PAUL WOZNEY: Speaker, I rise to address the issue of school violence. The epidemic levels of violence demand an epidemic response from this government, including devoting the fiscal resources to staffing schools appropriately, providing training to staff and education of students, supplying resources to families, and normalizing occupational health and safety protocols and practices in Nova Scotia's public schools.

Not only does this budget contain no substantive investments to address these critical needs, but this government appears to believe that launching an updated policy is the magic wand that will make school violence disappear. To be plain: The government's response to an issue this large, with harms this widespread and profound, cannot be limited to a policy rework and launch.

Yesterday in Question Period, based on the *Safe Staff, Safe Schools* report prepared by CUPE Nova Scotia on behalf of over 5,000 school support staff, I drew attention to the stark reality of how commonplace violence is in our schools. School staff at large report witnessing or experiencing violence in their workplace at least once a week. Looking at this data through the eyes of teaching assistants, that frequency leaps alarmingly to 52 per cent of teaching assistants who witness or experience violence on a daily basis.

Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development if he would confirm that the currently under development provincial code of conduct for students would fully implement the recommendations of the Auditor General's landmark 2024 report on school violence as a key step to enhanced accountability. Despite the minister's flowery response that school support staff can trust this government and its actions on their behalf, he offered no such confirmation. Further, the minister's comments reiterated the oft-repeated public stance of this government that the answer to the epidemic of school violence captured in the Auditor General's report is to implement an updated code of conduct by March 2025.

I want to be clear, not only as the Official Opposition's critic on public education, but also as a classroom teacher in Nova Scotia's classrooms since 2002 and the parent of two students who continue to learn in publicly funded schools in this province: I agree that

an effective code of conduct has been missing in action for a very long time. It is encouraging to see this government moving to rework this policy as a component of addressing school violence. It's both long overdue and a valuable starting point.

That said, policy alone always has been and always will be insufficient to address the issues that are systemic in nature. One of the challenges of developing good policy is it often leaves out voices and perspectives that provide one-of-a-kind insight on what issues look and feel like and ideas about how they can be addressed constructively, proactively, and effectively. Those on the ground in classrooms know that the government's recently announced cellphone policy was successful largely because of the wide inclusive scope of consultation that engaged front-line staff working in diverse roles.

Given the success of engaging with frontline staff on policy development about cellphones, one would assume this government would follow a similar blueprint to inform the redevelopment of the code of conduct. It strains all reason to report that this is not the case. Yesterday, despite his promises to school support staff, the minister failed to admit that the leadership of the unions representing school support staff have never been invited to provide input on school violence as part of redeveloping the code of conduct he promised would arrive in mere weeks.

Speaker, I can tell you these leaders have made written requests to the minister to be able to share this input. Unless the minister has late-breaking plans we don't know about, this means the perspective of 5,000 school support staff has gone utterly disregarded throughout the update of this policy, despite its material interest to school support staff because of its impact on their working conditions and bodily and psychological safety every day they report to work.

There are other glaring omissions in the minister's consultation process. Several organizations that advocate for systemic change to address the epidemic of gender-based violence in the province - such as Be the Peace Institute, a non-partisan advocacy group pursuing solutions to gender-based violence to trauma-informed culturally responsive approaches - have made written requests to the minister to present their input on a code of conduct that responds to gender-based and sexual violence in age-appropriate ways at all grade levels in public schools. As of the delivery of these remarks, the minister has neither responded to these requests nor granted them.

While this House has heard this government's acknowledgement of gender-based violence as an epidemic, its non-response to advocates seeking to inform an updated code of conduct so that it meaningfully incorporates trauma-informed responses to gender-based and sexual violence in schools belies an inexcusable ambivalence as the number of Nova Scotian lives lost to this altogether preventable scourge grows by the month. A rework of a policy as important as school code of conduct demands that this government seek out and consider every perspective on violence. Sadly, the process as followed to date falls greatly short of that mark.

School violence is a profoundly complex issue. Weapons arrive in Nova Scotia schools daily. The school I taught in experienced the brutal stabbing of two staff members whose wounds were life-threatening and remain life-altering. Students raised in homes where violence and trauma are ingrained in everyday life means they exist in never-ending states of fight or flight. They carry this trauma into their classrooms. For them, lashing out isn't about malice. It speaks to being locked in a fight just to live.

The reality of inclusive education in Nova Scotia is that students with complex developmental needs inexcusably go without direct support from teaching assistants and other support staff mandated by their individual program plans because inclusive education has never been properly funded in Nova Scotia. Staffing shortages in our schools mean learning centre and resource teachers and school support staff are daily pulled from the delivery of inclusive education supports to cover classes because there just aren't enough bodies to make schools work.

[4:00 p.m.]

The students most affected by these realities can and do express their loss and frustration in physical ways that result in physical harm to peers and staff close enough to reach. The epidemic of youth mental health in every corner of this province means youth who can't access care or resources concentrated in Metro arrive at schools in heightened states of distress and despair. Many of these youth harm themselves or peers and staff when they can no longer bear up under the weight of their legitimate yet unsupported mental illnesses.

I don't have to tell anyone in this House that we live in times where hate is on the rise. Schools are a microcosm of our society at large and are not immune to the radicalization that has emboldened white supremacy, anti-Black, anti-Asian, anti-Indigenous racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and myriad other forms of hate. There is no question that violence in schools is an echo of the violence of hate we witness with frightening regularity in broader society. These remarks only begin to scratch the surface of the realities of school violence in our province.

Without any update on the consultation process, it's unclear whether this government has taken the time to conceptualize violence in schools, taking into account that it is intersectional, complex, and systemic in nature. I say again that an updated code of conduct is a worthy and necessary venture. The Official Opposition stands fully prepared to support the robust consultation necessary to ensure this policy takes fully into account the complexity of the issue and supports a plurality of response that addresses its root causes for students, staff, schools, and communities.

That said, while an updated code of conduct is long overdue and an important foundation from which to address school violence, a policy alone is insufficient to address

its root causes. This budget falls short in addressing school violence because it does not fund the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy. It fails to fund an accessible, reliable reporting mechanism that is sorely needed to capture an accurate portrait of a systemic issue, that allows decisions to be made with sound, relevant data. It fails to fund necessary training for school staff and education for students on the issue of violence. It fails to fund education entities to properly action and adhere to occupational health and safety legislation and protocols at every school site.

This budget lets families down by failing to fund resources for them to support their children to be peaceful, respectful, and inclusive citizens and students. An updated code of conduct is a needed step - one we applaud - but this budget demonstrates that all the government's eggs to address school violence are in one policy basket when it comes to addressing this epidemic, rather than approaching this epidemic with the vision and funding necessary to address it at its root.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm honoured to get on my feet and talk about this important resolution, one that we support our colleagues from the NDP caucus in and that is, I'm sure, one that we all hear as MLAs across the province.

One of the opportunities we do have at home is that we meet regularly with the NSTU. They set up regular meetings with the local MLAs around topics that are important. They're wide-ranging, but this is one that, in the last number of years, has really been something that has taken the lion's share of the conversation around safety in schools and safety for our staff who support our kids every day along their educational journey. We've had emergency debates before in this House that many of us, regardless of what side of the House we've sat on, have promoted. Any time that we can have a conversation about the safety of our schools - or anything with our schools for that matter - we would support as a caucus.

To some of the points that my colleague made, the teaching assistant one is one that really kind of hits home for me as I have someone in my family who is one of the learning centre teachers at home. We've seen across-the-board cuts to teachers and teaching assistants. That is something that I think the government should actually fund more of moving forward. They play such an integral part in supporting our classrooms. They provide a lot of support to our resource teachers, and it's important.

I do want to talk as well about the evolution of our school system over the years, which is pretty substantial. When it comes to the environment that our teachers and our staff face each and every day, I would argue that has been even more amplified since COVID, since we saw the impact that isolation has on people. I believe it has a big impact on behaviours. Unfortunately, some of that has flowed into our schools. The more resources we can provide to our schools around this, the better.

We talk about the code of conduct. It's something we support. It's something we look forward to seeing. The government is going to have to really step up and fund what the recommendations are within that.

I also look at some of the things that have worked in the past, as well, that I think the government should look at when it comes to community policing. We know this is something that has had a presence in the schools, and provincial governments of the past have funded it. It's from a public safety perspective, but it's also from a community policing perspective.

I look at it from that sense that we've had these members of the police community in our schools - as a presence within the school - that could act quickly in the event of danger. They're on-site. Most importantly, they've built relationships with students. They've built relationships within their communities. We all have great examples of that in our communities. I think that's something that should be fully funded and looked at within our middle schools and high schools, and something that the government has funded in the past.

I don't have the breakdown of what schools may have that now, but I think that is something we could do consistently outside of looking at - which I'll get into in a minute - around core funding for great organizations that exist in our community.

I would be a big supporter of bringing a police officer into our schools - something that the government should fund provincially or at a federal level. It's been done in the past and still may be done in some capacity now.

It's about community policing. It's about building relationships within the student body. It's about being able to help identify, with experts and great organizations on the ground, potential problems that may arise.

If I can provide anything in that debate, I think that's something important. That is an important investment that government could make now by working with local police agencies. The concept of community policing within our schools and within our school community is something that not only brings a public safety perspective, it also brings a real level of not only support in community policing, in the sense that the police officers who have done exceptional work in communities across the province within our school systems do, but also brings a level of comfort and a new relationship between the students and our local law enforcement.

There are lots of stories that I've heard. I had the privilege of being the Police Commission Chair for the CBRM many years ago. We worked with the schools. We had officers in our schools. Again, it's not just about law and order; it's about building those relationships with local law enforcement. Students had somewhere to go if they had an

issue. If there was something onsite that happened all of a sudden, there was a presence there. There was quick communication. I think that's something we can look at.

We've heard a number of examples around violence in schools and some of the root causes of that. There are great organizations in communities. Whether it's through our transition houses when it comes to gender-based violence or through our youth clubs at home that play a very integral role outside of the school hours - which I want to congratulate - there are some really great ones. We all know those examples. They want to come into the schools. They have the expertise to come into the schools.

We don't need to reinvent the wheel in many cases. I think the important thing is that if we have the funding mechanism there - and this is the stuff that I'll be looking for as we move forward - they want to go into the schools. They're there to support students. Let's find the best way for that to happen. They are willing to do that work. They do that work every day outside of the school system as it is.

I just think there are some great opportunities that we can use to help to support our staff and our teachers, who have told me some pretty heavy stories about some situations where lives have been in danger. It is a huge toll on their mental health, on their physical health, and ultimately, we are losing people who have made it their career decision because they love supporting our children. They love to teach. That's their life's passion and they have left the profession because they just felt like the support wasn't there - and that is really unfortunate. I think, as I said, you won't be able to solve it overnight.

There are some things that the government is going to present in the very near future when it comes to the code of conduct, and I know many stakeholders have been involved with that. We will be watching that closely. I think the school support staff, especially in the teaching assistant area, needs to change. You are seeing gaps. I use Cape Breton as an example. We've seen a decrease in teaching assistants over the last number of years in Cape Breton. That is probably happening across the board, so that is something to keep in mind as the government is making decisions. Working on defined protocols within schools - that would be part of the code of conduct in working consistently with schools.

In my last minute and thirty seconds, I'll go back to what worked. Nothing will be perfect in this, but I just remember a time when the government worked closely with law enforcement agencies on the concept of community policing. It was something that my friend Myles Burke, who was a former Chief of Police - he is no longer with us - focused so heavily on, and worked with all of the schools within the community to build that relationship of trust between law enforcement and our students.

As I said, the Cape Bretoners in here who are MLAs have great examples of police officers in their communities who have stepped up for decades and made it their career to work closely with the schools, offices in the schools. When the time comes that they have

to present that law and order, they've built those relationships with kids, and ultimately the kids will trust law enforcement instead of looking at them as an impediment.

I can tell you just in my own local office, having these officers involved with the school system in that role has saved lives. Kids built a relationship. They felt comfortable. They could trust police. That's what we want, and I thank all the officers out there who do this work each and every day, and I hope that as you move forward, these are the things that I want you to consider.

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

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank both members for their words. There were a few things that were said - some I am going to address and some I'm not - that I do take offence to. One of the things was saying how this is flowery and it's just words. Well, it isn't just words. To imply that there is no consultation is not true, and I think it is rich for the Official Opposition. Today we've heard it over and over and over: Slow down, go fast, slow down, go fast. You are not doing enough. You are doing too much. You are not doing too much. We are spending time with the experts. We are trying to encapsulate every voice possible.

To say that we are not working with the NSTU is flat-out not true. I have personally met with the NSTU. To say that they are not being consulted and that the minister isn't meeting with them is simply not true. Simply not true. There have been phone calls, text messages, face-to-face meetings. In fact, I went to the provincial union meeting and was told I was the only minister they could remember who has ever done that.

I sat around the table with over 100 union representatives and took questions and we talked about this issue. I am glad that the member is passionate about this because I remember when he was president of the NSTU and I met with him, and he did not bring this up. He did not bring this up with me when I went to the NSTU head office and sat in a room with him.

It is offensive to all the work that's being done by students, parents, school associations, the NSTU, PSAANS, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, the Indigenous community, and the African Nova Scotian community that someone would stand here and say that this policy is flowery, that my words when I refer to the policy are flowery, or that these are just words.

What these words are going to do is turn into action for our teachers and our support staff, whom we value. To say there's nothing in this budget - it's clear to me that the members haven't read the Budget: 350 new positions and the ability to implement the code of conduct. We are working with universities, and there are announcements day after day

where universities or post-secondary institutions are stepping up to create more avenues into education.

[4:15 p.m.]

We know that one episode or one incident of violence is too much. I'm a father of three. My children go to school. For a member to stand and act like I don't care and that I'm just giving platitudes is offensive, because my kids go to school. I have friends who are in the education system. We are meeting with the people who will make the change and the people who know what's happening on the ground. We're not pulling this out of thin air. We have to have the conversations in order to be informed.

I'm not going to stand here and act like I'm the expert on all of this. That's why you surround yourself with people who know. That's why you talk to CUPE. That's why you talk to the NSTU. That's why you talk to PSAANS. That's why you talk to as many groups as you can, and that's what we've done. For anyone to say that we're not doing that is either ill-informed or just being political.

We have said that this code of conduct is coming out in March. We've talked about schools - the safety of schools and the root causes. I'm glad the member brought up the root causes, because it was his party that voted against the lunch program. It was his party that voted against the breakfast program. It was his party that voted against Income Assistance increases. I can go on and on.

There is massive investment - historic investment - in our schools, our staff, and our post-secondary in this budget, including an extension and the continued rollout of the very successful lunch program. I'll bet my Honda Civic versus his BMW that he's going to vote against it. They're going to vote against it. I'm just joking. I was being cheeky, Speaker. I was being cheeky. I apologize.

I will guarantee you that that party will vote against this budget. They will vote against this budget, but then they'll do what they always do. I see their videos online, where they're saying, "We brought in the lunch program. Look what we did." How can you say you're doing that when you're voting against it? I saw the videos.

THE SPEAKER: Order. (Interruption) I said order. That is true. Each member so far has had the chance to speak without interruptions. I have let quite a bit go. Let's get back on track. Let's give the speaker the respect by listening to what they have to say, no matter who they are.

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I wish I had an hour. I'm sure the member and I will get to know each other quite well during Estimates, and I look forward to that.

All this aside, I'm going to tell the member some of the things that the updated policy will do. It will give clear instructions on addressing incidents in the school - very clear instructions. It will give updated categories of incidents and tracking monitoring responsibilities. We will be tracking incidents in school and addressing them head-on.

The member is right: He did mention training. This is specifically going to address that. There is going to be professional learning to accompany the updated policies, the rules, the regulations, what they can and cannot do. For anyone to stand here and say we're not listening - we are listening.

I want to thank the support staff, the administrators, and the teachers for a sometimes thankless job. I will let them know that they have a minister who is very thankful. They have a government that is very thankful of the job they do. No matter what anyone says in this House, I'm going to continue to meet with the unions. I'm going to continue to meet with PSAANS. I'm going to continue to meet with everybody I can to help create the most informed decisions we can when it comes to the education system.

We need to listen to our frontline workers and we are listening to our frontline workers. The former Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development did an exceptional job with that, and that member should know that. She was meeting with locals. She was going in and meeting with locals and started the code of conduct. So to say that the local voices are not being heard, aside from sitting in their living room and pulling up a bed beside them at night, that minister did just about everything she could, and I'm going to continue to do that. She blazed a trail, she set the example, and I'm going to continue to do that.

We want to hear from our teachers. We want to hear from our support staff. We know their job is difficult. I get frustrated, angry, and mad when I hear about incidents of violence. So when the code of conduct comes out, we will make sure that it is implemented, that our staff feel supported. I will have direct conversations with whoever wants to have that conversation with me, to ensure that we do everything in our power to make sure not just our staff are safe, but the students are safe, everybody is safe, because nobody should into a school and ever, ever feel threatened.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time for late debate has expired. I want to thank all members for participating on this important topic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you, everybody, for that educational and great debate.

Speaker, would you please call the order of business Government Motions.

**GOVERNMENT BUSINESS****GOVERNMENT MOTIONS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 4.

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island with 47 minutes remaining in the Official Opposition's response to the Budget Address.

LISA LACHANCE: I am pleased to rise again to raise further questions and concerns about the proposed 2025-26 provincial budget. The government is presenting a Budget that contains an incredible amount of spending, with little to address the issues we hear from Nova Scotians in the last election campaign, in our constituency offices, through e-mail, and by phone. We have great concerns about the transparency of their spending, and we'll talk a bit about why that's important.

I wanted to start, actually, with the tax measures. The reduction in taxes, I know the aim is to have stimulus. So to have a stimulus in personal spending and household spending, and to have a stimulus for small businesses. What we're concerned about is that, without having some of the other structural fixes, without having truly affordable housing being available in this province, without the other affordability measures, in fact, the reduction of HST will not do much for folks who are lower- or middle-income. They will not see a great difference in their household budgets, and they will not feel the impact on their quality of life that I think this is aimed at.

Speaking to small businesses – the small business tax rate has been the highest in the country. Ideally, this would promote stimulus, and raising the amount of taxable income is important too. I have to say that in all my meetings with small businesses and with associations and the Chamber, there are other issues that people are actually quite a bit more concerned about, things like the cost of rent and the ability to afford rent. Folks are concerned about the recent changes in planning that eliminate the requirement for commercial space on the bottom of buildings. Basically, there are a lot of concerns.

When I met with all the Business Improvement Districts in the HRM, their main concerns are around safety and access to other types of supports. Are these tax measures enough to make a difference for Nova Scotians? Are these tax measures enough to make a difference for small businesses in Nova Scotia? In this time of economic uncertainty, even if the threat of tariffs doesn't come to fruition on March 4<sup>th</sup>, we know that we're in for

many years, at this point, of economic threats and instability from the United States. Are these enough to actually make a difference if folks are worried about paying their bills?

We've been talking a bit in this session about the spending on housing. Yes, the investments - I think I said this previously - in public housing are welcome, but they're just a drop in the bucket. I have to say again that we could have eliminated this housing crisis from 2021 onwards. We could reduce the crisis now by implementing real rent control. This is something the government could do very quickly if protecting renters was a priority. We need to look at removing the abuse of the fixed-term lease loophole, which with the rent cap has really destabilized the rental market. That's certainly something that I've seen and that we hear about all the time in our constituencies. We've talked about this quite a lot, where landlords want to be able to raise the rent in units past the five per cent cap. They move all of their tenants onto fixed-term leases. There are some potential areas where fixed-term leases are needed, but a majority of leases on fixed term is not stabilizing the rental market.

This government asked for and got a report on establishing a compliance and enforcement branch within the Residential Tenancies Program. We still don't see that in this Budget. As we were talking about, in terms of building truly affordable units, we think that we need to look at some sort of generational build in terms of looking at working with organizations that do prefab flat pack construction that's made right here in Nova Scotia. How can we do the wartime effort of building people affordable homes that they can buy now and they can stay in?

The other issues that we're concerned about: We are concerned about the access of folks living with gender-based violence or living in situations of violence and their access to safety and their access to shelter. I've been on various boards of organizations. I'm no longer on the front lines, but we listen to folks on the front lines. Organizations like Adsum for Women and Children and others have repeatedly described the types of barriers that folks are facing in this current housing crisis, when they want to be able leave a situation of violence, and there just isn't shelter; there just isn't a secure home for them to go to. People make decisions because they're worried about losing their kids if they're not in a perceived safe or stable housing situation.

We need to be really thinking about supporting folks who have immediate housing needs.

I am also interested to learn more about the new public housing and the percentage that would be accessible. In Nova Scotia, we have the largest percentage of residents living with a disability issue over all other provinces and territories. The last numbers from this Nova Scotia government say that 38 per cent of Nova Scotia residents are living with some kind of disability. That would be almost 450,000 people who have a disability and still require housing.

What are we doing on the path to 2030 in terms of ensuring that folks with disabilities have access to housing that works for them?

[4:30 p.m.]

We talked a bit earlier today about the real need to work with the non-profit housing sector and with community organizations to build truly affordable, long-term affordable housing, co-ops as well. The budget announces the rebate of the provincial HST for new, purpose-built rental housing but we just don't see this as an affordability measure. It doesn't distinguish between profit and non-profit proponents.

We need to do more that directly supports the non-profit housing sector. When I look at my own constituency, there are two public seniors manors and there's also a seniors co-op. I would say that based on spending lots of time with residents of all of them, that the quality of life and the stability offered by the co-operative model greatly outweighs the public housing model - so we need to see more care and maintenance there - but also offers people the ability to stay within their community as they age.

Co-operative housing: This is where we see long-term, 30, 40 years of affordable rent and stability for people to live their lives.

We've also talked about really wanting to see and have made apparent the investments in the health budget that they're actually going to result in greater attachment to primary care. One of my questions is: Where are the investments in collaborative care clinics? Why don't we have a target for how many we want to establish in the province in the coming year or the coming three years?

We know that there are still a lot of people, a lot of Nova Scotians, too many Nova Scotians, who are on the wait-list. Certainly, I don't always think that everyone who doesn't have primary care is actually on that wait-list sometimes.

I know the government talks about a reduction in the wait-list but that was after it doubled under this government. It's good that the trend is downwards but if more attention had been paid, we wouldn't have had to climb down so far.

We've asked some questions about the plan to hire new doctors. Okay, so how many net doctors? What's our retention plan? What are we offering that's different? Other jurisdictions, like B.C., are offering different salary agreements that have proven to be quite successful in attracting and retaining family physicians. What are we doing differently? How are we going to retain people when they get here?

In terms of other allied health care professionals, we also don't see a lot of the intent. I would say, too, that part of the challenge this year in the budget process is, of course, that departments didn't write individual plans. We met with a number of

stakeholders last night to look at the budget. People talked about the accessibility of the budget documents.

Really, instead of having a departmental plan for the Department of Health and Wellness where we could understand where the investments were, we have the overall Estimates book and we have a very high-level government business plan.

I would just say that it's very hard for us and for stakeholders to really understand where the investments are. I'll close that parenthesis. Things like we want to know more about the menopause centre of excellence. I will say I asked the Department of Health and Wellness on Budget Day some questions about funding for that. I was told there was no new funding in place for the menopause centre of excellence.

Even if this is in the planning stage, it begs the question: How real is this commitment? What are the goals this year? What are the outcomes? Without a departmental business plan, we have no idea how this project is going to advance. Given the types of delays, restrictions, and complications in terms of accessing women's health at the IWK Health Centre, in particular for endometriosis but also for pre-natal and post-natal care, I also worry about whether or not - where is system capacity to support the centre of excellence? All these things are good ideas, but they can't just be ideas and can't be divorced from the reality of staffing and access pressures.

We talked a lot today about access to contraception. I understand that maybe there's this narrative emerging about us wanting people to go fast or go slow, and we can't quite choose the speed. It is true that sometimes when deals are made - sole-sourced contracts, maybe not even a contract, just an agreement - and money goes out the door to different providers, we often feel that is probably too fast. We want to know that we're getting value for money.

On other issues, like contraception, there's federal money on the table, and the business case and the health case for access to contraception is pretty clear. We were also hopeful that we would see universal access to PrEP in this budget. We don't see it, and we would like to understand why.

We're also very concerned about reproductive and sexual health care access in Cape Breton, abortion access being a primary one, but also pre- and post-natal care. In terms of thinking about allied health professionals, again, we still didn't hear anything in this budget about supporting midwives in Nova Scotia. Right now, 16 per cent of babies are going to the unattached newborn clinic, which is kind of great because it shares space with my family doctor, so I get to see really cute babies all the time. It's not so great for the families. It's not a permanent, attached place for their babies. I certainly meet lots of people who say: I don't know, when this attachment ends, where do we go next? How do we track our child's development?

Midwives could be a part of the solution. This is what midwives do: pre- and post-natal care, and they care for babies. We don't have standardized post-natal care in this province. I won't go into all the health benefits of good pre- and post-natal care, but we continue to ignore folks like midwives who are here and available to help make things better for Nova Scotians.

We've asked questions about this today, too, around take-home HPV screening, take-home Pap tests, and other self-testing abilities. Again, we have an access problem. We don't have enough physicians. We don't have enough other health care workers. The Halifax Sexual Health Centre regularly, on the first or second of each month, announces that all the appointments are gone for the month. We need to make this easier for people. The technology exists. I think that people would be very interested in being able to do this in their own homes and would probably undertake testing more regularly and more consistently.

I just want to address - because we've been talking about this today - the funding that's alluded to or perceived to be in the budget. On Budget Day, we saw some reference to \$100 million for gender-based violence. I spoke to the folks at the Department of Opportunities and Social Development, and I spoke to the folks at the Department of Justice to understand: Was this new funding, or was it just a continuation of the announcements? On this day, I have a spreadsheet, and it's a continuation of what has already been invested. I really don't understand. Two departments told me there's no new money. When I talked to Justice about the gender-based violence unit, they also told me that it's five FTEs, but there are no new FTEs, and there's no new funding attached for that division to make investments in their work.

I would suggest - we're bringing forward the information that we have access to. Again, in the absence of government business plans, we follow the process set out where we call departments and talk to deputy ministers and communication folks. If that's not true - I'd be happy to walk through with the minister the spreadsheet that I have here about the expenditures that have taken place this year, what's planned for next year, and it's the same.

Obviously, as I've said before, we're very excited to have conversations about economic development in this province and to talk about the economic health of this province. This has been a gap since 2021 in terms of thinking about how to move this province forward. We are going to be asking questions. We've talked about the need for a business case, so there are issues around social licence, there are issues around environmental concerns, and then there's simply the issue around the business case.

Particularly thinking about things like critical minerals and uranium and fracking, I don't know that we - we probably don't know very much about how much we have - but will we be competitive in the global market? In uranium, Saskatchewan produces a huge amount, really fulfilling the domestic need and a great deal of the global market in terms

of uranium production. I don't know that we're going to be able to catch up and get any part of that global market. Is there really any benefit? How much do we have, and is it going to make a real difference for people?

I guess when I look at the past history of resource extraction in this province, it didn't lead to many individuals or communities experiencing prosperity. In fact, this is where we have the company houses, we have a legacy of environmental racism and environmental disasters that are not cleaned up, that communities have to fight for years, and then become very expensive liabilities for government. We're going to be asking lots of questions, and we're going to be working with stakeholders to listen and to get their questions as well.

There was some reference, I think, in the Budget Speech around the need to play our part as global citizens. We can do that. We can access resources from other parts of the world and work towards areas where they are, in fact, produced in ethical ways. It's not an either/or choice. That's a false dichotomy.

I think the framework around this discussion needs to acknowledge the complexities and needs to engage Nova Scotians in that conversation. I did ask the Minister of Natural Resources today about the situation where the private landowner did not want to grant access to a mining company. While I understand that the parties agreed to go to mediation, that doesn't necessarily mean that the landowner agreed to the access. These are completely two different things. The landowner did not agree to the access. The landowner is not happy about the access. I will find the article to table on that, but sure, they went to mediation. That's not the same thing.

I've been looking at our past uranium inquiry from the 1980s, and this was actually a huge issue in Nova Scotia. Folks were having people come to do exploration on their property - their property that they owned - and their property rights were being completely disregarded. That was actually a huge part of what was considered in the uranium inquiry that was undertaken in the 1980s. I kid you not, I was just reading that section when the story popped up about this landowner in Yarmouth County. We are just repeating our history, and I would encourage people to seek out the true story of what happened in terms of that issue in Nova Scotia over the years and consider it in the light of today's factors and environment.

In the budget, there is an allocation of \$500,000 for the Critical Minerals Strategy. I would say that if this is a - that almost seems like - what are we going to do with that \$500,000? What's it going to bring forward in terms of information? Obviously, we'll have a chance to ask the minister in Estimates a bit about what the plan is for that money.

I guess I would just say that the faster/slower accusation, but if this is the big deal - if this is what is going to save us - I am not sure that \$500,000 to implement a strategy is exactly signalling that this is a priority for the government or really enabling it in any realistic way.

In terms of economic development, I see reference to a trade action plan. I would love to hear more about that. I see reference to things around incubators and hubs, and I definitely saw the investment to COVE. But the question really is: What are the other sectors that need investments? COVE, I think, was also \$500,000. Again, does that match the needs and costs of the types of investments they need for the types of really innovative research they do in the blue economy?

[4:45 p.m.]

There are other issues that we need to resolve to advance economic development. We did benefit from an influx and a growth of population during the pandemic, but we are still restricted. We still face barriers for folks to settle where they want to because of access to world-class cellular and internet access in every nook and cranny in this province. Investments continue in this area, but this needs to be achieved ASAP.

I also didn't see much reference to transportation. This has become a critical issue. In HRM, with the recent population growth, this was one of the key topics on the doorstep during the election. I would say in 2021, I guess a lot of people were still working from home. We were just coming out of COVID and all that sort of thing, but that is not what people are saying. People were like, Number 1, transportation/traffic/ability to move around. I know that this is not just an HRM issue. I know that this is an issue around public transportation in Sydney to unlock people's ability to work and study. I also think it is a really important issue in rural areas.

We are investing in roads and that's part of the equation. We also have a large rural population, but we are also the most densely populated rural population, if that makes sense. The ability to build transportation networks is there and many communities have done so, like Kings Transit, Musgo. Listen, we need to be able to move around our community in some way without privately owning cars. They've done that work, but I really think we are a small province - we are a small jurisdiction - and actually we are not that isolated from one another throughout the province. So we need to crack the code on rural transportation.

I've heard rumours that perhaps the report from the Joint Regional Transportation Agency won't be released to the public. That would be a shame. Hopefully, we will hear more about that during this session. Then in other areas - there is an investment to the MOST Program. Again, I've talked about the issues around: Is it scoped the right way to attract diverse participants, diverse employees?

Also, we have heard lots and lots from unions and from workers about folks finding the whole process too complicated and hard to access, and people are actually giving up on it. I guess what we really want to see through this investment is also more investment in coordination and collaboration, and support for people to apply and to really make use of this program.

Then we also saw a major investment in Nova Scotia Loyal. I did ask the department again what that money is for and, you know, it's to continue what's been done. So if that's the case, we are going to provide marketing tags in grocery stores and whatever else that program's been doing. We know the output. We know the money has been spent. We can probably count how many stickers have been sent out and how many people are registered. Those are the outputs. Well, that tells you nothing about the effectiveness of the program. What are the outcomes? Is this program actually supporting really transformative change for local producers, farmers, manufacturers, and is it making a difference for Nova Scotians who want to access local goods? We need to see more about the outcomes of this program.

I would also suggest that the Budget remains quite silent on agriculture investments. Consistently, this sector has a series of priorities for supporting greater self-reliance and greater sustainability in the sector. If we're worried about being local and having access to local products, here is an area where I think we can all agree.

Farmers and producers really need access to manufacturing and processing capacity. Right now, there's just too much of our harvest - too much of our products - that we can only access during a short period of time during the year. This is a problem for us as consumers. It's a problem for farmers, who would love to not have 80 per cent of their income from three months of the year, but a 12-month income where you were having ways to have your products in the stores and going to customers all year long. That's clearly a huge priority.

I think, as well, the sector's been pretty clear on issues around more predictable funding - not in response to issues, but the type of funding that allows people to plan. Even some of the responsive funding that was administered in the last year - I was talking to vegetable farmers who in June hadn't heard if they were getting any funding. The decision-making about what you're going to put in the ground and how much of it happens a few months prior to that, so the type of funding actually wasn't helpful to a lot of farmers. We need to think about doing that differently.

I'm just wondering where the Food and Beverage Strategy is. It's been promised. There were consultations. There was a What We Heard document, and now there's silence. I'm really curious about how that's disappeared off of the work plan for this government. I think folks in the sector were really excited about this. It is very disappointing. I think it has all but disappeared, and it certainly wasn't funded in this Budget.

I do want to touch base on education. I appreciate the minister's words earlier about additional funding to support inclusive education and to create schools that are free from violence for everyone. Again, I spoke to the department. I was told that there was no new funding. I was told there was no new funding to support the implementation and actions against school violence. That's what I was told.

If that means that the new funding is wrapped up in people, I'm not sure we're getting to the crux of the issue. We know that our educators are overwhelmed. They're dedicated. They do amazing work, but if, for instance, this tracking and monitoring is about them taking on additional responsibilities, I'm not sure that's going to get us where we want to be.

Actually, I also really want to think about, again, their root causes. We've talked about gender-based violence as an epidemic in this province. We really need to start thinking about curriculum from Primary to Grade 12. We need the types of supportive environments - at one point, we had a real commitment to restorative justice and restorative approaches in Nova Scotia schools. I saw that work amazingly well at the school my children attended when they were much smaller, in terms of reducing the amount of conflict in the school. Again, that program seems to have been all but abandoned. We've done some good things in the past, and we need to start looking at those again.

We also need to hear about the guidelines to support trans and gender-diverse students. Again, there have been consultations, but the community hasn't seen them. We don't have a timeline and there aren't additional investments. Some of the things that we thought about in that - that stakeholders and young people and teachers wanted to see in those guidelines - was a commitment to developing curriculum - that takes money - and infrastructure - again, that's money. The principles are important, but so is the action through the budget.

I would just say, too, in terms of advanced education, I know there was a major announcement in the post-secondary sector today. What I would say is that this is also a sector that's in turbulent times and has also been through its own turbulent time in terms of reduction of numbers of international students, as well as a really unclear path set out by this government.

Over the past three to four years, it's been like: Tell us what your governance structure is, tell us about this. Okay, actually we're not going to do an MOU. Okay, everybody is going to have individual agreements. Okay, we're only going to have maybe 10 months to one-year-long individual agreements. Just to say that that has taken its toll on the sector.

Universities and colleges need to be able to meet their sustainability and accessibilities goals of this province. We need all Nova Scotians who want to be students to be able to access any program at any location. Students need to see signs of what Nova Scotia is doing to make it easier to study in Nova Scotia.

I obviously have a lot of students in my riding. I think I have five universities, so I talk to lots of folks about this. I'm not making this up, but day after day, when I'm out in that neighbourhood in particular, I will talk to students, at least one each day who says: I would not have come here to study if I had known it was going to be so expensive for

tuition - so hard to find housing. They've really been the victim of the fixed-term lease loophole and that sort of thing.

Instead of being our next generation and coming to Nova Scotia, exploring it through post-secondary and then wanting to stay, students are leaving midway through their degrees because they're like: I can live in downtown Toronto cheaper and do online courses. I'm not staying here. They're not going to stay in the long term.

So we really need stability. We need to deal with our tuition issue. We have the highest tuition in the country. We need to increase bursaries. Even within the student assistance program, we need an overall increase in the amount that is accessible for folks.

There's a whole bunch of other stuff that I didn't see funding for in the budget that I think is really important - things like a poverty reduction strategy, the child and youth commissioner, funding for the 2SLGBTQIA+ action plan. Again, I appreciate the minister's supportive works about the importance of that, but - I won't use the word flowery - if it's just an action plan and it doesn't have any money, then it's hard to see how it will make a difference.

We haven't heard a lot about the path to 2030 in terms of our commitments to accessibility, which again, require pretty transformative investments across sectors. So there's lots more to go through. We'll have the chance in Estimates.

I do want to talk about financial management. Just for the new members, I'm going to take us back. It is true that in 2010, the Finance Act was updated, and that was under an NDP government. That is absolutely true. I was also working in the Department of Finance at the time, and I can tell you that we took the best available information we could find across jurisdictions to update the Act.

Prior to that update, the Act was actually a bit of a mess. People had just tagged little bits here and there onto it. So it was an update. It was what we thought would work best. At that time, the provisions, particularly for additional appropriations, seemed adequate. I would say that they were, under the NDP government, because we barely used that extra-budgetary spending. Even under the Liberal government, there wasn't a great deal of extra-budgetary spending.

When you look at it, say, in 2020 when we had a pandemic, the details in the Order in Council are there in terms of understanding what was being spent - not \$1.6 billion, not \$1.3 billion, not \$29 million to this department and \$7 million to that department. Actual information so that citizens, and their elected officials, could understand what money was being spent where and why. Why was it an urgent issue that had to happen out of budgetary spending?

We do have great concerns about how budgeting is currently happening. This government has refused to consider bringing Nova Scotia into line with other jurisdictions. We know that we're really the only jurisdiction where there is no accountability measure. Other provinces and territories are able to respond to emergent issues. They're able to respond to emergencies, even with those accountability measures in place. We are concerned about this.

[5:00 p.m.]

The contingency fund in the current provincial budget is there to allow the province to borrow more if, due to tariffs or other economic uncertainties, there is a need for the province to have access to more money. That actually seems like a reasonable approach in an uncertain economic environment. It's made clear that there's \$200 million sitting there that the government might go to the markets for. It's hard to take that \$200 million seriously in the face of extra-budgetary spending, which year-over-year has been, as I said, \$1.6 billion, \$1.3 billion. I think hopefully - we don't know how the contingency fund will be accessed and under what conditions. I hope the Financial Measures Act will provide details of this so that Nova Scotians can track if that money is accessed and how it's spent, even if there'll be \$1 billion on the side that you can't track, and we don't have debate about.

The debt is increasing. I think we need to be concerned about the net debt-to-GDP ratio. This government has set a guidepost of a net GDP ratio of 40 per cent. If you look at the fiscal plan in the budget, by the end of the four years, we're at 39.8 per cent. It's true, you didn't hit 40 per cent, but you did actually just about hit 40 per cent. I think the extra-budgetary spending, the accumulation of net debt, and increased debt-servicing costs, especially in this climate of uncertainty, are really concerning. When I look at a net debt-to-GDP ratio that keeps increasing, that's really close to the bar that our Department of Finance has determined is an important measure.

Yet we face a very uncertain future. Our assumptions around the budget will likely change. For us in the NDP, our concern, of course, is that we're not seeing the marker move enough on the things that matter to Nova Scotians. We're not seeing enough progress in terms of attachment to primary care. We're not seeing enough movement on families and people having access to safe and secure homes.

If we don't have the GDP growth that's been estimated, if there are other factors that limit the growth of our economy, and we're taking on debt and we're not making things better, then we can envision a world where in four years, we have a bit of a mess. We'll still have a housing crisis. We'll still have people who don't have access to primary care. We'll owe a bunch of money, and it will get more expensive to pay it back. This is a really live issue, and I think this is something that we need to be talking about and really considering.

I think that when we look at this Budget - budget decision-making is not an easy process. I've been in it at the departmental level, I've been in it at the government level, and I would acknowledge that this is an increasingly uncertain time. This is a more difficult time than normal to be building budgets. Is this the Budget that Nova Scotia needs right now? It's really not clear. If things change radically on March 4<sup>th</sup>, I'm not sure this is the Budget that's going to help people pay the bills, that's going to help businesses survive, that's going to get people into homes that are safe and secure. We look forward to discussing more of the departmental investments during Estimates.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect to respond to the Budget Address.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Here we are with another Budget sitting and another projected deficit, this time nearly a \$1 billion deficit. That even surprised me, how much more spending this government is adding.

This is not a pro-growth budget. This is a continuation of the growth of government budget. We are just starting to see how dangerous it really is to run these perpetual deficits with no recession. This government even knows that a future recession could be coming. That is exactly why they're setting up the \$200 million contingency fund. However, they are already in deficit before they may have to borrow from future generations with \$700 million more in structural costs not associated with potential tariff threats.

Of course, they could have put some focus on the economy during their last term, but they've instead waited for President Trump's actions to talk about the economy. The fact is our economy could be stronger. Without question, our finances could be stronger. It is always a matter of when a recession hits our province, not if. There hasn't been a government, certainly in recent memory, that has been in the enviable fiscal position that they were in during their first term. Instead, that government allowed the increase of structural spending during the best of times.

Under this government, we have been growing in terms of our appropriations, but we haven't been growing in terms of our economy. In the past three budgets, the growth of spending has gone up by 32 per cent - with this projection, 37 per cent. In those same three years, our GDP growth has been 7.6 per cent.

That lack of alignment has nothing to do with the Trump administration or any other geopolitical event. Their ratio of spending is outpacing the economy four to one. When this government talks about growth, remember that the only thing growing in this province is the government itself. The growth of government compared to the Estimates from just the last Budget is \$1 billion.

If you look at history in the last three budgets, I'm willing to prognosticate that they're going to spend another \$0.5 billion in appropriations. I think that's a fair bet. We

can check Hansard a year from now, and we'll see - again, not because of anything happening south of the border. If it was, why did they spend an additional \$3.7 billion in the last three years alone? No recession, no economic emergency, and no tariff war - \$3.7 billion.

Some of this financial capacity could have been used to make our tax system more competitive for foreign investment and position us as a pro-growth province. They chose big government spending, which has been crowding out the private sector and taking resources away from the rest of the economy.

Under this second-term Progressive Conservative Government, we have an economy that has the second-lowest productivity in North America and the lowest GDP growth, which hasn't been that way since 2006. Guess who was in government then? We have the lowest household consumption per capita, the last place in Canada for non-residential investment, the second-last for research and development, and the last in international exports. These are the key performance indicators of the economy.

The government has been spinning its wheels by simply funding services more with a pot of money that isn't growing by that same trajectory. We need an economy here that matches our ambitions. After the first almost four years of an economic strategy of wrapping trucks with Nova Scotia Loyal and a tax break for just some people working in trades, they say the solution is to focus now narrowly on the public's natural resources and castigate all those and label them all as special interest groups for simply having some questions around it. That question was not put in any way during the last election. That would have been actual courage.

The government wants you to believe that the cause of being a have-not province is that corporations cannot simply come in here and undertake certain activities because regulations are getting in the way. I want to remind members opposite that regulatory reductions have been getting the top grades in this province ever since 2018.

What has changed markedly is that this government has little to no concern with spending within its own means, with a higher percentage of revenue coming from Ottawa than past governments ever had. This budget shows that growth now at almost 40 per cent; 37 per cent of the revenue this province is taking in - total aggregate revenue - is from transfers.

The federal transfers are slowing down. This has happened before to previous governments. The prior government in 2013-2014 had reductions in transfers. They had to make tough choices. The government before that, in 2009, was coming in after a recession; transfers were going down. The difference is it will happen to a government that has not demonstrated any sort of discipline or regard for public debt, a debt that is projected to triple under their watch in two terms to \$29 billion.

We have had perpetual over-budget spending in most departments, piling on structural costs with the low growth economy. You can find a plethora of studies that find there is a negative relationship between government debt and economic growth. Yes, jobs were added - I saw the press release and the social media around it recently - but guess what the largest part of that economic growth was? Guess what sector? Public administration.

The problem with that is it is only the public sector under this government whose purchasing power has grown with the cost of living. Where was the investment for traditional sectors in their first term that they talk about now? Budgets, it was just mentioned by my colleague - for Agriculture, that hasn't grown. Fisheries and Aquaculture - flat in their first term; there's actually a reduction in the Fisheries and Aquaculture budget in this Budget. The government is taking away future choices for people who can't vote yet for political reasons of today - choices that will impact their core services - and the ability to take on unforeseen calamities like a pandemic, like a trade war, worsening climate change, which is a betrayal of intergenerational equity.

Public funds used to be characterized as a scarce resource, but the government squandered windfall revenue from transfers and population growth instead of capitalizing on the chance to make us a more competitive place to be to do business, despite the rhetoric of being open for business. How can that be, when in the last four years there was no attention going into improving government productivity so that government can contribute more to private sector productivity while freeing up resources for the private sector to boost business sector productivity? They could have prevented the erosion of purchasing power in the private sector. They could have paid more attention to making our taxes fair and pro-growth.

This has happened in the past. Going all the way back to the 1930s, we've had major reform in this province over the last number of decades and generations. When the Old Age Pension came in in the 30s under fiscal discipline of Angus L. Modern highways were started. In the Savage government, there were province-wide paramedics coming in, workers' compensation alongside fiscal discipline. More recently, of course, the introduction of pre-Primary, which is an economic policy. It will be for generations of kids that have a fair shot and a fair start, alongside balanced budgets.

There are no reforms here of comparable scale in the last three years or proposed in the future. This is a "Protect the status quo, protect the government in power" budget. Lots of performative language to suggest we are a secret fossil fuel-rich province, potentially a Saudi Arabia of the western world. All we need to do is get the government out of the way. More and more, we're seeing the playbook of the 1980s, not just with the oil and gas rhetoric but the preaching of lowering taxes while simultaneously spending extravagantly. That's what future generations will have to take care of again, the folks who will have a difficult time buying a house or affording post-secondary education.

The government is crowding out private sector investment with government consumption now at the second-highest level in the whole country. Compare the size of government - which does include the other levels but we're comparing different provinces to this metric - but we are the largest government in the country, 63 per cent of our economy. I'll table that. Another report found that Nova Scotia has the highest combined federal and provincial debt to GDP. Of course, that's only going to grow, projected to be 40 per cent. The Ivany goal was 30 per cent, and the trajectory was going towards that before this government took power.

[5:15 p.m.]

What is the problem with reviewing programs? That's really the hard stuff. The easy way for a government with no success in growing the economy is to distract and divide Nova Scotians and spur up old debates, maybe even start firing folks who don't get in line with their cause. We will never be successful if we undervalue fiscal management. Is anyone measuring whether programs are bad ideas or have served their purpose, whether this unprecedented spending - much of it not scrutinized by the Legislature - is providing value for money? We actually have an office with that very role - the Auditor General - which is losing its independence, and now that Auditor General themselves could be fired without cause by this supermajority. Did the government not like the financial report that was tabled just a week ago, the report that was late because the Public Accounts Committee refused to until recently, the same committee that won't meet during the House Sitting? Or maybe it was the Auditor General who wouldn't sign off for the first time on their revenue estimates that have been so far off for the last three years, by billions.

I've never seen so much uncertainty in both the spending column and the expense column. Apparently, for as long as the independent Office of the Auditor General has existed, neither have they.

We're talking about the budget here: spending and revenue. Any businessperson who has any background knows that you need to control your spending and improve your topline.

I think the government knows that their transfers won't keep pace with their spending problems so they need to convince Nova Scotians that they can grow the revenue. I will say I am skeptical about their plans to find all this rich oil and gas, especially because we know that the last few calls that went out resulted in no oil exploration licences. That's just one example - no bids.

We know that these extraction decisions are mostly based on market decisions and where the evaluation of risk is. Oil is not near the price where it needs to be for interest in these companies.

We can focus on developing natural resources, and we agree with that, but we need to keep in mind that government is really the only entity that can protect clean drinking water, air quality and safety with regulations. What actually could transform our economy is supporting ways to process more of our resources and maximize the economic potential of value-added products and manufacturing.

There are lots of actual examples under way with this, like mass timber, looking at turning waste into biodiesel, biochar. I am familiar with a lot of the forestry work that is happening, but there's obviously other traditional sectors that are involved in this work, instead of just saying we're going to attract more commodities and feed the market with low-value products.

A deeper economic solution to the current weak investment numbers this government provides over is inducing major capital investments, especially with venture capital, to find the resources, process them and build products right here. That would truly be game-changing.

What about the need to focus on employment attachment? Why don't we hear about programs like Graduate to Opportunity, Innovate to Opportunity and other connected programs? I wonder if this government is not aware that labour force participation has been falling every single year under their government. They can't blame Ottawa for that, because in 2023 the Canadian rate of participation increased while Nova Scotia's decreased, widening the gap between this province and the rest of the country.

It sounds like the strategy is to get young people into the fracking fields rather than focusing on all of our competitive advantages. Maybe the plan is to subsidize multinational businesses here, pump low-value products into the commodities market with sub-par royalties, perhaps leasing or even giving away public land.

This could be the new version of big subsidies that we saw before from governments for generations here. Then it was cash. Forced growth, which this feels much like, rarely works. It reveals a lack of confidence in our inherent strengths and advantages here in our province.

I believe we have an entrepreneurial spirit and lots of innovation capacity, but how entrepreneurial is it to relax environmental law to induce new business here? Dare I say that's lazy public policy?

I want to also remind the regulators in the room that it is government's role to protect society and not corporations through regulations. Here's an idea that's not lazy public policy: why not convene another Ivany - 2.0 - and look at KPIs again? I mentioned all the KPIs that were struggling. That report actually did put a very big emphasis on resource development, but also on R&D levels, skills development, post-secondary innovation, start-ups, trading in high-value good, diversifying exports, placemaking

through tourism. These are all things that the government should be looking at and setting new targets for because some of them have been exceeded.

What about an Atlantic regional energy policy? We haven't seen any progress in starting to get off coal in this province or building the intertie to New Brunswick. We have this issue with the United States now. Quebec may need to find more markets, where they're not sending their energy to the U.S., which will mean hydro prices come down, yet we have no link to get that renewable energy into our province.

We need a comprehensive economic policy that's intertwined with well-being and social improvement policy. Pre-Primary education, developing COVE, which is now involved in hosting a large investment through NATO: These are the things that government has been involved in that are providing long-lasting economic growth. Our ocean sector alone employs 35,000 people in our province. We have one of the highest concentrations of PhDs in ocean-related sciences in the whole world. The potential is endless, with so much work happening globally in mechanics, seafood innovation, maritime clean tech, and maritime instrumentation.

My concern is that a singular focus on resource extraction distracts from all of these things. Roughly one-third of our R&D is in ocean-related sectors, yet somehow, we are second-last in the country in R&D. That should be unacceptable. It should be unacceptable that business bankruptcy has been growing each year - a 43 per cent increase in the last year. I believe a colleague tabled that information earlier. Any viable economic growth strategy must begin with a willingness to right-size government and to acknowledge the connection with growing debt and the urgency of improving the conditions needed for entrepreneurial acceleration.

How, in 2025, are we not mentioning the knowledge-based economy? Is there no desire to compete with AI, life sciences, cyber, or quantum? These are some of the hottest start-up sectors. Medicine, aquaculture, environmental sciences: There is some literature that's actually referring to these sectors as the new oil, but Nova Scotia is really that ambitious that they want to go back to the old oil.

As Liberals, we believe in an economy that matches our ambitions. Government can support the foundation of opportunities by supporting strategic growth sectors. Not all economic strategies or resources will work in every part of our province, which is exactly why a collaborative approach is needed to listen to all voices and traditional knowledge, not some autocratic decree from the Premier's Office and his Council of Twelve.

You might want to Google what the Council of Twelve is. It has a pretty good historical context for this province. That is what existed in our province before 1848.

Joseph Howe would shudder to see a government, almost 200 years later, disparaging any dissenting voices with the view that public consultation is an expendable

commodity; that the office of the AG, which has been around for over a hundred years, should no longer be independent; that Nova Scotians should no longer have their say to amend bills; and that the Premier gets to rule by executive decree with no mandate letters and no availability next to the very space where Joseph Howe delivered his speech about the freedom of the press.

We need to have more confidence in our people and the value of the quality of life offering here and go back to creating a fair, more pro-growth budget.

THE SPEAKER: Order. With the end of response to the Budget Address, the Estimates are now referred to the Committee of the Whole on Supply.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, could you please call Address in Reply - or Bill No. - sorry. Resolution - Bill No. 3, sorry, for second reading.

THE SPEAKER: Bill No. - hold on.

The honourable Government House Leader.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Hopefully, nobody's watching at home.

Speaker, would you please call the order of business Public Bills for Second Reading.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, I would like to request unanimous consent for Bill No. 3 to pass through second and third reading.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for Bill No. 3 to pass through third reading.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

I hear several Noes, so there is no unanimous consent. We will now move to the second reading of Bill No. 3.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Would you please call order of business Bills for Second Reading.

**PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 3.

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

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

LISA LACHANCE: Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: Oh, order. Wait.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I move that Bill No. 3, An Act to Amend Chapter 1, (1992 Supplement) of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the House of Assembly Act be now read a second time.

I rise today to speak in support of Bill No. 3, An Act to Amend Chapter 1 (1992 Supplement) of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the House of Assembly Act. This legislation is a reflection of our commitment to upholding the fundamental democratic rights of all Nova Scotians, including Acadians, ensuring that every voice is heard and every community is effectively represented.

Cette loi reflète notre engagement à respecter les droits démocratiques fondamentaux de tous les Néo-Écossais, y compris les Acadiens.

Nova Scotia is a province defined by its rich cultural heritage, and our Acadian communities are an important part of that heritage. The resilience, traditions and contributions have helped shape the fabric of our province. From the shores of Chéticamp to the historical communities of Clare, Argyle, and Richmond, the Acadian people embody the spirit of Nova Scotia, one of perseverance, dignity, diversity and cultural strength.

Like all the peoples and cultures who make up this province - their home - the Acadian communities of Nova Scotia help define what it means to be Nova Scotian. Their history, language and traditions are an essential part of our collective identity. Our Acadian communities serve as vital links to our past and as vibrant reflections of the cultural mosaic that coexists and supports the current and future prosperity of our province.

The Supreme Court of Nova Scotia has found that the decision of the last Electoral Boundaries Commission in 2019 respecting an electoral district for Chéticamp infringed Section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees voting and candidacy rights. As a result, the court ruled that Section 4 of the House of Assembly Act,

governing the composition and boundaries of the House, was invalid. However, it suspended this declaration to allow time for this House to correct the infringement. This government accepts the court's decision and recognizes the dedication of the Acadian community in advancing this crucial issue.

[5:30 p.m.]

Speaker, Bill No. 3 seeks to address this matter by enabling a House Select Committee to appoint a Special Electoral Boundaries Commission. This commission will be tasked with making recommendations to government to ensure the effective representation of the Acadian region of Chéticamp and its surrounding areas.

The government is moving quickly to appoint this commission which will now be established through a resolution by a Select Committee of the House within 30 days of this Act coming into force. Any delay in this House in moving forward does delay the establishment and work of this committee.

This enabling step reaffirms our commitment to the rule of law and to fairness in representation and the democratic principles that underpin our society.

Speaker, this bill is about more than just electoral boundaries: It is about affirming our shared values of fairness, inclusion, and respect for the diversity that makes Nova Scotia stronger. It is about ensuring every community, no matter how small or geographically remote, has a voice in shaping our province's future.

Je demande à tous les députés de cette législature à appuyer le projet de loi numéro 3, reconnaissant l'importance d'assurer une représentation effective de la région acadienne de Chéticamp.

I urge all members of this House to support Bill No. 3, recognizing the importance of ensuring effective representation for the Acadian region of Cheticamp. By doing so, we not only fulfill our legal obligations but also reaffirm our commitment to the principles of democracy that guide our province.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I'm just going to rise for a couple of minutes just to say first, very clearly, that we respect the findings of the court, we respect the decision of the court. We are greatly concerned by the changes that we see happening in this House, in terms of public engagement and the public's ability to look at what government is doing.

We still believe in the process of the Law Amendments Committee, while we still have one. Much like the minister referred to principles of democracy and having people

have effective representation, we think that the Law Amendments Committee is a great place to demonstrate that.

We look forward to hearing from folks at the Law Amendments Committee. We respect the findings of the court.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Just very quickly, we support unanimous consent of this moving forward because I believe this is what the Acadian community wants so we just want to stand in our place to say that we look forward to hearing the comments from people at Law Amendments Committee and getting the feedback but ultimately we feel that this is what the Acadian community wants and we're happy to support them.

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

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I'll share a few comments en français then I'll do en anglais afterwards.

Madame la présidente, la FANE, la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse, est la porte-parole de la communauté acadienne et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Ils sont un interlocuteur important pour notre gouvernement, un partenaire de collaboration sur différentes initiatives. Voyons que notre gouvernement s'est porté de bonne volonté et a appuyé des différentes initiatives à voir la révision de la Loi sur des services en français, qui a permis un renouvellement de l'entente bilatéral avec le gouvernement fédéral. On a vu une augmentation de financement pour les services en français de 6,5 millions de dollars à 11,8 millions de dollars sur cinq ans - de plus, la proclamation du Mois du patrimoine acadien proclamé par le premier ministre en août 2023 et célébré pour la première fois l'année dernière.

Notre gouvernement demeure un fort partenaire avec et respect les droits des Acadiens. On l'a vu par la modernisation et le passage du projet de loi respectant le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, mené par maintenant la ministre de Justice. Ce que j'aimerais noter, c'est que ce projet de loi ici représente une lutte, une lutte de la communauté acadienne qui n'a pas commencée en 2019 lors d'un appel à la Cour suprême de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

Ça remonte à 2012 lorsque le gouvernement néo-démocrate a choisi pour les décisions politiques de ne pas appuyer les régions acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse, a choisi d'éliminer les circonscriptions dites protégées basées sur des droits linguistiques. Malheureusement, aujourd'hui, on voit ceci continuer, se répéter. L'histoire s'est répétée dans cette chambre, que la partie néo-démocrate ne respecte pas les communautés acadiennes et francophones de la Nouvelle-Écosse, ne respecte pas un processus d'assigner

une décision apportée par la Cour suprême de la Nouvelle-Écosse. On n'a que 20 mois à passer à travers ce processus ici en Nouvelle-Écosse, et c'est très décevant de voir que la partie néo-démocrate encore aujourd'hui est en train de ne pas appuyer la communauté acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

The Acadian Federation, la FANE, is the organization representing the Acadian and francophone community here in Nova Scotia. They are a very important partner with our government. We have seen some really big successes in our first mandate, and I have a lot of respect for the Acadian Federation, the president, and all the organizations and suborganizations that they represent in our province.

We've been able to collaborate on a number of different initiatives, whether it be seeing the revision of the French Languages Services Act that the PC government actually introduced in the early 2000s. We were able to renegotiate a bilateral agreement with the federal government, increasing our funding to ensure that government services can continue to be provided in French and do more. The Premier was able to proclaim in August of 2023 Acadian Heritage Month, and we celebrated it for the first time last year during the Acadian Congress, the Congrès mondial acadien 2024.

I want Nova Scotia's Acadian community to know that the PC government stands with them, that they have a partner in our government. The bill that we're debating today that we had hoped to have unanimous consent - and I want to thank the Liberal caucus for their support on providing unanimous consent on this legislation - this is about respecting a court decision, a court decision that in November of 2024, Judge Muise had made his decision clear that the Commission had not respected or followed through with the same parameters for other Acadian constituencies: Argyle, Clare, and Richmond.

The fight that the Acadian Federation brought forward in 2019, it didn't start in 2019. It started in 2012 when the then-NDP government decided to abolish Acadian constituencies. It's unfortunate that today - this evening, on the floor of the Legislature - that we're seeing history somewhat repeat itself. We see the NDP caucus not respecting the linguistic rights of Acadians in this province and also not deciding to stand with the Acadian community, to go forward and follow through with this process that we have 20 months to establish an Electoral Boundaries Commission, at which time Nova Scotians will have an opportunity to have their say.

I want to be on the record as Minister of Acadian Affairs, as an MLA that represents an Acadian constituency, but also as a proud Acadian. That is very unfortunate that we are finding ourselves in this Chamber, that the NDP does not want to provide unanimous consent to streamline a process that respects a court decision, respects linguistic rights, respects the Charter in this country, and stands to continue to repeat political decisions that they tried to silence Acadian voices. I can't stand on my feet without making that point.

With that, Speaker, I really want to thank again the Acadian Federation for their partnership and collaboration with our government. I know the members of our caucus have great respect for what they do, and we'll look forward to continuing our collaboration with them in this mandate and the mandate after that and maybe the one after that. Merci beaucoup. Vive l'Acadie.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I'm cold in here, so I've got my Winter coat on.

I just wanted to stand for a moment and say that I do certainly support this bill. Unfortunately, I wasn't given the consideration of being asked for unanimous consent before it was discussed here in the Legislature. There are only 55 of us. Each one of us is here to represent the people of our areas. I represent around 18,000 people, and I don't feel comfortable voting "Yes" on something I'm not aware of. I just feel it's responsible to always do my due diligence and to know what I'm voting for.

I have asked the House Leader to inform me when they plan on bringing something forward and asking for unanimous consent. The people whom I represent deserve their respect so that I can vote intelligently on this, and I was not given that respect. Therefore, it's a disrespect to the people I represent.

I want to stand and make sure that the Acadian people who - I have Acadian heritage. My grandfather Leon Melanson came right from Beaubassin; 1755, when they were all expelled from this province. I'm proud of the great Acadian heritage that we have here in this province and stand in support of our Acadian people and support this bill.

I also stand for democracy, and I stand with the NDP that this bill should go to Law Amendments Committee and allow the Acadian people and the other Nova Scotians to come and speak at Law Amendments Committee. That is part of our democratic process here in the province of Nova Scotia, and it is shameful that it's going to be taken away. Let's use this as one of the last opportunities to allow the people of Nova Scotia to come and speak here in the People's House.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I want to just rise and say a few words, not to the bill because as we informed the House Leader, we were completely fine to waive debate on this bill, to give unanimous consent to move through second reading, but we want the bill to go to Law Amendments Committee.

I actually want to address the comments from the Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie. As he pointed out, FANE did go to court to contest the boundaries drawn

by the independent commission established by an all-party committee of this House in 2018, I think it was established. The case was 2019. They were contesting the boundaries drawn. I have met with FANE about this, as have all members of this House. They were fighting, as we heard, for full democratic participation, and that's an important fight. Today, we are also fighting for full democratic participation.

We are not debating this bill. We are in support of this bill. Of course we support the findings of the court, and the findings of the court were clear: The boundaries need to be redrawn, so we are going to change the electoral boundaries of our entire province. The idea that the passage of this bill might change give or take 48 hours, that somehow that's an affront to democracy and prevents us from empanelling the commission, is simply not true. It doesn't make a difference, but by asking for this bill to go to the Law Amendments Committee while we still have it - because make no mistake, Law Amendments Committee, like most of our democratic processes that allow for debate, that allow for public participation, will no longer be present after this sitting of the House.

I am certain that we will hear from FANE, that we will hear from them about their passion for Acadian representation, for Acadian culture, and for the work that they have had to do to ensure that they have that reputation. We may also hear from other groups. We may also hear from other folks. We have African Nova Scotian communities from one end of this province to the other. They have no special ridings. Preston is, in theory, a protected riding, but it's not. It's the same size as all the other ridings. The idea that we are somehow insulting the purpose of this bill by asking for public participation on electoral boundaries when the very genesis of this bill is the public having to launch a lawsuit to ensure their right to representation is laughable. We look forward to hearing from people at the Law Amendments Committee. We look forward to hearing from FANE at Law Amendments. We support this bill. We support democracy.

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

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Before I wrap up, I just want to make a couple of comments and to clarify what it is that we are actually talking about right now. There was some suggestion earlier that the debate around this bill or what would be in front of the Law Amendments Committee would be about debating electoral boundaries, and we needed an opportunity to take this to Law Amendments to debate electoral boundaries.

I want to make it really clear for the House that we are not debating electoral boundaries here. This is about addressing a court decision, responding directly to that court decision, and striking a commission which would then begin the process of considering electoral boundaries and getting public input on those boundaries. Every moment that we wait to pass this bill is another moment that goes by where that commission is not struck.

[5:45 p.m.]

The Leader of the Opposition, with reference to the timing of the passage of this bill, said it doesn't make a difference. I just would simply say that may be their opinion, but it is certainly not our opinion. We want to move urgently on this for our Acadian communities.

Having said that, I would also like to table a letter from la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse - correspondence that they are pleased with the Province's decision to form a commission and that they support our approach.

With that, I move to close debate on Bill No. 3.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 3.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Would you please call the order of business Government Motions.

#### **[GOVERNMENT MOTIONS]**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

#### **ADDRESS IN REPLY**

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

DIANNE TIMMINS: Speaker, Premier, fellow MLAs, and guests, I commend His Honour the Lieutenant Governor Mike Savage on the occasion of the reading of his first Speech from the Throne. On behalf of the citizens of Victoria-The Lakes, I am honoured to have the privilege to reply.

The speech provides a road map for our government. The speech outlines a vision combined with a viable economic and social plan to expedite further growth and prosperity for our Nova Scotia.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish His Honour good will as he goes forward as the 34<sup>th</sup> Lieutenant Governor. I would also like to recognize the Speaker on her assignment to this important post. I know all members of the Legislature will join me in wishing the Speaker the best as she returns to this important role. (Applause)

I would like to extend my congratulations also to the Premier and all the members of this House who have been newly elected or re-elected in their respective constituencies. All members of this House, regardless of political stripes, understand the privilege that you have been given to represent your constituency. We are fortunate to live in a democracy where our citizens are granted the ability to participate in the democratic process.

I have many to thank for enabling me to stand in this Chamber today. If my father and mother were still alive, they would be most proud. I could not have accomplished this without the love and support from my husband, Brian, my soulmate and my friend for more than 40 years; my wonderful children and grandchildren; and extended family and friends.

Thank you to my campaign team: manager Moya Farrell for keeping me on track. She knew that if the doors closed behind me, I would be there a long time. Cliff Johnston, co-manager, for keeping everyone on track and helping to manage the headquarters staff. Thank you Lisa LeBlanc, Ruth MacLaren, and Kathy MacKinnon for taking care of my headquarters. A special thanks to my dear sister Kathleen Doyle, who provided me with the love and encouragement, and even volunteered to be my official agent. This was a new role for her, and she was outstanding and efficient. Job well done.

What can I say? My door-to-door campaign team was exceptional: Martin and Patricia MacLean, Dennis Allen, Susan Martin, Jane MacGregor, Patsy MacKenzie, Kim Timmins, Keith and Justin Bain, Blanche MacKenzie, Robert MacLean, Ian Timmins, Laurie and Curtis Fraser, Wendy Dwornikiewicz, and Nadine Richards.

My sign team was a well-oiled machine. Thank you to my husband, Brian, and Tommy Boutilier for spending hours each evening building signs. Thank you to Wayne MacKenzie, Joe Bonar, and my brother Jim Doyle for hammering signs in many areas throughout Victoria-The Lakes. Thank you to my North of Smokey team - Dorothy Best, Bruce MacDonald, Scott MacDonald, and Kevin and Larry Dauphinee - for taking care of and managing the signs north of Smokey, and hitting the doors as well.

Thank you to all the residents who called and requested lawn signs. My campaign team and supporters who put their trust in me are to be commended for their hard work, and I am deeply grateful. I also want to welcome and thank my constituency assistant, Pat Stevenson. She stepped in a role flawlessly, and I am blessed to have her as part of my team.

I have one other very special person to be thankful for in my life, someone many in this Chamber know as a colleague and a friend: the Honourable Keith Bain. (Applause) I

had the privilege to work with Keith since 2006 as his constituency assistant. He was a humble and passionate MLA. The camera was never his focus; his focus was the people. I have the ultimate respect for his leadership and dedication. Thank you, Keith, for your guidance, encouragement, and your faith in me.

I am proud to stand in this House of Assembly today for many reasons, most of all because I too have a great love for Nova Scotia and its people. I want to continue to see our communities healthy and vibrant and have new opportunities for our children and their children. My mother and father raised eight children on a hobby farm in Millville. As a child, my life was perfect - the best home-cooked meals, vegetables and meats that were raised on our farm. The smell of baked bread in my kitchen was my favourite. We had pets to enjoy and even our own baseball and pond hockey team. All of our basic needs were cared for.

As children, we didn't see the struggles that our parents were going through to provide for us. Soon, life as I knew it - as we knew it - my father came ill and was diagnosed with ALS. He died in February 1983. As most of my siblings were pre-teens and teens, it certainly wasn't easy on my mother, raising seven children of her own with little or no support. Shortly after the death of my father, we lost a brother in a motorcycle accident.

My father and mother instilled in me the love of nature, people, and all living things. A person can overcome the hardest of challenges as long as they have faith in someone or something, sometimes known as their vision. A vision is a direction one develops to improve their current situation. As members of the House of Assembly, we have a vision. We have an opportunity to tell our story - our community story, our Nova Scotia story - and show that we can be strong and can overcome any challenges brought forward to us. Our vision.

As a lifetime resident of Victoria-The Lakes, I have explored the whole area of more than 3,400 square kilometres. It is an incredibly large constituency, taking up approximately one-third of Unama'ki - Cape Breton. I may be biased, but I feel Victoria-The Lakes is a resource jewel of Nova Scotia, rich with diverse culture, natural beauty, sea bounty, outdoor activity, ecotourism opportunities, natural resources, and much more. There is great potential to increase productivity and food security with the huge land mass and the sea resources it offers.

The Premier's commitment to take the "no" out of Nova Scotia has revitalized my hope to bring families and children home. The province is rich in many resources, and the sustainability of our health and social programs is relying on us to be self-sufficient as a province and a country. Victoria-The Lakes' main industries of fishing, farming, and tourism can be enhanced and live in unity with clean, safe, advanced mining considerations, as we have done in the past with gypsum, limestone, gold, and copper. Protecting our traditional industries is Number 1 priority. With open communications, we can succeed.

Nova Scotians and musicians from across the world come to Cape Breton to celebrate our Celtic heritage in a very successful and community-driven Celtic Colours International Festival. Our government continues to foster the incredibly rich talent of our culture and community. The recent decision to be further investing in the film industry shows the Premier's commitment to this important business.

[6:00 p.m.]

Victoria-The Lakes is the home of The Gaelic College, the first and only institute of its kind in North America. From its humble beginning as a one-room log building, the college has evolved into a beautiful, modern campus overlooking St. Anns Bay. It is a superb institution that keeps alive the language spoken by our first immigrants to the shores of Cape Breton as far back as 1773. Thanks to the work that was carried out from our former Premier - the Honourable Rodney MacDonald - who developed the Department of Gaelic Affairs, we are seeing signs of rebirth of the ancient language. Most recently, we saw the expansion of The Gaelic College - Beinn Mhàbu campus. The Gaelic language has also been adopted into the curriculum in Rankin School of the Narrows, drawing students from surrounding areas. The constituency has so much to offer. I invite all members of the House to visit, and I will personally be their tour guide and show all Victoria-The Lakes has to offer, including - and I know this may be controversial, but I know it's true - the best lobster and crab in the world (laughter) - fighting words.

The beautiful village of Baddeck is the birthplace of modern communications and home to the Silver Dart, the first airplane flight in Canada's history. The flight was encouraged and funded by Mabel Bell, the devoted and dedicated wife of Alexander Graham Bell.

Cape Breton Highlands National Park is a well-known destination that includes the Cape Breton Highlands Links golf course, known by many golf enthusiasts around the world. The Cape Smokey ski hill is expanding their focus toward being a year-round destination. Fishing, tours, ziplining, snowmobiling, ATV, and hiking adventures can be found throughout Victoria-The Lakes from Eskasoni through Iona and Boularderie Island to the tip of the Island and all places in between. On April 8, 2024, Meat Cove received worldwide attention as more than a hundred people flocked to the best location to witness the solar eclipse.

Speaker, I could not do justice to my constituency if I did not highlight the beautiful Bras d'Or Lake and the coastline surrounding the area. Although we can call it a lake, it's really Canada's inland sea. It's a hub for sailors and a true paddlers' paradise. Here you'll find salt watersheds surrounded by forest, hills, and warm welcomes. In June 2011, the Bras d'Or Lake gained international recognition and designation as Canada's sixteenth biosphere reserve through UNESCO.

The Highland Village Museum is the heart of Iona that overlooks the majestic Bras d'Or Lake. It's part of Nova Scotia's family of museums - a 43-acre outdoor living history museum illustrating the story, culture, and identity of the Nova Scotia Gaels. Come and experience and relive their ancient ways and traditions.

Encompassing the lake, we are blessed to include two of the five Mi'kmaw First Nations located in Unama'ki, Cape Breton - Eskasoni and Wagmatcook. Wagmatcook is the oldest permanent settlement of the Mi'kmaw nation in Nova Scotia and is situated adjacent to the Bras d'Or Lake and the Cape Breton highlands. In June 2024, Wagmatcook First Nation entered into a partnership with Breton Air and launched Kitpu Aviation. The word "kitpu" translates to "eagle," which symbolizes strength and vision.

On the far eastern tip of Victoria-The Lakes, we can find the community of Eskasoni, the largest Mi'kmaw community in the world, with a population of more than 4,600 people. Eskasoni runs the community-owned radio station CICU-FM, which broadcasts at 94.1 on your radio. The Eskasoni First Nation is also home of the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, a Mi'kmaw organization devoted to natural resources and the environment.

Eskasoni also operates its own school board, providing services to children from kindergarten to Grade 12, but students can also attend Rankin School of the Narrows to participate in programs that the school offers.

Volunteerism is the heartbeat of our community across Nova Scotia. I can attest that Victoria-The Lakes can demonstrate the most dedicated and generous of volunteers in our community, from the volunteers in the Big Bras d'Or Hall to the brow members of the many senior care homes. Organizations such as the Ross Ferry Marine Park, Frenchvale and Area Community Endeavours, trail development, Baddeck Nordic and Highland Nordic ski clubs, the Boisdale Fire Hall with their famous salt cod dinner and pancake breakfast - you have to go there - all rely on our special volunteers.

Middle River and Area Historical Society has historical publications, and we can't forget their newest event at the Middle River Community Hall this past November, the second annual Middle River Stomp, with five chefs and five bands. Thank you to the volunteers who work on these important projects.

Words can't express the gratitude we have for our volunteers. I feel confident I can speak on behalf of all residents across Victoria-The Lakes and express the deepest appreciation to our 11 volunteer fire departments in Victoria County, including six in the rural areas of Cape Breton County, which provide important fire and emergency services throughout Victoria-The Lakes. I also want to recognize the support the Eskasoni and Wagmatcook fire services provide for their communities and surrounding areas.

A very special thank you to the Cape Breton Search & Rescue, a registered charitable organization established in 1969. Members of the Nova Scotia Ground Search and Rescue Association, CBSAR is one of the four teams that serve the Cape Breton area Eastern Zone, alongside Chéticamp, Inverness, and the Strait Area GSAR. SAR volunteers endure extreme weather in the most remote areas to find lost and injured individuals. Thank you for this service to your community.

I'm excited to see further coordination links in place to support volunteers serving our residents with the establishment of the new Department of Emergency Management and the Nova Scotia Guard.

Our government has been working hard to improve health care across the province, especially in our rural communities. We know that the Nova Scotia health system faces financial pressures, with health care being incredibly expensive to maintain at a high standard. We also know that these costs are necessary to keep Nova Scotia healthy. I am proud of the innovative achievements our government has accomplished since 2021: the Cape Breton Medical Campus, the accelerated nursing program, the investments in the new PET scanner at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital, investments in mental health - such as the Northside mental health clinic, and the creation of the YourHealthNS app, not to mention the advancements made under the paramedic program and the Pharmacy Service Agreement, which are incredibly important to Nova Scotians.

I'm also extremely proud of our government with the opening of the Kiknu in April 2024, which is the very first Mi'kmaw-owned and -operated long-term care home. I am equally excited to wait for the completion of the new seniors care in Neils Harbour, Highland Manor. Shovels are in the ground, and it's ready to be built. This is only a small sample of what we have accomplished since 2021. We know there is always more that can be done, and it is incredibly important to keep health care as our focus. Our accomplishments so far are being recognized across the province. I think you can see that from the results of the last election.

Speaker, I am privileged to stand in this Chamber, both in my role as MLA and ministerial assistant to the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture. The Speech from the Throne is a document that gives Nova Scotians optimism that the province they imagine is sustainable and will continue to flourish along with our natural beauty. Each and every resident sees themselves as the caretakers of our province. It is our role, which we all take very seriously.

With the leadership in this Chamber, we can all succeed together and do our part to grow an even brighter, better future for all of us. For this reason, I am very honoured to reply to the Speech from the Throne.

With that, I now move to adjourn debate. (Standing ovation)

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

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Before I recognize the honourable Deputy House Leader, I'd like everybody to stand and give a warm welcome to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Dartmouth Girl Guides and their leaders. (Standing ovation)

Thank you for coming in and watching democracy happen. Also, a big thank you to the honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion for giving them a tour and welcoming them to this beautiful House.

The honourable Deputy House Leader.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: That concludes Government Business for the day. I ask that the House do rise to meet again on Thursday, February 20<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Government Business will include Committee of the Whole on Supply and second reading of Bill No. 6.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House - order, we're almost done here.

The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Thursday, February 20<sup>th</sup> between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until Thursday, February 20<sup>th</sup>.

[The House rose at 6:11 p.m.]