

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

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**First Session****THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2025**

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS:</b>	
Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Proceedings of the Pictou West By-election, May 21, 2024 The Speaker .....	201
Report of the Auditor General: 2024 Financial Report, The Speaker .....	201
<b>GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION:</b>	
Res. 12, Nova Scotia Guard Members: Service - Recog., Hon. K. Masland .....	202
Vote - Affirmative.....	202
Res. 13, Maillet, Antonine: Death of - Tribute, Hon. C. LeBlanc .....	202
Vote - Affirmative.....	204
<b>INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:</b>	
No. 21, Justice Administration (2025) Act, Hon. B. Druhan .....	204
No. 22, House of Assembly Act (amended),	

C. Chender .....	204
No. 23, Power Bill Reduction and Green Economy Support Act, Hon. I. Rankin.....	204
No. 24, Temporary Access to Land Act and Joint Regional Transportation Agency Act (amended), Hon. F. Tilley.....	204
No. 25, Finance Act (amended), L. Lachance.....	204
No. 26, Justice System Improvement Act, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	204
No. 27, Juries Act (amended), E. Smith-McCrossin.....	204
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:	
Habib, Rodney: Pet Blogger - Recog., Hon. T. Halman.....	205
Fraser, Wendy: Retirement - Congrats., S. Leblanc .....	206
Murphy, Max: Birthday - Best Wishes, Hon. D. Mombourquette .....	207
Hanratty, Rose: 100 <sup>th</sup> Birthday - Congrats., A. Fadare.....	207
Alcare Place: Addiction Recovery - Recog., L. Lachance.....	208
Mahoney, Katie: WAY Team - Recog., Hon. I. Rankin.....	208
MacIsaac, Peter: Com. Serv. - Recog., B. McGowan .....	209
Melanson, Patti: Death of - Tribute, R. Wilson .....	209
Com. Credit Union: Perm. Location - Congrats., E. Smith-McCrossin.....	209
Breakspear, Mary: Lily Bee Bazaar - Recog., Hon. I. Rankin.....	210
Spicer, Bernice: Death of - Tribute, Hon. B. Maguire .....	210
The Bridge: Unionization Drive - Recog., P. Wozney .....	211
Rideout, Carl: Death of - Tribute, Hon. D. Mombourquette .....	211
Mersey Rose Theatre Co.: Musical - Best Wishes, Hon. K. Masland.....	212
Niece: Brooklyn Mary Gangoo - Birthday Wishes, S. Hansen .....	212
Christie, Joan: Learn to Sail Pgm. - Congrats., T. Outhit.....	213
Ignite Music Lessons: Instruction - Recog.,	

L. Hamid .....	213
E. Cumb. Lodge: Long-Term Care - Recog., E. Smith-McCrossin.....	213
Truro: 150 <sup>th</sup> Anniv. - Recog., Hon. D. Ritcey .....	214
House of Eights: Dance Studio - Recog., L. Lachance.....	214
Marion Com. Ctr.: 20 Yrs of Service - Congrats., Hon. T. Rushton.....	215
Sheet Hbr. Marina Assoc.: Project Work - Recog., Hon. K. Smith .....	215
Sandy Lake Conserv. Assoc.: Tireless Work - Recog., P. Wozney .....	216
Narasimhan, Prathibha: Tamil Her. Mo. - Recog., D. Stoilov .....	216
School Support Staff: Work - Recog., S. Hansen .....	217
Myatt, Don: Friendship - Recog., T. Taggart.....	217
N. Syd. Food Bank: Com. Serv. - Congrats., Hon. F. Tilley.....	218
Luckett, Pete: Awd. Recip. - Congrats., J. Vanexan.....	218
Sinden, Bob: Death of - Tribute, Hon. N. Young.....	218
Walford, Lorne: Pudgery Tire - Thanks, Hon. L. Martin .....	219
Weir, Dorothy: 100 <sup>th</sup> Birthday - Best Wishes, J.A. MacDonald .....	219
Maher, Allison: Book Success - Congrats., D. Bowlby .....	220
Dom. Firefighters: Rescue - Thanks, J. White .....	220
Kitpu Aviation: Success - Congrats., D. Timmins .....	220
Barker, Nate: Red Dog Mini Golf - Best Wishes, Hon. M. Thompson.....	221
Pitts, Vernon: 30 Yrs. of Council Serv. - Thanks, Hon. G. Morrow.....	221
Lake Echo Lioness Club: 45 <sup>th</sup> Charter Night - Recog., Hon. T. Grosse .....	222
Accidental Actors: Charity Dinner Theatre - Recog., M. Sheehy-Richard .....	222
Surette, Dan: Little Brook Distilling Co. - Recog., R. Robicheau.....	223
Fowler, Wayne: Com. Serv. - Recog.,	

C. Palmer.....	223
Medaglia, Talon: Motocross Achievements - Recog., Hon. S. Armstrong .....	224
Rodenhiser, Barry: Wings & Wheels Event - Thanks, Hon. B. Wong .....	224
ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:	
No. 34, Prem.: Auditor General Position - Clarify, C. Chender .....	225
No. 35, DOJ: Auditor General Threats - Explain, Hon. D. Mombourquette .....	226
No. 36, Prem.: Auditor General Change - Stop, C. Chender .....	227
No. 37, DHW: Hogan Court Cost - Provide, R. Wilson .....	228
No. 38, DOA: Fruit Growers - Support, K. Gallagher .....	229
No. 39, DOJ: Auditor General Interference - End, Hon. I. Rankin .....	230
No. 40, LSI: Paladin Workers Penalized - Explain, L. Hamid .....	231
No. 41, DHW: HR Plan for ERs - Explain, R. Wilson .....	232
No. 42, GAD: Housing Support Application - Simplify, S. Hansen .....	233
No. 43, DAE: Nurse Education Loans - Forgive, E. Smith-McCrossin .....	233
No. 44, DNR: Abandoned Mine Sites Number - Divulge, L. Lachance .....	234
No. 45, DOE: Heat or Eat Dilemma - Resolve, S. Leblanc .....	235
No. 46, SNS: Enforcement Unit Scrapped - Explain, S. Leblanc .....	236
No. 47, ECC: EGCCRA Target - Commit, Hon. I. Rankin .....	237
No. 48, EECD: Child Care Shortage - Address, P. Wozney .....	238
No. 49, EECD: 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth Guidelines - Release, L. Lachance .....	239
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:	
GOVERNMENT MOTIONS:	
ON MOTION FOR SUPPLY:	
S. Hansen .....	241
HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CW ON SUPPLY AT 3:17 P.M. ....	245
HOUSE RECONVENED AT 7:33 P.M. ....	245
[GOVERNMENT MOTIONS:]	
Res. 5, House of Assembly Rules: Amend - Recog.,	

S. Hansen .....	246
Hon. D. Mombourquette .....	258
K. Coombes.....	263
L. Hamid .....	272
Hon. S. Armstrong .....	273
S. Leblanc .....	274
ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Fri., Feb. 21 <sup>st</sup> at 9:00 a.m.....	281



**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 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, please. We'll begin the daily routine.

**PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

**PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

THE SPEAKER: As Speaker of the House of Assembly and pursuant to Section 163 of the Elections Act, I am pleased to table Elections Nova Scotia's *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Proceedings of the Pictou West By-election, May 21, 2024*, Financial Information and Statistics.

Pursuant to Section 18(4) of the Auditor General Act, I am tabling the *Report of the Auditor General to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly 2024 Financial Report*.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS****GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Emergency Management.

**RESOLUTION NO. 12**

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

Whereas more frequent and severe wildfires, floods, and other emergencies threaten the safety of Nova Scotians; and

Whereas it is the Bluenoser way to step up and help our neighbours when they need it most; and

Whereas over 1,500 Nova Scotians have already joined the Nova Scotia Guard to help whenever and wherever;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in recognizing Nova Scotians who are willing give their time and their energy as members of the Nova Scotia Guard.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

**RESOLUTION NO. 13**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, à une date ultérieure je demanderai l'adoption de la résolution suivante:

Attendu que les peuples acadiens et les francophones du monde entier pleurent le décès survenu cette semaine d'Antonine Maillet,

une figure emblématique des arts, de la culture, et de la littérature acadienne; et

Attendu que la plume remarquable d'Antonine a magnifiquement illustré à l'échelle mondiale l'esprit et la résilience du peuple acadien, lui valant des distinctions bien méritées, comme le grade de commandeur de l'Ordre de la Légion d'honneur ainsi que le prestigieux prix Goncourt qu'elle était la première auteure non-européenne à se voir décerné; et

Attendu que son héritage continuera d'inspirer et d'influencer les générations, nous rappelons l'importance de la langue française et la nécessité de protéger notre patrimoine culturel;

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que tous les membres de l'Assemblée législative se joignent à moi pour reconnaître l'influence durable d'Antonine Maillet sur l'essor et la vitalité de l'Acadie.

Madame la présidente, je demande l'adoption de cette résolution sans préavis et sans débat.

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

Whereas Acadians, Francophones, and French speakers across the world mourn the passing this week of Antonine Maillet, a major influence in Acadian literature, arts, and culture; and

Whereas Antonine's masterful storytelling brilliantly captured the spirit and resilience of the Acadian people on the world stage and rightfully earned her accolades, including being named commander in the Légion d'honneur, as well as becoming the first non-European author to be awarded the prestigious Prix Goncourt; and

Whereas her legacy will continue to inspire and influence generations, reminding us of the power of the French language and the importance of preserving our cultural heritage;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly join me in recognizing Antonine Maillet's lasting legacy to the development of the vitality of Acadie.



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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 21 - An Act Representing the Administration of Justice. (Hon. Becky Druhan)**

**Bill No. 22 - An Act to Amend Chapter 1 (1992 Supplement) of the Revised Statutes, 1989, The House of Assembly Act, Respecting Sittings of the House of Assembly. (Claudia Chender)**

**Bill No. 23 - An Act to Reduce Power Bills and Support Nova Scotia's Green Economy. (Hon. Iain Rankin)**

**Bill No. 24 - An Act Respecting Temporary Access to Adjacent Land, and to Amend Chapter 23 of the Acts of 2021, the Joint Regional Transportation Agency Act. (Hon. Fred Tilley)**

**Bill No. 25 - An Act to Amend Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2010, the Finance Act. (Lisa Lachance)**

**Bill No. 26 - An Act to Increase Funding to the Justice System. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

**Bill No. 27 - An Act to Amend Chapter 16 of the Acts of 1998, the Juries Act. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

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

### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

### **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

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

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, joining us today in your gallery is bestselling author and businessowner Rodney Habib and his sister, Michelle Doucet. Rodney and Michelle, I'd ask you to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

**HABIB, RODNEY: PET BLOGGER - RECOG.**

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge Dartmouth East resident and business owner Rodney Habib. Rodney is the owner of Planet Paws and author of *The Forever Dog* and *The Forever Dog Life*. Both books soared to instant success on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list.

Rodney is a passionate pet blogger whose social media following exceeds four million people across the globe and has the most popular pet health page in the world today. (Applause) Rodney is passionate about changing the way people think about feeding their pets, but most importantly, Rodney is a pet parent with a dream to inspire others.

As an entrepreneur, community leader, blogger, and pets advocate, Rodney is an excellent role model for our youth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, I beg leave to make several introductions.

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

SUSAN LEBLANC: The first one I would like to make is to welcome to the Legislature a whole slew of brand new constituency assistants who are working with us in the NDP caucus. I will introduce them and ask the House to give them a warm welcome. As we all know, the work of a constituency assistant is essential to the work we're doing right here.

Welcome to Aevan MacDonald, who is the CA for Halifax Chebucto. Welcome to Alanna Harper, who is the new CA for Fairview-Clayton Park.

I can say names and things, but I can't remember constituencies.

Alex Robbins, who is the new CA for Sackville-Cobequid, and Damian Russo, who is the new CA for Halifax Armdale. They are joined by Truelee Love, who has been here before. Truelee is the CA for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and Truelee is bringing all these CAs together for a field trip to the Legislature today. Welcome to all and thank you for your work. (Applause)

[1:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for coming. We hope you enjoy your time and thank you for all the work you put in. It is a hard job and I know your MLAs must appreciate you.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: This is my second introduction. Today joining us in the gallery opposite we have some very special folks. I'm going to be doing a member's statement about Wendy Fraser. Wendy is here and Wendy is the Executive Director of the North Grove in Dartmouth North.

Wendy is joined by Anne-Marie McElrone and Laura Horn, who is the incoming Executive Director of the North Grove. Wendy is joined by her partner, Carol Dayment. Happy to have you here. Please give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **FRASER, WENDY: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: It is my great pleasure today to rise to honour Wendy Fraser, the Executive Director of the North Grove and congratulate her on her upcoming retirement. After six years of exceptional leadership at the North Grove, Wendy is stepping down and has her sights set on new adventures. Her leadership has transformed the North Grove into a community hub where people of all ages can access a wide range of services.

Under her direction, the Dartmouth Family Centre and Dartmouth North Community Food came together under one roof, bringing services for families and individuals to a single, accessible location. The shared home then adopted a shared name, the North Grove, a powerful image that represents the care, connection and belonging that are at the heart of the organization.

People living in north Dartmouth face many challenges: food and housing insecurity, social isolation, and poor health outcomes. Wendy truly sees the community for the incredibly resilient, engaged, and proud place it is. We are so fortunate to have been afforded her passion, kindness and leadership these past six years.

I ask the House to join me in thanking Wendy Fraser and wishing her all the best in her next chapter.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**MURPHY, MAX: BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I rise in my place to recognize a good friend who is celebrating a birthday at home today, Max Murphy. Many people in Cape Breton would know Max Murphy for his love of music and also the interviews that he does. He has interviewed many politicians and former Premiers. He is a bright light in our community.

I met Max through the Cape Breton Down Syndrome Society, with his buddies. I know he is home celebrating right now. I had a chance to talk to him this morning, so I rise in my place to recognize one of my best friends, Max Murphy. I wish him a very happy birthday and hope he enjoys the day with his family and his buddies.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**HANRATTY, ROSE: 100<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY - CONGRATS.**

ADEGOKE FADARE: I was wondering if I was going to be able to talk.

Speaker, I rise today to extend a heartfelt congratulations to Rose Hanratty, who will be celebrating a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday today, February 20, 2025. Reaching a century of life is truly a remarkable milestone and it is inspiring to reflect on the incredible journey Rose has lived throughout.

Born in 1925, Rose has witnessed profound changes in the world: the birth of the automobile industry, women getting the right to vote, and a time when radios were the entertainment opportunity. These historical moments are just a glimpse into the remarkable era she has lived through.

I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Rose Hanratty on this extraordinary milestone and wishing her the very best as she celebrates this amazing milestone occasion surrounded by friends and family.

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

**ALCARE PLACE: ADDICTION RECOVERY - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Today I rise to recognize a long-standing, transformative, not-for-profit that has been in my constituency for 30 years but is off on a new adventure. Alcare Place is more than just a simple recovery house. It has been a welcoming, comprehensive facility. Service users have described how they have been down the road to recovery before but hadn't been able to complete their journey until they found Alcare Place.

I would also like to recognize their Executive Director, Phil Bissett. Phil has worked tirelessly to ensure that Alcare gets the people, funds and support it needs to run optimally.

Alcare is looking for a new home base and I know that whichever community welcomes them will be grateful for their positive presence and service.

I ask that members join me in recognizing Alcare Place for being a life-changing organization to countless men on their road to recovery, as well as Phil Bissett for making the organization a warm, welcoming place.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**MAHONEY, KATIE: WAY TEAM - RECOG.**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise to recognize Katie Mahoney, co-founder of the WAY Association. The WAY Association all started with an act of kindness when Katie was nominated to perform an act of kindness. Having grown up surrounded by her grandparents, Katie chose to spend the day with a 79-year-old senior.

The WAY Association was born out of kindness and fulfills wishes for seniors and hosts annual events such as the recent Valentine's Day campaign. The campaign invites people to be a Valentine to a senior by having handcrafted chocolates delivered to anonymous seniors. It is a heartfelt gesture and a reminder to extend love beyond our immediate circles, reaching out to those who may feel isolated or marginalized.

It is through compassion that we nurture an inclusive and harmonious society. The WAY team has succeeded by building a team from different generations who are equally passionate about changing how we view, value, and support aging in our communities. I'm a proud supporter of WAY's annual golf tournament that takes place in my area and helps fund the association's mission that fosters a community driven by love and kindness.

Please join me in thanking Katie for her work with seniors and her reminder to extend our love beyond boundaries and to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

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

**MACISAAC, PETER: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

BRAD MCGOWAN: Today I rise to recognize the owner of the iconic Portland Street McDonald's, Peter MacIsaac. Portland Street McDonald's has been a Dartmouth institution for decades and is very well known by residents in our community and beyond.

What may not be as well known is the fact that Peter has contributed so much back to the community. Recently, his McDonald's partnered with Cleve's Source for Sports to donate meals, sneakers, toques, gloves, socks, and friendship bracelets to the Shannon Park Elementary School. They also sponsored the U18 Major hockey team, the Halifax Macs.

I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in thanking Peter MacIsaac and his team for their fantastic contribution to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**MELANSON, PATTI: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

ROD WILSON: Today I rise to pay tribute to a role model, mentor, and hero of mine, Patti Melanson. Patti was a nurse, leader, mother, friend, and colleague. She inspired others to join her in providing care to those who needed it the most. It was always easy to get behind Patti.

One of Patti's many accomplishments, over 20 years ago, was the creation of MOSH, a Mobile Outreach Street Health clinic - a truly collaborative team of nurses, doctors, mental health workers, and occupational therapists who provided care to those in need at shelters, parks, and often on street curbs from a van. Patti's mantra was: "If you really want to make a difference in people's lives, you need to meet them where they are at, not where you want them to be" - a lesson not lost on me as I sit in the Legislature.

Shortly before Patti passed away on December 15, 2018, she was awarded the Order of Nova Scotia. Patti, you may have left us, but your memories are a blessing and remain a lesson in compassion and confidence. Thank you, my friend Patti.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**COM. CREDIT UNION: PERM. LOCATION - CONGRATS.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I am pleased to congratulate the recently established Pugwash branch of the Community Credit Union on their new facility that is currently under construction in the Village of Pugwash.

After Scotiabank made the sad decision to close their branch in Pugwash and, based on an overwhelming need and response from local citizens, the Community Credit Union

opened a temporary branch in the Co-op Pugwash building. This has proven to be quite successful for both the Credit Union and the community, and now a permanent location is currently under construction. People in the area are watching the progress with anticipation and looking forward to the official opening sometime later this year.

I would like to congratulate and thank Community Credit Union CEO Georg Oberprieler and his team for their faith and commitment to the people of Pugwash and surrounding area.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**BREAKSPEAR, MARY: LILY BEE BAZAAR - RECOG.**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise to recognize Mary Breakspear, the owner of Lily Bee Bazaar, a charming local business nestled in the heart of Beechville. Lily Bee Bazaar is known for its unique selection of handcrafted goods and artisanal products.

Mary is not only a dedicated entrepreneur but also a pillar of our community. Her generosity and commitment to giving back are truly commendable. Mary recently purchased \$100 worth of handmade cards for a local Beechville Lakeside Timberlea classroom, showing her support for our young, budding artists. Her benevolence extends to the Bags of Love initiative, where she has made a significant contribution to help those in need.

This year, Mary is taking her commitment to the community a step further by planning to create a tree adorned with the names of children from our community. This heartfelt initiative aims to support families during the holiday season, ensuring that every child experiences the joy of Christmas.

In recognition of Mary's dedication, generosity, and community spirit, I ask the members of the House to join me in extending our gratitude to Mary, whose contributions have made a significant impact. We are fortunate to have such an inspiring and compassionate entrepreneur in our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

**SPICER, BERNICE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Today I rise to honour a life well lived, a true legend of Spryfield. Bernice Spicer passed away on January 10<sup>th</sup> surrounded by the love of her family. To know Bernice was to love her. She was the heart of our community, and a woman whose door was always open to anyone in need. Bernice was loud and opinionated, fiercely protective, and unwavering in her love for those around her. She had an enormous heart and took immense pride in her Spryfield roots.

She leaves behind a legacy of strength and love carried forward by her sons, Bill, Bunker, and Jason. To Bunk, Jay, and Bill, I want to say this directly: Your mom was loved and cherished. The entire community and I will always have your back. Rest in peace, Bernice.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

### **THE BRIDGE: UNIONIZATION DRIVE - RECOG.**

PAUL WOZNEY: Workers who organize together win together. Across our province, unions represent workers across many sectors, and more still are rallying to assert their rights collectively. I stand today in support of the unionization drive being undertaken by workers at The Bridge, Nova Scotia's largest shelter. Through the efforts of its staff, The Bridge supports Nova Scotians by providing housing, medical attention, and food to those who would otherwise go without. Still awaiting a decision from the province's labour board, those same staff have been working diligently, not only to help Nova Scotians but to help one another by securing their collective voice.

Speaker, I ask that those in attendance today join me in encouraging the workers of The Bridge to sustain their fight for unionization and congratulate them on their ceaseless work on behalf of Nova Scotians in need.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

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

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I rise in my place to recognize someone that the community knows very well who just passed away. That was Carl Rideout. Carl, for those who knew him, was a community champion. He volunteered in many different ways.

Originally from Newfoundland, he married his wife, Lorraine, and moved to Cape Breton. Carl was also a big part of the Cove Guest Home in Sydney. He was a big part of Williston House and the expansion of the Cove, which is such an important facility for many families in the core of the Sydney area. I know he had a lot of family and friends. He was well supported by so many in the community, and he supported so many wonderful organizations.

I rise in my place to recognize someone I've known for many years, Carl Rideout, and the work that he did in the overall community, but also especially the work that he did with the family at the Cove Guest Home in Sydney.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.



**MERSEY ROSE THEATRE CO.: MUSICAL - BEST WISHES**

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, this coming April 10<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup>, the West Queens Recreation Centre will be transformed into Wonderland.

Over 40 young thespians from Mersey Rose Theatre Company will stage the musical *Disney's Alice In Wonderland JR*. Backed by a strong production team of parent and community volunteers, it promises to be a crowd-pleaser.

Under the direction of Ashley-Rose Goodwin, youth performers from elementary through to high school have been attending complimentary workshops and rehearsals since last Spring. They've already performed numbers in the Privateer Days Parade, the opening of the Liverpool International Theatre Festival, and the Kiwanis Community Christmas Concert.

[1:30 p.m.]

I wish this production much success, and to the entire cast and production team, I say, "Break a leg!"

THE SPEAKER: Not a shoulder. That was a tongue-twister.

The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**NIECE: BROOKLYN MARY GANGOO - BIRTHDAY WISHES**

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to wish my beautiful niece a happy birthday: Brooklyn Mary Gangoo. She was born on Love Day, February 14, 2012, to a proud mom and dad, Crystal and Roy. Brooklyn is a beautiful, smart, fun-loving, and determined young person.

She lights up a room when she steps in it, and it doesn't help that she has beautiful blue eyes. She loves basketball, fashion, TikTok, and photos because she's just so cute and I'm her auntie. I'm so proud to be her auntie because I can, and will, teach her the most amazing things in her life.

I would like all members of this House to help me in wishing Brooklyn Mary Gangoo a happy 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. I love, you, boo.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**CHRISTIE, JOAN: LEARN TO SAIL PGM. - CONGRATS.**

TIM OUTHIT: Speaker, I'd like to congratulate long-time Bedford Basin resident Joan Christie and the Bedford Basin Yacht Club on a very successful fundraising campaign undertaken last year. Joan was instrumental in helping BBYC raise over \$100,000 towards the Learn to Sail program.

The BBYC Learn to Sail program has been a cornerstone of the club for more than five decades, and has resulted in teaching many award-winning sailors, including several North American and world champions.

I ask the members of the Legislature to join me in thanking Joan for her dedication to the Learn to Sail program.

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

**IGNITE MUSIC LESSONS: INSTRUCTION - RECOG.**

LINA HAMID: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate a local business, Ignite Music Lessons - formerly known as Halifax Guitar Lessons - as they begin an exciting new chapter.

For the last 10 years, owners Sue and Maurice Richard have taught guitar lessons from their Clayton Park home. In this new iteration of their school, Ignite Music Lessons will offer both piano and guitar lessons for all ages out of their beautiful new office space at 3845 Joseph Howe Drive.

Sue and Maurice are passionate musical educators with a unique teaching approach focused on making the learning process accessible, engaging, and fun. Imagine a parent and a child being able to learn the same song on different instruments, each at their own level, or a group of students meeting up to play together in an evening jam session, and you'll get the right idea.

With their creative and flexible lessons, I am sure Ignite Music Lessons will continue to spark passion for music in the community for years to come.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**E. CUMB. LODGE: LONG-TERM CARE - RECOG.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I am pleased to recognize the staff, residents, and families at East Cumberland Lodge in Pugwash.

For anyone who has ever had a loved one spend time in long-term care, you understand how challenging that time can be for residents and their families. We sometimes hear of situations where care isn't as good as it should be or could be. However, I am proud to say that East Cumberland Lodge has a reputation for providing excellence in care.

A grateful family member recently penned a message of appreciation entitled "A Little Piece of Heaven Here on Earth," in which the staff and management were complimented for their unwavering dedication to making life as enjoyable and safe as possible for residents. It concluded with: "This is a heartfelt thank you to all Lodge staff, in every area - no exceptions. You will always be a very special facility and forever hold a place in my heart." High praise indeed.

Please join me in thanking CEO June MacDonald-Jenkins and all the staff at East Cumberland Lodge.

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

#### **TRURO: 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - RECOG.**

HON. DAVE RITCEY: The year 2025 is a big year for my hometown of Truro as we celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This milestone is a testament to the town's rich heritage, resilience, and vibrant community spirit.

From its beginnings as the land of the Mi'kmaw people, to its evolution into a thriving hub shaped by the contributions of the African Nova Scotians, Acadians, and people from around the world, Truro's history is one of diversity and growth. The incorporation in 1875 marked the start of an incredible journey that continues to inspire our residents and visitors alike.

As we honour the past and celebrate this special occasion, let's embrace a future rooted in respect, collaboration, and inclusion. Here's to Truro's bright legacy and the exciting opportunities ahead.

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

#### **HOUSE OF EIGHTS: DANCE STUDIO - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize House of Eights Dance Studio, a vibrant community hub in downtown Halifax. This inclusive studio offers over 30 drop-in classes weekly, catering to diverse styles and skill levels where dancers of all ages from youth to adults can explore their passion for movement.

The studio's commitment to accessibility is evident in their flexible drop-in approach, as well as their approach to welcoming people into any class that they wish. Their approach has re-ignited the love of dance for many and provides a supportive space for beginners and experienced dancers alike to feel encouraged and challenged.

House of Eights goes beyond just teaching steps. They foster a sense of community, empowering individuals through dance education and artistic development. Their dedication to creating a safe, nurturing environment has helped many overcome self-consciousness and rediscover their creativity.

I am pleased to stand in gratitude and appreciation for the important forms of artistic, creative and self-expression that happens both inside and outside the walls of the studio as the result of House of Eights Dance Studio.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

**MARION COM. CTR.: 20 YRS OF SERVICE - CONGRATS.**

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the Dr. Carson and Marion Murray Community Centre for 20 years of service to the residents of Springhill and the greater municipality of Cumberland. The arena opened in the Fall of 2004, three years after the former Springhill Arena collapsed in 2001. The community suffered a terrible loss when the arena was destroyed, but it has, like so many times, gathered together and residents rallied behind the campaign for a new venue.

Since then, the Dr. Carson and Marion Murray Community Centre has become the social recreation centre for Springhill and much of Cumberland County. Their milestone anniversary was celebrated with so many people in the county in September 2024.

I ask all the House to celebrate the 20 years of success for not just this arena, but also the hometown Ramblers.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

**SHEET HBR. MARINA ASSOC.: PROJECT WORK - RECOG.**

HON. KENT SMITH: Speaker, I rise today to extend my sincere gratitude to the dedicated group of community volunteers at the Sheet Harbour Marina Association. They continue to advance a much-needed full-service marina project in Sheet Harbour. It is widely known in the boating community that there is a void in the market between Dartmouth and Liscomb, and the association has worked diligently to fill that gap and promote tourism and economic development on the Eastern Shore. This includes a full-service marina destination, providing slip rentals, a boat ramp, fuelling station, maintenance services, and other important services.

Although a significant undertaking, the association is well under way towards their goal, having already completed a feasibility study, business plan, spatial planning, and bathymetric surveys. Additionally, properties were secured in an effort to establish a future marina in Sheet Harbour that will offer boaters a safe haven while transiting the Eastern Shore and visiting the 100 wild islands.

I ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in recognizing the dedicated, ongoing work that the Sheet Harbour Marina Association members have undertaken, and to wish them continued success as the project advances.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**SANDY LAKE CONSERV. ASSOC.: TIRELESS WORK - RECOG.**

PAUL WOZNEY: Fifty-four years ago, Sandy Lake was deemed a protected park. With 1,000 acres of biodiversity and natural beauty, it ought to stay that way. Today I rise in support of the Sandy Lake Conservation Association's long-standing efforts to protect a key component of the Sackville Watershed for the sake of all communities in the HRM.

Dedicated to preserving the ecological integrity of Sandy Lake and protecting a number of species at risk from irresponsible development in the area, the Sandy Lake Conservation Association has worked tirelessly to capture the government and public's attention to the matter. Despite years of work and a number of reports highlighting the importance and fragility of its ecosystem, Sandy Lake's fate still hangs in the balance.

Dedicated activists such as these are often the only thing standing between the machine of government and our irreplaceable natural world. As such, I invite all present to join me in thanking the Sandy Lake Conservation Association in standing against the destruction of our region's ecological foundations.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

**NARASIMHAN, PRATHIBHA: TAMIL HER. MO. - RECOG.**

DAMIAN STOILOV: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a community leader in Bedford South, Prathibha Narasimhan. Prathi recently organized a Tamil Heritage Month celebration in Bedford South which showcased Tamil culture, history, and featured vibrant performances of dance, displays, and traditional artwork. That event was well-attended by over 300 people - members of the South Asian community and others from all over the region introducing them to Bedford South, many for the first time.

I ask all members to join me in acknowledging and applauding Prathi for her outstanding work and invaluable impact on our community of Bedford South.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF: WORK - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize our school support staff in the education system. Every day, I hear from staff and parents of our school system about some of the hardships and a lot of the amazing moments. School support staff talk about how they love their kids, and the kids are the reason why they do the work they do.

Support staff endure many challenges - many of which should never occur - and yet you hear great love for the work and the kids in the system. Educational program assistants measure their success by the success of the students they support. They need adequate funding, increased paid hours of work that provide full-time support throughout the school day, proper training and development, and wages that reflect the importance of their work.

I would like to ask all members to join me in supporting our school support staff across the province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

**MYATT, DON: FRIENDSHIP - RECOG.**

TOM TAGGART: Speaker, I rise today to recognize my loyal friend Don Myatt. Don spent most of his working career in Dartmouth as a real estate appraiser and agent, and then moved to Colchester North.

Don is a very quiet, unassuming man who was close to his father, who lived in Bass River, which is how I got to know Don. His father was my friend and lived in Bass River. Together they would go fishing, often along the Bay of Fundy.

Don is a loyal political supporter of mine. He was my driver for both of these last two elections. Interestingly enough, Don has a cat named Sophie after a famous Sophie in the Liberal Party.

Don's first love is politics. Every day, he watches the news on television, listening to the latest headlines from the provincial and federal governments. Don will often call my office, discussing current affairs and policies, and voicing his opinion on what we should do.

THE SPEAKER: I think everyone here could have a job as an auctioneer at some point.

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**N. SYD. FOOD BANK: COM. SERV. - CONGRATS.**

HON. FRED TILLEY: Today, I would like to recognize an organization in our community, the North Sydney Food Bank. Recently, I had the opportunity to tour the food bank and see all the progress that has been made.

The food bank is constantly expanding their programming and providing additional services for the residents of North Sydney and surrounding areas. Their most recent project, providing affordable housing for many seniors, is almost complete, with residents expected to move in next month. The apartments are beautifully laid out and with a rent structure that makes them affordable.

Speaker, I would ask the members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating the North Sydney Food Bank for their success and thank them for their support to the community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**LUCKETT, PETE: AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

JULIE VANEXAN: I rise today to congratulate Pete Lockett on his 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce. The award is presented to Pete Lockett “in recognition of his exceptional contributions and longstanding dedication to the growth and prosperity of our community.”

In 2000, Pete purchased a 92-acre open hayfield overlooking the beautiful Gaspereau Valley. He planted anything he could on the property: vegetables, fruits, herbs, and, of course, grapes. In 2010, he opened his winery and has helped shape the culture of the wine industry in Nova Scotia ever since.

Speaker, I ask members of this Legislature to please join me today in congratulating Pete Lockett for his much-deserved Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

**SINDEN, BOB: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. NOLAN YOUNG: Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the late Bob Sinden for his dedication and commitment to our community. Sadly, Bob passed away recently, leaving a legacy of devotion to supporting our community that will be long-lasting. He supported the Shelburne Mill Building restoration, pet projects, the Shelburne Historical Society, and was a founder to the hugely popular Giant Pumpkin Festival & Regatta, just to name a few. Bob also loved to share his knowledge that would help residents and visitors alike to understand everything about the history of Shelburne. That

was so important to him. I respectfully ask all members to join me in sending condolences to Bob's family, the community, and all who knew him. His sharing, his caring nature, his hearty laugh, and his constant positive outlook on life will be missed.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

**WALFORD, LORNE: PUDGEY TIRE - THANKS**

HON. LEAH MARTIN: Today, I would like to recognize Cole Harbour community member Lorne Walford. Lorne is the owner of Pudgey Tire, a successful local business that's been in operation since 1999. Over the 26 years of its operation, Pudgey Tire has provided excellent services to locals and beyond, but beyond their service to cars, they also provide service to our community. The business sponsors numerous Cole Harbour boys' and girls' hockey and baseball teams as well as hosting car shows in the community and sponsoring a local youth legends racer.

Mr. Walford's contributions and sponsorships have helped the youth of Cole Harbour excel at their hobbies and passion and helped establish Cole Harbour as a dynamic community. I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in thanking Mr. Walford for all that he does for our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

**WEIR, DOROTHY: 100<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I rise today to celebrate a truly remarkable milestone in our community. On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Dorothy Weir celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. That's a century of memories, experiences, and contributions. Reaching 100 years of age is a testament to Dorothy's resilience, wisdom, and the love that she has shared with her family, friends, and community throughout her life. It was an honour to surprise her with a special letter on her birthday to mark this extraordinary occasion, on which she commented: "Who is that man standing there?"

Dorothy's milestone is an inspiration to us all, reminding us of the strength of spirit and the joy of life well lived. Please join me in wishing Dorothy continued happiness, health, and cherished moments as she begins this incredible new chapter.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.



**MAHER, ALLISON: BOOK SUCCESS - CONGRATS.**

DAVID BOWLBY: I rise today to recognize someone who's incredibly important to me, and the incredible achievement of my wife, Allison Maher, on the success of her book titled *The Last of the Firsts*. Allison's work has not only showcased her creativity but has also brought inspiration and artistic vibrancy to our community. Her storytelling brings laughter and tears to readers and encourages a love of literature.

Creativity and the arts are a strong part of Nova Scotian society, and Allison's contributions remind us of the power of storytelling, and she asks everyone who has bought the book: In what chapter did I make you cry? I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Allison Maher on her literary success and for enriching our community with her work.

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

**DOM. FIREFIGHTERS: RESCUE - THANKS**

JOHN WHITE: Dominion is a picturesque community with a peaceful charm that is the envy of any Hallmark movie. It is one of those proud little towns where everyone knows everyone and where people come together in times of need. On January 8<sup>th</sup> at approximately 3:00 p.m., the serenity was suddenly shattered with the sounds of sirens with the structure fire discovered on Commercial Street. Within minutes, firefighters arrived on the scene, facing not only a working structure fire but also bitter cold wind conditions.

Firefighters Tommy Ellsworth and Adam Murphy were met with extraordinary conditions as they searched for a young man reported to be inside. Neighbouring departments of Glace Bay Volunteer Fire Department and Reserve Mines Fire Department assisted with the rescue. I am pleased to report that the quick actions of these community heroes successfully pulled the young man from that blaze. I want to extend my profound and sincere thank you to all those who played a role in this extraordinary outcome.

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

**KITPU AVIATION: SUCCESS - CONGRATS.**

DIANNE TIMMINS: I rise today to recognize the remarkable success of Kitpu Aviation, founded by the Wagmatcook First Nation as the first majority Mi'kmaq-owned aviation company in Canada. Kitpu Aviation is not only providing essential flight services but also creating opportunity for Indigenous youth to explore careers in aviation. Their commitment to training, mentorship, and community engagement is breaking barriers in experience for the next generation of pilots and aviation professionals. It is fitting that Kitpu Aviation has been recognized by the Vital Lnu'k Excellence Award, which

celebrates those who preserve and share the Mi'kmaw culture and lead with vision and dedication.

Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating Kitpu Aviation on their achievement and in wishing them continued success as they soar to their new heights.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

**BARKER, NATE: RED DOG MINI GOLF - BEST WISHES**

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Grade 8 student Nate Barker from St. Andrews.

Nate is the owner of Red Dog Mini Golf. It is a mini-putt course that was recently featured on CBC News, which he operates out of his family's yard. Nate says that some days there were only three people playing golf, but it grew from word of mouth.

The course, which was originally built as a 4-H woodworking project, eventually became Red Dog Mini Golf. The obstacles are recycled items from around the house and scraps of wood leftover from Hurricane Fiona.

Running Red Dog Mini Golf is a family affair, with older brother Cameron and his parents Christine and Sean chipping in when needed. Nate says that he will be donating the proceeds from this season to a charity that supports animals.

I ask all members of this House to wish Nate great success for this Summer's mini-putt season. I am sure he is already working on the next course.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

**PITTS, VERNON: 30 YRS. OF COUNCIL SERV. - THANKS**

HON. GREG MORROW: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the former Warden of the Municipality of the District of Guysborough, Vernon Pitts.

Vernon served as District 6 councillor from 1994 until 2008, as deputy warden from 2008 to 2013, and warden from 2013 until last year's municipal election - an incredible 30 years of public service. During this time, council saw the development of the Sable Offshore Energy Project, the new landfill site, and part of the early stages of projects that are under development now. Vernon always maintained a great working relationship with all levels of government and was certainly not afraid to voice his opinion or suggestions.

His dedication to promoting Guysborough County as a place to live, work, and welcome new business was something that did not go unnoticed with his colleagues and residents of the municipality. Please join me in thanking Vernon Pitts for his 30 years of service on the Municipality of the District of Guysborough council.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

**LAKE ECHO LIONESSE CLUB: 45<sup>TH</sup> CHARTER NIGHT - RECOG.**

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Lake Echo Lioness Club, which in June 2024 celebrated their 45<sup>th</sup> Charter Night. This Lioness Club is the only such club still operating in Nova Scotia.

They are extremely active. Last year, they donated over \$5,600 to various organizations such as the IWK Health Centre, Alice House, Phoenix youth programs, the Lung Association of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and Kids Help Phone. They also provide an annual high school bursary to Eastern Shore Consolidated School and Auburn Drive High. The Lioness Club supports the Canada Day celebrations, Terry Fox Run, Remembrance Day parade, annual community tree lighting, and seniors Christmas supper, and operates the Lake Echo Lions Bingo canteen.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to please join with me in recognizing and commending the Lake Echo Lioness Club for their unwavering dedication and tireless efforts in supporting the residents of the Lake Echo community and beyond.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

**ACCIDENTAL ACTORS: CHARITY DINNER THEATRE - RECOG.**

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a unique non-profit in our community.

The Accidental Actors is a charity dinner theatre founded in 2003 by Carole Peterson. Ticket sales are always very reasonable and include a delicious meal with priceless entertainment. What makes the theatre group so unique is that all proceeds go to supporting local groups and organizations.

This past November, I had the pleasure of attending a dinner theatre, and I was blown away by their performance. Don't let this group of amateur actors fool you, as they will have you in stitches and may even cause you to blush a time or two. I can also tell you they certainly know how to work a room.

Although Carole passed away in 2019, leaving behind big shoes to fill, she would be extremely proud that the show has gone on with much joy, laughter, and giant success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

**SURETTE, DAN: LITTLE BROOK DISTILLING CO. - RECOG.**

RYAN ROBICHEAU: Speaker, I rise to acknowledge Dan Surette. He is the visionary founder of Little Brook Distilling Co. in Clare, bringing a blend of passion, expertise, and dedication to the world of artisanal spirits. With a deep-rooted connection to our community and a commitment to sustainability, Dan has transformed his vision into a reality that stands out for its exceptional quality and environmental responsibility. Under Dan's leadership, Little Brook Distilling has embraced innovative practices, including a remarkable 99 per cent reduction in water consumption, reflecting his dedication to sustainability.

As a 25 per cent Black-owned business, Dan and his team are proud to contribute to a diverse and vibrant community, integrating his cultural heritage into the fabric of the distillery. Dan's passion for his craft and his commitment to making a positive impact are at the heart of Little Brook Distilling Co. His vision continues to drive the company forward, ensuring that every bottle produced is a testament to his dedication to quality, sustainability, and community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

**FOWLER, WAYNE: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

CHRIS PALMER: I rise today to recognize another community leader and valued volunteer in Kings West, Wayne Fowler of Kingston. Wayne is a business leader and volunteers on many boards in the area, selflessly giving his time to his community.

Wayne currently is the chairperson on the Village Commission in Kingston and treasurer with the Association of Nova Scotia Villages. He is a president of the U13 AAA Hockey League with Hockey Nova Scotia and a board member with the Valley Credit Union, past president of the Western Valley Minor Hockey Association. He has also recently been named the recipient of the 2024 Jed Ritcey Award, named after the father of the member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River, which recognizes the province's top hockey volunteer of the year. Congratulations, Wayne. He is always ready and willing to support various organizations, supporting many events through his business, Greenwood Auto Sales, and continuing to advocate for his community and region.

I am pleased to work with leaders like Wayne who share a vision to build up the Annapolis Valley and make it a great place to work and live. I'd like to ask all members of this House to please join me in thanking Wayne Fowler for his tireless work on behalf of the people of Kings West.

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

**MEDAGLIA, TALON: MOTOCROSS ACHIEVEMENTS - RECOG.**

HON. SCOTT ARMSTRONG: Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines. I rise today to recognize Talon Medaglia from Brookfield who, at the age of 13, is setting the mark in the area of motorcross. The son of Heidi Cooke and Tyler Medaglia, both of whom are renowned in the sport around the globe, Talon started racing at the age of five. He started racing on a PW50, before moving to a YZ85.

With a Walton 2023 podium finish at the Eastern Canada Amateur Motocross Championships and again at the Loretta Lynn Ranch 2023 races, Talon was selected as one of three racers in his age group to represent Canada last September on Team Canada at the World bLU cRU Yamaha Riders Races in England. With a fourth-place finish in this worldwide competition, there is no doubt that this young man will once again be on the world stage of motorcross for many years to come.

Start your engines, Talon. Bring it home for Canada.

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

**RODENHISER, BARRY: WINGS & WHEELS EVENT - THANKS**

HON. BRIAN WONG: Today, I would like to recognize the works of Barry Rodenhiser, the executive director of the Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum. Barry once again achieved success with his annual Wings & Wheels fundraiser, featuring an impressive array of aircraft and vintage cars.

The event brought the community together in a spectacular way. The Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum provides a free, fun, and engaging experience for the entire family. When you visit, they simply ask for a small donation to help maintain the museum and keep it accessible for everyone.

Speaker, Barry creates a wonderful environment where anyone can learn about the rich aviation history of our community and Nova Scotia. Please help me in thanking Barry and the Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum for keeping our history alive.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

HON. JILL BALSER: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

JILL BALSER: My mom is here today. (Applause). I just want everyone to know that I know she has been waiting for this day to be able to come to the Legislature not only

to see me in action but everyone here. Please enjoy, Mom, and thank you and I love you.  
(Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Hello, Mama Balser.

Order, please. The time allotted for Statements by Members has expired.

[2:00 p.m.]

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

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

THE SPEAKER: The time is now 2:00 p.m. We will finish at 2:50 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **PREM.: AUDITOR GENERAL POSITION - CLARIFY**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The Auditor General held a press conference this morning to speak out against the threats to her office from this government. We are talking about an independent officer whose job it is to share reliable information with Nova Scotians about their government's policies and spending. Why is this government so afraid of transparency and accountability? I'll ask the Premier that question.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'm happy to speak to our colleagues and the people of Nova Scotia on this question. We absolutely respect the work of the Auditor General. In fact, we've had 24 clean audits in a row, and as the Auditor General said this morning, all our departments work very diligently on all the recommendations the Auditor General gives. We do almost all of them. We work very diligently. We respect the work of the Auditor General, and we have had clean audits.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The opinion of the Auditor General on this budget isn't clean, is it, Speaker? The Auditor General has produced invaluable reports on school violence, government spending, and the government's response to intimate partner violence. Instead of respecting her role as a valuable part of our democracy, this government is trying to force a powerful and competent woman out of her job. Why is changing the rules to silence the Auditor General a top priority for this government?

JOHN LOHR: I will point out that the rule changes that we are proposing are in line with other jurisdictions and in no way will silence her ability to do her work at all. I will say that even her suggesting that casts aspersions, unfortunately, on other jurisdictions'

Auditors General, which is unfortunate. I don't believe that's what the Auditor General intended, but that is the effect. We believe the Auditor General will be fully able to continue to do her work.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I want to ask the Premier: Is he not just upset that the Auditor General's job isn't doing what he wants it to, but now he wants to blame her for having a problem with it? There are two other jurisdictions, and in those jurisdictions, those rules existed before the existence of a two-thirds majority that could turf her from her job without any cause. Instead of helping Nova Scotians get attached to primary care, protecting renters, ensuring there are more affordable homes, this government is focused on changing the rules to undermine the Auditor General. That is not what they were elected to do. Why is restricting information more important than delivering solutions for the people of this province?

JOHN LOHR: I will say not only is our current budget delivering more food for students, not only delivering a \$500 million tax cut, but it is also delivering this year an 8 per cent increase into the budget of the Office of the Auditor General. We support the work of the Auditor General.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Liberal Party.

#### **DOJ: AUDITOR GENERAL THREATS - EXPLAIN**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: My question is for the Minister of Justice. This morning, the Auditor General held a press conference to discuss the threats to her office coming from this government. She made it clear that the threats from this government are affecting her ability to do her job. The AG's role in our democracy is to provide independent assurance to the people of Nova Scotia that public money is spent properly. My question to the Minister of Justice: Do the comments from the Auditor General give this government pause?

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: I will reiterate that we support the work of the Auditor General. We've had 24 clean audits from the Auditor General. We continue to work very hard as a government to do all the recommendations the Auditor General makes. As the Auditor General noted, we increased the budget for the Auditor General. We support the work of the Auditor General.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Again, my question is for the Minister of Justice. The cornerstone of the ability of the Auditor General to do her job is independence. If you erode the independence, then you are affecting the ability of the Auditor General to do her job. It is completely unacceptable for this government to be able to control all the spending, control who gets the contracts, and also who controls the spending audits. The government

needs to change course and stop threatening the Auditor General. How can the minister possibly justify this overreach?

JOHN LOHR: I will remind the member, and I'll remind Nova Scotians, that our process of spending is very transparent. We do four reports a year. We table our extra appropriations with the Speaker's Office. The process is transparent. The process is a process that has been in place since 2010, and we continue to get clean audits on that process.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Again, my question is for the Minister of Justice. The government has taken action this week to weaken the Office of the Auditor General. This threatens everything that this House stands for when it comes to transparency for this government or any government that comes after it. My question: Can the Minister of Justice explain to this House why she wants the power to be able to fire the Auditor General without cause?

JOHN LOHR: Again, I'll remind the member and all Nova Scotians that we have increased the budget for the Auditor General in this current budget, and we continue to look for the Auditor General to do the valuable work of auditing all of our departments. In fact, we recently asked the Auditor General to do a specific audit on a specific subject. We continue to look for the Auditor General's work, and we continue to respect her findings.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **PREM.: AUDITOR GENERAL CHANGE - STOP**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The process of out-of-budget spending followed by this province is out of step with the rest of the country. I thought we were trying to normalize our rules and processes. Maybe the Premier could comment on that but giving themselves the power to terminate the Auditor General for reasons other than cause or incapacity erodes her ability to do her job and threatens the independence and objectivity of her office. It is crucial that Nova Scotians understand whether they are getting value for money, and the Auditor General is the one who can tell them that, if she is not under threat of losing her job. I'll ask the Premier again: Will he stand up for good governance and stop this change?

HON. JOHN LOHR: On behalf of the Premier, I will say absolutely we will stand up for good governance, and we are following a process that the past three governments have followed since 2010 on our spending, and we're very transparent on our spending. We welcome the Auditor General's reports. We adhere to and we do our very best across departments to meet all the recommendations of the Auditor General's report, so absolutely.



CLAUDIA CHENDER: Well, like I say to my children: “Show me, don’t tell me.” If you are saying you’re transparent, be transparent. Change the rule. Table your spending. Show some actual transparency in a way that matters. We just came through an election. We know what the issues were in that election - they were primary care, they were housing, they were affordability - but we are not talking about that. We are talking about attacking the Auditor General, and I’d like to ask the Premier one more time: When did this become a priority, and will he pull it back?

JOHN LOHR: I’m happy to talk about the issues raised during the election, and we are addressing those in a historic budget. We are addressing the affordability for Nova Scotians by implementing the largest tax break in the history of our province. More than \$1,000 for every family in Nova Scotia. We are doing the largest capital build in the history of our province. We are building schools. We are building hospitals. We are building roads. We are building housing. All the issues the member has raised, and we will continue to do that work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

#### **DHW: HOGAN COURT COST - PROVIDE**

ROD WILSON: My question is directed to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Today we saw yet another real estate deal involving Hogan Court. I’ve lost track, to be honest. Nova Scotians were promised this facility would be ready, and yes, there have been some small admissions to it, but nonetheless, that is good.

The “More, faster” mantra of this government would be commendable if there were more checks and balances. After millions spent to purchase the building, millions on renovations, we now find out the building has been sold to a private, not-for-profit operator in an interesting purchase agreement that cost \$114 million. My question to the minister is: How much is this costing, and if you were to do anything differently, what would you do?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I’m actually really thrilled with what’s happening at Hogan Court. I had an opportunity to visit it recently. So far, West Bedford has saved over 1,266 bed days in our health care system. The average length of stay is 20.6 days, which means that people get restorative care during that time, and 80 per cent of the individuals in that facility are being discharged to home.

This is an incredible facility, and if I could do anything different, I would’ve run sooner and it would have been open for ten more years.

ROD WILSON: My question today is for the Minister of Agriculture and MLA for Guysborough-Tracadie. As you’re no doubt aware . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. (Inaudible) The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ROD WILSON: As you're no doubt aware, people with cancer are caring and resilient. As someone who has provided ER coverage for cancer over the last two years, I'm worried that during this sitting of the Legislature, the ER at Western Memorial Hospital has been closed and remains closed until March 5<sup>th</sup>. My question to the honourable minister and MLA for Guysborough-Tracadie, how are you addressing the current and recurring lack of ER services for the people of Canso?

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'm sorry, I rule that question out of order. That does not belong in the minister's portfolio, so you'll have to address it to the minister. The minister agrees to answer it. The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness, being so kind to answer a question not addressed to her.

[2:15 p.m.]

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Health is our wealth, there's no question about it. The current model in the Canso hospital has been in place for some period of time. We know that there is a period of time that there is no physician coverage there. We've been working for a while to recruit there. We do have a model. The nurses are well supported through a virtual care model, and we work in community there. There are a number of meetings that are held and my colleague the MLA for Guysborough-Tracadie is very involved, and keeps me very up to date. We continue to work with community particularly in order to find them the resources that they need.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

### **DOA: FRUIT GROWERS - SUPPORT**

KRISTA GALLAGHER: Nova Scotia exported over 10,000 tonnes of apples in the last fiscal year, and about 75 per cent of those went to the United States. Emily Lutz of the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association has warned that most of the profit from the apple exporters will be eaten up in tariffs if the tariffs materialize. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture: What is the minister doing to support fruit growers in this province?

HON. GREG MORROW: We realize the very real threat that the tariffs have on our many industries in Nova Scotia. Agriculture is no exception, whether it be wild blueberries, apples, or Christmas trees. What we're doing is we're taking a Team Nova Scotia/Team Canada approach. We're working with our Premier, the other premiers, and the other provinces. In fact, our Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has built \$2 million in contingency into the budget for situations that arise from tariffs. In the meantime, what I can tell you is that we just launched new support for wild blueberry and apple farmers in Nova Scotia that Emily Lutz herself called "good, practical support for the industry." We're working and will continue to work.

KRISTA GALLAGHER: Across the agriculture sector, people in this province have very real concerns about potential tariffs. This government's hotlines and survey are not easing that concern. Will the minister commit to an economic task force with representatives from the agriculture sector?

GREG MORROW: John F. Kennedy said, "In crisis, be aware of the danger - but recognize the opportunity." In this crisis, there is absolutely danger, but there is also opportunity - opportunity to invest here at home, opportunity to reduce the interprovincial trade barriers, and opportunity to find new export trade markets for our producers. We're always talking to industry, whether it's me, my colleagues, or the Premier, and we'll do what we can to help agriculture in this province.

I will tell you one thing: We - this Premier, this government - have a Team Nova Scotia and a Team Canada approach. At one point, the Leader of the NDP talked about good leadership in another province. Where was that Premier from? The NDP - a Team NDP approach.

THE SPEAKER: Order. A member stood. No.

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

#### **DOJ: AUDITOR GENERAL INTERFERENCE - END**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, the issues with the government's actions aren't limited to the ability to fire the Auditor General without cause. It's also about the combination for the government to be able to interfere with the Auditor General's report before it's released. The Auditor General must be able to do her job as an independent officer of this House. Can the Minister of Justice give any example at all of a time when the Auditor General released confidential information, or will she admit that this is nothing more than an abuse of power?

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I'm happy to talk directly to the bill that is before the Legislature. I know there will be plenty of opportunity to debate that bill. In terms of what the member is asking about, the reality is that there is a mechanism in there for the Attorney General to be able to say "this is confidential information" followed by a mechanism to provide that, to go to the Public Accounts Committee to be provided in camera to members here. There are times when there is confidential information related, for example, to cybersecurity or litigation that the Auditor General may not have a line of sight on, which departments do. That is the reason that clause is in that bill.

IAIN RANKIN: The mechanism exists today to go over those issues. She has always complied with those issues, in my 11-plus years in the House, and always

demonstrated careful due diligence when it comes to information. In fact, the reality is that the Auditor General must follow the same laws related to personal information that all government departments do. There is no reason to expect that the Auditor General would abuse their access to information and no examples that I've heard, at any time, that the office has abused that power.

This government's actions amount to nothing more than an abuse of power and a threat to the officer of this House. Can any minister here today say what triggered this action by the government?

JOHN LOHR: I again will reiterate the member's question. I'll refer to potential issues regarding cybersecurity or litigation or maybe others as he's referenced, but those are the reasons those clauses are in the bill. It is a process that will be exercised through the Attorney General and made available to the members of the Legislature through committee.

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

#### **LSI: PALADIN WORKERS PENALIZED - EXPLAIN**

LINA HAMID: In December 2024, Paladin Security - a company with significant contracts with Nova Scotia Health Authority - was delisted as a Nova Scotia Nominee Program-designated employer. This means that over 100 of their current employees - frontline security of our health care facilities - suddenly have their permanent residency applications closed or paused. Can the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration explain why these workers are being penalized at no fault of their own?

HON. NOLAN YOUNG: I understand this is difficult for any employee who may be going through this. I can't speak about specifics here on the floor of the Legislature. However, I would say that it's very important that our partners we're working with have a focus on retention rates within their programs and looking towards people who will be here in the long term.

LINA HAMID: This is just one of many problems that we are hearing about with the Nova Scotia Nominee Program. In fact, the biggest issue that folks have been raising is that many are not seeing their application being processed because the department has such a large backlog to work through. Furthermore, communication to applicants on changes of priorities or who are just waiting for their applications to be processed, communication is non-existent. Given this, can the minister explain why the number of full-time equivalent positions in his department is decreasing?

NOLAN YOUNG: We're working very hard with all the people who have been affected through Paladin Security to offer them time to find meaningful employment and update their applications. We're working incredibly hard through the numbers to keep

pushing them through immigration and, I mean, we have shortages. We have shortages in health care. We have shortages in construction. We have shortages in critical sectors, and we'll keep pushing and moving through to keep building the skills that Nova Scotia needs.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

### **DHW: HR PLAN FOR ERs - EXPLAIN**

ROD WILSON: I direct my question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. If you look at the Nova Scotia Health Authority site of ER closures today, February 20<sup>th</sup>, the numbers are striking, and the closures are largely in rural Nova Scotia. These sites are largely represented by members of the government. Nova Scotians deserve to know that there are health care providers, emergency doctors, and nurses in the emergency rooms, and they are open today - not tomorrow. Therefore, the question I ask the Minister of Health and Wellness is: What is the human resource plan for emergency room health care professionals - again, the human resource plan, not just buildings - for the upcoming fiscal year? Empty buildings without people is not emergency care.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We really do need short-, intermediate-, and long-term approaches in order to manage the HR crisis that we have in front of us. We've done a number of things. In the long term, we've looked at the medical school at CBU. We're looking at CaRMS placements for people who have Nova Scotia attachment. We just opened the PACE clinic, which is going to bring internationally educated graduates to Nova Scotia, and we really are looking at folks who can work in emergency rooms across the province. As an example, South Africa is a really important in-market place where we're looking, and also Australia, and certainly wherever we can. We're working hard with local clinicians to increase their ability to work in the local ERs.

ROD WILSON: My second question - well it's really two - is: Does the Minister of Health and Wellness know how many emergency room physicians we need in 2025 and in 2030?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: That number actually is not a static number. It changes over time depending on the capacity in the communities. We have to look at not only ongoing HR issues but also when people need a break. We also need to understand how we can support people if they become unexpectedly ill, et cetera.

This is top of mind for not only the Department of Health and Wellness but Nova Scotia Health Authority. We continue to work in community. We have a lot of our recruitment efforts that are under way. We are really pleased with the number of physicians we have been able to attract to Nova Scotia, and I am confident that over time this will continue to improve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**GAD: HOUSING SUPPORT APPLICATION - SIMPLIFY**

SUZY HANSEN: We hear all the time from Nova Scotians who are struggling to pay their rent, yet also struggling to access rent supplements through the Canada-Nova Scotia Targeted Housing Benefit. Housing support workers and the constituency assistants in our offices are doing their best to connect folks to the support they need, but even they are struggling to navigate the application process. Can the minister tell us why this government is making it so difficult for Nova Scotians to access the support they need?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: We recognize the need to support Nova Scotians as we continue our work across government to make life more affordable for Nova Scotians. One of those initiatives is increasing our investment in rent supplements. When we took office, the investment - the budget line - was \$11 million. We are up to \$73.9 million.

We are helping more Nova Scotian families than ever. When we took office, it was 3,000 households, and now it's 8,500 households. We will continue to work to improve the process, understanding there is a little bit of a processing timeline, but we know this program is important to Nova Scotia.

SUZY HANSEN: I feel like I am experiencing the same barriers to get the information that I need for the people of Nova Scotia right now. There is a lack of clarity on what metrics are being used to evaluate applications. We have heard, for instance, that staff have asked for proof of occupancy from the landlord in some cases, while in other cases they have asked for proof of occupancy from the actual property owner. Obtaining the latter can obviously be an arduous process and sometimes impossible to do. We have asked this question before, and yet here we are doing it over again.

Why is this department making folks who are struggling to afford their homes jump through so many inconsistently placed hoops?

COLTON LEBLANC: Last year, we made a number of program changes to increase the program equity and fairness to ensure that the money that is going through the department is going to Nova Scotians - some of our most vulnerable Nova Scotians. There is, with programs of government, some rigour to ensure there is some accountability to that process to make sure an application is meeting all the requirements. That's why we have dedicated staff ready to support Nova Scotians as they go through that process. We will continue to be there to support our most vulnerable Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**DAE: NURSE EDUCATION LOANS - FORGIVE**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. The topic of interprovincial barriers is in the news. Cumberland County is

located in Northern Nova Scotia and borders the Province of New Brunswick - and our people know all too well about interprovincial barriers.

Cumberland County, and in fact, all the northern zone, does not have any educational programs to become a registered nurse. Therefore, many students living in Cumberland County study in neighbouring New Brunswick. For some reason, the provincial government is not allowing nurses who live and work in Cumberland County but studied in Moncton to be eligible for the Student Loan Forgiveness Program.

Will the minister commit today to making them eligible?

[2:30 p.m.]

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I will certainly look into it. I don't have all the details on it, but I am willing to work with the member and her constituents. We want to make sure that every student in Nova Scotia who takes education in Nova Scotia is eligible for the support they need. I'll gladly sit down with her constituents or anyone else who wants to talk about this.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: The challenge is there's no program in the Northern Zone for anyone who wants to become a registered nurse. Just recently, Beal University has been working with the Government of New Brunswick. They have just opened an accelerated RN program in Sackville, which is only 10 minutes from Cumberland County. We're really looking forward to that being available for our students. Also, paramedic free tuition was offered. When Cumberland County students who studied in Moncton couldn't get it, as soon as I brought that to the government's attention, that was fixed. But for some reason they're not fixing this for the nurses. I'm wondering: Can the minister once again commit to changing this so that our nurses are treated fairly in Cumberland County?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What I will commit to today is we'll do a jurisdictional scan of her communities and surrounding communities to make sure that the resources are there. There are lots of facilities in those areas. Maybe we could be using them to better the lives of our students and our youth. Speaker, we have a bill before the House that can address some of those issues. Again, I will gladly sit down with the member or anyone who wants to discuss the future of our children.

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

#### **DNR: ABANDONED MINE SITES NUMBER - DIVULGE**

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. The Auditor General's recent financial report highlighted that the associated costs for the cleanup of abandoned mines is rising. The liability at former mine sites has grown from

\$48 million in 2019 to \$146 million today, and the costs are expected to increase once additional site inspections are completed. Can the minister tell us how many abandoned mines sit across our province?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: This is a burden on the taxpayers of Nova Scotia. We know that we have legacy mines from decades or hundreds of years ago in some areas. I work very closely with my colleague at the Department of Environment and Climate Change to ensure that there's a pathway forward. Some of these mines are actually just putting signs up to inform people that there are contaminated sites on the areas. Others are going to need extensive cleanup of those areas. We do put it in the budget annually.

Quite frankly, Speaker, we're hearing from jurisdictions and investors that want to come and clean up those tailings to put the minerals back into our utilization. There are new talks and new technology taking place as we speak here. Going through the budget process, I'll have more to say.

LISA LACHANCE: These abandoned mines that the minister rightly notes are a burden on taxpayers of Nova Scotia were created before environmental regulations were in place. We're seeing the consequences not only in terms of cost to government but also to the safety of our environment, as toxic tailings from our abandoned mines are moving downstream to bodies of fresh water. I'll table that.

Can the minister assure us that clear environmental regulations will be in place before new critical resource extraction projects begin?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Nova Scotia is a leader on strong environmental regulations. Any project, whether it's related to the contaminated site regulations or any proponent that wishes to move forward with a project, needs to put forward an environmental assessment. My team at Environment and Climate Change will make decisions based on science, data, and the evidence. We have a robust, strong regulatory framework in place. Nova Scotians can be assured that my department and the nine regional offices work hard every day to protect the environment and protect human health.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **DOE: HEAT OR EAT DILEMMA - RESOLVE**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy. A recent study in Bridgewater found that 31 per cent of people were cutting back on groceries to pay for utilities, and 18 per cent of people were cutting back on utilities to pay for groceries. That is nearly 50 per cent of folks stuck in a heat or eat dilemma. My question to the minister is: Can the minister tell us what he expects people in Bridgewater and all of Nova Scotia to do? Should they heat or should they eat?



HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: We recognize that the cost of living has certainly put an impact on Nova Scotians' ability to pay for things. That's why we've taken unprecedented steps as a government to make sure that Nova Scotians have the support they need. I think of a number of different programs we have with respect to supporting people with energy poverty. I think of the HEAT Fund and I think of the HARP. I also think of the Seniors Care Grant that provides \$750 for Nova Scotia seniors who are struggling. We will continue to do what we can to support Nova Scotians. They know that and this government is here for them.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Perhaps in Estimates the minister and I can debate the definition of "unprecedented," because those programs that he just listed are (1) not unprecedented and (2) not enough money. No one should be forced to decide between heating their home and buying groceries. I said in the last question that that's what people are doing. Nova Scotians deserve a government that will step up and take the necessary actions to alleviate the stress that comes with tight budgets and increasing costs. My question to the minister is: When will this government take concrete steps to make home heating and power bills affordable for all Nova Scotians?

TREVOR BOUDREAU: This gives me an opportunity to talk about the unprecedented, extraordinary actions we've taken to support Nova Scotians with efficiency programming. Over \$250 million has been allotted for efficiency programs in this province. Nova Scotians have been applying to those programs in droves. Nine times the number of people have been applying for those because of that program that we provided. Part of that program is providing heat pumps to Nova Scotians. Those heat pumps will help people get off oil and will save people up to \$1,500 a year. We are here for Nova Scotians and will continue to be.

#### **SNS: ENFORCEMENT UNIT SCRAPPED - EXPLAIN**

SUSAN LEBLANC: In January of last year, the Department of Service Nova Scotia responded to an inquiry from the Investment Property Owners Association of Nova Scotia about how a potential compliance and enforcement unit would impact landlords. This spurred internal communication, with one department representative recognizing that the unit would predominantly be landlord-based, meaning it would have predominantly protected tenants against such things as unlawful convictions. My question to the minister is: Why was the enforcement unit scrapped when it would have clearly met the needs of tenants?

HON. JILL BALSER: I know my predecessor in his time as minister did bring forward some changes to the Residential Tenancies Program. I know that a report was commissioned to look at what a compliance and enforcement unit could look like here in the province. At that time, the government made the decision not to move forward, knowing that we have a Residential Tenancies Program in place that provides equity, respect, and balance to the needs of both tenants and landlords. We want to make sure that

all Nova Scotians know that that Residential Tenancies Program is there to help them in their time of need. We're going to continue to utilize that program and make positive changes to it as needed.

SUSAN LEBLANC: When it came down to the creation of a residential tenancies enforcement unit, the former Minister of Service Nova Scotia concluded that it would not meet the needs of tenants and landlords. My question to the current minister is: Can the minister explain which specific needs would not have been met by a compliance and enforcement unit? When will she table a new program that will meet the needs of both tenants and landlords?

JILL BALSER: I want to recognize that we do have a Residential Tenancies Program in place to support the needs of both tenants and landlords. We know that Nova Scotians need to be able to reach out to a program in their time of need and one that is efficient and is going to find a resolution in their time of need quickly. Recognizing that the report was commissioned to look at a compliance and enforcement unit, we made the decision not to move forward, knowing that there is an opportunity to improve the existing program, which we are doing. We want to make sure that Nova Scotians know that that program is there in their time of need. We want to make sure we are improving communication and tenants know they can use that program when they need it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

### **ECC: EGCCRA TARGET - COMMIT**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Yesterday, when given the opportunity, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change did not confirm that he is still committed to protecting 20 per cent of land and water in our province. He did correctly point out that this target is legislated through EGCCRA, but as far as we've seen in this session, there is nothing that will stop the government from changing important laws. My question for the minister is: Will he unequivocally confirm today that this government will commit to keeping that target in legislation?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: The answer is yes. We remain committed to the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. We're the only province in Canada with legislated climate change targets. We are a province with a fully funded climate change plan. We have a balanced, comprehensive Coastal Action Plan, and we continue to work hard every day to transform how we produce and use energy in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: Do you want to just heckle for a while?

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

IAIN RANKIN: They're riled up for me today. (Laughter)

The disdain this government has expressed against the advocates who have been a big part of these conservation targets is quite known. We do know that there are specific interests that oppose new protected areas and want to harvest natural resources in the existing protected areas. Will the minister ensure that the interim target will be reached, which requires more land being protected within the next year than he has protected in all of the last three-plus years?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Since this government protected Owls Head, we have had incredible momentum as we move forward to protect more land and water in this province. We currently have about 13.67 per cent of land and water conserved - our interim target of 15 per cent by the end of 2026 - and we will work hard every day to get to that 20 per cent target. Nova Scotians are recognized nationally as a leader on land and water conservation. We were the second jurisdiction in Canada to sign a Canada-Nova Scotia Nature Agreement. The feds recognize us as leaders on it, and I am very proud of all our conservation organizations.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

#### **EECD: CHILD CARE SHORTAGE - ADDRESS**

PAUL WOZNEY: We hear regularly from constituents who are looking for a child care spot for their young child. One of the centres, a recent constituent relayed to us, responded to their request: "We don't anticipate any openings until the end of 2025. We have over 250 families looking for space. The outlook is quite dismal at this time!" It is a very difficult time to access child care. Can the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development tell us exactly how many families are on wait-lists for child care at this time?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We are transforming child care. The fact is that it is top of mind for me. Today, I was on the phone with the federal minister. Yesterday, we were on the phone with the federal minister. Today, there are meetings between the feds and the Province.

THE SPEAKER: Order. A few questions ago, I asked everybody to please keep it quiet. I will start naming members out if I start hearing heckles go too loud.

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: As of December 31, 2024, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has created 6,542 spaces. That's 2,045 in child care centres; 1,648 in family homes; 2,849 in before-and-after school care; and we're still going.

THE SPEAKER: If anybody noticed, I let the minister go a couple of seconds longer due to my little speech from the Chair.

The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

[2:45 p.m.]

PAUL WOZNEY: It's unfortunate the minister couldn't answer or didn't answer the question. The demand for child care is obviously much higher than the number of spots available. We hear from parents all the time that they are stuck calling a dozen or more child care centres to find child care, only to end up on multiple wait-lists, and in the end, still not getting access to the care that they need, waiting for months or even years. My question for the minister is: When will there be space for every child in this province?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We are actually on track for the 9,500 child care spaces and to achieve \$10-a-day daycare by March 31, 2026. We've already added 6,500 spaces, and we're continuing to add spaces. In fact, now we're looking at things like new school builds. When we build new schools, can we put child care centres off to the side in those schools? We're looking at every space possible.

I want to thank our federal partners. I want to thank everyone in the department and everybody working in this industry. We're working day and night to ensure that every single family has a space.

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

### **EECD: 2SLGBTQIA+ YOUTH GUIDELINES - RELEASE**

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. It's a tough time for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in Nova Scotia, as their identity, their safety, their right to exist and thrive are all being threatened and batted around as a political wedge issue. Thankfully, we have been doing things differently in this House, but Nova Scotia students need the updated guidelines now. It creates a situation of uncertainty. They need to have their identities and their rights affirmed. When will the guidelines be released and how much money is in the budget for them?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What I will say is that we are listening. The 2SLGBTQIA+ community needs to know that they are valued, that they need to be shown in the education system, and we are going to continue to represent them. We are meeting with groups. We are continuing to learn from them, meet with them. We want to make sure that every single person is safe and is recognized in our school system.

LISA LACHANCE: I didn't hear a date. And I know that there's a draft version of those guidelines floating around the department and that have been talked about with

community members. I do hope that we'll see it before the end of this school year. Nova Scotia curriculum also has a strong history of working with outside service providers to provide sexual health education. In the past year, I have been approached by teachers, schools, and partner organizations who have seen their contracts cancelled for specifically providing information on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues, sexual orientation, and gender identity. They feel the information is being suppressed. My question for the minister is: Is it?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Not under my watch. You bring it to me directly, and I'll deal with it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North, with 25 seconds.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care. With the growing number of our senior population, can the minister explain what she's doing to increase the number of long-term beds in Cumberland County?

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

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

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Permission to make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, in the gallery, we have a Dartmouth legend. We have Claire Belliveau with us. Claire is the former constituency assistant in the Dartmouth East office and is now proudly representing Dartmouth and Nova Scotia in Great Britain, studying there. We're very proud of Claire, and I ask my colleagues to offer a warm welcome to Claire Belliveau. (Applause)

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

## **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

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**GOVERNMENT MOTIONS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, I move that you do now leave the Chair and the committee resolve itself into the Committee of the Whole on Supply.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I am just going to have a little conversation today about democracy. Democracy is a form of government that empowers the people to exercise political control, limits the power of the head of state, provides for the separation of powers between governmental entities, and ensures the protection of natural rights and civil liberties. Democracy, if people didn't know what it meant, means rule by the people, and we are in the People's House, so we should be ruling by the people. It empowers individuals to exercise political control over the form and functions of their government so everyone's voices should be heard around the table here in this House.

While democracies come in several forms, they all feature competitive elections, which we just recently had, which gives us freedom of expression and protection of individual civil liberties and human rights. In most democracies, elected lawmakers charged with writing and voting on laws and setting policy represent the needs and wishes of the people. We should be writing and putting forward laws that represent the needs and wishes of Nova Scotians.

When creating laws and policies, the elected representatives in a democracy strive to balance the conflicting demands and obligations, to maximize freedom, and to protect individual rights.

I don't know if anybody has been following, but it has only been a few days that we have been sitting here in this Legislature. What we have seen in a few days is absolutely scary. It reminds me of the election in the U.S., and I know some of you might not have felt that. As a black woman, it was very scary, and it continues to be because I have young children who also have entitlement in the U.S.

Just to keep that in context, we need to be very mindful of the power that we hold and the things that we put forward because it affects a lot of people's lives. Some political parties around the world are using this same playbook. They want to change the rules because they don't want to bother with the process because they never believed in law.

Example 1 is fixed election dates. A number of different places have fixed election dates, and we had one that was not actually enforced. It sounded great because I thought it was a great idea - maybe not in the Summer. I thought it was a great idea because we need to have some predictability. We were told that the people wanted the election early.

What happened? We have seen a failed commitment to Nova Scotians. Progressive Conservatives want what they want as fast as they can, without any oversight or discussion. We see that across the world. What we see are the rules changing to take the land and expropriate it, to poison our water, to destroy the environment - all for the power and the almighty dollar - period.

The point of rules is not just to be able to do something but to do it in the right way and to be accountable to the people. If there's no transparency or accountability, you are not following the principles of democracy.

We are in the oldest House, the oldest House in any of the provinces. People look to us to do the right thing. Actually, I have travelled to many different Houses across the country, and we're upheld to a high standard because we are the birthplace of democracy here in Canada. We need to take this very, very seriously.

We have noticed that governments have appointed sycophants to obey their leaders versus the rules - where they stand by knowing something is wrong, based on the rules. When you have that gut feeling in your heart and think, Oh my gosh, that doesn't seem right, you should really follow your gut. But they do nothing unless ordered by their leader to obey.

The playbook is to spread false narratives, to lessen transparency, say no to the public, say no to listening, say no to questioning by the media, and say no to accountability.

We talked about - I mean I'm very proud to say "Nova Scotian." I would never take away anything that is meant to be. It doesn't make sense to say "Va Scotia," to be honest. We don't want to say no to Nova Scotia, because that doesn't sound right.

We don't want to take that "No" out, but it seems like some parties are okay with saying no to accountability and transparency. Here's what just happened. I need to say this to Nova Scotians across the province: The rules have changed. The people who elected this government are happy for now, just like in the U.S., until the mess comes to their front door. Then we will hear it.

We're starting to hear it now in our emails and in our phone calls, because we know some governments will act when their friends with big pockets and lawyers backing them speak up. We have seen things being rolled back in this government so quickly. I'm afraid that Nova Scotians won't have a chance to have a say over what this is and what they want, period, especially when it comes to our environment.

This process of change affects the African Nova Scotian communities, the Indigenous communities, and marginalized folks across the province. They will be the ones who suffer the most.

I wouldn't be me if I didn't point out the obvious, because we have seen no one else recognize it unless we say it. My questions are: How are these changes to government going to affect the Indigenous community? Have we thought about that? Have any of these pieces or any of these changes been run through, consulted, or talked about with any of these communities? It's going to harm them.

Is there consultation or reporting stating that there have been discussions tracked and recommendations for these changes? We hear a lot about how we're talking and we're listening. I don't know if you're talking to yourselves or listening to yourselves, but I really feel like folks - and I mentioned this earlier - the folks who are going to hurt the most are those who are in the African Nova Scotian communities, our Indigenous communities, and our marginalized communities.

Has the African Nova Scotian community been consulted? Those are always questions that I ask. When we were here when the Dismantling Racism and Hate Bill passed - you should be prepared for this, to be honest with you. I'm just saying this out loud because I mention this just about every time I get up and speak.

We have a piece of legislation on the table that talks about dismantling hate and racism, and yet we don't even look at it. We don't even discuss it with our departments. We don't even view any of our legislation, resolutions, or anything through the lenses of these major people whom we will be affecting.

Has the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs put forward recommendations for any of these changes? Has this gone through the lens of equity and anti-racism? I could go on. I know what the answer to this question is, because the government has no plans for informing the Nova Scotian people, let alone the African Nova Scotians, let alone the Indigenous folks - absolutely no one.

They have no plan to have a discussion. We didn't even know that this was something that was going to be put forward, and we are actually colleagues around the table, which is very scary. I mentioned that earlier. We had an election in the U.S., and folks are going to go, Aw, that, or whatever. People in communities and people who are marginalized - Black Americans - folks who are not of European descent are feeling the effects of all these changes. We see it.

We are not them. We are absolutely not them. Every Nova Scotian I have spoken with has not come with that intent or that feeling of "This is who we are," because we are not them.

Settler colonialism is what we're seeing. It's a type of colonization structured and enforced by a party directly while they retain a connection or control through settler colonialism. In settler colonization, a minority group rules either through the assimilation or oppression of Indigenous peoples and African Nova Scotians - and in this instance, a



party and Nova Scotians - by establishing itself as a demographic majority through driving away, displacing, or the outright killing of the democratic process the rights of the people. All people.

[3:00 p.m.]

I just want to say congratulations to the PC Party. Well done at a time when voter turnout was at an all-time low. We had voter exhaustion and volunteer burnout, which was real. Congrats on a win that some would say was voter oppression - my reference to colonization - keeping our voter cards from all Nova Scotians. If you know anybody who's a die-hard voter, they depend upon that. They wait on those things. So well done to the negative narrative just before the writ drop and the pamphlet of empty words to constituents.

Congrats again on the low percentage of engaged voters. You may have won with a majority, but did you actually think all people believe in your platform or the message? Some just checked the box to be done because they were sick of elections. As we've seen in a large portion, they didn't even vote. So congrats on a historic win with a low voter turnout - the lowest in history. Take that on. Way before the legislated set election date by the Progressive Conservative government, they called the election that was supposed to be legislated in law, but they called it early, because, you know, heck, people needed to get out there and vote - but not to confuse folks more, because that wasn't the plan. It's all about accountability and transparency, but not for the Progressive Conservatives, but for, you know, everyone. We hear every day about the things that our parties have done decades ago. Actually, we don't even have anybody who's part of our caucus who was part of that party, so we're kind of immune to that.

We hear every day about the things that our parties have done so many years ago, but we can't even get a report on the progress of this government. How are we doing, truly, for Nova Scotians? Most of you all are happy to vote blindly for things that will affect your riding especially for years to come.

I'm speaking to Nova Scotians across the province: Hold this government accountable. Ask questions and pressure them to do the right thing for you. Let them know that they are elected because of you, and they work for you. Believe you me, I know all too well. I hear from my constituents. I love Halifax Needham, and I listen to the good and the bad. So when we hear in this House that the people have spoken, that Nova Scotians have elected a government to do the work that all Nova Scotians would want, please remember that we all - elected officials in this House - have a riding that we should be proud of, that depends on us to speak their voices in this House.

(Laughs) I say this because this is just really nice. Only if government seats were based on the highest votes percentage and turnout, let's just say that this government would look different - a bit more diverse and intellectually sound, meaning better common sense.

The work that we would do would be for all Nova Scotians in this province, not just for the few friends, large corporations and rich folks.

This message is for all Nova Scotians: I've said it before, and now it's really even more important to be paying attention. A majority government can pass bills without changing the rules. It shouldn't be at the expense of Nova Scotians and our beautiful province. Our future is at stake, and the Progressive Conservative government in Nova Scotia is abusing their power to make sure that their accountability and transparency are non-existent, silencing everyone who doesn't want to kiss their ring and obey their party. (Interruptions)

You have a right to use your voices here in this House and should remember this when election time comes. Thank you, Nova Scotians, and Halifax Needham in particular.

THE SPEAKER: Order, order. I ask everyone here to respect the members. I expect you to stay above the belt. I expect you to not be rude. The member for Halifax Needham can shake their head. (Interruption) Okay, well let's practice that when we speak, okay?

The honourable Government House Leader.

The motion to resolve into Committee of the Whole House on Supply is carried.

We'll take a brief recess to set up.

[3:17 p.m. The House resolved into a CW on Supply with Deputy Speaker John White in the Chair.]

[7:33 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened with the Speaker in the Chair.]

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

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, earlier today I rose on a point of order. I believed that I was operating within the rules and there was a misunderstanding. For one reason or another, I didn't see the text, but that's on me. If my misunderstanding inadvertently caused me to mislead the House, I truly do apologize.

I know this job isn't easy. To the member specifically, I know it's not an easy job,

and I will strive to do better. To the Official Opposition, I apologize, and to the entire House, I apologize. It was a mistake. I will strive to do better.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, 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 Resolution No. 5.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, I move that Resolution No. 5 do pass.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: Where do I start? We're going to talk about Resolution No. 5. It all comes down to being democratic and a democracy. I spoke about that earlier today. I talked about the democracy literally meaning ruling by the people. This resolution in no way, shape, or form is ruling by the people.

It empowers individuals to exercise political control over the form and functions of their government. While democracies come in several forms, they all feature competitive elections. I spoke about that - freedom of expression, and protection of individuals' civil liberties and human rights. When we're creating laws and policies, we as elected representatives in this democracy strive to balance conflicting demands and obligations to maximize freedom and protect individual rights. I said earlier, It's only been a few days, and here we are. Here we are talking about dismantling democracy.

I'm going to talk about debates because this is a part of the resolution. Debates are the backbone of democracy, and they play a crucial role in the work we do as MLAs. The integrity of debate should be protected at all costs. Debate is an integral component of democratic discourse and has shaped societies and political landscapes throughout history, and we are standing in a historic place. This is Province House - the birthplace of the work that we do here - and we should be very proud that we're able to stand and represent the communities which we represent through the democratic process.

Debates are a battleground for ideas and ideologies, and we see that day to day when we're in here. We all have extremely passionate recommendations, and we want to see the best for Nova Scotians through the legislation that we put forward. It is an exchange

of arguments and a crucial mechanism for testing ideas and for promoting transparency. We use debate as a tool to get our constituencies' concerns heard.

We've heard about this multiple times, how sometimes this is an opportunity for us to speak about what's going on in our constituencies. Each and every one of us is representing a constituency in which there are a number of concerns that need to be heard, and this is an opportunity - in debate - to have these concerns heard. Our people whom we represent deserve for us to have that voice and to speak for them. By taking away or minimizing debate, it silences those voices. I don't think that we want to be remembered - or this government wants to be remembered - as the ones to silence the voices of Nova Scotians, especially when this government is so proud to say that they're listening, so proud to say that they're first to do, so proud to say: Look at us. This is historic. Yet, this will be a historic moment for this government to remove or to minimize debates in this House, which is a tool of Opposition and every other member here in this House to have an opportunity to speak about their constituency.

Having a healthy and challenging debate is what makes our work democratic. I know some of us in this room have gone across the country to multiple different Houses, and we've talked about how important it is to have a healthy democratic process, to have a healthy Speaker sitting in the Speaker's chair, to have proper decorum when we come in here in this House, because we represent Nova Scotians. I wouldn't want to minimize that and to take that away by removing debates and not having a robust discussion about issues that are concerning Nova Scotians here and now, which is in real time.

The essence of debate is a means to challenge ideas and to foster informed decision-making, and that's exactly what some of us do. We want to have informed decision-making. We hear from our constituents all the time about how there are things that shouldn't be happening and wondering why they don't know anything about it and why we are not as informed as we should be. This is why the debate is so important, for us to be able to have these conversations across the floor and actually - possibly - get some answers from whom we're asking those questions of in debate.

It is critical and crucial for the health and vitality of democratic societies, and if you want to really break it down, it is critical and crucial for the health and vitality of Nova Scotia. Removing that, removing or minimizing the debate process, is going to harm many Nova Scotians. I know you may think, Oh, it's just a debate, but guess what? Their voices are minimized when we don't get to speak in the House. Their presence is minimized when we don't get to speak in the House. These are the only tools that we have to be able to get our information across for the people that we serve who have elected us in these positions.

Debates are also about serving the public interests and responding to the needs of the voters, and I know we all need those. I mean, we wouldn't be here if we didn't have those folks who believe in us to be their representation for their constituency, and so we owe it to them. We actually have a duty to be able to speak their concerns here in the House

through debate. It is in the public interest that we respond to the needs of our voters.

You would think that we, as a government, would want to keep debates instead of minimizing them, mainly because we hear often from the government side that they are speaking to all Nova Scotians, that they represent all Nova Scotians, that they are listening to all Nova Scotians. I can tell you right now that every single member in this House has probably been flooded by emails from Nova Scotians with their concerns about how this government is moving and the direction in which they are moving, and this is why debate is very important - because we have to have these conversations.

Sometimes it's uncomfortable to have conversations that some people may not like, but unfortunately, if we don't have these conversations, who will? Debate is very important for that reason, and if you know anything about debates, effective leaders who debate gain public trust and can increase confidence in the institutions and foster citizen engagement. We talk about this all the time - how voter engagement is low. I don't think this government wants to continue to have low voter turnout, because they continue to not engage folks in community - because they continue to not listen and have conversations with folks in community, because that's what we are seeing.

It hasn't just happened this time around. It happened the time around when I was elected and that was supposed to be the lowest voter turnout - in 2021 - but unfortunately, here we are again because we, or folks, haven't built public trust and that public trust is showing in the votes that are being cast and not being cast by this province. After all, this government is confident that all Nova Scotians' needs are being met and we hear this every day, how everything is great. Things are moving wonderfully and, you know, nothing needs to be changed. We're working hard, but I will say in four years, has anything really changed? In three years, has anything really changed?

I know numbers have grown, probably not the good numbers that you'd like, but it is all about us having conversations about how we can do better. That is what debate is about. It's about having conversations and debating issues that Nova Scotians want to hear about. This is why it is so important for us to continue these robust conversations, because how else are our citizens going to get their voices heard?

I said that debate is crucial to the work that we do as MLAs. All of us - all of our constituents deserve to hear our voices and their concerns in this House - every single one of us. I'm not excluded just because I'm an Opposition member. Every single one of us in this House has a duty to our constituents - each and every one of them, no matter what party stripe they hold.

We owe them their voice here in this House. We say it's the People's House and we talk about how people are invited to be in here. We talk about how we talk about their concerns. We give member statements. We do all of these other things about the people in our constituency, but we are going to minimize debate so that people don't hear about

what's really happening in Nova Scotia and the concerns of all Nova Scotians. Just some - just some concerns, not all Nova Scotians'.

Debate is really crucial in the work that we do if we don't already know that. We are simply the vessel in which we carry those concerns through debate and discussion. I said it is our work as Opposition, and our constituents' voices need to be heard.

[7:45 p.m.]

I don't know about anybody in this room, but I can tell you right now Halifax Needham ain't no joke. Halifax Needham will be the first ones to tell you or me that things aren't right, the first ones to want responses, the first ones to demand that they voted for me or voted for somebody, and they demand to have their voices heard. Guess what? Every single time - and I know you've heard me in this House - you've heard me speak about our constituents. Why? Because their voices matter.

Every single voice in Nova Scotia matters, from one end of the province to the next. When we minimize our opportunities and our tools to be able to do this great work that we have, that we should be privileged to have - when I say privileged, we don't sit here because we want to sit here because we didn't get elected. We were elected by our constituents. This isn't something like, "I want to be an MLA." No, we actually have to be voted in by the people we represent.

When I say our constituents deserve our voices, I mean every single one of those constituents - the same constituents I would respond to in Yarmouth, the same constituents I would respond to in Digby, the same ones that I would respond to in Shelburne, the same ones in Argyle. I can name all kinds because I get them all the time.

When I tell you that we deserve to respect our constituents in a way that we don't minimize the work we are doing because folks want to be rushed out of this space, guess what? We have a job to do. We're here to do work. We are here to work for Nova Scotians. When we minimize the work we do, we also tell Nova Scotians that we don't care.

I'm going to tell you right now that I care. I care deeply for my constituency and I care deeply for all Nova Scotians, especially when the government tries to take away things that are really crucial to the work that we do.

In my few years here, I have proudly sat on the Law Amendments Committee. I have learned so much and we have heard from multiple stakeholders from different backgrounds, for many different reasons, all because of a bill being presented.

Let me tell you a little bit about my experience with bills. When I first started here, in my first few years I was perplexed at the fact that we received bills here in the House - not before - we're not consulted - it doesn't go to a committee to actually go through any

type of screening or recommendations through expertise or whatever type of committee we might have that deals with these types of topics - like the Health Committee, for example, or Community Services Committee. A ton of things can be done differently.

Instead of us making those changes, we're going to change and minimize the work - the real, good work that's being done. We want to minimize that when we could be doing other things with the time or with the time that we have here in the House.

Back to the Law Amendments Committee. In my time here I was perplexed at why we didn't actually get to see the bill, why we didn't get to have input on the bill, why we didn't meet together and collectively have a conversation about what could work well in the bill. When I read about the Law Amendments Committee - it was an opportunity for stakeholders to come, have a conversation, really dig deep into what the bill is about - I was excited. I don't know if anybody knows this, but I come from a community facilitation background and I encourage community to come forward and to talk about the things that are happening and to really express their thoughts and to really just come forward because their voices matter. To me, they really do.

When Law Amendments Committee happened, as I said, I was super-excited. I was like, Great, we're going to hear from some experts, we're going to hear from some passionate people, we're going to hear from some folks who really know more about what this bill is going to bring forward. We had a mixed bag. Some were there because they cared about what the bill was about and they were passionate and they gave some recommendations.

Then we had some folks who were completely opposed to the bill. They would say, You know what? The bill would be better if - why don't we try this? How about if we send it back to the department so that they can relook at it and rework it? Why are we rushing these things?

Law Amendments Committee for me was really quite interesting because it was an opportunity. I'm going to say this because I'm very optimistic. If anybody knows me in this House, I can see a ton of sides but I'm very optimistic about the great work that can be done here in this House.

I thought, hey, this is a great opportunity for folks to be in space and to speak their truth and to really just be heard, only to find out that folks are being dismissed a lot of the times in Law Amendments Committee. Even if we put forward a motion or an amendment to the bill at the time, which is where I was told that's where they go, if we had any amendments, that was the place to take it, Law Amendments Committee.

I was like, great, I'm going to bring some law amendments forward and I'm going to talk. I'm going to put my suggestion forward, with the expertise from the stakeholders and from the scientists and from the doctors and whoever else, but I'm going to put it

forward, because it's the place to put it.

I was asked by a government MLA at the time: Why am I bringing it forward here? It has no purpose here. Bring it forward in the Committee of the Whole on Bills. I said, Oh, because I'm new, I didn't know about these things. I thought, Okay, Law Amendments Committee is where they gather the information, they take that information, and then when we get to the floor, we're going to see amendments. Because that's what I was told by a government MLA.

To my surprise - because I was very optimistic - that was not the case, but guess what? The work we do here in this House is extremely important, because we are here to speak those voices and to reinforce the things that are being said by our constituents and by Nova Scotians who are really passionate and concerned about the direction in which we're going.

In Law Amendments Committee, I kept saying to people, This is an opportunity to come forward and speak your piece, and to say what needs to be said. I remember one time I was in Law Amendments Committee, and I can't remember the topic, but it was a really tough topic. There were over 30 folks coming to speak. At the same time, it was a budget sitting where we had Estimates.

Instead of allowing all 30 people to speak at Law Amendments Committee, those 30 people were minimized to 15. Imagine my disappointment. Imagine that. Here I am believing in a process, a democratic process, believing in the way that we do work here. Believing in and learning all these things, as a new member, on how we can do things better for Nova Scotians, and here I am being told that 30 people signed up, but 15 people will speak because we need to rush forward and finish off work here in the House.

Not that we couldn't do it, but it was just very disheartening from the government's side to force that, when they don't need to do that. People's voices were excluded from those conversations. People travelled from across the province to come to Law Amendments Committee to actually have their voices heard. To hear, "Sorry, you cannot be on the list, even though we told you that you were on the list." Imagine that.

This is why I feel like it's really important for us to continue the democratic process in which we keep these things going because there is a reason for why we do these things. I understand that folks want to get things done quickly, and they want to move fast, and they want to be expediting, and all of these things. I understand that these are things that some folks might feel aren't important.

Say that to somebody who's travelling from Yarmouth to Halifax or Cape Breton to Halifax to come and speak at Law Amendments Committee only to be told, "Well, we're sorry, you can't be here," or "Your time has been cut because we don't want to have any more discussion on that." Imagine that.



I say this because these are really important pieces to build trust. To be able to have people engaged in the work that we do and as well, to vote us in again, especially when we're speaking the truth of the people that we serve - and I mentioned travelling from one end of the province.

Another level of accountability and transparency that helps Nova Scotians understand the processes of how bills go through the Legislature: I just gave you an example of how I started, and I had no idea how things went. I was given information, and then I was told something else. Then I tried to do it in another way. Think about that.

There is a process. There is a process in which you can do these things, and there are only so many tools in the toolbelt that Opposition has to get their voices heard and constituents' voices and concerns heard in this House. This is one of them: Debates and Law Amendments Committee, because Law Amendments Committee is first voice. When we removed first voice from this House - the People's House - very scary. I'm going to tell you this right now, because I am one of two Black women in this room - one of two . . . (interruption.)

Oh, sorry. One of three Black women in this room. It was not you, Minister, I was excluding. I apologize.

I'm one of three Black women, and there are only four of us in here. When you tell me that you want to minimize debate, remove Law Amendments Committee or change Law Amendments Committee without any clarity on what the changes are going to be, and do everything else to feel like we need to rush through this House to get things done under the veil of darkness - what time is it? It's 7:55 p.m. - it's very scary. It's scary.

I can tell you, as someone who has always had to use their voice to speak for others and to speak for myself, I'm actually very disappointed and disheartened by the way that we are talking about democracy and changing democracy to suit reasons to expedite getting out of this House.

We were elected by the people of Nova Scotia to sit in these seats. It is a privilege. I'm going to say it's even more so a privilege for me because not only am I a Black person, I am a Black woman. I'm the first Black woman to sit in this seat for Halifax Needham, and I'm going to tell you right now, there will be no way I will ever be silenced in this forum. No disrespect, Speaker.

I want to reiterate that we have an onus on all Nova Scotians to be able to continue to have a robust debate, have expertise and first-voice conversations in this House. When we remove that or change the processes to minimize that, you're also minimizing the voices of all Nova Scotians, and I would not be proud of that.

Law Amendments Committee is an opportunity for folks to speak to a bill that has

been debated in this House, give feedback and recommendations on how to make the bill better. That's on a whole other level: how to make things better. I really wish folks would listen. I don't know what ears they're using when they're listening to people, but I really wish folks would listen. It's another level of oversight.

We have talked multiple times in this House about how we are seeing more and more lack of transparency, lack of accountability, lack of even just having a conversation with folks. I can count on one hand how many times I have spoken to or have had responses to or from a minister in this House, or from an MLA in this House. When I say it's important for us to hear from Nova Scotians, I would like to think that we're listening to that, because that's the most important thing that we have here in this House - to listen, to debate, and to really hear from first-voice accounts about what is really going on in Nova Scotia.

When we're in here, it's like flowers and roses. Don't get me wrong, Speaker. I am not saying that things aren't being done. I'm absolutely not going to dismiss that, because I know people are going to stand up and say how much money they spent, department this, and we did that, and oh my goodness, this is all the work we're doing.

Guess what? Are we better off in four years? Have we been better off? Have things changed dramatically or drastically in four years? I can tell you from being in here from 2021, I have literally asked the same question multiple times. That tells me nothing has changed. If I have had to ask the same question of multiple ministers, because there have been changes, there's a problem with what's going on, which is why debate is important. You hear from folks.

Yes, some people don't like constructive criticism. I love it. I actually thrive off it. It works well for me because I know that there are things that I could be doing to be better. I wish some people had a thicker skin and could take some criticism or even some recommendations. We see that it's hard to penetrate through the skin of people here in this House sometimes to talk about the things that matter the most to Nova Scotians. We don't see any changes in the four years that I have been here that have made a drastic change to Nova Scotians' lives.

As I said, it's another level of oversight. Consultation with stakeholders who wouldn't have seen or known about the bill coming forward - sometimes it's to ask to have more information before the bill is being passed.

Back to Law Amendments. The Law Amendments Committee is also an opportunity to be able to ask the department to take it back to take a look at it, and really think about some of the recommendations that are put forward, and really think about what people are saying and how important it is for them to be heard. I just want to tell you that I've heard from many folks at the Law Amendments Committee. The best part about Law Amendments - even though we know that things typically are not passed in Law

Amendments or that the government doesn't listen, and they always vote down motions. But I've heard from multiple folks who have come and spoken at Law Amendments, and they have said "We are so grateful to be able to have our voices heard. This was an opportunity for us to speak our piece. We would love to be able to come back and have conversations about what this looks like in our community."

[8:00 p.m.]

It's an opportunity - and I said this before - for us to build trust in this democratic process. It's an opportunity for us as MLAs to be able to have these conversations with people in community with whom we typically wouldn't have. It's an opportunity to hear from stakeholders, from scientists, from doctors, from pharmacies, from firefighters. It's an opportunity. I don't want to stress this any more than I can, but I heard the minister across the way during a speech say, "We are about optimism, not opposition." When I think about optimism, I think about opportunity. I think about possibilities. I think about all the ways that we could be engaging folks through these processes that we have here that are democratic, that allow us to do the work we do as MLAs. I see them as opportunities, and I'm very, very optimistic about the decisions that could be made here on the floor. Very optimistic.

This is for the new members around the table here. This is going to be an interesting time for folks. I say this because this resolution being put forward - Resolution No. 5 - will not give you an opportunity to really get to know how to work in this House, or how the work is done in this House, because you will not get to see the possibilities that can happen here on the floor. You won't get to see or hear from stakeholders from across the province about what matters to them the most. You won't get to have the opportunity to speak for long periods of time about something that you're passionate about, about issues that are concerning in your riding in particular. You won't get to have those long conversations with folks. Absolutely, I don't mind having a conversation in the House about this. I think this is really important. I think people need to hear about this.

These opportunities will be minimal for you, and you may feel right now that this is great. Some folks in this room might be like, Wow, this is really lovely. We're just in here for a couple hours and we're good to go, and we don't actually have to do much. The work will be when you get back into your constituency office and the people around you and your constituents are going to tell you about what it is they think is wrong and what the government has been doing that they shouldn't have been doing - or some of the things that are great. You will get those amazing, really good stories, but I'm going to tell you right now - just let you know - that's not what I'm getting, and it's not addressed to me.

Just know that you may feel great right now. Things might seem good, and you might think, Oh, this is a walk in the park, and, oh my goodness, wow, we didn't have to do much. I don't want to hear this, because I know this is probably what has been heard: "We're just trying to modernize things. We're just trying to modernize how democracy

runs here in the House.” There are rules for reasons. It’s called decorum. It’s called democracy. There are rules for reasons.

When you went to MLA school, the Clerk and everyone else in this House gave you some information on how to carry yourself in this House and some of the things you can do. They’re called rules, and these rules include debate. These rules include Opposition having conversations. These rules include standing up and stepping up for your community. I don’t want to hear how this is modernizing, but that’s probably what you’re hearing, because it’s been said multiple times. We know that in no way, shape or form is this modernizing. It’s minimizing. It’s minimizing people’s voices. It’s minimizing our roles here as MLAs in this House. It’s minimizing the work that we do in our constituencies. It’s minimizing the voices that come to us every day about their concerns, and not just about what government’s doing - about everyday things. It minimizes these things.

I need you all to know that. No one else will tell you this, but if nothing else, you know I’ll be real. I’m going to keep it real in this House. It’s what I do. This is a set-up for failure. Each of us is not guaranteed a seat in this House. We’ve seen that things can change really quickly. I want to be very clear on what we do and the changes that are being made. Some of us may feel it later and may not be too happy with the way that feels.

I’m just going to go back. It’s really interesting, because we’re bringing forward Resolution No. 5, and we’re talking about debates and the Law Amendments Committee. The thing that really is striking right now is something that was said in a committee meeting about fairness - how we want things to be fair, and how it’s really important for us to be fair here in this House. Fairness is really important, and we want to make sure that everybody gets an opportunity to speak and have something said here in the House. I’m going to say the same thing that I said in committee to each and every one of us here today.

Every single one of us has an opportunity. I use that word again. I’m optimistic. We have an opportunity to speak in this House, whether it be member statements, whether it be debate, whether it be in committee, whether it be just to stand up and introduce somebody. Everybody has an opportunity to speak in this House. When we talk about fairness, I don’t know how this fairness translates into Nova Scotian fairness, because what I’m hearing is that we don’t want to hear from Nova Scotians. We want to minimize the amount of conversation that’s being had. We don’t want to hear constructive criticism. We don’t want you to talk about the things that are happening that are concerning for Nova Scotians, because if you did, the debate would be great. It would be robust. It would be wholesome. It would be everyone having a conversation at the table, because each and every one of us has a story or something to talk about with an issue that comes forward in this House.

I did say things will change very quickly, and they could at any time. I want you all to think about this. Would you want your community or constituency to be silenced in this

House? By limiting debate, you do just that. Limiting debate takes away the voices of the people we serve or minimizes the voices of the people we serve. Sometimes it silences those voices of the people we serve. Is that really what we want to be remembered for? Is that really what this government wants to be remembered for?

Do you want to take away public voices? Changing the Law Amendments Committee does that and so much more. For some, the Law Amendments Committee is the first and only time to have your say over the bills and legislation that are being passed. Since every one of us in Opposition receives this information on the floor, like I said earlier, we don't get time to have conversations with the minister or conversations with the department about what this legislation is about. We hear it in a briefing note. We hear it in an announcement. Guess what? That's pretty much what we hear.

If we ask for more information, we don't really have a whole lot of time, because it goes to the Law Amendments Committee, which in turn is a time for experts to listen and hear - I said this earlier - which is an important and a crucial part of the work that we do, because we're hearing from Nova Scotians.

Once it goes from there, it comes to the floor again, where we can actually have a bit more of a debate on some of the things that we heard in the Law Amendments Committee from the experts, from the passionate people, from community members. This is our opportunity as MLAs, as ministers, as members, to be able to absorb the information, and make decisions on whether it's a good move for your riding or a good move for Nova Scotians.

Sometimes it's not a good move for your riding and some of us feel that. Some of us don't really care, but it is told by the vote. When we vote during this process, it's your voice and your representation of the riding in which you feel that your riding - you hold that vote for them. You have a choice to make a good decision or a not-so-good decision. I don't want to get into details.

As I said, we have only a few days to dissect the information, contact stakeholders and hear from folks. Listen to their concerns, their likes, their dislikes, and really just listen to the recommendations, and what it is that they want to hear from us, and what could be possible around the table.

As I said, Resolution No. 5: When we talk about changing the time allotted for debate, it's not a good move, because we are minimizing Nova Scotians' voices. Then when we talk about the Law Amendments Committee, I think the Law Amendments Committee is an opportunity for us to listen to those voices and to hear from stakeholders and to really dig deep into what their reasoning is for why they would travel from across the province to come and tell you their five-minute spiel about how passionate they are about this issue. Then we could bring it back to the floor for debates.

I'm actually walking people through this because some people probably just don't even know, to be honest. We come back to debates because I had to learn this trial by fire. I had a really good team and they taught me a lot, as you can see.

We get back into debates, and when we get into debates, this is our opportunity. It's an opportunity to speak the voices of your riding, of your constituents, of Nova Scotians, of the expertise - all of the things that you hear through the first beginning process, which is why the democratic process is so valuable.

Some of us may not always agree, believe you me. I don't always agree with some of the things that happen in the democratic process. I feel like we could be more collaborative, but guess what? That's not in the resolution. You know what? Maybe we could utilize some of the voices around the table who have expertise in some of these issues that come forward in legislation. That's not in the resolution. The resolution could be so much more instead of minimizing the things that do so much work.

I do have more. I'm just going to gather myself here, because I don't want to say the things that might bother some folks. I just want to say that - and Speaker, I know you understand this - debates are valuable. Having debates in this House is valuable. Our voices need to be heard. As someone who loves their community, who is involved in their community, and who advocates for their community - and not just Halifax Needham, for my community because I also carry a community - I also understand the value of having my voice heard in this House.

I know that each and every one of us has that same presence, so debate is really important. The Law Amendments Committee gives us an opportunity to speak to people because this is the People's House. The People's House is the most important piece. When we think about who we represent, any Nova Scotian is able to do that and be here, which is why it's the People's House, and why it's so important for us to use our voices.

I want to say that the resolution could look so different. Instead of us having conversations about what really matters across the province and talking about the things that Nova Scotians really want to hear about and talking about more health care and housing and cost of living, and you can name it. It's there. There are a ton of concerns. Instead of us having a debate at 8:15 at night about something that's going to change the way we do things and do our work here in this House that is valuable - and Nova Scotians expect us to be here to do this work - is absolutely, very much so disheartening.

I say all these things because I don't think the government wants to be remembered as the fall of democracy. I don't think the government even understands what this looks like, and if it does, I don't understand why the resolution was put forward. If anybody read the resolution and went through the green book that we all received when we became MLAs that tells us in detail our rules and responsibilities of us being in this House, then I think whoever wrote the resolution got it wrong, because the resolution speaks nothing to

how it helps better Nova Scotians' lives.

[8:15 p.m.]

The resolution speaks nothing about how we get more houses built in Nova Scotia. The resolution speaks nothing to the cost of living of Nova Scotians. The resolution speaks nothing about the continued marginalization of folks in communities. The resolution speaks nothing about how African Nova Scotians are still being attacked. The resolution speaks nothing about our Indigenous folks being attacked from one end to the other through our coastal non-protections.

Let me tell you, the resolution could be so much more, Speaker. Instead, we bring forward a resolution to minimize the Opposition's voices so that they don't have to hear, so that they don't have to listen, so that they don't have to know and maybe possibly read later in Hansard or watch later on Legislative Television. The resolution does nothing to help Nova Scotians get better and be better and have better lifestyles, or do what we're supposed to be doing in this House as legislators and create laws that make Nova Scotians' lives better. It has nothing to do with that, other than to silence and to remove and to minimize the hard work that happens here in this House through a democratic process. I say all of this because I know people in this House don't want to be remembered as the party that had the fall of democracy. I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I want to just get up for a few minutes. I'm not going to take too much time, but I think it's important to add a little bit of context to the debate and to the resolution, and I appreciate the feedback from everyone. Is something wrong? (Interruption)

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: Just face the microphone.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Sorry, I'm just getting used to being in the corner over here. It's going to take some time. I've sat in every section of this place.

I just want to say this, and there'll be lots of discussion around the content of what is in the resolution. We heard passionately from my colleague about concerns around the resolution and what is lost in the talk. I just want to talk for a minute. Maybe it's because I've been here for a little while. Maybe I've been here too long, I don't know. I've seen governments of all different sizes. I've seen majorities. I've seen minorities. I went through three days straight of being here and sleeping on the floor. I've seen it all.

Generally, governments will make decisions around policy, or they'll make decisions around strategy and they'll use the Legislature as part of that. They'll compose committees on certain things or they'll make changes around composition of committees.

There's a whole pile of examples. All governments have done it, but ultimately that's done because of a whole bunch of different scenarios.

Ultimately, it's about the size of the government that matters. In a minority government situation, you're looking at different makeups of committees, you're looking at a whole different world. A slight - I would call it a majority of 20 - whatever it is, if you have a majority of one, you're looking at your committee composition and you're looking at some of the rules and you're asking yourself as a government, Okay, we have to function in this reality for the next term. Ultimately, we're going to make some decisions or look at changing some policies around - how we're going to operate because of the composition of the place.

Here we are in 2025 with a government that has a supermajority. A supermajority that ultimately can do whatever it wishes . . . (interruptions). Yes, well, people can clap about that, but like I said, I sat in that corner over there as a Liberal, and that's how quickly it can change. The supermajority doesn't have a federal Prime Minister to run against this time, or anybody to blame, if you're following the polls, Speaker. It's a very different world out there right now. I feel bad for the NDP, to be honest, I do.

My point is, on the resolution, we've seen all week all of these changes come through when they have 43 seats. Whether you agree or disagree with the resolution is not why I am on my feet right now. I'm on my feet going, This is one of the largest majorities in the history of this place. "We have 43 seats, let's go in and just start smashing everything. Law Amendments Committee was such a problem for us to form government that we are going to get rid of it. The Auditor General was such a problem for us, and we've got 43 seats, so let's fire her without cause." The list goes on and on.

As somebody who is one of the more veteran MLAs in here, I'm scratching my head and I'm going, Why are you? There was an old friend of mine - he was a councillor, God rest his soul. He's not with us anymore but he said sometimes in politics you make decisions, and suffering is optional when you make them. (Interruption)

That's right. I didn't want to use the name, but my colleague served with him too. He used to use that when I started, and I'm watching this situation and going, Why is the government doing all of this stuff? You are getting absolutely obliterated in the media right now. I'm getting calls from all over the place. You're trying to fire the independent Auditor General without cause and you have 43 seats. It doesn't make sense to me at all why we're here tonight, and I'm sure some of the members of the government probably agree with me. I would agree why you're in this situation right now.

It has been story after story about cutting time for committees - negative story. Looking at policies to fire the Auditor General without cause - negative story. That's just circulating all over. People are really paying attention to this stuff. I saw an article on television tonight where they had this government and Trump in the same article. This is



where you are, and I'm watching this and going, Why are you putting yourself through this? This is not going to create any more success for the government. It's not.

Again, people may agree or disagree with the resolution. The government is going to support it, but I'm sitting here ten years later going, They won 43 seats. They are sitting here and they are getting pounded and pounded in the media over decisions they don't have to make. Law Amendments Committee isn't going to cost you the government. If anything, Law Amendments Committee is used for people to bring forward resolutions - by the way, the Premier of the day filibustered for four hours straight. I have never seen anything like it in my life. They used the committees to their disposal when they were in Opposition. Like everyone here, we're sitting here having debate on this resolution and I sat on that side and listened and listened and took every word from the PCs and the NDP when we were in government. The independence of the Auditor General in protecting that integrity is not going to cost you the government.

But boy, oh boy, the decisions that you're making right now - a lot of people are raising their eyebrows. They're asking, "Why? This wasn't in the campaign. They didn't campaign on any of this stuff." None of this was in the campaign. It was "Vote against Trudeau, vote against the carbon tax, Liberals are bad." You can't do that anymore.

I said this in the debate before, and I talked about this in the resolution: This government went through its first term having to make very few decisions. They had historic transfers from the federal government, and they had historic revenue coming in through population growth. That's going to slow down. The transfers are going to change, based on the deficit that the federal government is facing.

This resolution, Speaker, is their action. This is a decision that they're making that they never made in the last mandate. They won 43 seats, so let's make it now. Let's make all of these decisions now and have the public turn like that, because wait a second - the Auditor General's important. They didn't campaign on removing the independence of the Auditor General. They didn't campaign on cutting time in the committees. They didn't campaign on reducing the number of reports that will be public, that now they'll be all vetted. They didn't campaign on any of this stuff because if the government campaigned on some of this stuff, plus what's happening right now on the federal scene, there would not be 43 seats in here right now. Some people would not be here right now. I think some of the MLAs on the government side understand that.

It was a wave. It was a tide. Tides come in, and tides go out. I have seen this time and time again. The NDP had a tide, and we had a tide. The PCs have had a tide. The tide always changes, whether you believe it or not.

In the first two months of the mandate of this government, they have shown people, they have moved away from the messaging that they had in their first term to say, We are in control. We are not going to govern with empathy. We're going to govern with ego. This

is our government. This is our House, and we're going to do whatever we want. This is where we're going to start. We're going to start with this resolution.

We're going to give the ability to fire the Auditor General, which people are never going to forget. They're never going to forget that move, whether you switched it or not, which this government does. I hope they do. They're not going to forget that.

Resolution, Auditor General reports - the media was told today that you could only ask the specific questions of a department to a minister - the media. We all know from our experience, we'll be in front of a microphone, and the media will come forward, and they'll ask us a bunch of questions about everything. Whether we're in politics or not, there are people here who had professional careers before they came in here. The media was told today that they can only ask the specific question of a minister. I was asked that in a scrum today. I said, "It's absolutely, completely disrespectful to the media and the people who tell the stories of what happened in here."

[8:30 p.m.]

Again, for whatever reason - I know many of you in this room. We debate issues. I'm getting to meet the new people. I have had long-term friendships with people. I respect you, and I respect your families. I don't understand how you guys can accept this stuff. It's not who you are. This was not who you were in the first term at all.

When I look at this resolution, I say to myself, for the people I know in the room, this isn't who they are, not even a little bit. None of you campaigned on this in the last election or this one. Now you all have to wear the fact that you're trying to fire the Auditor General without cause. If you want to - and you would have to vote on that. I guarantee you, if that ever happens, we're calling for a recorded vote - one hundred per cent.

The thought of that to me is unbelievable that we would go there, regardless of other provinces. Two other provinces had some sort of the same legislation. Does that make it right? We've heard messaging from the government saying, Oh, we respect the work of the Auditor General. Then scrap that. If you do, scrap that and give those people the autonomy they deserve to do their jobs.

THE SPEAKER: You're speaking too much to the House and not to me: you guys, you, you, you. I ask that you keep it on track. Thank you. You did it once, and I was going to let you get away with it, but you've moved on and done it too many times.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I respect your decision. That is the Cape Bretoner coming out in me when I use those terms. That's right. You put an "s" at the end of "you" - "yous". That's been used in a democratic forum before.

Anyway, I won't go on too much longer, but the message for me is that you can go through this resolution. There are things that people will agree or disagree with, but I really just don't understand how - knowing the people whom I know in here, the relationships that I have with many of you, and the relationships I'll have with some of the new members, regardless of parties - 10 years later, I'm like, Man, a 43-seat supermajority, Let's go in and just do whatever we want.

It's backfiring on you already, two weeks in. The Auditor General decision is super backfiring on you, and this resolution, I just don't get it. You have 43 seats. Come into this thing. Be the cheerleaders. The province - you won. Celebrate it. Embrace it.

Instead, we're going to go in and pillage. We're going to take all the democratic institutions that we've had all these years, and we're going to say, It's our time, and we're going to change all the rules. We don't need to change them all, because we think we can win 63 seats in here.

I've just got to laugh at it. I used 63 just to see if it would raise any eyebrows for people. The point is that we're here tonight having this debate. We don't need to be having this debate. Throw out Law Amendments. What's wrong with what we had? You won. You won a supermajority.

THE SPEAKER: You, you, you.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I know. I'm sorry.

THE SPEAKER: What am I going to do with you? You're killing me here. All right. Okay, this is the second time I've warned you.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Kick me out.

THE SPEAKER: I wouldn't do that, but I'd cut off your mic and not open it again.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Okay.

THE SPEAKER: All right.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Thank you, Speaker. I'm going to finish. I think I've made my point. Good people in here, regardless of political stripe, I think you're being led down a - I think that MLAs are being led down a path that many of them don't want to go down. I get it. Governments make decisions, but in an environment where you won 43 seats, none of this makes sense.

THE SPEAKER: You had to go out with the y-o-u, didn't you?

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm sorry, Speaker, you have another Cape Bretoner about to stand up, and it's late. Just so you know, the word "yous" is kind of in the context of everyone, so just bear with us all, because it's been a day.

My colleague for Sydney-Membertou brought back our mentor with his words: Suffering is optional. I open with that to tell the members here when the late, great Ray Paruch was mentoring me, the first thing he said to me was: Kendra, suffering is optional. This resolution is optional. You're suffering for nothing. You're not gaining brownie - sorry, Speaker - they're not gaining brownie points. There are no brownie points to be gained from this resolution. The suffering is optional. Instead, what the government members are doing is taking on suffering that they don't need to take on in order to - what? - to limit debate in the House? to limit the voices that come into this House? Suffering is optional, as my colleague reminded me.

On Tuesday, I sat in a hospital room with my daughter. I was watching Legislative TV while she was napping. I sat dumbfounded. For a moment, I couldn't believe what I was seeing and what I was hearing when the Government House Leader stood up and read this resolution. I sat there in that room, and I could not believe the resolution that I was reading. My colleagues will know me. Some of them in this House who know me, Speaker, you yourself, would know I carry my little green rules book around like the Bible. It was with me. I grabbed it out of my bag, and I started reading each and every resolution and put it back to this book that I have in my hand.

Again, I said, This is unbelievable. Would the member for Pictou East in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 recognize the member for Pictou East of 2025? I remember that member, who delayed Law Amendments Committee by using this tactic that only that member has ever used. I find it laughable that we would now have, in the rules, to limit not only the debate in Law Amendments Committee but limit the voices of Nova Scotians. The member for Pictou East used every rule in this book that he is now trying to change. That's laughable. It's honestly - there are no parliamentary words that I can use to describe it. I'd be ruled out at each and every turn for any of those parliamentary - I swear, none of them are swear words. They're all very good words; I'm just not allowed to use them.

I cannot believe that government members would be so willing to silence the voices of Nova Scotians whom they say they represent, the Nova Scotians whom they say they speak for. If they speak for them, then why are they so afraid to hear their voices at Law Amendments Committee? If they speak for them, why are they so afraid to allow us to debate the bills? We live in a . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask that we all respect. I can understand a little bit of

whispering, but for long conversations in the House, please keep it down.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: We live in a representative democracy. It is a political system in which citizens of a political entity or boundary vote for representatives to handle legislation. The elected representatives are, in turn, accountable to the electorate for their actions.

Speaker, that means that every one of us MLAs has a choice. This is to the government side, because I know where I'm standing, but this is to the government side members: Were you elected to represent your constituents, or were you elected to represent this Tory government or the Premier? Were you elected to represent the Premier of this government?

Again, I ask: Were they elected to represent the constituents of their constituencies or one person? The answer, I would hope - and I know many of my colleagues here would fall on - is that they were sent here by the residents of their constituency to represent them.

We were sent here to this hallowed chamber, the People's House, by Nova Scotians to do what we believe they sent us here to do. That means that we listen to them when they phone us, when they call us, when they appear before the Law Amendments Committee.

We are responsible, each of us, for the actions that we take in this Legislature. We are responsible for upholding the democratic principles of our parliamentary constitutional monarchy government, a parliamentary government which is a representative democracy. We are responsible for each and every decision we make.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I just find that - like with the last speaker - you are speaking too much to the House. It's just a gentle reminder, as I did with the last member.

KENDRA COOMBES: I think the reason for that, and I will get back to the resolution, is that we are trying to provide some information to our colleagues, to provide little pearls of wisdom that we have picked up over the years.

Democracy is a very important thing. We have seen south of the border how fast it can disappear when democratic norms start getting eroded. I don't believe in being an alarmist. I don't believe in hyperbole. I don't think everything can be extreme. But when I see a resolution before me that strikes at the heart of the democratic process in this province, I cannot help but think of what's happening south of the border. The Trump playbook is alive and well in many countries. It's alive and well in provinces. We are seeing it play out on the federal stage. Earlier, the member for Sydney-Membertou alluded to a news document that compared this PC government to the Trump administration in the U.S. I actually have that document, and in that document, it states: "'Flooding the zone' is a

term used by Steve Bannon, who was very close to U.S. president Donald Trump during his first term.” I have no idea where he stands now in terms of who is in and who is out.

[8:45 p.m.]

It refers to doing so much so fast that it’s impossible for people to keep up. What do you pay attention to when so many changes are brought in at once? What is important to oppose? How do you oppose it? How do you even keep track of everything that’s happening, especially in the absence of good communications? With the disembowelment of Communications Nova Scotia? With the omnibus bills that seem to become a norm in this House that used to be very few and far between?

We’re seeing the flood zone. I think it is accurate to say that we are seeing the flood zone. Confusion. Put so much on the table that nobody knows what’s there and what isn’t. Confuse the enemy, I guess. The people of Nova Scotia need to know what to oppose. They need to be able to tell their elected representatives what they think their elected representatives should oppose. They should be able to come before government in the form of the Law Amendments Committee - and that’s anybody.

I don’t believe in restricting the Law Amendments Committee. To me, anyone who signs up for Law Amendments should be at Law Amendments to speak to government. The Law Amendments Committee allows them to say: This is what we want you to pay attention to in this bill. This is why we think you should oppose it. This is how we think we can make the bill better. If this Tory government follows through with Resolution No. 5, they have dismantled a major part of our democratic process in Nova Scotia.

I’m going to quote someone very famous - a feisty redhead. Her name is Reba McEntire, and my mom used to play her a lot. We were watching this video, and it was called “Is There Life Out There,” and there’s a break in the video. She’s at this university, and the professor said: “Excellent paper - an A - but I could do without the stains,” and she said: “I learned more from the stains than I did the paper.” You learn more from your mistakes. You learn more from the things that may not be just right than you do from everything you do perfectly. Law Amendments allows Nova Scotians the opportunity to say: These are stains, and let’s make changes to them. Let’s fix what we think are flaws. That is an important tool.

It’s a very long article, but it does go on to talk, which is great because we like media, and we don’t want to see media die. I’m just trying to find that last quote that I have in here. There are a few other things. I’m going to pass this in its whole, but in the rest of the article in the *Halifax Examiner*, it says: “I don’t think anyone would argue that the Premier is pulling a coup or that Nova Scotia is descending into fascism, but what we’re seeing here is an erosion of norms that makes a future descent into authoritarianism less unthinkable.”

Those are harsh words. Those are very strong, harsh words. I thought they were important to bring forward to my colleagues and to you, Speaker, to say again that when they try to limit the amount of time MLAs can speak more than they already are, this government disallows the voices of Nova Scotians in Law Amendments Committee, or disembowels Law Amendments Committee altogether. We in Nova Scotia are heading straight towards the very thing that we said “never again” to, the very thing that we fear: the lack of democracy, descent into fascism.

All 43 seats - it doesn't seem to be enough. Would all the seats have been enough for this government to feel secure in their majority? The fact is, this Tory government had to bring forward a resolution that limits the Opposition, that limits the voices of Nova Scotians. I can't fathom it. I don't understand it. I cannot believe I'm standing here at 8:52:38 p.m., discussing the importance of democracy, the importance of the voices of Nova Scotians in their House.

I think I'd cry if I wasn't so unbelievably angered and frustrated, and still uncomprehending of this fact. But here we are. I think of my colleagues, and I know quite a few of them by now on the government side. I would agree with my colleague from Sydney-Membertou that that's not who they are. This is not who many of these members are. I thought they believed in democracy. I thought they believed in the democratic procedures and the democratic norms. I thought they believed in compromising and good governance. This is not good governance. This is bad governance.

This is the kind of governance that would spin political scientists' heads around. Political scientists are looking at this right now and shaking their heads. This is something that would just make them look at their students and go, “See this? When you get into government, don't do this.”

The debate that we have in the House is not about the MLA. It's not about that. It's about our constituents. I represent the people of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier. They sent me here because they believed I would bring their voices to this Legislature. They sent me here to be their voice in this Legislature, and to provide them with information about what's occurring in this Legislature.

To limit their voice by limiting mine and my colleagues' is a disservice to each and every constituent whom the members of this House represent. These seats don't belong to us. They belong to the people of Nova Scotia. To act like they belong to one of these members or to a government is wrong-headed. It's egotistical - because they don't. We sit in these seats for a period of time because a majority of our community allowed us the privilege. In turn, those community members who allowed the members of the government to sit in their seats for this period of time have decided to limit their voices, silence, dissent.

I can only think it's because they don't want to hear the criticism. Speaker, constructive criticism is an important aspect of our democratic process. If somebody agrees

with us all the time, that is not somebody you should have in your corner. You should have somebody who strives to make you better. That is what the people of Nova Scotia do. They strive to make all of us as MLAs better. They strive to make the laws that are presented before this House stronger, more robust, more fair.

Oftentimes, what we have are people who really understand the issues at hand, professionals who will actually say to us at Law Amendments Committee what this bill will do. The consequences of a bill will have this negative impact, whether it's on the environment, housing, health care. For example, in Law Amendments Committee, we had professionals come to us to say in health care regarding the bill that the minister could just gently touch our records. People said there could be problems with that, major problems for a minister or their designate to be able to look at these medical records. What we have seen actually, I believe there have been some issues. There have been issues.

There were people who had appointments in my riding get sent out for these appointments. They didn't know how someone - this private company I think it was, if I'm not mistaken - got told about their appointment, and were sending them information about their appointment. Guess what, Speaker? They were sending them on - I believe it was B.C. time. B.C. time. Tell me if they were showing up for their appointments early or late. You tell me. They weren't showing up on time.

This was part of the concerns that people had at the Law Amendments Committee. We in Opposition heard those concerns, and through that, we brought forward amendments. Were they accepted? The answer is no. But those people had the opportunity to come to us, to give us that dire warning.

What voices are going to be muffled if we limit the debate in Law Amendments, or forget having the conversations with Nova Scotians in Law Amendments at all? What things are on the chopping block? The Auditor General. The Auditor General's job, without warning, without reason, nixed. Non-unionized civil servants, without cause. Fired. Personally, they need to get unionized.

Oh, this is an interesting one. Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy, the FOIPOP Act, allowing the heads of bodies can refuse to administrate frivolous, vexatious applications or too broad in scope. As someone who has used FOIPOP, I couldn't have been more specific if I had put my full SIN number in for information, and still was not allowed at my own record.

I was told it was too wide in scope. I had a date from this date to this date, which was only a couple of months. My name, my birth date, all the information, and still it was too wide in scope. We already have a problem with people being able to get access to their freedom of information. We already have a problem with this. As the member - the Premier now, back then he was the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Pictou East - went and tried to FOIPOP the ferry, and then took the government to court.



[9:00 p.m.]

Without Law Amendments, these types of bills will go unchallenged by the people of Nova Scotia. By this resolution, it limits the Opposition to be able to bring Nova Scotians' voices into this House for robust, much-needed debate.

Now, I don't know about you, but I like being in this Chamber. I love being in this Chamber, sitting in this chair that I am privileged to occupy, standing in my place, and representing the members of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier. It's a privilege and an honour. I want to be here to do that work.

I'm offended by anyone who does not want to be in this House doing that work, wanting the robust discussions, because I believe in them. I truly believe in them. They're needed because in those discussions you find the truth. In those discussions you find compromise, if you're willing to listen, if you're willing to hear. In those discussions, you find better bills, better legislation for the people of Nova Scotia.

I don't mean that you have to just oppose. I have to get something up here that I had written just a little while ago, and it was this: The loyal Opposition improves ideas by openly pointing out when they are deficient in a positive fashion. Disloyal opposition does not like an idea but doesn't do anything about it.

Loyal opposition promotes a healthy, happy, pluralistic culture by promoting healthy competition between different ideas or schools of thought. Disloyal opposition breaks companies with in-fighting. Loyal opposition points out your blind spots and ego distortions. Disloyal opposition allows you to continue unknowingly beating your head against a wall. We are His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and what we are bringing forward tonight in our opposition to this resolution is telling you why it is harmful to the democratic process. We are telling you that it doesn't even need to be here.

In fact, my colleague from Halifax Needham told you what we could be doing with this resolution. This resolution could have been completely different. This resolution could have said: We are officially making Law Amendments a place where you can come in virtually or in person, making it more accessible to Nova Scotians. This resolution will state that no member from Law Amendments can disallow members of the public to present at Law Amendments, even if that means Law Amendments goes on for days. As long as Nova Scotians are at the door wanting to speak, they will be heard. That's what this resolution could have been. It could have been a defence of democracy. Instead, it is a fight against democracy, and it's shameful, but it's not the first time.

I said before I was dumbfounded by this resolution, and I was, but that's not the first time I've seen a consolidation of power from this Tory government. All last sitting, every bill that came through the Minister of Housing, when we had a full-time Minister of Housing, was consolidation - and consolidation of powers into his department. We saw it

in other areas, as well - consolidation of power, consolidation of power - and it felt like it was something we just got to say: This is another consolidation of power, here's another example, and this is what we're seeing again.

This resolution - because God knows it's not a bill. A bill would have required a lot more scrutiny from this House, but instead this government chose to put it in a resolution in order to skirt the scrutiny that it would need. To - what is it?

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: Scrutinize.

KENDRA COOMBES: If it was a bill, it would have had to be scrutinized by the people of Nova Scotia at Law Amendments. Instead, they put it in a resolution. That's how - I don't know the word - maybe insecure they are about their majority or how the people of Nova Scotia would feel about their voices being silenced in this House. Again, I still can't believe I'm here doing this.

I thought that when we saw that man in the U.S. become president, we in Nova Scotia and in Canada were appalled. How could the United States of America allow their democracy to fall to one man? Yet here we are with a government consolidating power again, silencing the voices of those who are providing constructive criticism and dissenting to bills that they have a right to dissent to and disinviting them from coming to their own House to speak to why they like a bill or why they don't like a bill, what needs to be changed in a bill, what's good about a bill, and what are the unintended consequences of a bill.

I hope my colleagues are going to sit with that for a bit, because I have been sitting with it for a few days now, trying to come up with reasons as to why they would want to do this except to think that they really do not like criticism. I don't know if they're allergic to it. Maybe they are. Maybe there is an allergy to criticism that I'm not aware of, or maybe they have a hypersensitivity to dissent and criticism. I didn't know it was a thing, but maybe it is.

Democracy is fragile. We've seen in the United States, we've seen it elsewhere how fragile democracy can be. When we start eroding democracy bit by bit, piece by piece, in small and big ways, we can turn around one day and find that democracy has died. Where did it go? It would be part of that song, "Where Have all the Flowers Gone" - it's "Where has all the democracy gone?"

Again, with this resolution, the government has decided, if they vote for it, if each individual member who was sent here by their constituents, votes for this bill - this resolution. Right, I keep forgetting: It's not a bill. A bill would have more scrutiny. I keep forgetting that part. They wanted to get rid of that scrutiny. They didn't want to deal with it. They wanted to have it all done up in a nice little package, and boom, it's gone out the door. That's sad.

Anyway, again, I digress. The members have been sent here. When they go to vote, I hope they're going to vote with their constituents. I'm going to tell you something, Speaker. My constituents are not impressed by this. My constituents are not impressed when their voices get silenced. I don't think anyone's constituents would be okay if you went to them and said, we have this thing called Law Amendments and you can come and speak to a bill. Speaker, can you imagine saying to a constituent, you used to be able to speak to a bill, but now you're not allowed in the House to speak to a bill? We don't want to hear from you. We don't want to hear your dissenting opinion. We don't want to hear your constructive criticism.

[9:15 p.m.]

Imagine saying that to a constituent, because that's what this resolution is saying. Can you imagine saying to one of my constituents, for instance, Hey, Adam, guess what? I don't want your MLA speaking for you. Keep in mind you may not want to hear my voice. I know I'm not everybody's cup of tea, but can you imagine saying, I don't want to hear your MLA speak on your behalf? I don't want to hear your MLA speak the words that you have spoken to them to bring to the Legislature. It's best that we limit the debate so that only a few people speak. Yes, we used these tactics when we were in Opposition to prolong debates that we thought were really important, that we knew more people wanted to speak on, but we're not going to allow other people that same opportunity. Imagine that.

While in Opposition, we had an Opposition under the Tories who used every tactic in the book. Now in government, those same Tories want to stop others from doing the same, stop others from bringing Nova Scotia voices to the Legislature, stop actual Nova Scotians from coming to their House. That's what this resolution is going to do. This resolution is also going to stop good and healthy debate on omnibus bills that - oh my gosh, they're huge. They require hours of discussion. These omnibus bills demand our attention, Speaker. They demand your attention. They demand my attention. They deserve that.

This government wants to curtail it. Curtailing robust discussions on, let's see, what are the other - there are so many of them I'm honestly astounded by them. We've got a Petroleum Resources Act, and we have Bill No. 6 that looks to repeal an unproclaimed amendment to the Petroleum Resources Act, which would prohibit fracking in shale formations, except for testing or research, as allowed by regulations.

It doesn't matter whether you're for or against it, Speaker, it deserves robust conversation. Further opening Nova Scotia to mining requires - whether you are for or against it - robust conversation.

I had a conversation with a constituent, and I agreed. They said to me, I don't know if I agree with uranium mining, but I don't know if I have trust in this government to do it right.

I think that's valid. I think it's a valid concern that Nova Scotians should be able to bring to the Legislature. They don't know if they agree, but they don't know if they have the trust in this government to do it right. Could they do it safely? Could they do it without harming the environment? Can they do it without causing damage?

We've seen what happens when the Coastal Protection Act is in their hands: it disappears. Nova Scotians came before the Law Amendments Committee in huge support of the Coastal Protection Act - huge support. Those conversations that we had in Law Amendments Committee were - there was a lot of conversation on the Coastal Protection Act. People were passionate about it. People were in support of it.

Some people you wouldn't even expect to support a concept like a coastal protection act were in support of the Coastal Protection Act because they understood the need to protect the coast.

Those conversations, if this resolution passes, will not happen in Law Amendments Committee again. It's going to be Public Bills now too. Even the change of a name. We're changing names left, right, and centre. It's hard to keep track. I'm still trying to learn the former Department of Community Service one. I'm very sorry, but I'm still trying to learn that one - Opportunities and Social Development. I don't even know what that is. I'm sorry, it's so vague.

I digress. What I'm saying is, it goes to my concept of vagueness that when a bill has been vague, people have questions and concerns about it. What happens in our Legislature and in Law Amendments Committee is that people bring those questions forward. They have time to email and call and phone us, but they also have time to get on the list for Law Amendments Committee. They say, I have a lot of questions, I don't even understand the bill, I'm here because I don't even understand this bill, it doesn't make sense to me, it might as well be written in hieroglyphics for all I know.

But, a lot of people say, through Law Amendments Committee, through listening to MLAs on all sides speak to the bill, I finally understood the bill. I got what it was about. You know what? I don't support it, or you know what? I do support it.

All of that happens through these processes. If we dismantle those processes, there are going to be many Nova Scotians left potentially not understanding the bills that their MLAs are voting for or how they impact them and their lives. Again, by the time - because it seems like this government only wants to get out faster from this Legislature - everyone gets home, that's when people are asking, What was that bill? How could that bill have been passed in the Nova Scotia Legislature? Well, you know, the government only wanted to sit for 10 or 17 days. The government side really didn't want to sit and do the work of Nova Scotians. Forget a calendar. Forget a legislative calendar that would allow for more robust work.

Maybe that's what this resolution should have brought in as well. In the new rules book, rather than those Monday sittings or the Tuesday to Friday sittings and the times, at the will of the Speaker - Speaker, no offence to you - we could have had a calendar that said: This is when we sit. We sit from this date to this date. The House of Commons has it, and guess what? Actual work gets done.

That's what this resolution could have been. These resolutions could have been things that built up our democratic institutions and built up our democratic norms. Instead, it is a how-to guide in dismantling the democratic norms of this House. It is a promotion on silencing dissent and constructive criticism at Law Amendments Committee. It is a how-to on silencing His Majesty's Loyal Opposition. It is a how-to guide in that. By silencing His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, it silences the voices of Nova Scotians.

Speaker, it's wrong. This resolution is wrong-headed, and we are heading toward a cliff. It is time to pull it back. With that, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize anyone else, I ask that the honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier table the article she spoke from and also table the song by Reba - the red-headed singer. My memory is good; it was like 40 minutes ago - the quote from the song. For all new members, you're not allowed to sing songs in the House, but the honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier only took a quote and didn't sing a phrase.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier with a quick . . .

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I did not break the rules. It wasn't a quote from the song. It was a quote from the video where she was speaking, and I will table that video.

THE SPEAKER: Please do. You can only table things with writing. I think at one time we had a teacup with some magic marker on the bottom of it. Please, you can print it off and table it. I never stated you sang a phrase. I stated you quoted from it. (Interruption)

The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

LINA HAMID: Speaker, I'm going a little bit off the cuff here. I'm going to start by saying this is a terrifying time. This really is a terrifying time. When we were doing MLA school, and we first got our little green books, my colleague for Halifax Chebucto said, I bet you can't wait to go home and read it cover to cover. I said, No, I'm not going to do that. I didn't, but I did read a little bit.

I'm not that familiar with legalese yet, but when I heard the resolution called out on Tuesday, I believe it was, I thought to myself, there is no way I'm understanding this correctly. This has got to be a misunderstanding on my part. There's no way that they're trying to come in - this government is trying to come in and bulldoze all ways of

accountability and all ways of listening to the people we're here to represent.

I don't think anyone outside of my caucus knows that this last election was the first time I voted as a citizen of Canada and also the first time I voted in my life. I was born and raised in a monarchy. The country that I am from right now has, unfortunately, dissolved into a military dictatorship.

This is not what I was expecting when I put my name on a ballot. This is not what I was expecting. I was expecting to be here to be given the chance to represent the people who gave me the honour of being in this chair.

By disallowing debate and by disallowing the voices of my constituents, whether it be in debate or if they wanted to come to Law Amendments Committee, this is a bulldozing of democracy. This is exactly what it is, and frankly, I am terrified. It feels dystopian. My constituents are terrified, and we are also fuming.

I initially thought, again, that I misunderstood this. Then I thought, Okay, they're trying to dismantle a few things. This government's trying to dismantle a few things brick by brick. Then I thought, Wow, just taking away complete ways for us to be able to speak on behalf on our constituents.

I'm getting a little warm.

I'm not going to be too much longer, but I needed to put that in there. This genuinely - this resolution is taking down our democracy, and as someone who is new to democracy and was excited to be part of it, this is not what I was expecting.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Opportunities and Social Development.

HON. SCOTT ARMSTRONG: I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Resolution No. 5, which I'll be voting in support of.

Change is tough. We have a new mandate. We are going to modernize the practices here in the Legislature. There's a process for changing rules in the Legislature, and that process is being followed. That's democracy. We will put forward rule changes, and if the majority of members vote for those rule changes, that's how democracy works. There hasn't been a vote yet, but we'll see what the vote is when it comes up. The suggested resolution - I'm just going to read what it actually says, because I want to make sure everyone understands what we're actually talking about. I'll be very quick here.

In Article 10(1), it's amended by striking out "Law Amendments" and substituting "Public Bills." It's not like we're eliminating the whole process. Public Bills is still going to give every Nova Scotian, if they want to, the opportunity to represent themselves here

to us as MLAs in the Legislature on any piece of legislation that's being voted on.

In Paragraph (2) of Rule 60, it's "amended by adding immediately after clause (a) the following clause: (aa) The Public Bills Committee is established only to receive" public "feedback on public bills and may not amend the bills referred to it."

It is a committee which is being set up just to hear people's input. That's democracy. There is still opportunity to make amendments. If your constituents want an amendment, you as an MLA - you're representing them. That's your job. If you agree with an amendment your constituent wants to see you put forward, you can still do that at Committee.

[9:30 p.m.]

The ability to put forward amendments and have those voted on is not being eliminated. The ability for public members to come to the Legislature and have input on what we're doing here is not being eliminated. It's not like the whole committee is being shut down. In my opinion, I don't think this is anything to light our hair on fire. It's certainly not an attack on democracy. I mean, that's just not what's happening here.

Change is tough. Everyone has to go through changes sometimes. I know I have to do it in my life, but what I'm asking everyone to do is take an actual look at the wording in this resolution, see what it actually says. It's not a threat to democracy. It's going to change the way we do things in this Legislature, but you know what? I've only been here a week. I haven't been here very long, but I can tell you the decorum that's shown here and the respect for other members is far superior to what I've experienced in my past and that's a credit to all of you. I mean, we've sat here and watched people speak on all sides of this House. There's barely a heckle. There's barely a criticism.

I think democracy is safe and sound in Nova Scotia and Resolution No. 5 is going to do nothing to limit that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I would like to keep my remarks to a very specific part of this resolution, and that is Section 27. I would also like to read from the Resolution for the benefit of the House to remind folks what we are talking about here.

In Section 27A(1) it says:

27A (1) If the Government House Leader, from the Leader's place in the House, states that there is agreement among the representatives of all recognized parties to allot a specific number of days or hours to the proceedings at one or more stages of any

public bill, the Leader may move a motion without notice setting forth the terms of such agreed allocation.

Which sounds great. We do that already. We did it yesterday, I think, and we've done it on lots of bills in this House.

The second part is:

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

And number 3:

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

In fact, what my honourable colleague, the Minister of Opportunities and Social Development, has said is actually incorrect, Speaker. I will get to that in a minute, but I just want to point out this small thing. Yes, people can come and speak at Law Amendments Committee, or whatever it's called now - Public Bills - according to this Resolution, but not necessarily will the Opposition be able to take the voices of our constituents and bring them to the Committee and propose amendments, because that committee could be limited by Section 27A(2).

This is what we are talking about here. It is not so much the issue, in my view, of Law Amendments Committee being changed to Public Bills, although I do think there are problems with that, but this here - Section 27 - is a very important and troubling section.

Speaker, I want to tell you that I have a friend - a person in my life, someone I know - who loves to play games. They love competition. I also love games. I have a point to this and it's going to come around in a beautiful way, so just hear me out for a minute.

I love playing games. I played sports growing up. I love playing board games. I love playing chess with this person. I've recently learned to play chess, and I'm quite proud of myself, to be honest. This person essentially taught me how to play chess. For a long time, we've been playing chess against each other, and I'm pretty bad at it. So most of the time, this person wins. It doesn't take much for him to win. But I play, and I'm learning, and it's fun. It's really fun.



But lately, I have been improving my game. I've been getting a little better and a little better, and this person has noticed. I've won a couple of games in the last couple of weeks, and what this person has done is decided that they need to change the rules of the game now. So they'll say something like, "Okay, for this time that we play, we only are allowed to move our pawns in this direction," and set some silly rule at the beginning of the game.

Sometimes I agree, and I'm like, "Okay, we'll do it that way. We'll play it that way." And sometimes I'm like, "You know what? Actually, no. If you want to change the rules of chess so that you can win, or that it makes it harder for me, then I don't want to play." Sometimes I give in and sometimes I don't. I feel very frustrated by this new trend in the game playing.

I was thinking about why this person insists on this new rule-changing. It's simple - they love to win at chess. When they play against me, they can win. And when they started seeing that they weren't able to win as much, they needed to change the rules because they couldn't be in control anymore.

I will bring this to an end, Speaker, by telling you that this person is one of my favourite people in the entire world. And this person is a 10-year-old. A 10-year-old child. I bring this up, in case it's not obvious, because this behaviour of this 10-year-old child reminds me of what's going on in Clause 27 and 28.

Unfortunately, this ain't no game. We're actually debating real laws and real resolutions in this House that have actual impact on people's lives, their well-being, their health and their wellness. So we're not fooling around with a chess game in here. We're actually debating real things. No offence to the chess players in the room or outside the room. The implication of removing the process of debate, which is laid out in Section 27(A) (1) and (2), could be - and I'm not saying it will be, but it could be - and that's the problem here; it's extremely serious.

I want to speak to the House, for those members that were here at the time, I want to remind you of some debates that took place in this House, and for the members who are new, I want to explain to you a couple of amazing moments in this Legislature where debate, and robust debate, affected the outcome of a piece of legislation, in my opinion, for the better.

The first example I'd like to offer is in 2021, when the Minister of Environment and Climate Change tabled Environmental Goals and Climate Reduction Act. There were a lot of good things in that bill. There were a lot of good things. Everyone said it. The people from the special interest groups said it. The people in this Chamber said it. God knows, the government members said it, for a lot of time.

That's okay, because that what democracy is, and that's what debate is: standing

up and talking about the good things about the bill and the bad things about the bill. But I remember, in the Committee of the Whole House on Bills, it was an epically long evening - or day - where our party and the Official Opposition at that time, we presented many amendments to the bill.

I actually remember the day the bill was read for the second time. In fact, there was a protest outside the House and you could hear the people shouting “Amend the legislation, amend the legislation,” while the minister gave an hour-long speech about the legislation. It wasn’t the day of second reading; it was actually the day we went into Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

We started proposing amendments; we debated them robustly. Most of them were voted down but there was one that was accepted - I believe it was Clause 17. My colleague, the honourable member for Halifax Needham, moved that amendment. It was to do with creating a council on environmental racism.

This government, or the government at the time, which was this party, saw the benefit, heard the debate, understood that this amendment made the bill better and voted for it. By the way, the results of that amendment actually have not been made public yet, so P.S., let’s get on that one.

This was a very important day and that would not have happened if this clause was in place and that government, or this government, decided: Oh well, we’re going to limit Committee of the Whole House on Bills today to 15 minutes. That’s what can happen when this resolution is passed, Speaker. Any part of the process of making a law can be essentially eliminated and that’s really bad.

When this government finds themselves in the Opposition, it’s going to be really bad for them - except that we’ll change it back. Won’t we, pal?

I also want to bring to the memory of the House and to let people who are new to know about another bill that we passed when the Liberal government was in power, when my colleague from Dartmouth South and I were newer MLAs, and it was the Human Organ and Tissue Donation Act.

This was a seemingly uncontroversial bill, actually. All three parties supported the bill in kind of a beautiful way. For those members who were in the House on the night that bill passed, it was truly a magical night. What seemed like it was going to be a very sort of tick-tick-tick process to get the bill passed, because there was all-party support for it, turned into a lengthy debate.

What happened was people stood up and talked about their own personal experiences with organ donation. We heard from members whose children had been killed in car accidents and whose bodies or organs had been donated and whose organs had saved

the lives of other people.

We heard from people whose family members - or maybe even them personally - their lives had been saved by donated organs. We heard from people from all around the room. It was amazing. People were in tears, it was a really special night.

I hold onto that debate, actually. When things get bad in this room, I remember that night. It was so special. I remember that democracy is possible and important and the work we do in this Legislature is vital, again, to the people of this province. If that bill had not been passed then the great changes that have happened and the more people using the organ donation program or donating their organs or not opting out - that would not be as robust and there would be people who are dead because they didn't get a donated organ.

[9:45 p.m.]

It might sound kind of funny that I'm saying it in this way, but this is the impact that we can have in this House. If this resolution had been in place at the time, the government at the time could have said: You know what? Everyone supports this bill. There's no need to debate it. In fact, the outcome wouldn't have been different; we would still have the organ donation program in the way that it is now, but we wouldn't have had that positive experience in this Legislature where we can hold onto it when things get dark and deep in here, but also for the people on the outside who saw all three parties working together. They would have missed out on that.

If this resolution passes when we debate Bill No. 1 - whenever that happens - we don't know if we will actually get to debate it. We don't know how much time will be allotted. We don't know if people will actually get to come to Public Bills and speak on Bill No. 1, and God knows - we all know - that every person in this room has an inbox full of email concerned about Bill No. 1. Bill No. 1 threatens the foundation of accountability of this House. I have a lot of email about it. I know other people do. People who have never written to a political representative in their lives are writing about Bill No. 1. They're very worried, and this resolution would allow all of their voices to be silenced because - what's the word when you say something is going to happen in a second?

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: Prediction?

SUSAN LEBLANC: No, never mind. Spoiler alert is what I'm trying to say. Spoiler alert: If I am granted the ability to debate Bill No. 1, I will be talking about all the email. I will be bringing those voices - those emails - to the floor of this Legislature in one way or another. Now that I've said that, maybe I won't get the chance.

I'm going to move an amendment soon, but before I move it, I will explain that the amendment basically strikes out this change. That's what the amendment will do when I move it. Essentially, I think that the first part is great because that's what we do already.

We can agree to move along the process of passing a bill, but the second part wrecks it, so my amendment will be talking about getting rid of it.

Before I do that, I just want to comment on my colleague from Halifax Needham's comments about minimizing constituency voices. Again, I will reiterate that every one of us has been elected to represent the people in our riding - not just the people who have voted for us but all of the people in our riding - and I proudly do that. Everybody will have received some comments about the bills that we're going to debate. The question I really have is also: Why have we not heard anything about why the government feels that it is necessary to make these changes?

When you table a bill that changes something dramatically, the minister who's tabling the bill gets up and does Second Reading. We hear what the rationale is. We hear about the process. Often there's debate. Then the minister closes Second Reading, and we hear some comments by the minister about the concerns that have been heard. All of that process happens. With a resolution, the House Leader gets up, reads the resolution, and then expects it to be voted on. Except for my colleague here, the Minister of Opportunities and Social Development - who spoke just a few words - we have not heard a thing from the government about the rationale behind this. I'm saying that as sort of an invitation, Speaker. It would be great to hear from the government. Maybe the Government House Leader will get up and talk about it.

I do want to talk again about - this is going back to what the minister said earlier about Committee of the Whole House on Bills - the ability to propose amendments on a bill. The Premier of this province likes to characterize the Opposition, and in particular the Leader of the Official Opposition, as a deeply negative person. I'm only going to say that once because I don't want to perpetuate that. I don't want to keep repeating his message. This is a classic Conservative playbook tactic. Doug Ford, the Premier of Ontario - who, by the way, our Premier has been recently campaigning with - does exactly the same thing to the Leader of the Official Opposition in Ontario. We see it all over the place by Conservative leaders across the country and, dare I say, the United States.

The thing about it is that the Committee of the Whole House on Bills is the place where the pesky Opposition - God, I wish they didn't have to speak all the time - get to propose things in the Committee of the Whole House on Bills. We bring amendments to bills that are suggestions for improvements. Sometimes the amendment will be a striking out of a clause, a renumbering, or whatever, but they are suggestions for improvements. They are usually based on things that we have heard at the Law Amendments Committee or Public Bills. We have that opportunity to bring amendments.

In that time, in that section of the bill-making process, we get to say things like: Yes, let's pass the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, and let's make sure, when we do it, we eliminate the ability to have environmental racism perpetuated in this province. That was a good amendment. Let's pass that bill. We can also ask: What if?

Here we have the environmental bill: the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. What if we made it so that the reporting process was yearly instead of every three years? What if? That would make this bill even better.

We also can use the amendments process of the Committee of the Whole House on Bills - the amendments we bring - to imagine or to blue-sky a better Nova Scotia. Saying yes and, asking what if, or saying imagine a truly better - imagine this. What if this happened?

How many people have said that in their life? What if we go out for dinner tonight? Wouldn't that be great, honey? What if we go out for dinner? How about: You know what? You've been working hard - how about we take a drive down to Digby today? Wouldn't that be nice? Yes, that would be so nice.

Everybody has an imagination, hope, and images of what would be better than the moment we're in at this moment. (Interruption) Yes, amen to that. That is what we do in the Committee of the Whole House on Bills. We propose ideas to make things better.

I want to put forward that the Premier of this province wants to limit our ability to do that because he doesn't want to hear our ideas and because he wants to be able to characterize us as negative, as taking the "no" out of Nova Scotia. He doesn't want us to have a voice in this House, so he has instructed the Government House Leader to table this resolution to limit the Opposition's voice and purpose in the process of making bills. That's very shameful.

It makes his job as the Premier of this province, getting things done faster and getting to work for Nova Scotians, and all of the little Communications Nova Scotia adages - sorry, all of the Premier's Office communications adages that have been created over the last little while - it makes his job easier to shut us up. You can't make this up. It's just beyond my understanding.

Getting back to my 10-year-old friend - whose brain is not fully developed, by the way - no slight against my friend, but it's true; 10-year-olds' brains are not fully developed. (Interruption) I said he's 10. Like my 10-year-old friend, the Premier is afraid of losing the chess game. He's afraid of the Opposition making a move that might topple one of his pawns. That's what this resolution is about.

As I draw my remarks to a close, I would just like to reiterate that the opportunity to be part of the bill-making process is a true privilege. We have heard this already tonight - that people have put us in these seats to represent Dartmouth North, Dartmouth South, Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, Digby-Annapolis, Kings South, Kings North, all parts of the province. People have put their trust in us, checked our name on the ballot, and asked us to come here to voice their concerns in this Legislature. This privilege should not be put into jeopardy in this way.

I will remind everyone in this House - it's not true for me yet; I have not been on that side yet, but many of those folks over there have been on this side. The election cycle changes, the governments change, and we have a duty in this House to protect democracy for future governments, for future politicians, for future representatives, for future generations. This is the House of the oldest responsible government in the country. This House is about to seriously diminish the democratic process that takes place within its walls.

It is sad. It's deeply unfortunate. The worst part is that we actually can't do anything about it, except to stand on our feet and voice our concerns, and remind each and every one of us here that we are no better or more special than any of the other people sitting in these seats. We all sacrifice things. We all work hard. We all represent a portion of the province, and we all represent very diverse voices. Some people will probably think this resolution is A-1, let's go, good on ya. Get in and out of that House and just get 'er done - bigger, faster for Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: Order. We have reached the time of adjournment.

We stand adjourned until Friday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 10:00 p.m.]