

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

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First Session**TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 2025**

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HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 2025

Sixty-fifth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Danielle Barkhouse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

John White, Marco MacLeod, Tom Taggart

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

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

THE SPEAKER: As Speaker of the House of Assembly and 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, *Funding to Universities: Department of Advanced Education*.

The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, with your permission, I'd like to hold up on the Government Notices of Motion until our guests arrive in your gallery, hoping to revert to Government Notices of Motion when the time comes.

THE SPEAKER: Does anybody mind if we do Introduction of Bills and then revert to Government Notices of Motion?

It is agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 62 - An Act Respecting Rent-to-own Starter Homes. (Claudia Chender)

Bill No. 63 - An Act to Modernize Aquaculture in Nova Scotia. (Hon. Derek Mombourquette)

Bill No. 64 - An Act to Secure Fairness for Renters. (Suzy Hansen)

Bill No. 65 - An Act Respecting a Homelessness Task Force. (Lina Hamid)

Bill No. 66 - An Act to Expand Agriculture in Nova Scotia. (Hon. Iain Rankin)

Bill No. 67 - An Act to Support Commercial and Household Greenhouses. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

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

We are going to revert now to Government Notices of Motion.

[GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, before I read my Government Notice of Motion, permission to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, in your Gallery, it's a special honour for me to acknowledge the presence of an inspiring and successful local businesswoman: Rashmi Prakash, founder of Aruna Revolution. This company is innovating women's health while tackling the environmental impacts of traditional disposable hygiene products. Rashmi is joined by her proud parents, Prakash and Shridavi, as well as three members of her team: Bridget, marketing specialist responsible for sales and partnerships; Kavia, a mechanical engineer responsible for verification of lab testing; and Vicki, a process engineer responsible for manufacturing. I ask you to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. (Standing ovation)

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

The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

RESOLUTION NO. 34

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

Whereas a strong circular economy keeps waste out of landfills, drives innovation, reduces carbon emissions, and creates jobs, making it a win-win for our environment and our economy; and

Whereas Rashmi Prakash, founder of Aruna Revolution Incorporated, has developed a sustainable and compostable menstrual pad design with the principles of a circular economy in mind; and

Whereas Aruna is tackling the environmental impacts of traditional disposable hygiene products, which contribute to global waste, water pollution, and soil degradation;

Therefore be it resolved that Nova Scotians join me in recognizing Rashmi Prakash and her team of brilliant engineers at Aruna who are combining science, sustainability, and technology to drive health innovation that is always creating jobs in Nova Scotia and advancing our transition to a circular economy.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Emergency Management.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction before I do my Government Notice of Motion.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KIM MASLAND: Today in your Gallery, we are honoured to have a group of courageous men who have dedicated their lives to protecting Nova Scotians and ensuring public safety during all types of emergencies.

I would ask that they please rise as I introduce them so they can receive the warm welcome of the House: Ancel Langille, David Westlake, and John Bignell. I also recognize Paul Schnurr, who could not join us today. I look forward to welcoming Paul at a later date to the House. Thank you so much, gentlemen. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for coming. We hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable Minister of Energy - of Emergency Management.

RESOLUTION NO. 35

HON. KIM MASLAND: I do have a lot of energy, but I'm not Minister of Energy. (Laughter)

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

Whereas the Emergency Management Exemplary Service Awards recognize the work being done across Canada to help prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies; and

Whereas the awards for 2024 were presented in Ottawa on February 26th to four deserving Nova Scotians; and

Whereas the contributions of these individuals include wildland fire response, incident management, emergency social services, and municipal emergency management;

Therefore be it resolved that this House congratulate Ancel Langille, David Westlake, John Bignell, and Paul Schnurr on receiving the Emergency Management Exemplary Service Award and thank them for their continued efforts to help keep Nova Scotians safe.

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. (Standing ovation)

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

HON. DAVE RITCEY: Speaker, I beg leave to make a special introduction today.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

DAVE RITCEY: Sitting in the gallery is our former colleague and most honourable member and a good friend from Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley, Larry Harrison. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Well, Larry, we hope you enjoy your time here. (Laughs) Couldn't get enough.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction for both of my member statements.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Joining us in the gallery today is Jude Gerrard, who is the ombudsperson at the NSCAD University, and Buffy Googoo, who is a 2024 graduate of

NSCAD and is the Treaty Education Curatorial Assistant of the Treaty Space Gallery. I ask them both to rise and accept a warm welcome. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

TREATY SPACE GALLERY: *PROJECT OF HEART* - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise today to share information about an impactful exhibit currently on at the Treaty Space Gallery, which is on Granville Street. This is an important space that exhibits work from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and is also a place supporting Indigenous students at NSCAD University.

Project of Heart started with artist/educator Sabine Fels, Jude Gerrard, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Justice, the Halifax Regional Centre for Education, and the students and staff at J.L. Ilsley High School in Spryfield, Nova Scotia. Through art, education, and reflection, students engaged with the history and intergenerational legacy of the Indian residential school system in Canada. Participants explored the devastating impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities while honouring the resilience and strength of survivors and their families.

The *Project of Heart* initiative stands as a testament to the power of art in education, truth-telling, and reconciliation. The original project is usually found at the Millbrook Cultural & Heritage Centre, but until March 7th you can see it at the Treaty Space Gallery, and you can participate in art making as well.

Speaker, I encourage all members to make their way to the Treaty Space Gallery this week.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HARRISON, LARRY: FORMER MLA - RECOG.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Since he's here, I'm going to do a member statement for him. I'm going to recognize Larry. Ten years ago, I met a lot of people in this place. A few folks are still around, but one guy I met was Larry Harrison, sitting over here in the corner. I can tell the new people here when the walls were on fire because of passionate debates, Larry had a way of turning the temperature down about 500 degrees by just being Larry.

He was strong in his faith. He was strong in his friendship. He was strong in his loyalty to his family and his party. What he doesn't realize is that he taught a lot of young guys a bit about humility when they came in here as young guys, trying to take on the world

and save everyone at the same time. I rise in my place - as a Liberal - to recognize a guy whom I believe has had "honourable" in front of his name his entire life, Larry Harrison. (Standing ovation)

[1:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: As a neutral, I couldn't agree more.

The honourable member for Annapolis.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

DAVID BOWLBY: Speaker, I am honoured to introduce, from den Haan Greenhouses, Luke and Jodi den Haan and their children, Madex, Roen, and Haden. Please stand. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Annapolis.

DEN HAAN, LUKE: CONTRIBS. TO SUSTAINABILITY - THANKS

DAVID BOWLBY: I rise today to recognize Luke den Haan, CEO of den Haan Greenhouses, and his family's remarkable contributions to agriculture and sustainability in Nova Scotia.

Founded in 1963 by his grandfather, Jac den Haan, this family business has upheld the values of innovative and environmentally responsible farming practices. Under Luke's leadership, den Haan Greenhouses has embraced cutting-edge technologies, such as biomass heating using local forestry waste - about 5,000 cords of firewood a year - water recycling systems, and integrated pest management, reducing their environmental footprint while producing high-quality tomatoes and cucumbers for Atlantic Canada.

Beyond their commitment to sustainability, the den Haan family is a leader in our community, supporting organizations like Feed Nova Scotia, local hockey programs, and 4-H Nova Scotia. Their commitment to food safety, environmental stewardship, and community engagement sets an example for businesses across the province. The family also has a very large vineyard in the Annapolis Valley, and it's doing exceptionally well.

I ask all members to join me in applauding Luke den Haan and his team for their outstanding contributions to agriculture, sustainability, and the Annapolis Valley community.

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

GERRARD, JUDE: EDUCATION CONTRIBS. - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise to recognize the impact on education in Nova Scotia of Jude Gerrard. Jude was born in Sheet Harbour and is a member of Millbrook First Nation. He has worked for several federal departments, including the RCMP, the Correctional Service of Canada, and Veterans Affairs Canada. He also worked for many Nova Scotia departments, including the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, where he helped establish treaty education in Nova Scotia; the Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage; the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency; and the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives.

He has worked at a number of post-secondary institutions and served on the National Indigenous Education Advisory Committee for Colleges & Institutes Canada. He is currently NSCAD University's first ombudsperson and the first Indigenous ombudsperson at a post-secondary institution in Canada. Jude has been a speaker at national and international conferences on systemic oppression and racial identity. He has been trained as the first Canadian in Beyond Diversity: Courageous Conversation About Race Protocol, and he has received the Certified Diversity Executive designation. He was also the first Mi'kmaw employee to be awarded the Nova Scotia Premier's Award of Excellence and has received the King Charles III's Coronation Medal from Universities Canada for his work on treaty education.

I would like to ask all members to thank Jude for his work and dedication to education in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

MURPHY, HON. KEVIN: DISABILITY BENEFIT WORK - RECOG.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I want to recognize a former colleague and longtime Speaker of the House, Kevin Murphy, for his part in delivering on the new Canada Disability Benefit, aimed at reducing poverty amongst Canadians with disabilities. The new benefit is income-tested and will provide eligible applicants with up to a maximum of \$200 a month on top of existing provincial disability benefits.

I do want to acknowledge that the Province has agreed not to claw back any existing benefits to recipients. The Government of Canada has recently approved the final regulations for the program and is committed to rolling them out by this July. Nova Scotia

residents with disabilities who meet the criteria and who do not currently have a disability tax credit are encouraged to reach out to Independent Living Nova Scotia for assistance in applying for a disability tax credit to ensure that you are prepared for the launch this year.

The Trudeau government's Budget 2024 approved \$6.2 billion over the next four years for the benefit. Nova Scotia and Canada are better off when its citizens with disabilities are enabled to be full participants in every aspect of our society.

Thank you to Kevin for his relentless work over the years to make our province more accessible and his continued work as Director for Disability Inclusion Office with the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

CHRIS PALMER: Speaker, in your Gallery - the Speaker's Gallery - are two of the leading ambassadors of Berwick, and indeed the entire Annapolis Valley. The Moody brothers are leaders in business, community and politics. I'm honoured today to introduce to the House, if I could ask you to stand as I say your name, Harley Moody, George Moody, and his son, Mike Moody.

Of course, George Moody is a legend in this House. George served in the Kings West seat between 1978 and 1999. He is my mentor, and I've always said if I could be half the MLA that George Moody was, I'll do okay. As we were standing downstairs before we came up, he looked at the wall of Premiers' pictures and he had this realization: He served his time in the House with seven premiers. I'd like to ask all members of the House to please join me - pertaining to my member statement - in welcoming the Moody brothers today to the House. (Standing ovation)

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

The honourable member for Kings West.

BARGAIN HARLEY'S: BUSINESS SUCCESS - RECOG.

CHRIS PALMER: I rise today to recognize a true cornerstone of our local business community, Bargain Harley's . . . (interruptions), a beloved discount store in Berwick that has been serving Nova Scotians for more than 40 years. More than just a retail shop, Bargain Harley's is a destination. People travel from all over our province to explore its aisles, hunting for hidden treasures and unbeatable deals. It has built a reputation, not only

for its great selection, but also for the warm and welcoming atmosphere that keeps customers coming back.

A key part of that success is the dedicated team behind the store. Bargain Harley's regularly employs more than 25 people, many of whom have been with the business for years. Its low employee turnover is a testament to the positive work environment created by the owners, Harley and George Moody. True hands-on leaders, they can often be found stocking shelves and chatting with customers, ensuring that every visit is a special experience.

Small businesses like Bargain Harley's are the backbone of our communities, providing jobs, supporting the local economy and bringing people together. I ask all members of this House to join me in thanking Harley and George Moody for their decades of service to our community and province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

NATIONAL SONS DAY: CARE - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize March 4th as National Sons Day. Having a son can be an amazing gift in life: from holding him when he was born, to raising him and teaching him to be a respectable young man. I'm extremely fortunate and blessed to have three boys by birth, and many other community sons that continue to make me proud.

National Sons Day is a great time to be reminded exactly how great it is to have a son. I want all of us to celebrate sons across the world. Here are a few tips to recognize them and show them how much you care: Call them. Let them know how much you love them. Spend quality time with your son and give him big squeezes - that's my favourite. As we recognize this day for our sons, let us love and hold our families close each and every day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

FIREFIGHTER, CHRIS: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Great words from my colleague from Halifax Needham. On that note, I want to just rise today and acknowledge the pain and suffering right now back home, as our Amherst Fire Department lost one of its own.

Yesterday, a young firefighter - I say young, he's my age - died tragically from a heart attack. Chris was loved. Chris had his struggles in life and he persevered. He would have received his 25-year pin this year for serving in the Amherst Volunteer Fire Department. He was a man I had a lot of respect for. Every day on his Facebook page, he would share a little quote about what the angels were saying. Just yesterday morning, he

shared this: “The angels are saying to you today there is new positive energy entering your life, so remain open and know what is good for you and be selective and aware.” May he rest in peace.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

U.S. TARIFFS: IMPACT - RECOG.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: A lot of our time today and into the future is going to be consumed with the decisions that have been made in the States around tariffs by the U.S. government. We will spend a lot of time as politicians in this House and in legislatures - provincially, federally, and municipally across the province - trying to navigate what is going to be a very difficult time for a lot of people.

I do want to rise in my place today because as we make decisions and as the government makes decisions, as always when crisis comes, there are people who will be behind the scenes implementing programs, trying to support families, trying to support small businesses, and those people will never make the media. Their story will never be told as we debate in here, but it is a very difficult time for us. Very difficult decisions were made, but the biggest thing we can all do now as politicians is be unified in our response and make sure we support those people who are going to support our families across the province every day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

LARRYS RIVER: ÉCOLE BELLE-BAIE OPENING - CONGRATS.

HON. GREG MORROW: It is with great joy and pride that I rise today to congratulate the community of Larrys River on the grand opening of École Belle-Baie. This remarkable milestone represents not only a new chapter in the early days of this new CSAP school but also a testament to the strength, determination, and commitment of this proud Acadian community.

École Belle-Baie will serve as a beacon of learning, growth, and opportunity for the youth of Tor Bay, Larry’s River, and the surrounding communities. The new school represents not only a physical structure but a foundation for a bright future, and one built on the education and preservation of the Acadian language. This achievement would not have been possible without the hard work of so many individuals, including parents, educators, local leaders, and countless volunteers who came together to make this vision a reality.

Today is the official grand opening day - right now, in fact. I wish I could have been there in person, but I do want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to everyone

involved in this incredible achievement, and to Principal Madame Nicole Bell and her staff. May they continue to inspire and instill pride in their Acadian culture at École Belle-Baie.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

KINSMEN CLUB OF SACK.: CURLING FUNSPIEL - CONGRATS.

PAUL WOZNEY: Heads up, Speaker: There's a pun alert for this one. In Sackville, you are never more than a stone's throw away from those who will fight until the end just to see others' lives made better. The Kinsmen Club of Sackville proved just that this past Saturday, when they hosted their Annual Curling Funspiel in support of Cystic Fibrosis Canada. Like its previous 20 years, the event really rocked, and the Kinsmen had 12 teams come around to play. Each team was tasked with raising \$250 to earn entry, but they hammered expectations to hurry hard and raise over \$6,000 for Cystic Fibrosis Canada.

This organization, founded in 1960 by parents of children with cystic fibrosis, has advocated on behalf of those with the disease for decades. I ask that the House join me in recognizing the Kinsmen Club of Sackville for their successful Funspiel, from one house to another.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

PETTEN, BONNIE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today, I rise to give honour to the life of Bonnie Petten, a remarkable woman who touched the hearts of so many in Amherst and beyond. Originally from Conception Bay in Newfoundland and Labrador, Bonnie made Amherst her home and worked in our community as a dedicated registered massage therapist.

In November of 2021 she was diagnosed with ALS. From that moment on, she became an ALS warrior facing every obstacle with unwavering strength and determination. She never backed down in her strength, in her fight to receive the quality care she deserved. Her wish was to remain in her home surrounded by her two beloved fur babies, and she did just that on her own terms with dignity and grace. Bonnie was a woman of deep faith, embodying the principles of strength, perseverance, and love. She lived by the words "I am not what I have done; I am what I have overcome."

Her journey was made possible by an incredible team of caregivers. Today, I want to recognize two of those: Lou Shaw and Dr. Helen Sandland. I also want to extend my gratitude to those in government who helped me advocate for Bonnie, including Deputy Minister Tracey Barbrick.

[1:30 p.m.]

On Saturday night, Bonnie passed away peacefully. Although she is no longer with us, her spirit, courage and unwavering will to fight will remain in our hearts forever. Bonnie will never be forgotten.

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

VICTORIA-THE LAKES COUNCIL: ELECTION - CONGRATS.

DIANNE TIMMINS: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the newly elected council members of Victoria-The Lakes following the October 19th municipal election. Please join me in celebrating Tim Donovan, Donna Matheson-LeFort, Rosella Born, Jess Kerr, and Wanda Hennick, who have been chosen by the people to guide our communities forward. Congratulations to the returning council members as well: Fraser Patterson, Perla MacLeod, and Jackie Organ. I would also like to congratulate Jackie Organ on her appointment as warden, and Perla MacLeod as deputy warden.

I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating the 2024 council members and wishing them success in serving Victoria County.

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

HALIFAX HAWKS: CANCER FUNDRAISER - RECOG.

LINA HAMID: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Halifax Hawks U15-B Red Team for their success on their Pink in the Rink Hockey Fights Cancer fundraiser. On February 14th, two minor hockey teams faced off in a charity game with a shared goal of raising funds to fight back against cancer.

With the Halifax Hawks team in pink jerseys and the opposing Sackville Flyers team in purple, all proceeds from the game were donated. This event was a great success, raising \$2,600 for the Canadian Cancer Society.

To all the players, coaches, parents, and everyone who generously donated, I extend my congratulations and appreciation. Well done.

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

MCCURDY, MEGAN: ST BARBARA COMP. WIN - CONGRATS.

HON. SCOTT ARMSTRONG: Speaker, I rise today with great pride in recognizing Musquodoboit Rural High School student Megan McCurdy for winning the St

Barbara Competition. St Barbara and its subsidiary, Atlantic Mining Nova Scotia, announced Megan as the winner out of 17 proposals submitted by three schools.

The competition was held to design a community space at the Touquoy lookout area as part of the mine's reclamation process. A committee of five members from the Atlantic operations reviewed the proposals, and Megan's win resulted in \$25,000 for the school. The school advisory council will now decide how the funds get allocated. Fortunately, Megan sits on that committee. A plaque describing the reclamation will also be located at the mine lookout site. As Megan said, this allows people to feel involved and see first-hand that mining doesn't have to have a negative impact on the environment.

As Megan finishes out her last year of high school, you can be sure she will leave a lasting impression, as well as a legacy of her contribution to Musquodoboit Rural High School.

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

PARTICIPANTS: SWEETHEART TOURNAMENT - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: The Sweetheart Tournament was held at Glace Bay Elementary over the weekend. According to players and coaches, it was exactly that - sweet. Every basketball player on each team received a valentine. The Tompkins Memorial Elementary Tigers roared this weekend, going undefeated, winning gold at the tournament, and returning a beautiful banner back to Tompkins School. Congratulations to all players, coaches and organizers.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

RECIPIENTS: KING CHARLES III CORONATION MEDAL - CONGRATS.

HON. NOLAN YOUNG: I proudly rise today to recognize a number of residents in Shelburne County who were honoured with the King Charles III Coronation Medal in recognition of their contributions to our county: Barrington Ground Search and Rescue president David Nickerson; Bob Grundy, who runs Rally Point Retreat, a peer support facility for veterans, firefighters, police, and paramedics suffering PTSD; Gary Hemeon, who is a peacekeeper and Memorial Cross Father of Christopher Hemeon; Island and Barrington Passage Volunteer Fire Department Deputy Chief Tyson Ross, who also serves as the chair of the Bay Side Home board; Tina Smith, who is the Silver Cross Mother of Sgt. Kirk Taylor, who was killed tragically in Afghanistan; and Capt. Christopher Ross and Johnny Butler, both of the Shelburne Fire Department.

I respectfully ask all members to join me in congratulating these deserving medal recipients and thanking them for their commitment to community service.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

MCFADGEN, NAN: CUPE LEADERSHIP - RECOG.

PAUL WOZNEY: Speaker, I rise today in recognition of a powerful, long-standing voice for labour in Nova Scotia. Nan McFadgen, the president of the Nova Scotia branch of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, has recently announced she will not reoffer for union leadership.

A licensed practical nurse and CUPE Local No. 2330 member for two decades, Nan was elected the president of CUPE Nova Scotia's over 20,000 members in 2016. That same year, she was also elected regional vice president for Nova Scotia on CUPE's national executive board. Nan's tenure leading CUPE Nova Scotia exemplified the working-class leadership Nova Scotians have come to expect from organized labour. Over the years, Nan has been a vocal advocate for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, renters' rights, patients' rights, and of course, workers' rights. Nan has said CUPE's strong standing in Nova Scotia's organized labour community is her proudest achievement.

I ask that all present join me in congratulating Nan McFadgen on her many achievements with CUPE, and in wishing her all the best in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

DEMONT FAMILY FUNERAL HOME: SERVICE - CONGRATS.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: The DeMont Family Funeral Home in Windsor has served our community since 1922, offering over 10 decades of continuous care and empathy during an extremely difficult time.

The original founder, the late Ira Lohnes, also became Mayor of the Town of Windsor, and later sold to Les and Faye Beazley, who then sold to Paul and Barb Beazley. Ownership changed hands again in August 2005 to the current owners, Jonathan and Emelie DeMont. The historic significance of a locally owned family business isn't something they have taken lightly, and they pledge to continue to uphold that tradition for many years to come. Last May, Jonathan and Emelie also acquired Lindsay Windsor Funeral Home, where Jonathan originally started his career in January 1998, which brings them an immense amount of pride.

I ask that all members join me in congratulating Jonathan, Emelie, and staff on their newest acquisition and for almost 20 years of service.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DARTMOUTH NORTH MASJID: IFTAR CELEB. - THANKS

SUSAN LEBLANC: Each year, during the holy month of Ramadan, the Dartmouth North Masjid opens its doors and hosts an Iftar celebration for the local community. It is always a wonderful experience of education, reflection on personal faith, and community connection.

On Sunday, I attended this year's community Iftar, where I joined teachers from the local school, the MP, the city councillor, my colleague the MLA for Fairview-Clayton Park, our HRP community response officer, folks from neighbouring organizations, and folks who live in the neighbourhood, as well as, of course, the many members of the Muslim community who gather at the masjid much more regularly. This year, there was a collection taken of food items for the Dartmouth Community Fridge.

I've been lucky to attend the community Iftar for several years, and each time I go, I learn new things about Ramadan, fasting, and the Muslim faith. I also meet so many warm and generous people, and I am grateful for their friendship. Thank you to the Dartmouth North Masjid for this wonderful annual event. Ramadan Kareem to all who are observing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

FISHER, OWAIN & CERY'S: CURLING CH'SHIP PARTIC. - RECOG.

TOM TAGGART: Speaker, I rise today to commend two up-and-coming curlers in Colchester North: Owain and Cerys Fisher of North River.

Owain and Cerys are heading to P.E.I. to represent Nova Scotia in the U21 Nationals for mixed doubles from March 15th to March 20th. It doesn't end there. Cerys is a member of Team Weissent, the 2024-25 U21 Women's Provincial Championship curling team, curling out of the Halifax Curling Club, and will be competing for the 2025 New Holland Canadian Under-20 Curling Championship in P.E.I. from March 22nd to 30th. Meanwhile, her brother Owain is a member of the MacIsaac Team out of the Truro Curling Club, who just happen to be the 2024-25 U21 Men's Provincial champions. They will also be competing in this year's Canadian championships.

March will be a very busy month for the Fisher family, and we will be watching them closely and cheering them on. I look forward to recognizing them in this House as Canadian champions before the month is over.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

NATIONAL SNACK DAY: SATISFYING CRAVINGS - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise to recognize today as National Snack Day. How do we celebrate Snack Day? Well, whatever your vice is to fill your cravings. I would suggest chips, cookies - Hickory Sticks are my favourite - chocolate bars, crackers, fruit, cheese. Well, you know what I mean. Today celebrates the joy of snacking. It highlights the diverse range of treats that folks enjoy. From sweet to salty, healthy to indulgent, this day is dedicated to those little bites that bring comfort and pleasure. It's a time to appreciate the role that snacks play in our lives, offering quick energy boosts and satisfying cravings during busy days.

Speaker, I would like to encourage each and every one of us to get snacking today, and whenever the belly moves us, so that we can be satisfied and not hangry.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

U.S. TARIFFS: NEED TO WORK TOGETHER - RECOG.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, I just want to recognize that we're entering a different economic reality today. The words from the Prime Minister about working together hold true. He actually mentioned civil society, labour groups, and businesses themselves, especially those businesses that are trade exposed. We are in this together.

There will be some pain in our province - retaliatory tariffs, potential layoffs, and more. It's not the time to divide people and weaken processes. We need experts engaged in policy and decisions around where public money is spent to soften the blow. One of the ways we can ensure that is public scrutiny. There is no doubt that we will get through this. Nova Scotians are resilient. We need our leaders to show an example of how to respect all views and have processes in place that people can understand and act on.

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

GAUDRY, ABBI: TRACK & FIELD ACHIEVEMENTS - CONGRATS.

HON. BRIAN WONG: Speaker, I am proud to recognize Abbi Gaudry for her extraordinary achievements at the Atlantic University Sport track and field championships in Saint John, New Brunswick.

Abbi, a remarkable athlete from Windsor Junction and a Lockview High alum, showcased her incredible talent by winning three gold medals for the Dalhousie women's track and field team. Her victories included the women's 60-metre hurdles, where she outperformed strong competitors, and a commanding win in the women's pentathlon, scoring an impressive 3,413 points. She also triumphed in the women's long jump, solidifying her dominance in that event.

In addition to her medals, Abbi earned a well-deserved spot at the upcoming U-Sport track & field championship in Windsor, Ontario being held later this week. Her outstanding performance has rightfully earned her the title of Championship Meet MVP. Congratulations, Abbi.

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

ORGANIZERS: GALLANT BASK. TOURN. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, the annual Paula Gallant Memorial Basketball Tournament was hosted by the girls varsity basketball team at Glace Bay High from February 14th to 16th. Sixteen elementary teams competed in a big-league style tournament. It was an exciting week of basketball. The tournament also held another mission: to honour Paula Gallant and shine a light on domestic abuse in our province.

The Greenfield Celtics boys and girls teams won the championship banners. A big congratulations to the Greenfield Celtics teams and a huge thank you to the event organizers. The ballplayers had a great time, and they raised awareness and created more spaces for conversations about intimate partner violence.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

DEROZARI, JO & BIANCA: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Speaker, I'd like to recognize Jo and Bianca DeRozari for all their hard work and dedication in giving back to the Eastern Passage community through musical singing and dance arts. Jo plays guitar in an all-Indonesian band, and Bianca is happy to showcase her cultural spirit through song and dance along with other Indonesian singers and dancers.

Recently, Jo and Bianca, along with their band and dance members, volunteered their time to perform for a local fundraiser. Later this month, I am happy to have them join me as I host the 5th annual MLA Multicultural Potluck. We are excited to have them join us to perform their beautiful Indonesian song and dance. With their beautiful store and restaurant in our community, they are a wonderful addition to our community.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in thanking them for giving back to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

[1:45 p.m.]

EL ESTE TAQUERIA: EXPANSION - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, five years ago, Dartmouth North got a new pop of flavour in the form of El Este Taqueria. Tucked away just off Albro Lake, Remelino “Mel” Madlangbayan makes incredible tacos, burritos, and other delights. Since opening his doors, Mel has operated with a grab-and-go approach. Everything is made in front of you to order and ready almost immediately.

When he opened his restaurant, Mel’s only goal was to be able to pay the bills. Eventually, like many chefs, he started dreaming of a restaurant where customers can dine in and he could see them enjoying his food from the kitchen. Very soon, Mel will be able to see that dream become a reality. He revealed back in October that El Este will be expanding and opening a new location right down the street on Barrington Street. I couldn’t be happier for Mel but also for the people of Halifax, who will finally get a taste of the fantastic food that Mel has been bringing to Dartmouth North for the past five years. I ask the whole House to join me in congratulating Mel on his cross-harbour expansion. See you there for a taco.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

DAURY, BETTY ANN: CORONATION MEDAL RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Queens County’s Betty Ann Daury on receiving the King Charles III Coronation Medal.

This prestigious award was presented to Betty Ann as recognition for the countless hours that she has given supporting our community, her workplace, and for the countless years she has spent supporting and mentoring people with intellectual disabilities. Special mention was made of her work and the many years of dedication to Special Olympics in Lunenburg and Queens Counties.

Speaker, please join me in applauding Betty Ann on this well-deserved honour and recognition, and in thanking her for all that she has done and continues to do to enhance the lives of others.

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

CAMPBELL, CRAIG: COM. SERV. - THANKS

BRAD MCGOWAN: Speaker, today I rise to recognize a long-time Cole Harbour-Dartmouth resident and exceptional educator, Craig Campbell. Craig is the principal of Woodlawn High School and is viewed by staff, students, and the community as an

exceptional leader who has built a team that is focused on ensuring students not only see themselves reflected in their school but also find success while they're there.

Craig began the Africentric cohort at Woodlawn High, and that class will walk across the stage this June. Craig grew up in Cape Breton, and both of his parents, Colleen and John, were teachers. They both taught me. They also did an amazing job raising an extraordinary son who has gone on to become a wonderful husband to Christina and dad to Katelyn.

Speaker, we are all very grateful for Craig's contributions to Woodlawn High School and our community. Also, I am personally thankful for the role he played as my official agent in my campaign. I ask the members of this House to join me in recognizing an extraordinary educator, an amazing man, and my friend Craig Campbell.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

644 REVITALIZATION NETWORK: COM. SERV. - CONGRATS.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate members of the 644 Revitalization Network.

This New Germany-based non-profit, named for the local telephone exchange, took shape in the latter months of the pandemic and is comprised of a powerful mix of newcomers and those with deep roots in the community united by a single passion: to make good things happen in our community. A lot is happening.

From running the weekly farmers' market to organizing children's play groups and computer classes for seniors, the 644 is constantly looking for ways to increase local services and supports. For instance, just a few weekends ago, I joined a group on a Saturday morning to cook soup and tea biscuits to stock the community food pantry.

I applaud the efforts of the 644 and encourage other communities to check out their model.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

AXE BASKETBALL TEAM: CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.

JULIE VANEXAN: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Axe Basketball Club's U18 Boys team, who took home the D2 Championship on February 23rd.

The Axe Basketball team was created to instill a lifelong love of basketball in youth of all levels of interest and ability. The atmosphere brings one of enjoyment, learning, and character building.

This team was created to give students who may not have a high school team to play on, or have limited opportunities in their school program, a chance to learn and enjoy the sport. They were able to create a team that fights together and wins together. Uniting as one, they played well, and I know their coaches and families are proud of each one of them.

Speaker, I ask the members to please join me today in congratulating the U18 Boys Axe Basketball Club on their championship win.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

THE STUDIO LOUNGE HAIR & ESTHETICS: SERVICE - RECOG.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize The Studio Lounge Hair & Esthetics, which is a family-owned beauty business built on passion, legacy, and community. Owned by a mother who always dreamed of opening a salon, it is now a thriving place where her daughters Caprishia, a hairstylist, and Taylor, an esthetician, work alongside her. Located in Kinney Place in Dartmouth, the salon is part of a historic space dedicated to Black entrepreneurship and healing. This family chose to build this business together because beauty is about more than appearance. It's about connection and care.

At the studio, clients become family. With expert services and a welcoming atmosphere, they continue to grow, uplift, and serve our community one client at a time. I ask all members of the Legislature to please join with me in recognizing the Studio Lounge Hair & Esthetics.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

WOOD, HARLON: DEVIL'S HALF ACRE MOT. RALLY - CONGRATS.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and congratulate Harlon Wood, the chairperson and founder of the Devil's Half Acre Motorcycle Rally in the Town of Kentville.

The Devil's Half Acre Rally began in Summer 2018 and runs every June in the heart of Kentville's downtown area. It's a fun event for all ages, attracting many sponsors and vendors, which brings an economic boost to the town. The name "Devil's Half Acre" was chosen for the event as it was Kentville's nickname back in the early 19th century. Back then, the town had a bit of a reputation.

I would like to ask the members to please join me today to recognize Harlon Wood and the Devil's Half Acre committee of outstanding volunteers who bring this fun event to the Town of Kentville every year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

SAINT BENEDICT PARISH: COM. OUTREACH - THANKS

ADEGOKE FADARE: Speaker, I rise today to applaud Saint Benedict Parish's outreach ministry program.

Four years ago, the Reverend Father Simon Lobo, the pastor of Saint Benedict Parish in Clayton Park West, committed to providing 10 per cent of their general collection toward the outreach in the Fairview and Clayton Park communities, which is an estimated \$120,000 per year. This generosity has provided the means for many individuals and families to pay their rent, put food on their tables, keep their lights on, and pay for medications.

I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in applauding the parishioners, staff members, and volunteers of Saint Benedict Parish for providing support to those in need and for their efforts to make the lives of others easier, instead of harder.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

BOYD, ANN & BRENDON: BIG B'S VARIETY - CONGRATS.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, I rise today to welcome and congratulate the new owners of the Lower Main Market in Oxford, or as it will now be called, Big B's Variety.

Ann and Brendon Boyd are looking forward to connecting with the community and growing the store so it can continue to serve the people of Oxford and surrounding area. Ann grew up in the Oxford/Pugwash area, and Brendon, originally from Cape Breton, moved to the mainland when he was young. Ann and Brendon welcome all to drop in to the store and are excited to see old friends and make new ones.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating Ann and Brendon Boyd on their new adventure with Big B's Variety in Oxford.

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

RICK BURNS: Speaker, before I read my statement, may I make a quick introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

RICK BURNS: In the gallery opposite, we have Claire Butler, a local Hammonds Plains resident and caucus member, and her staff. (Applause)

Speaker, may I read my statement?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, absolutely.

The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

BUTLER, CLAIRE: CAMPAIGN WORK - RECOG.

RICK BURNS: I rise to recognize Claire Butler, a lifelong resident of Hammonds Plains and a dedicated staff member at our caucus office. As a volunteer, Claire came door-knocking with me during this past election. She even convinced her parents to put up their first-ever election sign, something they never thought they would do.

Claire recently celebrated her one-year anniversary as communications officer at the caucus office. She works tirelessly and always with a smile and a cheerful word to support our MLAs with their communications requests. We are happy to have Claire as part of our team, as she spreads kindness and a positive attitude wherever she goes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

COLTON LEBLANC: If there are a couple fewer viewers on Legislative TV stream this afternoon, it's because there are a couple of extra viewers in the gallery. In your gallery, I'm happy to welcome my mom, Odette, and my grandmother Donna, for today's proceedings. (Applause.)

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

NEW DEAL DEVELOPMENT: HOUSING PROJECT - CONGRATS.

HON. FRED TILLEY: Today I would like to recognize an organization in our community, New Deal Development Inc. Recently, I had the opportunity to tour their second affordable housing project that they have developed in the town of Sydney Mines. It's a wonderful facility providing affordable housing for many seniors in the area. Led by Dave Julian, president of New Deal Development Inc., and Clarence Dawe, chair of the

board, New Deal Development Inc. has been supporting the Northside community for many years.

I'd ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating New Deal Development Inc. for their hard work and success in supporting our community. I can't wait to see what's next.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

BEDFORD BUS. ASSOC.: ECON. GROWTH CREATION - RECOG.

TIM OUTHIT: I rise today to recognize the Bedford Business Association. The BBA is a network of businesses in Bedford that aims to create economic growth while fostering community well-being. The Bedford Business Association has been growing. However, according to the Chair, Sean Murray, it is not well known that the BBA now encompasses all of the Bedford Basin constituency and also Bedford South. Businesses in Bedford that haven't already should reach out to them to see about getting involved.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

MORSE, DAVID: MLA SERVICE - THANKS

JULIE VANEXAN: I rise today to recognize and express my deep gratitude to David Morse, former cabinet minister and MLA for Kings South. David's dedication to public service and his unwavering commitment to our community have left a lasting impact on those who had the privilege of working alongside him. During my own journey to elected office, David's guidance and support were instrumental. His wealth of experience and encouragement played a pivotal role in my campaign. He not only shared his wisdom but also led by example, demonstrating the importance of integrity, perseverance, and genuine service to the people of Kings South.

David's legacy as a representative continues to inspire those who follow in his footsteps. I am grateful for his contributions, and I extend my heartfelt thanks for his belief in me and in the future of our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

KHAN, KHURSHID: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Today I rise to remember Khurshid Khan, a pillar of the Spryfield community. Mr. Khan was the owner of Khan's Take Out & Catering in Spryfield, and the first individual to bring halal food into Nova Scotia.

He was passionate about ensuring that halal food was accessible to all Muslims in Nova Scotia since 1984. He also owned a local corner store, when we all went to high school, called Krazy Khan's, that we used to go to, and he and his wife would give us candy. Mr. Khan was a man of integrity, honesty, and kindness. He loved our community and the people who came to his store. He often went above and beyond to ensure that everyone was able to access the products they needed.

Please join me in sharing my condolences with Mr. Khan's family, friends, and community as they grieve this immense loss.

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

S. COLCHESTER AHS: BASK. TOURN. - CONGRATS.

HON. SCOTT ARMSTRONG: I rise to congratulate the South Colchester Academy High School on hosting a very successful Division 2 Boys Basketball Championship on the weekend. Brette Holland, the athletic director, Ginger Carson, the principal, and their team of volunteers put on tremendous provincials. All the teams played very well. I have to congratulate Northeast Kings Education Centre in the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board's constituency for their championship. It was a great game played by all - very sportsmanlike. Congratulations to all the teams, and congratulations to the school for putting on a very successful tournament.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

SMITH, SUE: 65TH BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: I'd like to wish my dear friend Sue Smith a happy 65th birthday. (Applause.)

THE SPEAKER: Order. 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.: TARIFF SUPPORTS - REVEAL

CLAUDIA CHENDER: As promised, the March 4th tariff deadline is here, and the tariffs have been imposed. Workers, manufacturers, fishers, growers, small business owners, everyone is watching and waiting to see how they will be impacted. My question for the Premier is: When will Nova Scotians impacted today know what supports will be available through this difficult time?

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: I want to acknowledge that these are extraordinary times and this is an extraordinary challenge for our province. I just want to acknowledge that the Province has responded to challenge and adversity at times in the past and will do so again. We as a government - all members of this Legislature - will respond to these enormous challenges. I want to point out that the first inkling that these tariffs would come was in December. This has impacted our thinking ever since and is reflected in our budget, which is a budget to stimulate the economy of Nova Scotia through tax cuts, through an extraordinary investment in infrastructure, and as other impacts as well.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Yet we've spent the past few weeks in this House debating the rules of debate, changes to government accountability - when what we need is a plan for the Nova Scotians affected. Nova Scotians from every corner of this province are worried about what this will mean for their paycheque, for their expenses, for their family's budget, for their livelihood. My question is: When will this government start working on the issues that Nova Scotians actually elected them to do?

JOHN LOHR: I want to say that as a government, we've been responding to the tariff issue ever since we became aware of it. I want to acknowledge the hard work the Premier has done. He's seen as a leader in Canada on the response. Clearly, one of the outstanding things that needs to be done is to change the way we do business with each other. The interprovincial trade barriers are something that have to change. We're seen as a leader in that effort, Nova Scotia is. Thank you to the Premier.

We know that even in small ways, we can all do a bit more business with other provinces, with Nova Scotians. We can change the economy of our province. I want to acknowledge that. I want to mention the fact that we've invested in Nova Scotia Loyal and continue to do so.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The government estimates that last year, Nova Scotia's top exports were tires at \$1.5 billion; fish and seafood at \$1.2 billion; forest products at \$430 million; agriculture and agrifood products at just under \$300 million. This revenue isn't just columns on a spreadsheet. It's thousands of people's livelihoods and the economic prosperity of our communities. The key thing that needs to be done is to let these individuals know how they will be supported. I'll ask again: Can the Premier stand up in

this House and tell people what is being done to protect our local jobs, businesses, and communities?

JOHN LOHR: I can say that since December, our government has met with hundreds of business groups, individual businesses, and Chambers of Commerce. We are listening. We have set up a tariff hotline for individual companies to call in. We are looking for the feedback from that. We realize these are extraordinary times. The tariffs will be devastating - challenging for our province and challenging for our American neighbours. We will work through this. Nova Scotians have faced adversity in the past and triumphed. We will triumph again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Liberal Party.

PREM.: TARIFF CONTINGENCY FUND - INCREASE

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: The new U.S. tariffs will have serious consequences for workers, families, and businesses across Nova Scotia. We stand united in pushing back against these harmful trade barriers and appreciate the efforts that many people across this province are putting forward. At the same time, we know the economic state of our province is precarious. We have a \$700 million deficit and a rising debt to GDP ratio, which raises some serious concerns about our ability to respond effectively. My question to the Premier: Does he believe that a \$200 million contingency fund is truly enough to support effective industries and workers during this difficult time?

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: We are bringing in a stimulus package in our budget for Nova Scotians to stimulate our own economy, to create made-in-Nova Scotia wealth - a \$500 million tax cut directly to Nova Scotians - the largest-ever capital plan delivering things we need, like schools and hospitals and roads and new homes. We are doing that. As well, we have, as the member mentioned, a contingency fund. We are investing in Nova Scotia Loyal. We're investing in Nova Scotia businesses.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: We know that workers across the province are already feeling the pressure of these new tariffs. We need to ensure that they have the support they need. According to the government, one in 16 jobs in Nova Scotia relies on trade with the U.S. The government has set aside a \$200 million contingency fund, but we've yet to hear how that number was determined. Can the Premier share the rationale behind this figure and explain how his government arrived at it?

JOHN LOHR: I just want to again reiterate the hard work the Premier has done and the national recognition we have gotten for the work we're doing on interprovincial trade and on all of the other aspects of this. As far as the contingency fund is concerned, we communicated with a number of experts across the financial sector and across the country,

looking at other provinces and their response. We believe that this amount will be adequate, if necessary. We will do more if necessary. The Province has responded to tragedy and to crisis. We've responded to COVID. We've responded to Hurricane Fiona. We've responded to floods and fires. We will respond to this crisis as well.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: We support the creation of a contingency fund and believe that it should be used strategically to protect and strengthen the industries that drive our economy. Investments in local market development and interprovincial trade and projects like mine reclamations can provide long-term stability for workers and communities. Can the Premier commit to ensuring that these funds will be directed toward initiatives that will create real economic resilience for Nova Scotia workers and businesses?

JOHN LOHR: We as a Province realize that we need to not only do more business with ourselves through Nova Scotia Loyal but need to do more business with other Canadian provinces. We are making those things happen. Nova Scotians will respond to this adversity. We realize that we need to take advantage of the natural resources that we have in our province. That's another aspect of this. That is something that has come out of our recognition that we cannot be as reliant on our U.S. neighbours as we have been in the past. The world is rapidly changing. We will respond to this adversity. We will overcome it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ACSW: INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE - ACT

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Since October there have been eight confirmed deaths as a result of intimate partner violence in our province - another one just recently. This is an epidemic. Urgent action is needed. Organizations like the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia have been asking for stable core funding for years and they have still not received assurances. Long-term predictable funding will provide life-saving services to those experiencing gender-based violence. Eight lives have been lost since we passed legislation to declare this an epidemic. Why hasn't the government acted with epidemic-level funding?

HON. LEAH MARTIN: We will always want to do more in this area. I want to acknowledge that intimate partner violence and gender-based violence is an epidemic, and it needs to stop. That's why this government last year identified and then named it as an epidemic. In terms of the funding and the epidemic-level response, we are seeing that, both in the dollars we invested last year with an historic investment - the biggest one in over two decades - and \$103 million across all of government. It's not a singular budget line item in one department; it's all of us across government and an all-of-society approach, which is the biggest change that we can possibly achieve.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Many frontline organizations disagree. One-time announcements and status quo funding bundles are not stable, core funding, and the minister must know that. The most recent budget lets down hundreds of thousands of women and gender-diverse people across this province. There is no new spending to address gender-based violence, and there is no increase in core funding to support the organizations that are doing the work. Nova Scotians deserve better. Will the Premier provide increased stable, core funding to these frontline organizations to help save lives in this budget? Yes or no.

LEAH MARTIN: The investments that were made as part of the 2024-2025 Budget are investments that we will stand by year after year. We're standing by the investments, but we're also changing the system. When you're talking about changing the system, that's a huge part of the discussion. That's a major overhaul - that cultural change, that societal change. That's something to speak about and be proud of. Do we want to do more every single day? Absolutely. Every single person in this government is taking a piece of that work, applying it to their day-to-day work, and seeing it show up in every single department. I'm proud of that change, and there's more we want to do, but we'll continue to work hard every day to make that change happen.

RTA: RENT CONTROL - IMPLEMENT

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Yesterday, media reported that some of the most affordable rentals in the city have gone up in price by more than 40 per cent in the last four years. Renters are struggling as costs soar. There are many things the government can do to help if only they had the political will to act. My question to the minister is: Will the minister commit to implementing rent control and bringing in an enforcement branch so renters and rental markets can be insulated from some of the shocks that will come, starting today, with the tariffs?

HON. JILL BALSER: We know that Nova Scotians are concerned and scared. They know we are a government that is going to be there for them, especially during this challenging point in time. We do have a Residential Tenancies Program, and I want every Nova Scotian to know that it is a program that works. If a tenant does find themselves in a situation where they're in a conflict or at odds with their landlord, they have to reach out to us. That's exactly what Service Nova Scotia is intended to do. We put Nova Scotians at the heart of everything we do. We always want to be able to look for improvements in the program, and we will continue to do that. I stand here very proudly, knowing that our government has made incredible investments in housing because that's what we want: for Nova Scotians to have choice.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: With respect, this government has not been there for renters - categorically. As for good ideas to improve the system, the government's own report said they should bring in an enforcement branch, and they trashed it. It doesn't make any sense. Renters are so vulnerable now, more than ever. Instead of protecting them, this

government is making it easier to evict people. Soon landlords will be able to begin that process after only three days, not 15, denying tenants the ability to challenge a decision or seek assistance from navigators. This will lead to an increase in evictions. In this market, at this time of year, that is an enormous concern.

My question to the minister is: Will she pause this policy so renters do not literally find themselves out . . .

[2:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order.

The honourable Minister of Growth and Development.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I would respectfully ask the member to review that policy. When we're talking on the floor of the Legislature, it's important to have facts. It's important to talk about the entirety of the process and not take a piecemeal approach to taking apart that policy change. There were a lot of things missing in that story that the member is referencing. I spoke about it last night in Estimates. To insinuate that we're not investing in affordable housing is incredibly wrong. We're making historical investments in affordable housing - \$120 million in the last two years alone. We'll continue to work with the community as our partners, because they are a valued part of the solution.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

GAD: AFFORDABLE HOUSING - INCREASE

SUZY HANSEN: If people review the tapes, that is not what we did. We did not insinuate at all. We asked questions. Speaker, this government has repeatedly claimed that building new homes is the solution to the housing crisis, yet data shows that the cost to rent Nova Scotia's newest rental housing units is nearly double the price of the oldest apartments. Meanwhile, the affordable housing stock that we do have is disappearing faster than we can replace it. To the minister responsible for housing: When will this government admit that it is failing to keep housing affordable for Nova Scotians?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I will admit that we are the first government to actually implement a housing plan - groundbreaking investments across the spectrum, including for affordability. We want to continue to create the conditions to build more housing across the spectrum. We're at 125 per cent of our target for 2028. As I indicated before, we're not letting go of the gas pedal. We'll continue to do more. We want to work with our community housing partners. We want to work with non-profits. We want to work with developers to build that supply. As it relates to affordability, I'll remind the member that we announced a lot of public housing in the last couple of years.

SUZY HANSEN: I wouldn't be excited about 125 per cent of the 16,200 when more than half of those affordable housing units are rent supplements. This government boasts about its investments in public housing. What has been announced so far is a drop in the bucket compared to the thousands of truly affordable units being lost to rising rents and redevelopment. Experts say protecting existing affordable housing must be a priority, yet this government has failed to act. Will the minister responsible for housing explain why they have an inadequate plan to stop the loss of affordable housing and keep rents down for Nova Scotians who need it most?

COLTON LEBLANC: Our investments in the community housing sector - again, \$120 million over the last two years has enabled the preservation or building of 1,400 affordable units. I agree with the member that we need to continue the work that we started. We talk a lot about rent supplements. That was a problem before our government came into office. We have quadrupled the investment, recognizing that was an issue left on the corner of the table. We recognize that there were some changes needed to public housing to ensure there's fairness and equity, to ensure that the most vulnerable Nova Scotians who need it the most are actually getting into public housing faster.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

FTB: CONTINGENCY FUND PROCESS - EXPLAIN

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, today workers and businesses across our country are waking up to a worrying new economic reality. The actions of one man have plunged markets into chaos and put the economic well-being of our entire continent at risk. In this House, we need to make sure to work together across party lines to do everything we can to support Nova Scotia workers and businesses. We're ready to do that work, and we have been here suggesting ways that the government could spend its contingency fund to actually benefit Nova Scotians. My question for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: Can the minister clearly outline the process that will be used to determine who receives funding from the contingency fund?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that the response to the tariffs has been led by the Premier and Department of Intergovernmental Affairs. The communication with all of the businesses that we communicate with has been ongoing by the Premier and the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs. We will continue to communicate with all Nova Scotians. We look for feedback from all Nova Scotians on how we respond to these tariffs. We realize this will be a challenge for our province. We've met challenges in the past. We'll meet them again, I'm confident, as we see our economy change, and our world change in ways that we would not have wished it to change. We will respond as a province. We will listen to Nova Scotians as we respond.

IAIN RANKIN: Our budget deficit is concerning, and with tariffs, it's possible that we will experience a deficit of over \$1 billion. That is unless, of course, revenue projections

are off, as they have been since they started. The government must act across all departments to be responsible with spending to ensure we're able to meet this threat head-on. My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: Is he concerned that our growing debt - which already grew by \$300 million since we started the House session - will impact our ability to respond to tariffs?

JOHN LOHR: I'll remind members of this House and Nova Scotians that as a government we had four deficit budgets that we have delivered four surpluses on. We're investing in things Nova Scotians need, like hospitals, schools, housing, and roads. When we look at the capital program that we are doing, we ask ourselves: Can we afford not to do it? Nova Scotians desperately needs all of these things. We will continue to invest in Nova Scotia.

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

PREM: WITHHOLDING OF REPORTS - EXPLAIN

LISA LACHANCE: This government has a pattern of ignoring expert advice and keeping Nova Scotians in the dark. Reports on environmental racism, student housing, regional transportation, the food and beverage strategy, and action for the 2SLGBTQIA+community have been gathering dust for months. Paid for with public money, yet out of the public's reach. Nova Scotians deserve to see the findings that could impact their lives, but this government refuses to release them. Why is this government withholding these reports from the very people who paid for them?

THE SPEAKER: May I ask which minister you're directing that question to?

LISA LACHANCE: It covers the whole government, so I would suggest that it be the Premier.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Advanced Education.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to . . . (interruptions).

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order. First of all, I saw that member first, and I made the judgment.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The report that the member is talking about is the one that's in Advanced Education. What we're doing is we're using that report - sorry, it's in Education - to guide our code of conduct, which will be out at the end of March. I've had this conversation with all members of this Chamber. We support the 2SLGBTQIA+community. We will continue to do everything we can to make sure they're safe, and make sure that they have a place to study. If the code of conduct doesn't go far enough, we'll continue to work on it.

LISA LACHANCE: I appreciate the words of the minister because that wasn't even one on my list. I will update my list of things that we haven't seen. My question is for the Deputy Premier. Even when this government publicly releases reports, they treat it like a PR exercise, ignoring the recommendations and wasting public funds. They scrapped the Coastal Protection Act, despite Nova Scotians overwhelmingly supporting the Act in public consultations. The government also paid \$300,000 for a report on residential tenancies enforcement, and then refused to act. How much public money is this government wasting on reports it has no intention of following?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Premier.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: What is important for Nova Scotians to know is that this government listens to Nova Scotians. What we were told when we were on the doorsteps back in October and November is that they wanted us to keep building hospitals, to keep building schools, to keep building nursing homes, to keep investing in affordable housing, to keep doing the Coastal Protection Action Plan that we have. They spoke loudly and clearly on what they wanted us to do, and we listened.

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

DHW: EMERG. DEPT. CLOSURE - EXPLAIN

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. As of March 1st, the emergency department at Queens General Hospital will be completely closed on weekends - no virtual care, nothing. As of 1:30 p.m. on Fridays, anyone in the emergency department will either be put on a stretcher in the hallway of the medical unit or be transferred for 40 minutes to the South Shore Regional Hospital's ER. The Queens General Hospital's emergency department serves a huge geographical area, and the South Shore Regional Hospital's ER is too far in a medical emergency, especially with the EHS response times for advanced services. How will residents in Queens County access life-saving emergency care on weekends?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: It's an important opportunity for me to be able to talk to the folks of Queens. Certainly, through conversations with local care providers, the current model that we have has been developed. I want people to know that emergency care starts the minute that you call 911. We have incredibly trained dispatchers. We have people in the medical communications centres: physicians, paramedics, nurses who can support individuals. There are medical first responder units across this province who will come and support people when they are experiencing an emergency.

We are working very hard to support the people of Queens and others around this province. We know that there is a gap in emergency services with their clinicians, but I want people to understand that 911 and EHS are always available to them and provide excellent care.

LISA LACHANCE: The people working at Queens General Hospital have expressed their concerns about this current model. They want to serve their community. They need the support to do so. Will the minister confirm that no FTEs will be lost with the permanent decrease in opening hours at the Queens General Hospital emergency department?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: There is nothing that's going to be taken away from any of the hospitals in this province. Those cuts were under former governments, but not ours. We are very committed to recruitment and retention. We've worked with health providers. This is the model that right now is best suited for them to maintain their own ability to provide services as well as support the community. We'll continue to recruit folks there.

I want people to feel reassured that we have excellent emergency health services, and I don't want anyone to be afraid. We know that there are some gaps in our workforce, but we are working very hard to address them. Fear is not helpful. Nobody should ever be worried about calling EHS or seeking care when they need it.

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

DMA: OVERRIDING OF MUN. DECISION-MAKING - EXPLAIN

KENDRA COOMBES: Mayors across Nova Scotia are speaking out about this government's plan to override municipal decision-making. They're worried about having to take on debt for projects they did not approve, and they're warning that this is an overreach that could push communities to the brink of financial ruin. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs explain why this government is intent on steamrolling local governments instead of working with them?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I want to assure our municipal leaders across the province that they are important partners for us. I know that's easy to say, but there is lots of evidence for that. We have renegotiated the 1995 MOU in the past sitting of the Legislature, in the last three and a half years, including putting a historic amount of money into our municipal partners. We continue to invest in our municipal partners. We'll continue to do that. We've been good partners for our municipalities. We brought in the Municipal Code of Conduct. We've done many things to enable and strengthen our municipal partners across the province, and we will continue to do so.

KENDRA COOMBES: Yet the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities has called this government's plans "tremendously concerning." It is clear that this is another attempt for this government to consolidate its own power rather than work with others to improve the lives of Nova Scotians, and municipal leaders are demanding answers. Can the minister explain why this government believes it knows better than the local leaders and their residents?

[2:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. FRED TILLEY: We have a great relationship with all municipalities in this province, as well as the NSFM. We've met with them recently, and we are talking about a bill that is on the floor here. I can assure the member that we listen to Nova Scotians, but at the end of the day, we are here to fix problems, make solutions, and we are going to continue to do that work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DHW: FRONTLINE WORKER POLICIES - EXPLAIN

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Last week during Question Period, I shared the concerns of our frontline health care workers here in the House. The minister said I was making allegations and harming morale. I will table Hansard where the minister says, and I quote:

It does hurt the morale of every health care worker in this province when somebody puts allegations on the floor that are unproven and they tear down not only the work they do but also the people who are trying to lead them through a very difficult time. If the member would like to table that policy, I'm certainly happy to speak about it.

Last week, I tabled the auto pull policy three times, and today I will table the transfer tool. Can the minister please speak to these policies, now that they all have been tabled?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I'd like to start by thanking the health care workers in the leadership team across this province over the last three and a half years. They have done incredible work in order to transform the health care system in our province. There have been a number of policy changes that have had to happen.

We are undervetted in this province. There is no question about it. The projections from previous governments were for a shrinking population. We have a larger population than we anticipated. We do need space, both in community and in hospital. The policies that have been enacted in collaboration with things like C3, in conjunction with SAFER-f, in conjunction with mobility teams, are to support Nova Scotians across the continuum. We continue to look at how best to serve Nova Scotians at a time when our system is under significant . . .

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Will the minister commit today to ending this new practice in the name of patient safety? This use of this transfer tool could lead to misinformation or loss of the nurse's ability to ask questions at the time of transfer.

Nurses are being told that verbal communication is no longer necessary when a patient is being transferred from the emergency department to a unit or from the ICU to another unit. A nurse contacted me over the weekend and told me that when she brought these concerns to her Nova Scotia Health Authority manager, she was told to stay silent. The changes were going forward regardless of what the frontline workers felt. I cannot table these messages because of fear of being reprimanded. Can the minister commit . . .

MICHELLE THOMPSON: There are a number of ways that nurses give reports to one another. There is an SBAR tool that's available that nurses are very familiar with working. When nurses transfer patients, there is an exchange between nurses, whether that be in a different department or at the end or beginning of a change of shift. There is nobody saying you can't talk to other people. There is written tool that is available that outlines the information associated with the transfer of a patient.

My understanding is that is an accredited standard. We have different ways to communicate. One Person One Record is going to further help the journey of a patient through the system so that people have access to all of these records. I am confident in nurses' ability to safely transfer patients in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

DAE: UNIVERSITIES INDEPENDENCE - ALLOW

PAUL WOZNEY: Universities are essential contributors to Nova Scotia's social, economic, and cultural development. Their impact is immense: Thousands of Nova Scotians work, study, and learn at post-secondary institutions across our province. People are concerned that changes proposed to enhance accountability for public funding for universities mask thinly veiled attempts to control programming and academic freedom. The executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers recently said the government's actions represent unacceptable political interference. My question to the Minister of Advanced Education is: Can the minister explain why the government is acting to compromise the independence of Nova Scotia's universities?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: This bill does not compromise the independence of universities. I'm glad the member is reading what's in the news, because today the Auditor General released her report and was very concerned about the financial viability and sustainability of these universities. What I want - and I have been very, very clear to anyone who is listening - is for these universities to be around for my children and my children's children.

When I think of Nova Scotia, there are many things I think of. One of the things we think of is our post-secondary education from NSCC to our universities. We are going to continue to support our universities to the tune of over \$2 billion, which is what was reported in the AG's report. I would say to the member that we should know where that money is being spent.

PAUL WOZNEY: The Auditor General's report also found that a key factor in the lack of accountability is the department's ineffective use of its already considerable powers. She found that the minister has failed to use the powers he already has, yet this government is attempting to give itself power to appoint 50 per cent of the board of governors at universities and withhold funds if an institution cannot show how it meets the government's social and economic priorities. My question to the minister is: Can the minister explain how the power to stack university boards will result in greater accountability for public funds?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: First and foremost, we are not stacking university boards; we're working with universities. This is a framework. The meat and potatoes of this bill will be in regulations. We're meeting with university presidents this week and we're going to work with university presidents to create the regulations to strengthen the sustainability of the universities. We want to make sure that these universities are changing to face some of the issues that are coming down the pipeline. We've heard loud and clear from the university presidents that because there are going to be fewer international students, this is going to have a financial impact on them. We have signed a bilateral agreement with them, they've met every single standard and we're about to sign a new one.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

FTB: FOOD SECURITY - SAFEGUARD

KRISTA GALLAGHER: In 2022, our province had the highest rate of food insecurity in Canada. Now we know the problem has been getting worse. Feed Nova Scotia and the great work they do has been serving more and more Nova Scotians year after year. Trump tariffs are going to make this worse. Right now, Nova Scotians need assurances that their government plans to help them keep food on their tables. My question to the minister is: What is the minister's plan to safeguard food security in this province?

HON. JOHN LOHR: We recognize the immense challenges faced by Nova Scotians. That's why we're bringing in historic tax cuts of almost \$500 million, which is \$1,000 per family. Furthermore, we are ramping up our school food lunch program. We are multiplying it by four times. I would encourage the Opposition to vote for the school food lunch program this time, where they didn't last session.

KRISTA GALLAGHER: Nova Scotians have long known that agricultural land coincides with potential land areas for fracking, especially in the Annapolis Valley. Yet

when this government talks about its plan to start fracking, nothing is said about agriculture. My question is: Why is the minister failing to advocate for and safeguard the agriculture sector?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

HON. GREG MORROW: We're not failing to advocate for agriculture. In fact, the Premier is very clear that in our natural resources strategy for the province going forward and building the province's economy, agriculture is a big part of that, along with our fisheries sector, along with our natural resources. We can do two things at the same time. We can grow food here. We can increase local food consumption. We can help support our growers in this province and we can expand our natural resources and help grow our economy.

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

ECC: DONKIN MINE HEALTH EFFECTS - ADDRESS

KENDRA COOMBES: Last Thursday, residents of Donkin protested outside the Nova Scotia Government's regional office in Sydney. They are frustrated by how this government continues to ignore the health risks caused by ongoing exposure to the noise caused by the mine. Will the Minister of Natural Resources explain why this government continues to ignore the severe health effects being caused by the Donkin Mine operations?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: The work is ongoing to monitor Donkin Mine and the multiple levels on the environment side and on the labour side. I encourage residents to reach out to our local office with their concerns.

KENDRA COOMBES: For years, the residents of Donkin have been doing just that. For five years, residents have struggled with chronic sleep deprivation and deteriorating health. This government is failing to ensure that the mine is operating in a way that respects and protects community health. Will the minister stop the Donkin Mine noise?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: The company is compliant with the terms and conditions of their industrial approval. I know there have been concerns in the community regarding this. Staff in our Sydney office have engaged with those residents. We'll encourage those residents to keep working with staff to ensure we work on this together. It's not lost on me, some of the challenges that have emerged as a result of this. We'll continue to work with residents, and we'll continue to work with the company to mitigate this.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

FTB: TARIFF RESPONSE - ELUCIDATE

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: We have been following closely the announcement around tariff response coming from the province, which has included Cobequid Pass tolls, procurement changes, and taking products off the shelves at NSLC. This is a start, and we're eager to hear more details about the province's response. The Premier mentioned that the government is looking at all existing contracts with American companies to determine which contracts will and can be cancelled. My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: Will he table, as quickly as possible, the list of contracts they are reviewing that could be cancelled?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I don't have such a list available. When the individual contracts, if that does happen, we will deal with it when it comes. It's not our desire to see these contracts change. In fact, we know that we have many American friends and many companies that we would like to do business with. We hope that the tariffs will end, and we will not have to change any contract.

[2:45 p.m.]

We want to keep doing business with the United States. The reality is they have been a strong neighbour and a good friend of ours. We're very disappointed to be in the situation we're in. We want to continue to work with America in the future. However, we will continue to do whatever we need to do to respond to these tariffs. I know Nova Scotians are resilient. We will do what we need to for our economy, and our economy will continue to grow and prosper.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: We all agree that Nova Scotia must play a leading role in Canada's response to the tariffs. A month ago, when this first came up, the government outlined three actions that they would take. Over the last month, I'm sure that the Premier and the government have heard from Nova Scotians with ideas for other potential actions the government can take to respond to these tariffs. My question to the minister: What other actions is the government considering to respond to these tariffs?

JOHN LOHR: What I want to say to Nova Scotians is that we first became aware of the potential of tariffs - the likelihood of tariffs - in December. Much of what is in the budget is, in fact, a response to the tariffs. The budget we have tabled is a stimulus budget for the economy of Nova Scotia, giving back \$500 million in taxes to residents and a historic build on the capital plan. There are other parts - the contingency in the budget is part of that response to tariffs. We're looking at all we can do to grow our economy and natural resources as a response to the tariffs, looking at what we can do in regard to Nova Scotia Loyal and developing our own production of many items as a response to the tariffs.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DOE: ENERGY AFFORDABILITY - INCREASE

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, the Nova Scotia Energy Poverty Task Force, which included government representatives, delivered a four-step solution to address energy affordability last Spring, yet this government has refused to act on the report's recommendations. Why is this government refusing to make energy more affordable for Nova Scotians?

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Absolutely, we understand that there are challenges with cost of living that Nova Scotians face. As a government, we've invested significantly in supporting Nova Scotians with respect to energy poverty. Over \$250 million has been invested in energy efficiency programs. Just as an example, it's provided deep energy retrofits for 1,350 Mi'kmaw homes and over 2,800 public housing units. We'll continue to look at ways to support Nova Scotians. I'm very proud of the work that we've done and the work that was done by my predecessor. We'll continue to always look out for Nova Scotians.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Programs like HARP, the HEAT Fund, and the Seniors Care Grant are targeted programs that the government has talked about in this conversation before. They provide support to a few Nova Scotians who have to jump through hoops to get the support. What we need is a universal program that ensures that all Nova Scotians can afford to pay their energy bills, especially as we face the unknown times coming because of these tariffs. When will this government deliver real energy affordability for all Nova Scotians?

TREVOR BOUDREAU: As I've said before, and I'll say again, and I'll repeat it over and over again: We always are looking out for the best interest of Nova Scotians. As I've said, and I'll keep reiterating, we've invested a significant amount of money in efficiency programming and in other programming as well. Just to give Nova Scotians an idea of what these investments in efficiency programming have done: We've saved over \$180 million a year for Nova Scotians on their energy bills. These are important investments. We'll continue to look at what we can do in the future to support Nova Scotians.

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

OSD: FRONTLINE SOCIAL WORKERS - SUPPORT

LINA HAMID: Speaker, frontline social workers are struggling because of the broader intersecting systemic issues that folks they are working with are faced with. This includes unaffordable housing, food insecurity, and the lack of access to supportive services such as mental health supports. Does the Minister of Opportunities and Social Development have a plan to ensure that social workers can actually connect folks to the support they need?

HON. SCOTT ARMSTRONG: March is National Social Work Month. We want to thank them all for the work they do. I think it's one of the most difficult jobs in the public service. They see people on their worst day, and they provide necessary supports to make Nova Scotians' - who are struggling - lives better. We are working with social workers across the province to ensure that they have the resources they need. We have added resources so they can reduce the amount of work and time they put into administration, so that they can focus on what truly they need to do, which is supporting individual families, working with the children . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order, please. (Interruption) Order.

You're out of time. I know, but that's going by the amount of time you have to respond to a question. Up there is the - it's 2:50 p.m. We're all out of time. This will resolve it all for you.

The time allotted for Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers has expired.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, pursuant to Rule 5C, I move that the hours for March 5th be not 1:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. but instead be 1:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for the hours for Wednesday, March 5th, be from 1:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

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

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

KRISTA GALLAGHER: I'm here today to talk about and bring light to food sovereignty, often confused with food insecurity. I'd like to briefly discuss the importance.

Food sovereignty is the fundamental right of people to define their own food systems. It's about reclaiming the power to produce, distribute, and consume food in ways that are socially just, environmentally sustainable, and culturally meaningful. It's more than just a policy; it's a celebration of our connection to the earth and to each other.

In the rolling hills and the fertile valleys of rural Nova Scotia, this vision takes root. Our farmers till the soil with dedication. Our fishers brave the tides with resilience. They're the guardians of our substance, the stewards of our land and sea. By embracing food sovereignty, we honour their labour and ensure that the fruits of their efforts nourish our communities first.

I'm happy to offer a few examples today of international and more local examples of food sovereignty in motion. The Slow Food movement, which is one of my personal favourites, originated in Italy. This global movement celebrates traditional cooking and local food cultures as a reaction to fast food. By hosting events, protecting regional cuisines, and promoting sustainable practices, slow food connects pleasure and responsibility with the food that we eat.

The Nelson Mandela food garden initiative in the townships of South Africa is community gardens that have become hubs of empowerment. They provide food security, create jobs, and serve as educational centres for sustainable agriculture. A little closer to home, Indigenous communities in Ontario are revitalizing traditional food practices. They have reintroduced ancestral farming techniques, cultivating Indigenous crops like corn, beans, and squash, known as the Three Sisters. This can restore cultural connections and strengthen community bonds.

Of course, right here in Nova Scotia, TapRoot Farms and other local CSAs, like Hutten Family Farm and Four Seasons Farm, connect families directly with the source of their food and the farmers who grow it. Members of community-supported agriculture receive weekly bounty from the farms. In return, farmers receive community support and the cash flow they require to keep the farms moving forward.

FarmWorks Investment Co-operative allows citizens to invest in local food businesses like Fawn Restaurant, The Canteen, Valley Kitchen, the Flying Apron, Sissiboo Coffee Roaster, Bessie North House, Goodmore Kombucha, and the list goes on and on. By providing loans and support to food entrepreneurs, they strengthen our local food economy and increase access to local food.

I imagine a Nova Scotia where local food is celebrated and showcases the province's rich agricultural and culinary heritage. I imagine a Nova Scotia where schools have gardens and kitchens where children learn hands-on about growing and preparing

food. I imagine integrating agricultural education into schools, funding community workshops and supporting apprenticeship programs to cultivate the next generation of mindful food producers and consumers.

I imagine a Nova Scotia where policies actively support small scale producers, making farmers and fishers have viable and rewarding careers for young people. I imagine a Nova Scotia where we have pride of place in our food. In the hills of Italy, every meal is a celebration of place and heritage. They tell the world about it. Imagine a Nova Scotia where we revel in our harvest and we tell anybody who is listening about the bounty of Nova Scotia.

Our Nova Scotia Loyal program has the potential to skyrocket this pride. Let us step onto a world stage, not in the shadows of others, but radiating in our own light, where the spirit of Nova Scotia is cooked into every dish. I would love to see a Nova Scotia food and beverage strategy for Nova Scotians.

I would also like to see a Nova Scotia food policy council. Create a platform where fishers, farmers, Indigenous representatives, policymakers and citizens collaborate on shaping food policies that reflect local needs and values.

I image a Nova Scotia where we are protecting farmlands and fishing grounds. These are of the utmost importance to our province. And I would love to see a policy that prevents the loss of agricultural land, and developments to protect fishing areas from over-exploitation.

Finally, I imagine a Nova Scotia with a strengthened Indigenous food system that respects treaty rights and traditional knowledge. Food sovereignty isn't just about food. It's about building community. It's about embracing the opportunity to build a Nova Scotia that is more equitable, sustainable, and connected.

When we have a more food-sovereign Nova Scotia, we are creating more jobs and we are contributing to our circular economy, making Nova Scotia less food-insecure. Having a more food-sovereign Nova Scotia could also support reducing costs in public health, because access to fresh nutritious foods improves overall health.

Together, by learning examples from around the world and tailoring them to our own unique Nova Scotia context, we can craft legislation and funding that not only protects our local food systems, but also enriches the lives of Nova Scotians. Let's walk together on this path. Let us be the generation that ensures Nova Scotia's bounty feeds Nova Scotians.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I rise today to talk a little bit about some questions and some ideas around responding to child and youth mental health issues in this province.

It remains quite difficult, if not impossible, to actually understand or substantiate with publicly available data and evaluation results the state of mental health of children and adolescents in Nova Scotia including the rates of mental illness, access to treatment, and patient outcomes. That's important, because it's hard to know what to focus on, or if what we're doing is actually helping. Are people getting better?

[3:00 p.m.]

Within this government, there has been increased emphasis on data collection and evaluation on mental health. In many cases, there was a commitment to publicly share this data. I would invite the government to find ways to share this information more broadly. I think government has recognized the role of research, the role of community-based organizations, the role of clinicians across the spectrum of backgrounds. But together we need to understand how our children and youth are doing in terms of their mental health.

What we do know, we should be concerned about. Across Canada, 75 per cent of ongoing mental health illnesses develop during the youth period, between the ages of 12 and 25. That is affecting an estimated 25 per cent of the population. The peak period of onset of severe mental illness is between the ages of 19 and 25. However, the majority of children and adolescents do not receive needed mental health treatments in Canada, and only about 20 per cent of those affected get the help that they require.

Because of that unmet need, because young people are struggling to find the support they need, it's resulting in growing demands in other areas. In the past couple decades, we've seen a huge increase in emergency room visits by children for mental health issues and a huge amount of self-harm reported, resulting in hospitalizations.

Suicide remains the second-leading cause of death for young people under the age of 24 in Canada. Clearly, there's a lot we can be doing. Here are some important steps that I think we could be taking now, and that should be part of this budget, and part of the approach that we can all do as MLAs and to the government.

First and foremost is thinking about stigma. On one hand, we have moved a long way in terms of reducing stigma around talking about mental health - both from government and from community-based organizations. We've gotten to a point where people are more comfortable talking about anxiety, depression, and those sorts of issues. I'm not sure we're quite there on severe mental illness. I think we can see that reflected in the language we use and the reactions we have.

I would start this by imploring all MLAs to think about their role in reducing stigma and not perpetuate misunderstanding of mental health and mental illness, not to perpetuate

discrimination based on stereotypes or out-of-date ideas, or the idea that folks with severe mental illness are dangerous and that the only way to be successful is to be locked up. That doesn't help anybody. It also makes people scared to access help.

We want to make progress on this. We want to reduce stigma so that no matter who you are, no matter what stage of life you are in, or where you live, whether you're feeling anxious about a particular aspect of your life or you're developing anxiety, an eating disorder or a severe mental illness, you feel you can come forward and have the services respond to you.

This is also a lot of the work that community-based organizations are doing with young people. We need to be there supporting them too. Please don't reduce this to quick answers and quick thoughts about what severe mental illness is and how we can best treat it.

As I said, children and youth are underserved. In fact, they remain underserved in Nova Scotia. Looking at the wait times for community mental health and addictions in terms of non-urgent wait times, we still have some information online that is very concerning. For instance, for the 50th percentile of folks in Cumberland County - for young people - they will get to their first appointment in 37 days and their first treatment in 64 days. That's at the 50th percentile.

Maybe that doesn't sound very long to us as adults in this room, but of course to young people - 37 and 64 days - that's essentially a semester of school that can be lost, for instance. It can mean not being able to have a Summer job or not participating in a community-based organization. It can be lots of things - and those aren't our longest times. If you look at the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, at the 50th percentile for the first appointment, it's 106 days. For the first treatment, it's 98 days. Again, I can't do math in my head, but 106 to 98 is a lot of days. For a young person, it's an excruciating number of days. It can result in school failure, social exclusion, and worsening symptoms.

One of the things we know about early intervention for child and youth mental health is that - as most mental health issues develop in young people - timely and appropriate care can have life-long impacts on health and well-being. Children and youth who face long waiting lists for accessing mental health care are still waiting longer than adults in this province, despite having shorter windows for effective intervention.

The longer that young people don't have access to treatment, the less likely they are to adhere to treatment when it becomes available. Maybe some of us could imagine young people in our lives who wait six months for their first appointment for a non-urgent thing, and then that appointment comes up but they are having a good day. They are probably not going to show up - they've gotten this far. This is an anecdotal example, but this is borne out by the research.

As well, mental health issues become unnecessarily entrenched and can become more severe if not treated well and early. We have lots of models around early intervention for psychosis, for instance, that have informed the development of the Integrated Youth Services Nova Scotia model. These are really important steps. That's why when I look at the current wait times for non-urgent treatment, it's not just about that non-urgent treatment; it's also about those folks who are waiting within there. What percentage of folks are at risk of developing severe mental illness, and who are we missing along the way?

Globally, we've measured that mental illness and substance use disorders are the leading cause of living with disability and cost approximately \$51 billion annually in Canada. In Nova Scotia, we had a pilot around assessments for autism spectrum disorder and ADHD. There was supposed to be data collected that was supposed to be public. I haven't seen it publicly released. I know that folks in the sector haven't seen it, and we still have a large waiting list.

I know the minister knows that. I know the minister understands the impact of that, but what that means is that we have young people with neural developmental differences who are waiting years. They are starting school, starting junior high and, in fact, are trying to transition from public school to the next portion of their lives without having had adequate access to assessment or to services.

The autism wait-list remains - actually, now I don't want to quote myself - over a thousand people, and the ADHD wait-list is hundreds of folks. That doesn't just mean they are going to wait while they're three and eventually, by the time they are four, they're going to get their assessment. What this means is that folks sit there on the wait-list for a long time, and it doesn't happen for them.

What that can look like for folks is it's really hard to go through the school system, and we know that the inclusive education system is not achieving what it needs to. So folks are being excluded. Folks are leaving schools. Folks end up being home-schooled. They are also developing a history of education that is based on shame, exclusion, and failure - and it just doesn't have to be this way.

We also need to look at transition to adult care, which is a huge issue as well. I am going to table a whole bunch of these things at the end, I think, but I will keep them with me for now. Basically, at the age of 18 or 19 currently in the public system, folks have to transition from child and adolescent services to adult services, which are much different and often inappropriate for young people. Their model is as soon as folks can show up to appointments between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., our Integrated Youth Services pilots are really going to start addressing some of this, but they are not set up to address clinical needs in terms of severe mental illness. They are not set up to provide comprehensive psychological care.

In other jurisdictions, there have been changes to how programs are funded and how physicians are compensated to support that sort of continuous, shared, integrated care across that time period because, as I said earlier, that time period is actually when young people are most likely to develop mental illness. That is the time period most common for the onset of severe mental illness.

One thing I've been talking about during the session, too, has been the question of patient safety. We have a launch of universal mental health pilot in this province, starting in less than a month. One of the things, when I looked at other jurisdictions, that they really pay attention to were the issues around patient safety and making sure we are using evidence. For far too long in mental health, we have not used evidence-based practices.

What does that mean, and why is it important? If you show up at an ER with a broken arm, there is a fairly finite route of treatment that would be suggested and you are probably not, based on evidence - based on years of fixing broken bones - we know what we should do. You are probably not going to be sent home with, "Well, maybe you should get some more sleep." Or: "When did you eat?" "How are your eating habits?" "Are you playing sports?" "What is your relationship like with your friends?" Yet we still have young people showing up in the ERs, and that's how mental health issues are being treated.

There are evidence-based assessments. There are tools out there that we can use right then and there to get a better sense of where people are at.

I'm totally running out of time, which is what happens whenever I talk about child and youth mental health.

One of the proposals that I have been talking about is the proposal from the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology. What they say quite clearly in this proposal is that we don't have enough people in this province who can do the type of complex assessment and treatment plans that our young people need. That's just the reality of the situation. It's based on wait times for services. It's based on not having access to inclusive education, et cetera. These are important issues because we want to know, if we're launching universal mental health and spending funding, that what we're doing is actually based on evidence helping people get better, helping young people thrive.

In the U.K. and Australia, they have a universal mental health model, and they have paid attention to evidence-based practice. Why? Patient safety. They want to know that people who are seeking treatment through their programs are getting the best they can get, and that they are getting better, and that they are not deteriorating. I think that's really important.

I also just wanted to touch base on crisis response. We are starting in this province to have some limited clinician-led responses to mental health crises. We've had two fatal responses by police to mental health calls in HRM in the past couple of weeks. We're not

doing enough. We're not doing it fast enough. The models exist all around the world now, across Canada, where folks are able to provide crisis mental health response where the implications of police are more limited, where folks are better able to get the care that they actually need to be safe in community and safe with their loved ones.

With that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm not going to take too much time, but I just want to get on my feet very quickly in Supply to make a plea, more than anything else, to government. As we all know, it's tough times right now. There's a lot happening across the province, a lot of conversations happening at tables with families, a lot of questions that we'll have in here around supports the government will provide to Nova Scotians. We'll continue to ask those questions. Some of those questions, the media is actually asking, which I think is good. The more information that government can provide, the better.

Here's my plea, and I'm going to talk about this when the bill comes too. There's lots we can talk about - the debate around the Auditor General, and the government pulled that back. Then there's the privacy commissioner, and the government pulled that back. There's one thing the government hasn't pulled back yet, and this is my plea for the public service. I said this last night during Estimates, and this place was full of public servants who do the work to provide programs and supports. We all know them. We know many of them. They support departments. They step up in times of difficulty. We're in here debating issues, passing laws, passing bills, and ultimately, a lot of those folks are the ones who implement them on a daily basis.

We are about to go into an unprecedented time of economic uncertainty, which is going to be an all-hands-on-deck approach, where you're going to see multiple departments playing a role. We know that from last night - conversations through Estimates. We're going to learn that more. I want to say this: We're going to ask those staff, again, to work day and night, based on the conversations and the decisions that government makes - and we have legislation over their heads that can fire them without cause. It is destroying morale. I can tell you that. It is a massive problem. We are going to tell these employees: Go work around the clock to support families in the most uncertain economic time in our history while we have legislation over your head that can fire you without cause.

This is my plea to this government. You pulled back on the Auditor General for a number of reasons. It's the right move, obviously. The general public agreed with it too. They pulled back on the Information and Privacy Commissioner. That was the right move - again, pushback from the public. Transparency became an issue. I've said this, Speaker - as we go through the budget, I call them unforced errors. This is one, especially now.

As I said, we are going to ask the employees of this province to step up like never before, to design programs like never before, to leave their families and work seven days a week. That's what they're going to be doing. I saw it first-hand during the pandemic. I saw it again during hurricanes. I saw it again during 200-plus centimetres of snow. I saw this time and time again. They step up.

The message that they're getting from their government right now is that you can be fired without cause - and the government's going to ask them to build all of these new programs to help support businesses and to help support families.

[3:15 p.m.]

My plea to the government is: Pull that back. Pull that back, too, and bring some morale back into the public service, especially at a time when they are going to go to bat for this place. They are going to go to bat for every Nova Scotian, as they do every day. As companies teeter and as economic uncertainty comes, it will be those people, as I said in my member statement today, who are never in the media. They never do the clips. They never get to celebrate in here. They're doing the work behind the scenes. We all know it.

I know everybody in here respects them. I know that for sure. Whether I was in government or Opposition, whether it was a minister on the government side who needed help, they sent their staff to help me and vice versa, because we want to do what's right for people. That's what we do. Regardless of being in government or not, we're all here to represent our communities.

Again, my plea to you all - and I'm going to say this again during the bill - you have a chance to do something right here, and it doesn't cost you a cent. You know what it's going to give the government? A whole lot of goodwill and a morale boost within the public service that is going to need it. I can tell you I've had conversations with lots of folks in the public service - folks who I've had the privilege of working with in departments - and the morale has never been worse.

Now we're going into an economic uncertain time - a historic economic uncertain time - with legislation over their heads that could fire them without cause. I plead to the government: You can pull this back too. Do it for the staff of this Province.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

We will have a short recess while the committee sets up.

[3:27 p.m. The House resolved into the CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker John White in the Chair.]

[7:47 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened. The Speaker, Hon.

Danielle Barkhouse, resumed 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, has made significant progress, and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed? It is agreed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, would you please call the order of business Private and Local Bills for Second Reading.

PRIVATE AND LOCAL BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 48.

Bill No. 48 - An Act to incorporate the Trustees of the Third Cornwallis or Billtown Baptist Church, Kings County (amended).

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, this is an Act to incorporate the Trustees of the Third Cornwallis or Billtown Baptist Church, Kings County (amended). This is an act to update the incorporation of a small church - an active church - which makes more gender-inclusive language more reflective of how they operate. Billtown is a small community between Lakeville and Centreville in Kings County.

With that, I move second reading of Bill No. 48.

THE SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, the motion is for second reading of Bill No. 48.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Private and Local Bills.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 30.

Bill No. 30 - Windsor Curling Club Continuation Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 30, An Act to Authorize the Windsor Curling Club to Convert to a Society under the Societies Act, be read a second time.

The Windsor Curling Club in Windsor has been a staple in our community for 117 years. It suffered a devastating fire and was rebuilt in a new building. The Windsor Curling Club was originally, at that time - 117 years ago - incorporated under the Companies Act prior to the Societies Act and has requested that the Windsor Curling Club be changed from a company to a society. This change is a big deal for the club, its 240 members, and the long-term success of the overall club.

With those few words, I move second reading of Bill No. 30.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 30, the Windsor Curling Club Continuation Act.

All those in favour? Contrary minded. Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Private and Local Bills.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Would you please call Public Bills for Second Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE. Would you please call Bill No. 1.

Bill No. 1 - An Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I am pleased to rise and say a few words about Bill No. 1, An Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration.

This is an omnibus bill and although the Premier did open debate on second reading, he didn't actually say much about the bill or what the bill does. I'm going to make an effort to go through it because in my time as an elected official I have received more individual correspondence - not like email chains or campaigns - individual correspondence from people in every corner of this province on this bill than I have had on anything before.

Still it's coming in and still people I don't think actually know what's in it. I'm going to be honest: Omnibus legislation exists to obscure. That is why it's used. Why you would put so many amendments to so many different bills that do so many different things in a single piece of legislation - there is no reason other than to obscure the purposes of pieces of the bill.

We have been told that some of the bill will be repealed and we are glad. That hasn't happened and so I am going to go through this in some detail, although I am going to save the bulk of my remarks for Committee of the Whole House on third reading after we have had a chance to hear from people at Public Bills.

The last time Bill No. 1 was introduced, at the beginning of the sitting, folks who were here might remember that it was fixed election dates. That was the first bill this government introduced upon ascending to government. Good news: It's being repealed in this piece of legislation. We are hopeful that one day, too, the bulk of this bill will be repealed.

In the meantime, let's go through what's in here. There are some huge issues with this bill but the overriding one - and not to beat a dead horse, but it's something we have talked a lot about - is the, I would say, shocking lack of consultation that led to this bill.

We're going to talk about changes to the role of the Auditor General. We're going to talk about proposed changes to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, some lesser-known changes to the Municipal Government Act, to the Executive Council operations. In most of these cases, it is clear that conversations were not had with the impacted parties.

I hope that someone on the government side can get up and explain to us the rationale for some of these changes, because we have yet to hear good explanations about many of them. What we know is that aside from the lack of consultation, the other thing that many of these provisions have in common is that they reduce accountability, they reduce oversight, and they - I guess to put it more kindly - streamline processes. But streamline for whom is the question, Speaker.

This bill amends nine pieces of legislation. It amends the Public Service Act, making changes around salaries. It amends the Executive Council Act. And here's something we haven't really had a chance to talk about: Ministers will know, but most others probably don't, aside from the press corps, that when a decision is made by the Governor in Council, there is an Order in Council that is produced as a result of that decision.

When Cabinet is required to approve an agreement with an order of government or a municipality or an organization - and there have been lots over the years, of course; we're dependent on funding and relationships with all kinds of entities and bodies - that is then published as an Order in Council. It's one of the only ways, particularly if it's not something the government feels like announcing, or it's not part of the story that any government of the day is wanting to tell at that particular moment - we find out about a lot of things through looking at Orders in Council. That's how we know what our government is doing.

The amendments in this bill clarify, according to the notes, when Governor in Council approval is needed, and by "clarify" they mean "reduce." So in fact, there will be many decisions now that do not have to go to Cabinet, that can be entered into by ministers on their own authority and therefore there might be no record. We already have such a hard time getting information from this government. We haven't seen the contract for our hospital. We talked today in Question Period about the number of reports that have been done but not produced. This is a hallmark of this government. And now we may not even know of the existence of these arrangements, because the government is giving themselves an end-around to public accountability.

This bill amends the Civil Service Act. It stipulates that non-unionized employees - which is a big chunk of the public service - can be dismissed without cause. Those are the folks who have been filling the galleries. Those are the folks who are helping all these ministers do their work. Those are the folks whom we rely on in Opposition to help our constituents and to help navigate government services. Those are the people, as my colleague in the Liberal Party mentioned earlier today and no doubt will again, who will be relied upon to take point on our tariff response, to help businesses and communities and individuals navigate that.

Those are the folks who, in our non-partisan public service, we also rely upon to give the government good advice. So while we have a majority government in this House - and I think every member in this House is a respected member of the community they serve and has been elected to this House for a reason: Their constituents like them. More on that later.

Most of us don't have experience in government. Most of us don't actually - I would suspect that most ministers don't - the Minister of Justice aside at this moment, because we have a lawyer in that role - come to a Cabinet position with a great deal of experience about

the minutiae of the bureaucratic wheels that grind through that department. We rely on the public service for that. We need their expertise.

Yet there is an implicit threat to them in this legislation - and not just in this legislation. This provision is of a piece with the language around “problem stretchers” and “problem solvers” and the letters that are going out. While it may be well-intentioned, it is not being perceived that way. It just isn’t. It’s being perceived as a threat to people’s livelihoods.

[8:00 p.m.]

This bill amends the Elections Act - no more fixed election dates. I think the Premier the other night said: We figured out that doesn’t work. I think maybe the Premier decided that it didn’t work for the Premier and the Premier’s party and their electoral success, which in our system is his wont. I don’t think it is entirely accurate to say it didn’t work, and I think in fact, when that bill was introduced, we really fought against the fact that they were trying to legislate a Summer election date.

We thought: What an absurdity. Why are you going to bring everyone to the polls in the Summer? It’s going to depress the vote. There’s going to be lower turnout. It doesn’t make any sense. Well, that’s true; we saw that. What it does do is it creates certainty. It allows Elections Nova Scotia to plan, and it allows Nova Scotians to have an expectation of when they are going to the polls. The snap election this time - combined with the Canada Post strike - was the worst possible example of what goes wrong when you don’t have that certainty on the heels of a municipal election.

The number of people who didn’t know that there was an election - who didn’t know where to vote, in particular - was astounding, and we saw that in the overall turnout. I think it’s pretty sad and it’s pretty cynical to not take every opportunity we have to engage people in a public process. Again, this is one provision, but I think what we see in this provision is a hallmark of this bill, which is less information for Nova Scotians. In this case, it’s information about when they have the opportunity to choose their elected representatives.

I think that repealing the fixed election date is a real missed opportunity because as we know, fixed election date or no, premiers can still call a snap election. That’s the Westminster system of government. They will always have that power. This was a nod to the fact that it is challenging from an organizational point of view and it is challenging for people in communities to keep up with when elections are happening. I would say that far from seeing that this doesn’t work, we actually saw the need for this in the last election.

I know that the government probably doesn’t hold that view, because they came here with this resounding majority, but I think if you look at the challenges people had finding their polling station, if you look at the challenges Elections Nova Scotia had

communicating with people, if you look at the challenges that we had around information, I think an objective analysis bears that out, and so I think this is a real missed opportunity.

Now we get to the changes to the Auditor General Act. The government has said that they will be repealing these provisions in whole, and I will take them at their word, but I still think to the point of the hallmark of this bill being a lack of consultation, I do want to say a couple of words about how damaging and ill-considered these provisions are.

First of all, to be clear: These provisions allow two-thirds of this Assembly to fire the Auditor General without cause. The Auditor General, who is responsible for informing the public, for being a watchdog around public spending, could be fired without cause. There is simply no rationale for that. We are told it's to align with other jurisdictions. That has been refuted, including by the Auditors General in the jurisdictions that were named, which I think are two. It's just not true. We've been told for years now that we can't have NDA legislation because only one other province is doing it. Why aren't we aligned with them? I just think the whole alignment thing is a total red herring. I think it is to have less oversight.

The other provisions here would allow government to keep confidential reports of the Auditor General. Those reports are meant, yes, for government, and they are shared with government in advance of being published, but also, importantly, for the public. A lot of time and money and energy and social media is spent on discrediting the voices of the Opposition. We are in a partisan environment, and in that partisan environment the cut and thrust of political debate - most people won't pay attention, some people will pay attention, some people already know how they think, some people are very partisan or not partisan or care about one issue or another.

We rely on third parties. Those third parties are the Auditor General; the media. I know this seems quaint in the age that we're living in, but I still maintain that we do need some unbiased, respected sources of information. In this formation, in this House, as an independent officer of the Legislature, the Auditor General is that source. So to make the changes proposed in this bill to that office amounts to one thing and one thing only, which is reducing accountability of government decisions and government spending.

I'm going to table some articles that came out just to confirm by headline what I'm saying:

- “Nova Scotia government giving itself power to fire the Auditor General”;
- “N.S. Auditor General says she could not do her job if Houston government has power to fire her”;
- “N.S. move to allow firing of auditor without cause should be seen as threat: watchdog”;
- “Accountability at stake says AG as she urges Houston government to scrap changes to her office”;

- “Auditor General’s university report in limbo, as Tories bring forth sweeping changes in bill”;
- “N.S. information commissioner says government bill threatens right to access records”.

Oh wait, I’m onto the next topic. Hold on.

Those are a few of the titles. If that many articles could be written, with multiple sources - watchdogs, former Auditors General, current Auditor General, unbiased information sources - if this government had bothered to ask literally anyone, they would have been told that this was a terrible idea. It’s clear that either they didn’t - that’s the generous interpretation - or they did and they decided to do it anyway. In both cases, it represents a dramatic overreach.

I want to say that I am glad to see that it is coming back. That they are pulling back from this. If there is a silver lining, it’s that as soon as these changes were introduced, as I said, there was this public outcry. If you had asked me six months ago: If they try to make big changes to the Auditor General Act, do you think people are going to freak out?, I would have said no. I would have said: I’ve been around here long enough to know what people care about. They care about the cost of groceries. They care about whether they can find a home they can afford. They care about health care.

We’ve seen, even in the polling over the last year in particular, that people broadly care about the same things, but there are different ways to fix it, which hasn’t always been the case. I think that we’re in a different moment, particularly today with the imposition of tariffs. We’re in a different moment where people are paying attention to politics in a different way and where people are sensitive to government overreach because we’re seeing it south of the border.

I am heartened by the outcry over this bill because I think it’s a really good sign for democracy. I really do. People are paying attention. I am going to get through the other provisions, but I mentioned that I received a lot of correspondence. Most of the correspondence I received followed a very specific formula, which was that most of it was that I was copied on an e-mail from a resident to an MLA. Most of those MLAs were PCs, and most of the e-mails said: “Dear Blank, I really like you. I voted for you because I think you’re a champion for our community, and I loved the way that you reached out to us in the past, but I’ve got to tell you, I didn’t vote for you to do this.”

Again, I think it’s such a good sign of democracy. Again, people vote for people they see as people who will represent their communities. I think Nova Scotians are paying attention.

The next bill that this bill amends is the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I think the headline for this one is that the heads of public bodies can refuse

to administer frivolous, vexatious applications or applications that are too broad in scope. The point has been made in here a few times that the Information and Privacy Commissioner asked for these powers. I think that's true, but she asked for the powers - she did not ask for the powers to be given to the public service. There's a reason, and that's because the heads of many public bodies serve at the pleasure of the Premier.

If we are creating a regime where we say to people: Your employment is dependent on whether or not the Premier is pleased with your performance, and we are asking you to make a decision about a freedom of information request from a body or individual that may displease the government, that may contain information that the government does not want released, you're putting people in an impossible position. By accepting a request, in theory, they could be risking their employment.

We're heading into tough times and rough waters. I don't think many people want to risk their employment right now. I don't think they should be blamed for that, but this is not a responsible regime. While we've been told that this will be repealed, I think again it's worth making the point that we are convinced that there are indeed freedom of information requests that are vexatious and frivolous. I'm sure that's true. I think the Information and Privacy Commissioner is absolutely the person who is best determined to make that call. We support that office having that power, but we do not support heads of public bodies and the way that it's laid out in this legislation having it.

Again, it appears as though there were no conversations had about this provision. Another selection of articles:

- "Nova Scotia information commissioner says government bill threatens right to access records";
- "N.S. wants to deny 'vexatious' information requests. Critics say they are concerned".

Those are just a couple. Again, why the omnibus bill? Why the lack of consultation? Why Bill No. 1? Why now?

In his remarks the other night, the Premier said: This is about the issues of the day. We wanted to bring forward the first bill to tackle the issues of the day. I will tell you, not a single Nova Scotian I have spoken to thinks that these are the issues of the day. Not one Nova Scotian has ever said, You know what? I think we should be able to fire the Auditor General. I've never had that conversation with anyone. Never.

I think that it's disingenuous to present this as though this is an issue about the issues of the day. The Premier, in his remarks the other night, also referenced the Law Amendments Committee. I'm not sure why. I think he was speaking to ways in which this is connected to Resolution No. 5, which the government passed, changing the rules.

[8:15 p.m.]

In his remarks on this bill, he mentioned that he didn't think a bill had ever been amended at the Law Amendments Committee. This goes to oversight. This goes to - Resolution No. 5 was Number 1, Bill No. 1 was Number 2.

Here's a list of 295 bills that have been amended since the year 2000 in the Law Amendments Committee. That is a fraction of the time that the Law Amendments Committee had been in existence.

I think it's important that we put the facts on the table in this Chamber. I really do. I hope the Premier is listening because he has said many times that once he hears a good idea, he'll take it. I'm not convinced that's true, yet we will continue to try to present the information as we understand it and as we hear about it from our constituents.

I'm almost done. There are amendments to the Municipal Government Act, and I am hoping we'll have some representation on that in Public Bills. It seems there are some provisions that would create the same powers for freedom of information requests at that level as they do here. I don't know if that was requested by municipalities or not. I'd be interested to hear if that's the case.

There's a change to the Private Ways Act. I also have lots of questions about that. I suspect it relates to the government's surprise natural resource strategy that we've all been learning about in the last little while. It essentially removes the government from private land disputes. I think my colleague will talk about this a bit. We're not really clear about what impact that will have, but I'm hoping we will hear about it from government at some point.

The House of Assembly Act is amended in a few ways.

The Members' Retiring Allowances Act is also changed. MLA compensation is dealt with in this, but MLA pensions are also dealt with in this. I know there have been a number of retired public servants who have also pointed to their desire for a cost-of-living increase after a long, long time. A lot of the changes in this will result in a change to MLA pensions, so I think that's a conversation that folks are asking about.

That's a summary of what I've been able to digest of this bill. I will tell you that there's a lot more in here. We get these little explanatory notes on the bill; they're not entirely accurate, and they're not entirely clear. There are lots of times when it says "this clarifies" when it doesn't clarify - it substantially changes.

I would urge people to spend a little time with this. This is one piece of legislation that essentially seems designed to cast a pall over public information, the public service, and access to information.

I want to come back to where I started and say that this is not an issue of the day. This is not something anyone asked for. This is a well-known political playbook. First session, Term 2, majority government - bring the bad stuff. It happens all over the country. It has happened in Nova Scotia many times. Do the things that are unpopular at the beginning of the second term of a majority government. By the time you go back to the polls, people will have forgotten.

Maybe that's a good gamble. I don't know. We'll see. I still think the government has to answer the question of why. I started a little exercise last week as I was trying to manage my inbox. I started writing down the names of places where people were emailing me from on this bill. This is probably about one-third. I am going to read a few place names; Waverley, West Hants, Bedford, Halifax, Sundridge, Spryfield, Berwick, Dartmouth, Truro, Blandford, Lunenburg, Shelburne, Preston, Sheet Harbour, Head of St. Margarets Bay, Woodlawn, Paradise, Annapolis Royal, Queens - definitely a handful from Cape Breton, although they didn't make it on to the list. If your constituency wasn't mentioned, it doesn't mean I didn't receive an e-mail from there.

I want to just close by saying that, surprisingly enough, this is a bill that Nova Scotians care about. These are things that Nova Scotians care about. We are seeing the dismantling before our very eyes of what many would have called the greatest democracy in the western world: the United States. It's gone, pretty much, and it didn't take very long.

We still have ours, and it's semi-functional. But it only works if we protect it. So much of what we do in this House is not in legislation. It's not in the rules. It's convention. It's actually incumbent upon all of us to decide why we're here. Are we here to participate in a representative government that brings the concerns of the people into this Chamber, debates them, and then comes out the other side with the best possible policies to serve Nova Scotians? Today, more than any other day, that is a question we all have to ask ourselves. This bill, as it stands, does not do that. It does not address the concerns of Nova Scotians. It weakens our democracy, and Nova Scotians won't stand for it.

I look forward to hearing from people. I wish I could hear suggestions for amendments at Law Amendments. We can't. We don't have Law Amendments anymore. But I am certain we will have many representations at Public Bills of people who want to have their voices heard on this. We will be listening. I hope the government will be listening too. We will certainly be coming forward with amendments at Committee of the Whole House.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Liberal Party.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I'm honoured to get on my feet and provide a few comments about Bill No. 1. Some of it will be a bit of a reiteration from my colleague from the NDP.

I really call this bill the bill of unforced errors. I say, when I look at Bill No. 1, and I look at my colleagues whom I've talked to on the government side, not one of them campaigned on the vast majority of what's in this bill. None of the members of the government campaigned on firing the Auditor General. They didn't campaign on the changes that were going to be made around the Information and Privacy Commissioner. They did not campaign on keeping reports confidential and releasing the ones that may be in their best interest. I'm sure most of the members probably had no idea that this stuff was coming in this sitting. Credit to them, because I'm sure, as my colleague said, they received many e-mails, which we all did. I'm sure they went back to their leadership and said: We have a problem. There is a problem with what we are doing to give ourselves the right to vote to fire the Auditor General without cause.

I never expected in all my political career the response from people from that. It was pretty amazing. I've been in situations on all sides here where we've had some pretty significant decisions made where you get a lot of feedback from the community. People were upset. It was almost like the perfect storm. The stars aligned.

I said this in a speech earlier that Bill No. 1 came right on the heels of Trump and some of the decisions that were being made in the United States around the Trump administration trying to decide who was going to interview them. They were going to start making those decisions - that they were starting to consolidate power to the centre, and that certain people would make the decisions, and people were really paying attention to this. Lots of people watch the American news and this is all-encompassing on the news, so when Bill No. 1 comes, people are seeing similarities around it.

They are seeing this: Oh, we're going to fire the independent Auditor General, we're going to change privacy rules, we're going to make it harder for FOIPOP's, we're going to have the ability to keep reports of the independent Office of the Auditor General private. All of this stuff was coinciding with one another and as my colleague from the NDP said, I am heartened that people were paying attention to this more than I thought. People were like, wow, these are our public institutions and when we are in a situation as a province and as a country where our sovereignty is questioned all of the time by new leadership coming out of the U.S. government, people are elevated. Their thought processes and their emotions are elevated, so they are paying attention to everything that's happening in the political world.

They were really paying attention to this and they started making the comparisons between Bill No. 1 and the U.S. government. People can disagree with that, but ultimately when you put this much in a bill that takes away independence, that takes away transparency, that limits the ability for debate, of course people are going to ask questions. They are going to ask questions, and they did. I'm really proud of people for doing it, because it was ultimately the public who made these reversals happen.

Congratulations to the people of the communities across this province, because in

a supermajority situation, it is very difficult to be on the Opposition side and be hopeful that you can make change, because ultimately the government could come in with a two-thirds majority and do whatever they want.

Again, there is a lot to unpack in Bill No. 1. As I said, many of the changes have come as a result of the government stepping back. But I am going to say this again - and I said this earlier today - there is one more the government can pull back. As my colleague said, and as I said earlier today, and I said it tonight in Estimates - when I was over across the street at the Department of Municipal Affairs, the staff were there and I thanked the staff, and I've said it on record with the staff in the room - there should be no piece of legislation held over their head that could fire them without cause.

We can debate the merit of why government wants to do it, and I am sure people will do that. But in a situation, as I said earlier, where we are in the most economically uncertain time of our history - one of them, definitely in decades - the people who are going to implement the decisions that government makes are those people for whom we have the legislation over their head saying that we can fire them without cause. I can tell you they have reached out to me. They have reached out to other people in this House, and they have expressed that concern.

It sends an awful message to them, and it is something the government does not have to do, especially now. As I said, when they're going to go out and they are going to work day and night when that company needs help, when stimulus programs are released, however they look, when the contingency funds are spent, when the negotiations need to take place, all across this province it will be those people who will do the will of the government. The message to them is to go out, work day and night for us, and we're going to pass legislation that can fire you without cause.

It would cost the government nothing to repeal that right now - nothing. Motion on the floor, repeal it - costs the government nothing. As I said earlier, what do they gain? They gain goodwill in an unstable time. These are thousands of people who could be impacted by this, who are talking to their families. We're all having tough conversations. We don't know exactly what the future is going to look like.

These are real people who work for the government every day. Again, this is one of those decisions, along with the Auditor General, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and all the things we listed tonight - this is one of those things . . . (interruption). I can wait.

THE SPEAKER: Order. There's someone speaking. I ask that there be quiet in the room.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

[8:30 p.m.]

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Not one of these members, whom I know - and I have said this - all due respect to them because they respect their staff. I hear them talk about it in Estimates. I hear them talk about the support they receive from staff, and not one of the members in this House campaigned on telling their employees that we can fire you without cause - not one. Here we are, and the first bill that comes through here sends shock waves through the public service. Why? I've had to ask why so many times. I've been called out of order for getting - I don't understand this whole process around the decision making. All these things that never had to happen - it was all a consolidation of power, but not only a consolidation of power: It was a consolidation of people.

What you're doing with this, with the public service, is that you're telling the public service they're all on notice. If we decide we don't need you, you don't get to defend yourself. You don't get to defend the good work you've done on behalf of the people of communities and the departments that you've worked in. We can just fire you without cause.

It's sad. That's not who people are in here. I've known people for years in here. They'd never campaign on that. They respect the staff. They're the same people who support all of us in here, whether we're in government or not, and they do a good job.

Of course, governments will make changes around departments and how departments flow, and we can have that conversation. That's part of what I would call the unforced errors of this sitting. If anything, tonight - my colleague was excellent in her response to a lot of things. I've mentioned the same things. The biggest thing for me tonight was to get up for those people, get up for the people who do the work, get up for the people who, when we're all gone, are still going to be here and have families - in the thousands - who will expand programs and have done it for their entire career. They are going home now after work, talking to their families, and legitimately asking, Am I going to have a job? Am I going to have a job? I do my work every day. I perform well every day. Now I have a government that wants to fire me for no reason.

It's sad. Why? Why are we having another conversation like this about something that is absolutely ridiculous to think about? There's no value in the government doing this except sending the worst message at the worst time to the people who work for us. That's why I wanted to get up tonight. We're going to talk about this bill again. There will be public submissions, which I think will also help the debate.

Please - "please" is parliamentary - please, I'm begging the government to change this. Change this. You changed the Auditor General. You repealed it. You have repealed a number of things since this bill has come through, to the point I don't even know exactly what's in the bill anymore. I use that - sorry - Speaker . . . (interruption). It's my - go ahead.

THE SPEAKER: The last speaker said government members by name. We're getting a little relaxed in here.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm not coming at this in a huge political debate, pointing my finger at the government. I'm just asking humans to do the human thing as the people who were elected in this province, and send the right message to the employees whom we are about to ask to go to the line for government again. After pandemics and storms and hurricanes and floods and everything that has been thrown at us in the last 10 years, the staff of this government - of multiple governments, regardless of political stripe - have stepped up 300 per cent to do the work for the people.

All I'm asking is for the government to take a second sober thought, like they did with the Auditor General, like they did with the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and like many other things in this bill that they've pulled back. Pull this back. Pull it back for the people who work for you. Pull it back for the people who - as I've said multiple times - are about to go to the wall for all of us and go to the wall for Nova Scotians when the new programs come out in one of the most economically difficult times in a generation.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I'm just jumping up for a couple of minutes, specifically because I really want to talk about what happens when draft legislation is perhaps not well thought out. Perhaps it's not subject to consultation. Perhaps it really has unintended consequences and creates unintended concern and worry. I'm going to give one very specific example.

In Part V of Bill No. 1, under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act - and again, this may change, we don't know what's coming forward - under Clause 18, it talks about: The head of a public body may disregard one or more requests for correction of the applicant's personal information if the head is of the opinion that the requests are trivial, frivolous, or vexatious. There are a couple of other subclauses, but you get the idea.

The head of a public body may, in fact, refuse to update somebody's information. Maybe that's not what it means, but these are the questions we have, and I want to understand what this means. I've been contacted by folks who are very concerned about this and what this means in terms of being able to have their name and pronoun recognized, and their name and gender recognized. Again, given the environment and the ecosystem which we are part of these days, that's a very real concern.

I don't think that's the intent of this government, but a bill becomes a law - we know how that all works - and thus it's sitting there on the books. If we really don't know

how our bills are being developed, if we don't understand the consequences, we are not being responsible with our lawmaking responsibility as members of the Legislative Assembly. That was really all I wanted to bring tonight. I think this is a great example of really rushed legislation that just wasn't ready and had no consultation or analysis.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I'm pleased to say a few words on this bill. I'll start with just saying that on principle, I am opposed to omnibus bills and the way that they amend several different pieces of legislation that have nothing to do with one another. I resisted them when they were brought to me as consideration to effectively get multiple bills through the House quickly and not have longer days in the House and ultimately longer sittings.

I think this is a clear example of why they're bad. I've never seen what took place with not only one but two parts of the bill basically saying in advance that they will be changed in advance of the next reading, before the next reading even came to the House, before the public had their say on the former Law Amendments Committee.

The bill's name itself, about respecting government organization administration, is the opposite of what I think it's trying to achieve. It's not really respecting the offices that hold the independence, whether that is the Auditor General or the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

It is a good thing that there is the commitment from the government that they are going to pull back on some of those commitments. Nova Scotians should be congratulated for that. The cynical side of me thinks that when the public was outraged at what was happening, it wasn't necessarily about knowing exactly what the Auditor General does - the importance of independence - and the importance of the independence of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and not about being as outraged at the other parts of the bill. There is a lot of respect for the office of what the Auditor General does, even not knowing the importance of all the reports and the recommendations on the overspending and all the rest that the government is ignoring.

If you look at surveys in terms of respect for professions, what is in this bill still does take away the effectiveness of opposition members - politicians - and takes away the ability for civil servants to do their jobs without the threat of being let go. I would venture to say that the public may not have the same level of respect for what politicians do, in general. I think that's fairly well known - that politicians don't rank high - and I think the government knows that. I think the government is finding it easier to beat up on opposition and the length of time that opposition members can speak - and even media. There's certainly a growing part of our population that doesn't have respect for mainstream media. We see that more and more.

In some corners, there is a lack of respect for some of the work that the public service does and this idea that it's a downtown Halifax thing.

I don't think there are going to be any more changes, despite what the Premier said about being open to more changes. I think he has read enough from what Nova Scotians had to say when the bill was introduced. Despite saying that he wasn't going to make any changes when the Auditor General first brought up her concerns that they were going to continue with the bill, he decided at a later date that there was too much noise around this, and that it could become a problem.

It is odd to be debating a bill that is going to be amended and not having the information before us. Again, I've never seen that before.

My colleague mentioned the parts of Part II and several other parts in this bill. I'll mention Part III because that's repealing the fixed election date. I have to say this because in 2021, I was asked about this many times, and I gave the honest answer that I believed most premiers didn't respect the date. If we put it in law, history shows that premiers simply don't follow the date.

The rebuke we got from the now-Premier was fascinating, especially after he brought it to the House. I was surprised that his first bill - he brought the bill forward to repeal it. He referred to the debate where I was asked that question and how shocked he was - I think he referenced he was talking with family members or friends - how shocked that I said that no premier follows that date.

I feel completely vindicated. Not only did he not follow it on his first chance, but he is now repealing the fixed election date with no real reason other than he was wrong. We technically did have a fixed date beforehand. It's a maximum of five years, so when we brought in a fixed date, it just brought that down to a four-year term. It's illegal to go past a five-year term in the province. Anyway, that's Part III.

The other part is around the FOIPOP - again, hard to comment on when we don't have the amendments before us on what exactly they're pulling back. I did note, when the Premier spoke to debate in this reading, that he said we already are the best. We are already responding to more than any other jurisdiction, I think. I'm paraphrasing - at least most jurisdictions.

It begs the question: Why is the change needed? Also: Why are we getting so many requests, and why is that growing exponentially every year? Is that a symptom of an open government - a government that is proactively sharing information with Nova Scotians? Or is it that it is getting harder and harder to get information from the government?

It just begs the question of what the problem is that the government is trying to solve with this bill. What this bill does do, and likewise with Resolution No. 4, is it clearly

shows the government does not like criticism and does not like public scrutiny. I think that is a clear signal. What makes that even more of a challenge is the concentration - and I can speak from experience with this - the concentration of the power of the Premier's Office. That's increasing. All parties, I think folks would know, consolidated power. This goes back decades, and certainly federally goes back a number of years.

[8:45 p.m.]

The reduction of transparency, the reduction of oversight, allowing fewer and fewer people to make decisions, makes that so much worse. We don't even have mandate letters anymore. It's an incremental erosion of public accountability. When mandate letters are now advertisements on the front page of the *Chronicle Herald* and are completely not respectful of the myriad of issues in different departments and what they should be working on and focused on, it's just a pattern of other issues and other actions that are taking place, even aside from the legislation - terminating Communications Nova Scotia, concentrating that within the Executive Council, which is concentrating it in the Premier's Office.

With my last 51 minutes, I'm going to speak about . . . (laughter). We still have Parts VI, VII, IX, X and XI, which I won't go through in detail. Obviously, I have some issues with this bill. I look forward to what Nova Scotians have to say at Public Bills Committee.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

PAUL WOZNEY: I won't speak broadly on the bill. I think other colleagues in various parties for the Opposition have captured a range of concerns and questions that we have about this omnibus legislation. I do want to talk for a couple of minutes about one of the concerns that I have that intersects with other legislation that's on offer by this government.

In particular, I'm concerned about the intersection of the portion of this legislation that gives this government very lightly checked ability to dismiss public servants without cause. Other speakers have talked about the impact on morale, and the vital importance of the public service at the moment that we find ourselves in. I want to talk a little bit about how the ability to terminate public servants without cause intersects with proposed changes in other legislation.

If this legislation were to pass as presented, and this government gave itself a Sword of Damocles to hang over staff, and then it turned its mind to Bill No. 12 - one of the concerns that we have about Bill No. 12 is that the government, despite only funding universities on average of 30 per cent of their operating budget - I'm talking about the intersection, the interplay with this legislation with other legislation on the docket.

If we pass this legislation, we come to Bill No. 12, where the government intends

to give itself the power to name up to 50 per cent of the composition of any university board. Those positions won't be filled through the Governor in Council process. They will be appointments by the minister, and they will be public servants. I want to sit with that for a minute. Members of boards of any kind have a fiduciary responsibility as a board member to act in the best interests of the entity that they are a member of the board for.

It raises questions about whether or not public servants who need to worry about whether or not they will keep their employment if they do something other than what they are directed to do by a minister or a deputy. It raises real concerns about whether or not public employees who exist under this kind of control can discharge the duties required of them as board members of universities.

This legislation doesn't only impact the things that have been addressed already. Its tendrils creep into other legislation. Its tendrils reach into other sectors above and beyond what's explicitly outlined in Bill No. 1. It has potentially pernicious effects when it comes to university governance - the fact that the minister is going to appoint employees who can be fired without cause to carry out priorities in decision-making concerning university governance programming. If they fail to execute that duty in a manner that's satisfactory to the respective minister, they may not have a job. That's not a good thing.

Before we move on, second reading is an opportunity for us to think about or raise questions that we have about the potential impact of a bill if we pass it as is. Before we move to Public Bills Committee to hear commentary from the public and concerned parties, before we hear from expert witnesses, before it comes back to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills, this is the appropriate time in the legislative process for us to sit with questions that we have about impacts that a bill may have. And whether this impact is intended or unintended, it is a problematic impact.

Should we pass Bill No. 1 as currently constituted, it would have negative ripples in other legislation that we will soon debate in this House. If both pieces of legislation are passed as currently constituted, it could have a dire impact on the way that universities in Nova Scotia work. For that reason, I think it's important to flag this concern at this point in the process. I realize I could have brought it up in third reading or Committee of the Whole House on Bills, but I think if we are truly in the spirit of the process at second reading going to sit with the things that maybe give us pause or make us feel uncomfortable, it seems to be unwise to sit on this input at this point in the legislative process.

Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on second reading and I look forward to what we'll hear in Public Bills Committee on Bill No. 1 and conversing more on this when it comes back to Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 1.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Bills.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, that concludes Government Business for today. I move that the House do now rise and meet again - I've already given the hours, obviously. Following the Daily Routine and Question Period will be Opposition Business. I will pass it over to the honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

LISA LACHANCE: I did have the numbers in front of me. Just one second.

THE SPEAKER: You'll find them.

LISA LACHANCE: They're not on the list yet.

Bill No. 62, Bill No. 65, and the Notice of Motion that was tabled by the member for Halifax Needham on the issue of housing.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do rise and meet again on Wednesday, March 5th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until tomorrow.

[The House rose at 8:57 p.m.]