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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Novia Scotia | 55e | 1e | Discours sur l’éducation | 1989 | Ronald Giffin | Ministre de l’éducation | Progressive Conservative |

**Nova Scotia: Education’s speech, First session of the Fifty fifth legislature, 1989**

TUE.. FEB. 28. 1989

HON. RONALD GIFFIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Lunenburg East on the floor of the House because he and I

were two of the less successful members of the French immersion course at Universite Sainte-Anne in the fall of 1985 and I have been waiting for him to deliver a speech in French here on the floor of the House, knowing full well that when he does, then I

shall feel obligated to do so also. Indeed, you are probably quite relieved that you have been spared that.

I would first of all, Mr. Speaker, like to bring greetings to you and to the members of the House on behalf of the constituency of Truro-Bible Hill, which I have had the honour of representing since it was created in Gerry Regan's last great effort of gerrymandering in the summer of 1978, an effort which was somewhat less than successful. I am very appreciative of the fact that the approximately 20,000 people in Truro and Bible Hill have seen fit to return me to this House in every election since then.

May I also take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate our new Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Lloyd Crouse, and his wife, on undertaking the very serious responsibilities which they now hold and to congratulate His Honour on his delivery of a rather long and comprehensive Speech from the Throne on the first day of the sitting of this House.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay my respects to the Honourable Alan Abraham for the five years of very diligent and vigorous service that they gave to the people of the Province of Nova Scotia in the discharge of those responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate you most especially, because I know that there was something very special for you in the September 6, 1988 provincial election. Not only did the people of Halifax Citadel see fit to re-elect you as a member in this

House, but they also saw fit to give you a larger majority than the majority achieved by the member for Halifax Cornwallis. I know that is the first time that has happened and I am sure that gives you a great deal of satisfaction, Mr. Speaker, that you finally overcame your younger brother at the polls.

I also note, of course I fully expected that you would be re-elected as Speaker in this sitting of the House simply because we already have your name engraved in stone out in the hall outside the door there and it would cost too much money to put another name up there. (Laughter) After all, we are, as always, experiencing fiscal responsibility and restraint and we certainly didn't want to have to put your office to any undue expense in trying to change that.

I also want to offer particular congratulations to our Deputy Speaker, the member for Lunenburg West. It has already been noted that she is the first woman to hold that office and I hope that, as time goes by and as more women enter these Chambers as elected members, that things like that will no longer be newsworthy.

On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Seriously, I would like to mention to those of us who are here today that this is truly an historical moment, to have a lady, distinguished as she is, take the Chair as Speaker, because she is Speaker

now, she is sitting in the Chair, the House is in session. So it is an historical day and

it should clearly show that on the record of this province, this day, this time and the individual who is involved. (Applause)

Madam Speaker, may I say that the member for Cumberland Centre took the words right out of my mouth (Interruption) because this is an historic occasion. Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on taking the Chair for the first time, and I know it is the first time that a woman has taken the Chair in this House of Assembly. Incidentally, Madam Speaker, I should caution you that you should have ruled that there was no point of order. (Laughter)

That is right, you are in charge. (Laughter) (Interruptions) That is

right. .

I do want to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, not only on taking this Office but also on the speech which you made in seconding the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On that point, of course, I also want to congratulate the mover, the member for Kings South, in making his first speech in this House as well and on the excellent way in which he did that. I couldn't help noticing, as the present member for Kings South was speaking, that one of the many former members for Kings South came into the gallery. I am speaking, of course, about the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court, and I was pleased to see him in the House when the present member for Kings South was concluding his remarks. A number of other very distinguished Nova Scotians have represented that particular constituency here in this Chamber and I know that the present member will continue in that tradition.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of matters that I would like to touch upon today with respect to my own constituency. I noted momentarily that the member for Lunenburg East when he was speaking quoted himself and when I was looking back through Hansard, those who are taking notes will want to know it was Page 1005 of the 1988 debates on March 24th that I said the following.

Yes, I am. Madam Speaker, what I said then was:

"It has become fashionable in the last few years to talk about the year 2000 but it has occurred to me that before we get to the year 2000 we are going to have to pass through the 1990's and I would like to talk about some of the things that I want to see happen in our part of the province in the 1990's.".

Now, I certainly would not want to accuse the Leader of the Opposition or Al Hollingsworth of plagiarism but I just want the record to show that I said that a year ago before they ever thought of saying it. In any event, if time. . . (Interruptions) That is right. That is right.

Well, Madam Speaker, I do want to say a few things about some matters pertaining to my constituency and if time permits I may also touch upon one or two issues pertaining to the field of education, the portfolio for which I have been responsible for the past year, but let me first speak about some important matters in my constituency.

In the 1980's we have been dealing with a wide range of issues there because with a constituency like Truro-Bible Hill with a large population and one that is very centrally located there are many services that are provided there which serve people not only in Truro and Bible Hill but also in Colchester County, East Hants, parts of Halifax County and other areas. So Truro is by its geography the center of the Province of Nova Scotia and that carries with. it a number of significant implications for the people in my community.

Let me mention first the expansion of the Colchester Hospital. We are engaged in an exercise which will ultimately lead to the Colchester Hospital becoming a truly regional hospital. It is not there yet but in the 1980's we completed Phase I of the

expansion of that hospital and that moves us much closer to being able to provide the

kind of specialists services, out-patient services, a psychiatric day centre and other services that must all be part and parcel of the establishment of any truly regional hospital and so Phase I of the expansion of that hospital has been completed. We are now engaged in the planning for Phase II of the expansion of the Colchester Hospital.

As we proceed through these various phases in the expansion of the hospital we will end up with a truly regional hospital facility. That is important not only for Truro and Bible Hill and Colchester County and Hants East but it is also I think important here in the metro area because we have very heavy demands being placed upon the hospitals here in the Halifax-Dartmouth area. If we can move further towards developing regional hospitals around the province, then we not only make those services more readily available to people throughout the province but we also ease some of the demand that is now burdening the major hospitals here in the Halifax-Dartmouth area.

So as we move ahead with Phase II and the planning process in which we are now engaged in the Colchester Regional Hospital we do so in the knowledge that what

we accomplish there not only benefits our community but benefits other parts of the province as well. One always needs to say that, Madam Speaker, if one wishes to enlist the support of one's Cabinet colleagues in any endeavours that may require significant expenditures of the taxpayers' money.

Health care, of course, is only one of the major services that we must offer to our citizens and particularly with an ageing population we have to recognize that the demands on the delivery of health care in our province in the 1990's are going to escalate significantly and we must find ways and means by which we can address that demand. One of the programs that I think holds out great promise for us, not just in my own community but province-wide in terms of trying to ease those demands in our health care system, is the development and implementation of a comprehensive home care system.

As it happens the first area in the province in which the home care system has been established is Colchester County and so far very real progress is being made

there. I am very pleased with the approach that has been taken. It is a cooperative

endeavour that involves several departments of the provincial government and many community agencies and we are fortunate in the Truro-Bible Hill, Colchester County area, that we have a strong volunteer component. We have dozens and dozens of very active volunteer organizations that are devoted to helping those citizens who need help from the rest of us and I think that the departments concerned chose well when they decided to start the home care program in our part of the province.

But that only goes part of the way towards meeting the needs of our senior citizens. We are also, of course, constantly engaged in providing senior citizens' housing units. In Truro and Bible Hill now we have more than 200 units. The last one that we opened was on Lyman Street in the east end of Truro. We have just opened, not officially, but when the Minister of Housing, the Deputy Premier, sees fit some Friday afternoon when he is on his way from Halifax to Amherst, then perhaps we could schedule a small ribbon cutting with appropriate publicity, which will enhance his image and mine, and we will be able to officially open the newest senior citizens' housiJlg unit, which is located on Young Street in Truro, which is an excellent facility. I wandered through it while I was canvassing in that part of town during the election, before it had actually been completed. It is extremely well designed and I think a real asset for that part of our community. So we have to constantly be addressing these needs.

Another program which the Government of Nova Scotia is not directly involved in, but one which I think is really excellent, is the cooperative housing program. I made some reference to this when I spoke in the Speech from the Throne debate last year. At that time one such project had been initiated and opened in the Queen Street area of the Town of Truro and another such project has now been completed and opened on Ryland A venue in Bible Hill.

It is an excellent facility and I support this type of approach because it provides housing not just for seniors but also for younger people. One of the dangers that I think we can have with senior citizens' housing units is that tendency to hive off our senior citizens or to take them away from the mainstream of our society, whereas

these co-op housing projects involve a mix of seniors and others. I think that has a great deal to commend it and I hope we will see more of that not only in my own constituency but across the province.

Another issue that I would like to mention just briefly in passing, with respect to my own constituency, is the ongoing concern that we have, particularly at this time of year, and I know the members for Colchester North and Colchester South will join me in this sentiment, is the flooding problem that has beset us in Truro and Bible Hill and Colchester County for time immemorial, certainly since the area was first settled. Part of that is simply because of the nature of the topography of the entire area because we not only have extremely high tides but we also have a number of rivers which converge in the Truro-Bible Hill area. At the wrong time of the year and under the wrong conditions we do have very serious flooding problems.

Having said that, I should point out that our government in the 1980's has spent over $1 million on various measures that we have undertaken to try to alleviate the flooding problems that we have in the area. I do not think that anybody can realistically hope that we will ever eliminate those problems altogether but we have, through dyking, established protection for certain areas and also have undertaken other measures which we hope will assist in the runoff of flood waters and, therefore, lessen any damage that might occur.

The latest step that we have taken in this regard is the establishment of a committee with representation from the Departments of Transportation, the Environment, Agriculture, Municipal Affairs and the Emergency Measures Organization, to look at additional specific steps that we have to take to continue to address that problem.

One recent problem that we have encountered since the construction of the new Park Street bridge, which was my last official act as Minister of Transportation in 1983, the announcement of that, is that we now have a traffic problem there. If the flooding comes the wrong way we have to close that street. So one of the issues that committee will be addressing is the ways and means by which we can prevent future closures of that street under flood conditions.

When I mention transportation issues, Madam Speaker, those are always extremely important in the Truro area because Truro is central to the province and because the major transportation links in Nova Scotia, both. rail and highway, converge at that area, so we face very heavy traffic volumes there and we have to address those.

In the 1980's, and it took us several years, we have managed finally to complete the four laning of Highway No. 102 past Truro to link up with the Trans Canada

Highway at Onslow. That was a $10 million project and one that had to meet great challenges in the construction of many of the bridges and overpasses to achieve that. But it has been completed and is the final link in Highway No. 102, an extremely important one, and obviously of benefit not only to communities in that area, but to all Nova Scotians because, I suppose, most of us pass through that area at one time or another. Of course, there is also an enormous amount of tractor trailer traffic that goes through there.

That leads me to another ongoing and outstanding issue and that is the question of the four laning of the Trans Canada Highway. We know the traffic volumes, from New Brunswick through to Truro and then on from there to Halifax and also on the Trans Canada Highway to Pictou County and up to Sydney, are increasing and we know that we have to four lane these highways just to cope with those traffic volumes.

I am pleased that the government has made a commitment to the four laning of the Trans Canada Highway and that work has already begun at the Amherst end.

Obviously a great deal more needs to be done and if the four laning of Highway No. 102 in the 1970's is any indication, it will take not only a great deal of money, but a number of years before that will be brought to completion. But it is certainly something that I support and I know that we will bring it about.

At the same time, I mentioned that Truro is a transportation centre and that also includes rail transportation. This has been a matter of ongoing concern, I think, to all of us. I know when I was Minister of Transportation I made repeated representations to CN and to the Government of Canada about the condition of the roadbed on the rail

link between Halifax and Montreal, and in recent years the number of accidents and derailments that we have had, indicate to me that much more has to be done by CN

and by the Government of Canada to maintain that rail link. Because while we are improving our highway links, the fact remains that a great deal of traffic still moves by rail, particularly container traffic, from the hinterland to Halifax and from Halifax to the hinterland and we must ensure that that rail link is maintained.

I think we have seen enough rail line closures in our part of the world and we must not lose a link as vital as that one, or for that matter, the link that goes from Truro to Cape Breton. I want to put it on record as I have on other occasions that I

would be completely opposed to any move to close that line from Truro to Cape Breton. I know that my successors in that portfolio have continued to make representations to the Government of Canada on this very important issue.

Of course, when we talk about transportation, we are talking about something that is extremely important to the economy of the Truro-Bible Hill area. The first real economic growth that occurred in the Truro area was the direct result, I think, of

the establishment of what was originally known as the Intercolonial Railway in the 19th Century. For generations, Truro grew and prospered very largely because of its location and because of those important transportation links. That is the case today because we have many industries located in the Truro area for geographical reasons and for access to those transportation links and, indeed, many of the industries there support these various forms of transportation.

We have many industries that are located there now, particularly in the Truro Industrial Park, which are directly linked, for example, to the trucking industry. So that industry, too, is extremely important to us, and I might mention in passing,

particularly in the last couple of years, the Truro Industrial Park has enjoyed remarkable growth. With the economic prosperity that we have had in the late 1980's, we have certainly benefited by that.

In 1981, the former Minister of Development was responsible for providing funding for new land and servicing of that new land for the Truro Industrial Park and a number of new industries have now moved into that new part of the park. The original part of the Truro Industrial Park, which was established in 1962, is pretty well filled up now and we are in the process of moving into the new part. So I think the former Minister of Development showed a great deal of foresight in providing almost $2 million for that work and it is now paying off for the Truro Industrial Park.

Another important component of our local economy, as I think is the case with most parts of Nova Scotia, is the tourism sector. We have had a number of major developments there that I think are extremely important. In the private sector we have had major expansions of facilities that can now host conventions of 300, 400, 500 people in the Truro area and that is extremely important, because as the Halifax Dartmouth metropolitan area has developed a capacity, particularly with the hotels that have been built here and the World Trade and Convention Centre to handle much

larger conventions, communities like Truro and others around the province now have a chance to get those conventions that have 200, 300, and 400 people, the smaller ones that may not want to come into Halifax and are happier to go to communities like Truro and other similar sized communities around the province to hold their conventions. So I think that we have benefited by that.

At the same time, because of our location in Truro, we see a lot of tourist traffic

that goes past us and we have to make increased efforts, I think, to get those people off the main trunk highways, the 100-Series Highways and into our communities. I am very pleased that in the Town of Truro, in the west end of Truro, under the Mainstreet Program, which I think is one of the best programs we have had for many of our small towns across Nova Scotia, we are now building a new tourist bureau at Victoria Square in the Town of Truro. I think that that will help us to attract tourists into the community.

At the same time I think we have to recognize that we will have to do even more than that if we are going to draw that traffic off those trunk highways and into our communities. I have great confidence in the Minister of Tourism and Culture who has been so supportive of doing this kind of thing for our smaller towns around the province, that with his help we are going to be able to do more in that regard.

I have spoken about the Town of Truro and of course I should not overlook the Village - of Bible Hill which is also part of my constituency and a rapidly growing part. The population of the Town of Truro has remained fairly stable in recent years,

generally at about 13,000 people. In the Village of Bible Hill in the 1980's there has been a remarkable period of growth. The population of the village has just about doubled in the 1980's from roughly 2,500 people to more than 5,000. I can attest to that from personal experience because I knocked on every door over there. I appreciate the support, I might add, that the people in Bible Hill have given to me over the years.

The result is that the problems that we face in the Village of Bible Hill are problems of growth and those perhaps are the best types of problems to have. In the

development of recreational facilities, for example, a great deal has been accomplished and a great deal remains to be done.

I particularly want to take note of the expansion of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, because I think that that more than anything else has spurred the growth in the Village of Bible Hill in the 1980's. Under the stewardship of the former Minister of Agriculture, the present Minister of Housing, that expansion took place and about $25 million was spent there in the 1980's to move the agricultural college from a two year non-degree-granting institution to a four year degree-granting institution.

The influx of additional students, the expansion of the faculty there, the expansion of the research facilities, which was also extremely important, those things, all of which took place under the stewardship of the former Minister of Agriculture, have been of great benefit, not only to the agricultural community in this part of the world but certainly to the Village of Bible Hill and I think generally to the economy of the Truro-Bible Hill area.

Since the Minister of Housing has left that portfolio I would like to record here so that he will be nice to me in the future and give me more senior citizens' housing projects. I do want to record here not only my appreciation but the appreciation of the people of Truro and Bible Hill and most especially the appreciation of the people at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College for everything that he did in the more than nine years that he served as minister of that department, to bring about that extremely important development and to express to him, through you, Madam Speaker, our sincere thanks for everything that he has done.

When I mention the agricultural college I should also of course mention the Nova Scotia Teachers College. As you know, Madam Speaker, I made an important announcement earlier today with respect to the degree-granting status at the Nova Scotia Teachers College and that is something that we have been pursuing for a number of years.

I almost hesitate to admit that I first made that commitment in the 1978 provincial election. It is a matter of public record, so it took us a long time and a lot of people were involved in that process, not only the people at the Teachers College, especially Margaret Swan, the retiring Principal of the Nova Scotia Teachers College, but also people in the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, people in the Department of Education, Dr. Naomi Hersom and others at Mount Saint Vincent University. I think that has been an excellent cooperative effort and I think that what we have now achieved there is extremely important, in terms of teacher education and the future of teacher education in the Province of Nova Scotia. At the same time, of course, it is of real benefit to the Teachers College and to the community in which it finds its home which, of course, is my constituency.

Speaking about educational matters, let me talk about one or two matters in my constituency, vis-a-vis the Department of Education. During the 1980's we have carried out all of the capital construction projects that were requested by the Colchester-East Hants District School Board, and that includes not only projects in my own constituency, the expansion of the Princess Margaret Rose School which is now nearing completion, the expansion of the East Court Road School in Bible Hill which has been completed, but also major expansions to the Valley Elementary School which has been

completed, the elementary school in Debert which has also been completed, to the

elementary school in Great Village which has also been completed, or it is nearing

completion, and to the Rawdon District Elementary School in Hants East. That expansion

has been completed as well. I know that because I happened to be at the opening.

So we have now completed all of the projects that have been submitted by the

Colchester-East Hants District School Board in the 1980's. The board has established a

Facilities Needs Committee, which, after exhaustive work, has prepared a very comprehensive report on the facilities needs that the board sees for the Colchester-East

Hants district in the 1990's. I understand that the Facilities Needs Committee has

been conducting public hearings to receive community input on the various proposals

that have been put forward. The committee will then finalize its report. That will go

back to the district board and, of course, the district board will then set its priorities

and submit those priorities to me in my capacity as Minister of Education.

I will not go into detail on this at this point because obviously I shall have to,

as minister, await receipt of the requests and the priority listings from the Colchester

East Hants District School Board. But I know that a great deal must be done, in terms

of either new facilities or the upgrading and expansion of existing facilities because we

have had a good deal of growth in the Colchester-East Hants area. There are more

students and we are going to have to respond to those needs at all levels.

However, I will not go further with that at the moment, Madam Speaker, simply

because it would be inappropriate for me to do so until I receive the recommendations from the Colchester-East Hants District School Board, but after we receive them we will

certainly be dealing with them in an orderly and sensible manner and in a way that

will respond to the educational needs of that entire area.

Madam, I was going to say Madam Speaker but I will change that to Mr. Speaker,

we have also witnessed another historic occasion, this is the first time that a woman

has left the Chair. (Laughter) (Interruptions) I may take credit for that.

Yes, that is right. Let me mention two or three other matters

pertaining to my constituency, Mr. Speaker. When I spoke to the House a year ago I

mentioned a number of initiatives pertaining to the Millbrook Indian Reserve which is

located in my constituency. I pointed out at that time that the then Minister of Community Services had just approved funding for the construction of a centre which

is located on the Millbrook Reserve, which not only provides a gymnasium and related

recreational facilities for the use of the people of the Millbrook Reserve, but also

provides a centre for the Confederation of Mainland Micmacs, an organization which

has developed recently and which will have offices located in that facility.

So the present Attorney General, the former Minister of Community Services, was

able to approve funding which assisted in the construction of that excellent facility

and is now very close to completion.

More recently, we have been holding discussions with representatives of the

Department of Indian Affairs and the Millbrook Band Council and the provincial Department of Transportation and Communications and others with respect to a proposed

new economic development proposal with respect to Millbrook. Some members will have

seen recent news reports of Chief Lawrence Paul's statements in that regard.

What is being proposed is a major development that obviously will have to involve the participation of the appropriate agencies of the Government of Canada and which would also have to involve the participation of the provincial Department of Transportation and Communications because one of the aspects of that proposal would involve the construction of a new interchange on Highway No.1 02.

It would provide a link, not only into the Millbrook Indian Reservation, which would be a key to a major economic development for the reserve, but which would also provide a new highway link into the Truro Industrial Park which is significant for the part for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that the present link going off Highway No. 102 and through McClure's Mills to Willow Street in Truro is experiencing problems with the heavy tractor trailer traffic which is moving through there because of the impact that is having on the structures there.

In the long run we will probably be better off to have a separate link and to move some of that truck traffic away from that particular street into the industrial park from another direction and it would also make it easier for truck traffic to get into and out of the Truro Industrial Park.

This is obviously a major multimillion dollar project and not one that is going to happen overnight. Consultants have been working on it, studies have been done. The key to it obviously will be participation by the Government of Canada, but the Minister of Transportation and Communications has already indicated to me that provided the appropriate federal government participation is there, that the Government of Nova Scotia through that department will also be prepared to participate.

Another matter of real significance in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, that I want to mention is the upgrading of the water system in the Town of Truro, because, of course, this type of thing is always important in terms of economic development. The former Minister of Municipal Affairs, the present Minister of Health and Fitness announced some time ago now the funding under the Capital Assistance Program of the department for this project which will cost a total of $9.8 million. I understand the necessary approvals have now been obtained from the Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities and the project will be going ahead on the basis of a 50/50 cost-sharing between the Government of Nova Scotia and the Town of Truro.

So, I just mention that as a matter that is proceeding and that will be of real long range benefit, not only for the users of the water system but also for future economic development of the Town of Truro.

Two or three other items that I should mention before I leave, local constituency matters, Mr. Speaker, would include the establishment of a transition house in the

Truro area. I mentioned a year ago that we were working on that although it had not yet been accomplished. With the very real help of the former member for Halifax Needham, the former Minister of Community Services, the honourable Edmund Morris, we have now not only completed the establishment of a transition house in the Truro area, but it has been officially opened and is now in business.

It is sad in a. way, of course, that we should need transition houses at all, but as long as the need is there we are going to have to meet it. I am pleased that we now have that facility in place. It is a great improvement over the safe houses that were being used in the past and it will provide a very necessary haven for women and

children who have to leave family situations in which there are violence and related problems.

Let me also touch upon a couple of other matters before I end this part of my

remarks, Mr. Speaker. One is a couple of transportation related matters in the Village

of Bible Hill, the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of Farnham Road and

Park Street and Main Street in Bible Hill. That has now been done and they became

operational in about August of 1988. Another set of traffic lights at the intersection of

Vimy Road and Pictou Road and Bible Hill were installed at the same time and those

too became operational in about August in 1988. I am a firm believer, Mr. Speaker,

that timing is everything.

I should also mention that I indicated when I spoke last year that we were looking

forward to the establishment of an RCMP detachment in the Village of Bible Hill and

that site had been made available by the Government of Nova Scotia to the Government

of Canada. I am very pleased to advise you, Mr. Speaker, and any members of the

House who might be travelling through Bible Hill and feel the need of police protection,

that that is now under construction and will be completed in the not too distant future.

So 1988 in many respects was a very busy time in my constituency and at the

same time we have been able to embark upon many of the things that are going to

benefit us in the 1990's and I do not suggest for a moment that I do that by myself because that simply is not true. Any MLA learns very Quickly that you can only make

progress if you have the cooperation of your colleagues and if you are able to work

closely with the municipal level of government.

I have enjoyed an excellent working relationship with Mayor Douglas Carter of

the Town of Truro over the past 10 years, with the members of Truro Town Council,

with the members of the Colchester-East Hants District School Board, with the Chair

man, Mr. Wayne McCormick and the members of the Bible Hill Village Commission and

also the municipal councillors who represent the Village of Bible Hill on the Municipal

Council of the County of Colchester. May I also say that I have enjoyed an excellent

working relationship with my long time colleague, the Minister of Consumer Affairs,

and the member for Colchester South, Dr. Colin Stewart. I particularly want to con

gratulate him on his elevation to the Executive Council. As you know, Mr. Speaker, Dr.

Stewart served for a number of years as Deputy Speaker of this House and did an

exemplary job in discharging those responsibilities.

I should also mention a former member of this House who is no longer with us, the former member for Colchester North, Mr. Jack Coupar, with whom I also enjoyed

an excellent working relationship over the years and I would not want to leave out the

present member for Colchester North because, although we are not in the same Party,

he and I have worked together on many matters over the years and I have enjoyed

that working relationship with him.

I should also mention our federal Members of Parliament, 1988 saw an historic

event in Cumberland-Colchester because Bob Coates retired after 31 years in the House

of Commons. He was succeeded by Mr. Bill Casey who is now the Member of Parliament

for Cumberland-Colchester and whom I have already found to be a very effective and

hardworking member and I have enjoyed working with him in the relatively short

period of time that he has been in the House of Commons.

Let me now turn just for a moment to a couple of issues, Mr. Speaker, and I know you will warn me if my time becomes short, involving the Department of Education in which I have now been the minister for just over a year.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is not a new problem. Last week I had the privilege of addressing the Nova Scotia School Boards Association on the occasion of their annual meeting. My remarks made it all the way to Page 48 of the Halifax Chronicle-Herald and so I thought I might repeat some of them here and try to move them up to about Page 26 and touch upon a couple of extremely important issues that we will be dealing with or are dealing with at the present time and will be dealing with very much in the 1990's.

First, let me talk about the inclusion of students with special needs in the regular school classroom. That is an important movement that represents I think a real advance in our appreciation of what such students can accomplish in our schools. In years gone by many of these students were placed in different types of facilities and taken away from the regular classroom and I think we all now realize that it is better for them and I think better for all of us if they can become part of the regular school classroom. Now, it also means that there have to be greater expectations as to what our schools can do to improve the chances of these students whom we once thought could not derive any great benefit from attending the regular classroom. We have seen in the

1980's a much greater commitment by the Nova Scotia school system to the area that we still refer to as special education. The dollars themselves tell a story.

In 1980, which was the last year that we were operating under the old system of shareable rates in Nova Scotia, the total spending on special education was about $11

million. In' the first year after the change was prompted by the Walker Commission Report and I might pause for a moment, Mr. Speaker, just to acknowledge the retirement of George Walker as Chairman of the Formula Review Committee. He had served on that since it was created and gave the committee and the Province of Nova Scotia very distinguished service. We honoured him the other night at a private occasion. I just wanted to pay tribute to him here on the floor of the House for the great contribution that he has made, particularly in the field of education and financing in the Province of Nova Scotia.

After the adoption of the Walker Commission Report that figure rose from $11 million to about $16 million. The total now is in excess of $40 million, which represents a major commitment of dollars to the needs of students with special needs in the Province of Nova Scotia.

We have to recognize, too, that that overall rubric of special education includes other types of handicaps that have not previously received their due attention. Particularly in this decade, our schools have fully acknowledged the challenge that is presented to us in the field of learning disabilities.

One former member of this House, the honourable Ronald Barkhouse. the former

member for Lunenburg East. really spearheaded this movement. He first raised the issue

of learning disabilities on the floor of this House in 1977 and 1978. When our government took office in 1978 he was one of the people who really pursued that issue with

great vigour and personal concern and he continues to be very much involved with it.

Recently we have established a division within the Department of Education that

concerns itself with learning disabilities information and research. Its Director is Dr.

Joan Backman, widely recognized as one of the most qualified people in this entire

field. It also includes a learning disabilities consultant. Carmen Shields. Their presence

in the Department of Education enhances our capacity to develop policies on learning

disabilities and also to advise boards on their own programs for their own learning

disabled students.

Now if we remain consistent with our overriding belief that students should share

as much of their education as possible in their own school environment. then boards

should do whatever they can to serve learning disabled students in their own districts.

In the past some students with learning disabilities obviously required a type of

instruction that could only be offered in special residential schools that have been

established expressly for them. As we know. the Atlantic Provinces Special Education

Authority has. for a number of years. supported the education of severely learning

disabled children in such special schools as Landmark East in Wolfville.

However, with the added resources and support now available to boards. we can

hope that fewer cases of learning disability will require special residential schools. with

the high costs that are associated with them. We can hope and expect that many more

learning disabled students will remain in their home districts and still receive the

education that they require. We have to consider ways and means of encouraging our

district boards to develop programs for these students.

It would be my view that in enrolling learning disabled students or. indeed. students with any disabilities at all, in special residential schools should be seen only

as a last resort. only when no other solution seems to be adequate. This is a matter

which has had a very high priority with this government ever since we took office and

it will continue to do so. Making it possible for more learning disabled students to

remain in their home districts is just a part of a larger movement that has encouraged

educators to envisage the possibility of an increasing proportion of students with

special needs receiving more of their education in the regular classrooms with other

students. So more specialists are needed. more consultants are needed. It places greater

responsibilities on our classroom teachers. who have had to accommodate a wider range

of abilities and potential among their students.

At the same time we often have to deal with very difficult individual cases.

Specialists and educators and consultants may not always agree on what is the best

course or educational path to be followed with respect to a particular student. The

concerns of educators and the concerns of parents will have to be taken into account.

For that reason last year the Department of Education recently adopted the policy

recommended by the Special Needs Placement Committee. which proposed a dispute

settling procedure to be invoked when it proves impossible to resolve disputes between

district school boards and parents over the placing of a special student.

As part of this policy all boards should have established their own dispute settling procedures for cases involving the placement of students with special needs. Most boards already have such a policy, but at the same time there is an appeal procedure which would go to the district board first, through its own appeal procedure before it would reach a province-wide tribunal.

If the procedures followed by any district board are seen to reflect fairness and completeness, then there will be a much greater likelihood that those decisions will be accepted as final. Nonetheless, we have put in place the province-wide appeal procedure to deal with particularly difficult matters.

However, and any lawyer will tell you this, the best use that could be made of any appeal procedure is no use at all, because it can never be a happy situation when parents and schools or when any two parties, for whatever reason, argue over the fate of a child in front of any board or court.

So I do believe that most of these matters can be resolved at the local level and hopefully before they become disputes and that has been the experience in other provinces that have adopted similar procedures. How is my time?

All right, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will just deal with one other issue in the educational field and then I will end these comments. One of the issues that I dealt with when I spoke to the School Boards Association last week was the question of AIDS education.

I noted a notice of motion was introduced by the member for Sackville on Monday, at Page 112 of Hansard, in which he dealt with that. I was somewhat concerned about the tenor of-his comments when he introduced that notice of motion because it seemed

to suggest, and I am sure he did not mean to do this, that we were not doing anything

in response to the recommendations of the Task Force on AIDS that had dealt with education.

I just. want to set the record straight on that because I announced in this House last year after we received the interim recommendations of the Task Force on AIDS that the Department of Education would be adopting all of the recommendations for educational measures in the public school system in the Province of Nova Scotia.

We all know, it is a perception of the obvious that education is really our only

line of defence against this disease. When we received those interim recommendations the government, on my recommendation, accepted all of them. The final report of the AIDS Task Force reiterated those interim recommendations and I just want to touch upon some of the things that we are doing in this area.

They called for compulsory AIDS education in the junior high grades, for AIDS information to be disseminated to all teachers, for consultation with parents over any proposed education materials and for information on AIDS to be included in teacher training programs. I agreed to all of these recommendations because of the deadly nature of this disease. We are introducing education about AIDS in appropriate places in the school curriculum.

In particular we are introducing AIDS education as part of a mandatory course

called Personal Development and Relationships which has been introduced into the

junior high grades all across Nova Scotia this year. The topic of AIDS is found within

the Human Growth and Development unit along with discussion of other sexually

transmitted diseases.

Incidentally this course was piloted in a number of schools before it became

province-wide, including the Truro Junior High School. My older son has already taken

the course and I have reviewed the material myself and have a personal knowledge of

that course and it is excellent, I think one of the best things of that type that I have

ever seen.

I was extremely impressed, not only by the course content, but by the way the

teacher handling the course, Charles MacMillan, dealt with the students, with young

teenagers on these very sensitive issues. The Department of Education has also developed a mandatory AIDS education program for senior high school students. All high

schools in Nova Scotia now have received course outlines regarding AIDS that include

objectives, specific aims and suggestions for teachers. These outlines are accompanied

by appropriate print and audio-visual materials.

Concerning AIDS education for the elementary grades, the department has acted

to arm elementary teachers to cope with questions about AIDS that may be raised by

students in elementary grades. Indeed, teachers are telling me that they do get questions of this type.