

M12451- Nova Scotia Power – General Rate Application (GRA)
Opening Statement From The Nova Scotia New Democratic Party Caucus
Delivered by Leader of the Official Opposition Claudia Chender

Nova Scotians have shown incredible resilience, fortitude and patience over the past few years as everyday costs for homes, groceries, and utilities have skyrocketed. We work hard and should be able to build a good life for ourselves and our families.

Unfortunately, too often that has meant people making hard choices to make their dollars stretch. Choices that they should not have to make.

Since 2021, power bills have risen by an average of \$400, and 43 per cent of Nova Scotians are paying more than they can afford to keep the lights and heat on.

We're here today to discuss Nova Scotia Power's rate application. An application that would increase power rates **another 8 per cent** over the next two years, and push people's bills up \$600 compared to 2021. If this increase is approved, it would mean Nova Scotia Power's profits would hit \$212 million by 2027 – a 50 per cent increase in just four years. Nova Scotia Power is asking people to pay more while increasing their corporate profits. Meanwhile, household income is stagnant, power is unreliable, our data has been breached, and trust in the utility is at an all-time low.

We've heard from Nova Scotians across the province – parents, students, business owners, farmers, seniors – who all tell us they cannot afford more increases on their bills.

Following a data breach that saw NSP fail to protect people's personal information, including social insurance numbers that the company never should have had to begin with, people are dealing with estimated bills double and triple what they actually owe.

It's generally the responsibility of government, and currently of this Board, to ensure that public utility rates, services, and practices are "just and reasonable." The proposed rate, the terrible service, and these lax practices do not meet this threshold.

Power is an essential service. It's essential for heat for many of us. For lights. But it's also essential to keep people connected through their phones and computers, for work, school, and life in general. It's essential for emergency services.

Nova Scotians already spend **30 per cent more** on their home energy bills compared to the average Canadian. And a residential customer in Halifax pays double the energy rates of someone in Winnipeg or Montreal.

At a time when half of Atlantic Canadians are within a couple hundred dollars of being unable to pay their bills, people simply can't afford to pay more.

Nova Scotia Power is a private company, AND because the service they provide is essential, we regulate them to ensure people can afford their bills and the company isn't passing on more costs to consumers than is reasonable and appropriate.

As the Official Opposition, we have been urging government to step in to ensure people can afford the power they need. Government has the regulatory tools to make many changes, including an additional rebate for customers, an affordable power rate, strengthening performance-based regulations and renewable energy standards so that the company can pass on savings from using cheaper renewable energy sources. The government can also initiate a fulsome review of the company and its ownership structure, including both transmission and distribution, to determine how best to serve Nova Scotians.

So far, the Houston government has refused to take any of these steps.

Against this backdrop, it is vital that the board review this rate application with affordability top of mind, and take steps wherever possible to ensure the company is working in the best interest of their customers.

For eight years in a row, Nova Scotia Power has failed to meet reliability standards. In 2024, there was an unplanned power outage somewhere in Nova Scotia nearly every day. Parents waking up in the dark, having to get their children ready for school and themselves ready for work.

Business owners having to send staff home and losing working hours with no explanation. Yet the fines for this failure are a slap on the wrist for a company making hundreds of millions in profit.

In the last year, rather than invest in more sustainable, affordable, and reliable energy sources, the company increased the use of coal and spent \$55 million more on fuel and energy, passing these costs on to Nova Scotians.

We ask the Board to examine the costs that the company is passing on to customers and ensure they're "just and reasonable".

For example, Nova Scotia Power is paying an industrial carbon tax for not meeting emission targets and passing these costs to consumers. These costs are avoidable and should not be justified as simply "the cost of doing business". NSP should not be allowed to pass on these costs to consumers. If NSP is not required to cover these costs from their profits, then we argue that they will continue passing them on, rather than ensure power is more affordable and sustainable for Nova Scotians.

People need to be able to afford their power. This is not a nice idea; it is a necessity.

The board has the power to review this application, and ensure the company's services, rates, and practices are reasonable and just. Nova Scotians have no trust in Nova Scotia Power right now, and it's not hard to understand why.

We urge the board to do everything in its power to ensure Nova Scotians have affordable, reliable power and that Nova Scotia Power is held to the standard of ensuring they work in the interest of the public.

Thank you.