

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island

Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings

(Hansard)

Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Wednesday, 1 April 2026

No. 5

The Honourable Brad Trivers, Speaker

Published by Order of the Legislature

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Wednesday, 1 April 2026

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests 163

Statements by Members
- Georgetown-Pownal (Easter Beef Show and Sale) 169
- Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke (Establishment of an Independent Public Intervener) 170
- Charlottetown-Belvedere (Human Trafficking Awareness) 170

Oral Questions
- Leader of the Opposition (Environment permit investigation) (further) 171
- O'Leary-Inverness (Environment permit investigation) (further) 175
- O'Leary-Inverness (Wetlands) 176
- Leader of the Third Party (Environment permit investigation) (further) 176
- New Haven-Rocky Point (Wetlands) (further) 178
- New Haven-Rocky Point (Environment permit investigation) (further) 179
- Georgetown-Pownal (Georgetown Elementary School) 179
- Charlottetown-Belvedere (Human trafficking) 180
- Leader of the Opposition (Environment permit investigation) (further) 181

Statements by Ministers
- Health and Wellness (Cancer Month) 182
  - Charlottetown-West Royalty 182
  - Leader of the Third Party 183
- Education and Early Years (World Autism Awareness Day) 183
  - Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park 183
  - Charlottetown-Victoria Park 184

Tabling of Documents 184

Motions Other Than Government
- Motion 2 – Improving workplace conditions and retention for frontline health care providers (further)
  - Leader of the Third Party (further) 185
  - Health and Wellness 186
  - Charlottetown-West Royalty 188
  - Recorded Division 191
  - Motion 2 Carried 192
- Private Member's Bill – First Reading
  - Bill 101 – An Act to Amend the Community Care Facilities and Nursing Homes Act 192

Orders Other Than Government
- Second Reading and Committee
  - Bill 100 – An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act 192
    - Proposed Amendment 198
    - Amendment Carried 199
    - Recorded Division – Report of the Committee
    - Report of the Committee Carried 201

Orders of the Day (Government)
- Throne Speech Debate
  - New Haven-Rocky Point (further) 201

Adjourned 210

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
67th General Assembly
Third Session

Lieutenant Governor – His Honour the Honourable Dr. Wassim Salamoun, O.P.E.I.
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Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
Arsenault, Gilles (IND)	Évangeline-Miscouche (21)	
Bell, Hon. Zack (PC)	Charlottetown-Winsloe (10)	Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning Minister responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs
Bernard, Karla (G)	Charlottetown-Victoria Park (12)	Third Party Whip
Bevan-Baker, Peter (G)	New Haven-Rocky Point (17)	Third Party House Leader
Burridge, Hon. Jill (PC)	Stratford-Keppoch (6)	Minister of Finance and Affordability
Compton, Hon. Darlene (PC)	Belfast-Murray River (4)	Minister of Land and Environment
Croucher, Hon. Robin (PC)	Souris-Elmira (1)	Minister of Education and Early Years
Curran, Brendan (PC)	Georgetown-Pownal (2)	
Deagle, Hon. Cory (PC)	Montague-Kilmuir (3)	Minister of Health and Wellness
DesRoches, Tyler (PC)	Summerside-Wilmot (21)	Government Whip
Dillon, Susie (PC)	Charlottetown-Belvedere (11)	Deputy Speaker
Dollar, Hon. Kent (PC)	Brackley-Hunter River (15)	Minister of Housing and Communities
Henderson, Robert (L)	O'Leary-Inverness (25)	Opposition Whip
Hudson, Hon. Ernie (PC)	Alberton-Bloomfield (26)	Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism
Lantz, Hon. Rob (PC)	Charlottetown-Brighton (13)	Premier Minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs

Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
MacEwen, Hon. Sidney (PC)	Morell-Donagh (7)	Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy
MacFarlane, Matthew (G)	Borden-Kinkora (19)	Leader of the Third Party
MacKay, Matthew (PC)	Kensington-Malpeque (20)	Government House Leader
MacLennan, Hilton (PC)	Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke (23)	
McNeilly, Gordon (L)	Charlottetown-West Royalty (14)	Opposition House Leader
Perry, Hon. Hal (L)	Tignish-Palmer Road (27)	Leader of the Official Opposition
Ramsay, Hon. Barb (PC)	Summerside-South Drive (22)	Minister of Social Development and Seniors Minister responsible for the Status of Women
Redmond, Hon. Jenn (PC)	Mermaid-Stratford (5)	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence
Simpson, Carolyn (L)	Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park (9)	
Thompson, Hon. Bloyce (PC)	Stanhope-Marshfield (8)	Minister of Agriculture Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General
Trivers, Hon. Brad	Rustico-Emerald (18)	Speaker

Vacant	Cornwall-Meadowbank (16)	

[The Legislature met at 1:02 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to welcome everyone in the gallery. Just three here at the moment; I expect there will be more as the proceedings go on. I want to welcome Nathalie Walsh-Annand, the executive director of Autism Society of PEI; Taylor Jenkins, president of Autism Society of PEI; and Suzi DeBlois, autism coordination project lead for the department.

I want to recognize that tomorrow, April 2nd, is World Autism Day. This day is observed worldwide to promote understanding, acceptance, and inclusion for individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. It also highlights the importance of ongoing support, education, and policies that help build more neuro-inclusive communities. With approximately one in every 127 people diagnosed with autism, this is an issue that touches many families in our province. I encourage all members and the public to wear blue tomorrow in support of World Autism Day.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize a great local initiative focused on building the next generation of carpenters here on Prince Edward Island. As we recently saw, young Islanders had the chance to get hands-on experience through a carpentry workshop hosted by 4-H PEI. This is exactly the kind of exposure that's really important as we work to spark interest in the skilled trades and respond to ongoing labour shortages in construction. I want to commend everyone involved for giving our youth real opportunities in helping strengthen the future workforce in the province.

[1:05 p.m.]

This evening, Holland College is hosting their Distinguished Alumni Awards. I'd like to congratulate this year's recipients, Dr. Michael Gauthier and Yvonne Duivenvoorden, on their outstanding achievements. Both of your accomplishments serve as an inspiration for current students, alumni, and future generations. Congratulations.

Today is the official return of PEI Burger Love. This April marks its 15th year with a record 114 Island restaurants taking part. This beloved tradition has truly become an Island tradition for sure, bringing people together, showcasing local food, and supporting the important work of Anderson House.

I understand that Islanders are very excited. I haven't seen for myself, but I guess there's a lot of intrigue online about Burger Love this year; might even be overshadowing events in this Legislature. But I encourage everyone to take part, eat responsibly, enjoy your great burgers, and celebrate all that makes our Island special.

Thank you. I wish everyone a great day.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to welcome all those who are watching online and those who are joining us in the gallery today, especially those with Autism PEI. Welcome.

Everyone knows that today the road conditions were not the greatest, and the weather was not the greatest. It's April 1st. That's not how I want to see it come in, but I'm hoping that it's soon over. Regular two-hour drive door to door took me two hours and 40 minutes. The first half hour – should have been a half hour – probably took double that time. There were no plows out at six o'clock in the morning, but then we got out of the snow and into the rain, and the roads got a little bit better.

I just want to tell people: don't take your winter tires off just yet, because there were a few in front of me that I know were white-knuckling it for a while. You could tell that they had already taken their tires off. Might be a little too soon there.

As I mentioned yesterday, last night was game 4 of the Junior C championships. I'm proud to say the Tignish Aces came out as the returning champions of the Junior C league here on Prince Edward Island. They played the Pownal Ice Dogs. I have to give credit to the Pownal Ice Dogs. They were very sportsmanlike during the whole process. I thank them for coming up and

all their efforts. Congratulations to the players, to the coaches, and to all their families and friends for their support.

Also, Easter is coming. I want to wish everyone out there a very happy Easter. If you're looking for something to do with the family, on Saturday afternoon at 2 p.m., come into the Tignish Elementary School. The Tignish Co-op is hosting an Easter Bunny egg hunt. They have about 1,000 eggs that will be hidden all over the place with various prizes inside. Local businesses have donated baskets, et cetera, for the children. Everyone walks away with something. There are other events that are going to be happening at the same time. The Easter Bunny may make an appearance, is what I'm hearing.

I also want to say on Saturday, drop into the Tignish Co-op. The St. Felix CWL is holding a bake sale there all day. I know most of the ladies who are involved, and boy, can they bake. I will definitely be there to pick something up.

Talking about baking, MJ's Bakery, yesterday, teamed up with Royal Star, and they made lobster burgers. The lobster burgers were to fund the Tignish fire department. They sold out very, very quickly. Thanks to MJ's Bakery and thanks to Royal Star for making this happen, and thanks to our volunteer fire department who do a wonderful job taking care of us in the Tignish and surrounding area. The burgers were awesome; I had one for breakfast.

[Laughter]

Hon. H. Perry: With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Speaker: Delicious greetings there, today.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Didn't get to enjoy a burger for breakfast this morning; maybe tomorrow morning I'll see what I can do.

Welcome back to all members in the Chamber this afternoon. Great to be back for another day of debate here in the Legislature. Welcome to our guests in the gallery and everybody watching online in District 19 and across the province. Daffodil Month, Cancer Awareness Month – it's great to see all of us in the Chamber wearing our daffodils.

Last Tuesday, Culture Summerside presented the 2025 Culture and Heritage Awards at the Mayor's Tea. The awards recognize individuals and groups whose contributions enrich the city's cultural life and preserve its heritage.

[1:10 p.m.]

There were a number of awards. I won't take the time to read all of them, but the information is obviously available online, all of the well-deserving groups and individuals who received awards. It's such an incredibly important part for our province to support these cultural activities/awards and to recognize so many of the contributions made by so many committed Islanders, usually in volunteer roles, who do so much to support our heritage and our culture in Prince Edward Island.

Also, yesterday the Island Nature Trust announced that through the generosity and support of Islanders, they have been able to secure a 219-acre property just north of Souris. That wildlife and habitat on this parcel consists of a hardwood forest, and it will be protected under the PEI *Natural Areas Protection Act*, ensuring that the native ecosystems stay intact in perpetuity. Incredibly important to do this as much as (Indistinct); we have to achieve our targets for natural areas and protected areas in Prince Edward Island.

The overwhelming support helped Island Nature Trust exceed their $100,000 goal, which has allowed them to begin the process of acquiring further forested land in the region. The trust will continue to work with neighbours and partners to grow the protected area in the network of Eastern Kings.

Last but not least, a little tardy making this particular announcement but over the weekend, my mother celebrated a big birthday, and I got to spend some time with her. To Mom, Ruth MacFarlane, happy birthday once again, and thank you for everything that you have done for the family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I just want to say good morning to everyone tuning in from Charlottetown-Victoria Park and all around the Island; our Pages – Zack, Jorja, and Jisele – thank you for being here with us today; to colleagues and staff, welcome back; to everyone in the gallery joining us, thank you for everything you do to make our communities more neuro-inclusive.

I just wanted to quickly stand up and thank the Heritage Fair project team at West Kent for inviting me there on Monday morning to be a judge of the Heritage Fair. It was so inspiring. So many of the students there embodied the spirit of what this project is supposed to be and were so proud of their project, and proud of what they learned. Some of them did it on family members. I asked them how it changed who they were, and they had the best answers. I just want to thank the organizers for putting that on and for inviting me to be a part of it.

Very quickly – given this is April Fool's Day, I saw the cutest video from West Kent. Emily Waye, the principal, and the 3B class called Rob Carmichael, who's the custodian, in a panic saying there was a mouse in the classroom. He came in with gloves on and an ice cream bucket. They had a blue box turned upside down over the mouse. He came in and tried to get. He tapped the side of the box. They lifted the thing up gently and then Emily lifted the box up. Here it was – a computer mouse. So, they got him really good. Anyway, gotcha, Rob. We'll see you tomorrow morning for breakfast program.

I hope everyone has a good day today. Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence.

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon to all my colleagues, to those joining us in the gallery, and to everyone tuning in from beautiful District 5 Mermaid-Stratford. I'd also like to say hello to a good friend of mine who tunes in regularly, Ms. Jill Cameron; hello, Jill.

I just wanted to stand today and wish our U16 and U19 PEI Wave teams from our ringette community who are out competing today and this week at the Canadian Ringette Championships…. We certainly are cheering you on from PEI. Go, Wave, go!

As well, a special happy birthday to a really good friend of mine, Darren Smith. It's no joke, it is his birthday today, and I hope he has a great day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Well, good morning, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize that students from across the province are representing their schools tomorrow at the provincial Science Fair. It was supposed to be today, but unfortunately, the weather got in the way.

This annual event is a great example of STEAM learning in action, with students building real skills through curiosity and hands-on experience. I want to wish all participants good luck with their projects tomorrow. I have the privilege of attending along with my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and whatever it is [Laughter] to present some medals.

[1:15 p.m.]

Also, as our Premier had mentioned earlier, tomorrow is World Autism Awareness Day. A little later in the proceedings, I'll be delivering some remarks to recognize the occasion. I'd also like to welcome a few people that are joining us here today in the Legislature. They are Autism Society president Taylor Jenkins and executive director Nathalie Walsh-Annand, along with autism coordination project lead from my department, Suzi DeBlois. Thank you for being here with us to mark this occasion.

Finally, a good morning to everyone in District 1. I've had a few requests over the last couple of days to stand up and ask questions on an important topic that's stewing in my district. Because of the honour of being on this side of the House, I don't have the privilege of asking questions from that side of the House, but I want to assure everyone that I am paying attention, I am engaged, and we are working through this problem.

I just want to say good morning to everyone and wish everyone a great day. Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism.

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon to everyone. Certainly, I want to welcome those who have joined us in the gallery and say hello to everybody that may be tuned in, certainly those that are watching from up in beautiful District 26.

The Leader of the Opposition had referenced the Easter Bunny. I understand that if the Easter Bunny, him or herself, cannot make it, that somebody might be standing in. It'd be quite interesting to see who that somebody might be.

With that, this coming weekend, the U18 Female Atlantic Hockey Championship is taking place here at the Simmons Arena in Charlottetown. Starts tomorrow evening. There are two teams from PEI competing in the championship. There is representation from right across the Atlantic Provinces, but the two teams from PEI are the Down East Auto Parts Stars and our Western Wolves from up in the western part of PEI. Certainly want to wish both of those teams all the best. I know that they will do us proud.

The opening ceremonies are tomorrow evening at 6:45. I do believe that my seatmate here, the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, is going to be emceeing the opening ceremonies, and as the Minister responsible for Sport, it will be my pleasure to bring greetings on behalf of the Province as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure to welcome back our friends from the Autism Society today – Nathalie, Taylor, nice to have you here – and of course, my friend, Suzi, who works closely with the Autism Society on coordinating the needs to our young folks on the spectrum.

Also, Alby Curran, the father of Georgetown-Pownal, has joined us today on his lunch break, I'm guessing. Welcome, Alby. Good to see you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to have a shout-out to everybody watching online, and especially those in District 2, Pownal. I want to welcome my father, who just snuck in the door. Also, I want to welcome my good friend, Suzi DeBlois, who's joining the proceedings today.

I also want to recognize some of the newest fans watching the proceedings in this House: my in-laws in Port Morien, Nova Scotia – David, Trina, and Roddie – who have been watching every day and providing advice, which I welcome; I really do. David and Roddie, who is at the ripe age of 94, are the epitome of why age is nothing but a number and is no stranger to watching legislative proceedings as Roddie's late son and my mother-in-law's brother, Guy, was a member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I hope I can represent my constituents as well as he did his.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today to wish everyone a happy Easter and to say hello to everyone listening in District 22 – Mysie, Margo, Barry, Alma – all kinds of folks down there.

Also, I'd like to thank the restaurants who are selling Burger Love. One dollar of every burger sold, the proceeds will go to Anderson House. Last year, there was $113,417 that went to Anderson House. Thank you to every restaurant across Prince Edward Island for your kindness in pursuing Burger Love.

[1:20 p.m.]

Tomorrow is World Autism Day. This year's theme for this day is "Autism and Humanity – Every Life Has Value," highlighting and affirming the dignity and worth of all autistic people as part of our shared human future.

I'd also like to recognize Nathalie Walsh-Annand, executive director, as well as Suzi DeBlois, autism coordinator for the Department of Education and Early Years, and a friend of

mine who I worked with many years ago at addiction services at the Strength program in Summerside – it's a long time since I've seen her, and I'm very pleased to see that Taylor Jenkins is now the president of the Autism Society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to welcome us all back today and those in the gallery and joining online.

Special note as well to Taylor Jenkins and to Nathalie Walsh. Thank you for all that you do. And a heartfelt hello to Suzi. It's great to see Suzi DeBlois, whom I've known and been friends with for a very long time. As well, to our leader, Robert Mitchell, who has joined us.

Also, two of my constituents are very excited about their health care journey. They are on their pathway to becoming nurses. Ava Clark has been accepted into the nursing program; very excited about that. And her sister, Gracie Clark, is actually about to graduate with her BScN. Their mom, Michelle Clark, is over the moon, as you can imagine. Ava and Gracie, we look forward to seeing you in your practice.

As well, congratulations to my niece, Zoe MacWilliams, who just completed her first year of bachelor of nursing and received her white coat at a recent ceremony.

Congratulations to these young women.

To that, I wish everyone a great day in the House. Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon to all my colleagues and those watching from District 11 Charlottetown-Belvedere, and my faithful watcher, Eileen Stewart, who is also my neighbour and keeps a good watch on our house.

April is Daffodil Month. It's the first flower in bloom and it is resilient. It is a reminder for those living with cancer, and a symbol of hope for over 70 years. It brings together Canadians all across our great nation. As well, I'd like to thank Heather Mulligan for her work and her advocacy in getting the colonoscopy screening age down from 50 to 45. Thank you, Heather.

As well, I also would like to mention Suzi, Taylor, and Nathalie, and thank them graciously for all that they do for children living with autism and their families, supporting them all along their path to having a fulfilled life. Thank you for all you do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and say hello to everybody watching from Charlottetown-West Royalty, District 14, and everybody who's here in the gallery supporting Autism Awareness Month as well as Cancer Awareness Month this month; we've heard a lot about that. It's great to maybe be able to speak later on with the minister about that.

We've lost a well-respected member of the community around here. Everybody kind of knows the word GWG Flooring. When you see the brown cube van around town and around Prince Edward Island, you kind of knew that good things were happening. Gordie Griffin passed away on Sunday. He ran his business with his family for 40 years. He built the foundation of our homes in Prince Edward Island; did a lot of charity work around the community. This is a real sad time for his family. I just want to take a second and remember what this great person did and how he did his business and how he involved everybody else.

I want to send condolences out to his family: Christine; daughters Bobbi Jo, Angela, Sarah, Shirley Ann, Allyson; and his eight grandchildren. Thank you very much, Gordie.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll start off by saying welcome to colleagues and those in the gallery, and welcome to all those watching from District 23.

Of course, this is Easter weekend. I'd just like to wish everyone a happy Easter. I hope that everybody gets to enjoy it with their family and friends.

[1:25 p.m.]

This Saturday is also a very busy weekend in Tyne Valley. The Cavendish Farms Community Centre – there is an Under 7 Jamboree in the morning. At 1:20, there is an A&E Legacy Foundation hockey game between the RCMP and the fire department. All the proceeds are going to the foundation. I just found out, I guess, that the Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere – all three sons of hers are playing for the RCMP. It should be a good game. Also, they'll have 50-50, Chuck a Puck, and their Shoot to Win.

Also on that day, across the road at the Tyne Valley fire hall, the Ellerslie Home and School is having a chili and chowder cook-off. There are lots of different recipes of each. The public is invited to sample. There's a $5 admission, and all the proceeds are going to their playground fund.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

G. Arsenault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome to all the members here in the Legislature and all those who are visiting today in the gallery.

A special hello to people in District 24, wonderful Evangeline-Miscouche. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their overwhelming support in the last couple of days. There are wonderful people in the area. They've been very supportive. I want to let them know as well that I have their back. I will be here as a strong voice for them in this Legislature, and I will continue to advocate for them.

Thank you very much and have a great day.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome everyone back today. Those joining in the gallery from the Autism Society, thanks for coming in; other members. We've got everyone out in District 4.

It was a slushy ride in today, and the plow didn't come in towards town until almost Cherry Valley, so I'll have to get on the road supervisor about that.

I'd like to mention the passing of two very dedicated and stalwart members of our community.

Marjorie Warburton passed away. I just want to send condolences to her daughter Jill and her son James and their families. She was a very dedicated volunteer within the community and did lots, especially with the Women's Institute and other groups.

The other lady who's passed away is Mona Ryan. She is Brenda Simmons's mother, and also Karen, Carolyn, Patrick, Annette, and Kevin, and also Janna's grandmother, as well as her other grandchildren.

Mona was a Newfoundlander, and they moved to the Island back when I was a kid, I think. She was a member of the Women's Institute, and I can remember having a bridal shower, I think it was, at my house. Our daughter Katie was maybe three or four or five, around that age, and Mona lit up a cigarette. It was back when you lit up a cigarette around the room. Katie went in and she said, "Those are really bad for you, and you should stop smoking right now." I was mortified, but shortly after that, Mona gave up cigarettes, so I'm going to give Katie a little bit of credit for that.

She was a great, great member of our community, and she will be missed. I'm just sending my love and best wishes to the family.

Lastly, I'd like to say hello to Maggie Gillis, my ministerial assistant. I know she's watching with her granddaughter, Rae. Rae was very excited when the member of the opposition brought up the Easter Bunny. So, Rae, I'm pretty sure the Easter Bunny is going to come to you on Sunday. I just want to say hi, and I hope you have a great day.

Thanks, everyone.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, today was a little bit of a storm for April 1st. I did take the opportunity to give a big thank you to the snowplow operators in the province, especially the ones in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness, and my own particular snowplow operator that does the Murray Road, Matt Ballum – a greater operator. No mailbox is ever damaged or destroyed. All good.

Anyway, I wanted to do that, and I also wanted to make a comment of last night. We had the Na'ku'set solar farm public meeting at the Ellerslie Legion in Mount Pleasant, but the interesting part of that was that during that presentation, it will be the largest solar farm in Atlantic Canada once it's constructed. Plans are for 2027 to commence construction, assuming all of the permits and things of that nature get approved; 60,500 solar panels, just to give you an idea of the scope and scale of that.

So, a big thank you to Drew Bernard and all the people that were there, the municipality of Central Prince, as well as Maritime Electric that were there to answer any questions that the public would have.

I guess I'd have to give a big accolade to the competition going with PEI Burger Love. Obviously, I have a couple of participants from O'Leary-Inverness participating. The interesting – is always the names of the burgers. I always get a great kick out of that.

So, if you want to come to O'Leary-Inverness, you can come to Moth Lane Brewery and partake of the Corn-spiracy Theory. If anybody knows the owner there, he's always got lots of conspiracy theories…

[Laughter]

R. Henderson: …on everything that goes on. He has quite a social media presence, to my dislike sometimes, but we've got to take freedom of speech seriously.

[1:30 p.m.]

The other is the Hot Competition, which is the Backwoods Breakaway in O'Leary, which shares it with Backwoods Burger in Tyne Valley, and the Smokin' Stampede Stack at Kenny's Restaurant and Dairy Bar. So, come on up in the month of April. Come tour O'Leary-Inverness and partake of some great burgers and promote the beef industry in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. members, I want to recognize the contributions of the late Mr. Neil Ferguson, Kings Counsel, who served this House as parliamentary counsel from 2020 until his passing in December 2025. I want to offer my sincere condolences to his wife, Elizabeth, and his children, Jonathan and Hillary, as well as on behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island.

Neil worked with us from early 2020 until his passing in December 2025. In that time, he drafted countless bills, amendments, and motions. More importantly, Neil was a friend and ally to all who knew him.

With his extensive knowledge from his time as legislative drafter and Clerk of the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly, Neil could always be counted on to find the answer to some procedural or drafting question being posed. His passing has left a big hole in the Office of the Clerk's team. He continues to be remembered on a daily basis.

Thank you.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

Easter Beef Show and Sale

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For 75 years, the Easter Beef Show and Sale has stood as a cornerstone for the Island's agricultural calendar. A few weeks ago, as I do every year, I had the privilege of attending this milestone anniversary, and I can tell you that the energy was something truly special.

Since its start in 1951, this event has been more than just about competition; it's a master class in the livestock industry, and it's where our producers – many from Georgetown-Pownal – showcase the results of months of early mornings, meticulous recordkeeping, and top-tier animal husbandry.

The level of quality on display for this 75th anniversary was second to none. Every animal in

that ring represented a significant investment of time, pride, and family legacy. For our 4-H members, this show is also the culmination of a year's worth of discipline. Seeing these young Islanders handle their cattle with such professional ease gives me immense confidence in the future of our family farms.

I was glad to join the Minister of Housing and Communities and the Minister of Agriculture to attend the anniversary on behalf of our PC caucus and be part of the crowd celebrating this historic occasion. But ultimately, the day belonged to the producers and those who purchased. I want to congratulate the organizers and the generations of families who have kept this tradition thriving for seven and a half decades. Their hard work ensures that the PEI brand remains synonymous with excellence.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Establishment of an Independent Public Intervener

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to advocate for the establishment of an independent public intervener to represent consumers in proceedings before the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission. This office is a necessary safeguard to provide Islanders with a dedicated voice during complex hearings on fuel pricing and electrical rates.

These decisions affect every Islander. They influence the cost of living, the affordability of heat and power, and the financial stability of households and businesses across this province.

We do not have to look very far to see how well the model works. The Province of New Brunswick has successfully utilized a permanent public intervener for years to provide professional oversight on these exact issues. In that jurisdiction, the intervener ensures the public interest is always represented by experts who can challenge the technical evidence presented by large utilities.

While members of the public are technically allowed to participate, the reality is that most people do not have the legal knowledge, the financial resources, or the technical expertise needed to effectively engage in these complex hearings.

I was pleased to see in the Speech from the Throne that this government is looking at ways to reform IRAC. However, to truly modernize the commission, we must include a dedicated, professional voice for the public interest.

A public intervener – ideally, an independent lawyer with access to research and expert analysis – would help correct the current imbalance. Their role would be to rigorously test the evidence, question the assumptions, and ensure that the consumer perspective is fully and consistently represented.

[1:35 p.m.]

Establishing a public intervener would not weaken IRAC; it would strengthen the decision-making process and improve public trust in the outcomes. It is time to ensure Islanders have a meaningful voice in the decisions that directly affect their daily lives.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Human Trafficking Awareness

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to highlight the need to build a stronger awareness around human trafficking.

We know that human trafficking is not a distant problem. It's happening here in the Maritimes. Nova Scotia has consistently recorded the highest rates of human trafficking in Canada, and Halifax remains one of the country's major centres for reported cases. In nearby New Brunswick, the Moncton area accounts for a significant share of the province's reported cases, forming part of a well-documented Halifax-Moncton corridor of activity.

These are reminders that PEI is not isolated. We are part of a region where young people face real risks.

What concerns frontline experts most is how human trafficking begins. It rarely starts with violence or abduction; instead, traffickers use grooming – building trust, affection, and dependency. RCMP investigators emphasize that many victims first are exploited by someone

they know, often through relationships that slowly become manipulative and controlling.

This is why awareness is our strongest defence. Conversations on early signs:

- when people become possessive;
- when affection becomes control;
- when a relationship starts, isolating them from friends and supports;
- when loyalty is demanded but respect is not given.

Parents, guardians, teachers, coaches, and community workers also need to recognize when a young person is becoming vulnerable to manipulation. Trafficking thrives in silence, in secrecy, and in the belief that "it couldn't happen here." But it can, and that's why PEI must invest in youth-centered education, strong community training, and partnerships with Maritime organizations that have already developed successful awareness strategies.

Protecting our young people requires all of us – governments, families, schools, communities – to understand the signs, speak openly about the risks, and ensure that every Island youth knows that they are supported and safe. This awareness starts with us.

Thank you.

Speaker: Members, just before we go into Question Period, just a word about greetings. We had 14 members give greetings, which is excellent. The time is supposed to be around 45 seconds, which would set us in – strictly 45 seconds – about ten and a half minutes. Given a little bit of leeway, let's say 15 minutes. We were approximately 30 minutes – about twice as long. So, I just ask you to be mindful.

It's good that you didn't give up long greetings for Lent, which is almost over. However…. You can ponder that over the Easter weekend as you get ready for next week.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders have spent days trying to understand what happened here – who knew what and why it took so long for this information to come forward about this $100,000 secret payout scandal tied to a government decision. The Premier says he waited because he did not have all the facts. He knew this matter was serious – he knew it was serious enough to involve the RCMP – he knew a Cabinet minister was involved, and he knew that there were questions about a $100,000 payment tied to an environmental decision. Islanders were not told then, and they should have been.

Environment permit investigation (further)

Question to the Premier: What specific information did you receive after March 13th that justified waiting weeks to inform Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to stand and answer these questions for the first, second, third, fourth time if I have to, but I received information on March 27th. I gathered the facts, I made decisions, I took action, and I've been transparent and open with the people of Prince Edward Island about the timeline and all the events surrounding this situation.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[1:40 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, transparency doesn't come weeks later. Transparency is basically damage control in this case.

Yesterday the Premier defended his decision to appoint Mr. Murphy, saying, "He's somebody I trust, which was important in this case." When a government chooses a lawyer with close political ties to the governing party to review a matter involving one of his own ministers, it raises an obvious question about whether their political interests were put ahead of the public interest. Islanders are not looking for someone the Premier trusts; they're looking for someone that they can trust.

Question to the Premier: Why did you prioritize personal trust over independent oversight in a matter as serious as this?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When the opposition resorts to these types of questions, they're admitting that they're not finding fault with the actions we took, but they're looking for political victories. Trust is important, and look, Murray Murphy is a King's Counsel, which is an exceptional merit awarded to lawyers who have exhibited integrity and skill. Lawyers are hired for their expertise, not for their agreement. If you could buy an opinion, where would the profession be?

I have faith in the integrity of the facts that we gathered, and they are in fact the basis for the actions I took. So, Mr. Speaker, I apologize for nothing in this case.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

But Islanders are telling me something different. The optics on this do not look good. A PC Party supporter, a PC Party fundraiser, a friend of the Premier's – that does not look good to the public. The Premier made it clear that he chose Mr. Murphy because he is someone that he trusts.

But this is not the only time the same politically connected lawyers were brought in on sensitive government matters, including work connected to the Jenkins review into the handling of the Craswell scandal at the Public Schools Branch. This raises a broader concern about how this Premier exercises judgement when independence is required. It leaves Islanders asking why this Premier continues to rely on the same individuals for reviews that require independence.

To the Premier: Did the Premier direct the Department of Education to engage Mr. Murphy in relation to the Jenkins review, and how does he justify using the same politically connected individual on multiple sensitive matters where independent scrutiny is expected?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: I'll take that question.

As Minister of Education and Early Years, I was not directed by anyone to seek out specific counsel.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier chose a lawyer that he says he trusts to review this matter, at a time when Islanders are being asked to accept fiscal restraint and when public finances are under a great deal of pressure.

My question to the Premier: How much did that decision cost taxpayers, and will you table the service agreement, scope of work, or terms of this engagement?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The terms of the agreement were simple: Go get the facts and report back. The public can judge for themselves the integrity of the facts that were returned back to us. As I said, they are plain-spoken facts. They are not glossed over, they are not sugarcoated, and in fact were the basis for the actions that I took.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: I will ask again, Mr. Speaker: How much did that decision cost taxpayers, and will you table the service agreement, the scope of work, or the terms of the engagement?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, in keeping with my commitment to be open and transparent about everything surrounding this situation, I'd be happy to make that information public.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It only took me two times to ask you to get that.

The premier told Islanders that the RCMP were informed on March 13th, but that was done by a deputy minister; it was not done by this Premier. At the same time, he says he did not have all the facts.

My question to the Premier: When did you first learn that the RCMP had been notified, and why did Islanders not hear that from you at that time?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I've been very clear that I learned very few facts on March 13th about this situation, but what I did learn concerned me, which was the reason we took action to gather the facts so that we understood exactly what we were dealing with.

[1:45 p.m.]

I've answered this question. We gathered the facts, made decisions, took actions, and we've been transparent with Islanders. It is out of my hands now. What the RCMP knows and what they do with it is none of my business. I do not intend to interfere with that. I've done my job. Those who can review it from here will do their job.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, Islanders weren't told when it actually mattered, and that says everything. The situation raises serious questions about relationships, influence, and judgment at the highest levels of government.

The former minister was not just a colleague, he was a known supporter of the Premier's leadership campaign, actively involved in organizing support and fundraising. Islanders deserve to know whether those relationships influenced how this situation was handled.

Question to the Premier: How active was he in your campaign, and how much fundraising did he undertake on your behalf?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, the answer is none; he was not involved in my campaign.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

If the Premier is serious about transparency, Islanders deserve to see the full financial picture.

Question to the Premier: Will you table all financial contributions to your leadership campaign, your party, and all your district associations?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that donations to leadership campaigns are made to the party and earmarked for a specific candidate. We can provide that information, provided the party is able to provide it.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

He can make that decision; he can make that decision right now.

Yesterday, I asked Summerside's representative in Cabinet what involvement she had in discussions related to this golf course project. Her first response was, "I had no discussions on the situation whatever," so I asked her again. Her second answer was: "I didn't have many discussions, but I was certainly excited about this project to come to Summerside. I would love to see a golf course come to Summerside."

But we have also seen a social media post from this minister showing her attending the dinner with individuals connected to this project, including the project's architect. Those are clearly not consistent statements.

Question to the minister: How many times have you met with individuals connected to this project? Who paid for those meetings?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As MLA for my district, it is my role to support economic growth and employment. I support many businesses coming to District 22 for those opportunities.

I'm not sure what road this member is going down, but what I can tell you is I meet with new businesses; I meet with folks who want to get businesses off the ground; I meet with businesses who have been in place for years; I meet with residents looking for housing, health care, social assistance, and just plain support; and in fact, I've serviced 850 residents in the last three years. So, I meet with all kinds of businesses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

But I asked her as being the minister of Summerside, and you know what? Her response today was not what she said yesterday. Given the minister's conflicting responses yesterday about her involvement in this project, Islanders are still trying to understand what discussions actually took place. This is a significant development project involving government decisions and the environment, and the minister has acknowledged at least some level of engagement.

My question to the same minister: What, specifically, were those conversations about?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I just said, I meet with hundreds of people. I have and will continue to do that because that's my job and it's the hon. member's job as well. I am the advocate for District 22 Summerside where the golf course is located. I'm also a member of Summerside where the hospital is located. I speak for the hospital, and I speak for golf courses, and I speak for all sorts of businesses.

[1:50 p.m.]

I was a member of city council when the golf course was there, and it closed. I was very disappointed about that. The group came to town – maybe it's got to be over two years ago now – to say that they would like to start the golf course up. As you can imagine, I was excited; I met with them at that time. I met with them 19 months ago to do a tour of the golf course, and we had a bite to eat after. I met with them a year ago; that's the last time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Yesterday, she said she couldn't remember if she had any discussions with them, and now today, it's something totally different.

The post that she had on social media was actually one year ago from today. At that meeting that I questioned her about, who paid for that meeting?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, that meeting one year ago today – thank you, I knew it was in April of last year – was an update on what was going on. There was a councillor from Summerside that joined me at the meeting. It was just an update on what was going on. We sat and had a bite to eat and talked about the project.

What I did answer yesterday was did I have any involvement in what you were trying to bring up yesterday, and I absolutely knew nothing about that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much.

My question, once again: Who paid for that meeting, and what was discussed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, there was not much discussed. We showed a few pictures on how the project was going. We had a bite to eat, probably there for about an hour, and Nicole Morrison paid for the meal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

So, I believe Nicole's also a councillor in Summerside, is she not?

[Interjection]

Hon. H. Perry: Oh, she was the real estate developer. Yes, she was the one working for the developer.

Islanders are now learning more about the organization that received the $100,000 payment. The report indicates that this organization has offices at 48 Mill Street in

Wellington. However, there does not appear to be a clear physical presence at this location. The only apparent ties to that address are the former minister's constituency office, and individuals connected to his office and political network.

My question to the Premier: When did you first become aware of these connections, and why was this organization considered an appropriate recipient in the first place?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I have stated numerous times now, the public – and that would include the Leader of the Opposition – knows the facts that I know at this point. He can come to his own conclusions about this group, but this has been turned over to external – to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and to the RCMP. They can come to their own conclusions about this group. That's where we stand today. We have done our job. We've handed over the facts. They can take it from here.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Well, what Islanders are saying is this doesn't pass the sniff test. The Premier has committed to tabling documents, but Islanders are still waiting for answers. Transparency delayed is transparency denied.

My question to the Premier: When will those documents be tabled, and what will that include? Will it include all correspondence, instructions, and briefing material related to this matter?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We instructed the department this morning to gather those materials to make them available.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to seeing them tabled today.

This situation has raised serious questions about judgement, about oversight, and leadership at the highest level of government. Islanders are not looking for explanations; they're looking for accountability.

My question to the Premier: Will you support a full committee investigation and direct your caucus to cooperate so Islanders can finally get the answers that they deserve?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition points out that this issue has raised questions about judgement. That's true. We've admitted that, and I've said numerous times here again already today that this has been handed over to third parties that will conduct a proper independent review. If the Leader of the Opposition thinks that we're going to get more clarity by handing this over to politicians, perhaps that's the approach he wants to take. I'm very clear about the approach that I've taken, and I'm confident that we'll get to the bottom of the situation.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I want to pick up a little more where I left off yesterday on this board, the Comité Diversité et Équité who received a donation at the request of the former Minister of Environment.

[1:55 p.m.]

Yesterday, I had asked the minister about the qualifications of this organization to carry out environmental work. She didn't seem to know a whole lot about that particular group or what their mandate is, but I do feel transparency matters, especially when public trust has already been shaken, so I'm going to ask a little more to the minister. There's no publicly available information outlining the governance or structure of this organization, and media reports suggest individuals tied to it have close connections with the PC Party.

Environment permit investigation (further)

Question to the Minister of Environment: Who sits on the board of this organization, how were they selected, and when was their last annual

meeting? Will you table in this Legislature this organization's list of executives and membership along with their mandate?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I don't know who sits on that board. I really don't know anything about the board. I didn't even know, personally, that it existed until this came forward. It was brought to me through my deputy and through the department. That's all I know.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Well, at least you're with every other Islander that has no clue what this board is about. I appreciate that, but we know that a stop work order was issued on February 27th at the department after the department became aware of the work that was being carried out outside an approved area. This was weeks before the Premier was informed.

Question to the Minister of Environment: When you were made aware of this situation, when did you inform the Premier? As he didn't seem to be informed until later on, because the stop work order seemed to be issued well in advance of the Premier being informed.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you.

Hon. member, the stop work order came forward and was put in place because the company – the developer – was working outside of the area that had been approved in the only permit that they've ever received. There was an anonymous tip that came forward to the department. They had to investigate to see what was going on. They went out to the development, and it was very apparent that they were working outside of the area that had been approved, and that's when the stop work order was put in place.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Okay. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

For months I've raised concern in this House about the inaccurate wetland mapping that even the minister's department has also argued or has agreed that they are inaccurate. Wetland mapping has caused growing confusion around what is and what is not considered a wetland. Islanders understand marshes, swamps, and waterways; what they do not understand are vague designations like "wooded wetlands" that impact private land without clear boundaries or definitions.

Wetlands

Question to the minister: Will your department commit to a full on-the-ground review of wetland mapping across Prince Edward Island to ensure accuracy, clarity, and fairness to landowners, farmers, foresters, and developers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I have the same questions as you do. I've had them raised by my own constituents. I can tell you right now that there is a review of the policy happening as we speak; not only wetland mapping, but compensation and everything that encompasses wetland application. So, I will be quite happy to commit to that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In my previous life, as you know, I worked as a lawyer. In the course of working as a lawyer, I oversaw many, many individuals giving evidence and recounting events under oath. When you spend a lot of time trying to piece together the facts, you know what the small but important things are to look for.

Environment permit investigation (further)

Question the Minister of Land and Environment: The investigation report prepared by Murray Murphy is dated March 24th. When did you give that report to the Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I did not give the report to the Premier. That was done by my department.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, first supplementary.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that the department had the report on March 24th. The information that we're getting from the Premier is that he got the report on March 27th. The seriousness of the information in the legal opinion can be seen by the consequences that have resulted from that particular report. I can't remember a time when a member of Cabinet or caucus was removed by a Premier from both Cabinet and caucus.

My question is to the hon. Premier: Are you concerned, Mr. Premier – because I know I am, and Islanders are as well – that your minister and her department did not give you that legal opinion with that serious information for three days before you got it to your attention, and can you table today the final legal memo that's dated March 27th? Not the 24th one; there was a revision to that. March 27th, I understand, is the final one – which we've yet to see.

[2:00 p.m.]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, there was a draft of the report, is my understanding, that came to the department, but there was some work that had to be done – some due diligence and fact confirming with the department for the report. The department did not receive the report until March 27th.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, second supplementary.

M. MacFarlane: So, I've asked for that final report of the 27th to be tabled. I think it's important that we, as Islanders, have the final report and not draft report, especially when there's been three days that we're now hearing where departmental officials have tweaked whatever was in that report. So, let's get the final report tabled so Islanders can see what that is.

We've had three days from the time the minister's department got that report, during which the Legislature was sitting during that period of time. Why did government hold onto it? Was there a reason to come up with a communications strategy? Was it because the PC Party had their AGM and they wanted to get that over with before the report came out? The Premier says he acted quickly, but not as quickly as I think Islanders are now seeing to be the reality.

My question to the Premier: Holes in someone's story like this undermine the entire testimony that you're providing. What other inaccuracies are we going to come to learn about in this entire situation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I took exception to what you said yesterday and I'm doing it again today. To accuse a department of tweaking anything is incorrect.

They were approached to find out some of the details, to confirm the details; the only people that would know would be the department. That was the job of the lawyer that was asked to investigate this. The lawyer approached the department to confirm some of the issues that they talked about. He wanted to make sure he had the right facts. That's what happened. I will stand by that. The final report came out on March 27th to our department.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Wetlands sometimes get a bad rap. Occasionally they're referred to as swamps and bogs, and some see them as a nuisance and an impediment to development. Their value is often seriously underestimated. The truth is that they provide almost priceless ecological services, capturing carbon, filtering water, providing flood control, creating critical habitat, and acting as a water reservoir in our increasingly common droughts.

Since 2007, which is when PEI's no net loss wetland policy was finally adopted, we've

actually lost about 15 percent of the acres of wetland that we had.

Wetlands (further)

Question to the Minister of Land and Environment: Can you explain why, since adopting a policy that was specifically designed to protect them, we've actually lost a large amount of our wetlands?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I will point out that this government has made a commitment to bring our protected land or government land to 7 percent, and we will stay committed to that. We're getting very close. I understand the importance of wetlands, as does my department.

We work with anybody who is interested in an application to change or mitigate wetlands. We work with them, but I said yesterday there are three pillars to this: the first one is avoiding wetlands; the second one is to use the very minimal amount; and the third one is, if there needs to be use of wetlands, there is a compensation fund that is paid into that goes towards enhancing, improving, or creating wetlands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, first supplementary.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

We'll get to that in a second, minister, but yesterday you suggested in one of your answers in this House that when it comes to protecting wetlands, we do things just like the rest of Canada. I'm paraphrasing. Our policies may well be in alignment with other provinces, but I can absolutely assure you that nowhere else implements their policies with the kind of looseness and willingness to make exceptions that we do here on Prince Edward Island.

To the same minister. In a recent standing committee, a presenter was clear that there sometimes are indeed legitimate reasons to make exceptions to the policy, but that most often those exceptions are made because through "back channels" – their term – someone in authority is asked to, as they put it – again, their words – "just make it happen."

Would you agree, minister, that loopholes in the existing policy are sometimes used inappropriately?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

[2:05 p.m.]

Hon. D. Compton: Hon. member, I really can't comment on previous ministers in my department – what they did, what they didn't do – but I can tell you that before this incident happened, I have never heard a complaint about how we handle any kind of wetland application. There is a process in place. We will continue to use that.

The department – I will point out that the director or one of the employees brought forward the fact that this had happened. It's an irregularity within the department that is not acceptable, and they brought it forward because they knew it was not acceptable and they were trying to find out what exactly happened. It's an irregularity within the department that is not acceptable. They brought it forward because they knew it was not acceptable and they were trying to find out what exactly happened. That is what we did in our department. It was forwarded to the proper people. That is what I will say and stand by, for the Department of Environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, second supplementary.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

There is, of course, an advisory committee that's meant to guide the minister in her or his decision when it comes to making exceptions, and if one of those exceptions is granted, what the financial compensation should be. The process is absolutely clearly laid out and would be absolutely very clear to yourself, minister, or any of your predecessors.

Firstly, an exception that's being considered based on the recommendations from staff. Secondly, a compensatory amount is established. Thirdly, that money is transferred to the wetland conservation fund. The department who holds

that fund then decides who should get the money. Then, they distribute it to that organization, and then the work is done.

Environment permit investigation (further)

To the Premier: Not one of these steps – none of them were followed. Do you still consider the behaviour of the previous minister a simple error in judgement as you've described it many times before or is this actually something far more serious that is worthy of an RCMP investigation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that these are two separate incidents. What occurred with a donation to a private community group is entirely separate, occurred entirely outside the official process that these cases normally go through. That's absolutely why we're here today talking about that. Those are the facts that have been disclosed publicly.

I'm not sure why you would need to answer that question because they are two separate things. It did not go through the process that it should have.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When a community loses its school, it loses its future. The 2017 proposal to bus our children elsewhere was a threat to the very fabric of Georgetown.

Today, thanks to this government's vision, those fears are being replaced by the sights of progress. We are moving forward with a net-zero ready design that will serve as a high-tech learning environment and a hub for the entire town. This is the stability that families in Georgetown and Georgetown Royalty deserve, knowing that their school isn't just staying open but becoming one of the best in the province.

Georgetown Elementary School

A question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Can the minister share the projected timeline for when the school in Georgetown will be replaced and be ready to welcome students, and confirm that this government will always prioritize building and supporting our Island communities and their schools instead of tearing them down like the Liberals tried to do?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the member, it's not only staying open; there will be a new school there that students, families, and the community can be proud of for generations and generations. It looks like it's going to be about a two-year project. The projected date for the Georgetown school to be open to students is 2030.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal, first supplementary.

B. Curran: Mr. Speaker, for years the conversation around Georgetown was limited to how much it would cost just to keep the lights on or provide basic repairs. The previous school board leadership seemed more interested in tearing down than building up. Our government has completely changed that conversation.

In our most recent capital budget, we didn't just propose a few fixes, we made an historic commitment to build a modern replacement facility, and we are making a generational investment because we believe Georgetown isn't just a place where people used to live, but a place where young families are moving to and thriving.

A question to the Minister of Education: With this generational investment now allocated for the Georgetown school replacement, can the minister update this House on the specific planning and design milestones currently underway for this vital project?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: A great passionate member we have across there, and you're right, member, unlike previous Liberal governments, we're not tearing down schools, closing schools. Unlike previous Liberal governments, we are investing in the infrastructure of our students.

[2:10 p.m.]

The project is expected to get underway – the planning and design phase – in ’27-28 with construction slated to start ’28-29. We’re getting very close on property for that school. Some great, exciting things are going to happen in Georgetown-Pownal.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal, second supplementary.

B. Curran: Mr. Speaker, the people of Georgetown have a deep and storied pride in their local school. For generations, it’s been the heart of the community. However, that heart almost stopped beating in 2017. At that time, a recommendation came forward from the Public Schools Branch under the leadership of director Parker Grimmer – who is now a Liberal candidate – to officially close the Georgetown Elementary.

It was a difficult time for parents who felt their community was being written off. Let’s be clear: two of the Cabinet ministers who were in favour of closing schools are sitting to my right, while the other is in the gallery as the leader of the Liberal Party of Prince Edward Island, and now, we’re slating the former director to come back and try to finish the job. Fortunately, our government chose to listen to families instead of following a plan that would have ended a century of education in the capital of King’s County.

Question to the same minister: Since the Liberals’ own Parker Grimmer recommended this closer and their current leadership sat at the Cabinet table that oversaw the project, what specific guarantees can this minister provide that our government’s plan for a new school is a permanent commitment to Georgetown’s future?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal for the question. He is a fantastic advocate for his district. I believe that since he was elected, he has asked me about this every single day, so he’s a great advocate.

Look, I’ve been to the current Georgetown school. I know that it needs to be replaced. Built in 1957 with an addition in 1974 – and maybe a great trivia question at some point – part of that school was built, they tell me, with reclaimed lumber from a shipwreck. I know the Georgetown school needs to be replaced. The children of Georgetown deserve a new and a modern school just as every other student across the province does. That is why we have made a commitment –

[Interjections]

Hon. R. Croucher: I have the floor, do I, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: Yes, minister. You can continue.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you.

Our government has made a commitment to Georgetown School in its five-year capital plan. I’m from a district where school closures were a real thing – Eastern King’s Consolidated, Rollo Bay, Fortune, Dundas. I know the effects of closing schools.

I’m not interested in closing schools. Our government’s not interested in closing schools. In fact, we’re interested in investing in our students’ futures. We’ve committed $390 million to new school construction over the next five years, and that includes the Georgetown school.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That’s a tough act to follow. I’m not sure I’m going to be able to do quite as good of a job.

Recently, in a study by Statistics Canada on human trafficking in Canada from 2014 to 2024, it shows clearly that the Maritime provinces continue to experience some of the highest rates of human trafficking in the country. The report also highlights that 93 percent of identified victims are women and girls, with two thirds of those being under the age of 25, meaning young girls and vulnerable youth remain disproportionately at risk.

Human trafficking

A question to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: What initiatives or plans are currently under way to help Islanders – especially young people – understand and recognize the signs of human trafficking?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the hon. member raising this very serious issue on human trafficking. I want to thank you for your advocacy on this issue as well.

The Women's Secretariat has the lead on this file. There is a provincial committee on human trafficking, bringing together representatives from justice, policing, social services, health, education, and community organizations to raise awareness and to ensure that victims receive the most informed and compassionate support possible.

Thank you, hon. member.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, first supplementary.

[2:15 p.m.]

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, traffickers do not operate in silos. Preventing human trafficking, especially when it comes to young girls and vulnerable youth, requires every part of government to work together. Education, Transportation, Justice, and the Women's Secretariat, as well as outside agencies such as law enforcement and victim services all have unique roles. Effective prevention demands coordinated and ongoing communication.

Question to the same minister: How is the Women's Secretariat engaging with other departments and outside agencies to better protect young girls and at-risk populations?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to this provincial committee on human trafficking, I have issued a letter to all ministers in all government departments requesting their support on anything relating to status of women. There also is a guide created by the Women's Secretariat to support victims of human trafficking, and we continue to update this guide to ensure information is current and to provide the best possible support.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, second supplementary.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that so much.

We know that the average age is just 13, and that 93 percent of those trafficking are Canadian born. The Women's Secretariat plays a crucial role in bringing awareness to the signs and the risk factors of human trafficking. They can take the lead and ensure that programs, partnerships, and targeted initiatives are begun so that we can stop this before it happens.

Question to the same minister: Will you in your role as Minister of the Status of Women provide leadership to the Women's Secretariat to ensure that programs, partnerships, and targeted initiatives are underway to better protect young girls and other vulnerable populations from falling victims to human trafficking?

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I'm fully committed to supporting this work. I'm working with all departments and with the Women's Secretariat to ensure that addressing human trafficking continues to be a priority moving forward. Our goal is to ensure that every Islander accesses the supports that they need.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Our office has been fielding many, many calls from concerned Islanders about the former minister's handling of funds. Islanders want to know that this is not part of a broader pattern. They want assurance that this is a one-off, not business as usual with this government.

Environment permit investigation (further)

Question to the minister: Will you commit today to a full review of all permits approved under the

former minister to ensure they complied with the law and departmental policy?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I stood in here and I praised the work that our public servants do in our departments. They're professionals and they are largely responsible for the situation that we've been discussing coming to light.

If there are questions about specific permits, the member is welcome to bring those forward, but I have confidence in the staff in our departments that they process permits in accordance with our policies and regulations.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Cancer Month

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

April is Cancer Month in Canada, and it is a time that matters deeply to all of us. Across PEI, cancer has touched nearly every family. It has affected parents and children, friends and neighbours, coworkers and loved ones. It is a diagnosis that changes lives and it is why awareness and prevention matter so much.

Throughout the month of April, many of us will wear the daffodil. It is a simple symbol but a powerful one. It represents hope, resilience, and our shared commitment to those affected by cancer.

Cancer Month is also a time to recognize progress. Here in PEI, we are making advances in cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment. In the past few years, we have improved screening for colorectal and cervical cancer, added more than 50 new and effective cancer medications, and strengthened prevention efforts so fewer Islanders face this disease in the future.

[2:20 p.m.]

This work is guided by the PEI cancer action plan, with a focus on earlier diagnosis, better care, and stronger supports throughout the cancer journey.

We know there is more to do. Cancer remains the leading cause of death in Prince Edward Island, with more than 1,100 Islanders diagnosed each year. We are committed to improving early detection for lung cancer as part of our broader cancer strategy.

None of this progress would be possible without the dedication of our health care professionals and the collaboration of partners across our health system and communities, so I want to say thank you to our frontline workers in cancer care. Your expertise, compassion, and commitment make a difference every single day.

During Cancer Month, as we wear the daffodil, we honour those affected by cancer, recognize the progress being made, and reaffirm our commitment to continuing this work together for all Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Responding to the minister's statement, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for getting up and talking about this month, the daffodil, and what it means.

In that statement, you said there's no Island family that hasn't been touched by cancer, and I would fully agree with that. It affects families. It affects us. People want to know that our government's there to support them and that people care, and I think that is the case.

We have much work to do in Prince Edward Island, whether it's hematology, oncology, whether it's – the minister did mention it – our lung cancer screening program…. Good news this week with the cervical cancer announcement. Get your FIT test and make sure that April is a chance for families to discuss cancer, to discuss what it's like to support each other. We will be there for you.

I stand with the minister today to say we can end cancer, we should end cancer, and we will do everything on Prince Edward Island to fight against this for the 1,100 people that get diagnosed in Prince Edward Island with cancer. I stand with you, and I stand with others. Let's put an end to this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for the statement and recognizing Daffodil Month for cancer awareness.

Indeed, cancer not only touches every family, but it touches every person in Prince Edward Island and in Canada. We're all affected. We all are directly or indirectly affected by this terrible disease. Yes, there have been some improvements, and I appreciated the minister's announcement yesterday on the colorectal screening with the FIT program being rolled out – a great initiative – and I appreciated hearing the minister's remarks just now that there will be some advances to the lung cancer screening program, which is also critically important.

As I did yesterday, I'd like to thank Heather Mulligan and her team with the Canadian Cancer Society, and also the frontline workers in the oncology unit, which is really a pinnacle of our health care system – that oncology unit, when it got stood up – and what it does to help people through a very vulnerable time and a very serious time. Everyone there needs to be recognized and thanked, and thanks to all the frontline workers who help people through this terrible disease.

Yes, we're going to get to better outcomes, and I'm looking forward to continuing to work with government to ensure those better outcomes are received.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you.

Moving on to a second minister statement, the hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

World Autism Awareness Day

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that.

Tomorrow, organizations and communities around the world will take time to recognize World Autism Awareness Day. This day of recognition provides an important opportunity to deepen our understanding of autism, and to acknowledge the experiences of autistic Islanders and their families.

I want to recognize the strengths, talents, and valuable contributions of individuals with autism. Tomorrow is a day to celebrate and honour the richness that they bring to our schools, our workplaces, and our communities.

It is also a time to reaffirm our commitment to being responsive to the needs of the autism community here on Prince Edward Island. As we heard earlier, in Prince Edward Island, one in 34 children and youth are diagnosed each year with autism. This statistic reflects the growing importance of ensuring that services and supports are available and accessible to Island residents.

Prince Edward Island continues to lead in the work as the only province with an *Autism Coordination Act*, supporting a coordinated and consistent approach across government and community services.

[2:25 p.m.]

Over the last year, we have expanded programs, increased investments in diagnostic services, enhanced supports for individuals and families, and strengthened partnerships with community organizations like the Autism Society, who is with us here this afternoon. This work is ongoing and needs to continue.

I would like to acknowledge the leadership of the autism community, individuals and families, and advocates whose insights and experience inform and help improve the supports available across our province.

World Autism Day encourages each of us in this room and across Prince Edward Island to challenge stereotypes, honour lived experiences, and uphold the rights of all autistic individuals. Let's work together towards increasing understanding, promoting acceptance, and supporting inclusion so that autistic Islanders and their families can thrive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the member has said, tomorrow is World Autism Awareness Day, and I'm reminded not only of the importance of awareness, but also of the deep responsibility that we all share in

building a much more understanding and inclusive world.

This day holds special meaning for me. Like many, many families across Prince Edward Island, I think about my own grandchildren, my own family, and the kind of world we are shaping for them – a world where differences are not only accepted but embraced, and a world where every child has their chance to flourish to their potential.

Autism is woven into the fabric of our communities. People living with autism are in our schools, our workplaces, our communities, and our homes. Tomorrow is a day that urges us to lead with compassion, with patience, and a dedication to making supports not just available, but genuinely accessible to people.

We owe it to Island families, to our caregivers, and most importantly to individuals living on the autism spectrum to listen, to learn, and then to act, because at the end of the day, this is about people. It's about dignity, and it's about making sure that every single person knows and feels they truly belong.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

Tomorrow, as has been announced, being World Autism Awareness Day, I feel like I might be repeating some of my words from the other day when the motion was on the floor, but that's okay because this is really important stuff.

As we know, PEI, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador have the highest rates of autism, as was mentioned. One in 34-35 children on Prince Edward Island are diagnosed with autism.

When I think of autism and I think about the ways in which it is celebrated, how much we have learned about it and how much more we have to learn about it, I am brought back to the stories that I hear all the time from families who are at a loss of accessing services.

I want to thank the various organizations who are doing this work in the province: Stars for Life, Autism Society, PEI Autistic Adults, ResourceAbilities, PEI Association for Community Living, and I'm sure that there are others. I want to thank you for the work that you do in helping create neurodiverse, neuroinclusive communities for supporting those living with autism and their families.

As I know that there are long wait times for diagnosis in schools – I was talking to a mom last night who has been waiting for three years, only to find out her child was actually not even put on the list, and she's back on. They're asking her if she even wants to bother at this point. Of course she does. I have a lot of questions for the minister later about this. I know that there are families waiting, and without that official diagnosis, you have no access to funding. You have no access to the resources and supports your child needs, and it is neglectful.

I think about when people living with autism grow into adults, and the need for housing and day programming and work, so I want to thank all of those community organizations – Inclusions East and West – who work in that, as well as Stars for Life.

While we stand and acknowledge and honour World Autism Awareness Day and we applaud the efforts that we've made as a province, we still have a lot of work to do. So, let's not get too comfortable with where we are right now because people living with autism are struggling right now because some of them don't even know that they are, and they feel different, and that's because of the beautiful culture of neurodiversity.

[2:30 p.m.]

We need to learn from that. We need to listen to people living with autism and ensure that our programs and services keep up.

Thank you.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a social media picture of the Minister of Social Development and Seniors with representatives

of the developer for the PEI Ocean View Golf Course, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table an article stating where the former leader of the PC Party was indeed wanting to close schools, and it was the former Liberal government who actually said no, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Orders Other than Government

Government Motions

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I seek unanimous consent to introduce Motion No. 32 calling on the Legislative Assembly to direct the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability to investigate dealings between the Department of Land and Environment, PEI Ocean View Resort, and the Comité Diversité et Equité without proper notice.

Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent?

Member, you do not have unanimous consent.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: At this time, I'll call Motion 2, please, back to the floor for debate.

Deputy Clerk: Motion No. 2: Improving workplace conditions and retention for frontline health care providers.

The motion has been read and debate was adjourned by the Leader of the Third Party.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, would you like to continue debate?

M. MacFarlane: Certainly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In my remarks previously further to this motion, I touched on the challenge and the struggle that I had simply by virtue of the fact that we would need a motion that compels government – or I should say urges the government – to do certain things like development action plan, into looking into workplace culture, look at staffing pressures, come up with measurable retention targets – and I guess, here's the kicker: To engage in meaningful conversation and discussion with the frontline staff and their representatives.

Unfortunately, that's where we're at. We have the motion on the floor for debate. I can't imagine a world where government would not agree to support this particular motion given it's essentially calling on government to do the job it should be doing when it comes to respecting our frontline health care workers with the goal being to retain frontline health care workers.

In my remarks yesterday, I talked about some of the challenges of workplace culture that need to be investigated, the fact that we're losing so many frontline workers to other positions either within government or to private sector, and why that is. There was talk about exit interviews and the importance of having exit interviews. These are all processes that should be undertaken when we're trying to retain our valuable frontline health care workers.

I guess there are a couple of things I'll make before I wrap up my remarks.

The mentorship piece I spoke about yesterday, and how important it is to have a tier of frontline workers with experience – senior experience, mid-level experience, junior experience – so that the system works….

[2:35 p.m.]

All of these levels and tiers of experience work together to learn, pass on knowledge, share knowledge/best practices, both from the new grads coming out and what they've learned, and from those who have been working on the front line for years and decades in many cases. That's invaluable knowledge, history, and experience that you can't learn in a book, but it's so important to be able to pass down to the young workers so they feel comfortable whether they're thrown into an emergency department or into an ICU that they've got someone there that they can turn to and ask for help.

Unfortunately, when we're losing frontline workers to early retirement packages or simply because of burnout, as the motion alludes, then you lose that. You lose that, and it's a struggle then for the workplace, a struggle for the professionals, and a concern and a struggle for Island patients in those environments.

I'm hearing, further to that, that instead of actually encouraging the retention of senior frontline workers, a program that was utilized by the LPNs, a mentorship program, is being cancelled. That's been a program that's been in place for a long time. It provided a little bit of a stipend to LPNs to work in a mentorship role. Now I'm hearing that that's being cancelled.

How do we expect to support the next generation of LPNs coming up when something that was so fundamentally important as providing the stipend under the mentorship program is potentially being pulled back? I'd be interested to hear the minister speak to how that brings value to both retention and comfort in the workplace for young LPNs.

Finally, overarching the entire discussion here about our challenges with our frontline workplace and frontline health care providers is something that's been talked about in this Legislature, not only a lot this sitting but in previous sittings to which I've had the pleasure of being a member of this Assembly: the negative role and the negative impacts brought on by political interference in the delivery of health care through Health PEI.

I think, fundamentally, that that is something that needs to be rooted out of our system so that our frontline workers work within Health PEI – the structure that's there, the hierarchy that's there – to deliver care to Islanders. That would get to the root of the challenge of so many of what we're seeing by way of stressors and pressures in our system and on our frontline health care workers.

With that, I'm going to conclude my remarks. I look forward to hearing other members speak to this important motion this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Pleasure to rise and speak to this motion, and will certainly be supporting the motion.

I did want to touch on just a few things that I know – currently, we've been over capacity in our facilities now I think for almost three months. I think on average, it's around – it depends on the day, but 117 to 120 percent over capacity, which is significant. That's extremely hard on our frontline workers.

I did, in my first week on the job, I stopped in at the QEH. There are overcapacity issues in all of our hospitals – and our long-term care facilities, too, because we're trying to make space for more beds. But really, the tremendous job that the staff at the QEH and all of our facilities are doing to deal with the overcapacity issue….

I did meet the nurses that work in this very small room. To be honest, I don't know how they do it. All of the patient bed flow is through them. They make everything work. They have a control panel basically, where people are being moved from facility to facility or are trying to open up a bed in a unit so they can move someone from the ER through. But I was quite shocked in just how dedicated they are, and how passionate they are, and what a good job they do. They all deserve our thanks. It's because of them that we're managing right now. We're just managing, really; that's how the system is operating right now.

I know the Leader of the Third Party did mention the LPN mentorship program. Perhaps sometime when they move off these questions and start asking questions on health care again, I'd answer these questions, but I do want to say I have asked – well, not yet, but I think we should look at that, the LPN mentorship.

[2:40 p.m.]

I have been getting emails from LPNs. I do understand. I think we're going to be going into negotiations soon with the union that represents them, so that could also be discussed at that table. But I think they make some good and fair points; I've certainly heard them, and we're going to look into that.

I just want to begin by saying clearly, obviously, we'll be supporting this motion. We're also supporting it because a lot of this work is already underway. Across our health care system and through Health PEI, there is active, ongoing work to address workplace culture, staffing pressures, and retention challenges. That doesn't mean the work is done, but it does mean the progress is happening. It's important to recognize that.

But at its core, the motion is about people. It's about the nurses, physicians, paramedics, technicians, and the support staff who show up every single day, often under immense pressure, as they are now, often stretched and still deeply committed to caring for others. The burnout is certainly real. The frustration is real. We need to keep listening, supporting, and trying to find new ways that we can support them.

At the same time, there is real, meaningful work already happening to support staff. We've seen tremendous progress in wages and working conditions. Collective agreements have been modernized, reflecting the complexity of today's health care environment, supporting more full-time positions, and improving stability for staff and patients alike. These are not small challenges; they are foundational to retention and morale.

We are also doing important work to rebuild trust with physicians, something I've taken on since taking this role about seven weeks ago now. Government and Health PEI are having meaningful, ongoing conversations with the Medical Society and physicians across the province because a strong health care system depends on strong relationships. That trust is essential.

Through Health PEI, we are also seeing a shift in how staff are supported day to day. There is a growing focus on workplace safety, wellness, and respect.

We now have dedicated supports for employees experiencing injury or disability, helping them stay in the workforce; a stronger culture of reporting and prevention when it comes to safety and workplace violence; and, importantly, 100 percent follow-up on reported incidents of workplace violence, ensuring staff feel heard and supported. That's about creating an environment where people feel safe, not just physically but psychologically.

We are also investing in learning leadership and workplace culture because culture doesn't change overnight, but it does change with intention.

Through Health PEI, teams are receiving training to strengthen communication, reduce conflict, and build respectful workplaces. Leaders are being better equipped to support staff through change and pressure. Work is underway to improve onboarding and ongoing learning so staff feel supported from day one.

Health PEI has put in place a clear engagement strategy focused on listening, recognition, and a strong unified team approach because people need to feel valued, they need to feel recognized, and they need to know their voices matter. The new CEO has made it very clear that one of her key priorities is rebuilding trust with staff and stakeholders, stabilizing the system, and supporting our front lines.

On staffing pressures, we know this remains one of the biggest challenges, but here, too, there is progress. Recruitment is faster. The new CRM system has made sourcing and recruiting candidates more efficient, alleviating pressure on the existing team. Graduate pipelines are stronger. There is a clear focus on filling permanent roles to reduce reliance on temporary staffing.

We are also using tools like locum physicians strategically so permanent staff can take the time they need without disrupting patient care. For physicians, specifically, there are enhanced supports in place, from parental benefits to continuing education to wellness programs and rural retention incentives.

All this is about making it possible not just to work here but to stay. There is much more work to do, but we should also be clear that this is a system that is actively working to improve, and with a shared commitment to better support the people delivering care.

We will certainly support this motion, and we will continue to work together to keep

strengthening our workforce and the system they support.

Thank you.

Speaker: Unless any other members want to speak to the motion, I'll return to the mover.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[2:45 p.m.]

Thank you for everyone who spoke to this, especially the minister who offered his own words, which is good for this Legislature to see what kind of direction he's – I know he's been working hard over the last little while to take health care, to talk to a lot of people. I want to thank him, too, for coming out to speak to the public most recently, as well.

I'm listening and I'm writing down these things. As the Health critic, I guess I've been here for a little while, so I've looked and I've heard a lot of these same things when before, the Minister of Fisheries now – he was the Minister of Health, and I appreciate his service there. Back to those days, it sounds like similar wording, and I would expect it is.

We talk about safety, wellness, and respect. We need to do a little bit of a better job – and I'll just say this – of the disconnect I think from these words and what the employees are telling us from the bottom up, because they're…. If they do have the courage to talk – especially to me, because I'm the opposition Health critic. If they do talk to me, it's usually that something has happened, or they're very apprehensive about talking. We just talked about that. They are vital pieces that maybe along the way have been thrust aside.

Just recently, I talked to somebody, even just last night. She hasn't been in the system for a while. She's over in the education system now. She had a rough go when she had to leave the area. It's nobody's fault; it's done. It's out of the area, but she couldn't get…. Once she was labelled as something, she couldn't get back in the system. There wasn't that acceptance there.

Father Taylor is here. We have to make sure that we provide people that acceptance and look and give them multiple chances to support and be part of the system. I'm trying not to say too much, and I want to thank her for the conversation. I spoke with her for 40 minutes last night.

Do you know what the common interest is, the common goal? It's that she cared about the people she was working with. It was the system and the parameters of the system she was saying weren't working for her and weren't working for the people she represented. That cost her three or four years of the best working experience of her life.

She got back in because – what happened was there are situations with her where she can't get a reference because it's the health care authority. It's big. You can't get a reference from your last position to go to another area. Whether it's a simple moving from one facility to the next, you are looked at as someone who can't work within the parameters of the system.

Well, the minister just said the system right now is breaking down, and we have to make sure that we deal with all these issues. When things break down, people get stressed out and they're trying to do more than they can. I think this was just a simple booking. This was just how people are booked, how staff are booked, and it just wasn't the right way, and – this is a true story – she ends up struggling. Four years later, she calls somebody, and here I am talking about it. I can't get that conversation out of my head.

I saw different avenues. What I'm saying right now is if this is a reset, make sure that before we look at casting doubt on people, that we give them a second chance and that everybody is given that second chance because we need them and they have a deep love for what they do within the system.

So, we talked about safety, wellness, and respect. Well, let's look at that. I know a lot of people are working hard because we haven't had a strategic plan with Health PEI. I've read the strategic plan. It does not read like a strategic plan. It reads like a report.

[2:50 p.m.]

We need to look at that strategic plan. If you look at it, you won't know where we're going in the next four years, and the business plan has no business metrics in it. It's wonderful, there's a lot of good key words in there, but it doesn't tell

me what the business of Health PEI is doing, and thus, we end up spending huge amounts in special warrants.

So, I want those to be strengthened because I should be able to look at those – and I have them in my desk – at any time and figure out where we're going with Health PEI. And there needs to be sections in there about what happens when – as the minister said. I, too, want to give a shout-out to all the staff working at 117 to 120 percent capacity. I appreciate the minister talking about that. Now we can work from government and maybe opposition about looking at that.

I have to look at that in my critique to the minister who's looking at the health care system. Things might have to change during that time in order for the system to be there. But what happens at 125 percent or 130 percent? Is this the ceiling? What do we do in here to make sure that those workers are feeling supported?

I was glad to hear the minister talk about workforce and the nursing staff working in a small room, trying to get things done and not having that place. That's something they often talk about too, whether it be at the long-term care facilities – when you go in there and you're just like, whoa, everybody knows where they're going, there are computers and they have to share different computers, and there's…. OT in the rehab areas have all their equipment lined up right there because there's nowhere to store it, and they're working in tight conditions, but they don't complain about that. They just get the job done. So, shout-out to those workers that the minister was talking about.

Then, he also said we're just managing right now. As worrisome as that might be, that is an indication to everybody that's using the system: remember what the minister just said and have a little bit – we have to come back down, when we're using our health care system. We know that it's struggling right now, but we have to try to keep that in mind upon entering the system because you can't take that out on the frontline health care workers. I think that that's maybe what this motion might do.

You will get service. We'll get you into the system, and when you get into the system, you're going to get incredible care.

But I know it's frustrating, and the wait room numbers, the avenues to get into the system, are very difficult. If they're just managing right now, I want to know that every Islander – people don't want to complain about getting into the system, and they've been pretty good, but it's at the point where – what do we do to make this better, both in the immediate…?

I know there were some plans on the floor. I know there are plans on the floor to make that better. There's not enough time to think about what that means for the long-term care facilities and the frontline care workers there. I'm sure the minister has taken action on – things like activity rooms are essential for people in those facilities all across the province. Respite beds are something that need to be protected for people in the long-term care systems, and day programs as well need to be protected and looked at in the area.

He did talk about, too – it's stretched. We're stretched.

[2:55 p.m.]

They're working on different contracts – which are important – with physicians at the moment. We're still in the pause phase. It's kind of ironic that we're doing this motion on April 1st, today, because that was the big goal back in July when we experienced another pause: how do we incorporate the master agreement or the physician services agreement back into the system?

Back in July, there was a pause back then, and that's where the MOU comes into place. That's how you apply the physician services agreement, the big document. The MOU document is only really small; it's a small document with a few different sections.

The reason why I call April 1st – this is the day where things turn over financially in our fiscal year. Today was the day that the master service agreement and MOA was supposed to be created, signed off, and applied. That didn't happen. There's a pause on now, and I'm not sure how that pause works.

If you'd like – I don't have much time – but I could go through the history as I saw it there, but in December, it came back out. We were supposed to have a signed agreement, then it went further on. I remember asking officials recently: What does a pause mean? Here we are, April 1st, and I'm still asking the question: What does a pause mean? How can we get this signed so we can get back to making sure that

physicians – family physicians especially – are supported in Prince Edward Island, and that they come here and they come here to stay? This has definitely set us back into where we are right now.

The next thing up about retention and recruitment is about nurses. During this motion – we talked about it a few years ago; the CEO talked about it too. They came out and almost said: "Oops, I don't know if we talked to the grad class on the Island." We didn't know if that was done. It got lost in the shuffle. How can that happen that we don't talk to the grad classes? Nurses right now are really at the point where they want to feel valued, because they're getting calls and they're getting emails and they're getting talked to from people all over the country.

So, how do we value our nurses? We, first of all, have to keep connected. I think that was a learning moment in Prince Edward Island. We have to continue to make sure that we're talking to those grad classes, forming that relationship, and if they do take positions within our system in Health PEI and here on PEI, that they feel valued and that they are here to stay for the long run because we need them so badly right now when they come in.

But at that stage, what we're finding too is that – the experienced nurses said they used to come in and they used to fight for these jobs. Now they're coming in and getting a job right in the emergency room as an ER nurse. They're coming in and they're getting these positions that are very, very difficult.

It takes a little bit of time, and it might take a little bit more where we stay with the nurse for a little bit longer, because that is a stressful position that they have their choice of where and what they can do. We want to make sure that Health PEI is as attractive as it can be – especially, too, with all the issues that we've faced over the last little while.

The negotiations with the nurses are coming up. I started off talking about this motion, which – we talked about the four concerns that the nurses have, and that's from the Nurses' Union. Like the minister said, negotiations with the nurses are coming up very soon. A lot of nurses are watching how that's going to go.

It's going to be an important discussion for the minister at this time. I hope that he's learned what are some of the issues with the master – or I shouldn't call it the master service agreement; that would be the old terminology for that, minister. It's the physician services agreement. That's just the terminology that we use now with the physician services agreement because the nurses agreement is going to come out and be very important.

[3:00 p.m.]

Along with the nurses agreement, the minister – I know that he's talked and reached out to nurse practitioners on Prince Edward Island. When you deal with the nurses agreement, the nurse practitioner scope of practice and where and how they present and work on PEI is going to be something that's very, very important to get done. Even though you're working with the nurses, this is the nurse practitioners.

What the nurse practitioners are saying is that they can…. And that's a very, very serious component of that, minister, because I've talked to them and they're very clear that they can look at – we always talk about it – walk-in clinics. They can, and they'll be able to be able to be there to look at walk-in clinics. On the outside, Islanders always say to us: Why don't nurse practitioners set up a walk-in clinic? I know the minister knows. There's an agreement that needs to be signed and there are a lot of negotiations to be done with that. I'm confident in the minister that that's something that he wants, and this is the time to get that deal signed for it.

Another thing is they're always under the – primary care. I'm talking about how nurse practitioners do a lot of different things. They should be in ERs, they should be in our emergency rooms, they should be all over the place, but right now medical homes have to be under a semi-supervision of doctors. What they're saying is: "We are and we have the education to be independent. We are. We can be kind of outside of the paneling there, and we should."

If you do that and you treat it kind of like the physician services agreement – please don't treat it like the MOA. Please do not do that. The physician service agreement, the big document – that's the one where there's a model there for nurse practitioners. If you get this right, we will and we can change the future by supporting nurse practitioners. What I mean by that is that you'd have to look at their compensation levels. Right now, we cannot get primary care.

Nurse practitioners need to be looked at, and this contract needs to be looked at, in both – walk-in clinics need to be in that agreement – their scope of practice and their panel size. They can take on panel sizes that….

[Interjection]

G. McNeilly: What's that? Yeah. Well, that's the thing. They can take on 800, but the incentive needs to be there, and it could be there, and it's an incentive. It's not "you should take this on." Incentivize our nurse practitioners, when they become independent, to take on more clients.

[Interjection]

G. McNeilly: No, I don't…. That's my understanding, but the minister might know. I don't think it's there. There are some issues around that…. Maybe it won't be. Maybe we do know. But there are some issues there that will come up.

Again, in typical fashion, I didn't write down the details of the important meeting I had, but I'm just going on the themes here. But there is a way that we can get and retain nurse practitioners in primary care, and it's all going to be in those negotiations. It will be a difficult negotiation, but if you can get this done – and I'm hoping that you get this done sooner rather than later. Look at that. It's an avenue, and it's something we need.

And look at the nursing contract as well, because right now, we have to make sure that that's there for our great nurses that are working very hard. The incentive has to be there.

Flex hiring: you have to look at making their workplace environment safe, and I know the minister just talked about that. look at giving them the opportunity to stay and say: "Wow, PEI is the place I want to start my nursing career." That's what we need –

Hon. H. Perry: And finish it.

G. McNeilly: And finish it, yeah, for sure.

I appreciated the minister's comments. This is a great place to leave it, and I applaud him for maybe supporting this motion that's coming up for a vote, minister. It's a good place to start.

We have work to do with retention, we have work to do with recruitment – it's obviously there – and we have a system that's operating at 120 percent. That means at least 20 percent over capacity. It's a lot on our staff. It's a lot on the department. It's a lot on the management of Health PEI.

[3:05 p.m.]

We'll ask questions along the way to make sure we're asking the right questions so that we can support that for Islanders. They want primary care first, and they deserve it, and we're listening on this side of the House.

I appreciate the minister's comments.

At that point, I will end debate and call for a standing vote, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, member.

The question has been called for a recorded division.

Ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to ring the bell, please.

[The bells were rung]

R. Henderson: The opposition members are ready for the vote.

K. Bernard: The third party is ready for the vote.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, government is ready for the vote.

Speaker: Members, I just want to give you a point of clarification here as well. We have an independent member. The rule is we wait for five minutes for members to come back into the Chamber if the Whips don't indicate their caucus is ready. We're going to wait the full five minutes to allow the independent member to come back to the Chamber if he so wishes, if you're wondering why we're not starting things right away right now.

[3:10 p.m.]

Alright, members. First, I'd like to ask all those voting nay, against the motion, to stand.

Seeing none, I would ask all those voting yea, for the motion, to stand.

[The Deputy Clerk calls the roll]

YEAS

Bell
Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Burridge
Croucher
Curran
Deagle
Dillon
Dollar
Henderson
Hudson
MacFarlane
MacKay
McNeilly
Perry
Ramsay
Redmond
Simpson

Speaker: Thank you, members.

The yeas have it, and the motion has passed unanimously.

Seeing as we've reached the end of opposition time, I'll call the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Community Care Facilities and Nursing Homes Act*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Bill No. 101, *An Act to Amend the Community Care Facilities and Nursing Homes Act,* read a first time.

Speaker: Member, would you like to give some more information about your bill?

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The amendment to the legislation establishes a maximum daily rate that an operator may charge a resident or category of residents for continual residential accommodation with meals and housekeeping in a category of facilities. It also limits the degree to which the rate may be adjusted annually and also prohibits an operator from charging a resident more than the maximum daily rate for continual residential accommodation with meals and housekeeping.

Orders Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the 17th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 17, *An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act*, Bill No. 100, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act,* Bill No. 100, read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'd like to call upon the Deputy Speaker and the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to chair the Committee of the Whole House, I believe for the first time as the Deputy Speaker.

[3:15 p.m.]

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act*.

Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be now read clause by clause? Yes.

Member, would you like to invite a stranger to the floor?

M. MacFarlane: Yes, thank you.

Chair: Is it okay with those in the House that the stranger come to the floor? Yes.

Welcome, stranger. Can you please state your name for Hansard?

Michelle Patterson: Michelle Patterson, director of policy and research for the third party.

Chair: Thank you.

I think we decided that we would read this clause by clause, so I will read it. If you have any questions, we'll take questions then.

1. Clause 37(1)(b) of the *Financial Administration Act* R.S.P.E.I. 1988, Cap. F-9, is amended by the deletion of the words "a payment is required" and the substitution of the words "a payment is urgently and immediately required".

I'll turn it over to you for your opening remarks.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

I'll be brief with the opening remarks in as much as the bill is brief itself. It's a simple bill, as can be seen by the brevity of the amending clause, but I think the bill is an important bill.

What I've attempted to do with this legislation is a couple of things – first of all, to bring us in line with other provinces because other provinces, from our jurisdictional review, employ language similar or identical to what this bill does to our *Financial Administration Act*.

But more importantly, the intention of the bill is to ensure that there are some parameters put around special warrant usage in our province – again, similar to what we do see in other provinces. We are an outlier in that regard, in that other provinces employ the language that this bill seeks to bring into our legislation.

We also are a bit of an outlier in our increasing dependence on the use of special warrants in our province. The intent of adding this language in – again, to make us a little more consistent with other jurisdictions – is to encourage good budgeting, realistic budgeting, and minimize the use of special warrants.

[3:20 p.m.]

I do think it's important to note that the legislation as presented will not prevent money from being issued if we need it for urgent or immediate requirements, which is the purpose behind special warrants in particular; they're supposed to be a last resort. But hopefully it will encourage government and government departments to do a better job of both budgeting for the year ahead and in utilizing the funds that are necessary to be used as appropriated to them through the legislative process of debating the budget and approving the budget.

As part of the consultation on the bill, we did reach out to the Minister of Finance and the deputy minister, the secretary to the Treasury Board, and the Auditor General. The Auditor General replied, supportive of the bill. I think that's consistent with what we've heard from the Auditor General, who has indicated some serious concerns with respect to the financial trajectory of the province at present.

I think it's also important to note, Chair, just as I conclude my remarks on my introduction of the bill, that when we look at the Treasury Board policy 6.03 surrounding the use of special warrants – and I'll read it directly from subsection (4) of the policy: "Treasury Board's general policy is fund from within first and Special Warrants should only be a LAST RESORT if no other funding sources can be identified."

I think it's telling, Chair, that "last resort" is in all caps, uppercase letters to denote the importance of using special warrants as, in fact, a last resort.

If we look at the trend in our province, we have become increasingly reliant on special warrants. From 2014 to 2021, they averaged between $37 million to $67 million during that seven-year span. In 2022, $184 million; 2023, $326.7 million – which I note is actually 10 percent of

the total operating budget, which the Auditor General noted at the time was higher than any other province that allows the practice of special warrants. Just jumping ahead to this year, Chair, we've seen over $150 million in special warrants approved in February alone.

I think that sets out the background of the bill as to why I felt the urgency and immediacy to bring this particular bill at this time. I'm happy, with my stranger, to answer any questions that members might have.

Chair: Go ahead, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Chair.

In there, you have now the words "urgently and immediately required." How will that be defined? Is there a legal or a policy definition?

M. MacFarlane: That will be for the government of the day to determine at the time urgency and immediacy. The government of the day will then also – of course, as we know through the process of going through the budget – have to be held accountable to answer the question as to why they determined and deemed the spend to be urgently and immediately required. That's where the accountability comes in – when government is called upon to answer as we go through in budget debates, line by line, on the special warrants.

Hon. H. Perry: I know you talked about generally, I guess, why it's important to put that in there, but can you talk about any specific situation or incident that led you to conclude that this wording must be changed?

M. MacFarlane: Probably no, not one specific incident or situation. I think there are several that all of us in the Chamber would be aware of.

[3:25 p.m.]

A couple of answers I would give to that question would be the fact that our province is an outlier when it comes to not having this language in place seems to have permitted government to have an over-reliance on the use of special warrants to backfill whenever the thought or the alleged need arises.

I think it also speaks to the challenges we're seeing with having realistic and accurate budgeting because – as you would have seen yourself, member – the lack of an appropriation in the budget for something like travel nurses, to pick one out. There are many examples we could use, but to have nothing budgeted for travel nurses in a year where we had spent millions before and not see a strategy to address that particular situation – that, to me, suggested that we need to bring this bill. That was not a realistic budget line at the time when that was put to the floor of the Legislature.

If we can tighten up the use of special warrants, then we're going to compel government of the day – whatever government that might be – to give to the Legislature a more accurate budget that takes into consideration previous years' allocations and actual spend, which I don't think we've been seeing to date.

Hon. H. Perry: How does this wording compare to other provisions in other provincial administrative acts across Canada?

M. MacFarlane: We did that jurisdictional scan. I can do a quick summary for you, member.

The words "urgent" and "immediacy" are included in the Nova Scotia finance act: the expense must be "urgently and immediately required for the public good."

If we look at New Brunswick, the language is "required urgently for the public good."

If we look at Newfoundland and Labrador, the language is that the expenditure must be urgent.

I'll keep going. Look at Manitoba; we see the identical language: "urgently and immediately required for the public good."

If we look at Saskatchewan, "urgently and immediately required for the public good."

Alberta: "urgently required" with respect to an expenditure.

British Columbia has parameters that there must be a state of emergency, disaster or emergency, and then also "urgently and immediately required for the public good."

Government of Canada: "urgently required for the public good."

I think that was the extent of it.

Hon. H. Perry: Basically, the intent of this amendment is to ensure that special warrants are only used in genuine emergency situations, correct?

M. MacFarlane: That's right, and not to be an inherent part of the budgeting process where we see unrealistic budgeting and then, throughout the year, a dumping of money through a special warrant that occurs outside of the Legislature's purview.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay.

That's fine, thank you.

Chair: Gord.

G. McNeilly: Sure. I wasn't on the list, but I'll ask a question.

"Immediately required"…. What I've learned about special warrants is that sometimes they show up but they're for the last fiscal year, and then we're paying them in this year; therefore, different things – sometimes programs start at a different time and there's no other way to pay them.

How do you get around the word – when you were describing your things there, we didn't really focus on "immediately required." I just wanted to ask a couple of questions on the word "immediately required." Sometimes it's not immediately required; it's things that have happened in the past, but the payment had to go out.

Could you talk about maybe the word "immediately"? Sometimes it's not immediate; it's things in the past, and there are insurance programs in there; there are some special warrants that – sometimes there's federal government money that comes in. There are different things like that in the special warrant that I've learned about as the chair of Public Accounts that sometimes are good. But the word "immediately" has me kind of putting a pause on, from my membership in this House.

M. MacFarlane: I guess one answer – you're welcome to weigh in on it too – is if other provinces can make do with their budgeting process and employ the exact same language as what this bill purports to do, I would suggest that it's within this government's ability to conduct its financial affairs in a similar manner as well, to conduct its business in a way that we are budgeting appropriately and realistically going out the door.

[3:30 p.m.]

If there are issues that come up of an urgent or immediate nature – I guess I think of something like Fiona, for example; that's one of the reasons why I believe the spend was so high in 2023 – make the money available because it's urgently and immediately required.

But I see what we're doing here as bringing our province, finally, in line with other provinces so that we're simply not using it to backfill or back support areas that have not been budgeted properly for, or where government decides outside of the will of the Legislature that there's a need to spend money on something that didn't get debated properly.

Chair: My apologies to the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty. I feel like I'm back in standing committee, and I used your name when I shouldn't have.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: It's great. That's fantastic. I appreciate it. Congratulations on the role. I think you'll do a great job.

Hon. H. Perry: You think?

G. McNeilly: I know she'll do a great job. Sorry, member.

[Laughter]

G. McNeilly: So, when we're talking about those words in those other sections where – and I appreciate the member is talking about bringing us in line with other jurisdictions. I've tried to amend the FAA here before and it didn't really go so well. Government didn't really seem to want to do that. It's a very, I think, sacred act. If you open it up, they just do not like to do that. So, I'm asking these questions now.

Do we need to look at…? Those other jurisdictions you talked about that have different languages – did you go back and check their definitions, and are there any definition pieces that we have to change in the FAA to make sure that your amendment goes through?

M. MacFarlane: I'm not aware of any. As I indicated in my remarks, the draft bill went out to who I thought would be the stakeholders involved. I've had some brief discussions just this afternoon with the minister. I had received an acknowledgement to my email from the department that the consultation draft was received, but I have not received any substantive written feedback to point to any deficiencies or challenges with the legislation.

G. McNeilly: I'm good for right now. Thanks. Good luck.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

Hon. J. Burridge: Thank you.

I just want to clear up a couple of things – actually, the questions across the floor were really good ones. They were on my list too. First is….

[Interjection]

Hon. J. Burridge: They were great questions.

The first is the timelines on the consultation. We received your request on Sunday, you tabled the document on a Friday, and we have a very small team to get the budget out. So, there wasn't a ton of time for us to really take a look and give you feedback based on that timeline.

M. MacFarlane: Sorry, just to clarify that, I don't believe it was the following…. Oh, sorry. It was tabled on the Friday, yeah.

Hon. J. Burridge: Yeah.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, I hear you. Sorry I misunderstood.

Hon. J. Burridge: The next piece is kind of following up on the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty and the Leader of the Opposition. You talk a lot about being an outlier – immediacy and urgency not being outlined in our special warrant legislation. The difference here is we only have one mechanism within the FAA for any over-appropriations. In all those other jurisdictions, there are other channels for those to happen.

That's kind of getting to the point that you guys were at, that when it comes to – sometimes there are special warrants that might be urgent, but the payment isn't immediate. In other jurisdictions, they have other streams for that. They have other mechanisms to do that. Here in PEI, we just have one special warrant.

So, I think that that is something that we could work on, to try to create those other buckets, but right here we only have the one mechanism, and we need to have flexibility because – we spoke about examples of where this comes into play. A couple of ones are federal agreements that come in. I think the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty talked about that. Federal agreements come in, or yearly accounting adjustments. Those are things that aren't immediate, but we have to funnel them through that special warrant mechanism.

[3:35 p.m.]

Restricting that truly is going to impact government operations, and truly, Islanders if we went down that road, the big one being that – we're okay with keeping it "urgent." I think that that fits but I think we would like to bring an amendment in on taking out the "immediate" piece because we have so many examples of where that may not fit in our FAA right now given that we only have that one tool in a special warrant.

Year-end adjustments are one. I gave the example of – see, civil collective bargaining just happened. When that comes to a close, there were certainly salary appropriations that were in play that we had to pay out. That becomes a special warrant because it's unplanned, but we'd still have to pay it. And it wouldn't be necessarily, I don't think – depending on the definition – it wouldn't be immediate. There is collective bargaining pieces that come into play. That would be problematic.

Fed-prov agreements: Another big one we had on the capital side – I was trying to think of all these scenarios – on the capital side, bridges. Sometimes in the spring we go out, do an inspection, and a bridge needs to be replaced that we weren't necessarily planning for. That might be a capital special warrant because that needs to get done. It could be deemed urgent, but that payment wouldn't necessarily be immediate, if you know what I'm saying. It would take time to do the design, get the work done, and do the construction.

I guess at the end of the day, I think the folks across the floor asked about definitions of

"urgent" and "immediate," and you didn't really have a definition for that; you're leaving that to us to figure out. Is that…?

M. MacFarlane: Well, I think that discretion might speak to some of your concerns, minister, to have the ability to work within those terms, and then be accountable and answerable to your use of those terms in the Legislature when it comes time to review at year-end how government used the special warrant process.

I do think that could speak to some of your concerns.

Hon. J. Burridge: Yeah, I think – and I did notice in your jurisdiction scan that there were, I think it was the feds, I think B.C., I think Alberta all just had "urgent" and not "immediate" and I think that's the reason why.

That would be our preference in moving forward this bill is to take "immediate" off and then I think that that would help us basically keep operating the way that we should be operating and not impact Islanders because I think that it really could, while it's a simple amendment, I think it could bring negative impacts to Islanders, truly, on the other side of that.

We are getting an amendment made up to remove "immediate." I think that would keep us in line with other jurisdictions for now.

M. MacFarlane: Sure, I might offer a quick response just for the purposes of the debate.

I guess I would question or challenge, a little bit, minister, whether grid increases under a new collective agreement would constitute an unplanned expenditure. I might even say whether a bridge replacement, with proper inspections in place whether that would also constitute an unplanned expenditure.

If you're going into a year where you know there's going to be a likely outcome of a new collective agreement that's going to result in an increased salary, that's something that could be budgeted for in my opinion.

[3:40 p.m.]

Also, there should be a sufficient amount set aside at the start of the year for the budget under the transportation side for capital repairs and for bridge replacement. I know you can't predict everything but that would be an urgent and an immediate requirement, I would think, if a bridge was going out, and it would meet the definition of both those terms.

Without getting into the weeds on every possible scenario that could arise, I do think that with good budgeting – proper budgeting – a lot of what we have come to rely on by way of special warrant could be avoided.

Chair: Do you have another question, minister?

Hon. J. Burridge: Yeah, I do. Thanks.

I think in an ideal world, yes, that would be the way things would work. I think we work in reality, and in reality, things go that well sometimes. The bridge is ready to give out. You've got to go do it. Collective bargaining doesn't come out the way that you potentially budgeted for because, at the time of budget, you go with the information you know, and you do the best you can.

It's quite a balance because ~~you're trying to~~ you can't overbudget. You can't have lots of – because that's taking away from other programs, right? It's a fine line to walk, so you go with the best information you have at the time, and you budget, and things pop up. That's reality, and that's what we work in.

In government, you have to keep those services and programs rolling sometimes. Social development is another one where we don't have an option to just not pay social assistance. It's not an option, but if the caseload is up, we have to pay it, and we'll go into special warrant to do it.

That is reality and that's how you service Islanders, but I do take your point on budgeting better. Our teams do the best they can and we're always trying to improve. Every year, we're trying to improve and you'll see that in the budget. You'll see us trying to rightsize things, and then it comes out and it's still not enough, but our teams do a really, really good job trying to do the best they can with the information they know.

With only that one mechanism in the FAA, I think we have to remove "immediate" because I think that could really impact Islanders. I'm willing to keep "urgent" in there, and so, I'm going to propose the amendment to do that.

I move that Section 1 of Bill 100 is amended by the deletion of the words "and immediately" from the proposed substituted words.

Chair: As you're receiving the amendment, I have two people on the list.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair, and congratulations.

Chair: So, there is an amendment on the floor. I think you have to speak to the amendment.

C. Simpson: Yes. Thank you.

The question that I would have – thank you for the bill and the amended bill. I see the benefits and the pros and cons to both, but one of the questions that I have is that, as I understand the usage of special warrants to date, there is a Treasury Board policy in place that does, I wonder, attempt to get at the very thing, hon. member, that this bill is – or amendment, an amendment to the amendment of the bill – is trying to bring forward.

[3:45 p.m.]

I'm wondering – not that I'm not in favour of the amendment because it strengthens it, obviously. It's in law, but does this compete in any way and in any unintended consequence to an existing Treasury Board policy which basically, in a nutshell, would say that departments must first find the funding within, and then, only then with ministerial approval, move forward to get Treasury Board approval and move forward to get Cabinet approval beyond this on a special warrant – not a speedy process, I might add, but nonetheless is what is in existence today.

Does this bill in any way compete with that or would it set up any unintended consequence that departments would find themselves in?

M. MacFarlane: I'm not sure if that's a question on the amendment that's being tabled. I think, Chair, I'll defer to you, but I think we're asking questions specific to the amendment. If I'm wrong, I'm happy to answer the question, but I just want to make sure I know what part of the process we're at because I thought there was an amendment brought that we're asking questions on.

C. Simpson: I will reframe the question. I'm responding to the amended bill. My question, member, is: In your research of this to take a look at coming to the need to amend the existing act, what was your research telling you that potentially could be, or not, a conflict with an existing Treasury Board policy?

Chair: I'm sorry, member, you have to actually speak to the amendment. It can't be a question on the bill. It has to be exactly to this piece of the amendment. You can go back after, but right now there's a motion on the floor.

C. Simpson: Okay, I'll re-word it. I'm going to keep at it if I may; one more attempt.

With the amendment that is saying that we must move forward and that we – let me just re-read it – to delete the words "a payment is required" in substitution of the words "a payment is urgently required." When you look at "urgently required," how does, in your research, that potentially compete, or not, with existing Treasury Board policy that is in place to deal with special warrants. I'm just trying to see the coherence there.

Is that still to the act? I don't want to see anything in competition.

M. MacFarlane: I'm happy to answer your question.

C. Simpson: I know; thank you.

Chair: Yeah, it's not really on the exact deletions of the word so I'm not sure that that falls under the amendment part. I think it does under a fall under a question of – if you want to ask him that – I'm not sure it falls under the amended pieces on the floor right now.

Michelle Patterson: I think we can answer to the amendment; I'll answer it from the amendment.

There is nothing within Treasury Board policy that we've found that's in competition. Treasury Board policy does make it clear that special warrants should be used as a last resort and that we should be looking from within first before going there, which, to me, would indicate that the departments have attempted other means to identify areas for those funds and now we are put in a position of urgency and immediacy where we need the funds.

We reached out to the Auditor General. He did point to Treasury Board policy and found that this wording would work in connection with the policy well.

C. Simpson: Okay, that's what I was looking for.

Chair: Does the member have another question?

C. Simpson: No, I think I'm good right now.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

As I consider the two words, urgently and immediately, and based on what the minister said and what you said in your opening remarks about it being up to government discretion, to me, as I consider the situation that was given in terms of contract negotiations, government knows – I mean, contract negotiations are sometimes in negotiations for years – government has a good finger on, if they're engaged, what that may look like.

[3:50 p.m.]

There will be times when that budgeting is off, of course – that is the budgeting process, that is life. But I still don't see the need – because you said in the beginning it would be up to government to define what "urgently" and "immediately" meant. To me, if that were the case, of course government needs to honour that, so I don't see how the difference of removing that word. I think that that word still works in there. Is that a fair assessment for me to make, if it's up to government to define?

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, I think it could be a bit of splitting hairs. It would seem to me that if an agreement is reached through the collective bargaining process with a union and there's money owed to members through that process, it would be – I believe it should be immediately paid out to them because oftentimes what we see are agreements that expire for months and years, therefore they should be immediately entitled to that payment, but I guess it comes down to how government would interpret that particular phrasing.

K. Bernard: I'm good.

Chair: Okay. Seeing that there are no other questions, we'll call for the vote on this motion.

M. MacFarlane: On the amendment?

Chair: On the amendment, sorry.

All those in favour of the amendment, say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All those against, say nay.

Some Hon. Members: Nay!

Chair: I would say the ayes have the amendment.

So, now we go back to questions on the bill as amended.

Is there anyone else that has questions on the bill as amended?

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair. My apologies for the mix-up prior. I was so excited about this. I love finances.

In terms of the requirements, then, under the act, will this require any adjustment to regulation? Will there be further accountability as such? Are you looking to lean into that accountability around the use as well, or does it start and stop with let's just pay closer attention? I'm not as familiar with the regulations under the act.

Michelle Patterson: We don't expect to see…. There wouldn't be a necessity for a regulation under this act.

C. Simpson: There wouldn't be?

Michelle Patterson: No, because it would be an interpretation. It would allow the House more ability to ask questions around supplementary estimates, to ask the departments to justify the urgency and immediacy around each supplementary estimate, but I think really where we're going with this is we've seen an increased use of special warrants that concerns Islanders, that concerns our Auditor General, and we want to encourage government to look at special warrants in the way that they are meant to be used. That's the intent of the bill.

C. Simpson: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

I know it's not up to you, but I guess I'm seeking your opinion as the mover of the bill. This needs royal assent and the government will have to do some work on this. In your opinion, what is a reasonable timeline that this can be seen to be made into law in Prince Edward Island?

M. MacFarlane: Assuming and hoping that the bill passes as amended, I'd like to see government begin work on what would be needed to get them ready to operate under the new provision as soon as possible. I don't think we're talking years here for that.

I don't know whether I can say specifically as to a time, but we're not talking years, member. There's no commencement clause indicated in the bill, so I guess my answer would be as soon as possible, so we could get it in law at least for the next fiscal year, for the budgeting process.

G. McNeilly: I'm good.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Seeing that there are no further questions, I guess we'll call for the vote on the bill as amended.

All those in favour of the bill, say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All those opposed to the bill, say nay.

Congratulations. Your bill has passed.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you.

[Hear, hear!]

[3:55 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: Madam Chair, I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act*.

Shall it carry? Carried.

M. MacFarlane: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows.

Shall it carry? Carried.

M. MacFarlane: Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and that the Chair report the bill agreed to with amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same with amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry?

A recorded division has been requested.

Sergeant-at-Arms, please ring the bell.

[The bells were rung]

[4:00 p.m.]

R. Henderson: Opposition is ready for the vote, Mr. Speaker.

K. Bernard: Third party is ready for the vote.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, government is ready for the vote.

Speaker: Alright. Seeing as we are ready for the vote, all those voting against the report of the committee, stand.

All those voting for the report of the committee, please stand.

[The Deputy Clerk calls the roll]

Bell
Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Burridge
Compton
Croucher

Curran
Dillon
Dollar
Henderson
MacEwen
MacFarlane
MacKay
McNeilly
Perry
Ramsay
Redmond
Simpson

Speaker: Members, the report of the committee has passed unanimously.

[Hear, hear!]

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

Speaker: I'd like to call upon the hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call order No. 1 to be read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 1, adjourned debate on the Draft Address.

Debate was adjourned by the hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise again and continue my remarks related to the throne speech.

Before I get going, nobody in the House yet has mentioned the passing of Stephen Lewis. Tremendous Canadian. Fabulous parliamentarian. A man of astonishing brilliance and eloquence who was very much a pioneer for progressive politics here in Canada. He died yesterday, right after his son Avi won the leadership of the federal New Democratic Party – a party, of course, with which Stephen and his father David Lewis before him, were also heavily involved.

I bring Stephen Lewis up partly because I think it's important that this Legislature recognize the contribution that he has made to Canadian politics, but also because it was just over ten years ago, in 2014, Stephen was here in Charlottetown delivering the Symons lecture. I think it was the first Symons lecture I had actually attended.

I'd admired Stephen Lewis for a very long time. I first became aware of him when he was a regular guest on *Morningside* with Peter Gzowski, as part of the political panel, and the quality of the debates that went on – I can't remember what day of the week it was they used to do it. They were really first-class – not only the wisdom of those who were taking part in those discussions, but the manner, the respect and the decency with which they presented their opposing views.

[4:05 p.m.]

It was a real education for me at that time, not an active politician, of how you can disagree well; you can disagree agreeably. He was somebody that I admired immensely.

I read through his Symons Lecture that he delivered here back in 2014 last night, and there are just a couple of little excerpts that I think are appropriate to the discussion that we're having at the moment, to the throne speech, to politics, to leadership, to what is possible, and what politics can sometimes attain. When he was here, he picked five topics that infused his speech.

He was a wonderfully progressive politician, strong feminist, and an unashamed socialist before that term kind of got hijacked and sullied by some political players. He was a man of great decency who respected his colleagues, his adversaries, and was just, I think, universally looked up to regardless of your political stripe. He was the sort of person that gave politics a good name, and we need more of them. He talked continuously about the importance of decency and respect being an integral part of the political process, and he was deeply concerned about the decline of parliamentary decorum.

He was an MPP in Ontario for 15 years, leader of the provincial NDP there. The Premier of the day, for most of the time that he was there, was William Davis, a Conservative Premier, of course. They disagreed vehemently on most things philosophically. My gosh, they would tear

each other apart. As Stephen Lewis put it in his address during the Symons Lecture, he said they had "splenetic political exchanges," splenetic coming from the spleen, meaning that this was visceral. They disagreed from the depths of their beings, but they did it with an underlying sense of decency and respect for each other.

If you ever have an opportunity to listen to some of those debates – again, sort of before the time that I got actively involved in politics, but I was aware of their relationship and their positions within the Ontario Legislature. I do remember thinking, wow, those are two absolute forces of politics who are bumping heads here, and clashing, and disagreeing in the most vigorous way. But they did it in a manner that left you thinking, "This is what politics should be about. It should be about the clash of differing ideas."

If you come into that conversation, that debate, that disagreement with a sense of decency and openness, and a willingness to look for shared solutions, then there's nothing wrong with disagreement at all. In fact, it's a necessary part of the learning process.

It's a sort of given that if you are listening with a truly open mind and open heart to what somebody is saying who may not align with your point of view, there's an opportunity there for you to grow, to learn, to change your mind. I saw that with Stephen Lewis and William Davis and a whole bunch of other people involved in politics.

But unfortunately the divisiveness, the partisanship which seems to have infected politics everywhere – I must say, I think it is less here than other places; I want to acknowledge that, and I want to look around this room and thank the people in this room for not allowing us to go to the levels that we all witness in other places. I appreciate that. I acknowledge that. I give gratitude for that.

[4:10 p.m.]

But it does concern me that politics is not that place of healthy exchange that it once was – hon. members bringing decency and honour to these privileged positions that we hold, the 27 of us who sit in this Chamber.

Anyway, the quotes that I wanted to get to from Stephen Lewis are these. Again, he's talking here about the decline of parliamentary decorum:

> "You can have deep ideological rifts across the floor" – he's talking about the House of Commons here, at a federal level – "of the House of Commons, and still manage to effect good, positive social change. But a vital requirement is respect: vitriolic nastiness" – he was even more wordy than I am, or the Leader of the Third Party – "in debate does not breed respect, nor does adolescent partisanship."

I've seen that in this House; not from all corners, but I have seen it. I've seen it recently in this House and it upsets me. Of course, we should disagree. Of course, there are opportunities for us to point out deficiencies in each other's approaches and perhaps the history of decisions that were made, but this adolescent partisanship, as Stephen Lewis puts it, is not something that's healthy for democracy.

I'm sorry, I obviously went away from – I moved outside of his quote, but that terminology…. Again, he was a master linguist, and adolescent partisanship is something that I think captures – I think we all know what sort of attitude he is talking about there.

He goes on – I'm not going to do the whole quote – and later on, on leadership…. Stephen Lewis was a leader of a party. He was, in many respects – he was immersed in the political milieu as we all are, but he believed that leadership was not just about authoritarian control. He spoke about it, but he also lived it – that leadership has to be when an individual, through their actions and through their words and through their ability to connect with others, inspires others to be seen in their light, and that leadership is not something that you beat into people; rather, you lead them along with.

Here's what he says on leadership, and this is not aimed at anybody in particular. I want to make that absolutely clear, Mr. Speaker.

> "You see, the behaviour of the leader of the government, the tone that is set, the messages that go out, mean everything. And if the government leader is contemptuous of parliament and the parliamentary processes, then the discourse grinds down into an ad hominin abuse. It's such a sad loss. The spirit of debate becomes coarse, surly, inflammatory. It also has the corollary of degrading political life, of bolstering the cynicism about politics that crushes the enthusiasm of young voters."

I mean, that's so representative of the brilliant mind that he was and the ability that he had to cut through things and speak very clearly, even though – he enjoyed his big words, Stephen, but he had a big mind and a huge heart.

Again, I said that, Speaker, because I believe it's relevant to the everyday proceedings of this House, including the Speech from the Throne. I thought it was important that, in Prince Edward Island, we recognize and remember a person who was a truly great politician, obviously a different party from my own, but somebody for whom I have the utmost admiration.

We've just passed a bill in this House, the first bill in this sitting – a third party bill; that makes me very proud. It was a bill on financial matters, on managing the finances of this province well.

[4:15 p.m.]

I want to thank the House personally for support of this bill, which will change, I hope, the approach that governments take to their attitude around the use of special warrants. We debate here, and we will debate shortly, later in this sitting, the operational budget. When we do come to those estimates, the level of debate and oversight that we give the estimates is important.

It's worthy of the fact, and it relates to the importance that these are our neighbours' and our friends' tax dollars, which are being paid into trust in the government that they will be used effectively, efficiently, and wisely, and that Islanders get value for money, results from the way that government spends that money. Therefore, it's absolutely right that this Legislature gives that a really close scrutiny.

The biggest issue that I have with the free issuance of special warrants is that that scrutiny, that level of oversight that this Legislature provides to the spending of Islanders' dollars, disappears. Government spends money, and after the fact, a supplemental appropriations act is brought before here which we have no opportunity, other than in hindsight, to ask what that was about. Why did you do that? What was the reason for that overspend? Why did we not budget more carefully? What was the emergency that required that this special warrant be issued?

I hope now, with the word "urgency" – again, we were the only province that did not have that sort of wording. It varied, as the Leader of the Third Party described when he was asked about jurisdictional scan by Charlottetown-West Royalty as to where the idea for this bill came. It's the fact that every other province has some reference to special warrants being absolutely only used as a last resort, except Prince Edward Island, and now we've joined the rest of the country. That makes me very pleased and very proud. Again, I thank the House for that.

I'm talking about this because on the second page of the throne speech, it says: "Our government is taking a balanced approach – continuing to invest in Islanders, while managing our finances responsibly." I really hope that the passage of this bill provides a tool or perhaps a little conscience sitting on the shoulder of the Finance minister – and every department head, I should say – that special warrants are not something to be taken lightly and should only be used in drastic circumstances, as a last resort.

My concern is not personal. If I look at what the provincial Auditor General and his superb, I should say, office – within the Auditor General's office, the work that they do – they've expressed consistently, and perhaps with increasing concern, worries around the sustainability of this province's finances. We've discussed this at length in PAC, of course. We've had one special report on this, and the last two annual reports have really highlighted – particularly, the most recent one – the concern that the Auditor General's office has with the sustainability of our financial trajectory here in Prince Edward Island.

I'm not sure that he would agree that this government is, again, "managing our finances responsibly." In fact, he might say that it's quite irresponsible what is going on at the moment. I'm not sure if that word appears in the AG's report; I doubt it. But he certainly talks about the unsustainability of what we have here.

[4:20 p.m.]

If I look beyond our province at the parliamentary budget office in Ottawa, who do reviews of each province and talks about the financial gap, the financial unsustainability or sustainability of various provinces, I think – I stand to be corrected on this – there were three or four provinces who are designated as having an unsustainable fiscal situation. Sadly, we are one of those.

We have a fiscal deficit which is structural. Unless we do something about that, whether that is reducing the costs that the government has to cover or we increase taxes, that structural fiscal deficit is not going to repair itself.

The problem that I and the Auditor General here and the parliamentary budget office in Ottawa have is that we, on Prince Edward Island – and we see this; it's actually mentioned several times in the throne speech – have had the strongest economic growth in the country for some time now.

In time of economic growth, if you believe in Keynesian economics – and I absolutely do – that is when a government has to react responsibly and not incur the kind of deficits that we see every year and an increase in our accumulated debt to the point where we're not spending $180 million every year just to service that debt. It's almost $1,000 for every single Islander every year to service that debt.

We absolutely need to do something about that to get our finances back in order, and unfortunately, I don't see a government that is managing our finances responsibly. I see a government that is erratic, that is irresponsible at times, that's short-sighted, that's uncoordinated, that doesn't seem to have a long-term vision of what we need to do.

I spoke about this yesterday when I was up. They're not foresighted. They're not looking at making difficult choices. I'm not going to pretend that financial decisions at a provincial level are anything other than extremely complex, but we have to start doing it because our situation is – again, I'm relying on the experts here, as I like to do. They're all telling us that our fiscal situation here in Prince Edward Island is unsustainable.

The investments that our government is making today are not short-term. I appreciate that. All too often, governments will prioritize their spending, looking at them through the lens of the political cycle, of the election cycle. You see tremendously misplaced spending, spending done in the most ineffective and inefficient way because it might show some results that might garner some votes before the next election, but rarely is that sort of spending conducive to creating a sustainable and strong and healthy economy.

We need to start thinking about making investments that may indeed cost us money up front, but will create the sort of economy, the sort of system here that we have on Prince Edward Island that gives people the services that they require but also creates long-term viability, long-term sustainability, long-term wellbeing – general wellbeing for the whole population.

That requires a whole different mindset as to how we are going to manage our finances, and again, unfortunately, I don't see that. I see uncoordinated, short-term, erratic spending, when what we need is a clear vision of what we're trying to achieve and then money going into that, whether that's in terms of health care spending or housing or helping Islanders with the cost of living or making sure that those who live with and amongst us who are the most vulnerable have the supports that they need to live a fully meaningful and purposeful life.

The next section of the speech, after the longish introduction, is on our economy.

[4:25 p.m.]

It's interesting today that Islanders can now get ten cents back on every can and bottle. This could be a massive infusion to the provincial economy. I shouldn't joke about this, but I know a lot of folks have been hoarding their….

R. Henderson: More cans in warehouses in O'Leary than there are potatoes.

[Laughter]

P. Bevan-Baker: So, you might see a big uptick in our provincial economy because this has finally come around. I remember the genesis of this, the now departed Environment minister of the time sort of glibly announcing this in this House and shocking not only the other members of this Chamber, but perhaps some of the folks in his department.

Anyway, here we are, we've managed to work through it, and I hope all of those folks who have dusty bags sitting in their basement or their garage or their attic, or wherever they are, are able to get that return on the hoarding that they've been doing.

Perhaps more seriously on our economy, one of the things that really concerns me around the way that the throne speech is written is that there is no mention at any point of climate. That

doesn't appear in here, and this is in a province which is the most vulnerable when it comes to climate change because of our erodible – the nature of our geography.

We are a low-lying coastal island. The sandbar in the sea is, as we all know, what we are. So, compared to other provinces, the future of our economy here…. And of course, we still, despite the fact that we have diversified over the last little while, the primary industries on which we rely – fishing and farming and tourism – are all acutely and intimately dependent on a stable climate and a healthy environment. We've seen over the last few years how devastating climatic changes can be to primary industries.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the oyster industry later. I was glad to hear Bobby Morrissey yesterday when he spoke to the oyster fishers, and I heard Bob MacLeod this morning on the radio as well. Finally, it seems like the federal government is actually going to come forward with some real money to support our oyster fishers. I mean, maybe I'm naïve here, but we've been waiting two years for some sort of clear indication that our oyster fishers are going to be supported sufficiently to get through what sadly appears to be a long-term, enormously serious problem. I'm talking about MSX and Dermo here, of course, which are a direct result of the change in our environment here, of the temperatures of the water.

That's just one example of how our economy – and it's a huge part of our provincial economy here, not to mention people's livelihoods, people's sense of purpose. Again, I go back to Jeff Noye. I think you tabled the words of his beautiful song, "A Fisherman's Got to Fish." It's a really touching song. The last time I looked, he had almost 40,000 views on that, I think.

Fishing – whether that's lobster or oyster or finfish, or whatever it is – that's something – and I grew up in a little fishing village in the highlands of Scotland. I'm aware what an incredibly…. It's not just a job; it is part of your being. It is what you do. It's what your father did, and perhaps your mother – my grandmother….

If I can take a little aside here, my grandmother, whose husband was a fisher in the highlands of Scotland and was drowned on a boat – not an uncommon thing to happen, of course, sadly even today, but particularly back then. She was left with five children. From that point, she developed a fishing business which ultimately had three trawlers, whilst raising children. She was illiterate, but she created her own language.

[4:30 p.m.]

She started out by having a wheelbarrow, going down to the docks, buying some fish, and then selling it around the community to support her children. Of course, there were no social supports back then. She ultimately built that business up to be a very successful thing. Most unusual for a woman to be doing that. I'm going back 100 years now – more than 100 years.

But fishing is something that is deep in my bones. So, when I listen to Jeff Noye and other fishers here talk about that, I absolutely understand that, yes, we can re-train them to be truck drivers or something else, but that's not what they want to do. The fisherman's got to fish. I was really glad, again, to see that there is some support apparently coming through for that.

The agricultural sector, of course, as well – we've had two years of pretty significant droughts here on Prince Edward Island. I know that there is work being done to develop new cultivars which are more able to withstand the changing climatic conditions here on Prince Edward Island, but it's a real concern. We see farmers having to invest half a million dollars, I believe it is – depending on the pivot system used for irrigation – in order to grow a crop. You didn't have to worry about that 15 or 20 years ago.

Our climate is changing, and that climate is absolutely profoundly impacting, in a negative sense, the fundamental bedrock of our Island economy. And yet, the word "climate" does not appear in this throne speech. That's a real concern for me. The word "environment" does appear three times, but not in the way that I imagined it would. It talks about having a safe environment in our schools – important, I'm not suggesting that, but one of the times that it appears here is in terms of the safe environment within schools.

It talks about the health training environment at the medical school at UPEI – again, not the kind of environment that I'm talking about. Again, the third time the environment gets mentioned is around what I've just been talking about – the challenges to our primary industries, whether that's input costs of labour or – and it mentions

environmental challenges. But those are the only times that the environment is mentioned, two of them in a completely different meaning of the word, and the third one, again, around the challenges that it is creating for our primary industries. But the word "climate" does not appear here.

If we are serious about supporting, maintaining, preserving, and protecting the fundamentals of our provincial economy, we need to at least acknowledge and recognize in the throne speech that the stability of the climate and a healthy environment, purely from an economic point of view – I'm not talking here about all of the other benefits, as I mentioned this morning during Question Period, of wetlands for example, and all of the services that they provide us.

I'm talking about a government that does not seem to recognize the importance of maintaining a healthy environment here on Prince Edward Island, of doing our bit to make sure that the changes that are occurring in our climate do not impact us to the point where we are really struggling. I fear for our children.

I'm going to move on from that, but I just really needed to express my distress that climate, which was the number one concern of Islanders and of Canadians and people around the planet not very long ago, has fallen off. And that's despite the fact that climate change is clearly accelerating and is an existential threat to us all. So, that's one of those – I mentioned when I spoke yesterday that throne speeches change, as they should, in reference to the concerns of our constituents. I get that.

[4:35 p.m.]

But we can't suddenly not concern ourselves with climatic and environmental challenges, emergencies that I would say we have before us. Those have to be consistent and constant parts of governing. I don't see that from this government.

The first part of the economic picture that's painted in this throne speech is around tourism. Last year, we had a fabulous season here when it comes to tourism from the hard numbers point of view.

R. Henderson: $20 bridge fee.

P. Bevan-Baker: Well, there are a lot of factors. The lowering of the bridge fee is certainly one of them, the exchange rate that we saw, the fact that nobody wanted to go to the United States for a holiday anymore – I understand that. So, we had a lot more domestic travel here, and people from Europe and elsewhere who might have been considering going to the U.S. and said, "Actually, no, I think I prefer to go to Canada." And what's a good place in Canada to go to? Well, PEI, and it wasn't because they saw the board flashers at the NHL games.

[Interjection]

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, it was. Sorry, it was.

We had a great year last year for tourism, but as with all things, the exchange rate and the weather and the bridge toll and the fact that there's a lot of tumult going on in our neighbours to the south – all of those things, you know, they will pass, and I hope that we can keep that up.

But there is, I think, a cautionary tale here. Our population more than doubles in the summertime here when – close to triples, actually. It depends, and in the middle of the season, of course, there's an arc. But we have infrastructure here to support those of us who are permanent residents of Prince Edward Island, and then when you get an influx to the point that we do in the summertime, everything gets stretched. You know how hard it is to get around the roads. You know how bad I already awful cell service becomes in the summertime. In all sorts of ways, the infrastructure here on Prince Edward Island is literally stretched to its max in the summertime.

There are places around the world, tourist destinations, who are now putting caps. They are curbing the amount of tourism that comes. I'm not suggesting, by the way – I want to be clear – that we need to do that here on Prince Edward Island now. I just think we need to be aware that there is such a thing as over-tourism, that you have to balance the benefits that come from the economic influx that tourists bring with them with the impact that that has on your permanent population, on the environment, on the services which are required to support that massive increase in population.

I'm thinking here of places like Barcelona, of Venice, of Banff in our own country. All of these places are really struggling. You cannot afford to live within the city limits of Venice anymore. The population has been pushed out

by all of the tourists that come there. Again, I'm not trying to draw a direct parallel, but I am saying that, yes, we celebrate the tourism that we have here and the massive economic boom that it brings to our province, but we cannot rely solely on that.

We must make sure that the folks who live here, that the farms, that the coastline – that we don't create a situation where the very privileged, the very rich can come and armour a seawall out onto the beach, as has been done in Point Deroche, so that they can come and spend a month or two at their summer home. That, to me, is one example. We haven't heard a lot about Point Deroche for a while. I don't actually know what the latest is on who owns that and what's going on, but it's one example of the dark side of some aspects of tourism.

[4:40 p.m.]

We have to make sure that the quality of life for those of us who call this place home, and also the natural habitat which is stressed by all of the things that come with having a large tourism business, are balanced.

I'm on page 4 here: "Across Canada and among our allies, there is a renewed focus on defence and national security – and with it, new economic opportunities." I don't quite know what that suggests, but I have an idea.

Wars are dreadful. Wars affect me in the pit of my stomach, and unfortunately, around the world at the moment, we have a number of wars raging. It always seems to be the case, but at this moment in time as I stand here today, April 1st, 2026, there are some dreadful, dreadful wars going on around the world. I would perhaps even go so far as to say illegitimate wars going on around the world. When I read in a throne speech that such things are considered to be economic opportunities, that concerns me.

We have a history here on Prince Edward Island of being judicious about how we invest, about the way that we have built an economy, a society here. Many of us will remember the uproar – I didn't live here, actually, at the time – when a munitions factory was planned for Summerside. I don't know the date; I wouldn't guess what it was. But Islanders didn't like that. They came out and they let the government of the day know, very clearly, that they did not appreciate…. Even though it may have been a wonderful economic opportunity – jobs created, factories built, a boost to our economy – they said, "No, we don't want this," and it didn't happen.

I think each government must make its own decisions about what constitutes healthy economic development, and while I absolutely understand that there are opportunities to be had here as a result of the wars that are going on, it concerns me that that may be looked on by this government as a way to boost our economy first and foremost.

My grandparents – I talked about my great-grandmother, who was the one who built the trawler business in Aberdeen, in Scotland. My grandparents never flew in an aeroplane. My parents didn't fly in an aeroplane until they were adults, to come and visit me here in Canada after I moved here. I, of course, as a teenager – actually, the first place I ever flew was Barrie, Ontario, to come over with a school band to play in a festival there. I thought Canada was just the most exciting country on the planet – part of the reason I decided to move here many years later.

My children have flown far more than I have. My grandchildren, some of them not even two years old yet, have all flown. The increase in air traffic – back in 1984, about a billion people a year flew. In 2024, I think – I'm not exactly sure. Anyway, it's a fairly recent figure. Over five billion. The amount of air traffic has increased fivefold – 500 percent – in a pretty short period of time.

[4:45 p.m.]

I look at the Charlottetown airport. That was such a little, tiny airport not very long ago, and now it's expanded. It looks like a big commercial airport now. I'm not saying this as a bad thing. I'm just talking about how economies change and how that has facilitated all kinds of economic growth here on Prince Edward Island, and that's wonderful.

But again, going back to the climate, I feel that we have to always be aware that we're trying to balance the convenience and the needs of people today with making sure that we have climatic stability for our children.

It also says in the throne speech here: "Growth on its own is not enough." I couldn't agree more. I talked yesterday, I think, about how we need to think about getting better, not necessarily getting bigger.

We have a wonderful project here on Prince Edward Island called Vital Signs. I think we're at the third report now. I think it was the minister…. One of the ministers in the House here was present at the launch of the Vital Signs. It was in the library a couple of months ago.

For me, when we're talking about our economy, we have to always ask the question: What is the purpose of our economy? It is to maximize the wellbeing, the contentment, and the happiness of the people who live here. Again, we can grow the economy; I know we can do that. There are all kinds of ways of doing that, including putting money into defence and machinery of war, but I'm not sure that that increases the contentment, the wellbeing, the welfare of Islanders.

Vital Signs takes a much more holistic view of what the purpose of an economy is. It looks at not only GDP – that's important, and again, I'm not suggesting that we don't look at the goods and services that we produce here; that's critical – but it also looks at the safety in our communities. It looks at the amount of volunteering. It looks at the health of the environment. It looks at the ability to find jobs. It looks at the disparity between the richest and the poorest in the community. It's a real high-level look at all of the matters that create wellbeing in a community.

We can have economic growth and not do better in some of those vital signs, as the report is titled. While I was glad to see one of the ministers of the Crown present at the unveiling of this year's *Vital Signs*, I was sad that it was only one because I would encourage all ministers to think about what we're trying to achieve here. What is our purpose as a government? Surely it's to improve, as much as we can, the wellbeing and the welfare of the people that we serve – Islanders.

I do want to say a little bit, having just put a cloud over the expansion of air travel, that I think it was back in August last year when there was a splashy announcement that we were going to have a regional carrier. I think it was $9 million it was going to be. It was a joint venture between the Atlantic Provinces, and it was going to bring back the flight from PEI, from Charlottetown to Halifax – and maybe Moncton as well; that was a little unclear – so we can connect with the carriers there, so we don't have to either get the bus to Halifax airport – which I've done on a number of occasions having to travel – or drive across and spend whatever it is to park and fly for a week. You could get this convenient flight from Charlottetown.

I remember the announcement well. The Premier was there – well, he was the interim Premier at the time, now the full-time, permanent Premier of this province – and made a big deal about this regional carrier that was the connector to Halifax that was being promised. I think some of the money is coming through ACOA, but the provinces are making a contribution as well.

And here we are. That was August '25, and we're nine months later or whatever it is. I can't do the math on that, but we're a good bit past that, and we were told that tickets would be available to buy in 2025. I hope nobody bought a ticket for this mysterious, non-existent airline; PAL Airlines, I believe, is the regional carrier who's going to do it.

[4:50 p.m.]

Doug Newson, the CEO at the Charlottetown Airport, said recently that we hope to have regional air service back by the summer of 2026. That was the most recent announcement at the AGM of the Airport Authority – unfortunately I couldn't make it off and go to that, but it was only very recent; I think we were even sitting in the House when it was on.

Anyway, it's gone from an announcement last summer to we are hoping to have regional service back by the summer of this year. So, it's going to be at least a year. It's just one of those things. Governments are only too happy to stand up and cut the ribbon and pop off the balloons and tell us what's coming.

R. Henderson: Sip the champagne.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, pop those champagnes.

But unfortunately, the reality is that there's not always follow-through. I know there are a lot of Islanders waiting for that regional connector to Halifax to come back. Unfortunately it's not happening yet. I hope, for Doug's sake and the Island, that it does come back.

Housing doesn't get much mention in this throne speech. I don't remember how much was budgeted two budgets ago for public housing, but it was a substantial amount of money. I'm not sure it all got spent, but we carried a budget line here of many, many tens of millions of dollars for public housing, and last year, the

budget line fell off a cliff; I think that's how Charlottetown-West Royalty put it during debate. It was in the capital budget, of course. It was about a quarter, maybe a fifth of what it was in the previous year – spending on public housing, I'm talking about here.

We know that we need to build about 2,000 houses per year just to keep up with the population growth that we have experienced over the last five years, and it does look like it's slowing down, so maybe that 2,000-units-per-year figure needs to be looked at again, but at no point during the rapid expansion of our population did we come close to 2,000 units. Last year we did 1,700 and that was, I think, as close as we came. And 2,000 was the lowball; I think it was more like 2,300 or 2,400. Matt Pelletier is the guy that I go to – Fusion Charlottetown.

But we have not hit as many houses as we need to, and almost all of that is through private investment. I know there was government funding and grants behind that to encourage private developers, and thank goodness we did that because, as I said yesterday, I think that our vacancy rate has now improved a little bit. It's a little slacker. But I see that housing gets very short shrift in this throne speech. There's that enormous decline in public investment, and we're still short of the housing needs that we have.

As I said yesterday, the issue has gone from the availability of housing to the affordability of housing. I suppose the fact that more folks have a roof over their had is something that we should be celebrating, but – "affordable" or "deeply affordable" is not really a phrase I particularly like, but affordable housing is something which is still in very short supply here.

Unfortunately, we have a large number of Islanders who are in need of affordable housing. A lot of students, particularly, are living in situations where a space perhaps designed and appropriate for a couple of folks is occupied by four or five people simply because it's the only way they can afford to live.

And it says here – again, I think this is a critical point – again, on page 6 of the throne speech: "Because if we want people to stay or to come here – we need to make sure that they can build a life here." That's absolutely correct. If we're going to push for population growth as we have done, then we need to make sure that we can support them not just when they arrive here but throughout the entire time that they come here.

[4:55 p.m.]

Prince Edward Island is a – I don't think I've ever been as happy to live on PEI as I have over the last couple of years as the rest of the world has sort of deteriorated into what it has. The fear – I have many family still in Scotland and Britain, and there are some really deep concerns there – and of course, all of the conflicts that I talked about a little while ago, around the world…. Here on Prince Edward Island, it feels like, at least to a certain extent, we are insulated and separate from that.

It's not that we don't have our problems; absolutely, we do. But as I said at the very beginning in my remarks regarding Stephen Lewis, I appreciate more than ever the fact that we have a true community here on Prince Edward Island. People talk about that in other places, but it really exists here. We have a province where there is a real, genuine, authentic sense of community that stretches from tip to tip. That's not something that we should take for granted. We need to remind ourselves of that and celebrate it.

The next section of the report is on our health. We had a motion today, of course, that concluded with unanimous support, on one of the aspects of health. There's a phrase that I hear from almost every minister in Cabinet when we talk about – whether it's access to health care or financial struggles that we're going through or the energy deficits that we're facing or the educational issues that exist in the classroom because of the diversity of children in school – what you hear every time is that these challenges exist everywhere. It's the same everywhere.

That's partly true. Indeed, these problems are ubiquitous. You can find them in every province in Canada, but that doesn't mean that they exist with the same level of intensity or to the same scope or are creating the issues that they are here on Prince Edward Island to the same extent in other places. It's not the same as it is everywhere else. Frequently things are considerably worse here on Prince Edward Island, and I would say that that is in large part due to mismanagement of this government.

When I hear, "Oh, there's nothing government can do; these are problems that we come across everywhere" – good governance can make an

enormous difference, just as mismanagement can make an enormous difference in the other way.

When I think particularly of health care…. In Ontario, Jane Philpott, who was the federal minister of Health for some time – wonderful person. I don't know if any of you have ever met her. Tremendous person. She actually had a beautiful post about Stephen Lewis, funnily enough, as I'm coming full circle with a couple of minutes to go today.

She now works for Doug Ford. So, there's somebody who cannot be defined by her political stripe. She's trying to do the best to help the people that she serves. She works with orange. She'll work with blue. I have no doubt that she and Elizabeth May are best buddies. I don't know that for sure, but it wouldn't surprise me a bit.

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Speaker: Members, the hour has been called. If you could adjourn with a seconder, please.

P. Bevan-Baker: Mr. Speaker, I'll adjourn debate, seconded by the Leader of the Third Party.

Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, that this House adjourn until Tuesday, April 7th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a great Easter weekend. We'll see you next Tuesday.

[The Legislature adjourned until Tuesday, 7 April 2025 at 1:00 p.m.]