



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings**

(Hansard)

Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Wednesday, 13 May 2026

No. 27

The Honourable Brad Trivers, Speaker

Published by Order of the Legislature

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

Lieutenant Governor – His Honour the Honourable Dr. Wassim Salamoun, O.P.E.I.

Speaker – Hon. Brad Trivers

Clerk – Joseph Jeffrey

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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 Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy

Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
Lantz , Hon. Rob (PC)	Charlottetown-Brighton (13)	Premier Minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs
MacEwen , Sidney (PC)	Morell-Donagh (7)	
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 1:04 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General.

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

I'd like to welcome everyone to the proceedings today. We have a full house. I see Marie Kenny is here and her family and some Women's Institute – Miriam Lank and Carolyn, welcome.

I look forward to the proceedings today. I want to shout out to all the farmers out there. It looks like we've got a few good days here to start seeding. That will be well underway. And, of course, our fishers – as they are hauling in their catches, I'm hearing some good reports around. Let's keep our fingers crossed that that continues.

I'd just like to say welcome to everyone. Thank you.

[1:05 p.m.]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome all those who are joining us in the gallery, welcome to today's proceedings, and those who are watching online, in particular those watching from District 27 Tignish-Palmer Road.

I would like to start today by wishing a very happy birthday to Robert Mitchell, the leader of the Liberal Party here on Prince Edward Island. He says he's 39 again.

Many times in here, I've talked about the PWHL, the Professional Women's Hockey League, and about Miminégash's own Abby Hustler playing with the Minnesota Frost. They were playing in game 5 last night, but unfortunately – it was a close game, 2-1 – they lost to Montreal.

I do want to congratulate Abby and her team on a great season, a great showing. She'll soon be back on Prince Edward Island, and we do have

events – I've mentioned in here before – planned for July 4th; you'll get more information on that as we go. But Montreal moves on to the Walter Cup final against Ottawa. So, good luck to all those who participate. We have, of course, two Canadian teams left in it.

I would also like to mention that the Irish Moss Festival in Tignish is coming up at the end of June. Right now, they're putting out a request for nominations for the Citizen of the Year; if you know of anybody in the community in the 882 exchange that is a volunteer within any organization, please contact the town office and let them know.

The Charlottetown Chamber of Commerce is also hosting a fireside chat this afternoon with Minister Joly and the chamber CEO Bianca McGregor on Canada's economic outlook, trade, workforce, innovation, and opportunities for growth, both nationally and here on Prince Edward Island. I guess that's open to the public; I'm pretty sure it's going to be online too.

Also, *Anne & Gilbert* will start their 22nd season today at the Florence Simmons Performance Hall. So, congratulations to them and giving them all the best for a good season.

Today at UPEI, congratulations to all of those who walked the floor and received their degrees. I want to mention two from my district, Chandler DesRoches and Sam Goguen, who received their bachelor of business administration. So, congratulations to them.

I wish everyone in this House a great day and look forward to debate.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to you and everyone in the Chamber today for another day of debate in our illustrious Legislature.

Welcome to everybody in the gallery. Marie Kenny and family, nice to see you out. A few other familiar faces – Harvey and Bethany and some others that are frequently observing in our gallery; I hope you enjoy the proceedings today.

Some of us in the Legislature just quickly had a chance to participate in the Walk in Silence at lunchtime today – myself, Charlottetown-

Hillsborough Park, New Haven-Rocky Point – and got to hear some remarks from the Minister of Economic Development. A really touching and moving event, walking through the streets of Charlottetown in complete silence. I'm very honoured to have had the opportunity to do that as part of the events on Family Violence Prevention Week. It's great to see so many of us wearing purple here today as well to commemorate the occasion.

I would like to offer congratulations, once again, to students and staff at Eliot River Elementary in Cornwall. Once again, for the sixth year in a row, the school celebrated another win in a multi-province battery recycling competition. Eliot River collected more than 2,500 kilograms of used batteries for recycling through the program Call to Recycle. Canadians recycled more than 8 million kilograms of batteries in 2025, the highest annual collection total in the organization's history.

I'd like to thank Eliot River teacher, Darren Ford, for the efforts that he participates in this event. There's a prize of \$3,000. Last year the school used that money to create an outdoor classroom. It'll be interesting to see what they do with the prize money again this year. Congratulations to the school and everybody who participated for their recycling efforts.

Also, this weekend is the Victoria fire department's annual lobster takeout supper, a fundraising supper on Saturday. Pick up at the Victoria Playhouse. It's a fun time putting the lobsters together and the takeout packages. I enjoy doing that and helping out the fire department.

[1:10 p.m.]

The money gets to go to good use, of course: to support the small, local fire department. And if you can't make it to the Playhouse to pick up your meal, they'll deliver it right to your door. A wonderful event, a lot of community support, and a big donation of the lobsters that come into the Victoria wharf. I believe it's usually Buster Boulter who usually makes a big donation on those lobsters.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wishing everyone a great day of debate here in the Legislature this afternoon.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I apologize – a little late this morning. It's a very busy day. We were at Slemon Park in Summerside this morning for a very important announcement at MDS Coating. Great announcement in partnership with our federal counterparts. It will have a tremendous impact on the provincial economy here, create a lot of jobs. The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence will have a statement on that a bit later.

Welcome everyone. Welcome everyone in the gallery.

I just want to quickly recognize a constituent. It was announced yesterday that Colin MacAdam is the first inductee into the 2026 PEI Sports Hall of Fame. Colin has had a really profound impact on track and field over the last 50 years. He's coached track and field at nine Canada Games, and with the UPEI Panthers track team, he helped guide sprinter Bailey Smith to a national 60-metre silver medal and three consecutive AUS titles. A big congratulations to Colin, a constituent of mine. I just wanted to recognize that.

Welcome all the guests to the gallery here. I look forward to the proceedings.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for indulging me.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to welcome all those joining us today, those online, and particularly those in District 9.

A special welcome today to a friend of mine, Adam Ramsay, who's joining, and also to Marie and Cecil Kenny, and Marie's daughter, Autumn Tremere, whom I had the pleasure of working with, and her husband, Corey. Welcome to the proceedings, everyone. I hope you enjoy a great day with us.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

I, too, want to welcome everybody here in the gallery, especially Marie and Cecil Kenny. I'm looking forward to Minister Thompson's statement later on. I did make half of an attempt in the Speaker's rules of 45 seconds to recognize you last week, but I'm sure Thompson will have a better go of it. And Autumn and Corey, as well, welcome, and Miriam Lank – it's good to see you, Miriam.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, minister. I'm sure the Minister of Agriculture will have a good member's statement.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and recognize everybody watching from home, especially those in District 2 Georgetown-Pownal.

I had the distinct honour to – I'm wearing my UPEI alumni pin with pride today, as I was able to join the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park as well as the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty at the convocation ceremony this morning honouring the business and master's in business programs.

I want to recognize three specifically from out our way: Helena Garnhum, who graduated; Katelyn Dockerty from Cardigan; and Trent Quinn. But one person specifically I would like to recognize in this House is a lifetime friend of mine. We grew up together. Her father actually served in this House as Member of 1st Kings – Laura Young, who graduated with not her first but yet her second master's degree, this time in a master's of business administration. Her first was a master's of science. Congratulations to all that worked hard and graduated here at UPEI.

Thank you. I look forward to the debate today.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I'd like to welcome back everybody in the Chamber today, our Pages – Jada, Connor, and Jorja – and everybody joining us in the gallery today. Marie Kenny, special welcome, and to Autumn and Corey Tremere, Bethany Collicutt-

McNab and Harvey Collicutt, and everybody else joining us, thank you for being here.

I, too, just wanted to give a quick congratulations to all the graduates from UPEI. It is one of the most fun things to attend. I love watching their faces as they shake the first hand and then get their degree – and their shoes. I'm like this every time; great shoes this year, as always. A really special congratulations to Ridge Crane and Emma Ledgerwood, who graduated this year. Again, congratulations to everyone graduating from post-secondary this year. It's been a hard road, but you're there.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:15 p.m.]

I just wanted to rise and welcome everybody back into the Chamber, and welcome everybody in the gallery, and everybody who might be at home watching from District 21.

I just wanted to especially rise and welcome a couple of my constituents: Craig Noonan and his wife, Kristin. I'll have a member's statement on Craig here very shortly with some accolades in it, and rightfully so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just be very brief. I know that the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park recognized them, but I've got two former radio colleagues in here: Corey Tremere from Ocean 100, and Adam Ramsay, who used to be on CFCY and Ocean 100, way back when. I just wanted to welcome you both. Welcome to the entire gallery. I see Craig Noonan there; nice to see your picture in the *Atlantic Business Magazine*.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and enjoy the day.

Speaker: I wanted to rise today and welcome everyone to the gallery. It's great to have you here today.

I particularly wanted to recognize Lana Penman. She's a councillor with the Town of North Rustico, and I believe, if all goes well, there will be a petition possibly tabled today she's been working on. It's great to have you here.

Thank you.

Statements by Members

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

Amending the *Electric Power Act*

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

Later today, I have the honour to bring Bill 108 back for debate. It's a bill that would make significant amendments to the *Electric Power Act*, which is the piece of legislation that largely guides our province's energy future.

The bill fills a gap when a promise made by the Premier – that the first order of business in this spring sitting would be precisely what this bill does – was broken.

The three goals of the bill are very simple: firstly, to create a safe, modern, and reliable electricity system; secondly, to ensure that the grid we build is done at the lowest possible cost for Islanders; and thirdly, that the investments we make help us meet our climate goals. That's it.

I know that Islanders want this change, and I know that the Premier wants them, too, having said that we need a modern regulatory system so that we can build a modern electricity grid. He's absolutely right.

I also know that Maritime Electric does not support this, which is hardly a surprise. A corporation with a virtual monopoly on the delivery of electricity in our province won't like having any more new restrictions placed on –

Speaker: (Indistinct)

P. Bevan-Baker: Really?

Speaker: Oh, pardon me. No, you're going (Indistinct) – I'm still counting to 45.

P. Bevan-Baker: This time I timed it to the second.

Speaker: You're doing great. My apologies for interrupting. You keep on going.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'll just repeat that sentence.

Speaker: Yes, repeat that last part.

P. Bevan-Baker: A corporation with a virtual monopoly in the delivery of electricity in our province obviously won't like having new restrictions placed on what they can and cannot do. When it comes to our electric grid, Bill 108 will create greater transparency, accountability, and reliability.

In a few hours, this House has a decision to make. Do we serve the needs of Islanders by keeping energy affordable, or do we serve the demands of a corporation and their shareholders? I really hope we make the right choice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Well, thank you, member, and my apologies again.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Community Culture in Mount Stewart

S. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Sometimes people speak about culture as though it only belongs in museums, galleries, or history books, but culture can take many forms. It is found in art, in food, in music, in storytelling, in recreation, and most importantly, in community itself.

That is why I want to recognize the incredible work being done by the community of Mount Stewart to build culture in ways both big and small.

In the last couple of years, the community unveiled the Canada Connects Winter Season Mural at the Hillsborough River Eco-Centre, a stunning mosaic coordinated by Meaghan Lister and Mural Mosaic's Global Roots Project. Residents of Mount Stewart, alongside artists from across Canada, contributed tiles to create a

piece of art that now welcomes both residents and visitors into the community.

But culture in Mount Stewart goes far beyond a mural. It includes free takeaway dinners for seniors prepared by Islanders of Korean and Indian heritage. It includes Korean dumpling-making workshops, music jam nights, arts and crafts workshops, and the celebration of local history through the new plaque honouring John “Hellfire Jack” Stewart.

It includes a beautifully hand-painted map of the community’s trails, a custom crosswalk honouring the old Strawberry Exchange, community gardens, Christmas light competitions, family events, and spaces like the new Joe MacLeod Rink that bring people together year-round. And even just last night, residents gathered once again to discuss ways to beautify and strengthen their community.

Thanks to Mayor Amanda, CAO Katharine, and council, and most importantly, all the buy-in from the community. Culture is not only what we preserve from the past, it is what we build together in the present, and Mount Stewart is setting a remarkable example of that every single day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

[1:20 p.m.]

Craig Noonan – *Atlantic Business Magazine’s* Top 50 CEOs

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize a resident of Summerside-Wilmot who was recently named one of *Atlantic Business Magazine’s* Top 50 CEOs for 2026. Craig Noonan is the CEO of PEI Mutual Insurance Company. Notably, he was the only Prince Edward Islander to make this list this year.

PEI Mutual is a true Island success story. Headquartered in Summerside, they protect more than 45,000 policyholders across this province. Since taking the helm, Craig has led a broad modernization of the organization, but he has done so without losing sight of the company’s roots. He believes that for a mutual insurer, success comes from depth – being

exceptional in our local market rather than average across many.

The recognition reflects not only Craig’s leadership, but also the strength of the team. That steady leadership was put to the ultimate test in 2022 following Hurricane Fiona. The company faced \$110 million in claims – the largest loss in its history. Craig led his team through the pressure with a calm, focused approach, ensuring Islanders were supported when they needed it most.

Under his guidance, PEI Mutual has also been named one of Atlantic Canada’s best places to work.

This Top 50 award is a testament to Craig’s integrity and his commitment to the people of this province. I ask all members to join me in congratulating Craig Noonan on this well-deserved honour.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, member.

Members, as you know, the member statements are one of the pieces that are pulled out by our great audiovisual team and posted to our Facebook page in their entirety. So, I would like to give the hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point the opportunity to read his statement again in its entirety because I did interrupt him halfway through. If you want, member, the floor is yours.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

Amending the *Electric Power Act*

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

Later today, I have the honour to bring Bill 108 back for debate. It’s a bill that would make significant amendments to the *Electric Power Act*, which is the piece of legislation that largely guides our province’s energy future.

The bill fills a gap when a promise made by the Premier – that the first order of business in this spring sitting would be precisely what this bill does – was broken.

The three goals of the bill are very simple: firstly, to create a safe, modern, and reliable

electricity system; secondly, to ensure that the grid we build is done at the lowest possible cost for Islanders; and thirdly, that the investments we make help us meet our climate goals. That's all.

I know that Islanders want this change; I've heard from hundreds of them. I know that the Premier wants them, too, because he said that we need a modern regulatory system in order to build a modern electricity grid, and he's absolutely right.

I also know that Maritime Electric does not want this, which is hardly a surprise. A corporation with a virtual monopoly in the delivery of electricity in our province will not like having any new restrictions placed on what they can or cannot do.

When it comes to our electricity grid, Bill 108 will create greater transparency, accountability, and reliability. In a few hours in this House, we have a decision to make. Do we serve the needs of Islanders by keeping energy affordable, or do we serve the demands of a corporation and their shareholders? I really hope we make the right decision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, member, and thank you to all members for your indulgence today.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Workforce data

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty had asked questions with regards to numbers. I'll tell you one thing about being in this portfolio: there are a lot of numbers out and they do change – some of them are monthly, some of them are annually, and some of them are semi....

So, I do want, just for clarity for the hon. member: In 2025, PEI had 93,500 people working, and 86.4 percent of those people are working full-time equivalency, which is the highest among the provinces.

With regard specifically to health care, hon. member, the goal of course is to grow and help provide that targeted support. I'd point to examples like the Marion L. Reid grant, the 100-percent tuition for LPNs, RCWs, and paramedics.

Lastly here, the data/survey that you had tabled yesterday – the employment and hours worked are broken down by occupation. Both have risen by about 20 percent in the first quarter of 2026 as compared to 2025. That means that there are more people reporting working in health care. The data also shows that the average overtime hours per worker has decreased slightly from about 7.1 to 6.7 hours.

My staff did reach out to the Department of Finance to review the datasets that were used in the quarterly labour market bulletin, and I'll be tabling that health employment data later in tabling of documents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:25 p.m.]

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This government has spent many years bragging about its tourism strategy. They spent millions on the NHL deal, promising it would put Prince Edward Island in front of the world and grow tourism. Well, now, the government is facing a real tourism opportunity with the Netflix series, *This Summer Will Be Different*.

Tourism PEI was publicly celebrating this series as a major opportunity for this province, and once again, instead of making a clear decision, this Premier is creating uncertainty around the project tied to hundreds of Island jobs in tourism and millions of dollars in economic activity.

***This Summer Will Be Different* production**

Question to the Premier: Will you confirm today that this production will have the support and certainty it needs to film on Prince Edward Island as announced?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

The first time I was approached or contacted about this opportunity was late last week, I believe, and I have my staff trying to set up a meeting, I hope for Friday of this week. We will certainly look at every opportunity to promote Prince Edward Island and promote economic activity here in Prince Edward Island, and certainly in our cultural sector. That's something we'd like to support. I haven't had the opportunity to sit with the proponents here and hear what they've got to say and specifically what their ask is.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Apparently, government officials have been in talks since earlier this year, and I'm sure you've had a conversation in the past, Premier, about this particular one. While this Premier hesitates, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland will jump at this in a heartbeat.

Pre-production is already underway here in Prince Edward Island: locations are being scouted, Islanders are being hired, and businesses are preparing for this work. Now, this single production is expected to generate \$20 million in direct economic activity for PEI in its first season alone, and multiple seasons are a real possibility, yet this government continues to send mixed signals of whether it actually is committed to supporting productions on this scale.

Question to the Premier: Why is your government creating uncertainty around a project that could bring tens of millions of dollars into the Island economy?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly, thank you, for these questions from the hon. member.

Any time that there are opportunities that come to present to PEI, we do have to sit down at tables and discuss how we make them successful and how we get there. We are working through that, and we are open to having conversations for any opportunity that helps our arts and culture, our film industry, our tourism industry,

our hospitality industry, and the growth of the economy on PEI, and we take those offers very seriously.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier's risking a major economic opportunity for Prince Edward Island because he cannot make a decision.

This government loves to celebrate tourism opportunities when the headlines are good. Well, here's a global Netflix series, based on a *New York Times* bestselling novel that showcases Prince Edward Island to hundreds of millions of viewers worldwide. Netflix has 300 million viewers. Projects like this have a potential to generate enormous tourist interest for PEI, but only if the series actually films here on Prince Edward Island as planned.

To the Premier: How can the Premier justify putting that opportunity at risk through uncertainty and mixed signals?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for the question.

Certainly, we invest across many sectors in PEI, and we are committed to doing so. An example would be what happened this morning with the largest investment in private industry.

But with this one, we know how important arts and culture are, and we know that tourism plays a big role in the economic growth of PEI. Opportunities like this are very important to sit down and discuss how we can be a part of, and we'll continue to have those conversations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But it started off really good this year with conversation, and then it stopped. These opportunities don't come around very often, and

this is one that is going to slip out of this province's hands very quickly. This Premier's indecision is becoming very expensive for this province.

The concern now extends far beyond a single production. Once again, the Premier's hesitation is creating consequences far beyond the issue directly in front of him. And here is what I don't think he understands: shows like this will not wait around for the Premier to make up his mind; they will simply go to provinces, like I said, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

Question to the Premier: Does the Premier understand that his government's indecision is now putting PEI's reputation with the global film industry at risk?

[1:30 p.m.]

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I was clear with the Leader of the Opposition in his first question. I was first approached about this days ago. I'm having my staff arrange a meeting with the proponent so I can hear exactly what it is that they're proposing to do, what their ask is, and we'll evaluate whether the government can support it. We will support all forms of economic activity in this province as we can.

The minister this morning announced the largest investment into private industry in Prince Edward Island's history. We make no excuses for investing in the economic growth of this province, and we'll do it on a case-by-case basis. We'll make those decisions in the best interests of Prince Edward Islanders, and I look forward to that meeting.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But this government knew about this for a long time now, and it is slipping by. The Premier is basically telling the production company to go spend millions or hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity somewhere else.

This issue is no longer about film production; it's about whether this government can provide the certainty that businesses need to choose Prince Edward Island. We all know tourism and local businesses are the backbone of our Island

economy. Projects like this mean jobs, visitors, and millions and millions of dollars spent here on Prince Edward Island. At some point, this Premier needs to stop delaying, and make a decision.

Will the Premier make a clear decision and give this industry the certainty it is asking for right away, yes or no?

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

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

Certainly, these conversations have not stopped or halted. We know how important they are. We will work with the partnerships that are in this ask. We'll continue to do that. We'll keep the Premier's Office abreast. They are going to have conversations as well.

It is a very important opportunity for PEI, and we are optimistic that we'll have great conversations in how we can help support so Islanders can benefit.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The minister just said there's been conversations. Obviously – I said it before: conversations have been going for months. This is an opportunity for \$20 million to \$30 million of economic activity here on Prince Edward Island, and you're telling me the Premier knows nothing about it?

Islanders do not have to look very far back to remember the Premier's first bid for the Premier's job in 2015 when he released a very flashy *Star Wars*-style ad promising support for the film and digital media industry.

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: He promised support for the film and digital industry. Back then, the Premier talked a lot about the potential of this sector. Now, he has the Premier's job, and instead of showing leadership, he's creating uncertainty around a real opportunity to put Prince Edward Island in front of millions of viewers worldwide.

Question to the Premier: When will the Premier stop delaying, stand by the commitments he once championed, and make a decision before Prince Edward Island loses the opportunity to another province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, the opposition has taken every opportunity to criticize the investments that we've made to put Prince Edward Island in front of international viewers for years now.

The Leader of the Opposition seems to think that this is something that I've been working on for quite some time. This opportunity came to me days ago. I'm organizing a meeting. We'll sit down, we'll evaluate the proposal, and we'll make a decision.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But these talks started months ago. This shows you what kind of lack of leadership this Premier has. There is no communication within this government about what's happening for opportunity in Prince Edward Island.

He's trying to compare the NHL deal to something like this? That's absurd. This is money that's spent on Prince Edward Island. Money does not go out until the money is spent here on Prince Edward Island, creating jobs. This is not an advertising campaign. It's Islanders that are working, that are filming here, that are producing, and they're building tourism here on Prince Edward Island.

Question to the Premier: Will you commit to supporting this project, yes or no?

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

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

As we've indicated in the House, conversations are happening. We do need to continue to do those. It would be irresponsible of me just to say yes right here in the Legislative Assembly without working through those that are a part of this deal for Prince Edward Island –

[Interjections]

Speaker: Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you – and we'll continue to do that. We know how important arts and culture and tourism and hospitality are to Prince Edward Island, and we look forward to working with opportunities such as the one the hon. member's referring to.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:35 p.m.]

The government has established a Cabinet committee on fiscal responsibility and red tape reduction, tasked with addressing this province's ballooning deficit over the next 12 months, which is now down to maybe 10 months.

Meanwhile, the government's own Project ART report published just months ago shows that administrative burden on Islanders and businesses has grown by 14.4 percent over the last five years. In addition, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business gave PEI a C on its most recent red tape report card, one of the lowest grades in the country.

Red tape and economic uncertainty for businesses

Question to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence: With red tape increasing over the last five years impacting businesses, why would Islanders trust that a committee with no legislative targets, no formal reduction framework, and now less than 12 months to deliver can deliver on anything meaningful?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

I think that's exactly the point of having the committee, is that we have a focused group looking at red tape reduction across government holistically, across every government department, every agency. This is what we're looking at, and we're going to actually have a very comprehensive process in bringing down red tape across the whole system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a great segue. The government points to legislation like the *Regulated Health Professions Act* as proof of simplification. But the data is clear: administrative burden rose 14.4 percent. This trend simply cannot continue.

Question to Minister of Finance and Affordability: Will you publish annual red tape reduction targets and identify measurable outcomes from this committee by June, and adopt a formal one in, one out rule so that new regulatory burdens are not continued to be placed on Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

We've already had a few meetings on this and I can tell you right now that reporting is going to be a big piece of this. We're going to have, shortly, a portal for anyone to report any red tape that they're experiencing to us so that we have record of that and we can start getting to work on it.

There's a number of other pieces that we're going to do that I can't put in my response right now, but we are already starting that process. Red tape is a key focus. We're going to keep plugging away.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's been reported that in January 2024, roughly 1,300 businesses were created on PEI, which is absolutely wonderful. However, approximately 1,700 closed, resulting in a net loss of 400 Island businesses.

Question to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence: Minister, can you tell this House what specific actions your department has taken since the downward trend began, and why would Islanders have confidence that the government's

current strategy is working when the numbers continue to go down?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question.

Certainly, we are aware and have been following this trend. We don't ever want to see that. We know how important Island businesses are to our economy. We know how important they are to the workforce and to building a sustainable, healthy Island. We will continue to work and listen in any way we can to ensure that those continue to thrive and that new will stand up here on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business is calling on provincial governments to reduce tax burdens and unnecessary government processes that eat up owners' time and delay permit approvals. Business owners in my own district have said that these burdens have actually stood in their way, delayed projects, and are costing them money.

Question to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence: Minister, will you commit today to a concrete timeline for identifying and eliminating these red tape barriers rather than appear content to watch Island entrepreneurs struggle with bureaucratic delays?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

I have a private background; I absolutely understand. This is a priority for this government to absolutely reduce the administrative burden on Island businesses. I speak with them all the time. I've had roundtables on this.

A big move that we've made is we have one of the smallest tax rates for small business in Canada. Last year we actually took the general corporate tax rate down one full percentage,

which hasn't been done since I don't think the late-'90s.

This government has been focused on Island business and doing the best we can for them. We're going to continue to keep doing that work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:40 p.m.]

The CFIB director for Atlantic Canada has noted that consumer demand is down and that entrepreneurship is becoming less attractive due to the economic uncertainty and supply chain pressures. Small business owners like those in rural PEI are sitting with empty shops, wondering if they can survive another season.

Question to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence: What is the department offering right now – not in the future, but right now – to help businesses keep their doors open?

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

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

Certainly, within the department, we do have support programs that are set up for small businesses, and dedicated staff that are ready and available to help. We do have outreach quite regularly with businesses to help the individualized needs of their business, depending on where they are – rural or urban, small, medium, or large – and we have dedicated staff that are there to help support. We know how important businesses are to the Island economy, and we're going to continue to support them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the third quarter of 2025, closure rates across Canada – not only in PEI, but across Canada –

rose to some of the most concerning levels in over a decade – outside, of course, of the pandemic – while the CFIB sent warning, saying that if this trend continues, “You could see some economic damage along the way.”

Question to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence: Given that the warning was sounded months ago, can you, minister, table any analysis that may have been done on the long-term economic impact of these damages to PEI businesses if closure rates continue as they are?

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

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

Certainly, I'll take that back to the department to find out what I can bring back to table, but what I would like to share is that there has been a program to market – the export enhancement and diversification fund – and as of January 31st, we did receive 253 applications: we approved 230, which is \$3.7 million; 18 pending approval, which is another \$300,000; and five under review.

We are ready and willing to help support where we can. We would encourage any business that's finding struggles or any MLA that's received that information to please reach out to the department. We've got staff that are ready and willing to help as we continue to know how important it is to PEI.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

PEI's tourism industry is not only a destination for North Americans. For over a decade, the Prince Edward Island government had Yuka Takahashi on the ground in Japan doing the work of building travel relationships and keeping PEI front and centre with travel agencies and tour planners. In fact, Japan is PEI's No. 2 international visitation in terms of numbers.

Japanese tourism and trade

Question to the Minister of Fisheries and Tourism: Why did your government decide not

to backfill Yuka's position after she spent more than a decade of work building PEI's tourism presence in Japan, and did you do a return-on-investment review to justify not backfilling the position?

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

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

I do thank the hon. member for the question. We had a good discussion yesterday in budget estimates, so appreciate him coming forward with it once again.

I think when you go back to look at the answers/details that were provided in budget estimates yesterday, it certainly answered the question: there was a decline in the Japanese tourist market. We are focusing on markets that are closer to home. When you look at the cost of travel, you look at the cost of airlines, prices going up.... We have a budget that is dedicated and focused, and it has shown results.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Well, it doesn't sound like there was any return on investment done on that issue.

Mr. Speaker, Japan is not a market where you can just put up a website and hope people come. Travel agents and package tours still matter there. PEI's own past promotion in Japan relied on those relationships, connecting the *Anne of Green Gables* books – it was always part of the school curriculum – to PEI as a major tourism destination to 123 million potential visitors. It sends a clear message: government needs to backfill this position.

Question to the Minister of Tourism: Does government still consider Japan, with a population of 123 million, a major tourism market?

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

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

Yes, PEI considers so many major markets right across. Absolutely. I think, as a former Minister of Tourism, that he would realize and would have looked at the situation of tourism back when he was minister and the situation that we have right now – tremendous growth in the industry, unparalleled, right across this country.

[1:45 p.m.]

Our tourism strategy is working. It will continue to work. We have dedicated staff that are extremely focused on the markets that we need to be focused on, and we will continue to do that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, this week households across the province are receiving their property tax bills. This year our seasonal residents will pay an increased rate which will add millions of dollars in tax revenue, but government has assured Island residents that their rates will not go up. Government even included a note in this year's tax bills telling Islanders this, which is why so many were shocked to see that their bills went up anyway. You can't boast about not increasing the tax rate when you know the reality is that the tax bills are going up.

Property taxes

Question to the Minister of Finance: With the increase in tax for seasonal residents, minister, why wouldn't you freeze assessment increases to give Islanders a break this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

When there were tough times, I think back in 2022-2023, we froze the property tax increases at that time and what that did was an \$8 million break on property taxes for every year into perpetuity. It's \$8 million that was never going to be charged to Island residents.

This year we did do the non-seasonal tax hike, but on the residents, we did decide to keep it just a CPI increase. That's all Island residents got, was a CPI increase, and that would be the normal course of property taxes of the past.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do remind the minister that her portfolio also includes affordability, and this would be a measure within the minister's purview to provide a small amount of affordability support for Islanders, because the assessments can go up by 5 percent without any notice to Islanders at all. Islanders don't really care what mechanism is used to tax them; they just care that they're being taxed at all. The rising cost of living is a huge issue in our province, and Islanders deserve a government that uses every lever that they have to make life more affordable.

Question to the Minister of Finance and Affordability: Will you commit, minister, to not only freezing the property tax rate, but also pausing the annual property assessment increases for this coming year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

I get a kick out of this. On one side, they're saying, "Your deficit's too big; stop spending," and on the other one, they're saying give everyone more of a break at every turn.

As the Minister of Affordability, we have delivered so many affordability programs. Just in personal income tax alone, for all Islanders, it's like \$20 million a year that we've been putting back in Islanders' pockets. This government, year over year over year, has been using the personal income tax mechanism to ensure that Islanders are keeping money in their pockets. We've added the Island essentials benefit this year. We've added the PEI child benefit tax – another \$50 this year on a new benefit that we brought in last year.

When you start adding all this up, we have been trying to keep as many dollars as possible in Islanders' pockets, and we are going to continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. MacFarlane: The truth is, Mr. Speaker, there's no break at any turn being offered by this government at all. There are opportunities to help with gas. The gas can be reduced by changing the benchmark. The government has taken away the Maritime Electric rebate. This would be an opportunity for this government to show that this government cares about Islanders' affordability.

The government also says that they want farmland on PEI to stay farmland. Islanders who own farmland are also getting their property tax bills for that land this week and their bills are also going up.

So, here's a question for the Minister of Agriculture: Will you advocate, minister, to have farmland assessment increases paused so that we can incentivize land to both remain in agriculture and also give farmers a break?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. B. Thompson: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. That is one of the best ways to protect farmland, is through taxation, and that's well known. Prince Edward Island pays some of the lowest farmland taxes in the country, but I will continue to advocate for that because that is a good way to protect farmland.

Thank you.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

Our office continues to hear from Island parents who tell us that our maintenance enforcement program is not working. These parents wait months or years to receive child support payments. With the recent cuts to programs that directly affect Island kids, it's more important than ever that we ensure that children are getting the money they are entitled to.

[1:50 p.m.]

In September 2024, there were 1,392 files with the PEI maintenance enforcement program with arrears totalling over \$12.5 million.

Maintenance enforcement program

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Have you made any progress in lowering

the number of maintenance enforcement files that are in arrears?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General.

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

I want to thank the member, who brings this up every year, and every year I probably have the same answer.

It's one of those difficult situations where it's like trying to get, some people say, blood from a stone; it's difficult. We offer the service, the people – one of the most difficult jobs, I think, in the Department of Justice is maintenance enforcement because they are dealing with vulnerable people; they're dealing with people that will absolutely do anything in their power not to pay. So, it's quite a....

We'll continue to invest in it. We'll continue to support and advocate for the most vulnerable people that are dealing with this.

Thank you.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

When we discussed this issue previously, we were told that staffing was an issue. Based on the budget figures, it would appear that the maintenance enforcement program in PEI is currently fully staffed and has been for some time. Even so, one single mom who reached out to us has been waiting for years for over \$45,000 in support payments that her children are entitled to.

To the same minister. The staff are there. They're working as hard as they can, but the program just isn't working. You said so yourself. What changes will you make to get these kids the support they deserve?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General.

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

I wouldn't say it's not working. It's not helping everyone, which is sad, and we have to do more to support this.

That individual case with \$45,000 – I can't advocate enough. Our maintenance enforcement people have the power to take the licence away from the person who gets their paycheques, but the people that aren't paying work extremely hard to avoid paying. They'll go to great lengths, and it's sad. It is sad because it's the children that suffer.

If the member wants to talk about this more offline, I'd be happy to do that because I know that we've had standing committees on this as well, but it's something that we continue to have to focus on. Just throwing more staff at it, I don't know if that's the solution, but what is the solution? I'd be happy to have this conversation with the member.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, and I appreciate that, and I will take you up on that offer.

But when I think of millions and millions of dollars being held up year over year over year, I would say that program is not working. Millions of dollars are being withheld from children who are entitled to this support. During a time when cost of living is at an all-time high, and these single parents are trying their darndest to make ends meet, this is having a real detrimental effect on many Island families.

To the same minister: Will you commit to looking into the option of government paying support payments in advance to families who have payments in arrears?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General.

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if that would be the solution, but it's something that I will have further conversations on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's been noted that mental health calls have consistently risen over the last number of years. Last year, policing agencies across PEI responded to 5,760 mental health and wellness

calls, while mobile mental health has responded to 1,311.

The numbers tell a story: Islanders still call 911 for police service when they are in need of mental health support, and our policing agencies are responding to these calls.

Mobile mental health (further)

Question to the Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General: What is presently being done to support police in PEI with the increased volume of calls for mental health services?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General.

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member across for these questions. She is a strong advocate for this, and I believe she asked questions last week to the Minister of Health on this similar topic.

[1:55 p.m.]

What we're doing for the police is we introduced last year the police standards, which were way overdue. Those standards are there to protect not only the police but the victims as well. We've got to continue to work with our policing on these difficult calls that they face because they are increasing, and we need to support not only the mental health patients on these calls but the police that are asked to go with them.

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

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do appreciate the police standards coming into play for our law enforcement across PEI.

PEI is the only province in Canada without an integrated model of police and mental health professionals forming a team-based approach to deal with mental health concerns in all of our communities. As recently as January 2026, New Brunswick implemented a pilot for an integrated model in Moncton, and last fall, Ontario increased their funding by \$9 million to expand their program. This is based on the positive results of an integrated model.

Are you aware of the successes and benefits of these programs across Canada? Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General.

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

We are looking at other provinces and what they do. These are definitely working in some areas and not working in others, but it's a partnership with the Department of Health that we have to work with because mental health lies within their department.

We will continue to work with the Department of Health to make sure that the best service can be provided to the people that are providing the service and the people that are requiring this service as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'll have to speak a little bit more quickly.

As of January 2026, the standing committee heard from Medavie and the Department of Health and Wellness, and there doesn't seem to be a willingness to embed plainclothes police officers into the mobile mental health.

Police are asking for the expertise of mental health clinicians to support their working partnership because it provides both knowledge and safety in difficult situations. PACT teams – or integrated teams – across Canada are having success.

Question to the same minister: Will you strongly consider a way to create an integrated model where police and mental health clinicians support mental health and wellbeing checks across all of PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General.

Hon. B. Thompson: I will advocate for this; of course, I will. Is it important? Yes, it is. Is it in my department? Not necessarily. It's the Department of Health, which we will closely with.

I know there have been a lot of discussions about this over the years, and I think we can come to some kind of a solution that, as I said, helps the victims and the service providers all at the same time because they both play an important role in the health of our Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

S. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A few weeks ago, during debate on a bill that created the Island essentials benefit, there were a few questions that were irking me. The Liberal opposition was suggesting changes that would reduce the amount of the rebate for the middle-class rebate.

Island essentials benefit (further)

A question to the Minister of Finance and Affordability: Minister, did you have any chance to listen to these suggested changes that were brought forward during the debate on that legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

I think when we built this Island essentials benefit, a key part of that was, of course, to help out your lower-income Islanders, but we really wanted to lean into that group from household income of \$60K to \$95K to give them a break, too. A lot of times, they're above the thresholds on a lot of programming that is offered through government, and they don't get to benefit from that.

With the Island essentials benefit, we wanted to ensure that they were captured and that they got the full benefit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, first supplementary.

S. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's funny; I didn't think a whole lot of people were paying attention to the debate. I was at the Morell Co-op the other night, and a guy came up

to me. He said: "Are the Liberals real? Are they talking about getting rid of that middle income?" He talked like: "Listen, I understand the point of it. You're trying to give more to the lower-income folks." And he was very proud, this guy. He said the Province is doing a lot for low-income folks, but he said: "We just don't qualify a lot for this kind of stuff." This guy was very – right in middle income. He was very, very pleased that he finally qualified.

Will the Minister of Finance and Affordability confirm: Is this a one-year thing, or will this go forward for the middle class year after year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

[2:00 p.m.]

Yeah, as it's set up, this would be year over year.

It's great to hear that because when we did build it, this was a focus in building it: to ensure that we captured that. A lot of household incomes up to \$95K – if you're a double-income family with two kids and a household income of \$95K, you still need a little help. That's what we hope to give them through this Island essentials benefit.

I'm happy to hear the comments that you heard at the Morell Co-op.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, second supplementary.

S. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is it; you think of it like an apprenticed plumber and an early childhood educator. They fall within this range, and I just can't imagine them not getting this benefit. It's important.

Another question to the Minister of Finance and Affordability: If any legislative changes come forward on this kind of thing, will you please, please, please push back and make sure that the middle class does get covered by this Island essentials benefit?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

On top of that, the personal income tax benefits that we've been giving year over year, all those income thresholds – low to moderate, modest to moderate – are all benefiting from that. And that, like I said, is close to \$20 million a year that Islanders are seeing in personal income tax relief. Year over year, that adds up.

We are doing lots over here. The PEI child benefit is another one, if you have a couple of children – a new benefit last year, and now enhanced this year with \$50 more a child. What we're trying to do is to keep the money in Islanders' pockets. The Island essentials benefit is more generous. It has more flexibility. They can spend it how they want to, and it's very fair. We're very proud of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

My previous questions – up to 20,000 international visitors to PEI is what this minister seems to be giving up on. This is not about one position or even one industry.

Prince Edward Island exports to Japan high-quality products like bluefin tuna, lobster, and wild blueberries. Japan is a key market for PEI exports at a time when we continue to enhance other markets as Canada continues to be in a trade dispute with the United States.

Japanese tourism and trade (further)

Question to the Minister of Fisheries and Tourism: You are perfectly situated as Minister of Fisheries and Tourism to benefit both sectors. Why is the government cutting the very tools needed to maintain and grow tourism and food markets that we have here as a tourism rep for PEI in Japan?

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

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

The hon. member is absolutely right that Japan is a tremendous destination with regard to our fisheries products, our agricultural products –

one of the reasons that the Minister of Agriculture actually went on a trade mission to Japan.

We are not giving up on Japan. One thing that I neglected to mention in previous comments is the fact that the individual who was working within Tourism promoting PEI in Japan actually retired. We did not let her go, per se. I do want to thank her, Yuka Takahashi, for her tremendous work promoting PEI over the last number of years.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I guess the point I was trying to make was that the position was not backfilled. That's the point. We appreciate everything that Yuka Takahashi did.

West Prince will also be feeling the impact of this inaction by government. Japanese tourists had a real value for sites like the Bideford Parsonage Museum, which depends on international interests and the PEI cultural story around Anne of Green Gables. If Japan is allowed to slip off the priority list, rural cultural sites in his district, like mine, will feel the loss first.

Question to the minister responsible for rural development: What is the government's plan to maintain Japanese visitors' interest in PEI and in the rural sites like the Bideford Parsonage Museum now that your in-market tourism position is gone and tourism (Indistinct) supports are being reduced?

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

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

To the hon. member's point, let's look at tourism right across the board. As I had mentioned here previously about a week or a week and a half ago, every sector, every area of the province is up; up 20 percent in western PEI – 20 percent in western PEI.

[2:05 p.m.]

The hon. member and myself attended the AGM of the O'Leary Potato Museum. Things are booming there, just booming there. You look at

the Bideford Parsonage Museum that he has referenced. The hon. member has pointed out how well it's been doing.

Our strategy within tourism is working, will continue to work, and we will continue to see growth in this vital industry, right from tip to tip.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, final question.

G. McNeilly: Well, while you're doing that, can you have a look at the people who are struggling to find a place to live in Prince Edward Island? That's a growing number in Prince Edward Island; the HIFIS number says so.

This government continues to strike other committees, and in the Minister of Housing's new terms of reference, he talks about developing and implementing an integrated provincial response for Islanders with complex needs who are experiencing homelessness, and that's with Health, Justice, and Social Development.

Provincial response to homelessness

Minister: What are the terms of reference of this new committee, and how do you expect Islanders to get a home with this new committee? What's it going to do?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to take that back.

Thank you.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Marie Kenny – World President of the Associated Country Women of the World

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

Today, I welcome several familiar faces to the gallery. Marie Kenny is with us today, and I will talk a little bit more about her accomplishments momentarily. She is here with Cecil Kenny and Autumn, her daughter, and son-in-law Corey Tremere. Also joining us are representatives

from our cherished Women's Institute: Miriam Lank, Carolyn MacFadyen, and Helen Nicholson. Welcome.

[Hear, hear!]

Hon. B. Thompson: Marie Kenny was recently elected as the World President of the Associated Country Women of the World. She is the first Islander to ever hold this title. She is also only the fourth Canadian to ever hold this role. This is a great accomplishment and I couldn't be more proud. Congratulations.

The Associated Country Women of the World is one of the largest organizations representing rural women. It represents approximately nine million members across more than 80 countries. They work closely with the Women's Institute. We all know the great contributions the PEI Women's Institute provide our province.

Marie has also served in roles within the Women's Institute and is active in her community. As world president, she will lead initiatives focused on education, food security, climate action, and women's rights. I know Marie will work hard to make sure rural women remain the heart of sustainable development worldwide.

As you know, this is the International Year of the Woman Farmer. Many women farmers are active in both organizations, and both organizations work hard to support causes related to agriculture. This is a fitting time to recognize Marie's work, her success, and the contributions of these two groups. Thank you for all you do.

Please join me in congratulating Marie on her election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause]

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

R. Henderson: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, want to acknowledge Marie's appointment to such a great position here as the World President of the Associated Country Women of the World. I guess, from my perspective, to have an Island woman chosen to lead such an important international

organization, with that many members and 82 countries, speaks volumes about her leadership and her capabilities.

And I have to tell a little more of a personal story. Obviously, I had, I'll say a short stint as Minister of Agriculture, which the Women's Institute falls under. We were in a little more fiscally challenging times back in those days, and I remember Miriam Lank and Marie Kenny, and I remember telling the Minister of Finance there's no way I can cut the Women's Institute. You can't do that. So, I did meet with them to sort of say we're going to hold things, but when we were finished, they came out with an increase. That speaks a lot to what Marie is all about.

I also want to acknowledge Autumn Tremere is here as well. Autumn, I guess during my time as minister in a different portfolio, was involved in communications. I didn't know the link between Marie Kenny and Autumn, but once I found out what it was, it sort of all fit together.

[2:10 p.m.]

They're two ladies of impeccable calibre and ability to get things done and put the right wording to whatever needs to be done.

Thank you very much, both.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

What an honour it is to respond to this statement. I'd like to thank the minister for bringing this forward.

It's stories like this that make you realize that little old PEI is not so little, is it? It makes you so proud to come from a small place like this because when you grow up in a small place like this, often things on this calibre on a worldwide stage seem darn near impossible to reach. When I consider that, it's quite remarkable. The first Islander, the fourth Canadian – you know, there are people like myself who are looking at you and little girls looking at you growing up. It's people like you and stories like yours that make women and girls believe that they can.

What a remarkable achievement. You're making PEI proud. Thank you very much, and we look

forward to seeing where these adventures lead you.

Thank you.

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

MDS Coating Technologies 2026 Expansion

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

I'm pleased to rise to speak about the Province's most recent partnership with the federal government and industry.

This morning, I joined the Premier and federal minister Melanie Joly to announce a joint \$110 million partnership with MDS Coating Technologies.

MDS is a PEI leader in advanced manufacturing, clean technology, with a commercial aviation and defence client base with over 25 years of proven excellence. Their proprietary technology is leading the way in supporting multinational clients reduce their fuel consumption and help improve their carbon footprint. And all this is happening right here on PEI at Slemmon Park.

It's truly a massive milestone for our Island economy. We are showing what our small province is capable of as a hub of innovation – a place of business where talented, high-skilled workers can make their careers. Despite this last year and a half of global economic instability, PEI and its industries have demonstrated that they are a force that can compete on a national and international scale.

This morning, alongside the federal government, we announced matching investments of \$55 million each, for a total of \$110 million, to support another expansion. This time it is a new 50,000-square-foot facility that will house another piece of specialized advanced manufacturing equipment to deliver the unique PEI product for their global aviation and defence clients.

Our contribution is a combination of a \$45 million repayable loan, \$3 million in a capital equipment grant, and up to \$6.75 million in projected labour rebates over the next five years, for a total of \$55 million.

This expansion is going to translate into up to 120 new jobs for PEI – new jobs that Island

students and established high-skilled talent can fill and work on the Island to help grow our economy.

I'm incredibly proud to see this initiative come to fruition. It's innovative and forward thinking, and positions Island industry in a way that will clear the path for a future where aerospace and defence can strengthen their foothold in our economic landscape.

This investment today helps us ensure the Island economy will continue to grow, diversify, and compete locally, nationally, and internationally.

Congratulations to Phil and the entire MDS Coatings Technologies team.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to the minister for this statement and to the government and to the federal government for this announcement.

I'm pleased on behalf of the official opposition to recognize the investment made in MDS Coating Technologies and what it represents for PEI's innovation sector, our economy, and the future of sustainable aviation technology right here in PEI.

As one of the largest manufacturing employers on PEI, MDS has built a strong reputation as a homegrown company that competes in highly specialized global aerospace markets. This work demonstrates that innovation is not limited to larger urban centres. It's happening right here at home on PEI, driven by local talent, local expertise, and local ambition.

Investments like this matter because they help Island companies continue to expand, create more skilled jobs, and develop technologies that position PEI as part of a global transition toward cleaner and more sustainable industries.

[2:15 p.m.]

The aerospace and advanced manufacturing sectors are becoming increasingly competitive. Strategic investments like this can help Island companies expand, scale up research,

commercialize new technologies, and attract and retain highly skilled workers right here at home.

Innovation policy is not simply about technology. It's about ensuring PEI has the economic resilience to participate in the economy of the future by supporting businesses that can compete internationally while creating good paying jobs right here at home.

This is especially important for young Islanders pursuing careers in science, engineering, advanced manufacturing, and clean technology. Announcements like this send an important message that there are opportunities to build meaningful careers in these sectors here on PEI; we don't have to leave. We know that PEI has tremendous potential in aerospace, bioscience, clean technology, and advanced manufacturing. Supporting companies like MDS helps to strengthen that reputation and encourages further investments in our province.

I look forward to seeing the continued growth and success of this Island company in the years ahead.

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 good news announcement for MDS Coating Technologies and for the Island aerospace industry.

We have to remember, when we lost CFB Summerside years ago, a big effort was undertaken to replace that economic generator/employer in the area and resulted in the Slemon Park aerospace sector growing. Many people from the area, including my former law partner, Derek Key, were instrumental in bringing that industry into the province. It's so important to keep it supported.

We saw a big negative impact during the COVID years on the work available to be processed in the Slemon Park aerospace sector; that's thankfully growing back again and it's to the testament of the industry that it survived that tough time. It's great to see government putting some supports into it. I believe, last year government put in a \$7 million loan as well to MDS Coating. So, we're continuing to support MDS again.

I would also, in closing – we’ve heard our Prime Minister talk on multiple occasions about increased spending in our national defence industry. We really hope this government is at the table looking for our share of that pie, which would be well suited for the sector that we’ve created in the Slemon Park aerospace sector, including MDS Coating and others in the industry.

So, thank you again to the minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Recognition of Guests II

Speaker: Just before we move on, the hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence.

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

I just ask for your indulgence and the indulgence of the House just to recognize that Phil Rodger has arrived, who is the CEO for MDS, and I just want to say thank you for all of your hard work, for what you’ve done for PEI, and what you’re going to do. It was a wonderful announcement to be a part of today.

Thank you.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition from the residents of North Rustico and surrounding areas. I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal, that the petition be now received and do lie on the Table.

This petition states:

- 1) Access PEI provides essential provincial services including, but not limited to, health cards and drivers’ licences.
- 2) Currently, residents in North Rustico and the surrounding communities must travel significant distances to access these services.
- 3) Establishing an Access PEI centre in our community would improve access to essential services for local residents, reduce travel time and costs, support seniors, families, and individuals with limited transportation, and

strengthen community infrastructure in the North Rustico area.

There are 618 signatures on this petition.

The petition prays for the Legislative Assembly to encourage government to consider this request and take steps to establish an Access PEI centre at the Eliyahu Wellness Centre Canada Games Place in North Rustico, PEI, to serve the needs of our residents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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 post of Tourism PEI supporting the Netflix application of *This Summer Will Be Different*, 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-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

[2:20 p.m.]

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter from Susan Hartley on behalf of the ASI – Atlantic Summer Institute – board of directors. It’s addressed to the members of the Legislative Assembly, and the purpose of the letter is to express concerns regarding proposed budgetary decisions as they relate to the health and wellbeing of present and future generations of PEI children and youth. I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a CBC story entitled, “Boys are falling behind in school, and some experts say it starts in kindergarten,” which comes from a new Quebec report which states that boys are systemically disadvantaged in the school system, and I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table health care employment data, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism, 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

Motions Other Than Government

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, I'll call Motion 55 to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant: Motion 55: Adopting a mental health-in-all-policies approach.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, the following motion:

WHEREAS supporting and promoting positive mental health and wellness for children and youth is critical to ensuring that they achieve developmental milestones, build healthy relationships, and can participate in their communities and society;

AND WHEREAS public health practitioners across Canada recognize that mental health and wellness and the social determinants of health are interconnected;

AND WHEREAS the Atlantic Summer Institute on Healthy and Safe Communities (ASI) published a policy brief in 2022, which highlighted the importance of “upstream” or prevention investments in mental health and wellness, and called on government to implement mental health and wellness in all policies;

AND WHEREAS government has recognized the importance of child and youth health promotion initiatives, such as Winter Wellness Day, in improving overall population health by supporting lifelong positive health outcomes for both individuals and society;

AND WHEREAS the Legislative Assembly unanimously endorsed Motion No. 83 during the second session of the 66th General Assembly on March 24, 2022, which urged government to change the way it builds healthy public policy and implement the recommendations of the Atlantic Summer Institute on upstream investment as outlined in ASI's 2022 policy brief;

AND WHEREAS supporting and promoting child and youth mental health and wellness and implementing mental health and wellness-in-all-policies remains vital to ensuring positive outcomes for individual health and societal well-being;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge government to undertake an “upstream”, or prevention approach to mental health and wellness-in-all-policies approach to developing public policy;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge government to renew its commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Atlantic Summer Institute on upstream investments in mental health and wellness, as outlined in the ASI 2022 policy brief.

Speaker: I'd like to call upon the mover of the motion, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park, to open debate.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to take just a moment to recognize a key individual in ASI – the Atlantic Summer Institute – who's here with us today. Patsy is back there. Patsy Beattie-Huggan has just been instrumental in the work and continues to work tirelessly on behalf of children and youth and their mental wellbeing. Welcome to you here today.

I am more than pleased to rise to speak about this motion and to encourage all members of this Assembly to support this important motion brought forward by myself and my colleague.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

At its heart, this motion is about something really very simple: making sure that the mental health and wellness of our children and youth is considered in absolutely every piece of policy that government embarks on, and that the decisions that are made are in consideration of the impact to our children and youth and their overall mental wellbeing.

[2:25 p.m.]

This motion also recognizes that mental health is not just a health care issue. Mental health is impacted by housing. It's affected by education, by recreation, by employment, poverty, food security, transportation, and – believe it or not – an individual's connection to the very community that they belong. In other words, every department in government has a role to play in promoting positive mental health outcomes for our children and youth.

I would encourage government to work collaboratively together in review of policies; when they're being developed, that they look at not only the impact – because this goes beyond that – but the upstream approach to ensuring that we encourage all of our policies to be moving in the right direction to support the overall positive wellbeing of our children.

This motion also calls on government to renew its support for the recommendations contained in the 2022 policy brief that was prepared by ASI titled *Investing Upstream: Placing infants, children and youth mental health promotion at the forefront*. The first 1,000 days of a person's life has tremendous impact. That's the first two years of a child's life. We really need to start very, very young – I'd argue even prior to birth and the wellness of the parents before they

engage in becoming parents. It really is something that is absolutely critical.

If we want to change the outcomes for our Island, we need to start when children are in their infancy. We need to follow and ensure that whatever we do, we don't negatively impact a human being's overall mental wellness.

Members in this House, we walked today on our Walk of Silence as we remembered those people living in family violence. It does take five to seven generations to break that chain. That's not just five or seven generations of easy work. It's hard work, and we need to do our part. If we truly want our school systems to be a safe place to be, we have to pay attention to what we're doing in our policies and our education and where we are moving.

The policy brief also was developed through a very broad collaboration with researchers, community organizations, Indigenous leaders, health professionals, educators, and policy experts from across Atlantic Canada, including right here at home on PEI.

The brief makes a compelling case that if we truly want healthier children, healthier families, and healthier communities, we cannot continue focusing almost entirely on crisis response. That's important – don't misunderstand what I'm saying – but we need to invest upstream. We need to invest and focus on prevention. We need to build the conditions that help children and youth thrive before they reach a crisis point. We need to help keep our children safe before they get into a very dark place where it could be a challenge for them to return.

Madam Speaker, I think every member of this House understands that we're seeing growing challenges related to mental health among our children and youth here on PEI. We've had great debate on those very issues and its impact on all of the departments, quite frankly.

Young people today are navigating many pressures that are unique to this generation. They are dealing with social isolation, economic uncertainty, the lasting effects – still – of the pandemic, increased anxiety and depression, online harms and cyberbullying, housing insecurity, substance use concerns, climate anxiety, and rising levels of stress, just to name a few.

As we discussed during the debate on Motion 3 yesterday in this House, youth mental health is a growing concern here on PEI. Many students are experiencing anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges are at record high rates.

We know from the results of the 2024-2025 Compass report that at least 31 percent of Island students surveyed responded that they felt nervous, anxious, or on edge most days. Can you imagine for a second going every single day and spending six hours and having those feelings?

At the same time, families and communities are also under incredible pressures, and growing pressures. When families and communities struggle, children struggle.

[2:30 p.m.]

The ASI policy brief reminds us that child and youth wellbeing is interconnected with the wellbeing of the adults and communities around them. It states clearly that there are no healthy children without healthy adults and communities.

So really, what that turns out to be is that we need to invest, yes, in what's happening with our children from the very beginning of their lives, but we also can't lose sight of the fact that if mom and dad aren't doing well at home, all the investments made for that child could be at risk because without parents doing well, children don't do well.

You can't cherry-pick where you want to place your investments. You need to recognize that it's family that we need to invest in, it's a community that we need to invest in, and all parts of that community that touch on that child and his or her family.

That's a really important point. Too often we talk about mental health only after it becomes a crisis. We focus on our waitlists. We focus on emergency response. We focus on treatment after the problem becomes severe. Those services are essential, but people must be able to access mental health services when they need them. I've spoken in this House before about how that isn't always the case. Unfortunately, that can have devastating impacts for families.

But if we only ever focused downstream after a crisis has occurred, we will always be catching up because we're always looking backwards.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

The ASI policy brief challenges government to think differently by calling for what it describes as upstream investment. An upstream approach means addressing the root causes that influence mental health outcomes – getting in and supporting families before there's an issue. It means creating supportive environments where children and youth can develop resilience, connection, belonging, and stability.

And importantly, the policy brief emphasizes that this is not simply about spending more money. It's about organizing existing efforts better. In other words, we can put our collective heads together – within government, within departments, within community – and do better and smarter. It isn't always about trying to find more. It's evaluating what we're doing, it's ensuring we're doing the right thing, and then it's taking a look at: Could dollars, could programs could be set up and used more effectively? It doesn't always have to mean new investments, although I'm not turning new investments down by any stretch, Mr. Speaker.

It's about organizing our efforts better. It's about breaking down the silos that all too often exist. It's about recognizing that departments and sectors cannot work in isolation if we want to improve population health.

Every department impacts people, so we can't just assign this to one line department and say, "There now, done," because that just simply won't work. We have to have a cross-government approach to the overall health and wellbeing of our society. I mean, this focuses on children and youth, but we're talking a societal change here.

It's about recognizing that departments and sectors can't work in isolation if we want to improve the general overall health. The brief specifically says: "We are not calling for new investments at this time. We recognize that budgets are tight everywhere. We are talking about how current resources across governments and organizations could be organized differently to support Mental Health in All Policies."

Like I've said, that is an incredibly important point to this. This motion is asking government to use a different lens when making decisions. So, before introducing new policy, before making cuts, before changing programs, government should ask itself: How will this

affect the mental health and wellbeing of children, youth, and their families? I believe that this is reasonable and, frankly, responsible public policy development.

The ASI brief also highlights the importance of understanding the social determinants of health – truly understanding them – not just being able to talk about them, but understanding what they mean in the PEI context.

[2:35 p.m.]

We know that mental health outcomes are deeply connected to income, housing, food security, social inclusion, discrimination, access to recreation, community safety, educational opportunities, and of course, childhood experiences.

The brief points specifically to adverse childhood experiences – often referred to as ACEs – that these include experiences such as abuse, neglect, family violence, substance use in the home, and severe household stress. Research shows that this can have – and does have – lifelong impacts on a person's physical health, their mental health, educational outcomes, employment, and overall wellbeing. In simple terms, these conditions that children live in will have an impact.

We need to not only change what children's experiences are; we also, I recognize, must support the end result of that experience, which is often health issues. There's all kinds of research that takes childhood trauma – not only the mental wellbeing but physical wellbeing and our physical diseases that many people are facing can be traced back to childhood trauma.

But the encouraging news is this: The evidence also shows that supportive environments, early intervention, strong communities, and social-emotional learning can significantly improve these outcomes.

So, when we talk to the Minister of Education and Early Years about the social-emotional realities of the curriculum and what's happening in our schools and what's happening in those environments and also in early childhood sector. That affective domain, or the social-emotional development of our children, we have to pay a different type of attention to. It's not a direct academic achievement, if you will, obviously, but it impacts academics.

But equally important – dare I say more important – is absolutely that social-emotional, those skills. What that child is able to do when those skills are developed and developed well – it's just unmeasurable. But if they aren't there, then the challenges that children and youth face are actually quite devastating. I've talked a lot in this House about the impact of childhood drama.

But government actually does have the ability to influence these outcomes in a positive way, which is great. The evidence in the policy brief shows that investment in early childhood support – I'll leave it at that – and mental health promotion provide significant long-term social and economic returns. There are countries across this world who make investments in the first 2,000 days and beyond because they understand that critical time in a person's life is essential to make those investments.

There are some parts of the world where school – the member talked about boys starting to fall a bit behind, but that's not: "Oh my gosh, what's gone wrong here?" That's us not recognizing development. That's us not understanding that in human development, we don't all develop at the very same time, rate, and speed. And that's true not only as individuals, but there is tons of research around the genders as well.

There are some places in this world who recognize, you know what, we need to start school a little bit later, and school actually doesn't start until age seven. There are other places in the world who understand the value of play and what play really is. It's not what you do when the work is done; it's actually how you learn. We call that different things as we grow. How many of us can't wait to get out of our work and go and do our rec?

But really and truly, we've lost sight of what play is just in our communities. But I think if we can take a look at how that is reinstated perhaps in a different way in our schools, we would see different outcomes for our children.

There's also a train of thought that says, you know what, teenagers ought not be in school before ten o'clock in the morning, perhaps even noon because the research supports – I know some might be shocked by that, but they're not functioning. They're not able to function. I recognize that school hours are set; they're standard. But if you look at it from a child and youth point of view, they're more ready to learn

come noon. Whether we like or not, that's just simple reality, and it's the evidence.

[2:40 p.m.]

The brief notes that economists have found returns of up to \$6 for every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood programs. We've known that for years – that that return is seen on the other end. Every dollar invested has a \$7 return.

But the other thing that it does is – if the investments are done well – it keeps our children physically healthier, so we're less sick, so we're not as reliant as we age on the health care system. It keeps our youth as well perhaps more resilient and able to sort of ride through, get through, through resiliency, some tough times as kids are growing up.

The things that the youth have to face today, I certainly didn't have to face, and my children – who are a little bit older too – didn't have to face, but I can tell you my grandchildren are facing. The resiliency that children need today just to go to school is remarkable, but those investments will help, and they're essential. Then it keeps kids potentially out of the justice system who don't have those skills, that aren't as resilient.

Economists have been saying that for years and years and years, and in fact, it was when economists started to stand up to say we need to invest in the early years that investments started to come, because they made the economic benefit clear to investments in early childhood. That should matter to every member in this Assembly, in this House, because it's not only the right thing to do morally, it's also very smart policy.

When we support children early, we know that we improve their educational outcomes, we reduce future strain, as I've said, on the health care system, we reduce involvement in the justice system, we improve workforce participation, and we strengthen, by default, our communities.

Investing upstream saves costs downstream, it's that simple, but it takes courage and it takes guts, basically, to be able to say – in a cycle where governments think three to four years – based on election cycles, often, let's face it – that's how our policy is often developed as well. We often don't sit back honestly and say, “I

won't reap the benefit of this policy direction because I likely won't be here 10, 15, 20 years down the road when those benefits would actually be seen.” So, if we could step outside that cycle of thinking, it's just endless what's possible.

The ASI policy brief outlines, too, four broad priority areas, and they are:

1. A whole-of-government approach through a mental health and all policies framework.
2. A whole-of-society approach through collaboration with communities, organizations, academia, and the private sector.
3. A whole-of-community approach that supports local action for sustainable and integrated funding models that allow prevention efforts to succeed.

These are very practical recommendations. Importantly, they are flexible recommendations that allow government to adapt to these principles of the policy brief to local realities and existing structures. It's not asking for government to change the way it's structured; it's asking to take those four pillars, if you will, and use those when creating our policies that impact our people. I mean, that's what we're here to do.

And again, this motion does not demand or call for perfection because we know that's just not possible, but it's a start. It simply asks government to continue to move forward in the right direction, to renew its commitment to recognize that all policy does affect people's mental health, and to prioritize prevention and wellness in public policy decisions.

The ASI policy brief also outlines several core principles that should guide a Mental Health in All Policies framework. Those principles include mutual responsibility; inclusion, equity, and justice; proactive action; and collaboration, but accountability as well. Those are principles that I believe all members of this House can support.

[2:45 p.m.]

The brief also emphasizes that equity must be central to this work. Not all children and youth experience the same barriers. Some young people face greater challenges because of poverty, disability, racism, discrimination,

housing instability, geographic isolation, or their family circumstances. A prevention-based approach must ensure that supports are equitable and accessible to all people, and that means listening carefully to the communities and designing policy that reflects real people and real experiences.

One thing I particularly appreciate about the ASI policy brief is that it does not present mental health promotion as solely a government responsibility, because I do recognize that we often turn to government to say government must do it all, but that's not what this is doing, and nor really is that reality. It recognizes the incredible work already being done by community organizations, by educators, by municipalities, Indigenous communities, the parents, and our volunteer sector.

Across PEI, we recognize organizations every day are working to build stronger communities and support youth wellbeing. We see our schools promoting social and emotional learning. We see what's happening in early learning and child care to support children and their families. We see recreation groups creating belonging and connection. We see community organizations reaching out and supporting families. We see local initiatives focused on inclusion, food security, mentorship, and wellness.

This motion recognizes all of those efforts, and it recognizes that government policy should support and strengthen that work rather than operate separately from it. The ASI brief describes this as a whole-of-community approach, which I rather like. It's us working together – government and community working together – because we're working all for the same people. We're working for ourselves.

The ASI brief describes it: this means recognizing that healthy communities are built together and collectively. It also means recognizing that communities themselves often know what their residents need best. Arguably, they always know what their residents need best.

The policy brief also discusses the importance of sustainable and integrated funding. Too often, community organizations are forced to operate on short-term project funding. They spend enormous amounts of time applying for grants, reporting on fragmented funding systems, and trying to sustain programs year after year.

The ASI brief argues that if we truly value prevention in community mental health promotion, then governments must think differently about how funding is structured. Stable, coordinated, multi-year supports help communities plan for the long term and build meaningful, sustainable programs and services for their residents.

Another very important aspect of the ASI brief is its focus on collaboration with Indigenous communities and Indigenous leadership. The brief clearly states that reconciliation and Indigenous-led approaches must be foundational to any upstream mental health strategy. It emphasizes the importance of respect for relationships, co-designing policy with Indigenous communities, supporting Indigenous-led initiatives, and learning from Indigenous knowledge systems.

That matters because mental wellness is deeply connected to culture, language, identity, community, and belonging. A truly effective Mental Health in All Policies approach must recognize and respect those realities.

The policy brief also reflects on lessons learned through the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, government demonstrated that they could work across departments and jurisdictions quickly when facing an emergency. The brief asks an important question: Can that same level of collaboration continue in support of long-term mental wellness? I believe it can, and I believe it should.

The pandemic also reminds us of the importance of social connection. We saw firsthand how isolation, stress, uncertainty, and disconnection affected mental health, but we also saw communities come together. We saw neighbours support neighbours. We saw volunteers step up. We saw schools, organizations, and communities adapt to support people.

There are important lessons here. This is when my husband took his life, because those were lost for him. That wasn't the only reason, but that was part of it.

[2:50 p.m.]

The ASI brief urges that Atlantic Canada is particularly well positioned to lead on this issue because of our strong sense of community and regional collaboration, and I think that applies especially here on PEI. Islanders understand

community. We understand looking out for one another. We understand that healthy communities do not happen by accident. They are built very intentionally.

I also want to speak briefly about the importance of our Winter Wellness Day, which is referenced in this motion. Winter Wellness Day may seem like a small initiative to some people, but it reflects a larger truth, and I thank the member for that. Mental wellness is built through connection, movement, rest, recreation, relationships, and community engagement. When that's lost, so is your mental wellness. Sometimes, public policy focuses so heavily on systems and institutions that we overlook the importance of simple opportunities for children and families to connect, recharge, and spend time together.

One of the strongest sections of the policy brief discusses the need to move away from pragmatic systems. Right now, too many services and programs operate independently from one another. Families often have to navigate complicated systems with different applications, different departments, different eligibility rules, and different priorities. That's exhausting and that's discouraging for the people. A more coordinated approach helps families earlier and more effectively. When systems collaborate better, communities benefit.

This motion also references the unanimous support this House previously gave to Motion 83 in 2022. At that time, members from all parties agreed that government should implement the recommendations of the ASI policy brief and pursue healthier public policy approaches.

Today's motion asks government to renew that commitment because the work is still needed. If anything, the need is even greater today. Mental health challenges among children and youth have not disappeared. We know that communities are still facing pressures and families are struggling. Organizations are stretched thin. We know that prevention and early support remain among the most effective tools we have.

In closing, I want to return for a moment to one of the most important ideas of this entire discussion: mental health promotion is not about preventing illness. It's about helping people thrive. It's about helping children feel connected. It's about helping youth feel hopeful. And it's about building communities where

people feel supported, included, safe, and valued – things that matter deeply. And while they may sometimes be difficult to measure in a budget line, there are enormous impacts on long-term health, community resilience, and societal wellbeing.

The ASI policy brief states that there is no health without mental health. That phrase captures exactly why this motion matters. Mental wellness cannot be treated as an afterthought. It must be integrated into how we think about public policy.

I know that members on all sides of this House care deeply about our children and our youth, and I know we all want Islanders to grow up healthy, connected, resilient, and supported. This motion gives us an opportunity to reaffirm that commitment. It gives us an opportunity to say that prevention matters, collaboration matters, and community matters.

The mental health and wellness of children and youth should be considered in every major public policy discussion. This is not a partisan issue. Mental wellness affects every family, every community, and every region on PEI. Supporting upstream investment and a Mental Health in All Policies approach is something all members should be able to stand behind.

Today, I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this motion to renew the commitment to the recommendations of the ASI 2022 policy brief to continue building healthier public policy and to ensure the wellbeing of our children and youth remains at the forefront of every government decision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: I'd like to call upon the seconder of the motion, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

Wow. Thank you to the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park. I feel like I could just say "ditto" and sit back down. That was incredible.

I'm going to start by reading just a paragraph of the letter that was shared to all members of the Legislative Assembly from Atlantic Summer Institute.

Actually, I meant to – before I begin – welcome Susan Hartley, Doug Crossman, and Patsy – oh my gosh – Beattie-Huggan. I always mix up the two last names. Thank you for being here with us today, and thank you for encouraging us to be doing this work and for being so persistent.

[2:55 p.m.]

This is from the letter:

“Unfortunately, our review of the 2026-27 review of the provincial budget indicates that this budget again contains little commitment to investing in achieving progressive population mental health outcomes. On the contrary, it is with significant concern that we hear of a \$1.4 million cut to the early learn and child development centres, among other cuts and reductions in population health promotion initiatives and programs.

“This policy decision flies in the face of provincial population health data that indicates, for example: 16.7 percent of PEI children live in poverty; 31 percent of our children live in food-insecure homes, while cost of living is predicted to continue – for example, a 21 percent increase for fuel and 3-5 percent for food; calls to Kids Help Phone have increased 60 percent; persistent student absenteeism is a concern for educators; and mental health practitioners are alarmed by the impact of social media participation on our children’s mental health.

“At the same time, the provincial health care budget has ballooned to \$1.4 billion, a 14.2 percent increase, almost all of which is targeted to primary/acute health care – downstream – services while cutting – upstream – programs proven to reduce the demand for already overburdened health profession services.”

When I read that, I feel a mixture of concern and frustration, among other things, because when I was first elected we talked a lot about upstream, upstream, upstream, but that conversation seems to have disappeared, and all of the very things that we see as upstream seem to be disappearing.

I’ll often stand in the House and say things like – and this is a prime example – how government says that they want to help children be healthier, and so rather than doing what their recommendations tell them – for example, with the inclusion review report in our school system;

that says that we need to beef up kindergarten supports and pre-K supports to support our kids. That’s exactly what this is talking about, yet we make cuts there.

The very services that are aimed to have healthier outcomes for residents begin before children are even born, so it’s so frustrating to me when I hear government talk about their want to be proactive and work upstream, and then all of these things that I see as potentials for that or working well there seem to disappear. We can’t lose sight of this. We can’t lose sight of how these things are so interconnected to everything.

The other document that I tabled this morning was the CBC article that came from a Quebec report that says that boys are falling behind in school, and some experts say it starts in kindergarten.

I could not agree more with what the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park is saying. This is not because our boys have changed. This is because we have ignored the signs. We have ignored the symptoms. We have ignored all the things. We’ve diagnosed boys – we’re kind of getting out of there now, but we diagnose boys so much quicker because of how things appear differently in them, and they’re not doing okay. That’s one of the examples of why this motion matters a whole lot, because we’re doing it wrong in so many areas and we know it. And when we know better, we have to do better; it’s our responsibility.

When the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park was talking about brain development – which is also something that I am so passionate about and have dove into learning more about – we really have to honour what we know.

Given how much time children and young people spend in school, unfortunately, a lot of this responsibility falls on the shoulders of the educators who work with them because what we know is kids need to get outside. They need to crawl over logs. They need to play with sticks. They need to throw rocks at slides. They need to engage in risky play. They need to climb and get dirty and do all those things because it makes connections in their brain. It helps them realize who they are. It helps them realize their goals. It helps them to grow into healthy adults. That’s just what we know.

When we force young children to sit at desks at such a young age, that's not where they are developmentally. I had such mixed emotions when kindergartens first went into schools because I knew in other parts of the world where they were seeing great success with healthy children that were growing into healthy adults, they started school later because they gave them time to play and risk and do all those things without any forcing of the skills that we force on kids way too soon.

[3:00 p.m.]

I know I've told this story a million times in here about the grade 3 assessments. One of the things I was proudest of was getting those grade 3 assessments paused because as a grade 3 teacher, I taught to the test the whole year and not because I wanted to, not because I thought it was right; it's because I was feeling the pressure because if the kids didn't do well here, we got in trouble.

So, it wasn't working well, and all of a sudden grade 2 teachers were forced with these writing prompts, like "first" and "then" and "next." Then that wasn't working anymore so it went down to grade 1. I'll never forget the day I was sitting in our teachers' lounge – we were having a meeting talking about these results – and a kindergarten teacher said, "We've written a whole bunch of new books to support us with the grade 3 curriculum."

So, rather than honouring the development of a child where they could see their best possible outcomes, we've forced them to take on things they're not ready for – and we wonder why our school system is failing an increasing amount of kids? We're not even honouring the very steps they need to take to get there, and that's a problem.

As I mentioned, I was so excited in the beginning. All of our committees were focused on early intervention and prevention. Another thing I'll never forget is sitting in a Health committee meeting and talking about the impacts of trauma on a childhood brain, and wanted to get someone in to speak about adverse childhood experiences.

The current Minister of Health and Wellness was really excited about that, and he voted to get that on the agenda. I was so thrilled and was really hopeful that this would lead our Island in a direction where we would honour brain

development because in honouring brain development, we're pretty much honouring this motion.

As was already mentioned, Mental Health in All Policies is putting that lens on any policy we create, any resulting programs, services – anything at all, and that goes across all departments. You might not think of where to place a new crosswalk. Personal story, but we live literally right outside an early childhood education centre, and they have placed crosswalks and then painted over them and placed them in other places because the crosswalk goes into a parking lot. When you're considering something simple like a crosswalk, there's a lot of thought that needs to go into that.

That's a prime example of putting that lens on a decision because we don't think about the fact of how many – living by there, I see it every day. It's not always but it tends to be moms, walking their kids to school. The sidewalks are last to get plowed but you see those moms walking their kids to school, pretty much over snowbanks. We really need to think about this in every single area.

As already mentioned, I'm not going to go back into the pedagogical cuts, but it's just such a good example of not looking at this with the lens that we need, with this Mental Health in All Policies lens. Again, the inclusion review said we need to beef up supports in kindergarten and early years. Great. I had great hope that was going to happen.

We know we've got unreal rates of children coming into kindergarten not being potty trained. That instantly falls on teachers and EAs to ensure that students are kept clean, are kept healthy, and that they're learning to do these things.

If you can imagine being in a classroom of 15 four- and five-year-olds and having to be changing diapers and wiping bums and doing all of that stuff – that's a lot to ask, and now we've removed the very services that could help us potentially help our kids get to a place where they're already potty trained when they enter kindergarten.

I was talking to a teacher the other day who shared with me that – and I think their school has nine kindergarten classes – there are 93 complex needs students coming in next year. There is a total of 32 EAs in that school, and 27

are needed in kindergarten next year. Let that sink in. Our kids are not okay, and neither are their families in a lot of cases. In setting someone up for lifelong success, that is not doing it.

And when I consider the number of young people we have who are not potty trained by kindergarten, I automatically think – because I’m a systems thinker – this child didn’t just come to school magically; they’re part of a familial system.

[3:05 p.m.]

So, how is their family doing? How is the health of their family? Is anyone checking in on them? Is school the first system where someone has had an eye of them, worried about their health or worried about them at all? Very possibly, it is, and schools aren’t equipped to deal with that.

That’s another thing that I talk about often – making schools more of a community centre where kids have access to the supports they need, because often it’s more than academics that they need, and it’s more than academics that their families need support with as well.

The social determinants of health – I just started listing a whole bunch of things to be considered here because if we look at a family living in poverty, what opportunity do they have to give their child to play a sport? I mean, I know we’ve got KidSport and we’ve got some things like that. But people – let’s say their kid really loves hockey. Hockey is expensive. All those sports are expensive and if you can’t afford to put your child there, not only does your child miss out but you do, too, because of the guilt that you feel, potentially, not being able to give your kid all of the opportunities that some around them have.

And, so, we consider poverty. We consider childhood food insecurity. We consider the perinatal health, the mental health of their mom. We have a perinatal mental health motion coming up, potentially this afternoon. I was reading about how one of the asks from the perinatal health community is that screening is to be performed on moms, and I forget exactly – I have to look through my motion – but it’s like so many weeks after the baby is born, so many months after the baby is born, to just kind of keep an eye on – is there any postpartum depression happening? Is mom okay, and in turn, is baby okay?

I was thinking back to my experience with my first child, who was quite healthy. You know the public health nurses come in to visit. I couldn’t remember how many times they came in with my first child, who was gaining weight healthily and doing all of those things, but I know for my second child, he was having some trouble gaining weight. Oh my gosh, the things you have to do to wake babies to feed them. It was awful, I wouldn’t do it again, but anyway.... They came to see me a few times for him, but if a public health nurse comes in and the baby’s okay, they may keep an eye on things a little bit, but really, it’s not their job to intervene beyond that. Their job is to look after the baby.

I would love to see us have supports wrap around young families so that they can all have an opportunity to get healthy. And while when you hear it like that it sounds like it might be a little bit impossible, it’s really not; it’s by doing some of the things I already talked about. Making schools more of a community centre is one way that we can do that, where families can come in and share their struggles.

Things like the First 1,000 Days, midwives, maintenance enforcement, bike programs, Dolly Parton book programs.... Imagine being a child and not having a bookshelf with books on it, because there are families who can’t – sure, they can go to the library, but they don’t get to keep their favourite book; they have to give it back.

Investing in younger people is just a smart investment. It’s just the right thing to do when you think about the savings you have in the end.

I’m going to use a very specific example. We know that childhood trauma has a high correlation to mental health and addictions issues later in life. We have got the Community Outreach Centre here working very hard to support the community of people living with mental health and addictions. If that is a service that we would like to see not used so much, we need to invest in young people. We need to consider their health there. We’re going to help them when they’re 30, 40 or whatever, but we’re not going to help them when they’re five years old, walking through the hallways of school? That just doesn’t make any sense. Of course, we need to help both, but why would we not invest when they’re young so that those costs are cut down significantly by the time they get older?

[3:10 p.m.]

I have grave concerns about the increase to the Kids Help Phone – 60 percent. I don't believe it's simply because young people are more comfortable reaching out. I think young people are crying for help and we're not listening to them.

I know the new Compass report – I haven't had a chance to read through it fully yet, but we were told that all the rates increased, that the national bullying – which happens when kids don't feel good about themselves – it went down, so it's 24 percent now, but the national average is 12. We still have a lot of work to do.

I adjourn debate, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

Speaker: Thank you, member.

Moving to Third Party time, 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 Employment Standards Act S.P.E.I. 2024, c.66*, 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. 110, *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act S.P.E.I. 2024, c.66*, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This bill, Bill 110, addresses a concern raised by the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning during recent debate, with respect to Bill 106 in that there could be confusion caused by passing that other bill without this other bill coming forward, which we have now tabled.

What this bill does before us today: repeals subsection 43(6) of the unproclaimed *Employment Standards Act S.P.E.I. 2024, c.66*, substitutes a new subsection 6 that provides that where an employee requests a leave of absence under that section, the employer shall not require the employee to provide a certificate signed by a qualified practitioner certifying that the employee is or was unable to work due to illness

or injury, thereby eliminating the confusion suggested during debate on Bill No. 106.

Orders Other Than Government

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the 30th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 30, *An Act to Amend the Electric Power Act*, Bill No. 108, in committee.

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

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

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 to chair Committee of the Whole.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

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

Promoter, do you have a stranger you'd like to bring onto the floor?

P. Bevan-Baker: I do indeed, Chair.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Please state your name and title for Hansard.

[3:15 p.m.]

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

Chair: Promoter, I know that you have done a brief introduction of the bill. Did you want a couple of minutes to just do an overarching view again, or are you good?

P. Bevan-Baker: I could read my member's statement for a third time if you like, Chair. That pretty well said it, I think, earlier this afternoon. But may I take a moment just to recognize some folks in the gallery?

Chair: You sure can.

P. Bevan-Baker: I see John te Raa here, who many, I'm sure in the Chamber would know, John has been working on energy and electricity issues for a very long time here on Prince Edward Island and is a great resource of both institutional knowledge here and on the file of electricity generally; welcome John.

I also see Leo Broderick from Energy Democracy Now; thank you, Leo. He was here two weeks ago when we were previously discussing the bill. I think that's Simone Webster beside Leo; nice to see you, Simone – welcome – who's run as an NDP candidate for a couple of times on PEI, and I believe is also involved with Energy Democracy Now. Thank you to you both.

To afar, I want to welcome Soham Kulkarni, who was sitting where Michelle is today two weeks ago. He was my expert on this file two weeks ago. Michelle will do a fabulous job, I have no doubt, but I miss Soham. He was a wonderful contributor to this bill and to the work that our office did to create it. Hi to you, Soham, and thank you again for your work. I know he's watching from Ontario.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: It's my understanding that we are up for general questions so I will open the floor to anyone.

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, member, for bringing this back on the floor for discussion. Michelle, I do want to say thank you for coming on the floor again as a stranger. I'm sure the work that you have put in to this as well.

I do want to start by acknowledging that overall the government does share the underlying intentions of this bill. We've seen it in our discussions, hon. member, whether it's in Question Period or, to be honest, even outside the rail when we've had meetings. We all do want a modernized electricity system that supports our climate goals, that supports the reliability, and, as much as possible, too, supports affordability for Islanders.

I do say, however, good intentions have to be matched with sound legislative mechanics. Our primary duty in this House – I take my duty as the minister responsible for energy very seriously, as we all do, I know – but it's to protect the ratepayer.

This bill claims to target affordability yet it contains absolutely no direct mechanism to reduce electricity rates. It does not modify sections 21 and 24 of the current *Electric Power Act*, which are the very provisions that establish for rate base and entitle the utility to recover reasonable operating costs and returns.

Instead of reducing cost, I would have to say that this bill piles on additional reporting, planning, and compliance requirements. It expands regulatory oversight, which inevitably increases regulatory costs. Under the existing framework, approved costs and investments are recoverable through rates.

[3:20 p.m.]

The undeniable reality of the bill is that it will place upward pressure on electricity rates, not reduce them. I want to be clear, electricity rates are increasing across the country. They are increasing right across North America. There is, unfortunately, no silver bullet to solve the energy shortage and anything that implying electricity rates will be lower is – I would have to say it's questionable, irresponsible.

This legislation, in my opinion, is premature. As the sponsor has noted, committed to legislation – the Premier did commit to legislation this sitting but after consulting with industry experts who have implemented performance-based regulations in other jurisdictions, including consulting with Power Advisory, it was clear that transitioning to a PBR system requires comprehensive public consultation. It requires deep engagement with key stakeholders. It requires rigorous economic modeling of potential rate impacts.

Member, that is one of the things that I had put forward, mentioned in a response to a question yesterday, was with regard to unintended consequences. I think that we're both on the same page of what we see the consequences that we want ultimately to be but we also have to be very aware and make sure through review, through consultation, that there are not unintended consequences that should come forward.

The bill, it bypasses this essential structured development process. Implementing a complex performance framework without carefully calibrated incentives and an understanding of the cost implications. This is a massive risk to our energy grid and our economy but most concerning, absolutely most concerning, to Islanders.

The bill will introduce legislative ambiguity. It relies on undefined terms like "least cost," "all feasible." In a quasi-judicial regulatory context, failing to define such – I would have to say such critical terms – opens the door to inconsistent interpretations and uncertainty.

The bill also introduces competing clauses in the preamble pitting affordability, reliability, and net zero targets without providing decision-makers any clear guidance on how to prioritize or how to resolve tradeoffs between them. These are the types of issues, the very types of issues, that need to be considered by stakeholders, by experts, and by Islanders overall.

Our government is not waiting on the sidelines. We are taking evidence-based action. Just for example, since February of this year, February of 2026, we have taken concrete steps to modernize our grid including applying for federal funding to replace aging sub-sea cables, issuing an expression of interest for battery storage – and I have to say that that expression of interest, that received over 40 submissions – and also collaborating regionally with our Atlantic partners.

Simultaneously, we're doing the foundational work required for true regulatory reform through our five-point plan. We have directed the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission, IRAC, to report on current rate-setting practices, decision-making criteria, and future approaches like PBR with findings requested from IRAC by June 30th of 2026. Chair, that's only next month – that's only next month.

Chair: Minister.

Hon. E. Hudson: Public consultation is essential to Islanders so they understand – so that they understand the system and can meaningfully adjust it, shape it.

Chair: I just wondered if you have a question.

[3:25 p.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: I will be ending up with a comment here. I do thank you, Chair, for your indulgence, and member, for your advocacy on this important issue.

I do want, as minister responsible for Energy, I do want to continue to work with you, to collaborate with you. This bill, though, I cannot support.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: You always have the floor, so if you want to speak –

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Recognizing that there wasn't really a question at the conclusion of that, that statement covered a lot of ground, made several presumptions, assumptions, accusations about what the effect of this bill would be on rates, on our economy, on Islanders.

The thing that I find difficult is that I hear the minister say he wants to collaborate and to work together and yet had – I don't think I heard any positive words in the last ten minutes there about a bill which actually mirrors many, many, many other pieces of legislation in other jurisdictions where utilities have been asked to comply with changes to legislation along the lines that Bill 108 carries – and have managed very well.

You would almost take it from the minister's statement there that if this was to happen, everything on Prince Edward Island is going to fall apart and it's going to get more expensive. That is simply not the case.

I can point, again, to many other jurisdictions where performance-based regulation and statute like the one we have before us has improved dramatically the reliability and the safety and the cost of energy in those jurisdictions at the same time as reducing carbon footprints and emissions.

You mentioned one of the many – I’ve got a list of maybe 12 or 15 very distinct concerns that you raised in your statement there. One of them was competing concerns, you describe them as, in section 1, I think it is, of my bill, which is in the preamble section, where for the first time on Prince Edward Island, we have a recognition that the way that we produce electricity here needs to be done in a manner which is sustainable, that takes into account climate goals, and recognizes that we are going to be in a capacity deficit within a very short time.

That isn’t even recognized in the existing bill, so those are not necessarily competing concerns. They can be symbiotic concerns where, if you choose a system which is the least cost – I think one of the other things you said, minister, was that there’s no clear definition of least cost. I would beg to differ very strongly on that. There’s a very clear indication of what least cost means. It doesn’t just mean the least upfront cost; it means the least cost to customers, to ratepayers, to Islanders over the lifetime of that asset.

That’s a very, very important concept because we may be on the verge of spending close to half a billion dollars on a couple of used diesel turbine engines to supply the capacity deficit, which – I absolutely agree with Maritime Electric and everybody else who has looked at the system – is going to be a reality for Islanders within the next decade.

[3:30 p.m.]

But if you look at the lifetime cost of that – never mind the capital cost up front of.... Well, it’s close to \$400 million now; it probably will be even more than that. But if you extrapolate over the 50 years of the lifetime of this asset and the way that the *Electric Power Act* is currently structured, Maritime Electric makes its guaranteed rate of return by spending capital, whether that’s on poles and wires, transformers, or half a billion dollars on a couple of diesel turbines that are going to sit idle for literally 99 percent of the time.

To my mind, when you measure that – and there are ways of measuring – oh my gosh, I’m sorry, Chair. I realize I’m off on a very long.... But there were a lot of issues brought forward by the minister. Are you okay if I carry on for a couple of minutes at least?

Chair: I feel I gave indulgence to the minister. I feel I owe you the same indulgence.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that.

For the first time on Prince Edward Island, this bill would create a framework which mandates that the utility look at alternatives – look at them from an environmental perspective, an economic perspective, a social perspective – to ensure that the investments that they are making are the best value for customers, for Islanders, and the least cost to Islanders as well because the rates that Islanders pay are directly related to the rate base, and that’s really just all of the assets, the capital assets, that Maritime Electric has.

There are so many different ways of meeting the capacity shortfall that we have other than buying two second-hand diesel generators which I argue would be far less cost, would be enormously more beneficial from an environmental point of view, and looking ahead for the next five decades, which is what the useful life of these turbines was supposedly meant to be, would save Islanders – I want to say hundreds of millions of dollars, but tens of millions of dollars and perhaps more than that in saved costs because we are not making poor decisions today.

The reason we are able to make poor decisions today is because we have a poor bill – not this bill; the existing *Electric Power Act* bill – with poor regulations attached to it that allow Maritime Electric to come forward with applications to IRAC without having to do the real work of measuring the costs and the benefits of what they are proposing with all of the other alternatives that are now available.

Ten years ago, these things were not available; they are now. It’s 2017 since we updated the *Electric Power Act*. This really just creates a modern regulatory framework so, as the Premier has said many times, we can build a modern electricity grid here on PEI.

Without this bill, I fear that we are going to make some very bad decisions which are going to saddle future generations – never mind ratepayers today – with unnecessary costs and environmental burdens.

I think I’ll stop there.

Chair: We do have a question.

P. Bevan-Baker: Excellent.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you, Chair.

Again, I do thank you for your indulgence. I actually don't have a question. I just want to give a very short follow-up here.

I have to state that as the minister, I cannot support legislation that risks driving up costs for Islanders under – I'll be blunt – the guise of affordability that potentially does not deliver a better electricity system.

Again, thank you, Chair, for your indulgence. Member, I do thank you for your advocacy and your work on this important issue. I do hope – I sincerely hope – that going forward, we can work together. I did appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you, albeit briefly – briefer than probably either one of us would like to have had the opportunity to – but I do sincerely want to continue to work with you.

Thank you.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, again, I'm waiting for a question, but I will respond to that because, again, there were some accusations and assumptions made that somehow this bill is going to increase rates for Islanders and that the minister feels he cannot support it for that reason.

I feel extraordinarily sure that not supporting this bill and maintaining the status quo of the *Electric Power Act* that we have now is a guarantee that we are unnecessarily going to increase rates in the immediate future and for decades to come for Islanders unless we take action now.

[3:35 p.m.]

I am deeply distressed that this government had an opportunity, and I would say an obligation, to recognize the really dire situation that our electric system is in currently on Prince Edward Island.

Before IRAC, we have an application – again, for close to half a billion dollars – that, if approved, will mean that there is no room in Islanders' power budgets for any other investments for a very long time to come. We are making a one-time decision to purchase very outdated technology to make our system even

more antiquated than it already is when we have an opportunity to join the 21st century and actually create a modern grid here that mimics so many other parts of the world where they are making investments that are saving their ratepayers money and responding appropriately to the climate emergency that we face right now.

I must say, I'm not naïve, Chair, I think I understand where the vote on this bill is going to go, but as I said this morning, I'm deeply disappointed. I believe we're making a very bad choice here in not supporting what I think is an extraordinarily powerful and good bill for Islanders.

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

R. Henderson: Just one question, member, on the bill. In my district, we've got a plan for the Na'ku'set solar farm in Mount Pleasant. I'd like to get sort of your sense on it, or at least to rest everybody's mind at ease. Would this bill have any impact on that particular project, or would this bill actually enhance that particular project?

P. Bevan-Baker: I really appreciate a question. Thank you.

It would absolutely – that sort of project fits perfectly within the general idea behind this bill, which is that we can invest in a modern grid here which, in this case, is a solar tied to batteries, or wind tied to batteries, in a way that the current legislation makes no space for, gives no credence to.

I started work on this bill in a way a year and a half ago when the application for IRAC came forward for the two combustion turbine engines, and it was the amount of money attached to that that really got me going.

As I dug deeper into the economics of utility-scale grids, I understood what the implications of that application were, not just for ratepayers here today but for my children and their children, because this is something that would have economic implications for a very long time. I saw that that was not necessary. There are other ways of creating a grid which meets our demands, does that reliably and safely, and does it in a modern way. That project you just described is exactly what could happen here.

Another benefit – and this project is just a really good example of that – is for a very long time

now, utilities have built enormous, centralized power facilities, whether that's a nuclear plant or a coal-fired power plant or a diesel generator, and then distributed that energy across a network. There's a loss of energy in doing that, by the way.

But there is no reason today why we cannot create what's called a distributed energy network where you have smaller, more localized energy production units, whether that's – in our case, we have a fantastic wind regimen here on Prince Edward Island, and solar is not bad. If you tie that with batteries and you place them in the right spots, you can invest far less money, and the proceeds from selling that energy to the grid comes back to the community. It doesn't go to New Brunswick Power. It doesn't go to Nova Scotia Power. It doesn't go somewhere – it stays in our community.

That's the beauty of this bill. It would have allowed – or it could still allow; I'm not giving up on it yet, Chair. It could still allow us to produce a much greater percentage of the energy that we need to use here on Prince Edward Island at a local level in projects exactly like what you're saying, member.

Thank you for the question.

R. Henderson: Yeah, I see that, too. I look at it – in this particular case, it is a partnership between the Lennox Island Development Corporation and L'nu Energy, as well as Maritime Electric itself. They are generating power, and they are looking at some component of storage that goes with that. They are putting that out onto the grid that goes to Islanders. So, I do appreciate that.

[3:40 p.m.]

The other question that I have – and it comes back to a little bit of the grid. As you know, member, as well as many in this House, I've been advocating for my whole political career, I guess, for the issue around Howlan Road and the role that that plays in the grid.

I'm going to say that the previous government at the time made an error in allowing that to happen, although it was put there by Maritime Electric. There should be some possibility that we can fund that somehow or make Maritime Electric move that from certain residents' homes.

Is there anything in this particular bill that wouldn't change the overall cost structure to Islanders in the rates that they pay, to make sure that the grid is not only doing what it's supposed to do in distributing electricity, but does it in a manner that doesn't infringe upon people's enjoyment of their properties?

Maybe you could speak a little bit about your thoughts on that and how this bill might be able to solve that problem because government does not seem to be willing to solve it at the moment, or a way to get it as something that's more satisfactory to the residents.

P. Bevan-Baker: Sure. I mean, one of the aspects of this bill – and it's not directly related to what you say, but I'll try and get to that in a minute, member – is the democratization of the process here where there is a public input process where Islanders are actually asked, "Would you be prepared to pay more if you had a more stable and reliable electric grid? Would you pay more if we were to, for example, bury some of the distribution lines so that we know that if there's another storm, that your power's not going to be as profoundly affected."

That sort of feedback mechanism which involves the public in decisions that are made at a utility level is something that I think is really missing now. Your question, I know, wasn't exactly about that, and I'm not sure, to be honest, that there is an element in this bill which would speak directly to that.

I don't know if you have anything to say on that, Michelle.

Michelle Patterson: It's the value of customer reliability – the VCR.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. So, I don't think there's anything that would necessarily speak to that, but this is a way of shifting our approach to electricity generation, distribution, and use here on Prince Edward Island away from a big brother that dictates everything, both to IRAC and to customers, to a much more – almost like a conversation or a democratic opportunity for Islanders to actually have some say in how we move forward with our grid.

Sorry. I don't think it does have a provision for exactly that.

R. Henderson: Yeah. I think when we do talk about a reliable grid, I think that's essential. We

certainly want to be able to distribute electricity all across Prince Edward Island to places, but we also have to – we do run into issues around infrastructure when it comes to substations, where they're located.

I give Maritime Electric a lot of credit for the recent upgrades in the substation that they did at Woodstock. It put it well away from everywhere. They at least took that into accommodation when they were trying to develop that.

That did not happen in the Howlan Road situation. People were unaware of what high voltage lines were, and I don't have a definitive answer to say high voltage lines are dangerous or not dangerous. I don't know that answer, but it has impacted those people's right of enjoyment of their property by having these big power lines literally a few feet from their home.

I know if I was in that situation and that was my place, I would be uneasy about it, and without having that opportunity to have a say to whether I wanted that to happen or not seems inappropriate, so I would look at – any time we're looking at making sure we have a good, sound, and solid working grid that we're able to do that.

Another issue I wanted to mention on this, too – that was a bit of a statement, but it's the issue around three phase power. Is there anything in this bill that would have an impact on either encouraging more three phase power – because I have that same problem in my district. They don't have enough three phase power, and I've got a lot of farms and businesses – especially in the West Point area – that can't access that.

[3:45 p.m.]

That's not an efficient way for them to run their businesses, nor is it an efficient way to distribute the power, but they are really in a situation where they cannot get that service to their business unless they pay for it, and they have to pay rather handsomely for that.

Does this bill have anything that would allow ratepayers to play a role in trying to advocate for better levels of electricity distribution in their region?

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, I really appreciate the question, member. I don't believe there is anything specifically in the bill, once more,

regarding the adoption of fee phased power, but as you said, it's a far more efficient way to deliver power to high power users.

Oh, gosh, I'm not sure how deep I want to go into the weeds here on this, but one of the abilities that this bill would bring forward that does not exist at the moment is following – no, I don't think I need to go there, Chair; it's too complicated.

There is no specific provision, but the idea that we should be creating the most efficient and effective distribution system possible is something that the central components of this bill would support, a move in that direction.

R. Henderson: A little comment to make on that, if you don't mind, Madam Chair.

Chair: Go ahead.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: As long as it's not going to hurt those chances of resolving both of those issues –

P. Bevan-Baker: Absolutely not.

R. Henderson: – it may not totally resolve it, then that makes – I just wanted to get that clear in mind, I guess, before I make my decision up on how to vote for this.

But thank you very much, Chair.

Michelle Patterson: I'll add for the member, the one thing – the promoter is correct; there isn't anything specific in this bill, but I would point you to the integrated resource plan and how that differs from the current process that Maritime Electric uses for planning their projects. Right now, it's individual – project by project.

The integrated resource plan would be more of a long-term outlook for all of their projects over, I believe, a three-year span. When looking at three-phase power, if that's something that the community or the individuals needed, that could be a part of that resource plan. Perhaps there would be conversations around it rather than right now if a project comes up, it's approved or denied and there's no mandated long-term planning.

R. Henderson: Good point.

Thank you.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you for that, Michelle.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

S. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks again for coming back and all the work on the bill again. Last time, I quibbled over the – imagine politicians being political – the political rhetoric over online of, “Islanders step up. If you don’t contact your MLA for this bill that’s going to reduce power rates, all hell is going to break loose in PEI.” Like I said, I get all that stuff.

Putting all that aside, I get your point over – I think what you’re really talking about is that we really have to worry about costs not going up more than they need to go up. I think you and I can find common ground on that, ignoring the, “If you vote this down, bills aren’t going to get to go down like we thought.”

The integrated resource plan, I love the concept of it. Right now, the application before IRAC, IRAC is doing all that work to try and find out if this is the least cost alternative. I think, would it be fair to say, too, that we’ve got to be careful with that “least cost” wording? Say Maritime Electric goes with one turbine that would fix things for the next little foreseeable future compared to a full-on battery system, especially with a distributed plan – which I love – all over the place. That could be the least cost one that IRAC could approve, too. I think that wording we have to be careful around, too.

But I guess can you speak quickly to the integrated resource plan and making Maritime Electric or, sorry, whatever public utility you come up with that, versus IRAC trying to find what the least cost plan would be or the most cost-effective?

And also, as you know, Maritime Electric includes the costs of creating that integrated resource plan into their rates as well.

P. Bevan-Baker: I really appreciate the question, member; thank you.

I do want to mention that the member was the Minister Responsible for Energy when this bill first came forward in its consultation form. We had some really good discussions. I’m fully aware of the depth of knowledge that the member has on this file and I –

S. MacEwen: Enough to be dangerous; that’s it.

[3:50 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: But to your particular question, the IRP, the integrated resource plan is something, according to this bill, that would have to be produced by the utility itself.

Just a quick aside here, Chair, that there are – Fortis, the parent company of Maritime Electric, is a massive parent company, a \$30 billion company with lots of subsidiary utilities throughout the world. Many of those utilities work in a regulated system, which would be very similar to the bill that we have here. So Fortis is very familiar with developing integrated resource plans and taking that responsibility on. This would not be a new venture for – it would be new for Maritime Electric, indeed – but the knowledge within the larger entity that is Fortis, their parent company, is absolutely there. I think they have, without doubt, the expertise and the knowledge to produce that IRP.

Once that is done, the least cost – the preamble to your question regarding that – the least cost, and I think I mentioned this a little while ago, it’s not just the capital expense, the upfront expense, the least cost refers to the lifetime expense of an asset which is “used and useful” is the phrase that’s used in most legislation.

For a moment, and again, recognizing the time and hoping this can get to a vote today, that when we make an expenditure for something like a combustion turbine, we’ve all seen the volatility of the diesel fuel, which is such an incredibly part of the ongoing operational cost of that, plus, as the world moves forward, I feel very strongly that the idea 50 years from now that we can still burn fossil fuels to produce our power is that people will – it’s just not to be there. I think very soon we’re going to have a stranded asset, which is another very important economic thing to take into account which the current *Electric Power Act* does not. IRAC has to try and figure that out themselves, as you say.

I think that this bill would actually facilitate, without doubt, overall lower costs of investment in terms of the lifetime of whatever choices the utility were to make.

S. MacEwen: Thank you member, for that.

I don't disagree. I know you want to get this to a vote today and I don't think we need to drag this out any more. I have questions on over making the commission establish the service performance incentive scheme versus government, but like I say, those are conversations that I will continue to have, too.

This bill is the great example of a department wanting to do its due diligence and get it right and a private member being able to cut through a lot of that and get something to the floor. Not discrediting – as you said you've done multiple years of work going in to this as well.

I know when I was there briefly, I like their plan that their doing. They feel that this fall is an incredibly fast-forward plan. I pushed back. I'm sure the current minister pushes back, too. They want to get something done quick, as well.

I'm not going to support your bill right, but I am going to push hard internally at whatever influence that I still have left that the folks that you've talked to and the experts you've engaged with, especially Energy Democracy Now as well, are heard as this process is only five months away, this fall.

I thank you for your work.

I'm good. Thank you, Chair.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

My question may seem quite basic, but thank you, member, for bringing this forward and thank you to the stranger for being here.

Can you, in very simple, easy terms, member, explain what the impact to the everyday Islander would be and their light bill?

P. Bevan-Baker: If this bill were to pass?

C. Simpson: Yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: There would be no immediate impact. This is something that once it would take effect would inform all investment decisions made by the utility going forward. If we make good investment decisions that are the least cost, then we will end up with the best value for Islanders when it comes to paying for

electricity, which means the lowest possible cost available.

[3:55 p.m.]

At the moment, that's not the case. Unfortunately, we have a decision where the way the legislation is written, it actually is in Maritime Electric's interest to spend as much money as they possibly can on infrastructure – hence their enthusiasm for the two combustion turbines – without actually looking at, well, is there another way of accomplishing this at lower cost? And if there is and that's adopted, then that will ultimately save Islanders money. That's where the long-term savings would be on power bills.

C. Simpson: I'm good. Thank you.

Chair: Shall the bill carry?

[Interjections]

Chair: I feel like the no's have it. Can I get you to do that one more....

Shall the bill carry?

[Interjections]

Chair: I would say that the no's have it.

P. Bevan-Baker: Madam Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair and that the Chair report the bill not recommended.

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 Electric Power Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and does not recommend the same to the Legislative Assembly. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: A recorded division has been requested. Therefore, ring the bell.

[The bells were rung]

Speaker: As usual, I think we're all getting the hang of this, of course, but we've got the double negative happening here again, I understand. If

you're voting for the report of the committee, it means you don't want to see the bill pass. If you're voting against the report of the committee, it means you do want to see the bill pass. Just always good to clarify that ahead of time.

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

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

T. DesRoches: The government is ready for the vote, Mr. Speaker.

[4:00 p.m.]

Speaker: All those voting against the report of the committee, please rise.

[The Deputy Clerk calls the roll]

NAYS

Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Henderson
MacFarlane
McNeilly
Perry
Simpson

Speaker: All those voting in favour of the committee report, please rise.

[The Deputy Clerk calls the roll]

YEAS

Bell
Burridge
Curran
Deagle
DesRoches
Dillon
Dollar
Hudson
MacEwen
MacKay
MacLennan
Redmond
Thompson

Speaker: The votes are in, members. The report from the committee has passed and been accepted, which means the bill has been defeated.

Orders of the Day (Government)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General.

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the 1st order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 1, Consideration of the Estimates, in committee.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of supply to His Majesty.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'd like to ask the Deputy Speaker to chair Committee of the Whole House and consider the grant of supply to His Majesty.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to further consider the grant of supply to His Majesty.

Minister, do you have a stranger that you'd like to bring on to the floor?

Hon. C. Deagle: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Please state your name and your title for Hansard.

Karen Stanley: Karen Stanley, director of finance for the Department of Health and Wellness.

Chair: Thank you.

For those that are following along in the book, we are on page 96 under Departmental Management. I believe that it's been read and there were still maybe questions. I wasn't here yesterday.

Hon. C. Deagle: I think they were done.

Chair: They're done? Is there anyone with questions on this section?

Shall it carry? Carried.

Health Policy and Planning

"Appropriations provided for planning, development, and implementation of departmental and Federal/Provincial/Territorial policies and strategic initiatives."

Administration: 2,100. Equipment: 2,000.

Materials, Supplies, and Services: 600.

Professional Services: nil. Salaries: 679,700.

Travel and Training: 6,000. Grants: 98,000.

[4:05 p.m.]

Total Health Policy and Planning: 788,400

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Hi. Welcome back, Karen.

In this section, I think it's the section that we talk about provincial-federal relations. I notice that your salaries might be down a little bit, but that doesn't seem to be going so well of late. Don't you think salaries should be up if we're talking about those important issues in this section?

Karen Stanley: This section was originally a combination of federal-provincial relations, policy and planning, and strategic initiatives. The strategic initiatives unit was actually established in 2021. Over the past five years, we have been changing our model so that we've been embedding the strategic initiative people in each of the individual areas, so we have eliminated the use of that particular unit.

G. McNeilly: And like Live Well PEI – Live Well would be an example, where it was in this section maybe, and then it – no?

Karen Stanley: No, Live Well is in its own section altogether. This would be someone who was working on strategic initiatives for every different area. They might be helping seniors health, or in something in the CPHO, somewhere in emergency services. What they were doing, their work was embedded throughout the different areas, but we have been putting people in over the last few years and

training them up so that they're able to do it themselves.

G. McNeilly: That would mean that that's probably one FTE, I would think, maybe two FTEs, that would have –

Karen Stanley: It was actually three FTEs.

G. McNeilly: Three? Okay. There's going to remain the same amount of people that are doing the provincial-federal negotiations, correct?

Karen Stanley: Correct.

G. McNeilly: For this, I guess you kind of overspent on grants last year. I see you kept the top number on grants. Is there any reason? It's not a very large amount, but I just wanted to know what – just opening that up, I know that it was \$85,000. You spent \$98,000 exactly, and it's \$98,000.

Karen Stanley: During '25-26, we had entered into a new agreement with Healthcare Excellence Canada. The governments of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island established an initiative called the Atlantic health quality and patient safety collaborative. They're operating as this entity called Healthcare Excellence Canada.

Their objective is to achieve objectives of communication on matters of interest in health care: sharing information/advice regarding health quality and safety, and sharing priorities, relevant programs, and initiatives. We entered into that agreement in '25-26, which is why you saw the little bit of an increase. It's a multi-year agreement so we made sure we had enough funding in '26-27. It's the amount that we pay to the organization so that they can operate.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair. Welcome back, Karen, to the floor.

I think the question I was going to ask on the salaries has been asked, but I'm looking at, now, the professional services line. There's no money budgeted for professional services?

Karen Stanley: No, the professional services that was there previously was actually associated with the strategic initiatives unit, which was eliminated.

M. MacFarlane: Did this section not do program review? I know that some of the programs last year were Best Start; you had the hepatitis C class action plan, I think, there; the *Regulated Health Professions Act* consultation, so –

Karen Stanley: No. They did do some work with Best Start; they did do that. That is transitioning to some individuals in the policy and planning unit.

The other items that you're referring to, that work was actually done within the units themselves or through the policy and planning unit.

M. MacFarlane: I know it's a small line, but I'm starting to see a little bit of consistency here. When we look at the forecasted column on travel/training, there seems to be some trending of overspending and then we're reducing the budget estimate going forward. Was there a reason why the travel and training line in this section and others seems to be higher than what was budgeted for?

[4:10 p.m.]

Karen Stanley: In this particular area, with the federal-provincial relations, the director of the area as well as a couple of staff had been accompanying the minister and the deputy minister or assistant deputy ministers to various FPT meetings. Just in the climate they're in right now, we're going to reduce the number of people that are going to support them. There still is some budget there, but it just won't be as many.

M. MacFarlane: So, maybe just to finish off that discussion and move on to another member – yeah, the budgeted spend was exceeded so I understand, going forward, the desire to rein it back. We're seeing generally conservative budgeting on travel and training going forward – that's what I'm seeing – but there was still an overspend.

Karen Stanley: Last year, we may have sent two or three people to a meeting in Alberta or a meeting in Winnipeg, whereas this year we'll only be sending one person and the meetings are a little bit closer.

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

G. McNeilly: I just have one. When you're taking out the strategic initiatives, has there been any discussion about merging the two, the top? The management and this one too? It would seem like a natural merger. I'm just kind of asking the question.

Karen Stanley: That's something that we can take into consideration for next year.

G. McNeilly: Yeah. Perfect.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Just a high-level question when we talk about health policy and planning and when we're doing the budgeting for that and strategic initiatives. I know I ask this every year, but is there corresponding perhaps competing or duplicative or redundant sections within maybe Health PEI where some of this similar work would be done for planning and strategic initiatives?

Karen Stanley: As I had mentioned in my responses yesterday, we have been working very diligently with our counterparts at Health PEI to make sure that we are working collaboratively and not duplicating work.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. So, the answer is no – I hear that pretty loud and clear – but I'll keep my eyes open as we go through, and I hope you permit me to ask the question from time to time if I see potential overlap.

Karen Stanley: Absolutely.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Seniors Health

“Appropriations provided to support seniors health policies and programs, as well as, for the inspection and licensing of Community Care Facilities and Private Nursing Homes in Prince Edward Island pursuant to the *Community Care Facilities and Nursing Homes Act*.”

Administration: 18,000. Equipment: 7,200.

Materials, Supplies, and Services: 10,400.

Professional Services: 194,800. Salaries:

2,238,700. Travel and Training: 73,900. Grants: 10,937,000.

Total Seniors Health: 13,480,000

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Chair.

For grants, the at-home caregiver grant – I see that it's going to be increased by \$500,000 plus for the 2026-27 budget over what was spent on the actuals up to February 28th this year. The return on investment is really, really good. The longer we can keep people out of the hospital beds – we know how much it costs to have somebody in there. So, this is a great way to, I guess, bring hospitals down to a capacity 3, too, and keep them in their own homes. Big supporter of this.

In last year's actuals, how did you base the increase for this year? What did you use to increase that number by \$500,000?

Karen Stanley: We looked at the utilization – how many people were using it each month – and then just looked to see if there was any trends. How many people did we base it on last year? Each month, how many did it look like it was going up by? Based on that calculation, that's how I came up with the number.

Hon. H. Perry: Great. So, people are catching on to it and all that.

Karen Stanley: Absolutely.

[4:15 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: Is there any talk or consideration in this of maybe increasing the monthly grant? It maxes out at \$1,500 presently. Is there any thought of increasing that?

Karen Stanley: There's nothing in this particular budget number for that.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. I really think that's something that they should be looking into.

On this program, too, I know palliative was also an issue and has been brought up at standing committee meetings. It was brought up to me by a constituent. Are there any changes that it allows palliative patients to be eligible for this grant?

Karen Stanley: It is still something that they are looking at; however, there were no changes to this particular budget to reflect that.

Hon. H. Perry: That's something, again, I would really appreciate the department putting some more thought into because it really is important to those that want to spend the end-of-life care at home with loved ones around them.

I'm going to jump to a line – the Tignish Seniors Home Care Cooperative operating grant – on that. Very appreciative, obviously, I know they are, and as much as I can go on about it, but we need all the support we possibly can. We are one of the extremities from many of the resources here on the Island, especially when it comes to the employment part of it. A lot of this was for cost recovery for nurses and such – nurse practitioner, nursing agency and that. That was – to take care of questions from last week – those who are a level 4 or more that need additional nursing staff. But there is no line in the '26-27.

Do you foresee any issues with, in particular, the Tignish seniors home in the upcoming year?

Karen Stanley: Our agreement to fund operating losses did expire on December 31st, 2025, so I have not seen the financial information since then. That being said, we do have some unallocated grants in that area, so if we did need to do so, we would be able to do something.

Hon. H. Perry: Not really a question, just a statement: I want to take this opportunity of the Tignish seniors home to thank you for all the support that they have received so far, but we will be asking for more, obviously. [Laughter]

Thank you very much.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just looking at some of the grants. I'm looking at the Alzheimer's Society of PEI. I remember the former Minister of Health talking about some of the trips he went on to look at – I may not describe it well, but Alzheimer's villages. I know there are all kinds of technologies being developed so people living with Alzheimer's can live pretty freely. I'm wondering if there's any bump to that, if there's anything in this budget that is coming a result of something that has been learned from that.

Karen Stanley: No. This particular budget is a 2 percent increase on their operating grant for the

First Link program. So, they may be looking for something like that within their own operating budget because we're just a part of their budget.

K. Bernard: Okay. I'm looking now at the – there was a consultant for the analysis of the at-home care benefit evaluation data. I don't know if that was happening. Is that something that will be made public?

Karen Stanley: I don't know what their intentions are. I can definitely make a note that that's something that you're looking to have made public.

K. Bernard: That would be great. Thank you. I'd love to see what that had to say.

One of the things that we've heard – gosh, we're going back years, to committee. There were some things that we were looking at getting the public and private kind of on the same page, and one of those was inspections. I see that this includes community care facilities and private nursing homes. Have there been any changes to inspection processes to the public homes yet?

Karen Stanley: What we have learned is that it takes a lot of work in changing legislation to do so, so we are actually now in the process of figuring out what we need to change in the legislation. When we do make changes to the legislation, we'll make a bunch of different changes, but it's my understanding that they are hoping to have changes to the legislation in the fall that would help start to narrow that gap.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair. I'm good.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

I know the Leader of the Opposition was asking on the at-home caregiver grant, but I didn't hear the question I had in mind. I may have missed it, but it does look like if we compare....

[4:20 p.m.]

Okay, I'm seeing that the right column now is the budgeted amount last year and the other column is the forecasted amount. So, that's a little different, but is there not \$1 million in underspending on that program?

Karen Stanley: No. The number in the – is not actually the forecast number. It's the actual

number to February 28th. So, that means March's numbers weren't in there. When March's numbers came in, we would be on forecast.

M. MacFarlane: So, then, looking down a little further at Aging with Dignity, there are two lines there. There's the allied health line and then there's the line below that. Can you explain what's happening there?

Karen Stanley: These programs have been taking longer to get put in place than we had anticipated. We were hoping to have all of them out by March 31st.

One of the items there was the capital funding. That would be the project that was announced last week for the infrastructure for cooling and heating for both the private nursing homes and the community care facilities. We were hoping to have that project announced and the cash out before March 31st, but with the deadline of March 31st, a change of a few weeks just changes what period it's in. So, all of that federal revenue that we did receive is carried over to the next year, as are the expenditures.

M. MacFarlane: Is that program you just referenced, Karen, the primary area of spend for that \$5.3 million, or is there more included within that number?

Karen Stanley: It is a part of it. The infrastructure is about \$3 million of that. There is also funding in there for allied health, as well as an interRAI program – an information management system for the private homes similar to what has been implemented in the public homes. So, it's a combination of the three.

M. MacFarlane: So, that information management system – that's earmarked for that particular improvement for the private facilities, similar to the heat pump...? It was heat pumps, wasn't it? It was earmarked for improvements. So, strings attached, I guess.

Karen Stanley: The one that was announced last week was cooling or other needed infrastructure. Some facilities need cooling. Other ones, in their inspections, they noted that there was other pieces of infrastructure that were needed, so we wanted to remain flexible but put the focusing on the cooling.

M. MacFarlane: Is it normal for the department to issue grant money to the private homes to

address the conditions or the deficiencies further to having a provisional licence?

Karen Stanley: Yes. Not necessarily provisional licence – these are just things that they could see that could have been improved upon. So, it wasn't why they had a conditional license, but it could be that if it wasn't addressed it could become conditional.

And yes, it is. This is not the first time that we have actually put in place funding for cooling systems. We did it in 2022 or '23. I'm sorry, I forget which year. We had provided money in the summer for some HVAC work, for fans, air conditioners.... It was one of the first really hot summers. So, this is not something new for us to do, but this is just the biggest scale that we've done.

M. MacFarlane: I recognize the HVAC or the climate control benefits that come from the money, but you had mentioned, Karen, in your response that there could be other deficiencies that may not necessarily be attached to a conditional licence, but could become attached to a conditional licence if not addressed.

So, I guess I'll ask the question a little more broadly in that it is not the first time we're seeing an appropriation made to private homes to address non-heating-and-cooling related issues, but other potential deficiencies.

Karen Stanley: Yes. There is a capital fund within Health PEI itself that they can apply to. It's a smaller amount.

We have also, I believe, given them money for capital repairs or capital improvements, but some of the homes are getting older and they do need major repairs, so we do want to help them.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Thank you for that.

Thank you, Chair.

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

G. McNeilly: Thanks a lot. I appreciate the conversation about the cooling. I'm not even going to mention heating because – well, it does come up a little bit, but the cooling....

[4:25 p.m.]

On that, how much was the federal government's contribution to that, and the Province's? The Province – I guess you're administering the program, so that will have costs associated with it, but how much was the federal government's contribution to that?

Karen Stanley: These are actually 100 percent funded by the federal government.

G. McNeilly: How much is that amount? Was that going to cover the cost to do the services, or is it going to be out as a grant?

Karen Stanley: With that particular program, all of this is coming from funding called Aging with Dignity. That is a funding agreement that was five years, \$19 million, which ends in March of '28.

With the infrastructure, there are no associated operating costs going forward. With some of the other programs, there will be. Once the capital improvements are made, we will be covering off the operating in the future.

G. McNeilly: That's great to hear.

I see here, it's not much money but it does have, in one of the lines under legal, the RFPs for the new beds – private nursing home negotiations and RFP for new beds. It's only \$5,000, but it has more to do with which RFP? Which one is this now?

Karen Stanley: This would be the RFP for the 175 beds.

G. McNeilly: The 175 beds that – I mean, there was one RFP a couple of years ago that was cancelled and it came back. Have the plans changed much since the initial RFP?

Karen Stanley: Since the initial one a couple of years ago, yes. After we did the initial RFP, we realized that what we had assumed the construction costs were going to be were not correct, that we were way underestimating what they were supposed to be.

We wanted to take it back and look at the RFP to make sure that we had enough specifications in there so that whoever wanted to bid would be able to do proper bidding and proper pricing.

Chair: One more, member, and I'll put you back on the list.

G. McNeilly: All we know basically is 175 beds; it's going out to tender. At the beginning, if I recall the first RFP, those beds were all going to be Summerside and west maybe. No?

Karen Stanley: No, the 175 have always been divided across the province: so many in Kings, so many in Queens, and so many in Prince.

G. McNeilly: Oh, shoot. Well....

Chair: I'll come back to you, unless it's a little, little one. I've given you –

G. McNeilly: No, that's okay. I just like –

Chair: It's just that there are more on the list, member, and as much as you're special, you're no more special than anybody else in this House.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair. Well now.

Thank you, minister, for this, and welcome back, Karen. You may have answered this question so I may be just very short-lived on this one. Aging with Dignity allied health: that doesn't have a budget line this year. Is that because it's rolled into the next budget line on Aging with Dignity?

Karen Stanley: The Aging with Dignity allied health – I'm just going to check how we actually presented it in your numbers because I know how it's presented in mine.

Yes, that's correct. We had split it out for the actuals because we knew which programs it went to, but in the budget, we know we have X amount of dollars; we're not exactly sure how much each of the programs is going to get this year.

C. Simpson: Can you explain what that would cover under allied health?

Karen Stanley: Sure. We actually started a program for private nursing homes for allied health workers to go in there. I will just confirm in my lovely little book what the description is.

In March of 2025, the department launched a pilot program to support selected allied health services in private long-term homes. The one-year pilot will allow private long-term homes to assess their anticipated needs for allied health

services and explore options for accessing allied health services for their residents.

[4:30 p.m.]

That is because right now, the homes have to figure out, through this pilot, do they want to hire someone to come in and do it? Do they want to outsource it? They needed some time to figure that out.

The pilot will also allow private long-term care homes to establish reporting mechanisms and planned spending. It will allow Health PEI to assess the impact on the reduction in their grants. They're allowed to use some of the money for equipment and other things that they need to complete their assessment.

Basically, this one is focusing on OT and PT – occupational health and physiotherapy.

C. Simpson: I'm good, thank you. Thank you for that, Karen.

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

H. MacLennan: Just as a clarification. The at-home caregiver grant – you have the total there. Does that include the self-managed care?

Karen Stanley: No. The self-managed care is in Health PEI.

H. MacLennan: It's in Health PEI, okay. Alright.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Just, again, back to the at-home caregiver grant. Did you answer how many Islanders are on the program?

Karen Stanley: No, I didn't, but what I have here is that there are currently 394 open cases, and in the month of February, of those, 377 received payment.

M. MacFarlane: Do you have the average amount of payment?

Karen Stanley: Yes. The average cost per case is \$1,183.

M. MacFarlane: And have the terms around that program changed in the last fiscal year?

Karen Stanley: No, they have not. They are currently undergoing an evaluation of the program, and once the evaluation is complete, then they would decide what they need to change.

M. MacFarlane: I thought that evaluation was underway for a while. Do you know how long that's been happening?

Karen Stanley: This particular section itself has gone through a lot of change, so there were some delays in things. The evaluation itself has only started in this calendar.

M. MacFarlane: Did you speak to the salaries line?

Karen Stanley: No.

M. MacFarlane: So, we're losing some people, to the tune of \$300,000?

Karen Stanley: No.

M. MacFarlane: No? Oh, sorry, I was looking at the –

Karen Stanley: The salaries in seniors health have increased over last year's budget by \$149,000, and that is a combination of obviously collective agreement increases, and as well, we had gotten funding in '25-26 for a partial year for a director of licensing. That position has not been put into place yet, but we do have a full year's worth of funding now.

M. MacFarlane: You say that's a new position, director of licensing?

Karen Stanley: It is.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, and can you tell me what that's about?

Karen Stanley: What we are hoping to do is – currently we have a board that looks at all the inspections, the reports, and they report in to the board. We're actually the only province in the country that has a board and that doesn't have a director of licensing. So, while we are modernizing these items by incorporating the private and the public both under it, looking at things, we want to move in the same direction as

the other provinces. So, instead of having a board, we would have a director of licensing.

M. MacFarlane: You said instead of having a board? So, it's a board –

Karen Stanley: Right now, we have a board that all the licences come through if they want to get renewed or if there are any conditions or anything like that. That will actually eventually be changed into having a director of licensing, and that will be their full-time job.

M. MacFarlane: No board?

Karen Stanley: No board, and that's how they do it in all the other provinces.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Thank you for that.

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

G. McNeilly: That's interesting. Who does the board report to now, the director of senior health?

Karen Stanley: Yes, that's my understanding.

G. McNeilly: When do you expect that position – it's been talked about for a while. When is it going to be filled, and how do you dissolve a board like that?

[4:35 p.m.]

Karen Stanley: We are still working on the regulations because before we start changing regulations, we want to do consultations and make sure we're out there. Right now, we're hoping for the fall. Again, as I had said, with any legislative changes, we're aiming for the fall. We are hoping to make all of the changes at the same time.

G. McNeilly: So, we won't be seeing a bill forward. You can do all that through regulations?

Karen Stanley: No, some will be regulations; some of it will be actual legislation changes.

G. McNeilly: Alright. Back to the RFPs for a second – 175 beds distributed. Are those going to go on? How did it come to 175 beds before and exactly 175 beds after? I can see it if you were going to build one facility, but these are spread out through the province.

Karen Stanley: We are actually working with the vendors right now so I can't speak too much about it, but I think it will not be 175; it will actually be a little bit more because it is based on the number of beds needed in each of the counties.

G. McNeilly: Okay. And this is senior health, so those are all going to be private beds. Are there any public beds planned?

Karen Stanley: That would be in Health PEI.

G. McNeilly: Yeah, so I've gotten into this before, haven't I? It's all coming back to me now.

[Interjection]

G. McNeilly: It's a song. It's definitely a sad song. No, it's not that bad.

Comparative analysis of private long-term home design standards – there's just a little bit of money. I'm more interested in what that.... Was that a study done? Are you trying to compare private long-term care designs to the public?

Karen Stanley: No, we're trying to look at – again, when we pulled back the first RFP in 2024, that's when we started looking – did we have the right things in place? We started looking at what Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were doing and how our plans were comparing to them. We actually outsourced that to an expert in the field to help us come up with that.

G. McNeilly: I am sure that document was very interesting. Can it be shared?

Karen Stanley: I can find out if it can be. It's very technical. I've seen it.

G. McNeilly: Is it?

Karen Stanley: I did not understand a lot of it.
[Laughter]

G. McNeilly: But it's just a matter of getting the things right and trying to figure out – because provisional licenses in private care and public – to try to get us the best care that we can get for our seniors as we can.

I don't appreciate delaying it. That's really upset me over the – as the minister would know, but now that we're here, hopefully this gets it right.

Thank you very much. I don't think I have anything else right now.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair. Just a couple of quick questions.

The overspend on the materials line, was that a one-off on something?

Karen Stanley: Oh, this is actually a really good news story. We did the first ever seniors health Making the Connection conference in the fall of 2025. The total of the conference was offset by revenue, so it ended up being neutral. It was a combination of private nursing home people that could come in, public – just a whole bunch of different people coming to talk about making the connection with seniors. That was the cost of just putting the conference on.

M. MacFarlane: That was an unknown or unbudgeted expense.

Karen Stanley: Correct, and to be quite honest, we may have another one this year, I'm not sure. It's not budgeted because we're not sure if we're going to have one this year or if we're going to do it every two years. It would end up being 100 percent offset by revenue.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. What would be the revenue that would generate from something like that?

Karen Stanley: Tickets. We actually sold tickets to it. If you wanted to go, you would have to pay to go.

M. MacFarlane: Alright, interesting. I look forward to my invitation.

Hon. C. Deagle: Would you like one?

M. MacFarlane: The professional services line, I don't know – sorry if it's been asked and answered, but there was about \$100,000 underspent or forecasted to be underspent.

[4:40 p.m.]

Karen Stanley: Yes. That was because some of the items, we were hoping to finish up before the end of the year and receive more bills; in particular, the seniors assessment screening and training tool, the evaluation. I am not 100 percent sure. I don't think we actually did hit the

target because we just were not able to get the work done on the bills in before March 31st.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Question on the grant for the medical alert. What is the medical alert? There's \$300,000 budgeted, \$300,000 spent.

Karen Stanley: This is interesting. It's funding that we had received for medical alert, but every year, we just give it to Social Development and Seniors. We really should be transferring the budget to them. We just keep forgetting until it's too late.

M. MacFarlane: Is it what I think it is – medical alert bracelet?

Karen Stanley: It's monitoring, similar to the bracelet. So, it could be a lifeline or something like that – just something that when seniors are at home, they are able to get the responses that they need.

M. MacFarlane: So, that gets paid out through Social Development.

Karen Stanley: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: I guess the issue I hear about, with respect to those sorts of programs – so, seniors fall or need to get attention – is that they don't work when there's no cell service. If I'm understanding what this is about, you need to have a reliable cellular connection in order for your medical alert or lifeline or whatever to work.

Karen Stanley: I do not know.

M. MacFarlane: I think that's the program that this is about.

Thank you for that.

Chair: Okay. Shall it carry? Carried.

Emergency Health Services

“Appropriations provided to support Provincial emergency health related policy and programs including ambulance services, air ambulance, and Telehealth (811).” Administration: 8,400. Equipment: 1,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 3,100. Professional Services: 33,038,300. Salaries: 590,500. Travel and Training: 10,500. Grants: 417,100.

Total Emergency Health Services: 34,069,400

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just curious. In there under professional services, would this be where we could see, minister, an increase to Hope Air?

Karen Stanley: No. Hope Air is in Health PEI.

C. Simpson: It's in Health PEI. Okay.

If you were to look at – going over under the grant section, the medical first responder training – it's great to see that there's a lot of training, but that's quite a jump in one year. Is that due to increased staff, or additional required training?

Karen Stanley: When we initially put this in about two years ago, we were working directly with the fire departments and such. They would go out, get the training, submit the bills; we would get them funding.

What we have found is we weren't spending a whole lot of money. It was more difficult for them, so we have been working with the first responders – primarily fire departments – and they said they would prefer having someone within Island EMS who could come give them the training. So, now we are working with Island EMS to put someone in place who can do that to them. Instead of them having to go out on their own, they know where the resource is.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

I guess the jump here that we're looking at is – congratulations. You got a service agreement signed for our ambulance services. I forgot if it was a five-year agreement, or – no. How long was that agreement signed for?

Karen Stanley: I think it's altogether 11 years. It's five, plus three, plus three. So, either party can extend it by agreement for another three years, and then another three.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Perfect, and that would be the – that's the jump that we're looking at with grants. That's why it went up a little bit.

Was there much in there in terms of ambulance response times? Was there anything in the contract regarding that quality?

Karen Stanley: There is. We worked really hard on this new agreement – I was actually proud of the negotiating committee for this – to put in response times – various KPIs. We wanted to make sure that if we were giving them these additional funds, we were getting our money's worth, so this new agreement did have significantly more in terms of what we were looking for in wait times, how they were going to be calculated, and so forth.

[4:45 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: When we look in the budget line here, it was \$27.2 million for 11 months and then it's \$29.94 million for the full year next year. Obviously, I can't do the one month –

Karen Stanley: No, that's okay. Actually, the \$27,729,000 was for the whole year.

We do a prepayment for all of those like month-by-month, prescheduled. Part of the increase between the two years – as you are probably aware – the paramedics are in negotiations with Island EMS, so we did put an allowance in there for that anticipating that they will be getting an agreement.

We're not involved in the agreement. We'd have nothing to do, but we wouldn't be doing our job if we didn't make some sort of allowance knowing that they will be getting a significant increase. We did allow for an increase in that and then for all the other expenditures, we just allowed for a 2 percent increase. Most of that bulk is because of hopefully what the paramedics will be getting.

G. McNeilly: For the KPIs, will a lot of those be reported on annually because we do see the numbers coming out? What's the criteria if they don't meet those? Maybe that's getting a little bit too specific, but I'm very interested –

Karen Stanley: We get them on a monthly basis. There are a lot of communications between our team and the team at Island EMS. I probably wouldn't be amiss if I said that they talk daily. We get the KPIs. We look at them. We have some data staff that look at them. They have their data staff. We get them on a regular basis.

We're hoping not to have to put penalties in place, but there are things in there that say that if they don't meet them, there are repercussions.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Just on that, I think a lot of that discussion there was on the response times, but what else is included for on the accountability side?

Karen Stanley: Also, we look at the number of filled shifts. I'm sure everyone is aware that they've had issues sometimes with not having enough staff. We also get information on how many filled shifts they have, what particular shifts tend to be more – harder to fill. We get that type of information as well.

M. MacFarlane: I am trying to keep it tied to the budget here because there's a lot we could talk about around this. Did you explain in the response to the previous member's questions why there's an increase of \$3 million?

Karen Stanley: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, I'll wash that back.

Karen Stanley: Would you like me to repeat it?

M. MacFarlane: No, that's fine. If it's on the record, I'll get it. I don't want to waste your time with that.

Is code critical negotiated into the new agreement?

Karen Stanley: Pardon me?

M. MacFarlane: Code critical, is that a familiar...?

Karen Stanley: That's not something I'm familiar with.

M. MacFarlane: And you were at the table for the negotiations so I guess it's not part of the agreement or you'd recognize it.

There are several lines in the big book for air ambulance services. Why are there multiple lines for air ambulance services?

Karen Stanley: Because we have more than one provider. We have one which is our primary provider. EMC, I believe the name is, out of Nova Scotia – they're a subsidiary of Medavie –

they are our primary provider. However, if they're not available, we have also used a company out of Ontario and possibly, if we have to take someone to Toronto, we use someone from there.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Am I reading it right that the funding for – across the board – for air ambulance is up by about \$700,000?

Karen Stanley: Yes. This is a combination of two things – volume. The volume has been going up steadily since COVID. It took a drop obviously during COVID and then since then, it has been going up, the volume.

[4:50 p.m.]

But also, the cost per flight with the company in Nova Scotia is going up. We entered into an agreement with them and it expired 12 years ago. They have been honouring that same price since then. We are entering into a new agreement. It's doing a CPI for each of those years so the cost per flight will be going up.

M. MacFarlane: We have agreements with all of the different providers, some longer term than others, some are probably rolling over there. I get the sense they're staggered; they're not all coming due at the same time.

Karen Stanley: That's correct because some of them we don't use very often. We have basically one when you need it, we'll be there. But our primary one is with EHS LifeFlight. That's the one that expired in 2014, I believe. Yes, it expired in 2014.

M. MacFarlane: Just maybe to close out on the air ambulance services, is this something that gets looked at for cost effectiveness? Can we consolidate into one and negotiate a long-term good agreement with one or do we need all of the multiple providers?

Karen Stanley: We need it for redundancy. If we only had one, an agreement with EHS LifeFlight, if they weren't available, we wouldn't have a backup. We need to have a redundancy in case they are not available.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to try and frame this as budget question. Karen, when you spoke about air ambulance use not dropping during COVID, I'm wondering if you can just elaborate on what that would – because if you're sick and needed to be airlifted, it wouldn't matter if there was a pandemic or not, you needed to be airlifted. Do we know that?

Karen Stanley: All I know is that pre-COVID, it was around 90 flights per year and that during '22-23, during the height of COVID, there was none. Maybe it was a matter of whether we had to take them over by ambulance, the operations weren't working. But no, there were no trips during '22-23.

C. Simpson: That's it; thank you, Chair.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

The 811 budget was underspent again this year by about \$400,000, which was similar to last year as well, but we have the same being budgeted again. Can you explain why?

Karen Stanley: The reason why we have so much in the budget is that during COVID our costs had gone up. That was because we were using 811 for not just 881. They were using it for other items through – if they had COVID and such – but the number of calls went up. It went up to a different tier. Our costs went up so we increased the budget.

We have noticed that the budget has gone down so we did reduce it a slight bit, but not very much. I'm always afraid the costs are going to go back up and I don't want to lose the money.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair. That is fair.

Do you review the trends over the years to ensure that it's being budgeted as accurate as possible?

Karen Stanley: Yes.

K. Bernard: Okay. As you had mentioned, in the years before it went up because of COVID, and that was used as the baseline and in a time when we are looking for savings, would this be a possible area for that?

Karen Stanley: It would be. However, right now we're actually looking at our agreement. We're piggybacking with the Government of Nova Scotia that's ending. It could be that when we enter into a new agreement with a different provider, they may be charging us more so it's good to keep that there.

But usually with decreases, I'd like to see a trend of at least two or three years before I start cutting the budget. But yes, absolutely, if it looks again next year and if we're going with the same provider and there's not any additional increases, we will absolutely reduce the budget. I'd just like to see a few years and not just make a rash decision based on a one-off.

K. Bernard: The ground service ambulance, is the new contract in place?

Karen Stanley: Yes it is.

K. Bernard: When does that expire?

Karen Stanley: I'm not very good at dates. It started July 1st of 2025 retroactive to April 1st. It's a five-year agreement with the possibility of two, three-year terms.

K. Bernard: Does that include any increases for paramedics this year?

[4:55 p.m.]

Karen Stanley: What the agreement has set in it is that – and that is actually – we made an allowance. We don't know what it is. We're not part of the bargaining. That is between Island EMS and the paramedics. However, we're anticipating increases, so we did allow for increases.

K. Bernard: Okay. Thank you.

Chair: Okay. I don't know if this is the right section. Emergency health services – that's not mental health and addictions office. That wouldn't be –

Karen Stanley: No.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Community Health Programs

“Appropriations provided to support community health policies and programs, including, but not limited to: primary care, chronic disease

management, public health, women and gender-diverse people's health, fertility supports, blood services, and organ and tissue donation and transplantation.” Administration: 26,800. Equipment: 19,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 171,500. Professional Services: 450,500. Salaries: 1,371,400. Travel and Training: 22,000. Grants: 9,506,800.

Total Community Health Programs: 11,568,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

Two quick questions, I think. Hospice PEI – that grant has stayed stagnant, basically the same, for several years, as I understand it. Would that be accurate?

Karen Stanley: Yes, that's accurate.

C. Simpson: There's no change this year, but is there room somewhere else in the budget should the organization, given their expanded nature, need additional funding?

Karen Stanley: In the past couple of years, they have come to us in December. If we have funding available, we have been giving them more money. It's not part of their multi-year contract, but we have been trying to assist them when possible if we have the funds available.

C. Simpson: If that's an ongoing thing that they do, does it make sense to look to increase that budget?

Karen Stanley: It would be lovely if we could. It's just not possible at the time.

C. Simpson: Great to see the budget increase, though, on IVF and fertility; very good to see that. This may not be a budget question, but I'll ask the minister and he can defer it. When do we hope to have things operational?

Chair: Probably going to let that question go.

C. Simpson: Okay.

Chair: No, I'm probably going to put it to the table. [Laughter]

C. Simpson: [Laughter] Okay, you're going to let that go, are you?

Karen Stanley: We are working through our internal processes right now.

C. Simpson: Okay. I'm good. Thank you, Chair.

Oh, I'm sorry, wrong – CHANCES Best Start. That's for the clinic at CHANCES, is it, that grant?

Karen Stanley: CHANCES is for the Best Start program, yes.

C. Simpson: The clinic at the Best Start program.

Karen Stanley: No, this is for the actual Best Start program. That's what (Indistinct) –

C. Simpson: The home visiting program?

Karen Stanley: Yes.

C. Simpson: So, the home visiting program sits with you and not with Education and Early Years.

Karen Stanley: That's correct. That moved about three or four years ago.

C. Simpson: Can you tell me what the increase for that would be for?

Karen Stanley: It was a 2 percent increase, so it was an economic increase.

C. Simpson: I'll save my questions for the floor.

Thank you, Chair.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm looking at the IVF/fertility. Is that total – it's hard to match the lines to the thing, but does that include the new government spend that was announced?

Karen Stanley: The budget does, but the total that is in the actuals does not because obviously we didn't spend it this year.

K. Bernard: But will that money be heading out the door?

Karen Stanley: Yes.

K. Bernard: Okay. I was also going to ask about Best Start. The operational funding would lie with Education, correct?

Karen Stanley: No. This is operational funding for Best Start. At one point in time, it did lie with Education, but it moved over to us three or four years ago. It felt that it was better suited with the health component because they work so closely with public health nursing.

K. Bernard: Has there been any change in that funding over the last few years? I don't know if you would have that here.

Karen Stanley: There has, primarily because we were trying to adjust the salary of the Best Start workers.

[5:00 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: Call the hour.

[Laughter]

Karen Stanley: Don't worry, I can keep talking.

Hon. C. Deagle: Madam Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

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 under consideration the grant of supply to His Majesty, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal, that this House adjourn until Thursday, May 14th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

See you tomorrow.

[The Legislature adjourned until Thursday, 14 May 2026 at 1:00 p.m.]