

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island

Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings

(Hansard)

Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Thursday, 16 April 2026

No. 12

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.
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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
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Hudson, Hon. Ernie (PC)	Alberton-Bloomfield (26)	Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism
Lantz, Hon. Rob (PC)	Charlottetown-Brighton (13)	Premier Minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs

Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
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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 1:03 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Welcome back, everyone – legislative staff, our Pages, my colleagues – to another day here in the Legislature; looking forward to it. Welcome to our guests in the gallery. We have Jayelee Grady, director of Victim Services with the Province, and who is it you have with you? Your nephews, I'm told, yes. Good, thanks for coming in.

I want to give a special recognition to Lily Paquet, who's here, who I met a few minutes ago. She's a student at Grace Christian School in grade 10 in the CEO class, career exploration. She's doing a little job shadowing today with the Minister of Education and Early Years. Welcome, Lily; glad to have you here with us today and please enjoy the proceedings.

This morning, myself and the Minister of Health and Wellness had the opportunity to visit the offices of Health PEI, tour the offices, and meet with staff. It was great to talk to the staff and just see the breadth of expertise that is there, working hard to deliver a $1.3 billion organization and the services that that encompasses for Prince Edward Islanders.

[1:05 p.m.]

I think it was good for the minister and I to meet with them and hear the challenges that they deal with and also hear about the good work that they do that sometimes is not always appreciated. It really was eye-opening to see the breadth of expertise, of course. I just want to thank them for the tireless work that they do, on behalf of the people of Prince Edward Island.

Cavendish Farms held a raffle for an extra week of vacation in support of Easter Seals. They raised $3,090, which their head office will be matching to bring the grand total to $6,180 to be donated to the Easter Seals campaign. I commend them for that; great work. I hope somebody enjoys that extra week of vacation. Thanks to Cavendish Farms for supporting this important initiative.

Finally, I just want to send out a huge congratulations to Dave Cameron. Dave, of course, is the coach of the Ottawa 67's in the OHL. He was just awarded Coach of the Year, so a huge congratulations to Dave on a great season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, everyone. Have a great day.

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 those who are watching online. Those who are visiting with us in the gallery today, welcome to today's proceedings.

While I'm on my feet, I'd like to wish a happy 42nd birthday to my nephew, Jarrett Lee Scott Gallant. I was still a teenager when he was born, and it meant a great deal for me to be his godfather. He has built a beautiful life in Castlegar, B.C., along with his wife Sarina, his daughter Raya, and his son Perry. Between the mountain views and a house full of family, it sounds like it's going to be the perfect setting for a celebration. Happy birthday, Jarrett.

Also, this Sunday, April 19th, the 2026 Westisle prom committee will be hosting a fundraising bingo. This will be held at the Tignish Legion from 2 to 4 p.m. There will be a 50-50 draw, a canteen, and many prizes, one of which may include a feed of lobster. Come on out and support a good cause.

With that, I look forward to today's proceedings.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to you and all my colleagues in the Legislature this afternoon, and everybody in the gallery. Thanks for coming out. Hope you enjoy the proceedings this afternoon.

A couple of announcements I would like to make:

I know we heard yesterday on *Compass* that the Confederation Bridge may pose a little bit of a challenge to get across for a couple of months. We're not used to having to wait now to leave

the Island like we were when we had to get to the ferry at a certain time. We're used to just driving up to the bridge and keeping going.

Well, starting at the end of April, weather permitting, through to the end of June, the bridge will be undergoing an entire resurfacing project, so Islanders can expect delays of 30 to 60 minutes, depending on when you arrive at the bridge and depending on the state of the construction. I'm told that the Confederation Bridge website and social media channels will be updated regularly with the situation to get across the bridge, but we will need to add a little bit of extra time to get off of our beautiful Island.

Next, I'd like to indicate and just remind Islanders of a very successful business out in my district. The Handpie Company under Sarah Bennetto O'Brien continues to expand outside of Prince Edward Island. We can now find Sarah's handpies at Atlantic Superstore locations across the Maritimes, and also in Newfoundland in Dominion stores, Independent stores across the Maritimes, and also Loblaws at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto. There's opportunity to get handpies all over the eastern sections of Prince Edward Island. We've all had them, and I haven't met anyone yet who does not like them. They're a wonderful product.

Last but not least in my district, I'd like to wish a very happy 60th anniversary to Jack and Arlene Sorensen from Tryon. Jack and Arlene are well known in their community for many volunteer activities over the years. Jack operates the Tryon Museum and the radio history part of that museum where he documents and displays local history. My sincere congratulations to the Sorensens, who were married in Tryon 60 years ago today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome all those in the gallery, all my colleagues in the House, and especially those watching from District 11, and my faithful watcher, Eileen Stewart.

[1:10 p.m.]

I don't imagine my mom is watching today, but if she does, I wish her a happy birthday. My sister's birthday was on the 12th, my mom's birthday is on the 16th, my sister-in-law's birthday is on the 11th, and my grandmother, who has passed away, was the 18th. There seemed to be an awful birthday in one week, but today I'd like to wish my mom and my sister a happy birthday.

But I'd also like to mention to all those living in the former Sherwood area that tonight, the City of Charlottetown is hosting a public information session at the Sherwood Rec Hall, 56 Maple Avenue, at 6 p.m., to discuss the plans for a new rink and community centre and some other sporting activities around that area.

I really hope that anybody who's watching has a moment tonight at six o'clock to stop in and help push this initiative for our community. Cody Banks is kind of aging out, and our community centre would definitely need a facelift, so I hope that everybody can come join us. It'll be a worthwhile venture.

Thank you.

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

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and say hi to those in District 22 Summerside-South Drive, and say hi to those in the gallery – Jayelee Grady, director of Victim Services, and her two nephews, Henry MacArthur and Jackson Grady. Henry is a cousin of mine. It's nice to see you young fellows here today. They're very musically talented, folks. I just thought I would put a little plug in for you there as well.

Yesterday was a very special day for our department. Our director of Child and Family Services, Mike Henthorn, received the 2026 Lieutenant Governor's Award for Excellence in Public Administration. With a career spanning more than two decades in child protection and social policy, Mike currently leads one of the most challenging service areas in the province with kindness, strong values, and steady leadership.

On behalf of the Department of Social Development and Seniors, we are so proud of you, Mike, for receiving this prestigious, well-deserved award.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I, too, would like to welcome Lily Paquet into the gallery today. As the Premier had stated, Lily's a grade 10 student at Grace Christian. As part of her CEO career exploration, she has been shadowing me in the department today. Now, some might say that she drew the short straw getting stuck with me, but I think we've had a pretty good morning talking about politics, the role of an MLA in your community, and the role of the minister. I hope you enjoyed your time here, and I hope you'll enjoy the proceedings today.

Lily's the daughter of John and Trina Paquet. Mr. Speaker, I think you might know the Paquet family. John was good District 1 stock in his early years, that's where he came from, but they now live in your district. Welcome, Lily.

Finally, I want to recognize the grade 12 French immersion students across the Island who are taking part in the DELF exam this week. The DELF exam is internationally recognized certification that assesses students' proficiency in French, specifically in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Best of luck to all the students, and congratulations on this academic achievement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

I'd like to welcome everybody here in the gallery today, and all those watching from home, especially those from District 15.

Mr. Speaker, in my short time here, you would have often heard me talk about the extraordinary people that I get to represent. This group I want to recognize today is no different – the Winsloe Players. This is a group that started…. When I was talking to a cast member last night, we couldn't quite nail down how long ago it was started, but we believe Barb Perry started it. Barb Perry would be recognized by many in here, I'm sure, and it's been many cast members in and out over the years.

For anybody who hasn't had the opportunity to attend the Winsloe Players performance, I encourage you to go this year. It starts next week – Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday – and they're going to present *For the Love of Flowers*. All proceeds that they raise go to the QEH Foundation. This small group of people has raised over $300,000 so far.

If I may, I'd like to read off this year's performers.

Speaker: Go ahead, minister.

Hon. K. Dollar: We're going to start with Gordon Aten, Roger Smith, Joan Reeves, Barb Jenkins, Diane MacLean, Mike MacKinnon, Carey Morris, Allie Webster, Autumn Gavlin, Joy MacIntyre, Virginia Proude, and Judy Reeves.

[1:15 p.m.]

If you would like to get your tickets, you can get them at Proude's Shoes, the Winsloe Irving, Clow's Red and White, the QEH Foundation, or any cast member. I do promise if you do go, you'll be hurting from laughing so hard at the end of the show.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, want to acknowledge those that are watching back home in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness and those in the gallery.

Speaking of the riding O'Leary-Inverness, the Member from Alberton-Bloomfield and I attended the annual meeting of the Canadian Potato Museum. When we had the opportunity, the first comment I think as soon as I walked in the room from the chairperson of the board, Alma MacLennan, was: "Did you see the financials?" So, I said: "Well, as long as it's black ink and no brackets, I'm happy." So, I left it at that, but then when we opened it up, pretty impressive turnaround that they had from brackets last year to nice long numbers of black ink. So, very impressive – the hard work at the board and the decision making they do.

That also gives me – there's hope now for the Minister of Finance and Affordability. With a little bit of fiscal prudence and some hard work, you can, too, turn your books around.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

Welcome back to all my colleagues and staff, and to our Pages, Zachary, Nate, and Jisele – thank you for being with us today – everybody tuning in from around the Island, and those, especially, from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, and everyone joining us in the gallery today. Thank you for being here. It's lovely to see young people in the gallery.

A special welcome to Jayelee and her nephews, Henry and Jackson. Henry and Jackson's dad, Troy, is a high school friend of mine, and an extremely talented musician. I love his style and his voice and his guitar abilities – incredible – and I think that you two are musicians as well? Yeah. Take after your dad and you'll be pretty lucky.

I just wanted to wish the grade 12 class at Charlottetown Rural – I'm not sure if Colonel Gray is doing this. I'm not sure if there are any other high schools in the province doing this. Apparently, this is something that is happening in high schools in the States, but it's called Senior Assassin.

What it is, is – it's kind of creepy because there's an app on your phone and you can track where people are, so I don't like that part of it. However, the goal is: you go around with a water gun and goggles, and you're given your target for the day or for the week – I'm not sure exactly how it works – and you have to shoot them with your water gun. If they don't have their goggles on, they're out. If they have their goggles somewhere on their body, they're not out.

It starts tomorrow. I think it goes for a month. Anyway, I cannot wait to hear the stories and see young people running around Charlottetown with goggles and water guns. If you happen to see it, that's probably what it is.

I want to wish everyone a good day. Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to welcome everybody that might be watching back home in District 21 and everybody in the gallery.

I wasn't going to get up today because I mentioned it every day this week, but I just got a message on my phone that tonight, the Western Capitals game – they're over 80 percent sold for their crowd tonight. They're expecting a sellout, so anybody that might be listening, you better get your tickets early.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. members, I rise today with heartfelt sadness to acknowledge the passing of Laura Zakem, née Rashed. She's the wife of the late Abe Zakem, and the mother to my partner, Anne, and her siblings Tony, Nofa, Philip, and Yvonne.

Laura was really an impactful community member and a proud Lebanese Canadian. She really was cherished by all who knew her, so my deepest sympathies to her family near and far. Rest in peace, Laura.

Thank you, members.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Fiscal Management

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, Islanders are asking a very simple question: Who's in control of the finances of this province? Because right now, it doesn't look like anyone is.

Prince Edward Island does not have a money problem; it has a government with a spending problem. The resources have been there. Revenues have grown. Islanders pay their fair share of taxes. Federal transfers have reached record high levels. But what has been missing? Discipline, judgement, and priorities that put Islanders first.

[1:20 p.m.]

I've asked this Premier direct questions about fuel prices, electricity, and the rising cost of

living. Instead of answers, Islanders get delay, deflection, and finger pointing. While this government hesitates, Islanders keep paying more – more at the pumps, more to heat their homes, and more to turn their lights on, and more at the grocery store.

That is the real cost of poor financial management. The government has fallen into a familiar pattern. When pressure builds, they look for someone else to blame. When questions come, they say anything to avoid answering them. When leadership is required, they do what they always do: nothing. Spend now, explain later.

That is not leadership. That is not fiscal management. It is a government that has lost control of the books.

Islanders deserve honesty the first time, they deserve timely decisions, and they deserve a government willing to take responsibility when things are not working. Right now, they are not seeing that. They are seeing a government that is always late, always defensive, and always content to be one step behind the problems Islanders face.

So, I'll ask again: If no one is willing to take responsibility, who exactly is running the finances of this province?

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

Managing the Budget Deficit

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government has tabled the largest planned deficit in Prince Edward Island's history, $410 million, and Islanders are right to ask: How did we get here, what are we going to do about it, and who is being held to account?

There is no doubt that cuts would need to be made with such a significant deficit; however, when making these decisions, careful consideration must be taken. When programs and services are slashed, Islanders deserve to know how those decisions were made. What analysis was done? What evaluation took place? What data guided which services to reduce or cut and which ones to protect?

And let's be clear about something else: focusing on pouring money into buildings and infrastructure alone does not produce a nurse, a doctor, or an educator, or address the resource needs. Bricks and mortar are not the health system, bricks and mortar are not the education system, but the people are.

Now this government, in response to a deficit that has more than doubled in a single year, created a committee on fiscal responsibility and red tape reduction. Chaired by the Finance minister herself, the Premier has given this committee 12 months to develop a plan.

But my question is this. The committee has been at work. What have they found? What recommendations have been made? And why, in the name of transparency, has none of that been made public?

Islanders are not asking for a plan a year from now. They're asking for answers today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Islanders were told that this budget was delayed because difficult and deliberate decisions had to be made. They were told government needed more time to get the numbers right. Can you imagine this government having a transparency problem. At the end of this week, and buried deep into the budget estimates book – not in the headlines and not in the minister's speech – is nearly $400 million in planned cuts over the next two fiscal years, hidden under the label of comprehensive expenditure review.

If this government plans to cut services, it should have the backbone to tell Islanders where and why.

Fiscal management (further)

Question to the Premier: Why did you hide nearly $400 million in planned reductions from Islanders, and what programs are on the chopping block?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

I wouldn't say we're hiding it when we actually had that written in black and white in the budget book. It wasn't hidden; it was right there, and that's why you know that information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

What it is is creative accounting that Islanders can't understand.

Weeks before the budget, the Premier said there was no question; cuts were coming. On budget day, those cuts were barely mentioned, never explained, and no departments were identified – no targets, no timelines, no transparency.

Question to the Minister of Finance: Which departments and services will be affected by these cuts, and when will Islanders finally get the details?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

[1:25 p.m.]

As you alluded to, our goal over the next two years is to have 5 percent reduction in government spending. As has been made public, we're going to have this comprehensive expenditure review of all departments. We've already had two meetings to lay out that work plan and how we're going to approach that. The work has begun.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But I asked when will Islanders get the details?

Government told Islanders to electrify their life – to buy electric vehicles, to get heat pumps – and they trusted this government when they said that these programs would be there to support them. Families made decisions, small businesses invested, and contractors hired. Islanders have heard promises before, and without results those promises start to mean very little.

And now, very deep in this budget, there are serious questions about whether this government is pulling back, and still refusing to give Islanders a straight answer.

Question to the Minister of Finance: Are these energy efficiency programs being cut fully, yes or no? When will you clearly tell Islanders what remains in place and what does not?

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

Hon. S. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank the hon. member for the question.

When we look at all those programs, we really want to put it through the lens of affordability, as the Premier and the Minister of Finance and Affordability have mentioned. That's how the decisions were made on all the energy efficiency programs.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, again.

Just keep going; ask questions, you don't get answers. My question was when will you clearly tell Islanders what remains in place and what does not?

Islanders did what this government asked them to do. They switched to heat pumps. They invested in electrification. Small businesses built work around these commitments too. Now after years of overspending on things like an NHL deal and pricey Toronto consultants, it looks like this government is trying to clean up its financial mess on their backs and at the expense of the environment.

My question to the Minister of Finance: Will you guarantee today that Islanders with applications in the system and the businesses depending on this work will not be left paying for your government's mismanagement?

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

Hon. S. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I apologize to the Leader of the Opposition. His preamble was lengthy on the previous question, so I didn't hear that exact question.

All information was sent out immediately to all of the contractors or point-of-sale people. Yesterday the website was immediately updated with all the program updates that are there. I can provide a list, actually, to the entire Assembly, too, so that everybody is quite aware.

Your question was about the queue. Yeah, I'm assuming you're talking about probably the heat pump program. Anybody that's in the queue now will definitely be taken care of.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I thought I explained that quite well. He must be tired over there. Can you imagine what's going to happen later on?

Islanders have watched this Premier time and again change his mind. He wasn't going to run, then he was, then he wasn't, and then he did. This Premier told Islanders there would be no fiscal shock therapy.

We may now see the collapse of a large section of the efficiency sector, but if these programs are being gutted, that is exactly what this looks like – sudden cuts, no clarity, and local businesses left twisting in the wind. This is what happens when a government loses control of the books and then expects Islanders to absorb the consequences.

Question to the Premier: Why did you tell Islanders not to expect cuts, then signal cuts, and now move to gutting entire programs instead of managing spending responsibly right across government?

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

Hon. S. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's nothing gutted here, hon. member. We put all these programs through the lens of affordability. The programs that we wanted to keep were the biomass energy efficient one, the business energy rebates, the firewood energy rebate, the home energy assessments, the home insulation rebates, the pellets energy rebates, the winter warming program, the free home insulation program, and the strategic energy solutions (Indistinct).

[Interjections]

Hon. S. MacEwen: There are programs that are paused right now that need to be paused. When we did that, we put it through that lens of affordability: What do Islanders need? Well, there's been heavy investment – $250-some-million invested over the last number of years – on energy efficiency to help Islanders save money and also reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We did that. Now we're putting the focus into things like demand-side management that I talked about before. These insulation programs are really important.

That's where the focus is on – affordability – right now.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I feel like I'm playing Whac-A-Mole over here.

[1:30 p.m.]

We know that this government has a spending problem. We know that they have a transparency problem. This government also has an accountability problem. They tabled this budget eight weeks late and two weeks into this fiscal year. That alone shows the level of disrespect that is being shown to Islanders.

And still, to date, we do not have the answers. We're told the biggest cuts are to energy efficiency. We're now hearing things like the bike rebate may be included in that.

Question to the Minister of Finance: Why are you now clawing back supports like the e-bike and bike rebate, and forcing families who want to buy a bike for their children to pay the price for years of your government's reckless spending?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

We are aligning where we're going to make the greatest impact on affordability. You can talk about e-bikes, but what we did was we protected $10-a-day child care. That was $80 million a year we spent on that. The PEI child benefit – in play and enhanced this year at $50 more a child.

These are the things that we focused on. We didn't make cuts just to make cuts. We aligned with what Islanders need today and what we were hearing from them that they need today. That's where we're putting the investments. That's where we're putting the money.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Island children cannot afford to ride bikes, but this minister likes to ride federal programs.

On budget day earlier this week, this government boasted about record health spending. They said the same thing last year, and they said the same thing the year before because it's the same old government over there. And after all of that spending, Islanders still face some of the worst access to primary care in the country.

They tell Islanders something important: this government knows how to spend money, but not how to deliver results. Money flowing to executive salaries, to consultants, and bureaucracy does not help Islanders who cannot find a family doctor.

Question to the Premier: What measurable improvement in your access to primary care will Islanders actually see this year, and when?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I don't think anyone over here quite understands this line of questioning from the opposition. On one hand, in his member's statement, he wants us to balance the budget, and now he wants us to spend, spend, spend. They really need to make up their mind.

Access to primary care – we have an excellent team at Health PEI that are rolling out how to improve access to care – our patient medical homes. We just need the opposition to stop politically interfering in health care.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Cuts have been made, and Islanders deserve to know how those decisions were made when departments made the cuts to programs and services that impact Islanders.

Social programs

Question to the Minister of Finance and Affordability: What analysis of program efficiency was completed, and what criteria for cutting programs and services to Islanders was given to line departments?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

When we went into this, we knew from Islanders that affordability was number one, so that was a huge lens that we put anything through. Affordability was number one.

We knew health care was obviously another priority of Islanders, so we protected it. Education – we protected that as well and made sure that the investments were there to make sure that health care and education ran seamlessly. Those were the lenses that we looked at when we went to this work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, that probably won't answer the question that I have to ask now. This government has cut over $100,000 from social sector supports, money that goes directly to the community organizations doing frontline work with our most vulnerable Islanders.

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors: Minister, please tell this House specifically which organizations have lost their

funding and what services people will no longer be able to access because of this decision.

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

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

I don't believe we had to cut any of our NGOs, I believe you're talking about. Yeah, they're all still in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If they're in place, the budget's been cut, so perhaps you could come back then, minister, with – has their budget been cut? Perhaps they've not been cut, would be helpful.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

When we went through this, a lot of the NGOs were protected in this. In fact, we kept in play a 2 percent increase in their funding to align with CPI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:35 p.m.]

I've raised many times in this House that seniors are struggling and that supports provided for seniors need to, in fact, be strengthened, yet the department is budgeting approximately $1 million less for senior supports.

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors: What specific supports have you cut to our seniors?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question because it's really important.

There was no $1 million cut. The money was transported to other programs that are in place. That $1 million wasn't used on the seniors independence program last year, so we were able to utilize it in other areas. It hasn't changed a thing within our seniors independence program.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The seniors independent living program was underspent, yet countless seniors talk about the difficulty accessing. Do you see the correlation?

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors: Because there was no clear criteria, if you will, rather than just simply transferring dollars over to another program, how about looking at the criteria for entrance into those programs and what the application is like so that seniors actually could apply and get that funding? Now, it's simply gone.

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

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

As I said, the money is not gone. It's been transported to other programs within our department, certainly in seniors programs as well. As I said, it wasn't utilized, so it's great that we can move it to other programs. Nothing was cut.

[Interjection]

Hon. B. Ramsay: Pardon? They can't get to it? Yeah, it's an income-tested program, as all of our programs are, so anyone that qualified certainly got the program.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not quite accurate. People were finding it incredibly difficult to actually fill out the applications. So, never mind the income testing; let's be able to actually get the applications submitted.

Social assistance benefits are going up by just over $200,000 in a $69 million program, so that represents approximately half of a percent. Is that an increase of half a percent or are you planning for millions of dollars in special warrants when you go over?

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors: With inflation still biting and more Islanders turning to assistance from your department, can you honestly say that half a percent is keeping pace, or is it simply cut – with a different name?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

When we go into this budget process, we go out to the departments, and we had a really well-oiled, collaborative process where the departments come – we knew that it was going to be some really tough decisions in this department. Everyone was committed to that. But we wanted to protect – I mention health care. I mention education. Social development is another department that we're legislated to fund. We have to ensure that those most vulnerable are taken care of, so that money was put in that bucket that's appropriate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders would like a straight answer. When funding does not keep up with inflation, do people actually receive less support per person, or fewer people will be able to get support when they need it?

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors: Is that yes or no – less support or no support when they need it?

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

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

We're legislated to support those vulnerable Islanders, and as you know, member, I work really hard at that – we communicate quite a bit – and I'll continue to do that. So, yeah, it's a legislated program, so yes, they certainly are supported.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

A question to the Minister of Housing. A few years ago, a former minister, now the Premier – so, Housing minister 4 and 6, Premier 2 and 4 – announced a $10 million community housing expansion project.

Affordable housing (further)

I would like to know from the Minister of Housing: What is the status of this project at this time?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question.

[1:40 p.m.]

The status of that program is it added 252 units to our cooperative groups, our partners that we work with. We're taking a little pause on it in this upcoming budget, but it was just a pilot project to start with, and we'll evaluate the results of it.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, this is the government of cut, cancel, and communicate. If that's how you're going to communicate the cutting of a program, we're in big trouble.

This program became very important. The Premier also said: "We will continue to find solutions to increase the supply of permanently affordable rentals and assist with creating ways

for all Islanders to have a place to call home in line with our provincial housing strategy." This was in 2024, by the Premier of our province.

Minister, are we out of line with our housing strategy now that you cut this program?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: No, not at all, member. We've taken an all-in approach to tackle housing here. It was a pilot project when we started two years ago. We spent $10 million, increased the housing supply by 250 units, and we're going to evaluate the outcomes and pause it for now.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, I'm looking at the Prince Edward Island Housing Corporation about the said program. In '24-25, applications approved was three. Funding approved was $7.5 million.

Minister, where are these 250 units? Will you table exactly where these units are, and are people living in them?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

Yes, I will.

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

G. McNeilly: If it's such a successful program – this is why we need cooperation. You guys stood up for a year, saying cooperation. We're going to use our community partners. Now you're pausing a program when there are 212 people chronically homeless in Prince Edward Island. We know that number is a lot higher than that, and you're cancelling programs. You can't build housing programs in your own district.

Where are we going? Where's the strategy? Because you're not following it, the ones that I see, minister. Where are we going for the people that can't afford housing in Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, member.

We have 200 units, I think it is, that are going to be coming on stream by the end of the year. We're continuing to build. We're working on projects every day. Charlottetown-Hillsborough has a great project that's in the works. We've got units going in Tyne Valley, we've got units going in St. Teresa, and we're going to keep going here.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, it's hard to believe that when you're cutting/pausing.

When was that pause started, minister, and what are you planning to do with the information? Will you table all the information in this Legislature so we can see what was done with this program, when you're pausing housing and cutting housing as the Housing minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

What has this program done? It's added 250 units to affordable housing units, and it's just a pause while we evaluate the outcome of it. We're under a little bit of a budget restraint here. We're continuing on. We're going to keep building.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, everyone in this Chamber agrees that Islanders are facing some serious challenges – cost of living, access to health care, housing, to name a few; there are many more. Not all of these can be fixed entirely with legislation in this House, but a lot can be updated, and improved laws can certainly help Islanders during this difficult time.

For example, electricity rates are a big expense for all Island families, and this government promised that they would be coming forward

with legislation this spring that would put stronger limits on what Maritime Electric can and can't do. But now we're told they don't have time to do this work for Islanders.

Conflict of Interest Act

Question to the hon. Premier: How can you find time, Mr. Premier, to hastily change laws to benefit a single Cabinet minister, but not to change the laws that would benefit all Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I think the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy has laid out his plan for changes to our energy regulatory environment here, and that includes moving towards a performance-based regulatory environment for Maritime Electric.

[1:45 p.m.]

Now, what the Leader of the Third Party is referring to is the mechanism to initiate that, and what we're not sure of yet is whether that actually requires legislation here on the floor, but the process itself is underway. Consultations with the utility, with stakeholders, and with the public will take place to move towards a regulatory environment that does not reward the utility strictly on the investments that they make but the outcomes and those public policy priorities that they achieve.

I know that the minister will work hard to make that happen. Whether that actually requires legislation here in the House is irrelevant. The work is being done.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Well, I guess what I'm hearing is that work will be done before we see changes to our *Conflict of Interest Act* brought to the Legislature.

Government spends money in many different places, and it's important that when Islanders' tax dollars are spent, we know we're getting value for money. Every province in Canada has legislation to control spending on procurement of government services, except Prince Edward Island, where even though over two years ago we were promised new legislation to correct this glaring gap that could be costing Islanders tens of millions of dollars every year, that legislation still hasn't appeared.

Question to the hon. Premier: How can you find time to hastily change laws to benefit a single Cabinet minister, but not to change a law that could save Islanders tens of millions of dollars a year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

We've been going through consultation on procurement of services. In this budget, we also have – so, that work is being done and those things will be coming forward, likely in the fall, I think. We have procurement of construction services as well that'll be included. We've sat down with all the stakeholders and roundtables on both of these, collected all the information that's being taken back, and put into how we're going to develop those changes moving forward.

Also in this budget, you'll find money for a contract management system, which will help as well. I know that's something that you've alluded to in the past as well, so there is money in this budget to develop that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. MacFarlane: Well, let's hope we see all of that work come to fruition for Islanders before changes to the *Conflict of Interest Act*.

For almost two years now, the oyster industry here on PEI has been struggling in the face of two devastating diseases, MSX and Dermo. Many harvesters, growers, and processors have been impacted significantly. For two years, this government has been promising that they have the Island oyster industry's back and will support them, but very few have seen any money at all.

Question to the hon. Premier: How can you find time, Mr. Premier, to hastily change laws to benefit a single Cabinet minister, but not to make changes and come forward with supports to save an entire Island industry that has been under threat for almost two years?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Third Party knows very well that we'll stay in this Legislature until the work of this sitting is done. One of those things that I'm going to do while we're here is support our fishermen so that they have the same democratic rights as everybody else in this province.

The fishing sector is filled with smart, capable, community-minded people who would love to contribute to their province by serving in executive roles. There's no reason why a lawyer can't serve in Executive Council. There's no reason a dentist can't. There's no reason a farmer can't.

For some reason, we've blocked lobster fishermen from having the right to serve in Executive Council in government here in Prince Edward Island. I, for one, would like to have the expertise, the community-minded capabilities that fishermen have in this province in Executive Council, and that's why I've appointed one to Cabinet.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

The education inclusion report was completed two years ago. Educators were told there was an update coming to the inclusion action plan on January 19th of this year. They were all very much looking forward to it because, as it turns out, I'm not the only one who believes that the implementation of the inclusion report recommendations has the potential to revolutionize our education system.

But just recently, with no explanation given, educators were told the update was not coming and have not heard anything since.

Education inclusion action plan

Question to the Minister of Education: Will you table the latest inclusion report action plan, including timelines if you have them, in this House today?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question.

[1:50 p.m.]

Look, there are numerous examples of inclusive education in some of the work that we're doing in our schools already that would tie into the inclusive education action plan, PBIS being one of them.

When I do have that report ready to table, we will table it, along with some of the actions that we're going to take.

Thank you.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I'm going to take that as in the inclusive education action report is not ready, and while PBIS is a wonderful program, it doesn't fix all of the problems. And that's all your government has done so far.

One of the things about these reports is that the recommendations are difficult to implement because there are a lot of them. They need to go in tandem with one another. It takes political will and prioritization.

I hear regularly that teachers are clinging by their fingernails because this report is their last hope that things will actually change. They believe it will help with violence in schools, bullying, absenteeism, complex classrooms – all the things they're currently facing.

Question to the minister: Educators have been waiting for you for over two years for real action. When will we see the change that our educators and our students desperately need?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Yeah, I think the last year – 14 months, I guess – that I've been in this position, we've shown great movement and great action in education. Knowing all kinds of places – we'll talk about them all you want in the House.

But it's important to note that this inclusive education action plan is not going to fix every problem in our school, as you might think that it will.

We are going to focus, once we get our budget –

[Interjection]

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

Speaker: Minister, continue.

Hon. R. Croucher: We're going to continue working on pieces of that inclusion plan. A new code of conduct…. We're hiring a new manager for inclusive education. We're going to do work in our alternative education piece.

Lots of work is being, member. We'll continue to do that work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: I don't buy any of those words because I hear from teachers. Unlike you, I'm not just touring the schools; I've been in them and experienced them.

This government loves to stand up and read lists and boast of all the things they've done, and education is no different. Last week in the Budget Address, the Minister of Finance shared with us that they are hiring, however, many new EAs and youth service workers. Great. But the challenges in our schools will not be fixed by simply hiring more.

The foundation of how we educate and how our classrooms are composed needs to change. This is not an easy fix. It's going to take real hard work, and I'm losing hope that Islanders are going to see that from this government.

Question to the minister: Is there anything you can offer our educators and our students as hope? Is there anything in the budget that signals that these much-needed changes are coming for Island schools?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: I mean, I've talked about these numerous times in the House here. I'll take a little exception to the member's statement.

I've been in, what, 56 of our schools across the province. I would be willing to bet that you've been in a handful in your district. You haven't worked in them since 2019. There's been a number of things change since that time. I don't need an education lesson from you on that, member.

Look, we're continuing to implement the policies and programs that support inclusive education. Over the last seven years, we've seen a 50 percent increase in the budget. We've hired 598 full-time staff. We've increased our staffing 22 percent versus the 8.4 percent increase in student population. PBIS, social-emotional learning, a new inclusion manager, a multi-tiered system of support, modernizing our alternative education – I can keep going, member, if you want to keep asking the questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I've been a champion for the Summerside police force, and for that matter, all police forces across this Island.

This government has been hands on, and I applaud them for that because we've seen such things at the JET – joint enforcement team – put in place. You don't have to go very far to see the success that they've had in recent months.

Let's go to the Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General to see if he can continue to deliver like he has for the safety of all Islanders.

Minister, don't get me wrong, I am pleased with the work that your department has done in keeping this file moving forward.

Safe communities and neighbourhoods legislation

This Legislature has passed a motion, safer communities and neighbourhoods, with unanimous consent, another tool that our police want in their toolbox. Has your department undertaken any work to bring this to fruition?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you to the Member from Summerside-Wilmot for his advocacy on policing, particularly in his area.

[1:55 p.m.]

I am quite proud of the joint enforcement team. Islanders have asked us to deal with the illicit drugs on this Island, and the JET team is hitting it head-on along, with the JFO – wonderful groups that are working to fight crime and the illicit drugs on this Island.

The member has come to me on the safe communities ask. We are working through it, but it takes time, and we will hopefully deliver on that someday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, first supplementary.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I did forget to mention the joint forces operation team. They had a big bust here recently as well. It's great to get these illicit drugs off our streets.

Back to that same minister.

Minister, I understand that it takes time, and the question really is how much time. We need to get this. We need this in place. Our police forces have asked for it. Community members have come forward and asked for it. I've done up a private member's bill that I put on hold because I'd rather see your department bring it – that would be more in-depth and more detailed.

Minister: Can you commit to bringing that within the next year?

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

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

To the member: I have had great conversations with multiple police chiefs. I think I've had three during my time: Chief Poirier, Chief Walker, and now Jason, who are tremendous advocates for their communities. We've dealt with them on their asks for more cadets. We've paid for funding for three cadets in the last two years, so that's six cadets.

We will work on this legislation, but if the member wants to bring his private member bill, we'll not stop that. But it takes time, it takes funding, and we will work towards that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, second supplementary.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's great to hear. Time is of the essence when we're talking about public safety. Anything we can do to improve that is always a plus, and yes, the last three police chiefs that the minister rhymed off out of the city of Summerside are great people, and I'm sure that all the members of the Summerside police force applaud the minister for the cadets that they have.

Back to that same minister.

Minister, one other tool that the police force is looking for in their toolbox is a four-hour hold for highly intoxicated people. All the other neighbouring provinces and most provinces right across Canada have put this in place. Not a punitive charge, not a monetary charge – a four-hour hold so that someone that is highly intoxicated can sober up. Someone that is a threat to themselves or a threat to the community – they need to be able to put them somewhere.

Minister: Have you taken any action towards implementing a four-hour hold?

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

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

This enters a debate which I've had many conversations with this member about. There's a fine line between addictions and criminal incarceration. I don't really like putting alcoholics and addicts into our prison system just for a short period of time. I don't think that was the design of our infrastructure and what they're for.

But saying that, if the City of Summerside wanted to build holding cells, I'm sure that we can work through that with some legislation to support that. But it's important that you actually talk to the Department of Health along with the Department of Justice. This is a societal problem that we have to deal with, and it's just not "lock them up."

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The people of Georgetown-Pownal know that this government has the heart for our seniors and those living with mobility challenges. We've seen a real commitment to making sure our neighbours can live with dignity and independence in the communities that they love.

Currently, the process for renewing a designated parking permit involves a $21 fee each year. While I know the department works hard alongside ResourceAbilities for this service, for someone on a fixed income, every dollar counts.

Designated parking permits

A question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors: Could the minister share some insight into the $21 renewal fee and discuss how the department ensures this process remains as affordable as possible for the Islanders who rely on it the most?

[2:00 p.m.]

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, member, for that question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, the designated parking permits are administered by a non-government organization, ResourceAbilities. Apparently that $21 is for administrative fees and processing fees, but I will definitely look into that and see what we can do on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's clear that this government sees our small towns as a place of growth and opportunity. We want to make sure that our provincial services are as accessible and supportive as they can be for every single Islander. We know that the minister is a champion for our seniors, and we appreciate the work being done to support independence.

A question to the minister: Can the minister confirm her commitment to keeping these essential fees low, and will she work with her team to ensure that the cost of a parking permit never stands in the way of an Islander's ability to get out and participate in our great communities?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you for that question, member.

I will certainly look into that and make sure that that cost is not a barrier to anybody that needs those services.

Thank you.

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

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our government is always looking for ways to put more money back into the pockets of Islanders, especially our most vulnerable. We take a lot of pride in the fact that we listen to families and respond to their needs. When it comes to these parking permits, even a small fee like $21 can be a major factor for a senior or a person with a disability who is managing a tight budget.

Question to the Minister of Social Development: Would the minister be open to exploring ways to further reduce the cost of these renewals, ensuring that we continue our trend of making life more affordable for those in Georgetown-Pownal and across the great province of Prince Edward Island?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker – thank you, member.

Affordability is always a top priority for this government, and I will definitely be looking into that as early as tomorrow to see what we can do to bring those costs down or eliminate them altogether.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Housing, a question to him.

Your government intended to establish a 65-acre, much needed housing subdivision project in Milton that was both on wetlands and farmlands. Last week, you said installing these – I'm trying to figure out the right…. – tiny homes, garden suites, and cottages sitting on the Sleepy Hollow Road were cancelled.

Tiny home project (further)

To clarify, does this mean that all 200 units are totally cancelled? What's the status of this project and where are these homes going?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

If you didn't understand it last week, yes, we're not moving forward with that project.

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

G. McNeilly: Hmm. So, this is a government of cancel, cut, and communicate. Today, we had a little briefing on pilot programs, and it just made me think about other pilot programs. We had the curling club pilot program, which ended in complete destruction. We had the seniors food program up east, the $250,000 food program that fed 16 Islanders –

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: Down east. Don't even know where it was.

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: You don't even know where it was – $250,000; they spent $40,000 and fed 16 Islanders. Now we have the paused community housing expansion program. So, people can't curl, they can't eat, and now they can't find a place to live.

Housing First strategy (further)

Minister of Housing: What does Housing First mean to you moving forward?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know. That was kind of an odd question.

This government has taken an all-in approach to tackle housing over the years. We have made record investments. We have seen a record number of housing starts in the last two years, numbers that we haven't seen since the '70s. We have decreased the affordable housing registry by over 60 percent. We have added 2,000 affordable housing units.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[2:05 p.m.]

Statements by Ministers

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Mr. Speaker, by Command of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table a statement pursuant to section 17 of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, by Command of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table orders pursuant to section 5 of the *Public Departments Act*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

Hon. J. Burridge: Mr. Speaker, by Command of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor and pursuant to section 47 of the *Financial Administration Act*, I beg leave to table a report of borrowing, and I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table. This is the May 21st, 2024, press release (Indistinct) about the community housing expansion pilot. There's a nice quote by the Premier of the time in there. I move, seconded that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Legislative Management, I beg leave to introduce a report of the committee recommending that Mr. Matthew Chapman be appointed as the Ombudsperson and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner. I move, seconded by the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, that the same be now received and do lie on the Table.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Rule 110(5) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly*, I will be moving the motion for adoption of this report tomorrow, Friday, April 17th, 2026.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Recognition of Guests II

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: I'd like to beg your indulgence for recognition of guests.

Speaker: Definitely.

Hon. D. Compton: I think we have some veterinarians in the gallery here. One in particular, Dr. Erin MacDonald, who's a family friend since forever – not only that, she's Bella's vet and she's the owner of the Stratford Animal Hospital. I feel she's here in anticipation of an act that's coming forward. I want to welcome each and every one of you here today. Good to see her.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Hon. S. MacEwen: Do you mind if I could have an indulgence for recognition of a guest too?

Speaker: Yes, you may have indulgence, minister.

Hon. S. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just think it's fitting when we have a member of the Order of PEI enter the gallery, we should recognize – Marie Burge is here, one of my most favourite people in PEI. Thank you, Marie, for being here today.

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

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 10th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 10, *Veterinary Profession Act*, Bill No. 10, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: *Veterinary Professions Act*, Bill No. 10, read a second time.

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 said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

[2:10 p.m.]

Chair: The House is now in Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill intituled *Veterinary Profession Act*.

Do you have a stranger that you would like to bring onto the floor?

Hon. B. Thompson: Two strangers, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted?

Good afternoon. Can you please state your name and title for Hansard?

Chantelle Boyko: Sure. I am Chantelle Boyko. I am the legislative specialist for the Department of Agriculture.

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: I'm Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie. I'm the registrar of the Prince Edward Island Veterinary Medical Association.

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

Hon. B. Thompson: Yes, I do, Chair.

The proposed act aims to modernize and better support and self-regulate veterinarians and veterinarian technicians on Prince Edward Island by improving the licensing and registration process, making the scope of practice clearer for both veterinarians and veterinarian technician members, and introducing clearer complaints investigation and disciplinary processes and procedures into legislation.

Chair: Thank you.

Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be read clause by clause, section by section, or open for general questions? General questions.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for being here to discuss this bill with us today.

We did have a *Veterinary Profession Act*, and the minister gave a bit of an overview in his preamble about what was updated, but could you tell us perhaps a little more detail – why the old bill needed to be completely overhauled as opposed to, perhaps, amended piece by piece?

Chantelle Boyko: The main reason why it needed to be overhauled was it was an outdated act. It was missing quite a few pieces in the current legislation.

Particularly, we focused on the definitions. We focused on the registration and licensing, updating to make sure that it was clean and clear. We brought the veterinary technicians into the mix to make sure that we were using them to their full scope and capability. We also added in the complaints and disciplinary process into the legislation, which was not there before. We thought that important in a self-regulated profession – to have that in the legislation.

Just adding some clarity to the legislation. It was a dated piece of legislation, and it needed to be modernized to bring it up to the standards of other jurisdictions.

M. MacFarlane: Is it modeled after other jurisdictions?

Chantelle Boyko: Yes. We used other jurisdictions. We used some jurisdictional scans. We used research – academic research. We largely used Ontario's new legislation that they just passed in 2024. So, trying to learn from other jurisdictions that just went through the same work.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that.

On the consultation side of it, obviously there would have been, I would think, pretty extensive consultation with the veterinarian community. Could you tell us a little bit about the consultation phase?

[2:15 p.m.]

Chantelle Boyko: Sure. We did do consultations. The department hosted a draft review session with the association and the Eastern Veterinary Technicians Association in

November of 2025. We shared a draft of the legislation with them at that time. What we did at that draft review session was walk them through the bill as it stood at that point in time, answered any questions, provided them with a walkthrough of what the investigations and the disciplinary process would look like in the legislation, and answered any questions, like I said.

Following that draft review session, we opened up a feedback email process for three weeks following that session if anyone wanted to ask any questions via email, if they couldn't make the in-person portion of that consultation, and we answered any questions via email following that.

We then took the questions that we heard through email, we made any tweaks to the legislation that we thought were pertinent to make, and we held a session with the Executive Council from the association in December and walked them through what changes we had made to the legislation from that consultation.

M. MacFarlane: That sounds pretty robust. Thank you for that. So, is it your understanding, then, that the bill before us does reflect the feedback, the concerns that the stakeholders who were consulted provided?

Chantelle Boyko: I believe so. I will also turn to Jessie to….

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: Yeah, I would concur with Chantelle.

On my part, we sent out several notices to members to make them aware of the draft session, as well as email reminders that written comment was available and any comment or any questions were welcome. As Chantelle said, final approval of the final draft was through council, and as a group, we were comfortable with the changes put forward.

M. MacFarlane: So, this profession has been self-regulating and self-governing previously. Is that correct?

Chantelle Boyko: Yes, that's correct.

M. MacFarlane: Were there any changes in this act that would impact the process or the requirements, the regulatory processes that the profession would now be having to follow, by way of its self-governance and self-regulation?

Chantelle Boyko: I feel that's a loaded question because this is substantive change in the fact that this is modernizing the legislation quite a bit.

I would say they're positive changes in the sense of the self-regulating framework, but to be quite honest, yes, there are a lot of changes. There are now requirements in terms of the investigation and the complaints process that are in the legislation that were not there before.

That being said, a lot of the requirements that are in the legislation were in the association's bylaws already. So, it depends.

M. MacFarlane: It sounds like a yes. Thank you for that. I appreciate that.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair. It's nice to meet you both, and welcome. Thank you.

I don't know about the shortages of technicians or veterinarians in the province, but when we improve labour mobility, as this act is allowing for, are there shortages? Where are the shortages? And does this help improve that for PEI?

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: Nationally, there is a veterinary workforce shortage, unfortunately. By having the technicians introduced into the act, this will allow us to better utilize them for their skills and capabilities under the supervision of a directing veterinarian as they see appropriate.

C. Simpson: So, that's broadening the scope that the technicians are able to work under?

[2:20 p.m.]

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: Correct. Activities that would be restricted to doctors would be diagnosis, treatment, prescribing, and surgery, but anything outside of that scope – assuming the supervising doctor is confident in that technician's capabilities – would be permissible.

C. Simpson: Thank you.

As part of the next steps to this, what would – it may be outside, so I'll ask it and we'll see if I can. Where there is a shortage of veterinarians and with labour mobility strengthened here in terms of helping to have vets move around, if you will, is there room for internationally trained

vets as well? Do you run up against that as a conflict at all?

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: So, what we've done in terms of the registration piece of it is we've moved a lot of the eligibility requirements into the bylaw making provisions.

The association has the ability to create the bylaws that dictate what the eligibility requirements are, which should make it easier for them to choose what those eligibility requirements are but still put the rigor into that. That should make it a little bit easier in terms of that mobility piece.

C. Simpson: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

So, looking at section 5, which is the composition of council…. I think that was a section that got revamped and updated a fair bit. Does the current council meet the requirements of the new section, or is there a transition period?

Chantelle Boyko: There will be a transition period.

In terms of what has been updated, the proposed act is going to require a certain number of veterinarians, and a certain number of veterinary technicians, so that's a new requirement.

The other thing that's brand new in the proposed act is the two public representatives, which we would propose is a very important piece of the council.

That being said, there are public representatives that currently, I understand, do join the council at this point, so it wouldn't be unheard of to have those representatives sitting on council.

M. MacFarlane: Just on those two public representatives, I know it's not uncommon at all for regulated professions to have one or two public representatives typically serving. I believe the appointment of those public representatives is by the minister.

Unidentified Voice: That's correct.

M. MacFarlane: I assume that's outside of the Engage PEI process. What's the process, or – no. I'll get you to explain for me, perhaps, what the process is for how those public reps would get placed on the board and if there's feedback from the veterinarian community, or completely outside the vets and vet techs.

Chantelle Boyko: So, there are a couple of different areas where there are public representatives within the act.

There are the two public representatives that sit on council, which are minister-appointed public representatives. Those would be done through public appointments, which would be Engage PEI.

Then, which I'll also point you down to section 5(5), which there are requirements that speak to where the minister would follow those requirements, in terms of who can and cannot be appointed, and those are aligning with other pieces of legislation in PEI in terms of who can and cannot be appointed as public representatives.

The other area where we see public representation is in the peer review committee under the disciplinary sections, and those are appointed by the council, and those are outside of the Engage process because those are in the association.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that.

I'm just going to jump down to another section that seems to be revamped pretty fulsomely. Section 17 is the information that's to be entered in the register. I believe the current act only requires the name of the member, but obviously, if you look at Section 17(1), there's quite a bit of additional information. Where did that come from, the need to include all of that additional information on the registry for the members? Is that placing a new burden on the register, who I assume – the registrar who is tasked with keeping that information?

Chantelle Boyko: I'll answer the first part of the question, and then maybe I'll turn it to Jessie, in terms of the burden.

[2:25 p.m.]

The amount of information comes from a growing trend across jurisdictions in terms of an accountability piece in terms of self-regulating

bodies. Just the more information that you can track and the more information you have, the better accountability that you have.

We've included information in terms of – which I think is not outside of the realm of what you would like to see in terms of the name of the business address, the qualifications of the matter, the class and the category of licence, any terms and conditions put on those licences or the membership. Not anything outside of the information that registrar should and would have at their fingertips.

It is all in line with other jurisdictions in terms of what information they are tracking. It's also, I would say, information that would be useful for the department to have access to if there is a case in terms of a disciplinary action or that sort of thing. But I will turn it to Jessie in terms of burden.

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: In terms of burden for new registrations coming in, this is already information that we collect for our own database. We do have a publicly available registry list in the new veterinarians licensed within the province, but specific contact information is not publicly available.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that.

I think one question that I might have further to that is: Is there a provisional registry? Where would we find that? For example, I know questions were asked about labour mobility. If a veterinarian was seeking to come into the province to practice, is there a provisional registry where that person would be on while the credentials of that veterinarian were being vetted?

Chantelle Boyko: Are you able to explain more, sorry, what you mean by a provisional?

M. MacFarlane: Maybe another example would be if there was an issue in renewing a registration of a member who may not be eligible for whatever reason, administrative or professional. Is there a provisional membership? I'm thinking maybe more along the lines of regulated health professions where there could be a provisional portion of the registry where a member would find himself or herself in a tentative period of time to either meet conditions if conditions were imposed. Does that fall within the framework of this legislation or regulations?

Chantelle Boyko: Yes. The registrar has the ability to put – there is the ability for the registrar to put terms, limits, and conditions on a licence or a registration if that's what you mean. Yes.

M. MacFarlane: I guess what I'm not seeing, though, would be a separate registry or sub-registry where those members would find themselves if they were subject to conditions or provisions placed on their licence. I guess it's the answer at the table that they would be included and denoted as such in the general registry.

Chantelle Boyko: Yes, under 17(1)(d).

Chair: Do you have more questions from the same section?

M. MacFarlane: Yes.

Chair: From the same section?

M. MacFarlane: No, I'm going to move to a different section.

Chair: Do you want me to give the hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point a chance, and I'll come back to you?

M. MacFarlane: Sure. Thank you, Chair.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Jessie and Chantelle, for being here; nice to see you both.

Actually, I'll start by following on from the Leader of the Third Party's questions. Am I right in thinking that any graduate who is licensed in any province in Canada is automatically licensed – that licence is transferrable to any other jurisdiction in Canada?

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: They would be eligible for licensure. We don't have – if you're licensed in Nova Scotia, for example, you're not licensed in every other province but generally speaking, if you meet the conditions, then you would meet the conditions for registration and licensure here.

P. Bevan-Baker: There's a consistent set of parameters around licensure across Canada.

[2:30 p.m.]

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: That's correct. We nationally coordinate that with the registrars of all of the provinces and everybody's pretty on board with that. Everybody is pretty good to share letters of professional standing and information as needed.

P. Bevan-Baker: There have been a lot of changes in terms of the ability of owners of businesses like vet clinics to be somebody other than the owner of the business. Maybe I'm going back to the dark ages here, I'm not sure, but in my time in a similar field, you could not be the owner of a dental office unless you were a practicing licensed dentist. Is that also true of vet clinics? Do you have to be a licensed vet in order to own?

Chantelle Boyko: Yes. If you look under section 15, that's where you'll find the rules associated with that. It's where it does say that you have to be a member, but that means that you either have to be a veterinarian or a vet tech. It does say in section 15(2) that either one could have shares in it. The vet tech could have shares in the corporation, but the majority owned has to be by the veterinarian.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. I mean, we've seen an explosion – perhaps a melodramatic word – of corporate ownership of vet clinics. I certainly wouldn't pretend to have any deep knowledge on this, but much of what I've read or seen strikes me as not necessarily good for the clients of vet clinics. We've seen some centralization of ownership and increasing costs associated with that.

Is there anything that was in the previous legislation regarding restrictions on ownership which does not appear in this new one?

Chantelle Boyko: Yes. The other thing that I will note in the proposed one is that we have given some flexibility to the council if there are some extenuating circumstances. There is some flexibility in 15(2) where it says: "…except as may be otherwise authorized by Council." So, the council does have some ability to make some exceptions.

But in terms of your question about the current rules, there was a piece in the current legislation that said that it needed to be wholly owned by a person licensed to practice clinical veterinary medicine or by the spouse of such person. That was removed, the wording about the spouse. That was as a result of discussions during consultations. The association did not want that language in there just because of the current makeup of the community and not everyone has a spouse. It seemed to be antiquated language, so that was the part that was removed.

The other part that had changed is that we wanted to bring the veterinary technicians into the mix and allow them to own a share of the corporation if they were going to be integrated into this act.

P. Bevan-Baker: Just to go back to the law as it currently stands and the one that we're operating under today, did I hear you right, Chantelle, that it has to be wholly owned by…? Can you explain how many of the offices that currently exist and operate on PEI would be outside that, or am I misinterpreting what that means?

Chantelle Boyko: No. There is also the line in there about – it says: "…except as may be otherwise authorized by Council." There is flexibility in that as well.

P. Bevan-Baker: Alright. I'm fine.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Scope of practice, section 25, is a new section. I'm assuming that that's all going to be set out in the regulations because…

Chantelle Boyko: That's right, yeah.

[2:35 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: …there's nothing in the act other than to set that out, that there is a scope. Is that going to result in any changes to the work that can be delivered by veterinarians or veterinarian technicians further to the updates over the previous legislation?

Chantelle Boyko: The hope is that the veterinarian – and I'll let Jessie sort of add as she wants – but the hope is that the veterinary technicians will be able to be better utilized in terms of what they're able to do and what they're qualified to do.

The framework that we're operating under is sort of a risk-based framework. Those procedures and acts that have an inherent higher risk will be identified in the regulations and identified as those services that are only to be

performed by veterinarians. Then there will be a subsection that will be able to be delegated to that text. Then the idea is that all other services are okay to be performed by anybody unless it is called out somewhere else or by regulations somewhere else.

The only other section that I will point you to is section 26, the risk of harm section. That basically says that, in layman's terms, if you're doing something that could seriously hurt an animal or a human, only a member should do or should be allowed to do it. It's really just an overarching framework to better the scope of the veterinarian and the vet tech as a whole.

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: And from an association perspective, we were more comfortable with the wording of diagnosis, treatment, prescribing, and surgery being limited to veterinarians and then other tasks as deemed appropriate for technicians, rather than having a prescriptive list of tasks that can and cannot be performed by technicians, because that allows the supervising veterinarian to use their discretion based on that technician's particular skillset/expertise in that particular area and lets us better utilize them on a day-to-day.

M. MacFarlane: But I don't think we see that language, though, in the bill, do we? Specific to what you just said – diagnose, prescribe…. I assume those are going in the regulations?

Chantelle Boyko: Yeah, those would be examples of the list that would be in the regulations. That language in particular is actually in the definition of practice of veterinary medicine, but those items that she's mentioning would be in the list of services that would be in the regulations.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, and am I using the wrong language when I specifically say veterinarians and veterinary technicians? Because when I look at section 25(1) and (2), we see "Authorized activities – members," and "Authorized activities – non-members." So, are we missing anybody, like veterinary assistants? I guess I'm thinking of dentists, I'm thinking of dental hygienists, I'm thinking of dental assistants – just as an example – whereas here we have veterinarians and veterinary technicians.

Is there a third tier that's identified, or should be identified, or does that all fit in the non-members?

Chantelle Boyko: Yeah, you're correct. That all fits in the non-members – section 25(3). We would put that in the regulations as well. All of those would be identified as exemptions. If we need to specify a specific service that they are able to carry out that are deemed as a higher risk, we are able to do that in regulation. Those professions that you mentioned are considered non-member because they do not need to be regulated under the act.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Thank you for that discussion.

I'm going to move to part 6 now, questions with respect to ministerial powers. That's another, I guess I'd say, significant new section. I don't think we had that in the previous section. Where did this one come from? What do we expect a situation to be where the minister would have to either issue a ministerial directive or…?

[2:40 p.m.]

What's contemplated to be addressed by this part, please?

Chantelle Boyko: I'll start with the first part of your question – where it came from. Anecdotally, working through our partners in other jurisdictions, we are aware of some circumstances in other Canadian jurisdictions that have prompted a need or a want for ministerial power provisions like the ones that we have in sections 46, 47, and 48. We felt that it was important to put the legislative framework in place to have the ability to have the powers to do this if these types of situations came into play at some point in the future.

To answer the second part of your question, the types of situations would be something like professional misconduct, fraud within the council, anything that would threaten to damage public trust in the association's ability to self-regulate, as well as damage the profession as a whole – that sort of thing.

M. MacFarlane: Does it give power to the minister to disband the council and insert – to that extent?

Chantelle Boyko: Yes. It certainly does that temporarily. It allows the minister to appoint somebody to take over all the roles and the powers of the council as an administrator. It allows an inquiry to take place and then to

determine what the next steps would be coming out of that inquiry, yeah.

M. MacFarlane: Just jumping to the offences provision – I think it's section 55 – and in particular, the penalties. When we look at the previous penalty ranges – I know, with inflation [Laughter], there have been quite a few jump. Penalties have gone from $25 to $200 for the first offence, $50 to $500 for second offence, $10,000 to $50,000 for individuals, and $50,000 to $100,000 for corporations.

How did we come to land on those new numbers?

Chantelle Boyko: Yeah, a lot of that was jurisdictional research. I will say that these ranges are still even at the bottom end of our jurisdictional comparators. We really looked at what other jurisdictions have put in place. The reality is, with a penalty of $25, it's not really deterring the misconduct that we're trying to prevent.

M. MacFarlane: Just a little point on the language. We see on the individuals "a fine of not less than $5,000," and then in the case of a corporation, "a fine of not more than $50,000." Any comment on why in one case, on the individual side we say, "not less than," and then on the corporation side, "not more"? Is that germane at all?

Chantelle Boyko: I don't have an answer to that.

M. MacFarlane: Okay.

So, we've talked a lot about the regulations, and I guess that's where we're at now, going through – section 56 is on the regulations. There's a lot contemplated here that could be made, and obviously from our discussion today, there's a lot of work that needs to be done in the regulations. Has that work commenced at all? What would be our timeframe, I suppose, for the act to get proclaimed?

Chantelle Boyko: I assumed that question would be asked. The target is fall. Obviously, we want the bill to be proclaimed, so we're looking at a fall timeline to get the regulations in place so that the bill could be proclaimed as well.

M. MacFarlane: It's contemplated that the council and the members will all be ready to adapt to the new regime by then?

Dr. Jessie MacQuarrie: I will comment from a council perspective that the department has been very generous in terms of their level of consultation and involvement with us. They really want to make sure that we're partners in bringing this forward.

[2:45 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: Just a final comment. I do think it refreshes the legislation and modernizes it. I hope it works well for everyone involved who has to work with it.

Thank you.

Chair: Okay. Seeing that I have no one else on my list.

Shall the bill carry? Carried.

Hon. B. Thompson: I move the title.

Chair: *Veterinary Profession Act*.

Shall it carry?

Hon. B. Thompson: I move the enacting clause.

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

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *Veterinary Profession Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the 17th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 17, *Charitable Lotteries Act*, Bill No. 19, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

I move that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: *Charitable Lotteries Act*, Bill No. 19, read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

I move 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.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *Charitable Lotteries Act*.

Promoter, do you have a stranger that you would like to bring onto the floor?

Hon. B. Thompson: I have two of them.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

When you're ready, please state your name and your title for Hansard.

Blair Barbour: Blair Barbour, legislative specialist with the Department of Justice and Public Safety.

Curtis Toombs: Curtis Toombs, general counsel, Financial and Consumer Services.

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Chair.

This act replaces the Lottery Schemes Order, made pursuant to the Criminal Code and intended to regulate charitable lotteries in Prince Edward Island.

Chair: Thank you for that.

Now, is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be read clause by clause, section by section, or open for general questions?

[2:50 p.m.]

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: I think we should go into a little more detail because there is a fair bit of stuff in this that could have some pretty big impacts on many of the groups in our communities and ridings. I don't know how detailed you want to go, whether you want to read it clause by clause, but I think more than just general questions. That's my opinion.

Chair: Want to go section by section?

R. Henderson: Section by section, then. Okay.

Chair: It's the will of the committee then to go section by section.

Section 1: Definitions.

In this Act,

(a) "charitable or religious objects or purposes" means objects or purposes for

(i) the relief of poverty or the consequences of poverty,

(ii) education services, including the advancement of literacy,

(iii) the advancement of religious or societal values,

(iv) or any other purpose that, in the opinion of the Registrar, is beneficial to the community;

(b) "charitable or religious organization" means an organization that performs services in furtherance of charitable or religious objects or purposes without profit or pecuniary gain to its members;

(c) "Commission" means the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission established under section 2 of the *Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission Act* R.S.P.E.I. 1988, Cap. I-11;

(d) "Department" means the Department of Justice and Public Safety;

(e) "electronic gaming equipment" means any computer hardware or software used for the sale….

Do we have questions on section 1?

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: When you get into the definitions of a charitable or religious object, I know it says "or purposes." So, we as elected officials go to a number of these things. I'm usually the first person everybody swarms on whenever there's a chance to –

[Interjections]

R. Henderson: Well, I guess so, yeah; buy a ticket or what have you. I'll use the example of a benefit. You see lots of these so-called benefits in communities on behalf of somebody who might have to go for off-Island medical services. Is that a charitable purpose?

Curtis Toombs: Currently, that's something that we would license for a lottery as something that's considered beneficial to the community. It depends on the circumstance, but it is possible that a situation you're describing could be licensed for a charitable lottery.

R. Henderson: But that's pretty general. It could be?

Curtis Toombs: It could. It would depend on what the person's application is, what the circumstances are. Just generally, it's not something that we automatically know, but it's also depending on circumstances. If someone wanted to pay for vet services for the pet, it wouldn't be.

R. Henderson: Okay, a vet service would not qualify, but I mean, when it gets into the situation of so-called medical purposes, how defined do you go on that?

I just sort of see it – it's the public's choice to decide whether they feel it's a worthy purpose for the particular benefit that is had, but we rarely know whether the government feels it's a worthy purpose. How are you going to determine that it's a worthy purpose?

Curtis Toombs: It's something I think the registrar in that scenario would be asked to deal with, similar to how it's dealt with now. But that is something that would be dependent on what other jurisdictions do in that circumstance, and is the circumstance something that's considered beneficial to the community – a purpose beneficial to the community?

R. Henderson: Wouldn't it be better to have it more specific in the legislation than leaving it up to the interpretation of ever who the registrar is to determine what's a benefit or a potential charitable purpose?

Curtis Toombs: We are limited by what the Criminal Code will permit. This is an act that's an act pursuant to the Criminal Code. The terminology – charitable/religious objects, charitable/religious purpose – that's terminology that's based on what the Criminal Code allows for licensing.

[2:55 p.m.]

There are certain items that are defined now as to what meets that, and that's what the definition we have is based on, which aligns with what's in the current Lottery Schemes Order now. So, adding additional items – while perhaps it could clarify certain instances, that's not the way it's done, generally speaking, and it's not something that we would be comfortable providing – a list – considering it wouldn't be inclusive of every scenario. You're still going to be in circumstances where the licensing body is going to be asked to determine: Well, does that meet a circumstance which is considered beneficial to community?

The other example would be sport organizations; that's not defined here explicitly, but that's an example that would fit under that clause as well,

similar to other types of scenarios I'm sure that you're probably familiar with.

R. Henderson: So, it's just if you're a sport organization and you were trying to raise money to go to a hockey tournament, that would be an eligible charitable purpose?

Curtis Toombs: It would depend on the circumstances, what you're talking about there, but in terms of a lot of sport organizations are non-profit organizations and they raise money for local community programs – that's the type of scenario I'd be referring to.

R. Henderson: Yeah. I'm not trying to be difficult. I'm just trying to get a little bit more of a sense of this because like I say, I tend to be asked for just everything that goes, and you contribute. If they're constituents, you're kind of somewhat in a tough situation.

What about when it comes to political parties? I know from my own district's perspective, we have banquets where we sell tickets for a meal or whatever and have a guest speaker in. Is that considered a charitable purpose?

Curtis Toombs: It can be, depending on the circumstances though. Explicitly raising funds for political purposes may not be, but raising funds as a political fundraiser – what you're referring to – could be, depending on circumstance.

R. Henderson: I know there are many MLAs here that are selling tickets on all kinds of different things for their own political benefits. From my understanding, there are issues around that to a certain degree on what you can do and what you can't, from a raising…. But is there are any clarity in these definitions that define, from a political purpose's perspective, what's an eligible expense or not eligible?

Curtis Toombs: It doesn't specify that in the definitions, no.

R. Henderson: So therein lies – I kind of look at the whole problem that I sort of see with this: it's pretty up to the interpretation of the registrar. I would like to see any particular legislation provide a bit more clarity for all of us in here, whether you're the purchaser of the ticket or whether you're not.

Anyway, I have more questions later, but I just thought I'd start it off that way.

Chair: Shall this section carry?

Oh, sorry. The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: No problem, Chair.

Hi, Blair. Hi, Curtis. Nice to see you.

This is a new act, and I'm wondering what changes it creates, or are we really just legislating existing policy?

Curtis Toombs: More the latter, but there are changes in it in the sense that a lot of, now, I guess the policy, if you will, is split between terms and conditions that are in application – when you apply for a lottery licence, the application has terms and conditions attached to it – and then the Lottery Schemes Order has the provisions that it has. Then, there's essentially what policy the minister or registrar now would have in terms of setting additional terms and conditions.

The act is attempting to take all of that and put it more into one spot, in combination with the regulations that would follow, in order to clarify what the rules/regulations are that organizations would be expected to follow. But it is largely taking the existing policy and codifying it into one modernized statute.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. I really appreciate that explanation, Curtis. That consolidation – is that bringing us more in line legislatively with the other provinces?

Curtis Toombs: Yes, we are the only province now that's regulating through what's called a Lottery Schemes Order, but it's an Executive Council order, which is what all provinces had at one point in time. This will bring us into alignment, as all others now legislate through some sort of legislation, whether it's a comprehensive act with all gaming or a specific charitable lotteries act, as this one is.

[3:00 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I know we're going section by section, so I don't want to jump ahead, but I see in section 5 it is, I believe, where the location of the licensee of the particular lottery doesn't have to be on Prince Edward Island anymore.

This is tying into the current section because of the definition of lottery ticket, which is a physical ticket or now an electronic ticket that you could buy on your computer, for example. Does the ticket that you buy have to be bought on Prince Edward Island for this legislation to have effect? And a lottery ticket that you buy electronically for a lottery that exists in another province – does our legislation cover that?

Curtis Toombs: Currently, there's no extraprovincial lottery licensing that would exist in terms of we're not authorized to provide that type of lottery. The act does contemplate the possibility of what's called interprovincial lotteries, generally what they're referred to. They are now provided for in other provinces, but it's separate from your PEI licence, I would call it, that you would get now. There's a separate process that would have to happen for that.

That would be the only scenario where a ticket could be out of province. All others would have to be in PEI. It would only be in an interprovincial lottery where it's authorized based on what the act is requiring, which has a separate set of requirements, including governments agreeing amongst themselves to do that.

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, related to this, it strikes me that there might be an added administrative burden that currently does not exist. Maybe that's not the case, but could you speak a little bit to that, Curtis or Blair, and if that is the case, how are we going to mitigate that?

Curtis Toombs: Actually, the administrative burden will largely be the same in terms of what we're doing, but we have added resourcing for this prior to now, going back about a year, in terms of having a staff person dealing with the charitable lottery licensing specifically. So, we don't anticipate any additional burden in terms of what we're doing now.

Our intention is to actually, at some point, simplify it by having more of the system upgraded to have more capability to do more with less in terms of what we're doing internally, in terms of how the lottery licences are managed by that individual.

P. Bevan-Baker: This is just for the record. I'm pretty sure that this is the case, but we're not talking here at all about all of the new online sports betting platforms that exist. This is purely for lotteries. Is that correct?

Curtis Toombs: That's correct. That would reference for-profit gaming – what I refer to it as – which would be provincially managed lotteries. This is only charitable lottery licensing.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: Thank you, Chair.

Just a quick question. Do the Chase the Ace lotteries or fundraisers fall under this?

Curtis Toombs: Yes, they do.

Hon. K. Dollar: How would this negatively or positively affect them?

Curtis Toombs: Well, current licensees will not really notice any change because it transitions automatically and the same obligations would essentially exist for those as they do now.

Going forward, I can't think of negative implications for Chase the Ace. Reporting obligations now for Chase the Ace will be the same going forward as what we're doing. There's a weekly reporting that we deal with, with Chase the Ace, and we're not contemplating changes to that.

Hon. K. Dollar: North Shore Chase the Ace is quite active in my area. One concern that they brought to my attention was the fact that once they start, they can't take a break. There are 52 cards in the deck and sometimes – they've started taking July and August off, but they've been told that they can't do that. Is there a simple way to address that so they can stop in June and pick up again in September if the ace hasn't been drawn?

[3:05 p.m.]

Curtis Toombs: I'm not sure what the specifics are of that individual circumstance, but I can say that there would more flexibility under the act going forward than there would be potentially now for that, given just the regulatory structure. But the Chase the Ace lottery involves – I'm not sure if that's weekly or if that's every two weeks –

[Interjection]

Curtis Toombs: They do it weekly? So, it would depend on what it is they're proposing to do, in terms of what we could do for purposes of accommodating changes.

I'm not sure what the timeline is, but you say summer they're intending to take off from the lottery?

Hon. K. Dollar: My understanding – every time they start a new draw, they have to apply for a new licence. That licence is good until the ace is drawn.

Last year, the ace wasn't drawn come June. It's a lot of stress on volunteers, so they paused for July and August, and then they resumed in September, but I think they were told that they can't do that because they have to continue until the ace is drawn.

I'm hoping that there would be a little bit of flexibility maybe with the registrar, that they can take July and August off through their licence, so we don't burn out our volunteers. They do incredible work for Islanders, and they're doing this on a volunteer basis.

Curtis Toombs: I can't speak to that exactly, what could or couldn't happen in that scenario, but it's certainly something that we could take back with the registrar to discuss.

Chair: Shall section 1 carry? Carried.

Section 2: Designation of Registrar.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 4: Prohibition.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: So, it says no personal organization shall conduct –

Chair: Sorry. Can I just pause you there for a second?

I missed Section 3: Delegation by Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Sorry.

Section 4: Prohibition.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: So, this goes back to the issue of "No person or organization shall conduct or manage a lottery scheme unless the person or organization is authorized to do so under a licence."

So, for these community benefits, they all have to get a licence, is that what we're saying? From this point forward? And they would be illegal if they are not?

Curtis Toombs: That's correct. It is illegal now if they're not. It's a Criminal Code offence. What this is doing is it's making it also a regulatory offence under this legislation so that the registrar in that scenario or the police, I guess, could lay a charge in that scenario as opposed to laying a Criminal Code charge, but it's just clarifying that in addition to a Criminal Code offence, it's also a regulatory offence under PEI legislation.

R. Henderson: That provides a bit more clarification. Thanks.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 5: Application for licence – charitable or religious organization.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: The previous section has established the need to apply and become authorized. Now, this section says that the organization "may" apply in the form required. Just a couple of questions there – maybe first: "May apply," or should it be "shall apply"? I assume that it's mandatory.

Blair Barbour: It's mandatory to have a licence to conduct the lottery, but it's discretionary on whether the organization wishes to apply for a licence. So, essentially, if you choose not to apply for a licence, you don't have to; it's just that there's a consequence if you operate a scheme without a licence, if that makes sense.

M. MacFarlane: Can I ask what the consequence is?

Blair Barbour: It's in the penalty provision.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. We'll get there, I guess.

Blair Barbour: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. It's interesting, though, that that's the way it's phrased, given that there are consequences. I would have thought to have seen "shall" there, but I guess whoever's applying or not, the organization can choose to comply with the law or not at their discretion.

I don't know if there's anything more you can say on that. I think you've answered it, Blair.

[3:10 p.m.]

Blair Barbour: I think maybe I can clarify. The offence is tied to section 4, which is the prohibition. Section 5 is just a procedural provision that says you may put in an application for your licence.

M. MacFarlane: And then the second part of this clause is "in the form required by the Registrar." So, that form – is it in the regulations or is it done yet?

Blair Barbour: No, we don't have a form prescribed. In many of our acts now, we don't prescribe the form; it's a form set by the regulator, or in this case, the registrar. That's similar to what we do under our business corporations laws and various other licensing statutes that we administer in the department.

In terms of what the application form is, there is a current application for lottery licence. As of this second, that will still be the form, but it will be updated at some point in time. But it isn't intended to be prescribed in the regulations. The Lottery Schemes Order now uses the word "prescribed," but it's not a form that's actually prescribed in any regulation either.

M. MacFarlane: So, just to maybe wrap up on this section: it's discretionary for the organization to apply to the registrar, but it's mandatory to use the form required by the registrar.

Curtis Toombs: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: Okay.

This may have been already addressed when I was out, and I know it's in the definitions section, but the title of this section is "Application for licence – charitable or religious organization." I'm really guessing it probably was addressed when I was out, but is there a gap there that's not caught by either a charitable or religious organization, such as a non-profit that's either not religious or doesn't have charitable status?

Curtis Toombs: Just going back to the definition? Is that what you're referring to?

In terms of that terminology, it is terminology that we are forced to align with what the Criminal Code provides, and that's straight out of the Criminal Code. So, "charitable or religious purposes," "charitable or religious organization," and then the definition of what those are, but it's essentially a charitable organization or a religious organization, but they each have to have charitable or religious purposes in terms of what it is they're doing.

M. MacFarlane: That answers that.

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

R. Henderson: Thank you, Chair.

On No. 5, to get back to a "charitable or religious organization," I would have assumed all religious organizations are registered as a charity. I think of churches. Are there any circumstances where a particular religious organization – and how do you define what's religious?

Curtis Toombs: Again, there is an extensive, exhaustive definition of it here, but that terminology is based on Criminal Code terminology which is not new terminology – it's been in the Criminal Code for quite a while – in terms of what it means, but from the perspective of whether they would be charitable or non-profit organizations, you're probably right. I'm just not sure 100 percent that they all would automatically be.

R. Henderson: Yeah, I get it that we're…. I'll give the plug: the Freeland Presbyterian Church is having a lobster takeout coming up next month. They would be, we would assume, a religious organization, but there are probably many other – I'll say maybe that have sort of cult-like kind of definitions. How do we prevent an organization that isn't what we'd normally deem to be a church or religious organization? I just think that's kind of a fundamental question that – there needs to be a bit more clarity.

You're saying you have to refer to the Criminal Code of what's a religious organization?

Curtis Toombs: No. I'm saying the organization would need to, as part of its application, set out what its objects and purposes are, and then provide, I guess, evidence in that scenario that they are a charitable or religious organization – that their purposes meet that type of definition.

R. Henderson: Right. So, if I go back to that lobster takeout, they would not have to apply to do a lobster takeout even though they make money on that, but if they decided to sell a ticket at that for, say, a basket of cookies or things of that nature, then they'd have to have a licence. Correct?

Blair Barbour: Right. If you're selling tickets for a chance to win something, that is what we're talking about.

R. Henderson: At that point, okay.

Thanks, Chair.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

[3:15 p.m.]

I'm going to sort of circle back to the question I started to ask in the definition section. It was around a location outside of Prince Edward Island, and section 5(4) addresses this: "Where the applicant is a charitable or religious organization located outside the province…."

I'm wondering, firstly, whether that is actually allowed currently.

Curtis Toombs: No, it's not.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, alright.

5(4)(b)(i) talks about: "The net proceeds from lottery ticket sales originating in the province will be used for charitable or religious objects or purposes in the province." I assume what they're talking about there is this is a lottery that's outside PEI but tickets that are sold here – the net proceeds from that, the benefits, will be used here on Prince Edward Island. Is that what that's saying?

Curtis Toombs: That's correct.

P. Bevan-Baker: I don't watch a huge amount of sports, Chair, but I do watch the Blue Jays. They do a lottery through the Jays Care Foundation. Only certain provinces are eligible to buy tickets for that. I don't know – Ontario is one for sure, Alberta, and I think maybe Nova Scotia. I can't remember. Would this allow Islanders to buy tickets in that Jays Care lottery?

Curtis Toombs: Yeah, the licensing in that scenario is – that's the type of lottery that would be potentially eligible for that. I think in that lottery, if my memory serves me right, Nova Scotia and Ontario, New Brunswick I think is now involved, as well as Alberta…. For that type of licence to be issued in those provinces – and I think that one originates in Ontario – each of the other provinces have to do what this clause is providing.

So yes, that would be a type of lottery that could be eligible for a licence in that scenario.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, interesting. And is that something that our province is considering?

Curtis Toombs: As part of that? If that organization wishes to apply for a licence here, it's something we would consider, yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, the process for that, Curtis, would be that they would approach us, or would PEI approach the Jays Care Foundation to be part of the…?

Curtis Toombs: I'm not sure I can really answer that, but I would think it would be the organization approaching here. But if the province wished to approach an organization, I guess there would be nothing that would stop that either.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Maybe it would depend on the specifics of the lottery outside the province, but would there be a fee involved typically for a province like PEI to be a participant in a lottery like that?

Curtis Toombs: Not that I'm aware of.

P. Bevan-Baker: Well, that's interesting because I don't know how we've spent $10 million on the NHL deal and we don't really hear or see an awful lot about that, but this is something they announce several times during every Blue Jays game – that you could buy

tickets in Ontario and Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Now, perhaps, we'll be able to add PEI. I mean, I'm just surprised that there was no word about this. I'm not disappointed, I'm not upset. I'm wondering whether that was one of the motivations, perhaps the primary motivation for this act.

Curtis Toombs: I can't really speak to that. The act itself, from our perspective, was part of a recommendation in the responsible gaming strategy in 2023, I think. That's where we were working on the act itself, based on that. In that strategy, there was a commitment for the department to bring forward an updated act that is to be reflecting what the other provinces do. I think the timeline was two to four years, so that's kind of what our basis was for it.

But the interprovincial lotteries item that you're referencing, that's a relatively new area. Our reason for including it was because New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are what we were basing ours primarily off. They each included this in their legislation within the last couple of years, and I believe the Jays Care one is probably the reason why they did.

But in terms of our specific clause, we've had a number of people inquire about it for other types of lotteries, organizations in Atlantic Canada, but certainly that one would also, I'm sure, be one of the ones that would potentially look for that type of licensing.

[3:20 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm good. Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Just so I'm correct, Chair, we're asking questions on all the subsections under section 5, right?

Chair: That is correct.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Maybe just to go back to the discussion with O'Leary-Inverness so I'm clear. Having a lobster supper, selling tickets for that – don't need anything to do with this if that's correct. Just selling the tickets doesn't meet within the requirements to get a licence for something like that.

But if I was to have a 50-50 or something at that supper…. At what point does the licence requirement kick in, if the event itself doesn't need it but I'm maybe holding a 50-50 or some sort of raffle or draw?

Curtis Toombs: As you said, if you're selling the ticket for a chance to win a prize, generally speaking, is when you're into what a raffle would be defined as.

M. MacFarlane: Thanks for the clarification, Curtis.

Then the subsection (3) goes into some detail about what needs to be provided with the application. Again, I'm sorry if I missed this when I was out, but I assume all of this had some consultation with stakeholders. Is this consistent with what other provinces are requiring? Was there any feedback from consultation with respect to all of those subsections (3)(a) down through (e)?

Curtis Toombs: Yes, that was based on consultation, but it's essentially putting into the act what it is we expect now and what we require now. We did have feedback from organizations before about could we spell out what they have to provide when they apply, as opposed to applying and then having us contact them with what we would consider incomplete.

M. MacFarlane: Subsection (4) makes reference to subsection 207 – not sure if that's an (l), (f), (i), (f) – of the Criminal Code. What's that make reference to?

Curtis Toombs: That's the provision in the code – section 207(1) – where charitable lottery licensing is authorized, and (b) is the clause that references non-profit or charitable lottery licensing; (f) is the clause that would authorize interprovincial licensing, which we were referencing or I think chatting about a moment ago. That's a separate clause, but it's the clause that's referenced explicitly in that context.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. So, subsection (a) under subsection (4) says that it's required to provide "a copy of an agreement between Government and the government of the other province where the lottery scheme was first authorized…." So, this would be a circumstance where there would actually be agreements with government and that the applicant here would have to somehow get a hold of an agreement with, I assume, a provincial government?

Curtis Toombs: Right. Under that provision in the Criminal Code, you can't sell or conduct an interprovincial lottery without the provinces agreeing. What that's contemplating is that if an applicant out of province was going to apply for a licence, they can only do so if there was first an agreement between the provinces to do that or to permit that. The registrar, in order to grant a licence, could only do that after the governments have agreed to do so or permit that type of operation, again for a non-profit organization to conduct an interprovincial lottery.

M. MacFarlane: Is there anything new here, Curtis? Is this sort of enshrining a process that's already been cobbled together without the specificity of the legislation or are we creating quite a few new requirements?

Curtis Toombs: For this specific clause?

M. MacFarlane: Yeah.

Curtis Toombs: This is new. We don't currently license that type of activity.

M. MacFarlane: So, this enables then something new to be pursued.

Curtis Toombs: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: Can I ask that question, then, with respect to the previous subsection (3)? Are we enabling something for our Islanders that's not currently permitted?

[3:25 p.m.]

Curtis Toombs: The previous clause relates to the existing licensing requirements and process. Now, I think there's reference there to standards relating to electronic systems – electronic raffle systems, generally speaking. That is something, again, that is not spelled out in the Lottery Schemes Order, but we would need that type of requirement now as well. But you don't see that anywhere in the Lottery Schemes Order.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. I'm just going to ask you your thoughts on subsection 5(2), where it says: "The board of a fair or exhibition may apply to the Registrar…."

Do you have any concerns with that language as to whether maybe a fair or an exhibition isn't governed by a board? Maybe it's a committee; maybe it's a loosely knit group of people.

Curtis Toombs: I don't have concerns, but the language comes from the Criminal Code clause, which is 207(1)(c), and what that clause relates to – examples in PEI would be the Summerside Lobster Carnival, the Exhibition in Charlottetown, Old Home Week…. That's the type of fair and exhibition, and it requires the registrar to designate that they can – that they're eligible, I guess, in that context – and then they apply for the licence.

But they're a specific type of organization that isn't necessarily the same as the charitable or religious organization.

M. MacFarlane: So, you don't feel, then, that that choice of language – I know you say it's tied to the Criminal Code language, but for the purposes of this provincial legislation, you don't feel that we're excluding any fairs or exhibitions? I note those are not defined terms either. Neither fair nor exhibition is defined in this act. Not trying to put too fine a point on it – I know the minister is starting to grimace – but I just want to make sure that we're not excluding anybody, because the words do matter.

Curtis Toombs: No. Again, that terminology – I say it comes from the Criminal Code because the term "fair or exhibition" is in the Criminal Code clause, and it's "an event where agricultural or fishing products are presented or where activities relating to agriculture or fishing take place." So, we are limited to staying within the parameters of the Criminal Code as to what you can expand onto.

An organization that's charitable or religious, if it was a fair, would be eligible to apply under that category, but the category that you're referring to – and this is in the current Lottery Schemes Order now – has to fall within that parameter in the Criminal Code. That's why it has a separate clause; it's just to clarify that it's a different type of applicant.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Just to kind of expand a little bit more on this whole concept of if – I'm getting some clarity here. I'll go back to that Freeland Presbyterian Church, on May 9th, their lobster takeout.

Hon. B. Thompson: I think you're selling tickets.

[Laughter]

R. Henderson: Well, you know, got to help them out.

So, if they decide to sell a ticket on a basket of something, that means they have to….

What about this option? Say they charge a higher price for the ticket – you go in and you get a ticket for a door prize and there are some pretty significant door prizes. You don't pay for the door prize ticket or to be part of that draw at all. Would that Freeland Presbyterian Church lobster supper have to have a licence if they were doing a door prize, because there's a draw for that but they're not paying for it?

Curtis Toombs: Depends on the circumstance, I guess, but if you're selling tickets with a chance to win a prize and it falls under that type of raffle scenario, generally you do need a licence.

R. Henderson: So, the key in this: they are not selling for a door prize. So, that wouldn't be….

Curtis Toombs: A door prize at an event generally isn't considered a licensed…

R. Henderson: Yeah, but I certainly can see an issue there where an organization – I would just use my own O'Leary-Inverness Liberal association. If we were to go buy some decent door prizes, sell a higher amount, have a draw for that, that would enhance our sales….

P. Bevan-Baker: Still not coming.

R. Henderson: Yeah, well, there would be a limited turnout, I'm sure, for that.

But that would be a way around it?

Curtis Toombs: That's a good example. And part of the requirements of having that –

Hon. B. Thompson: We'll send authorities to check on it.

[Laughter]

Curtis Toombs: The offence provision is intended to capture scenarios like that, which doesn't exist now, so that if someone complains about that scenario, there's a potential offence provision, as opposed to now it's a Criminal Code offence where it's probably not going to meet the Criminal Code investigation type criteria.

[3:30 p.m.]

R. Henderson: I think it boils down to just try not to be too obvious to try to abuse it, and be reasonable.

Anyway, my next question is on subsection (5): "An application for a licence or designation shall be accompanied by the prescribed fee."

How is the prescribed fee determined?

Curtis Toombs: That would be set in the regulations.

R. Henderson: Okay, and any idea of what that would be now? Is it based on a percentage of sales, or is it based on just a flat fee per event, or a ticket draw that you're doing?

Curtis Toombs: So, our current fees are – I believe there's no fee if it's under $5,000 for a raffle, and $25, over. We're not contemplating fee changes to that. That, again, will be set in the regulation, but there's been no proposed fee change.

R. Henderson: So, if I was doing an event, they're selling a ticket that's under $5,000, there'd be no fee. I'd just have to get the licence. That would be it.

Curtis Toombs: That's correct.

R. Henderson: Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Section 6: Issuance of licence to charitable or religious organization.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

So, subsection (3) says that the registrar may impose a term or condition on a licence at any time. Are those set out or prescribed some place as to what those could look like, or is it case by case and at the discretion of the registrar?

Curtis Toombs: The latter. It's similar to what's in our Lottery Schemes Order, and it's

what is in other provinces' legislation for this. It's authorizing the registrar to set terms and conditions specific to a case-by-case matter if needed. There aren't prescribed conditions that the registrar would set, but there will be prescribed conditions in general in regulations.

M. MacFarlane: I'm trying to envision in the regulations what that might look like. If I heard you correct, Curtis, there could be an enumerated list of prescribed conditions, but that might end with something like "such other conditions as determined at the discretion of the registrar." Is that it? I heard maybe in your answer that there were going to be prescribed conditions, but that they could be case-by-case specific, as determined from time to time.

Curtis Toombs: There probably won't be language that says "such other clause as" – because that clause in the act would be that authority, but it's possible there'd be conditions set for different types of lotteries – your raffles, your bingo, or other types. That's why you would separate it out in regulations. Each type of lottery would have conditions applicable, as opposed to just general set by the registrar.

M. MacFarlane: I guess what I'm trying to drive at and what I'm wondering about is whether an applicant would have a sense of what terms or conditions could be imposed to get a bit of a sense as to the terms under which they might operate, or if they could be somewhat predictable – to make it somewhat predictable, as opposed to something out of left field.

Curtis Toombs: As a general statement, I'd say the conditions will be what's set in the regulations. The authority is there; it's just in case there's a scenario where the registrar needed to set additional terms and conditions based on a unique circumstance. That would authorize doing so, but generally speaking, we don't set additional terms and conditions now, so we wouldn't plan to do so unless there was a specific circumstance that warranted it.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Section 7: Refusal to issue license.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Are there appeal options in case of a denied application?

Curtis Toombs: Yes, the act provides an appeal to IRAC, similar to a number of other statutes that we do the licensing for.

M. MacFarlane: That's coming up later, I assume.

Curtis Toombs: Yeah, the appeal clause is under section 24.

M. MacFarlane: I see subsection 7(2)(b) says: "the right of the applicant to appeal the refusal in accordance with…."

Okay. Thank you, Chair. That's all I had.

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

[3:35 p.m.]

R. Henderson: So, this appeal process – is that a particular board or staff of people within the department? Who makes up this appeal board? Not necessarily the names. I'm just saying, is the appeal board appointed or created?

Curtis Toombs: No, the appeal body would be the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission.

R. Henderson: Oh, IRAC. Oh, wow. Oh, gee.

Chair: Yeah, and I think that's the section later, right?

Curtis Toombs: That's correct.

Chair: So, we'll wait until we get to that section, member, to ask that question? Thank you.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 8: Suspension or cancellation of licence.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Same question: Is there an appeal right under section 8, suspension or cancellation of a licence?

Curtis Toombs: Yeah. Section 24 has appeal rights for the refusal, suspension, cancellation, or I believe if there are other orders that the registrar issues. Any decision of the registrar that has an order has an appeal right in the same clause – section 24.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 9: Compliance required.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 10: Electronic gaming equipment.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Sorry, I'm going to make a quick check here, Chair, before I ask. Okay, so "electronic gaming equipment" is a defined term.

Maybe this was discussed when I was out, but is there an understanding of what is authorized for electronic gaming equipment and what's not? What's been approved? I guess the word is "approved."

Curtis Toombs: That will be defined further in regulations, but generally speaking, it's in reference to electronic raffle systems, where online suppliers typically provide software systems for conducting raffles online for selling tickets and conducting your draw online.

M. MacFarlane: That's fine, Chair. Thank you.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Just to kind of clarify a little bit about the electronic gaming equipment. I have been at events where I see they pull out something online and they hit a button to spin, and it comes up with a number, and that's the ticket, winning number, or whatever. That's not prohibited? They can still use that kind of a device to determine…? Really, I suppose it's not much different than a whole bunch of balls in a dish or pulling something out of a hat, but that's an electronic device that they could use to determine a winner?

Curtis Toombs: That's correct. There are random number generators. There are little handheld devices for selling tickets. Those fall under electronic equipment. Generally speaking, there are requirements that exist across Canada to make sure you're using software or a device that has a sufficient certification based on established, usually international, standards. It's to ensure that you're using one that's fair, so to speak, to ensure your randomness – that it's providing that type of same randomness as if you were picking the number out of a jar.

R. Henderson: Are there certain certifications that you look for? What would that be? Once again, if I was pulling that out, I wouldn't have a clue one way or the other. Is there a certain one that the Province would recommend or Canada recommends that is the right program or device to do those random selections?

Curtis Toombs: It's, generally speaking, devices that have a certification from test laboratories, and they use international standards for that. Each province typically has provision where you're referencing standards or you're adopting standards. The act does provide for that – what we would do as part of regulations.

R. Henderson: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 11: Prohibition – sale outside province.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Just a quick question on why this clause is included here because the reference, as I've already asked in a previous question and Curtis, you answered, subsection 207(1) of the Criminal Code – if we go back to subsection 5(4), it makes it pretty explicit, I think, what's required to be able to participate in that realm. So, why do we say that it's not authorized unless those are – is it redundant to have that in there?

Curtis Toombs: Sorry, which clause is it you're specifically referencing?

[3:40 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: I'm looking at subsection 11(2).

Curtis Toombs: Right. That's referencing – the exception in (2) is where the province is entering into an agreement with another province, tickets may be sold outside. Sub (1) is saying you can't sell a lottery ticket outside of PEI. Sub (2) is saying if you are one of those interprovincial licensed bodies that contemplates that you would be selling a ticket outside of PEI to someone in PEI, it's just providing for that scenario so that you're not offside (1) if you have that licence.

M. MacFarlane: But I guess that's referenced already in subsection 5(4) of the bill we're looking at. It makes it pretty clear that to operate

within subsection 207(1) of the Criminal Code, you have to meet those requirements. I thought it was already addressed in subsection 5(4).

Curtis Toombs: It could be. It's just, in the drafting of it, we felt it was necessary to clarify explicitly that you're not offside sub (1) if you are in that scenario.

M. MacFarlane: I get it. I think we're saying the same thing. I think it's a clarification.

That's all I have on section 11.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 12: Approval of rules by Registrar.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Are there defined rules of play already approved by the registrar? Is this case by case? Again, I'm trying to get to the predictability of what applicants are going to be looked at. So, for every game, the rules of play have to be approved by the registrar in advance before the licence can be issued?

Curtis Toombs: Yes, we require applicants to submit the rules with their application now. We do have, for reference, template rules that we provide if organizations are looking for a template, but we do require that the rules be submitted now. We consider that as part of a requirement for the approval process.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, so you do have the ability to provide those out, in which case they'd be approved from the get-go because they're already from within the department.

Okay. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 13: Information to be provided to player.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Just as an example, when I go to the rink – just about every rink, when you walk in the door, there's at least a 50-50 draw. You have no idea what the total amount or the value of the prize is going to be – I guess you're told….

Can you clarify that? Is 50-50 just enough – you get 50-50 of the take – or would they have to project what they think the prize is? And would that hockey team or rink have to have a licence?

Curtis Toombs: Generally, they would need a licence. In terms of the prize structure or payout, that is something that needs to be set out in the application; that's part of the licensing process. This is clarifying that, on request, licensees have to be able to provide a person – or in that case, a purchaser – with that information. So, the information you're referencing – the licensee is expected to be able to provide that if asked.

R. Henderson: But just saying it's 50-50 is enough? Because here is one of the issues I would sort of see: How would they know if they're going to be under $5,000 or over? I mean, if you take the hockey game tonight in Summerside, that would probably be well over $5,000.

T. DesRoches: Guaranteed $10,000.

R. Henderson: [Laughter] Guaranteed $10,000.

[Laughter]

R. Henderson: I'm just giving you a promotion there, too.

Curtis Toombs: In that example, that would probably be an ongoing series licence. That would be a separate – even if it's under or if it's over $5,000, it would be an ongoing series, so there would be a reporting obligation, and at the end of that, there would be an obligation to then account for it.

R. Henderson: I don't know if anybody knows – the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke – Bobby Noye. That man can sell tickets. He's almost an asset for many 50-50 organizations to make sure they go get him to sell the tickets. They probably give him some lunch or something; I'm not sure what.

[3:45 p.m.]

But it just seems like it's very difficult to see how those – I'm assuming that none of these places are licensed at the moment. So, the team has to go get the licence, or is it the rink that gets the licence? How are you going to determine – what would be your advice to a rink or a team? Should they go automatically and get a licence for a season? Do they get it for a month? Can you give me some explanation on what you would suggest on that?

Curtis Toombs: A lot of applicants are licensed, even though they may not all be, but generally speaking, an organization like a hockey association – it would be up to the association. We would work with them to see what would work best. One example would be the association would get a licence and just have the teams under that licence, which is probably what we would suggest in circumstances – would probably do so. Depending on the situation, it's something we'd work through with them to see what would work best, but licensing would be the obligation to adhere to.

R. Henderson: Thank you for that. I guess that helps explain it a little bit better. I would encourage you to work with some of these organizations because it's going to be a tough one to – it will be a surprise to a lot of organizations out there that they really should be licensed, no matter what they're selling, for anything that's a draw.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 14: Prohibition – advancing credit, cashing cheques.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: That section prohibits advancing credit to any player. Are there scenarios where credit is advanced, I'm thinking whether through a machine or any other…?

Curtis Toombs: Not that I'm aware of.

M. MacFarlane: That's all I have. Thank you.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 15: Prizes shall be awarded.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Subsection (2) of section 15 says: "A licensee shall not offer in a lottery scheme a prize the amount or value of which exceeds the amount or value of prizes prescribed by the regulations."

Is that a moving number and that's why it's in the regulations, so that number can be moved? And how much is contemplated as the maximum amount at this time?

Curtis Toombs: Currently, bingo has specific maximums. That's what that's contemplating – that that same number now would be prescribed in the regulations, for what a bingo can offer in terms of prizes.

M. MacFarlane: So, I hear bingo is prescribed?

Curtis Toombs: Bingo has specific prize value maximums that they can offer under the Lottery Schemes Order now.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, but this is moving now to cover all things, not just bingo?

Curtis Toombs: It's possible there would be prize maximums for others as well. That's what that contemplates, yes.

M. MacFarlane: Sorry, I know we're talking about bingo, but the way this is worded is that this applies to every lottery scheme. I guess I'm wondering what the top end of it would be for – I mean, Chase the Ace gets pretty high. We've seen some pretty big numbers in Rustico. Is there a concern that that's bumping up against that number? I guess I don't know what the number is.

Curtis Toombs: There isn't a number now. It just provides for the possibility, but there isn't anything that we're contemplating for a cap on that. It's really that bingo right now has a maximum, so it's to ensure that that is still what would be provided for.

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, I got you.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Section 16: Prohibited prizes.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Got to hear this one, Chair.

I see that a prohibited prize is a live animal. Probably many in this House were aware that the local racetrack in my district, C.F. Willis Racetrack, had a draw of 52 cards. You had to buy a card, of which I bought a card, and wound up winning a horse. Now, just so everybody knows, I went through the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, and it is permissible. Now, how much money did I really gain on that $50?

[Laughter]

R. Henderson: I think the member from Land and Environment is quite aware of – yeah, there's not a big remuneration of value in winning that.

[3:50 p.m.]

But I guess my point is…. You're saying that they could not – can never, this point forward – be able to offer a racehorse as a prize, but here's my point on this: if you're running a racing industry and you're trying to promote new people to enter and be horse owners…. For me, I said, well, maybe I'll try this and see how it goes for a couple of years. I didn't make any money by the end. It was fun and an experience and I've done it.

But that's not permissible now anymore, you're saying?

Curtis Toombs: Yeah, the clause is making clear that's not something that would be permissible. I'm not sure it would be approved if it was applied even if we didn't have that, but that aligns with what other provinces have for their requirements for the purpose of a lottery licence.

R. Henderson: I would argue in this case, what harm has happened by having a lottery? I mean, the racetrack got a new horse owner. It raised money to provide upgrades to its track. It was kind of an easy fundraiser for them. I just question why that would be considered a harm.

Curtis Toombs: Just generally speaking, for disclosing in your application and for purposes of regulation, when you're talking about live animals, it opens up a whole host of other areas. Pets, other types of animals – it's just not something that's considered a prize that non-profit charitable lottery licensing would provide for.

R. Henderson: I sort of see where you're coming from in that, but I also sort of see it from the other side of the equation for a reasonable opportunity to enter an industry, and it might even be a pet that a person – say an expensive dog or whatever. You could have a draw for that for, say, a kennel club or the Cat Action Team, I can think of in my district. It gets another member and….

So, I'm just wondering, instead of having a blanket statement – a live animal – can we say something like any animal that's not deemed to be of benefit to the organization and its causes that it tries to achieve, or…?

Curtis Toombs: It's not something that I would recommend, from a policy perspective. I just think that's the policy decision that we had come to. Aligning with other provinces is what we wanted to do there.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thanks, Chair.

I'll just jump in on the same line, too.

Other jurisdictions – is every jurisdiction on the same page with this, with not allowing livestock?

Curtis Toombs: Generally, yes. That exact clause was mirrored off of New Brunswick, and numerous other provinces have the same clause.

Hon. H. Perry: Was there any consultation with any of the associations or groups with livestock on Prince Edward Island prior to making this decision?

Curtis Toombs: We did consultations in conjunction with the bill. I can't speak to specifics with livestock organizations.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, because I know many associations, whether it's the PEI Poultry Association or the Maritime or PEI rabbit association, where they often auction off pairs or trios of stock from really reputable breeders. A lot of times, the funding goes to student bursaries for individuals who are involved in agriculture, let's say.

So, now you're saying that that will not apply to them, to fundraise either for that or to keep these events going?

Curtis Toombs: I can't speak to whether those are lottery licensed matters now, but that clause would prevent operating a charitable lottery with a live animal.

Hon. H. Perry: Thanks, Chair. That answers my question.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

My question is with respect to liquor, which is prohibited specifically as a prize offering, along with live animals and cannabis.

We often will see on social media and in the public gift baskets that often will include –

[Interjections]

M. MacFarlane: A liquor basket, yeah. There's a name for it. Oftentimes, those are put together to support either, like, a minor…. Well, as I say it out loud, perhaps minor hockey may not be the best thing for a liquor basket, but oftentimes, it's for maybe support of a family in need in the community, someone going through medical – and it's an attractive prize basket to some.

So, this is going to prohibit that from being a potential thing for a prize offering?

Curtis Toombs: Yes.

[3:55 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: And the policy perspective behind that is that it's not an appropriate prize to award, or is it because, like cannabis, it's regulated within the province as a taxable supplied item? Where does it come from? Is it just the principle of the thing, the nature of the subject matter?

Curtis Toombs: Generally, yes, and it is something you see across Canada.

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

R. Henderson: So, you haven't really consulted with some of the organizations – the matinee tracks would be an example – but I feel this is something that probably should have some consultation and get some support.

Now, minister, you're involved with – I know not with matinee tracks, but with agriculture. I guess the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke had mentioned even there are situations where sometimes semen or embryo draws could be had. Somebody donates a particular item to a cause or whatever, and it raises money for their organizations. I'm assuming that would be considered legal, but not an animal that's alive.

Curtis Toombs: Donations are different from a charitable lottery draw prize.

R. Henderson: Yeah, I know, but if somebody donates the item – no different than the horse. If I use the example of the horse I won, it was donated, and it even could be purchased in conjunction with all of the members and then they turn around and sell that, so they have a draw on that to raise money.

I would like to see the minister take this bill and go back and consult with the groups that possibly have live animals that could be doing something similar to this and get some support for them. If they're in agreement that no live animals be part of any draw…. On the surface, it sounds like a logical thing, but now it seems like it's burgeoning into many different causes and organizations that could be impacted.

Minister, what are your thoughts on that? Do you think that there should be greater consultation, or are you very comfortable that all animal organizations involved here would be fine with saying that they can't be used for any draws?

Hon. B. Thompson: I'm comfortable with the consultation that has been done, but I'd like to see this bill pass, and then we'll go back and if there has to be amendments made, we'll do that. People have done a lot of work on this bill, and if that's an oversight, we'll definitely come back with an amendment next sitting, for sure.

R. Henderson: Pun intended here, but that's kind of putting the cart before the horse. I feel there should be greater consultation on that particular item. That's my opinion and view. That's all.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you.

I'm going to follow up on what the Member from O'Leary-Inverness asked, because there was no clear answer on that. What happens if semen was put forward as a win in the lottery to raise funds for a specific association?

I know with draft horses, for instance, in any of our national shows, there are always draws for different studs, so they could have up to maybe a dozen or more stallions, and you bid on that semen, and the moneys go either towards the association or, again, into other areas where

you're educating people on purebred animals, or to enhance breeding programs elsewhere, or to youth to try to keep their interest within the agricultural industry and promote the agricultural industry by providing bursaries, like I said earlier.

So, does semen count, or does it not? Is semen restricted in this new legislation, or is it not?

Curtis Toombs: Well, prizes would have to be specified in the application.

Hon. H. Perry: Pardon me?

Curtis Toombs: A prize that was going to be offered for a draw would have to be specified in the application.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. So, the prize is semen, let's say, from a horse, a cow, a pig, whatever – any kind of livestock.

Curtis Toombs: Well, it's not an expressly prohibited live animal.

Hon. H. Perry: So, it says live animal.

Curtis Toombs: That's correct.

Chair: I think he's answered the question.

Hon. H. Perry: He did. I have another question.

Does that also pertain to embryos?

Curtis Toombs: Again, the exception – the prohibited prizes are a live animal, so I can't really speak to that scenario.

[4:00 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: This is a good question to ask because when you're involved in the agriculture industry, people know this. You're involved with purebred animals; you know there are draws for this. So, I need to have an answer whether or not an embryo would be exempt from this or if it's included in the bill.

Hon. B. Thompson: It's four o'clock, Chair.

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 a bill to be intituled *Charitable Lotteries Act*, 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.

Motions Other Than Government

Orders Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, that the 20th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 20, *An Act to Amend the St. Dunstan's University Act*, Bill No. 200, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: *An Act to Amend the St. Dunstan's University Act*, Bill No. 200, read a second time.

Speaker: Member.

B. Curran: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, 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.

Alright, perhaps the Government House Leader would like to chair Committee of the Whole.

[M. MacKay in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the St. Dunstan's University Act*.

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

B. Curran: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Good afternoon. Please state your name and title for Hansard.

Margaret Anne Walsh: Good afternoon. I'm Margaret Anne Walsh. I'm a lawyer at Stewart McKelvey, and I'm here on behalf of the applicant, St. Dunstan's University.

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

[4:05 p.m.]

B. Curran: Yeah. This bill works to clean up constating legislation – enacted in 1964 and amended several times since – to change the corporate name to Saint Dunstan's University Foundation Inc., broaden and enhance the objects and purposes to include the activities referred to in the act, change the manner to which the board of directors are appointed, and delete from the act any references to the operation of a post-secondary institution.

Chair: Is it the pleasure of the committee to read clause by clause, section by section, or open for general questions? General questions.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thanks, Chair.

Thanks for bringing this bill forward. I wonder if you might have a little more to explain by way of the substantive nature of the changes other than what was in the preamble from the proponent.

Margaret Anne Walsh: Yeah, certainly. The purpose of the bill is to clean up some historical language that's been there that contemplated the purpose of St. Dunstan's University for providing and operating higher learning facilities. A lot of the language that is in the act contemplates just that – operating on a day-to-day basis, tuition, providing residence for students.

St. Dunstan's University has a bit of a history. It was first enacted in the early 1900s. And then, of course, in 1969, it graduated its final class. At the time, it was the rise of UPEI, and the Province decided to focus on a single academic institution for the province. The legislation hasn't been updated to reflect the reality that it's no longer operating a university.

The act does include charitable purposes. St. Dunstan's University has been operating as a foundation for the past number of years. It supports various causes across the province, but it does still include supporting Catholic priests and Christian purposes, together with providing bursaries and scholarships for students.

The changes that we're looking to make are to remove the language in there that contemplates operating the university and structuring it more to reflect the reality of its operation as a foundation.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that, Margaret Anne.

Does it change any of the day-to-day operations as the board might require to fulfill the duties obligated on them?

Margaret Anne Walsh: Yeah, the primary change is the composition of the board. The old section 11 had contemplated a board of between ten and 13 members, and of those, three members would be appointed by the bishop. That was to reflect the Christian causes of the university.

But given that that is not the underlying purpose anymore of the organization, the bishop no longer has the ability to appoint those three members. The bishop will remain a member of the board, but the remaining 12 members would be appointed by a vote of the majority.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that. I guess I'm kind of wondering how much of the bill removes some of the religious intent and purposes that may have been established back in – sorry, I forget the date you said.

Margaret Anne Walsh: Yeah, there are a couple of sections which have specifically been

removed. That's under what had been formerly section 2. It states to operate a centre for academic excellence, departments, institutes, and so on within the framework of our Christian heritage. That is certainly removed.

Also, tuition references are removed and operating facilities are removed. And then promoting relationships with other universities, those substantive provisions have been removed.

It hasn't given up entirely on the Christian background, which is the main motivation now or the purpose of the foundation – to provide charitable purposes, but also in memory of St. Dunstan's University as a Catholic organization.

In lieu of those sections which have been removed, they have put in to advance the Roman Catholic faith, to support Roman Catholic parishes, and to advance education in faith and alleviating poverty by various means – education, supporting religious endeavours, public forums, and so on. So, it really reflects what they do on a day-to-day basis, but not operating the academic facility.

M. MacFarlane: That's fine.

Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Margaret Anne.

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

Congratulations, member. I think this is the first bill that you've brought forward to the floor.

Hopefully I'm not repeating myself any, but in the explanatory notes, it says: "Section 9 repeals and replaces subsection 13(1) of the Act to provide for the election of a Chair and Vice-Chair and improve the wording."

[4:10 p.m.]

So, there isn't a chair right now? Is that correct?

Margaret Anne Walsh: Can you just point me to the section again?

Hon. Z. Bell: I'm reading the explanatory notes, and it says section 9 – or subsection 13(1), I guess. It replaces subsection 13(1).

Margaret Anne Walsh: Oh, okay, yes. Thank you.

Okay, that section speaks to chair and vice chair.

Hon. Z. Bell: Correct.

Margaret Anne Walsh: It confirms the election of – from those 13 members, they would elect a chair, and then it speaks to if the chair is unable, then there would be a vice chair that would fulfill the chair's role. Is that what you mean?

Hon. Z. Bell: Yeah.

Margaret Anne Walsh: And there are also carryover provisions. All of the officers that are currently elected under the current organization will carry over to the new foundation. No one is losing any appointment except for – there are sections in the legislation that refer to a senate, the senate that operates the university, but that entire section is removed. So, all appointments carry over except for any senate appointments because we're moving that piece of the legislation entirely.

Hon. Z. Bell: Okay. How often would this board meet? Will the changes make the board meet more now?

Margaret Anne Walsh: No, the board will be governed by the *Companies Act*. It's a not-for-profit, so under the *Companies Act*, it has to meet once a year. It would still have to have an AGM. Members of the board are elected for a three-year term. So, to the extent that any term is up at the AGM or if someone resigns in between, they would still be able to elect successors.

Hon. Z. Bell: I think I'm good, Chair.

Chair: Shall the bill carry? Carried.

B. Curran: I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend the St. Dunstan's University Act*.

Shall it carry? Carried.

B. Curran: I move the enacting clause.

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

Shall it carry? Carried.

B. Curran: Mr. Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

M. MacKay: 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 St. Dunstan's University Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Conflict of Interest Act*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Bill No. 102, *An Act to Amend the Conflict of Interest Act,* read a first time.

Speaker: Member.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This bill amends the *Conflict of Interest Act* to provide an exception to a minister who holds a licence where the applicable licensing regime requires the licence to be held only by the licence holder and does not permit the transfer, divestment, or placing of the licence in a trust, and where the interest is disclosed to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and all other requirements of the act are met.

Speaker: Pursuant to subsection 46(2) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*, this bill is related to the Legislative Assembly and will be committed to the Standing Committee on Legislative Assembly Management for consideration.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

[4:15 p.m.]

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that Motion No. 9 be called.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Motion No. 9: Calling on the federal government to provide immediate support and relief to the Prince Edward Island oyster industry.

Debate was adjourned by the mover, the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Speaker: I'd like to call on the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke to continue debate.

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll start at the heart of the motion, the jurisdictional responsibility of federal government.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, DFO, has a clear legislative mandate under the *Fisheries Act*. They are the stewards of our aquaculture and our fisheries, yet for too long, there has been a glaring disparity in how we treat disasters in this country. All Islanders remember how little support our farmers got when the federal government restricted the exports on our seed potatoes back in 2022.

But where is our safety net for the oyster fishers? The federal government has promised a buyback program for the wild oyster fishers before the season starts. I hope they follow through on that promise because the season is only one month away.

The provincial government is doing what it can, but we are talking about millions of dollars in lost equity and infrastructure. This requires a federal-provincial partnership that treats this with the same urgency as a crop failure in the Prairies or a trade embargo on our Canadian steel and lumber industries. Also, Mr. Speaker, CFIA is considering triploid seed for the United States but not diploid, a seed that would definitely benefit our wild fishers.

We are asking for two distinct things in this motion.

First, we are asking for immediate, direct financial relief. They have mortgages to pay today. They have staff who need to know if there will be a harvest season this year. We need a bridge to keep these family businesses solvent while we navigate the control zones and the mortality peaks.

Second, we are asking for an investment in the future. We have to accept that MSX and Dermo may be a part of our new normal, but we don't have to accept defeat. We need federal funding for research into the MSX- and Dermo-resistant oyster strands. We need to empower our local hatcheries to produce seed that can survive in this new environment. We need to invest in modernizing biosecurity gear, on-bottom and off-bottom technology that allows for better cleaning and containment.

Prince Edward Island has always been a leader in innovation. We have the scientists, we have the grit, and we have the coastal knowledge. What we lack is the federal capital to deploy these tools at scale.

If we do not act, the cost of our silence will be the hollowing out of our rural communities. If the oyster industry in our rural areas withers, it isn't just the fishers who suffer; it's the local gas stations, the grocery store, the hardware shop, and the school system. When you pull a thread like the oyster industry out of the fabric of rural PEI, the whole garment begins to unravel.

I am calling on every member in this House, regardless of your political stripe, to support this motion. This is not a partisan issue; this is an Island issue. It is about whether we believe that our coastal heritage is worth saving. It is about whether we are willing to stand up to Ottawa and say that our fishers and our growers deserve the same respect and the same security as any other worker in this country.

To the wild oyster fishers in this province, the men and women who rely on the public beds, I want to speak directly to you for a moment. We know that for the wild fisheries, MSX and Dermo isn't just a biological threat; it is an assault on your autonomy and your peace of mind.

[4:20 p.m.]

When this crisis first hit, the government came forward with mental health supports. At this time, it was a recognition that the stress of this situation is heavy. The money didn't stop the parasite, it didn't open the restricted zones, and it certainly hasn't paid the bills that have been piling up.

I am happy to see that the provincial government is going to keep the mental health support program going. The fact that those mental health resources were exhausted so quickly tells us everything we need to know. It is a blinking red light on the dashboard of this industry. Our fishers are stressed, they are exhausted, and they are looking at empty bags with no clear timeline for when they can return to a normal harvest.

I want to be clear: the responsibility for this support sits squarely on the shoulders of the federal government. The DFO manages these waters, they set the rules, they draw the lines for the control zones, and they have the jurisdictional mandate to protect the people who work these fisheries.

To the fishers out there listening: we see the stress you are under. We are in this House today to demand that Ottawa stops treating your livelihood like an afterthought and starts providing the direct relief you need to weather this storm.

Our four MPs, on December 18th, 2025, released a statement that the federal government will be there for the wild fishers and they are working together to develop a plan. In talking with the Shellfish Association, that "working together" hasn't happened in months. That is where the stress is. Because of the lack of communication, they are left unsure about the upcoming season. They don't know if the federal government has a plan for them or not. There have been talks about a buyback program, but like I say, with only one month until the harvest begins, time is running out.

I do ask the federal government to let the fishers know if they have any supports planned in case the upcoming season is a disaster.

Let us send a clear, unified message today. Let us tell our fishers that they are not alone in these bays. Let us tell our families that their heritage and their way of life will not be abandoned. Let us demand the federal government step up to the plate to protect one of the most iconic industries in the history of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: I'd like to call on the seconder of the motion, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure to second this motion that the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke brought forth. This is a motion that means a lot. This is a motion that a lot of oyster fishers out there are crying for. They're looking for help in every aspect, every corner that they can find it.

The oyster industry is one that is very valued by my district, Summerside-Wilmot. The oyster sector is a fundamental pillar of our province's economy, architectural/cultural heritage, and rural stability. For Summerside, the health of the oyster sector is the defining characteristic of our local identity and prosperity. Summerside serves as the primary service centre where fishery spinoffs support our retail, transportation, and maintenance business. It's no secret that a good year in oysters translates into big sales everywhere else.

An oyster fisher takes a lot of pride. Oyster fishers – you don't see too many of them driving old, rickety trucks. When they have a good year at the oysters, they're down at Township, they're down at Ford, they're down at the Dodge dealership; they're buying new trucks. They're spending the spinoffs from the oyster industry.

The oyster industry had an economic value of $54 million in 2024, with $27 million landed in oysters – $27 million landed. That makes up 30 percent of the Canadian oysters. On little PEI, we landed 30 percent of the national oysters. It's great. It's unbelievable.

[4:25 p.m.]

You know, these oyster fishers – they've seen some hard times. Some of these hurricanes that blew through – it was devastating to some of these fishers. They'd have their cages and their bags – they were washed up on shore. They were in fields. They were covered in silt. They had a lot of oyster kill. They had a lot of oyster damage. They had a lot of damage to their equipment. For someone who doesn't know the industry, who's never done it, it's very hard to translate what that meant to them.

Something as simple as when you see cages on a beach and you see bags all intertwined or emptied or torn, well, it goes a lot further. Those cages just don't float in the ocean. Those cages are floating out there. They've got to go out in the winter, and they've got to mark their spot. They've got to dig a hole in the ice. They've got to get their screw piles; they've got to set them down to anchor those cages. And they don't just put them anywhere. They've got to be within their lease confinements. They've got to be strategically placed, and they've got to have it so…. There's so much that goes to it.

When we saw the infrastructure on the shores, when we saw them in fields – out on the Barbara Weit Road, there were oyster cages; there were oyster bags in fields. The storm washed them right out of the water. For these fishers, how would you think that you had oysters in one bay on lines, and then it was shoved, it was moved to a completely different bay, and then they were in a field. Where do you start to look for stuff like that?

Now, when they're just getting recovered from this, when things are just starting to get back to normal for them and they're starting to see good years, this hits. MSX hits them.

We saw it in 1959 in Chesapeake Bay that MSX was detected. They had a 90-95 percent mortality rate. It was abandoned. The oyster industry was abandoned for decades. You can just imagine what that did. Sure, right now, they have a disease-resilient oyster down there that's working for them. Back in the fall of 2024 when they had some samples taken, they did have some sample areas with zero percent. The highest sample area they had was 7 percent. That's great; they figured it out and it's working.

But it's not as easy as moving it here to PEI. We have Malpeque oysters. It doesn't matter where you go in the world, people know what a Malpeque oyster is when it's on a menu.

We need to make sure that that identity is not lost. We need to get some money into a pot for these fishers, for these growers, for these producers so that they can sustain a product such as the Malpeque oyster, so they can figure out going forward and keeping it there.

And then to throw a little more into the mix, MSX was detected; it had a lot of kill. We sat in standing committee and we heard about Dermo. We heard about Dermo in our neighbouring provinces' waters, and it was something that these oyster fishers were scared of. They didn't

want Dermo here, and I don't blame them. But it didn't stay away; it's here.

In 2025, the second threat of Dermo came. Now you've got these oyster fishermen who just got over hard times dealing with two hurricanes that came through. Their product was devastated; their gear was devastated. They just get their feet back under them, they start doing things, they start working, and it's working out for them. They're growing their business again, and, boom, they get hit with MSX and the following year, they get hit with Dermo, and it's taking the life out of it.

When we're talking about the oyster industry, we're not talking about today for tomorrow. This is an industry that has to plan four years, five years down the road. They have to go out; they have to put spat collectors out and they've got to collect spat. Then they've got to take that spat and they've got to harvest it and then grow it, and after, it's one-year-old oysters, and then they've got to put them out in bags. They've got to tumble them. They've got to keep them clean. They've got to let them grow.

It's not something that happens overnight. We're talking two, three, four years down the road. These oyster fishermen, they are diligent. They do their homework. They get things done, and they do it correctly.

But when you have the threat of MSX killing two-year-old, one-year-old, this year's spat, next year's collection, they don't know where to go. They don't know where to turn. They need some help.

The only good part – the only good part – about the MSX disease, if you want to say there is a good part to it, is that it is critical to remind people that it is not harmful for a human to eat it. That's the only good thing you can take out of MSX, that it's not harmful for a human to eat. That's the only good part because everything else, it's devastating, absolutely devastating to an oyster fisher.

[4:30 p.m.]

And Bedeque Bay, which is right outside District 21 – I can look from District 21 at Bedeque Bay – that is the heart of the fishery. Bedeque Bay has seen a profound decline to an almost 100 percent mortality. It's absolutely devastating for these fishers, for the wild fishers. There's nowhere for them to go in Bedeque Bay. If you know the area, when oyster season started, they put their own community out there. They had a field that was rented out to them, and there'd be 40-50 little trailers out there, and every fisher would go out and fish all day, and then they had their little trailers in a campground set up right down on the shore. They moved there for the first few weeks of fishing season.

It's not just in an area like that. I can think of a number of different spots that benefit from the fishing in Bedeque Bay, and that was the Anchor Motel, right in Summerside. When you drive past Read's Corner during the fishing season, there was no problem to see 15 trailers and trucks lined up in front of the cabins. They moved there. Everybody from all across the Island, mostly the western parts of the Island, moved down to Summerside for this fishery, and it was in Bedeque Bay where the vast majority of them went, and now the fishery is gone there.

We need to figure this out. We need to get some money in the pockets of these fishers so that they can survive until they find a more disease-resistant strain of oyster so that this fishery can once again thrive.

Under the former Minister of Fisheries, who's now the Minister of Workplace and Advanced Learning, the provincial government has demonstrated proactive leadership, with a total commitment over $12.2 million. This was a start. With 250 wild fishers, 300 growers, and 18 producers, that was a start. It seems like a lot of money – $12.2 million – but that's a start. We need to keep building on it. We need to lean on our federal counterparts. We need to lean on every aspect that we can of this industry to get these fishers through this.

Now, there were a lot of support programs that were out there. There were grants based on historical revenue to help manage immediate costs: the processors – a $6 million program to de-risk the purchasing of oysters in support of facilities like Summerside Seafood Supreme; training and employment; providing financial aid for retaining; and wage reimbursement for impacted fishers.

And then we move onto the mental health support. We have prioritized wellbeing by offering 24-hour confidential counselling for industry members and their families. Well, the first two years that they had this out there, it never went over the allotment. Well, guess what? They overshot that a lot last year. There's

a lot of issues, and it is good to have things in there for these fishers.

The mental health of this industry, for these fishers, it's got to be a ticking time bomb to them, not knowing what's going to happen tomorrow with their industry. There's so much that is going on. They've been through so much. They fought through all these different storms. They've had their gear torn apart and lost. And just when they get their feet back under them, now this – MSX and Dermo. Hopefully we only had the one, but no, we got both.

So, one part of the motion is calling on all levels of government. It's calling on shared responsibilities. Well, while the Province has led the charge, the government has a jurisdictional responsibility to manage and support our aquaculture sectors.

I'd be remiss if I didn't tell this little story. I met with Bob and the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke here a couple of years ago, and we talked about the importance of the oyster industry, and MSX, and everything that was going on. The president of the wild fishers association, Bob MacLeod – we had a great conversation, and we went over a lot of different things.

[4:35 p.m.]

The part that struck me most – I'll never forget about the conversation – was dealing with the CFIA and what these wild fishers and whatnot had to deal with in dealing with the CFIA. Now, we've got to have a partnership with them, and it's great, but the president of the wild fishers association was sending pictures of one of the bays where there were oyster cages and all that. He was trying to explain that the MSX wasn't out of this bay; it was in this bay. It wasn't out of it. The one beside it was good, but that bay was shut down. They were trying to figure how they could manage this a little better for the fishers.

Then he sent another picture to them, and the response he got was: "How come one picture has water and the next picture doesn't?" He tried to explain to this CFIA agent that it was the tide was out. Here they are dealing with them, and they didn't understand what a tide was. The response he got was "What do you mean? What's a tide? The water is not there, and it's there."

The CFIA agent that they were dealing with didn't understand what a tide was. That's what they were dealing with, so we need to support this industry and we need to work with every aspect of this industry – whether it's federal, whether it's provincial, whether it's with them directly – to make sure that we are there for them. They need some financial support, and they need to know it.

We talk about mental health with them, we talk about everything, but these are our neighbours. These are our friends. These are our family members. We need to make sure we're there for them. They're the livelihood of this industry, and without them, the identity of a Malpeque oyster is gone. We need to support it.

I'm excited and proud to second this motion for calling for immediate and direct federal financial relief for fishers and growers and enhanced investment in research, biosecurity, and modernization. We need to do all that because, once again, this industry needs to strive. This industry needs to move forward and get through this, and it needs to do that with the identity of the Malpeque oyster front and foremost.

A couple of years ago, I was down in Las Vegas. There's an oyster bar on the strip in Las Vegas –

[Interjection]

T. DesRoches: Well, we won't talk about what happens in Vegas; it stayed in Vegas. But on that oyster bar, they had Malpeque oysters. I was fascinated. I was like, geez. I was overseas, and there were Malpeque oysters on a menu over there. It's amazing.

We need to do whatever we can to help to support these wild fishers, these growers, these producers, so that the identity of our Malpeque oyster can remain, because right now with the mortality rate that these fishers are seeing in their cages, it's not going to sustain. It's not going to remain if we don't make sure that we do something. We need a disease-resistant oyster that is a Malpeque oyster. We need to make sure that it remains and it's there.

There are scientific breakthroughs. We're investing in a research cluster of excellence at UPEI to develop rapid diagnostic testing and genetic sequencing. The disease resistance is our goal – to transition towards hatchery production of disease-resistant oyster seed as quickly as possible.

Once again, we just have to look at Chesapeake Bay. We always keep going back to it because in 1959 – that's when MSX was first found – they had a 95 percent mortality rate and they had to abandon the oyster fishery for decades. We cannot do that here on Prince Edward Island. We need to do whatever it takes, and we need to do it as fast as we can, because these fishers are counting on us.

We are not just managing a crisis; we are building a more resilient future. By working together provincially, federally, and as a community, we will ensure the Malpeque brand remains a global leader for generations to come.

I was proud to second this motion that the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke brought, and I went through it three or four times. I went through every "whereas" and every other "and whereas" and "and whereas," and then we got to "therefore be it resolved." I tried to pick it apart to see what part I didn't like, and there was not one part in it.

[4:40 p.m.]

This motion that the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke brought forward directly hits at home for anybody in the oyster industry. It's exactly what we should be doing, what we need to do right now.

If you know an oyster fisher, if you know a wild oyster fisher, you know that these men and women that do it, they're a different breed. They are tough, they are resilient, and they work hard. They don't have any quit in them. But when the oyster is not there, when the oyster is not on the bottom for them to harvest, there's nothing for them to do to bring home their paycheque. We need to work with them. We need to do whatever it takes to make sure that they can sustain and move forward.

When I was a younger fellow, I did fish oysters with one of my uncles for a while. Let me just tell you, once you do it, you have a different respect for the people who do fish oysters because it's one thing to think that you can do it, but when you get out there and you've got 12 feet of water and you're hanging over a washboard of an oyster dory and you're slinging 12- and 14-foot tongs and you're trying to rake the bottom and pull that up, it takes everything you've got in you to do it. I thought I was a pretty strong and capable young fellow, but let me tell you, after a day on the water with my uncle, I didn't want to get up the next morning and go back.

These oyster fishers put their heart into everything they do when it comes to fishing. They work hard, and they give a full day's honest work, and now they're relying on us to have their back. We need to support these oyster fishers in every which way that we can. They just weathered two storms, and now the third one is coming – and it's here; it's not coming. MSX and Dermo are in our waters, and their oysters are dying.

Once again, it was my honour to second this motion, and I just hope that going forward, we can do whatever we can to make sure that the second part of the resolved in this motion, where we "invest in enhanced research, biosecurity measures, and industry modernization" and "urge the Government of Prince Edward Island to work with the federal government to provide immediate and direct financial relief to oyster fishers" – I just hope that this is something that we can do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It is an honour to rise and speak to this motion. I certainly want to thank the mover of the motion. I want to thank the seconder of the motion. In their words, the passion that was coming through from both the mover and the seconder was so evident. They know the fishery. They know the ones that have worked in it. They know the ones that have counted on it – in some cases for years/decades – as their source of livelihood, and it shone through.

I certainly urge everyone in this Legislature to support this motion. It's an extremely important motion for an extremely important sector of the economy: the fishery here in PEI. We have seen before when we work together as legislators – yes, we get into Question Period and there will be back-and-forth. There will be disagreements. We're never going to agree on everything, nor should we, but when we work together, we can accomplish a lot.

That's what we have to do, going forward, with this motion here – to come together as legislators and all work together and push for

funding, push for a partnership from the federal government to provide assistance, presently and going forward, for such an important industry.

[4:45 p.m.]

This issue – it has consequences not only for the oyster industry, but for the entire province. I believe the mover and the seconder had both referenced the impact, the spinoffs of this industry in the economy of PEI. That economic impact is in excess of $54 million a year.

But even apart from the economic impact, the oyster fishery – that industry is part of our identity. The seconder had mentioned Bob MacLeod. Bob, I consider a friend. On days that the season has started, I've gone down onto the shore, had a chat with Bob, and the passion that he has and continues to have for this industry just shines right through.

Where I live, up in Fortune Cove on Mill River, when the season starts, I'll tell you, there have been times I'm sure that you could step from dory to dory to dory. It's part of the fabric of rural PEI. It really is.

I look at some other ones, friends of mine: Jason Handrahan, Aaron Sweet – the investment that they have put into this industry. It cannot all be for naught. The ones in the industry support families. They sustain rural communities.

When I was in Boston at the seafood show, the reputation that we have here as a province in the seafood industry – and it doesn't matter whether it's lobsters, whether it is mussels, but we're talking about oysters here today. The reputation that the province of PEI has, globally, for excellent seafood and for the excellent oysters that we have, that we have produced and that we will continue to produce – it's a world-class reputation.

But as has been said, this industry is under a lot of pressure. This industry is in crisis. MSX and Dermo have made severe impacts on oyster growers, oyster fishers, processors, and the many Island communities that depend on them. There is real uncertainty here, and there are Islanders making difficult decisions about their future.

This government, our government, recognizes this. Whether we look at the fishery, whether we look at agriculture, our primary industries are the foundation of our economy. They are that cement right at the bottom, that strong cement that our economy is built on. But this portion of our primary industry is facing an extreme challenge. Yet, Islanders in this sector have responded the way that Islanders always do – by adapting, by working together, and by pushing forward. They deserve support that matches the effort that they put in.

Our action as a Province, I think, speaks for itself. To date, over $12 million has been committed from the Province for targeted supports. It's been referenced before by the mover and the seconder, but what does this include? It includes disease surveillance, testing, sampling, diagnostics, equipment, supplies. There has been much research and expertise including, as I mentioned, diagnostic work.

[4:50 p.m.]

But there have been investments in capacity, too, to support our industry associations. We've launched several direct programs: the oyster disease adaptation and mitigation program, oyster fishers training, an employment support fund, the oyster growers income stabilization program, and the oyster processors inventory mitigation program. These programs have combined values in the millions of dollars.

On top of that, we've boosted mental health support services because we know that personal toll is real. It's very real.

But let's be equally clear about something else, too: from the very beginning, we have said this is not something the Province can carry alone. When you look at a brief transcript here, a statement by the federal Minister of Fisheries – and I have to admit, I have met with the federal minister different times. I think that she has the heart of the fishing industry right across this great country of ours at heart; I really do feel that. But at the same time, the federal government does have to step up, and the federal Minister of Fisheries, at a Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, acknowledged this.

I'll just quote what Minister Joanne Thompson had said at a SCOFO meeting:

> "We need to ensure that the funds and supports are there to meet the concerns of industry and harvesters. In fairness, yes, oysters are an example of work that we need to do to help the industry recover."

That is from the federal Minister of Fisheries.

We have not been silent on that. In fact, we have been extremely persistent. Communications were happening long before I stepped into this role, led by the former Minister of Fisheries. Since early 2025, multiple letters have been sent to federal ministers outlining the urgency of the situation and asking for immediate support, advocating for immediate support, lobbying for immediate support.

Unfortunately, at this point in time, have we received anything? No, we have not, and that is disappointing. But I will continue this ask, this advocacy, this lobbying, because I'll tell you something, Mr. Speaker: the oyster industry deserves nothing less – nothing less – than that.

We have formally requested federal action on income supports, buyback options, employment insurance flexibility, and direct financial assistance. We have repeatedly asked the federal government to come on board with us as a collaborative partner. We have requested meetings, and we have met with federal ministers right here in PEI, in Ottawa, and in Boston, and also virtually.

Mr. Speaker, imagine if they had come on board, if the federal government had come on as a partner. We've talked about the millions that the Province has –

[Interjections]

Hon. E. Hudson: It's no pipe dream. I know. Over there, the Member from O'Leary-Inverness, who loves to chirp on this extremely important issue, sits over there and laughs and smiles about it, but it is extremely important. He should know as well as I know, as well as the mover knows, as well as the seconder knows, the importance of this. I would absolutely love to see him come on board and work with us, as I had mentioned earlier.

[4:55 p.m.]

But again, imagine if the federal government had come on board. The input into the industry combined with the provincial contributions would have been in the range of $24 million to $30 million. Imagine that. What could have that helped with? A tremendous amount.

We have provided detailed data and real-time impacts from the ground here. This is sustained engagement that is going to continue. This government – our government – is doing its job. And yet, despite that level of effort, there's still no comprehensive federal support, no federal program in place to match the scale of the input that we have put into this important industry. There's no dedicated compensation program. There's no clear, coordinated response that reflects what this industry is dealing with – none of that coming from the federal government. Shame.

We've seen Ottawa move swiftly. We've seen them move swiftly to support steel, to support aluminum workers, which they absolutely should have, and I thank them for that. But where are they at with regard to the oyster industry on our dear Prince Edward Island? Where are they at? Not to be seen.

As I said before, shame on the federal government for not stepping up to the plate like we have. And this is not theoretical. This is happening in our communities right here, right now. This is about people trying to hold onto their livelihood. This is not about blaming the federal government.

I'll go back to March 27th, where the Member from O'Leary-Inverness states: "It's great to blame the federal government – I'm always happy to give a crack at them too."

I'm not blaming the federal government.

[Interjections]

Hon. E. Hudson: I'm not. If the member would clear out the head maybe a bit, what I'm asking for is the same as when I started here: to work together; to have a partnership. Work together. Collaborate. We've seen what we can accomplish when we work together. It was evident last week when the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park brought forward her private member's bill what, when we as legislators work together, we can accomplish.

That is what I'm advocating for here today. It's not to point fingers, it's not to cast blame, but work together to bring on a partnership from the federal government.

I know that we're getting handy the end of the time here, but there is one other thing that I do want to touch base on which ties into this, and that's the Atlantic fisheries fund.

Now, again, going back to the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness – states it again on March 27th: "All of the provinces are ready to be able to sign on. The Province of PEI has not signed as of yet."

Two days ago, a letter went subsequent to a number of previous ones from the eastern Fisheries and Aquaculture ministers to the federal minister. I'll just read a couple of –

Speaker: Minister, the hour has been called.

[Interjections]

Speaker: Call to extend the hour?

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hour is not going to be extended, members. We're about 30 seconds early. (Indistinct)

[Interjections]

Speaker: Minister.

[Interjections]

Speaker: Minister.

Thank you, minister.

[5:00 p.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: I move to adjourn debate, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Thank you.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, before I close for today, I just want to thank Jackson and Henry for coming in.

[Hear, hear!]

M. MacKay: You're obviously very patient individuals to sit here all afternoon, so thanks for your time.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, that this House adjourn until Friday, April 17th, at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

[The Legislature adjourned until Friday, 17 April 2026 at 10:00 a.m.]