

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Darlene Compton

Hansard, Published by Order of the Legislature

First Session of the Sixty-seventh General Assembly

Thursday, 18 May 2023

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE AND RECOGNITION OF GUESTS	124
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS.....	129
BORDEN-KINKORA (Naval Reserve Centennial 2023).....	129
O'LEARY-INVERNESS (West Point Development Corporation).....	130
KENSINGTON-MALPEQUE (Claudia Campbell – Big Brother Canada).....	131
ORAL QUESTIONS.....	131
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Health PEI CEO statement on PCH ICU).....	131
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Apology to health care staff).....	132
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Plan to combat inflated food prices).....	132
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Children in food-insecure households).....	133
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Islanders facing food insecurity).....	134
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Increase in food insecurity).....	134
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Approach to rising food costs).....	134
CHARLOTTETOWN-WEST ROYALTY (Number of unhoused Islanders).....	135
CHARLOTTETOWN-WEST ROYALTY (Number of Islanders on HIFIS system).....	136
CHARLOTTETOWN-WEST ROYALTY (Membership of new housing committee).....	136
CHARLOTTETOWN-WEST ROYALTY (Plan for new transitional housing units).....	136
LEADER OF THE THIRD PARTY (For-profit surgical clinics).....	137
LEADER OF THE THIRD PARTY (Shift LTC from private to public).....	138
LEADER OF THE THIRD PARTY (Moving virtual care to public system).....	138
CHARLOTTETOWN-VICTORIA PARK (Decrease in affordable housing).....	139
CHARLOTTETOWN-VICTORIA PARK (Right of first refusal for affordable housing).....	139
CHARLOTTETOWN-VICTORIA PARK (Instituting a rental registry).....	140
TYNE VALLEY-SHERBROOKE (Adding NPs, physician assistants to ERs).....	140
TYNE VALLEY-SHERBROOKE (Recruiting and retaining NPs).....	141
CHARLOTTETOWN-BELVEDERE (Wi-Fi in seniors housing).....	142
O'LEARY-INVERNESS (Expenses for West Prince agency offices).....	143
O'LEARY-INVERNESS (Use of empty leased space in O'Leary).....	143

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS	144
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SENIORS (Importance of Foster Care).....	144
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INNOVATION AND TRADE (Ignition Fund Accepting Applications).....	145
TABLING OF DOCUMENTS.....	146
REPORTS BY COMMITTEES	147
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEES (Composition of the Standing Committees)	147
ORDERS OF THE DAY (GOVERNMENT).....	147
RESPONSE TO THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE.....	147
LEADER OF THE THIRD PARTY.....	148
RUSTICO-EMERALD	150
MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT	169
Motion 28 – School resource officers	169
BORDEN-KINKORA	169
SUMMERSIDE-WILMOT	173
CHARLOTTETOWN-WEST ROYALTY	174
CHARLOTTETOWN-VICTORIA PARK.....	176
EDUCATION AND EARLY YEARS	177
JUSTICE, PUBLIC SAFETY AND ATTORNEY GENERAL.....	178
RUSTICO-EMERALD	179
FISHERIES, TOURISM, SPORT AND CULTURE	180
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SENIORS	181
BORDEN-KINKORA	181
Motion 31 – Saluting our primary producers	182
ADJOURNED.....	182

The Legislature sat at 1:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Welcome back to my colleagues for another day of debate in our provincial Legislature. Welcome to those who have joined us in the public gallery and those who have joined us in the Speaker's gallery, I think. It's great to see a good crowd here, and kind of like the new caucus we have, we're bulging at the seams over there, so it's great. Good problems to have.

I just wanted to begin in recognition this afternoon that in a military parade in Charlottetown last evening, Lt.-Cmdr. Michelle Hopping was named as the commander of *HMCS Queen Charlotte*, taking over command from Lt.-Cmdr. John MacDonald. Lt.-Cmdr. Hopping is the first woman to be the commander in the 100-year history of the *HCMS Queen Charlotte*. I wanted to congratulate Lt.-Cmdr. Hopping with that great privilege. I know she'll do a wonderful job in her leadership role.

I also wanted to say – something that's near and dear to your heart, Madam Speaker, as well as many in this Legislature – that the PEI harness racing season has kicked into full gear with racing right now at Red Shores in Charlottetown and soon to be Summerside. It's great to see that wonderful rite of spring on full display. I know, as you do, that there's a lot of excitement around with the new crop of fillies and colts that were purchased at the sale last fall, another record sale at the Atlantic Classic Sale in Crapaud. An exciting year, so I just want to wish everyone involved in the PEI standardbred industry in Prince Edward Island who do so much for our economy to have good luck and a good racing season.

Also, our provincial golf courses are starting to open up, along with the other private courses that make PEI a special destination throughout the summer months, for sure. Golf has really seen a tremendous growth trajectory, particularly since the beginning

of COVID. It was one of the seemed-to-be-COVID-proof industries, golf, and it's been growing ever since. All of those who participate in the golf industry in PEI, I want to thank them and wish them a good season, as well.

I was also pleased, as many know in the Legislature but might not know who are tuned in, that our Minister of Health and Wellness is undergoing some surgery at the hospital today. It's been in the works for a couple of years. It's nothing we weren't prepared for. So, I will be acting as the minister of health. Nobody else seemed to want the job so I took it on eagerly. But no, quite honestly, I was pleased in my first few moments in the role that the Nurses' Union ratified their agreement –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: – for its contract, so I was happy to see that. They were favourable. They signed off on it this week, though. We'll take it wherever we can get it.

But no, quite honestly, I was really happy that we were able to come to such an important deal with our Nurses' Union. There are lots of critical areas that we addressed in the contract along with finances. That was a very positive step, and I want to thank our nurses for doing a wonderful job and wish all of my colleagues today a good day of debate in the Legislature.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I want to welcome all those who are watching online today, and also those who are in the gallery today. I know we have a few friends from the PEI Federation of Foster Families. We have Linda Mayhew, Mary Noye, Aletha Mitchell-Power, and Wendy Ross joining us here today.

I, too, want to congratulate Lt.-Cmdr. Michelle Hopping in her new role and wish her all the best, and her naval family that's with her today to support her. I'm sorry I

have my back to you, but just with the setup in here today, it is what it is, unfortunately. Please excuse my back.

I also want to send out congratulations to all UPEI graduates today from the convocation this morning that handed out degrees in arts, education, and the graduate studies, and also the Master in Global Affairs. Also, a huge congratulations to an honorary degree which was awarded to Dr. Kathy Martin from Stanhope, PEI. She has a long career in scientific research and her contributions to ornithology.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I, too, would like to start by welcoming those to the gallery; Linda Mayhew, of course, who used to be, at least, a citizen in District 17 and a foster parent of children at Englewood School whom I knew back in my previous life. Nice to see you, Linda, and everybody else in the fostering community.

Also, I see Bethany Collicutt-McNab and, as she calls him, little Pete, her son, who's sitting in the corner there. Hi, little Pete. Nice to see you both today. I know that both Bethany and little Pete follow the proceedings in here very closely.

I, too, would like to welcome the family from *HMCS Queen Charlotte*. I was so sorry I didn't make it to the event last night, but I do want to congratulate wholeheartedly Lt.-Cmdr. Michelle Hopping on becoming the new commander-in-chief – the first woman ever to take this position, I should say – to *HMCS Queen Charlotte*.

There was a ceremony last night. I know that, Michelle, her desire is both to run, of course, this wonderful organization for as long as she is the Lt.-Cmdr., but also to inspire young women to join the Canadian Forces. I wish you well in both of those endeavours. The unit turns 100 years old, I believe, later this year in September.

I also want to give a shout-out to the nurses across this province. As the Premier said, they just successfully signed an agreement, and that's wonderful, but they haven't always felt so valued over the last little while. Many nurses have reached out to our office, particularly ICU nurses from the Prince County Hospital. It takes courage to do that and to speak up on behalf of the system they work in and on behalf of Islanders, which is ultimately what they're doing, because we all depend on that system.

So, thank you to the ICU nurses at PCH who have reached out to us. I really appreciate that and I'm so grateful for the work that you do.

This weekend, on Saturday at the Murchison Park and Centre, there's a cleanup. This is in Clyde River. It's an annual event, and usually it doesn't take very long, but I know this Saturday, they've scheduled, I think, four and a half hours to do it because there's a lot of cleanup after Fiona, as there is everywhere, of course. That's in Clyde River. It's on Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. I guess that's three and a half hours, not four and a half hours. My math is not great. I share that with the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Finally, the Cineplex opens up again. I think it's tomorrow, maybe even tonight, here in Charlottetown. For those cinephiles who've been missing the opportunity – of course, we have the beautiful City Cinema downtown, and many of us have been there frequently to watch movies – having the Cineplex back open is of great excitement for many people, including our Chief of Staff, Katie Rankin, on the second floor.

Katie actually used to work for a time for Cineplex, and I know she loves her movies. Both *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* are opening. I'm not sure which one of those she's going to pick. Maybe she'll go to both. That would be a double-header, which would be quite the mix.

Anyway, congratulations to Cineplex on opening up again. I'm sure there are many, many Islanders who are celebrating that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to welcome everybody here from Borden-Kinkora today, of course, everybody in our gallery, and especially, we have some special guests with us. I feel very safe with all the group standing behind me, which I'd like to recognize.

We have Lt.-Cmdr. Michelle Hopping, who assumed command last night from Lt.-Cmdr. John MacDonald. I was at that ceremony last night and it was great to see so many people out to that. All the best Michelle, and in your endeavours too, going forward, John.

We also are joined by MS Daniel Scott, S1 Daniel Bridges, PO1 Trent Fullarton, PO2 Troy Arsenault, MS Lucas Gallant, S1 Ana Belen, Lt. Spencer Lee, PO1 Noella Monkley, and also Lt. Michael Bergeron.

Thank you very much for joining, and I'll be speaking about the unit a little bit later.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Mr. DesRoches: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise today. It's the first time I've taken the opportunity to do this. I just want to welcome everybody that's in the gallery, especially a District 21 resident that I noticed over there, Mary Noye. Welcome.

I just wanted to take this time to thank everybody who worked on my team to make this possible. I didn't do that yet and it was great. I had a lot of support and a lot of people who helped us. I wanted to thank all the residents and voting constituents in District 21 for putting their trust in me, and just want to let them know I will not let them down.

I also wanted to bring attention to a name I missed yesterday in my member's statement, Abdel Rshaidat. He won an award with the

City of Summerside last night, and I neglected to mention him when I was flipping through notes. I put him aside and I apologize for that.

He won the award with the City of Summerside for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Champion. When you were there and you heard the writeup on him, it was quite remarkable. I can't believe that I missed someone like that; speaks four languages and does everything he can for new immigrants coming to Summerside. Sorry about that.

The Premier beat me to the punch on the harness racing starting in Summerside. Historic SRW opens up this Monday. We've had a couple qualifiers up there already and it's going to be great. We should have a full house. We invite everybody to come down.

I want to try, once a week, to acknowledge a District 21 resident who deserves some acknowledgement, and I want to take this time to acknowledge Doug Dexter. Doug has done instrumental stuff with Summerside Minor Hockey and whatnot, and recently he did something that was dear to me, and I just wanted to thank him.

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

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a true honour to rise for the first time in the provincial Legislature, so thank you for that opportunity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Ramsay: I'd like to start by saying hello to everyone watching from District 22 Summerside-South Drive, and I want to thank my family who've been supporting me through this new journey.

I'd like to welcome *HCMS Queen Charlotte* today. It's nice to have you here. And I'm honoured to welcome members from the PEI Federation of Foster Families to the gallery today.

Welcome to Mary Noye, president of the federation; Aletha Power, secretary and board member; and board members Wendy

Ross, Linda Mayhew, and Meaghan Younker. Thank you for joining us today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, congratulations to you.

I just wanted to say hi and thank you to all the residents of District 7 on the recent election. My family, in particular, were very supportive; so supportive. Joey MacDonald and all the great – my co-chairs, and Paul MacDonald, my president. We had the largest team ever. It was smooth, efficient, and very successful. So, I'm in debt to them all. Thank you.

I just want to say thanks to the hon. minister and the member from Borden for reading the names into the record for the two amazing groups that we have here in the gallery, as well. It's pretty special.

I'd like to recognize another big election. Abegweit First Nation: two of the three reserves align with District 7, and I want to congratulate Chief Junior Gould, Councillor Sheri Bernard, Councillor Chris Jadis, and Councillor Jacob Jadis on a resounding victory in the most recent band election.

It's no surprise, considering the economic success that the Abegweit First Nation is experiencing, but also the real sense of community, pride, and togetherness that's been really strengthened over the past number of years, too.

So, just my congratulations to Abegweit First Nation on a very successful election, and good luck to all the new and returning members here in the Legislature.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and to welcome back all of my colleagues today. Welcome to all

those joining us here in the gallery, and a big congratulations to Lt.-Cmdr. Michelle Hopping on assuming command of the Charlottetown-based post; big congratulations to you.

I also want to say hello to all those tuning in from District 9, and especially, two constituents, Gordon and Myrna Babineau, who are celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary today. I know they're tuning in today. I met with them this morning and it is just so obvious that they are just as in love today as they were 60 years ago.

Their daughter Lori told me a story about while Myrna was attending nursing school. She was staying at Beaconsfield House, and of course, she would skip past curfew and meet Gordon on some little dates in the evening. That was a cute little story, but they told me lots of stories this morning. These two are shining examples of kind, good-hearted people, and I was so honoured to spend some time with them today on their special day. Congratulations to you both.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I, too, want to welcome those in the gallery, as well as those watching back home in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness.

It's not very often I get many people who come from the riding of O'Leary-Inverness, and today I do have one. I have Wendy Ross, so I want to acknowledge Wendy. Wendy lives on the Boulter Road and she is in the West Point poll. I've got a little bit of a member's statement on West Point a little later on here.

I also have to say hi to Bethany Collicutt-McNab and little Pete. I'm quite confident that Bethany's father, Harvey, and Carol Ann, will probably be watching back home online. Harvey's a dedicated watcher and observer of the provincial Legislature here.

I also have some connections with Bethany and little Pete as well, because I have a good luck charm in my district, and it's called

Makayla Bernard. Bethany would be her aunt. It's sort of a tradition that I get a picture with Makayla and have it in my campaign photos. So far, she's a winner every time, so I've got to thank her for that.

Welcome to the gallery and all the best.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Pleasure to rise. Welcome to everyone from District 18 Rustico-Emerald watching, and of course, everyone in the gallery. *HMCS Queen Charlotte*, great to see you here, as well as a constituent, nice to see you as well, and the association of foster families.

I wanted to recognize Nicole Brenner as well. I missed her. She won the faculty award, the Bonnie L. MacPherson Memorial Award: "... to a graduating student who has exemplified excellence in scholarship in the Diversity and Social Justice Studies program." A great award, so congratulations to her, a graduate here at UPEI.

I also wanted to mention that on Monday night, we had a climate change adaptation information session, and Peter Nishimura from the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action came out. It was something I'd asked for in the Legislature in November. We had to wait a little longer than I wanted to, but we had it, and it was a great session. We had about 25 people there, and it was very, very useful. I wanted to especially thank the Trout River environment watershed group, TREC, because they did a lot of work and helping with that.

Also, everyone's probably wondering what we're wearing on our lapels here. This is in honour of Vyshyvanka Day, if I'm saying it properly, or Embroidered Shirt Day. This is a Ukrainian day that is celebrated around the world. I actually lived, for some time, in Vegreville in Alberta, which has strong Ukrainian roots, and the home of the Easter egg; they call it the Pysanka.

It's very important to recognize this because there are so many Ukrainians in Canada, and indeed, on Prince Edward Island. It holds significance in symbolizing Ukrainian

heritage, dignity, and it represents the resilience of the Ukrainian people in the face of adversity. And of course, that's what we're seeing a lot of right now in Ukraine with Russia. That's what that's all about.

I wanted to give a shout-out to my cousin Bruce and his wife Oksana, who is Ukrainian descent, and their daughter Natasha, who is a Ukrainian dancer at the national level as part of the Shumka Ukrainian dance group.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Mr. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It is always a pleasure to rise and welcome everybody who is watching online in District 10 Charlottetown-Winsloe. I do want to thank all of the visitors in uniform. I really appreciate your service, and really appreciate you being here, and hopefully you enjoy the proceedings today.

Also, Madam Speaker, when I came into this House back in 2020, at the time during the bi-election, I wasn't able to go on a door-to-door campaign like a traditional election campaign. Most recently, I did have the opportunity. It was great because you actually get to see some people, some faces that you'd recognize through the district. I do want to say hello to two constituents, Aletha Mitchell-Power and also Bethany Collicutt-McNab.

Now, it's funny because both Aletha and Bethany might not see the same political views as I do, but I do notice that little Pete has a blue shirt on. Pete is also a constituent in District 10, so I'm hoping someday that blue shirt might be something that I can work on.

I do want to just welcome you to the gallery and enjoy your time here today.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to rise today. I want to give a shout-out and a big hello to all of the ones watching in from District 26 Alberton-Bloomfield. To all the ones that are service personnel in the gallery, certainly thank you for your service. To the foster parents association, thank you for your work, your great work in service to our Island children. Great to see you here with us today, Mary.

Back when I was minister of social development and housing, I had the opportunity to meet with Mary and work with Mary on a number of initiatives. Again, thank you. It's great to see you're involved still with the foster parents.

Also, it was referenced and mentioned by the Premier that the nurses' contract was ratified. That is great news. Certainly, want to thank, too, all of the nurses, right across the province, but certainly at Western Hospital, the ones on the floor. I've seen the great work firsthand over the last several weeks with my dad being a patient at Western Hospital. A big thank you to the nursing staff on the floor, but not only on the floor, but also in the emergency room, the nurses that go above and beyond, together with the rest of the team at the ER at Western Hospital, where they see upwards of 10,000 patients per year.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: I think everyone has given their greetings who wanted to, and I just wanted to stand up myself and welcome those joining us in the gallery; foster parents association, what a wonderful job you do, and how needed it is for this province, and it would be great if we didn't need you, but we do, and we appreciate what you do.

For everyone joining us from *HMCS Queen Charlotte*, Michele Hopping, congratulations, Lt.-Cmdr., on your new well. I would be remiss if I didn't mention Spencer Lee, who used to be my communications officer back when I was finance minister for a time, and then he moved on to bigger and better things, I guess. But I know he's always been involved, and I really appreciate what each and every one of you do.

Anyway, everyone, have a great day.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Naval Reserve Centennial 2023

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the Centennial of the Naval Reserve in Canada, and one of our very own units, His Majesty's Canadian Ship *HMCS Queen Charlotte*, here in Charlottetown.

HMCS Queen Charlotte was established as a Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve unit in September of 1923 as one of the first in the country. The RCNVR became the backbone of the Royal Canadian Navy, recruiting officers and sailors from across the country.

Today it celebrates its centennial. The Naval Reserve has 100 sailors based out of His Majesty's Canadian Ship *HMCS Queen Charlotte*, right here in Charlottetown. These citizen sailors have been pillars in their communities, whether training for service at sea or coming to the aid of their neighbours when needed. I must make a note: I think it was two or three years ago that there was a boat accident in the City of Charlottetown, in the harbour, and it just happened that our sailors were on station, doing training, and responded to that accident in the harbour.

Naval Reservists, including those from *HMCS Queen Charlotte*, have deployed with the Canadian Armed Forces on operations both at sea and on land, and around the world, from counter-narcotics missions in the Caribbean and Pacific to sovereignty patrols in the Arctic. I believe we also have some of our sailors on station over around the action going on around Ukraine and the Baltic Sea.

They have responded when called upon to support provincial and local authorities at home and in Canada, including providing support to flooding in Quebec and the prairies, fires in British Columbia, hurricanes on the east coast, and more recently, supporting the care of seniors in Ontario and in Quebec during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For 100 years, the Naval Reserve have played a critical role in Canada's safety and security as a vital element of the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Armed Forces.

In the gallery today, we have representatives from the local Naval Reserve Division, *HMCS Queen Charlotte*. At this time, I ask that we recognize the Royal Canadian Navy Reserve by honouring their place in our nation and in the province's military history and heritage as they celebrate the 100 years of service excellence across the country and in our province.

Congratulations to Lt.-Cmdr. Michelle Hopping in assuming command at the ceremony last evening, where she relieved Lt.-Cmdr. John MacDonald.

During 2023, please join us in recognizing the Naval Reserve Centennial and their place in our province's military history and heritage. I ask this House and all politicians to support our men and women in uniform.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

West Point Development Corporation

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Last night, I attended the annual meeting of the West Point Development Corporation. This is a nonprofit organization mandated to own and manage the historic West Point Lighthouse, one of PEI's premiere tourism attraction. It also operates Willy's Wharf Restaurant, which will be opening on June 8th for this season.

The development corporation also advocates for issues within the West Point community and works in cooperation with the Cedar Dunes Provincial Park, West Point Harbour Authority, West Point Fire Department, and the West Point Craft Guild. This is a unique style of community advocacy and has worked for this community for many years.

In their financial statements, the corporation directly manages \$1.2 million worth of assets. The West Point Lighthouse Inn saw a

significant increase in occupancy in 2022, generating close to \$100,000 more than expected, even after losing three weeks due to the damage caused by Hurricane Fiona, which caused for a premature closing of the inn.

For a tourism business in rural PEI, this accomplishment should not be understated. Credit should be given to lighthouse manager Kendra Smith and her staff. Credit also should be given to the hardworking volunteers of the volunteer board, including Chair Harvey Stewart, members Tiffany Boulter, Jackie Stewart, Andrea Ellis, Greg McCormick, Nancy MacMillan, and Bev Boulter.

This organization does rely on government support for some wages, but they employ over 20 Islanders on a seasonal basis. This is significant in rural PEI, and both levels of government need to be more supportive. This means not only by being there with the programs, but to attend their annual meeting, to work with the volunteers, and point to opportunities where government can help.

At their recent annual meeting, I was surprised by the lack of attention government gave to this organization. I attended myself and saw one of PEI Parks staff members there. Where was the economic development department? What about the department of environment and climate change? What about Tourism PEI?

I questioned if they didn't come simply because West Point is too far out of the way for an evening meeting in May, or is it that meetings too far outside of the cities of Charlottetown and Summerside, that government won't pay mileage to its staff to attend, or is there some other reason?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: If they had attended, they would have learned about the shoreline protection of armour stone being used to repair the beach and protect the lighthouse from storm surges. They would have learned how projects like this have allowed beach walkers access to the beach in front of the lighthouse, between the water's edge and the armour stone. This is relevant information and could certainly be applicable in other areas.

I realize that government and staff cannot attend every meeting, but after recent challenges like COVID, Fiona, and labour shortages, it is important to learn and appreciate the toll that this has had on rural communities. Government should encourage departmental staff to attend meetings of stakeholder organizations and work with them and help them through their challenges and ways that they can move forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Claudia Campbell – Big Brother Canada

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise today to recognize Claudia Campbell, a 25-year-old from Kensington who recently placed second in the *Big Brother Canada* Season 11 finale.

Big Brother Canada is a Canadian television reality show in which a group of contestants live in a house that is isolated from the outside world as they compete for a \$100,000 cash prize, as well as additional prizes from the show's sponsors. Every week, the contestants compete in several competitions to win power and safety inside the house before voting off a contestant during eviction.

Throughout *Big Brother Canada* Season 11, there were 16 contestants. Although Claudia said she may have been underestimated, she was most proud of her success in competitions which propelled her to continue each week. She used her interpersonal skills, intelligence, and strategy to make it all the way to the end. Claudia was happy with the outcome and proud to be part of a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Congratulations, Claudia. You made your province proud, and especially your hometown, Kensington, proud.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

With health care crises unfolding in real time, the official opposition is committed to asking health care questions daily so Islanders know that someone is keeping this government accountable for their missteps on this file.

My question today was going to be to the minister of health, but the Premier had mentioned he's not here. I can't see whether he's here or not. He has him so far back in the corner, I really can't see.

Health PEI CEO statement on PCH ICU

So, my question will have to be, today, to the Premier: Your CEO of Health PEI stated the other day that the ICU of Prince County Hospital shouldn't be considered a real ICU. Do you agree with this statement from your Health PEI CEO?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that he can't miss me. I'm right in front of him here. By the look of myself on TV, if the camera adds 10 pounds, there's four cameras on me in here.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

An Hon. Member: Me too.

Speaker: You're not alone.

Premier King: But quite seriously, I think the CEO of Health PEI took some time last night to clarify the comments and obviously did not mean the intent that was taken by so many. I have great respect for everyone who works within the health system, for the CEO of Health PEI as well, and I was glad to see that opportunity taken last night to clarify those remarks and to also clarify his belief

and hopes from the system and those who work within it.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'm glad to hear that the Premier acknowledged that an apology was needed in that response, but I have to wonder if this is yet just another case of "do as I say, not as I do" with the Premier.

Islanders remember that it was this Premier who forced nurses and frontline staff to rally on the steps of the Confederation Centre just to have their voices heard about two months ago.

Apology to health care staff

Question to the Premier: Will you finally stand up in this House and apologize for the disrespect that you and your government have shown our Island health care staff, patients, and family over the past two months?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Madam Speaker, I have great respect for those who work within our health care system and do so much to try to provide a quality level of health care for Islanders. They're doing it under some very stressful circumstances that were obviously exposed through the COVID situation and continue to be exposed today.

I have a great working relationship with the leadership, whether it's our College of Physicians, the Nurses' Union, and others. I want to be a good broker and to try to continue to work forward and to try to work with all of those. I have nothing but the utmost respect for those who do that every day. It's not just a job, it's a public service, and they do it well and I respect them very much for it.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's no secret that food and grocery prices are at an all-time high, despite inflation continuing to fall closer to pre-pandemic levels when, in fact, as of April 2023, PEI's inflation is below the national average, but food prices remain high. The majority of grocery chains are raking in record profits.

Plan to combat inflated food prices

Question to the minister responsible for food insecurity: Can you explain to Islanders what your government plans to do to combat inflated food prices here on Prince Edward Island?

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

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question.

Eliminating poverty is a big job and we are working towards the ambitious goal to eliminate poverty by 2035. Forty million dollars was invested in social programs including social assistance, increasing shelter ceilings, and the Seniors Independence Initiative over the last three years.

These increases mean that Islanders' needs for receiving more resources to better meet their basic needs, including food, housing and security, transportation and communication, clothing, and optical.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That was very, very broad but I'm going to speak and I ask you specifically regarding food prices. To me, that was, at the best, really a non-answer to that.

It's pretty clear that the government has no plan – no plan – to combat the inflated food prices in the grocery stores here on Prince Edward Island and they are out of touch with everyday Islanders who are trying to keep healthy foods in their home.

Children in food-insecure households

Question to the minister: Can you tell the House what percentage of children lived in a food-insecure household in 2019, when your party first came into power?

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

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I do not have the answer to that. I'll bring it back.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'll save you that trouble. It was 24.5%. It's concerning that the minister doesn't know her own government's record on food insecurity.

Question to the minister: What percentage of Island children are living in food insecurity today?

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

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you for the question, hon. member.

With the few short weeks that I've been here, I apologize to let you know that I do not have the answer to that, and I will bring that back.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'll save you the trouble again. It's 35.1 percent.

So, now, I know you're new. I'll give you that, but it's important to be in touch with your file on a very important issue. We are aware that there's over a third of Island children that are living with food insecurity here on Prince Edward Island.

Question to the same minister: I'm not sure if you don't know. You should be up to date on that, but are you basically refusing to publicly admit information on food insecurity, that you don't know the facts, or that you're just really out of touch with what is going on in Island homes across Prince Edward Island, with one third of Island children not having food, healthy food every day? They go to bed hungry.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: Okay. This is a very important issue.

An Hon. Member: It is.

Leader of the Opposition: It's over a third of Island children on Prince Edward Island go to bed every night hungry. You guys are either neglecting to – or, not neglecting, you're deflecting –

Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a question?

Leader of the Opposition: Yes, I do. So, can I ask? Is that okay, if I ask right now?

Okay. I'm going to ask you, minister: Do you think this is a situation that all Island children – let alone the third of Island children that go to bed hungry every night – is this acceptable?

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

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It certainly isn't acceptable. I just want to let you know that the government is committed to enhancing food security for all Islanders, especially children. We have made historic investments in social assistance social programs of \$40 million in the last three years –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Ramsay: – including \$7-million social program rates, which is helping strengthen food and housing poverty.

Last year, the school food program served 470,000 students.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

We as Liberals believe in helping those who need it the most. The Conservative government doesn't even know how badly Islanders are struggling to put food on the table.

I spoke to a parent just yesterday. She told me that every week, she has to make choices between putting healthy food on the table, paying off her credit cards that she had to use just to bridge the gap, or simply going without. This is an incredibly sad situation to hear about and it's, unfortunately, too common.

Islanders facing food insecurity

Question to the minister: Would you be able to look at this parent in the eye and tell them that they don't have to worry about next week's grocery bill if you don't even know how many Islanders are living in food insecurity?

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

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yes, I am willing to look them in the eye, because I understand that hunger is not for anyone on Prince Edward Island. No one deserves to be hungry, and this government is doing everything they can. They've invested \$40 million in the last three years, and 470,000 children have been fed with meals in the school program.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

This is a government that has, obviously, no plan and no knowledge of how many Island families are in need of food. We have established that this minister doesn't know how many Islanders are going without food, and they live in insecure situations. It's

highly alarming. That CBC report from April of this year, they uncovered the numbers that all Islanders should be concerned about.

In March of 2023, 4,700 meals were served through the soup kitchen; 930 Island families received assistance through the food bank.

Increase in food insecurity

Question to the minister: Will you tell all members of this House how much of an increase that represents?

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

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question.

As I said, I've been here a few weeks, and I will definitely bring that percentage back to you. I do not have all the percentages, and I'm not going to stand here and say that I do. I simply haven't had the opportunity to find that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The answer is 25 percent; 25 percent from last year. That's huge; a significant increase that affects many, many families here on Prince Edward Island. I would just beg you to, please, get the knowledge that you need on this file in order to make plans because we need a plan to feed these families.

We heard that more and more Islanders are at food banks and soup kitchens. We are seeing community fridges popping up right across the province at alarming rates. Thank goodness for volunteers who are managing these sources of healthy food in our communities.

Approach to rising food costs

Question to the minister: Why has your government taken a hands-off approach to

rising food costs instead of actively working to reduce the burden of food costs for Islanders?

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

Ms. Ramsay: Again, I am very concerned that there are hungry children in Prince Edward Island. We've made historic investments in social assistance and social programs of \$40 million over the last three years, and 470,000 schoolchildren have been fed. I just continue to say that we are concerned and I will bring back any information that you need, or you can come and speak with me at the department if you'd like and we could work something out.

But the short few weeks that I've had, I don't have statistics on everything.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Access to housing is fundamental to Islanders, yet it's been overlooked by this government.

Inadequate and insecure housing is a reality for far too many Islanders, and the consequences have been too many Islanders living in unsafe conditions. This can lead to increased vulnerability and violence, discrimination, social exclusion, and significant obstacles to securing employment.

As noted in the Speech from the Throne, "Housing is a continuum that includes temporary shelter space, transitional housing, structured housing, rental units, co-operatives, and single households."

Knowing the scope of the issue we're facing is important.

Number of unhoused Islanders

Question to the minister of housing: How many Islanders are unhoused?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

An Hon. Member: Statistics.

Mr. Lantz: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm sure that the opposition staff has done the research and provided them with facts and figures that perhaps none of us on this side –

An Hon. Member: Don't count on it.

Mr. Lantz: – have not yet memorized, but I will say that I'm quite aware that we have a significant housing problem in Prince Edward Island. All of us heard this at the doors throughout the election campaign. All of us understand – I believe the Leader of the Third Party recognized in some comments yesterday – that we need to work on the housing issue throughout the entire continuum. We need more housing from shelter space to market space. We all acknowledge the problem. We acknowledged in the Speech from the Throne that our housing programs were chronically underfunded here.

We have a mandate. We've put a priority on this issue. I take it very seriously. I met many people throughout my district throughout the election campaign who are housing-insecure, and it bothers me. We need to lift people up and provide them with the resources they need to live in dignity.

I assure you that we take this as a strong priority of this government. We'll work very hard to alleviate the problems in the housing crisis here.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Well, that's a good first answer, not knowing the (Indistinct), so congratulations on your first answer to this question, but –

Mr. Lantz: I know you have the answer there for me.

Mr. McNeilly: Well, you know what's funny, I thought I would – I should have the answer, but I've asked your government for four years for that answer and it wasn't

coming to me. So, it's a little bit frustrating on this side of the House.

Here's another one.

The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System is the way that your department and this province collects data.

An Hon. Member: It works.

Mr. McNeilly: It's called the HIFIS system; the HIFIS system.

Number of Islanders on HIFIS system

Minister, how many Islanders are recorded on the HIFIS system?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Mr. Lantz: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I know that we suffer from somewhat of a lack of data around our housing issue in Prince Edward Island. We are in the process of marrying some of our data with data from Statistics Canada. We do expect to start receiving some of that back to give us further insight into specific data sets in Prince Edward Island regarding our housing situation. It will help guide policy into the future and help us get out of this crisis.

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

Mr. McNeilly: I'm not talking about data. The HIFIS system measures Islanders who are unhoused in Prince Edward Island. You have it. It's done in coordination from a lot of different groups. You have it, and "can you bring that back to me" would be a question, but I don't want to blow my question on that, so here's the next one.

Minister, you chair the special Cabinet Committee on Housing. According to the Speech from the Throne, your committee will "...focus on finding ways to immediately increase housing starts over the next 24 months..."

Membership of new housing committee

Given that housing for the most vulnerable is clearly part of the housing continuum, do

you think it was appropriate to leave the Minister of Social Development and Seniors off this committee? How will you develop a housing plan if you don't have input from the minister responsible for our most vulnerable?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Mr. Lantz: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would say that we have a strong membership of the committee to begin with. I look forward to the work that we're doing. I have a strong relationship with the Minister of Social Development and Seniors. All of the priorities that make their way through our committee on housing will make their way through the Cabinet, and I have no concerns whatsoever that we'll coordinate where required.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you.

Maybe it was an oversight, but I would like to see the minister of social development responsible for our most vulnerable on that committee instead of maybe the environment minister on that particular committee, because that's where it needs to be done.

Just this week, we've heard from Blooming House, and they clearly raise concerns of lack of access to transitional housing. Sadly, some women have been forced to stay for over two years at Blooming House. They were very clear – and I'm very clear – that this is a shelter, not transitional housing. This has been operational since 2019 and it's been full.

People needing housing in that area are seniors, young people, people who have fallen on hard times – just can't afford – there are various reasons why they're there.

Minister, we don't have the transitional housing and actually, this government has gutted transitional housing.

Plan for new transitional housing units

I want to ask you as a new minister: How many new transitional housing units will you create over the next two years?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Mr. Lantz: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I understand that it is a challenge to move people from our shelters into transitional housing. I know that the previous government here spent a great deal of effort to make sure that our shelter system here in Charlottetown was adequately resourced with our new facility at Park Street.

We will concentrate on helping people move through that continuum, through transitional housing to attainable housing into more community housing across that continuum.

But as I said in my first answer, we understand that we are under-resourced across that entire continuum. Yes, we need to work our way through that continuum and continue to provide more housing. We have a great relationship with Blooming House. Our staff work with them to try to find spaces for people to move through that continuum of housing. It's just something that we know is a challenge and we'll continue to work on it as we can.

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

Mr. McNeilly: We don't have any transitional housing because you didn't build transitional housing over the four years. You went down in transitional housing. You're the fourth minister in four years. I've been here every year looking at this file and I am upset at this point, and not at you, minister; at what's happened over the last four years.

We have a crisis out there, and Blooming House is just an example. When we're in a shelter system, we cannot move people onto the next – to get them supports, and this has become a major, important issue.

When will this government start to support the planning for our most vulnerable people on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Mr. Lantz: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We have added transitional housing space. In fact, I was speaking at the mayor's round table on homelessness last week. I was speaking with members of Salvation Army who operate transitional housing on Weymouth Street.

As you know – I understand that you're very well versed on the situation there – Salvation Army continues to move people into there on a staggered basis. They do have some beds still available but they're staggering the entry to the facility to make sure that everyone's needs are met; they're settled before new residents are moved in.

We are continuing to move people into transitional housing in that location and will continue to create more locations, more units as we are able to.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There are rarely quick or easy fixes to complicated problems, and that's never more true than when we look at our health care system.

One proposed so-called solution that we've seen growing in popularity amongst Conservative governments across Canada is to farm out public services like surgeries to private clinics. This was done with the promise of greater efficiencies, of better access to services, and of reduced costs.

Recent Canadian data, and I'm going to table this later this morning, suggests that the opposite is true. After tens of millions of dollars of public funds being spent on surgeries to for-profit private clinics, wait times are no better, and in some cases, they're worse, and costs have soared.

For-profit surgical clinics

A question to the Premier: Can you assure Islanders, unequivocally, that you won't be following the lead of your Conservative

colleagues like Doug Ford and Danielle Smith, and that there is no place on Prince Edward Island for private, for-profit surgical clinics?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Yes.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Yesterday, your health minister supported our motion to adopt the national standards of care in long-term care homes here on Prince Edward Island, and I was really delighted when that motion passed unanimously in this House. I look forward to those standards being adopted in regulation in our laws, how they govern the LTCs on Prince Edward Island, as soon as possible.

Shift LTC from private to public

To the Premier: One area where there is private delivery of publicly funded health services is in long-term care homes. How will you take steps to provide better and safer care to Island seniors, and shift these care homes from private, for-profit ownership to public ownership?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That is a good question, and it's a complicated question and situation, given the fact that PEI has probably more of a hybrid model of delivery with public and private than a lot of jurisdictions. I do think there are a lot of wonderful people providing wonderful care across Prince Edward Island through the private model, which is publicly funded, of course.

But I do think we also learned, through COVID and post-COVID, that we have to have a greater focus on the standards and the delivery of service for those, in particular in this province and in this region, where we have some of the most rapidly aging population in the country.

So, I think what we need to do, following up with the Michele Dorsey report, which we hope will come soon, and marry that with the recommendations at the national level. I think, overall, we want to work to deliver the best possible long-term care service delivery so those in PEI who age can do so with dignity, and do so safely, and to be at home when they're there.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I must say, with all due respect, I love you as our health minister, Premier.

Premier King: Write that down.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Another area where there is private delivery of publicly funded services is in virtual care. Provision of virtual care is pulling some doctors here on Prince Edward Island away from the public service, from their patients. They're leaving their jobs to provide virtual care to Island patients, making access for Islanders, of course, even worse than it already is.

Moving virtual care to public system

To the Premier: Is your government working on policies to move virtual care within the public system, and if so, when can we expect to see public delivery of virtual care starting here on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That is another great question. I think it really stems from the fact that I think we're living through a very transformational time in our society, and particularly around the delivery of health care, as we try to do more for more people, as our population grows and ages, and the challenges around health human resources are what they are.

I think the Maple app, as it has been designed, was essentially designed to try to have some type of level of service for those

who can't access a family doctor or a walk-in clinic, for example. As we build our collaborative care centres, our neighbourhoods and homes, it has been filling a void, but I think no good deed goes unpunished. I think it has become a situation where maybe some doctors have found it more profitable and easier to sit at home on the couch and diagnose patients than it would be to go to the office, et cetera.

So, I think there are significant challenges in how we move forward here. I think I would say quite honestly, to the Leader of the Opposition, we want to – or Leader – you're still the Leader of the Opposition to me.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier King: No, this is a serious issue. I really do think we want to try to use every bit of innovation and technology that we can in this changing and transformative time to deliver quality health care to Islanders but I also want to make sure that every Islander knows that it is the intention of this government to do everything we can and we believe wholeheartedly in the model of public delivery of health care. I think that's important.

We have to find our way through this. A long, roundabout answer to the Leader of the Third Party to say I take your point very seriously. I think it's a difficult situation we're finding ourselves in, and we're trying to work with all our health care professionals to find our way through that complicated situation.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We know we need to build new housing, but we also need to protect our existing affordable housing.

According to census data from 2016-2021, the Island lost more than 1,800 rental households that paid less than \$1,000 a month on housing. During the same time, the number of Island households paying

more than \$1,500 a month increased by more than 2,100.

Decrease in affordable housing

My question for the minister is simple: Where has all our affordable housing gone?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Mr. Lantz: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Well, we continue to add to our stock of social housing in this province through new builds, through acquisitions, and those are ongoing. We are planning for more.

We know that the price of rental properties is rising across the board in Prince Edward Island. Accordingly, the thresholds for being eligible for social housing continue to rise as well.

We know that we need to continue adding to our inventory of social housing throughout the province. We try to keep it affordable for those in need, for those most in need, and will continue with those efforts to put people in homes that are affordable for them.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There are all kinds of reasons why we're losing that affordable housing and we should be tracking that. We could be tracking that, but your government is making a conscious decision not to.

To preserve affordable housing, we can also look to jurisdictions like Montreal, which has used a first right of refusal to acquire affordable housing at market value and keep it out of the hands of speculators.

The PEI Housing Corporation does not have a right of first refusal, which restricts its ability to acquire and maintain affordable housing.

Right of first refusal for affordable housing

Will the minister institute a right of first refusal to maintain affordable housing stock?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Mr. Lantz: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We will take every opportunity to acquire affordable housing when appropriate. I would note that acquiring properties that are not vacant does not add any net new units to our inventory.

We have acquired properties in the past that are considered to be affordable units that may, in fact, be fully occupied but we've taken that opportunity, and as tenants leave those properties, we fill them with our clients.

That is one way to increase our inventory, but I would note that we have over 1,700 units of social housing in this province, and that continues to rise. We'll continue to work on that number to increase our inventory. That's an ongoing effort. It's a priority of this government, and it will continue to be.

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

Ms. Bernard: We just lost 1,800 units so we know we need to build more. Whether we acquire them and they're full or not, it doesn't matter. This is not just about our social program clients. This is about Islanders having access to affordable housing.

The Green Party has asked this government to implement a rental registry numerous, numerous, numerous, numerous times. This would protect tenants from illegal rents that put them further and further into debt. It would also give government a powerful tool – don't you want more tools in your toolbox? – to monitor rents on PEI and ensure that housing is not becoming more and more unaffordable, which we're seeing now.

Instituting a rental registry

Will the minister do the right thing and institute a rental registry or will he let tenants continue to pay illegal rents?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Mr. Lantz: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I believe that no other provincial jurisdiction operates a registry for the purpose of tracking rents. The department did commission a report from an independent consultant on the need for a rental registry and how it might be implemented, if it's required.

We feel that we can accomplish the same goal of a rental registry through our *Residential Tenancy Act*.

The act does include a number of changes designed to help address the issue of rent increases, for example, identifying the previous tenant rent rate on the lease; identifying, in advance to the Director, units which require evictions in order to complete renovations; including three years of rent roll on applications for greater than allowable rent increases. It also includes penalties for landlords that illegally raise the rent.

So, there are measures in place and protections for these cases.

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

Mr. MacLennan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Health care is top of mind lately, especially in East Prince, as the PCH works through its current staffing challenges. We know that our emergency rooms are a pressure point for access to care. One thing that I believe could help support our frontline health care workers would be if we could better use nurse practitioners in our ERs.

Adding NPs, physician assistants to ERs

Question to the Premier: During the election, our party proposed adding nurse practitioners and physician assistants to help provide care to patients in emergency rooms

like the one at the PCH. What is the status of this commitment?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. It is an important question. It was a key commitment in our platform because in talking with those on the front lines, there are tools in the toolbox that we have within our system that can help alleviate some of the pressure points in the system. Adding individuals to help in the ER is one of those.

We're working, currently, through the department and with Health PEI, on how we would integrate nurse practitioners and physician assistants, not only into our emergency departments, but in other areas of the health system as well. We do recognize the value and the role that those individuals can play.

We do want the initiative to be successful. We've been consulting with nurses and nurse practitioners and other health professionals and staff in the ER to make sure we're doing this right. We're in the initial stages now.

But as I've said many times in here, hon. member, these changes can't happen fast enough. I hope we will work with urgency to get them implemented as quickly as possible.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, your first supplementary.

Mr. MacLennan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I think this is a good idea and it was one my constituents liked, too, at the doorstep. Anything we can do to strengthen our frontline health teams will benefit our entire health system.

Question to the Premier: You might have answered it, but are the pieces in place to be able to move quickly on this, to getting this in place within the system to improve access to care in our ER at PCH?

Mr. McNeilly: That's a good question.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It is a really good question. I think, in general, I would say the pieces are in place, but I also think we have learned as a province over the last number of years – and even most recently with the situation at PCH, which I know you're familiar with – if you just make one decision based on one piece without dealing with the other aspects of the health care system, you realize it can cause some ripple effects down the road.

So, what I would again commit to saying here today is that we want to consult and work with all of those individuals who can play a role here, and to make sure when we implement this change, we will be able to do so in such a way that it will have the greatest impact, positively, on the system.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, your second supplementary.

Mr. MacLennan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I was pleased to see an agreement reached in the new contract with our nurses. I'm hearing good feedback from the nurses, and I understand it will help make our nurse practitioner wages very competitive.

Recruiting and retaining NPs

Question to the Premier: Do you think that the combination of better wages and improved scope of practice for our nurse practitioners will make it easier for us to recruit and retain these valuable health professionals?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: That's another great question. I would hesitate, based on my experience, to say any person in the health care system from a human resource position is easy to recruit. I do think it makes it easier for Health PEI and the department and the system in general to attract individuals from a professional basis if salary is at the level

that it is at. I think we're at a very competitive level, salary-wise.

But if you talk to many on the front lines, and I know you have and I know others in this House have done so, particularly during the election process, wages aren't just the only thing that impact. It has to do with work/life balance. It has to do with the stressors at work and working in a safe environment, and many, many things.

But I do think while the financial situations of contracts tend to get a lot of the focus, I think if you talk to the head of the Nurses' Union and the other executive members of their team, a lot that was dealt within this nurses contract, aside from money, are issues that you've been trying to deal with for a long time.

I think that will help in the long run, but I would hesitate to say any recruitment in health care right now is easy.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Dillon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Our seniors are a very valuable part of our community and we want them to thrive. One thing I've heard from seniors is about the importance of having access to technology.

We heard yesterday from the finance minister about the Computers for Success program, and what a great program that's being offered.

Wi-Fi in seniors housing

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors: Accessing Wi-fi is a significant barrier for many living in seniors housing. Do you know of any provincially owned seniors housing facilities currently that have Wi-Fi for their residents?

Mr. McNeilly: Oh, that's a great question.

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

Mr. McNeilly: I love this question. (Indistinct)

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. member.

I do not know that. I can't say that I do. I visited seniors on my campaign walk and that was one thing we didn't talk about. It hasn't come up with the department since I've been there. We've been over many, many things but Wi-Fi wasn't one of them.

I do know that we do have laptops available for seniors, but I don't know about the Wi-Fi, so that's something I could definitely look into.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Dillon: Well, that is great, and it's great to have computer access. It's not very good if they can't be connected.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Dillon: The reason I ask is that, more and more, we rely on technology to stay connected with friends and family these days. If our seniors living in public housing had access to Wi-Fi, say in common rooms, for example, then they would help bring neighbours together. It would help our seniors stay connected, which is a very good way to combat social isolation.

On a personal note, staying connected with the ones I love through technology is invaluable for when I have children that don't live on PEI.

Question to Minister of Social Development and Seniors: Has your department given any consideration to the feasibility and benefits of offering Wi-Fi access to seniors living in publicly owned housing?

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

Ms. Ramsay: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question.

It's a wonderful idea. I will take that back and I think we can probably do that if (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Dillon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Just another point, and I'm excited to hear that you'll take back that and give some consideration, but I just wanted to mention, too, that tools like Maple to access health care services are important for our seniors to be able to be a part of. It's just another tool. I guess you've answered my question of whether (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Dillon: Could you commit to having your department look into this idea and adding Wi-Fi access into our publicly owned seniors' facilities and report back to the House?

Ms. Ramsay: I thank the hon. member for the question.

Consider that done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) real good question.

Mr. Myers: Lead story on *Compass*.

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

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct) I can't handle it anymore.

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the minister of workforce and advanced learning sharing two of the three leases involving in SkillsPEI and CDS in O'Leary as I requested earlier this week. Very informative documents, I might say.

Expenses for West Prince agency offices

Can the minister of workforce and advanced learning explain why these two government agencies are spending an extra \$201,648 plus expenses for heat and lights, for this fiscal year, on, basically, nice offices in a resort municipality, and not putting it into

the skills to make people more employable and try to get these people working?

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

Ms. Redmond: Thank you, hon. member, and I'm happy that he read through the leases that were shared. There were three.

We made the decision, as a department and the staff that trust, to move that for better accessibility and visibility. Sometimes those decisions get made hard; always for the best interests of the Islanders and the clients that we're serving, which is over 800 in West Prince.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Redmond: So, we are doing it for those folks, to ensure they have accessibility to those services.

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

Mr. Henderson: Madam Speaker, the problem is we're putting money into nice, beautiful offices in a resort location, and we're not putting it into the people who need the training and have the skills.

But on top of this, they're also spending another 28,000 because they had to lease two facilities. They're going to have two facilities. They're going to have one where they're currently at leased for another year, and then they have the new facility, currently.

Use of empty leased space in O'Leary

I'm just kind of wondering, what does the minister have planned for these empty spaces? Because one of those places is going to be empty. What are you going to do with one of those spaces, minister?

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

Ms. Redmond: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. member.

I have been in conversation and I understand that there are other government office staff that will be using that space. It did allow us

a little bit of cushion time to make the move, but they will be moving in to fill that space.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, your final question.

Mr. Henderson: My curiosity is piqued now. I'll admit, that changes the water in the beans, as the saying goes, Madam Speaker.

Could you maybe give our community in O'Leary a little bit of a hint on what these great new staffing – I'm hoping it will replace a thousand people who come to the community on an annual basis, as well as 15 staff.

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

Ms. Redmond: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I don't have the exact departments. It does fall under another minister's responsibility, but I am happy to say that there is other staff moving into that space.

Speaker: Before we go any further, I'm just going to try to nip this in the bud right away. A lot of long preambles; a lot of long answers today. We try and keep within the timeframe. We were close, but I let us go over a little bit. I'm going to try to run a tight ship here. I know you all like to hear yourselves talk, but let's try and limit it a little bit so we stay within the parameters.

Also, just to remind everyone, and maybe some of the new members don't know, please do not mention people being absent from the House. I know the hon. Premier did that because we have a member who is going to be out for a long time, but it's just something we don't do on a regular basis, or at all, so please just remember to not do that. I'll try and continue to make sure we all do what we're supposed to in here.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Ministers

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

Importance of Foster Care

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm honoured to stand today to recognize the important work of foster families in PEI. From experience, I know that being a mother and a grandmother takes a great deal of commitment, time, and compassion, but the time, commitment, and compassion that these foster families show is second to none.

We have some foster families in the gallery with us today, and I can't help but feel overwhelmed with gratitude for the service and support you provide to Island children and youth who need it the most. Every child needs someone to love them, encourage them, and support them. Sadly, some children have parents who may not be able to do that now, for various reasons.

Foster families provide much more than four walls and a roof to children and youth. They are the teachers, they are the mentors, and they are the guides. They show up wholeheartedly and honestly, and they provide children with a safe home; comfort and routine; and most importantly, love, which truly makes a difference in their lives.

To the foster families with us today, I can say I know this is not easy. Some of the children you welcome into your home are hurt, emotionally and physically, and you feel their pain with them. The role of being a foster parent can be challenging, but it's so very, very important.

I am eager to work together with foster families to make sure that they have the support they need to give children a welcoming and safe environment.

I invite all members of the House to promote foster care opportunities across PEI, and I encourage all Islanders who are interested in making a difference in the life of a child or a youth in need to visit fosterparents.princeedwardisland.ca.

Thank you to the foster parents, and thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. McNeilly: I'd like to thank the minister for that great statement today. I think it's important that you did that and recognize that.

Over a number of years, we have often talked about fostering. I think it's something that we take the politics out of it. We all just want to support and love, just like you love a child no matter what. You welcome them into your home at the time they need them the most and you provide them a chance to live a life that they deserve. I just want to say thank you very much.

There's a lot of families; all are made up of different situations at different times in their lives and they need help, and we need to be there for your organization. I want to thank the minister for that. I'll continue to support on this side, along with working along with the minister to see whatever we can do. I'll push her gently to continue good work.

Thank you for coming today. Thank you, minister, for the statement.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, minister, for the statement. Welcome to the foster families that we have here with us today.

They do crucial, important work in our province, dealing with some of our most traumatized or vulnerable children who are in really awful circumstances when you consider why they wouldn't be able to stay with their families. Having people here who are ready and open with their open arms is a service that I don't think we can even appreciate enough or understand deeply enough to show the appreciation and gratitude that we need to.

I know in talking with several foster families over the years that they have their challenges. I know that the minister is new in this role so I'm sure just kind of getting her feet under her, but I look forward to her hearing some more of the challenges that they deal with.

Hearing people say that they've got foster children who have been through very traumatic events – and there is no counselling available for the children, which is a huge disservice to the children and to their chance at a healthy future.

This isn't directly related to foster parents, but it is, because they're the ones dealing with it: We have to align our child protection legislation with our *Adoption Act* because those two things butt heads, and we need to do a severe review of those two to ensure that they work together.

This is about the kids who are accessing the services of foster families and they are at the center of this. If we don't align those two acts, this will never be a better system. So, I'd really highly encourage you to look at that.

When we consider the importance of families like this and we consider the fact that the numbers of families who are offering foster care support are dwindling, we also need to look at that. I think that in doing a review of the two acts, maybe we would be able to find some common ground and get some folks back or to encourage new people to become foster families. But if we don't fix some of these big problems, we're going to keep losing foster families.

I leave everyone with the question: If we don't have foster families, who looks after these children?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ignition Fund Accepting Applications

Mr. Arsenault: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise for my first minister statement in this House.

It's a pleasure for me to rise today to encourage Island entrepreneurs to submit an application to the Ignition Fund. This fund has been an important part of many Island businesses' journeys to help them turn their ideas into realities.

The Ignition Fund is run by Innovation PEI and accepts applications twice a year, in the

spring and in the fall. The deadline for spring is fast approaching; May 24th, to be exact.

It's a competitive process but one that's quite worthwhile because those selected can receive up to \$25,000 in seed money. For someone just starting out, whether it's a brand new business or a new innovative product that they want to get to the market, this type of financial support can make all the difference.

We all know that Island residents have always had a strong entrepreneurial spirit. I'm incredibly proud to know that Island businesses can count on Innovation PEI to help them grow, helping them turn ideas into realities and helping them reach new heights.

With the deadline fast approaching, I would say to anyone who has a fresh idea not to hesitate. Reach out to our Innovation PEI business development officers and let's get you started.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. McNeilly: I'd just like to stand up and say that it's important to get businesses to participate.

I want to thank the minister for that statement. It's an opportunity for Islanders to participate and make sure they get all their paperwork in because this is a good program. I'd like to thank the minister for bringing that forward.

Merci beaucoup. On doit parler français un petit peu la prochaine fois. Merci.

Thank you very much. Next time, you'll have to say a few words in French. Thanks.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Thank you, minister; a very welcome announcement. Of course, I've watched a number of now-successful Island businesses

be launched through this Ignition Fund, and \$25,000 for a new entrepreneur here on Prince Edward Island is a substantial amount of money.

In the economic environment in which we find ourselves now, young people – and I don't want to assume that everybody that will come forward for the Ignition Fund is a young entrepreneur. They're a new entrepreneur and I know that's part of the criteria, but they could be of any age. But the majority of the ones that I know who have gone through this program are, indeed, young entrepreneurs.

Very difficult to establish capital these days, whether that's saving money or whether it's getting loans from a bank, so government coming forward and providing an opportunity for young entrepreneurs here on Prince Edward Island, of which there are many, access to that kind of money is literally the difference between them making it and not making it.

It's a wonderful program. I thank you for the announcement that the deadline is coming. I shall think of those in my own district and beyond who would be appropriate to make application for this. I know many who have done it before. It's a great program and, again, the Ignition Fund gives the launch to so many good businesses here on Prince Edward Island.

I thank the minister for the opportunity for young entrepreneurs – young, aged, old, whatever you are – to access this fund.

Thank you, minister.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a CBC article, *Women staying longer at PEI shelters because there's nowhere else to go*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of

the Opposition, 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.

Mr. McNeilly: Madam Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a document by Executive Council showing that the minister of social development is not on the committee but we do have the minister of climate change and energy on the housing committee. I'm not sure why, but anyway, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a report that I cited in Question Period today. It's a media report entitled: *Do private for-profit clinics save taxpayers money and reduce wait times? The data says no.* I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a CBC story called *City of Montreal to exercise right of first refusal to turn properties for sale into social housing*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table data about the loss of affordable housing on PEI, and I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. members, pursuant to Section 30 of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, I wish to advise that I have received the Child and Youth Advocate's Annual Report for the year ending March 31st, 2022. I move that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Madam Speaker, as Chair of the Special Committee on Committees, I beg leave to introduce the first report of the said committee, entitled "Composition of the Standing Committees". I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe, that the report be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Madam Speaker, pursuant to Rule 110(5) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly*, I'll be moving the motion for adoption of the report tomorrow, Friday, May 19th.

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

Mr. Thompson: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the minister of fisheries and parks and rec –

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Thompson: – that the 1st order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 1, Consideration of the Speech of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the present Session.

Debate was adjourned by the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise again and conclude my remarks on the Speech from the Throne.

I think if I was to characterize the four years of this government's tenure, it would be one of broken promises and missed opportunities. Broken promises, of course, right from day one to the final day before the election: "shovels in the ground," the mother of all broken promises, right up to "we will stick with the fixed election date." The Premier said that repeatedly for years and years and years, and then of course, we ended up in a spring election. Broken promises from the first day to the last day in office.

Missed opportunities, my goodness, so many – too many to count, really – but opportunities to deal with the issues that impact Islanders' lives every single day, whether that's access to health care, whether it's affordability and accessibility to housing, whether it is the cost of living that was discussed in Question Period today, or the protection of our environment, or so many other issues. Missed opportunities by a government to take action and bring forward policies and legislation and put money where it was needed to solve these problems.

Of course, it's not just about money. Money is important in solving many of our issues, and the housing issue that we discussed today at length in Question Period is absolutely something that requires public

money. However, money does not solve all problems, particularly in a situation – and I listened to Danielle Smith, who's in the midst of an election in Alberta right now, talk about how her government has spent more money on health care than any preceding Alberta government. But the measure of whether your health system is getting better or not is not how much money you've spent on it, it's whether you're getting results.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you. Good government is not about how much money you spend; it's about whether or not you're reaching your goals, whether you are measuring the results that you get, and seeing improvements. When it comes to health care, are Islanders seeing better access to health care? Well, the obvious answer to that is no, despite the proclamations of the Premier during the election that health care has never been better in this province.

I have no idea what metric he was using to make that statement. There is nothing; there are no measures by which you can say that our health care system overall – there may be corners of it that have improved, but that our health care system overall is better. We need results-based management. We need to know that Islanders are getting value for their tax dollars, and at the moment, they're not.

We need to measure things like, again, access to care. We need to measure things like wait times for surgeries and wait times for getting results of your tests, getting tests done and getting results back. We need to measure outcomes of procedures. If all of those are heading in the right direction, then the Premier can stand up and say with confidence and with evidence behind him that things have never been better in the health care system. But at the moment, that's not true.

That's one area where we're not failing. We're not measuring. There are other things which are perhaps more difficult to measure, they're more ephemeral; things like the morale in our health care system. Those of us who have received really poignant messages from nurses over the last little

while – particularly the ICU nurses at the Prince County Hospital – will tell you that morale is not good. Our frontline health care staff do not feel valued or respected, and while you cannot perhaps measure that in the same way that you can measure the days before you will have cataract surgery or a hip transplant or whatever you're waiting for, you can certainly see signs, very indisputable signs around this province that morale within the workforce is not good. That obviously has a direct impact on the quality of care that Islanders are receiving.

It's not about how much money we spend, it's about getting better results for Islanders.

More money being spent with worse results is bad government. We need a government that manages itself not by saying how much money we're spending on any particular issue, but says we are making progress here. I can show you that by saying that five years ago, this was happening, today this is happening, and that's a clear indication that we're getting the results that we want. Unfortunately, we do not have that kind of data here on Prince Edward Island.

That's true for housing as well. We have very sparse data when it comes to housing in Prince Edward Island. The Member from Charlottetown –

Mr. McNeilly: West Royalty.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you. West Royalty asked a question today about the number of homeless people here on Prince Edward Island. I don't think we know that number. I have never found it. I don't know whether there is data that could actually – reliable data that we could stand up, the minister could stand up, or the person asking the question could provide. I don't know. That's just one example of areas where we have sparse data here on housing here in Prince Edward Island.

What we do know is that vacancy rates are terribly low. We do know that we are falling behind in the number of units that we have to be building. We need to build 2,000 new units every year, 500 units a quarter, and we're not even close to that. Our housing things are getting worse.

That's an area where we can say we're not getting the results we want. Things are getting worse. In that case, government does need to spend more money. I have no issue at all with government coming forward with a significant capital investment to improve the housing situation here on Prince Edward Island.

We also need to support local landlords. We need stronger regulation when it comes to things like short-term rentals, and when it comes to things like the tax breaks that the real estate investment trusts are given. Real estate investment trusts, or REITs, are given tremendous tax breaks. These are the corporations which own multiple, multiple, multiple units, typically of rental properties. They pay much less tax here in our province than do, for example, a small landlord who may rent out their basement or may have a part of their house which is converted into an apartment that they rent out. They are taxed much more heavily than the people who own the corporations for real estate investment trusts.

We are making it easier for those who live off-Island and are profiting on the backs of Islanders than we are for landlords here on Prince Edward Island who are providing an immensely important service at providing housing for Islanders. We absolutely need to take a look at that and make sure that the tax system that we have is encouraging the behaviour that we want and providing the housing that Islanders need. That's just one example of how government has tools in its toolbox, as my hon. friend from Charlottetown-Victoria Park said earlier today, to nudge things in the direction that we want.

I've spoken at length now about some of the major issues here on Prince Edward Island, and we have, indeed, some very large concerns before us.

Government, to a large extent, is about succession planning. It's about leaving things better when we are done than they were before we got here, than we found them. Over the last four years – I just talked about health and housing there, but I could bring forward any number of other issues – things are not better. Things are heading in the wrong direction.

For me, there is nothing in this Speech from the Throne that gives me confidence that, despite this government's proclamation that "this is our time", which is one of the sections of the Speech from the Throne, that this government is actually capable of meeting that challenge or facing that responsibility of being the right government for this moment. And that's of great concern for me.

Islanders deserve a government that not only cares about them and the numerous challenges that we're facing, but one that has a clear and decisive plan for the Island, now and for a long time into the future; a vision for the future of this Island. This plan and the government, I believe, are failing to meet this, and I worry that Islanders will have to live with the consequences of that.

I really appreciate the opportunity to stand up in this House and speak to the Speech from the Throne, and I also really look forward to hearing from others. This is perhaps the one and only opportunity that we get as members of this House to talk about the full spectrum of government activity and possibility. Of course, we delve down into all sorts of minutiae on, in particular, parts of governance, but if you want to look at a high level of how government runs and the vision and the way forward for government, this is the opportunity that you have as a member of this House to stand up and say whether you think there are challenges and concerns with the Speech from the Throne, or to cheer it on and suggest that this is exactly what this province needs.

So, I really look forward to members of this House expressing, whether it's their concern or whether it's their excitement, about this document and what it says about this government and what that means for Islanders.

Madam Speaker, let us tackle all of these issues, large and small, with sharp and open minds, and a generosity of spirit that is worthy of the people that we serve and of this special Island that we call home.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's really a pleasure to stand and respond to the Speech from the Throne.

I find it is a very good document that, although very high level, does contain a great vision for where this government wants to go. I'm generally very happy with the Speech from the Throne.

What I'd like to do is go through the input that I prepared before I saw the Speech from the Throne and just talk about all of the things that the constituents in District 18 Rustico-Emerald brought to me when I knocked door to door.

I really do like the fact that this government, for the first time ever, starting with our mandate last term, actually asked all MLAs, including all opposition MLAs, for input to the Speech from the Throne, to all budgets, to really give people a chance to ask for things that they were hearing at the doors. I took that very seriously. I don't know, I wrote a few thousand words at least here that I submitted as my input to the Speech from the Throne. I won't go through it line by line, but I wanted to highlight the pieces that I thought were missing.

I want to go back, just as a point of recall, to 2011, when I first ran for office. I was listening – of course, being the tech guy that I was, even back in 2011, I recorded my nomination speech and I posted it to YouTube. There's a much younger-looking version of me looking back there, with a lot more hair, no glasses.

One of the things that I talked about in that nomination speech was problems with health care.

Guess what the number one and two problems were with health care in the province back in 2011, according to a young, aspiring politician? Wait times in emergency departments and lack of family doctors.

So, here we are, 12 years later, and guess what the number one problems are, going around District 18, at least, and I hear (Indistinct)? Wait times in emergency departments and lack of family doctors.

What I'm really proud to see and very pleased to see in the Speech from the Throne, in particular, is the patient medical home/neighbour medical home model, to turn the idea of a family doctor on its head. It's been talked about a lot, but I think it bears worth repeating. This is something I talked at almost every single door, and people said: "What are these patient medical homes? What's going on?" And the whole idea is, what I told people, and I hope this is exactly the way it'll work: You don't ever make an appointment to see your doctor. You make an appointment to see your medical team.

I've since heard the new Minister of Health and Wellness talk about the inverted pyramid. So, what you do is you start at the top and you see your medical team, and it's only if your problem can't get solved is you funnel down to your family doctor. I think this is a great model. It's an important model. It's been a long time coming. Of course, the big thing along with that model is making sure that (a) we have the space and the equipment and the staff for our medical homes; (a) equipment, (b) the staff.

This is the challenge. I want to urge the Minister of Health and Wellness and the government as a whole, as they go through this process to build these patient medical homes – again, the promise was by the end of 2024 or by the beginning of 2025 – to make sure they communicate with communities about what the status of the patient medical homes is, and in particular with the MLAs, because it's something that people want to know. They want to know the status. It's about being open, it's about being transparent, and working together with our communities to build these patient medical homes.

I know the two that would impact my district the most would be a patient medical home in Hunter River, which would, of course, be shared with much of the Premier's district, and a patient medical home in North Rustico. In particular, in North Rustico, there's the Gulf Shore communities health organization that has been lobbying for almost 20 years for clinics and now a patient medical home and wanting to see that happen. They've met with the minister.

I'm waiting right now for a status of where we're at. We've got at least two developers who want to offer space for a patient medical home. So, as things progress – and I realize it may take time, but first of all, let's move with a sense of urgency. Secondly, let's make sure we communicate the progress. This is not about cloak and dagger; this is not about secrets; this is about communicating with constituents to bring our promises to fulfillment that we made during the election. So, that's what I'm looking for.

The other prong – and this is why I mentioned my nomination speech as well – is in that nomination speech – this is back 12 years ago. I've mentioned many times in this House, I come from an information systems background. I'm looking across at the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities. I know he's an information systems guy as well. I think there might be some others around in this House too.

But way back then, this was kind of the infancy of the internet and social media. I remember the CBC did a big story about how social media could be used in an election in 2011, and Doug Currie and I were interviewed to look at our use of social media. Back then, it was using a digital camera, not a phone, to take your video. Then you had to take that and somehow upload it to the internet. YouTube was around, so that's what I used.

The reason I bring that up is, I saw a huge opportunity at the time for virtual health care or telemedicine. In fact, I talked about it at length in that nomination speech. Here we are, 12 years later, and really – this is the surprising part – we're just barely, barely scratching the surface of what I think can be accomplished through virtual health care.

I think that the approach that we heard earlier today from the third party is really narrow in thinking; this idea that all solutions have to be public, and we can't use private solutions. I think we have to use private solutions. I think it's going to be faster; it's going to be better; it's going to be cheaper and more efficient.

But there's no reason why we're just using video chat and text right now to do virtual health care. We have high-speed internet,

and continuous improvements are happening, and maybe some more improvements are required.

But there's no reason why you couldn't have an otoscope with a high-definition image that allows that doctor at the other end to literally see a high-definition image of inside your ear, inside your mouth, the back of your throat, inside of your nose. That's what I proposed back in 2011. There's no reason why they couldn't see your vital signs through whatever equipment was hooked up to you to monitor your blood pressure, your heart rate.

There's no reason why this couldn't happen in almost every single community across Prince Edward Island. There's a pharmacy in almost every community across the Island, and those pharmacies, all they would need is a small room with somebody that had a little bit of medical knowledge and a little bit of information systems expertise. Someone could go there, the equipment could be there, and it would allow for true virtual health care, remotely.

This is not, as I think it was the third party said, about doctors being taken away from providing in-person care because they're providing virtual care. Maybe that is happening in a couple of cases, but I think it'd be more efficient for everybody. It's more efficient for the medical staff; it's more efficient for the patients.

In fact, when I was going door to door to door, every household brought up health care, and at every household, I said, "Have you tried Maple?" I would say over half the households have tried Maple, and probably about 90 percent of those liked Maple. They said it worked very well for them, and they were overjoyed to use it.

In fact, although it was a huge problem and a legitimate problem that Maple cost \$70 if you weren't on the patient registry, there were people out there that were happy to pay \$70, especially young families who had three kids; they had to leave their job, they had a child with an earache, and they didn't have the time to go and sit for hours in emergency or roll the dice and get into a clinic. So, they paid the \$70, they used Maple, they got help they needed right away, and they got the prescription they

needed to help their child, and they did it in a very efficient fashion.

I think, if anything, I would've liked to see the Speech from the Throne a little stronger on this point. It does mention it, but we need to focus, I believe, on the future of what health care delivery is going to be. I think virtual health care will just be a commonplace thing in the future. We'll have health professionals working from home to provide it. We'll have people accessing it from home or from central spots in the community that have the proper equipment needed to allow true virtual health care.

I would urge the minister of health, who is actually from an information systems background as well, to pursue this, to pilot a project as soon as possible to take advantage of some of this next-level virtual health care.

The other thing that really surprised me when I knocked door to door and people brought up health care as an issue, I'd say, "What are your concerns?" and they'd say, "Well, health care is my number one concern." I'd say, "Well, what is it about health care that is your issue? How is your health care service? Are your health care needs being looked after?" And you know, I would say at least 48 or 49 out of 50 people would say, "I'm okay. I'm looked after. I have a family doctor. I found a way to make it work for me. I'm using Maple, and that's good enough." But then, you know what they would say? They'd say: What I'm really worried about is our staff in health care because I have a sister, a brother, a friend who's a social worker, who's an RCW, who's an LPN, who's an RN, who's a doctor, who's a respiratory therapist, and they're saying they are stressed to the max. They feel overworked, they feel underpaid, and underappreciated.

I'm not sure if we explicitly mention that in the Speech from the Throne, but it's the soft issues of management that are the problem. I wanted to talk a little bit about that.

Morale is low. One of the problems was nurses were up in arms, of course, because their contract hadn't been finalized after two years. Fantastic news that it looks like we're going to have an agreement very, very soon. And of course, there was the problem that was mentioned by others, where bonuses

were paid to some workers but not others. I had constituents work in cleaning services at the PCH, and that really bothered them. They kind of took it in stride, but they said, “Look, why should they get bonuses when I’m just as important to the system as anybody else?”

So, we need to focus on that team model, which I think we’re going to do, but let’s make sure that includes everybody on the team because everybody is part of that health professional team.

Specifically, I have a lot of constituents who work at the Prince County Hospital, and we’ve seen that as a major topic of concern right now, with the two internists leaving, which, of course, happened during the election, but also, nurses looking down the pipe and saying: With those internists gone, what are we going to do about the ICU? If we lose our ICU, we’re going to lose our hospital, and this is going to impact the province as a whole.

Well, I talked to them at length. I talked to nurses, social workers, respiratory therapists, janitorial staff, and everyone pointed to the problem at the end of the day – there was a lot of discussion, but it was poor management, is what they said, at the end of the day.

I had one person say that their director “sits with their feet up on their desk, and had told the person, ‘It’s not my job to make you like me. This is the way things are going to be. You go back and do your job.’”

But they didn’t blame the supervisor for that attitude. They said the supervisors and the management are under just as much pressure as them because of the staffing ratios. You’re a manager, a director; you’ve got 100:1 ratio of the people you’re supposed to manage.

So, we need a real, real shakeup in management in Health PEI. I’m not going to say I have the answer of what that actually means, but I’m hoping the things we’re hearing from Dr. Gardam are pointing towards this. But we need a shakeup.

I think one of the things that every single health care professional said is, “This is so refreshing to have someone coming and

asking me what I think the problems are and how I think they can be solved.” And again, this is nothing new, but somehow, we got away from that. It’s up to you ministers over there – I firmly believe it as well, whatever your portfolio is – to go down and sit with the frontline workers and say, “Hey, how can I help you do your job better?” And then feed that back into your senior staff and say, “This is what I’m hearing on the front line. I want you to fix these problems.”

It’s easier said than done, believe me. I’ve sat in those chairs and I tried to do it, and it’s tough. In fact, it was a senior administrator who told me that when I ran in 2011 that that was a good approach, and it was former minister Jamie Ballem who used to do that when he was minister of health. He would go in and he would actually book a room in the hospital. He’d say, “I’m here for the day. You come down. You talk to me. You tell me what your problems are.”

So, I would encourage this government and ministers, whoever you are, to do that. I know the former minister of health, when I fed him problems from constituents I talked to, like nurses, he said, “You know what? If you want me to meet with them, I will meet them.” And that’s what we need.

If there’s anything I regret from my time as minister, it’s that I didn’t spend enough time meeting with people one on one. I know the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park often had a lineup of people for me to meet with, and I said, “You know, I have other people who are experts who are better for them to meet with.” But you know what, I regret that, because I think it’s important for ministers to hear from people firsthand on the front line, and then let their operational experts take the problems they hear and solve them.

One thing – and this gets maybe a little too much into the operational details, but in particular, when it comes to RCWs and nurses, both LPNs and RNs, there are people – the nurses who are switching from full-time positions to casual positions – I think most of us in here would have heard that – because they want to be able to choose the time when they work. When they’re full-time, they’re scheduled in, and that’s what the schedule is. You ask for time off, you’re told no, and you work harder. If you’re

casual, you just say, “No, I’m not available to work,” and they say okay, and they move on to the next person on the casual list. And they’re doing that so they can manage their own work/life balance. I don’t know what the answer is to that problem, but that’s one that really needs to be looked at by Health PEI.

In fact, the full-time people often feel compelled to pick up the shifts and the vacancies that are left open when casual staff aren’t available because they care so much about their job. I talked to an RCW who works at a long-term care facility, and that’s exactly the position she was in. She was working full-time, but she knew all of the people in the long-term care facility, and she knew that if she didn’t step up and take that shift and they were down people, they were going to suffer. We heard about that the other day in the motion talking about long-term care. It really is about staffing shortages; it’s not about the care that people want to provide.

Now, the other thing that I heard, and I think it’s important to bring this up, is that so-called travel nurses are coming in at higher rates of pay, and this is causing morale issues.

Hopefully the new nurses’ contract will help solve that as well. I’m not saying these are easy issues, but they’re ones that really need to be worked on and solved.

I had one, it was a fellow who had worked for almost 40 years in the health care system as a respiratory therapist, and he said, “Right now, we don’t need people from Department of Health and Wellness, we don’t need people from Health PEI coming in to try and solve these problems.” He said, “You really need to go to a third party from outside of Prince Edward Island” – in my mind, I’m thinking, imagine the consulting firm that specializes in health – “and have them come and talk to frontline employees, document what they heard, and make recommendations back.”

Now, maybe this has been done in the past. I’m looking across at the former minister of health. I don’t know of a report, if that sort of approach has been taken in the past. Maybe it has. But I think that would go a long way to allowing executive branch of

government to hold Health PEI to account if they had that recommendations report, and say, “This is what we’re hearing from a third-party source. What are you going to do to meet those recommendations?” Kind of like when the Auditor General comes forward with their reports and then says to departments, “This is what you need to change because there are problems here.”

I actually wrote this down in my notes as well. It says, “I could go on and on about the various specific issues because they are many and varied,” and that’s true.

I heard about nurses leaving their profession to go work at the Summerside tax centre because they felt, even given the decrease in pay, the peace of mind was much better.

I heard people were not being made aware enough about what palliative care service is offered. In fact, they felt – this person – that sometimes, the MAID services, the medical assistance in dying services, were sometimes being chosen in error. That’s a huge topic.

I heard about health care workers who said the unions were telling them not to speak out even though the unions are telling us that, “No, no problem, anyone can say what they want.” But then I also heard a health care worker recently tell me that, in fact, it’s not a problem with unionized workers speaking out because they’re protected by the union, it’s a problem with management not being able to speak out because they’re excluded positions, and if they speak out, their head is on the chopping block.

So, we’ve got organizational management/operational management issues to deal with. This is where maybe the board of Health PEI can work to help solve those challenges. Maybe this is them that need to do that. But perhaps, as an Executive Council, it’s pushing the board of Health PEI to come up with solutions to these problems and report back.

I should mention that Derek Key is my constituent, the former chair of Health PEI. In fact, I haven’t talked to him specifically about his experience. I don’t know why. I reached out to him, but we haven’t connected on that issue, which may be just as well, honestly, at this point. Ignorance is

bliss, sometimes they say. But I hope to connect with him at some point in the future.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Fox: Is he with Malpeque?

An Hon. Member: #Malpeque?

Mr. Trivers: Anyway, to underline this whole thing, to summarize, perhaps:

(a) Patient medical homes and neighbourhoods, A+ idea. Let's get it done quickly. Let's communicate on the status.

(b) Let's work really hard to expand virtual health care and go to the next level. We can do it.

(c) Let's listen to frontline health care workers. Hire an outside firm if we need to, to get that report and make the recommendations.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: There you go. That's health and wellness, and that's the first part I wanted to talk about in my response to the Speech from the Throne.

Now, the next thing I'll talk about, actually, is not health but wellness.

When I was going around door to door, every once in a while, I would say one out of a hundred doors, they wanted to hear what I wanted to do when it came to government. Most people really just want to talk about their issues and make sure you know what they are so that you can represent them and fight for them.

I said that the three topics that I really wanted to push for – I had an inkling that I might be on the government backbench coming in here, and I am, but I said if I am, the three that I really want to push for are wellness, because we spend – really, it's a small percentage of our health and wellness budget on wellness, and I'll talk a little bit about what I think that means; land use planning, and I know the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities, we already met, and land use planning is high

on his list; and energy, so the minister responsible for energy. That's something, as well, that I really want to push for. I know he's looking forward to me pushing him on that file because I think he's got some good answers, or he thinks he's got some good answers, anyway.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) yes.

Mr. Trivers: I want to talk first about wellness.

Wellness, like climate change, really spans multiple government departments. Government silos really are a problem that we need to continue breaking down. This came up on Monday night at our climate change adaptation talk, and everybody agreed that climate change is making some progress in breaking down the silos. But the ministers across, there, whenever you get a chance to interact with other departments, that's good.

The special Cabinet Committee on Housing, I actually started a special Cabinet committee on housing when I was housing minister as well. It had limited success. I'm hoping that this one does better. We've got a nice strong minister. But I think the key thing is the Premier has to be driving that and making sure that he's telling his people in the Premier's Office, "This is the priority and I want to hear reports back."

I think a Cabinet committee on wellness or something along this nature, because it's cross-departmental, is what is needed. Wellness often falls to the Chief Public Health Office, believe it or not. They're the ones who are kind of responsible for that area. I remember, really, it became a marketing exercise: "People, you've got to be well. Here's why you've got to be well. We've got to educate you. Be well. Be exercising. Eat good foods."

But wellness is about much more than that. I think we need to discuss it more. I think, in particular, mental wellbeing is an area of concern. We've already heard that from multiple people, that the Speech from the Throne was a little light on the mental health side of things, and mental wellbeing.

But let's talk about what that means in the context of wellness.

One initiative that is really good from government is the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being. I think it's making a real difference. It's still a fledgling organization. I've always been a big fan of letting existing organizations thrive by giving them support and funding, and I like service organizations – everything from religious ones like Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's Leagues, United Church Women, United Church Men, right through to the Lions Clubs, the Kiwanis, and organizations like that – because they do so much with such a little bit of money.

I wanted to highlight, Madam Speaker, that the Hunter River Lions Club celebrated their 50th anniversary of becoming a charter member organization last Friday. I was able to attend and speak. It's absolutely incredible, the work that they do, and the people in the community who give their time to help their community. I know for a fact that, as an MLA, when there are gaps in government services, I go to the Lions Clubs, for example, and other; Knights of Columbus. They're the ones who fill the gaps, and they know who needs help, how much help they need, what's legitimate, what's not legitimate, and they do a fantastic job.

I say that because the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being – and I was talking with Karen Cumberland the other day, and I mentioned this to her as well. It's a very rigorous application process. It's good for the larger organizations with the larger projects.

If you're going for a \$300,000 initiative, like Dr. Murray – I was talking to her just the other day at the UPEI convocation about her GRAND-Families initiative. I don't know if many of you are familiar with that, but it's a really important one about grandparents raising grandchildren. GRAND-Families is what she calls them. She applied to the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being, and I believe she got around \$300,000. That is just catapulting her work into the next level. She's doing amazing work, and at some point, hopefully we can hear from her.

But we need to empower these small organizations when it comes to mental health and wellbeing, and right now, the application process and the size is really

geared at the bigger organizations. So, I appeal to you, as we come into this next four-year term, to look at improving that application process, making it more accessible, pushing them, so that it's not a barrier to simple wellness initiatives.

When I say that, I'm talking about the peer support groups. It's very simple. When I talk to my constituents, there are a couple that come to mind that went through serious, serious mental health issues, but what they really wanted is a weekly group of people who had gone through the same thing that they could check in with. I think we're all familiar with AA; it's the same sort of idea, I think, but a little bit different. It's a peer support group for people with mental health issues.

We need to be able to find a way to provide funding to let those things work, and I think our service organizations would be good centers of support for that.

Integration back to life after addiction treatment: Lennon Recovery House, of course, is in my district. It's an amazing organization that took a long time to get going. I want to give Dianne Young a lot of credit for her perseverance and her vision to make that happen. Dianne has moved on from Lennon Recovery House, she's not actively involved in the day to day, but that's not a bad thing. She was the founder; she had the vision. Lennon Recovery House now is going to the next operational level. But we need to support more of that.

Integration back into life doesn't have to be a big, complicated thing. It goes along the same lines as peer support groups, but providing ways for people, after they've gone through mental health and addictions issues, to be somewhere where they're not tempted and constantly pulled back into that same old routine that got them in trouble in the first place.

Another area that I advocated for when I was minister – and the Minister of Social Development and Seniors I hope carries on with this – it was the former leader of the third party, Sonny Gallant, who actually helped champion this idea of a seniors navigator. He wanted a seniors advocate, originally, but that was a little overkill, we

thought, so we came to a compromise: seniors navigator.

But what I always wanted was a whole seniors volunteer network so that when seniors had an issue, they could go out and they could be connected with someone in their community who could help them. I go door to door these days helping seniors sign up for Maple so they can renew their prescriptions easily, and I'm sure other MLAs do it as well, but if you had a seniors volunteer network, we could do that.

That's something I want to push for. We've got just a phenomenal seniors' community in North Rustico – for example, the Star of the Sea Seniors' Club, as well as the Rustico Bay Seniors' Club over in Rustico – and I think there are huge opportunities for that. Really, there are a lot of people who are seniors themselves, younger seniors, who do a ton of work helping older seniors.

This is all about wellness, by the way, because a lot of the help they give is just reaching out and talking to those people. That's a wellness initiative that I think – I understand the Speech from the Throne can't be too long, but that's something I think was maybe missing.

Wellness: community gardens. We've had some minor initiatives on those. I think the Minister of Agriculture has funded community gardens before. We need to do more of that. That's good for wellness. There's lots of people out there – again, I'm thinking seniors, but others – going out and gardening and growing something and making your own food is something that helps your mental wellbeing. Also, it helps with the pocketbook. We had questions today about the cost of living and food insecurity and the cost of food, and community gardens is a small way to help that. There's no reason why we can't support it. It's good for mental wellness, and it's also good for the pocketbook.

Another thing that we don't talk about enough is the regulation of gambling and VLTs, especially in community and online. Now, I'm not saying we have to get rid of it. It's going to always exist. But we need to regulate it better, and we have to make sure the people who are abusing it get the help they need or have the restrictions placed.

I'm going to say it; I can say things that, because I'm a third-term MLA, maybe others can't talk about. But when you go into a community organization and they've got a row of VLTs in the back room, I guarantee you if you talk to the people who manage that club, they can tell you the 10 people who are blowing their life savings every week going on those VLTs. That's no way to fund a community organization, and it's no way to build communities.

So, we need to do more with that. I think it's the minister of health, again, that has that under their portfolio. I think it's under the assistant deputy minister of health responsible for mental wellness, if I'm not mistaken.

The other thing we have to continue promoting is healthy food. I think that goes hand in hand with community gardens.

Along the healthy food side of things, I wanted to talk briefly about the School Food Program. I was very privileged to be the minister of education and lifelong learning that brought in that School Food Program. It was actually the department of social development and housing at the time that, when schools were shut down during the pandemic, really got it off the ground by delivering meals to people's homes for children that they knew needed the food.

But there's a lot more that can be done and needs to be done with that School Food Program. If I'm being honest, I think we need to focus more on accessibility of the food and making sure that the people who need the food get it, and we need to worry less about making sure that it's perfectly healthy and those sorts of things, or perfectly locally sourced. We have to make sure, first of all, that the people who need the food get it.

Our pay-what-you-can model is an excellent one. I think the operational process by what you can put in those orders and the way it gets to people – I'm not saying it's extremely bad right now, but it needs some improvement. That's the healthy food program, with school food.

The other thing that I wanted – oh, yeah, I wanted to talk about – this is as good of a spot as any. The minister of social

development was questioned today about the – it was really a newspaper article report that came out a couple of weeks ago, I think it was, talking about how children’s food insecurity on PEI – I think the numbers were – it was around 24-25 percent back in 2019; now, it’s around 35-36 percent, and it’s gone up.

But it boggles my mind. I don’t understand how food insecurity for children went up when we introduced our School Food Program on a pay-what-you-can basis. So, that tells me there’s a problem with the community accessing that food.

Also, we’ve increased the social assistance rates so much. There’s something called the Maytree report, and it’s going to come out in November, and it compares the social assistance programs across all of Canada. Prince Edward Island, with the increases we’ve given, if it’s not number one in every category, I’d be extremely surprised. There are people who want to come to Prince Edward Island, they want to move here, because they want the social assistance rates that we offer here because we’re so high in Canada. “Why are you moving to PEI?” “Well, I’m on social assistance and you’ve got the best rates in Canada.”

I’m wondering if – I’m going to throw this out there – there might be an actual flaw in that report in how they actually categorize what a food-insecure home was, and maybe they’re not measuring whether the child is getting the food they need, but whether it’s a measure of poverty of the home. I don’t know. I want to know what the problem is. I want to dig into that report a little bit more. It just does not compute. With the amount of money in social assistance and our School Food Program, I don’t understand why that’s happening, even in a poor home, why the children still have food insecurity.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I don’t understand why. That’s what I want to know.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: So, people who are poor have access to get food, and we need to – of course, that’s another issue altogether: addressing the root cause of why people

don’t have enough money to buy healthy food themselves. But the report was specifically on food insecurity of children, and with the amount of supports that we give, I just don’t understand how the report got where it was.

I kind of wish I was the minister of social development today because I would have really loved to answer that question when that one was brought up, let me tell you.

Anyhow –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I just went over my answer there for about 10 minutes, but that’s alright.

The harm reduction site is another area of wellness. It’s something that’s a long time coming. We got caught up in the federal and the provincial responsibilities and the rules and the laws, but I think it’s finally around the corner. It’s just what it sounds like. There’s a reason why it’s not a safe injection site. It’s harm reduction because it’s a place where people can go to improve their wellness.

Mr. McNeilly: Harm reduction is a (Indistinct). Harm reduction is the overall theme.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah. So, when it comes to wellness, we have to focus on harm reduction. We have to focus on that theme. The site where people can go to reduce their harm is just one part of it.

The Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty has been a big proponent of wellness. I mean, I’ve been elected for four years on him, so I was the original proponent of wellness, but he’s also jumped on board and that’s good to see.

But wellness is a key, of course, and that’s one reason – now that I’m on the backbench, I’m not on Executive Council, I’m not focused on a portfolio, I want to be an ally of the member from West Royalty to help him in his fight to improve wellness, to see more money spent. I just talked about a whole bunch of areas. This is a just a short list; I’m sure you’ve got a dozen more. So, let’s work on that together.

Speaking of which –

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct) minister –

Mr. Trivers: – I remember when we were elected in 2015, the leader of the third party and I were interviewed by CBC, and oh my goodness, I think about the new members here in this Chamber and how exciting it is to be a new MLA and how much you want to make a difference, you want to make change, and you want to represent well. I remember just about jumping through the TV screen when we were interviewed, about – we were going to work in a positive – we were going to collaborate, and we were going to make change.

Madam Speaker, I'm taking inspiration from the new members in here now to try and get back to that person I was then, because you take a lot and you get the snot beat out of you –

Mr. McNeilly: You did. You did.

Mr. Trivers: – and sometimes, you forget to be optimistic and you forget to work and collaborate and be positive. So, that's where I want to get back to. Someday, I might even agree with the Charlottetown-Victoria Park MLA on some issues. I don't know.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: I don't know. That's a little bit up to her. That's a little bit up to her, Madam Speaker. I can only – you know, collaboration is a two-way street.

Ms. Bernard: You're right, it is. You're right.

Mr. Trivers: It is. Yeah, exactly.

Ms. Bernard: Yeah.

Mr. Trivers: Exactly. So, I'm hoping that we can collaborate in the future too.

I wanted to move on here.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh no.

Mr. Trivers: We could talk about wellness a little bit more, but I think the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty has

completed his response to the Speech from the Throne?

Mr. McNeilly: No, I haven't.

Mr. Trivers: No, so I think we're going to hear a lot about wellness there. So, maybe I'll leave wellness now and I'll let him take up where I left off.

I wanted to talk about something that's – in my district, after health, believe it or not, the second-biggest topic was not housing. I hear that all the time: "It's always health and housing." Housing was not the biggest topic in my district. I live in a rural district. I live in, let's face it, I think for the most part, a fairly well-off district in the centre of the Island. There are a lot of government employees; people can travel to Summerside; people can travel to Charlottetown; the large tourism component, a large fishing and farming component, our three major industries.

So, the number two concern in District 18 Rustico-Emerald – and this has been consistent since I first ran in 2011 – transportation and infrastructure. Our roads are the things that people want to see – and it's just gotten more and more a topic of concern. I know the minister responsible for population would know this: Where are the people going who are coming to Prince Edward Island, moving here?

Mr. McNeilly: Rustico.

Mr. Trivers: We're going to be 200,000 people in 2030 or so. They're moving out into my area. That's where they're coming to, because there's not enough room in Charlottetown and Summerside. Those ones are at capacity.

Mr. McNeilly: You didn't build it (Indistinct) –

Mr. Trivers: They're coming into the centre of the Island. They're going east and they're going west, but a lot of them – let's face it, it's a desirable area of the Island because you can go to Summerside, you can go to Charlottetown, you can go both directions. I know the Member from Kensington-Malpeque has the exact same thing.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Mr. Bell: Winsloe.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, Winsloe too, yeah. The Special Planning Area makes it a little tough there.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct) housing.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, but I'll let someone else talk about Special Planning Areas.

Anyway, one thing that's happening is when they move into the area, we've got roads that have been dirt roads for 50 years. The people that have lived there for 50 years, they said, "Yeah, for two or three weeks in the spring and for two or three weeks in the fall, either I've got a four-wheel drive truck and I get really muddy, or I park my car at the end of the road. I walk in. I take my waste bins and my recycling bins; I pull them out to the end of the road because they won't get picked up otherwise. That's just the way it is. I've lived here forever."

I know the former minister of transportation – the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action knows this because he had the foresight and the vision to actually put in an initiative to go out and – he was bold: he went to social media, he went to Facebook, and he said, "What clay roads would you like to see paved?" He got thousands of responses, thousands –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – because it's something that needs to happen. It's something that people care about. This is not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, and I don't know if we're trying to cater to people in the urban areas or what, but we need to have a policy on clay roads.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, and the Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture, when he was minister of transportation, I had to ask him questions in the House. His name had to go up on lights in Emerald and on the big sign, but we are paving the Mill Road into Emerald this year.

However, I think the minister may remember when we met with the chief engineer and said, "So, what's our policy on clay roads? What's our policy?"

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Do we know when clay roads go to gravel, when gravel goes to paved? He said, "Our policy is we don't pave clay roads." Full stop. We don't really have a policy, and we need a policy on how we move clay roads to gravel roads to paved roads.

Mr. Fox: Especially with the population increasing.

Mr. Trivers: The population numbers are going up. People are moving into rural areas. These roads are in bad shape. Climate is warming; we have warmer winters. It was a mud bath for most of the winter on the clay roads in my area. People are going crazy. These are people who are moving from Ontario and British Columbia and Alberta, and they don't even know what a clay road is. They're like, "Oh, this is quaint," when they move there in the summer. The next thing you know, they're up to their axles in mud.

It's nice to say, "Oh, didn't you know it was a clay road when you moved here?" But that doesn't solve the problem. We need a policy. We can look at the population that lives on the road. We can look at the traffic count. We can maybe make it part of the land use plan that goes across the province.

But we need a policy in the department of transportation – and I want the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to know this – of when we start to progress a clay road along a continuum. It could even be a heritage road right now. It could be a tractor trail, it could be a cow path, but when do we go from a cow path to a tractor trail to a heritage road to a clay road to a gravel road to a paved road? We need to make that happen. That's something that has to happen here.

The other thing on the transportation and infrastructure side – and I think this was clearly outlined in the Speech from the Throne – is, we do continue to need to expand public transportation to serve rural

areas year-round. That's something I heard time and time again, especially in the population centers in my district, like North Rustico and Hunter River. The people are looking to take the bus. They want to take the bus. The toonie transit is a great thing; great government to put that in, and we need to keep expanding on that.

We need to continue to expand the Active Transportation Fund. There's a lot of people who would love to bike, and can bike, and travel and walk and ski year-round if the pathways were there, so we have to continue with that. There's a number of projects in my district that are underway, like the replacement of the North Rustico boardwalk, and then extension of it out through the North Rustico Harbour. Right now, there's no safe way to really get to Gulf Shore Consolidated School from within the village, and I think if that was there, that would be great. There are opportunities for that.

I know there's a lot of people on board, but we have to focus on that. I think that was in the Speech from the Throne. I think I heard that.

And another thing – getting right down to the nitty gritty – is, we don't have enough graders in the central part of PEI. We've got a grader and a half to do all the clay roads in my area.

Mr. Fox: I've got three in my district.

Mr. Trivers: I hear that the Member from Borden-Kinkora has three in his district. There's a problem here. There's an imbalance. Minister of transportation, this is something I wanted to talk to you about anyway, but we need more graders. We need more graders in my area.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Fork out the money. It's just a budget thing. Get another grader. Get another grader operator.

Mr. Hudson: (Indistinct) capital budget this fall.

Mr. Trivers: Well, good. This isn't capital. This is operating budget. You can do it right

now, in the budget. Make sure you put more graders –

Mr. Hudson: (Indistinct)

Mr. Thompson: (Indistinct) budget estimates.

Mr. Trivers: More grader, more grader.

This was my input to the Speech from the Throne/budget requests.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Oh, slash – ChatGPT.

An Hon. Member: So, no questions for the budget.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, and everything I've said today, I generated through ChatGPT. No, I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. That's not true. I'm going to do that one of these days though. That's a topic for another day.

An Hon. Member: It is.

Mr. Trivers: The other thing that I want to see from transportation and infrastructure – and I wanted to thank the minister for his announcement yesterday for Fiona cleanup. It's a huge thing. I'm hoping the program doesn't exclude some people who do need the help, but I know the minister will be flexible to make sure the people who need help, get it.

One thing that happened during Fiona was there was a lot of people – because they're amazing. The communities are amazing around the Island. I like to think my district – we heard it here today – is one of the best, but they went out and they cleaned up government roads. Chad Deagle went out and he cleared the Perry Road himself because his house was down there, and he needed to get out. Alfred Fyfe went out to the Bumble Bee Road and he cleared it off. Those are just two examples of many, many.

The thing is, they weren't able to go back and get any compensation because they just went out and they saw work that needed to be done, and they did it. I don't know what the answer is, but this is a problem across

our government programs: If you do the work and then you apply, you can't get any compensation for it. And I can understand; if you open it up and let people do work and get compensation, then there's room for abuse. You don't know if the amount of work they did actually needed to be done, and you want to look at it first and get approval. But if there is a way that we can solve that problem or improve it, that would be really great.

I want to thank all of those who did go out and clear government roads on their own dime, on their own sweat and blood, for their neighbours, for themselves. Thank you. Thank you very much.

One thing I wanted to mention just on the topic of both active transportation, reduced fuel consumption, and wellness: when requests come in – and I think the minister of sport and culture is probably now responsible for this – when schools, for example, say, “Hey, we want to buy snowshoes for our intermediate students,” then let's get a fund where we can make that happen. That was a request that I put in for sport and recreation, and right now, as far as I know, it's still in the queue, churning away somewhere in there, deep in the belly of government.

Mr. McNeilly: We've got a new guy in there (Indistinct) –

Mr. Trivers: Yes, I think it was snowshoes, are what they wanted.

But I mean, that's about wellness. That's about getting outside. It's about active transportation. It's about a whole bunch of different, good things.

Mr. Fox: It's not a (Indistinct) –

Mr. Trivers: I'll get that request into you, but let's just think about that, because a little bit of money can go a long way. The giant initiatives that we can pound on the desk and say, “Wow, we just made a great announcement for \$2 billion,” or whatever, \$2 million, those are great, but it's the small ones.

The Member from Kensington-Malpeque is fantastic. He's fantastic at these small ones. In fact, he helps me out. He may or may not

live in my district as well, but in his community, for example, down in South Granville, which is really the member's community as well, they wanted to build a rink outside the community centre. Really, we're talking a few thousand dollars, so he took it upon himself, and I want to thank him for that, to talk to the former minister of communities, and that was all in the works.

It didn't actually happen yet, so I'm going to appeal to the new minister of communities and possibly the minister of sport and culture to make that happen coming up this summer and winter. I think they're looking for \$5,000 now, not three, but anyway, that's another thing.

An Hon. Member: Outdoor rink in West Royalty, too.

Mr. Trivers: An outdoor rink in West Royalty? Outdoor rinks are good. It's about health. It's about wellness. It's about active transportation. It's about so many good things.

I'm going to move on now from transportation and infrastructure –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: I'm trying not to get myself in trouble here too much.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Trivers: It's not going very well. But I think I'm going to talk about housing, land and communities next.

You know what? I'm going to wait.

Mr. McNeilly: No, no.

Mr. Trivers: I'm going to wait. I want to make sure that the minister is here and perhaps – not that he's not here right now –

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Trivers: – but I want to make sure that he has his full attention to listen to my input on this subject.

So, why don't we talk about social development and seniors?

Mr. McNeilly: Oh, yes.

Mr. Trivers: One of the things that I was able to introduce when I was minister – and really, not a lot of people even know about it. It had no fanfare. It wasn't really even announced; nothing.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, I know. It was great.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) program.

Mr. Trivers: You might say I was doing good work on the downlow, maybe.

But in all seriousness though, it was a targeted basic income guarantee. Maybe you were aware, but we had over 600 people in the province who were living in deep poverty. So, if you use the market basket measure, which is a basket of goods and services to measure what a person needs so they're not in poverty, we had over 600 people that were less than 75 percent of that full basket of market basket measure.

I like the idea of a basic income, if implemented right. I like a universal basic income a little better than a basic income guarantee, but we don't want to get into semantics here.

The targeted basic income was a way to say these are the people who need the help the most, and most often, through no fault of their own, they are living in deep poverty. They don't have the medication they need, they don't have the food they need, they don't have the shelter they need, and we're trying to help them along through social assistance, but we've got thresholds. We've got rules. Too many rules; that's another thing I'll talk about.

However, why don't we just say, if you meet these criteria, you've been on social assistance for five out of the last six years, you're not getting off social assistance, and you're living in deep poverty, we're going to bump you up. Originally it was 85 percent; I think most of those people are over 100 percent now of market basket measure.

People who have a disability so they can't work, like there is literally physically no way that they can pull themselves out of

poverty, why should they be living in poverty? It's our responsibility. That's a good Progressive Conservative value right there. That's what we do as Progressive Conservatives. So, I was really glad to bring in the targeted basic income and pull all those people, over 600, out of poverty.

We also included children in care who were aging out of the system because what happens is, they're in the system, whether it's a group home or a foster home; when they come out of the system, literally, they turn 18 – I think we extended the period. Now it can be up to 24. But they're literally kicked out on the street with nothing but welfare to fall back on.

So, this targeted basic income, we wanted to target them. I think it was around 625 people we helped.

Mr. McNeilly: Secure basic income?

Mr. Trivers: Targeted basic income. It was really started – the former minister of social development and housing – it was called a secure income pilot. I changed it and increased the criteria and made it a targeted basic income.

Newfoundland, right now, is getting all the credit for targeted basic income if you go to the FPT meetings and you sit in those circles, but we had it a full year before they did, just so you know. Just so you know.

But the current criteria are very strict for that program, so what we need to do is we need to continue to try to open up the criteria, and people who are still in poverty based on that market basket measure, we need to continue to bring them out of poverty. Now we can target people who are not just in deep poverty, but maybe they're at 80 percent of market basket measure. Let's bring them to 100.

That's how we're going to solve the problem with food insecurity. The Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park may or may not agree with me, but that's how we solve the problem of poverty. I mean, we have our *Poverty Elimination Strategy Act*. That's how we're going to make the targets that are in there.

The other thing I wanted to see in social development and seniors was more focus on foster families and associate families, but in particular, associate families.

It was great to see the foster families association here today. They do an amazing job. The problem with foster families is Child Protection actually has to take a child into the care of the Province – and I think the minister of justice and public safety knows exactly what I'm talking about – before you can place them with a foster family. Once they're in the care of the Province, that's where things can really go downhill.

What you want to do is, if you can, leave them in the care of their own family or their loved one. That's what the grandparents-raising-grandchildren program is all about. Child Protection doesn't want to take it under provincial care. They want custody to remain with the family because they have a much better chance of thriving and being better, because families are so important.

I wanted to say, on that front, we did a review. I'm not sure what happened with the questions that – I think it was the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park talking about a review of the *Child Protection Act*. Maybe it was in her minister response. But we did a review of the *Child Protection Act*. The former minister of social development and housing started it. We completed it, and we got a new child and family services act ready to go, and it's going to help solve this problem of custody. It's going to allow Child Protection to take a child out of the custody of their parents, put it in the custody of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, loved ones, and allow them to have the legal custody they need. But we need that act to pass before that happens.

But associate families are the ones that I really wanted to talk about because there's a huge number of people – and both former ministers of social development and housing know this – that are sitting out there, and Madam Speaker, these are people who have been living with their parents for years and years, and their parents have really done an amazing job looking after them, and really borne, in many cases, a burden because of it.

But back in the late '60s/early '70s, our institutions were closed down, and these people who were in the institutions had to go live somewhere, and they went into their families' houses. Now, they're seniors themselves and their parents are not around anymore to look after them. And where are they going to go? We have hundreds of people like that in the province.

Associate families are kind of like foster families for adults – in a way, it's one way you could describe it – adults with special needs. Those needs are huge for caregivers for adults with special needs. So, if we could have proper day programs and respite programs, and then have associate families, instead of building group homes, that's where we can go to help solve this problem. I'm convinced of it.

I think we had something in the budget last year, but I want to make sure we don't lose focus on that. We need to really review the amount of funding that they get as associate families, and the same with foster families. We've increased a couple of times, but boy oh boy, with the cost of living going up, we need to increase the amount of money we give people who provide this valuable service and add a significant advantage to government, because it's such a much lower cost for associate families and foster families to do their work than it is for government to try and do it internally.

One thing that I wanted to talk about as well was expanding the Seniors' Secretariat project funding and scope, especially for wellness-related activities. I think you could easily double the amount of funding that goes there.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: A little bit of funding goes a long way. If you look at the list of projects that they do, a lot of them are really related to mental wellbeing and helping people out. So, we need to do that. That's more of a budget request, I guess.

The other thing is we need to continue to work on and expand the Seniors' Food Program.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh, there's a good one.

Mr. Trivers: We've heard some announcements about it. I think there's a pilot that's taking place in the eastern part of the Island, which is the Rotary Club coupled with the Meals on Wheels organization. But I tell you, in North Rustico, they're already doing this on their own.

Mr. McNeilly: Exactly. Fund it.

Mr. Trivers: They serve it. Yeah, and I'm not saying we have to give 100 percent funding to these organizations. This is the part about community organizations that's the best. A little bit of money goes such a long way. They know how to do things efficiently and effectively, and that was something that I've been lobbying for, for a long time, but I want to make sure it's not lost.

I wanted to highlight the Stella Maris Church in North Rustico. Through the Knights of Columbus, they run a food bank, and a regular meal for seniors. That food bank, unfortunately, has expanded quite a bit, but they do a great job.

One thing I think we need to continue to review is the income support/Assured Income model, with respect to reduction clawback. When working to reward those who work, we want to make sure there's absolutely no penalty for going out and earning money yourself, because I think we're just shooting ourselves in the foot if we do that. It's a tricky one, don't get me wrong.

I think we need to continue to improve accessibility and promote this as a priority. I heard that time and time again. I can't remember who was talking about it – maybe it was the member from West Royalty – about Beach Grove Home. Yeah, it was.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: All we have to do is widen a doorway so wheelchairs can get through.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) fundraise for it.

Mr. Trivers: This was something, when I was minister, I said time and time again, and it was very frustrating for me. I said it's great that we have budget and capital budget

for fixing the roofs and fixing the HVAC systems; we need to do that. But I want a relatively small portion of the budget allocated every year to help with forward-facing issues. This is like painting the foyer of a seniors' home.

Mr. McNeilly: Absolutely.

Mr. Trivers: Going in and replacing the floor; these sorts of things.

Anyway, we need to continue with that and set aside – really, because those are the things that make a difference to people. And someone going in may not perceive them as major issues, but when you see them day and day again, they just make a huge difference.

We need to continue – and the minister of social development might know this, but there is currently an initiative on the way to review all of the policies within social development, update them, and hopefully simplify them. We need to keep doing that. That was not mentioned specifically in the Speech from the Throne, but I like that.

This was an idea that's really – I think the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park actually likes to champion this one, and it's something I agree with wholeheartedly, and that's social enterprise for those with barriers to employment. It's long overdue. I mean, I was told, "Okay, we're going to get the outreach centre in place first and then we're going to do social enterprise." But you know, we need to make some progress on that.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: This is a way for people to help themselves. That's why it's so important.

Mr. McNeilly: Couldn't get the information (Indistinct) –

Mr. Trivers: Now is the hour. And it doesn't have to be at the outreach centre either; I just used that as an example. It could be anywhere. We already have the Reach organization that's doing that sort of thing, and others.

Also, I have down here, it's something we need to continue to do: The Minister of Social Development and Seniors has to continue to review the thresholds that we have for our programs. They're not where they need to be, and we have to look at inflation and we have to make sure they match. Typically, we're a year behind or something like that. That's one reason we should probably – and I don't know how we do that faster. It was something I requested, but I don't know, here I am.

Now, I wanted to move on to agriculture.

An Hon. Member: No, no.

Mr. Trivers: I don't have a long list in agriculture. I've got to say, the Minister of Agriculture has done a really fantastic job over the last (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: What I do have on my list are more things like make sure that the supports are awarded for Hurricane Fiona that the farmers have applied for. I'm sure his phone rings off the hook all the time on that. There are a lot of applications in, but they need the help now. Get those payments rolling out.

This goes right in with the Public Safety: create a plan and implement measures to mitigate and respond to future extreme weather events. I know that would be on your radar. I mean, you don't want to have a giant rainfall coming and washing out a crop, for example, or the drought events. We've already made great strides on an irrigation strategy. I think there's probably more work to be done there, as well.

Mr. Thompson: Soil health.

Mr. Trivers: It's soil health, yeah. Is it soil health? Not just irrigation, I guess; soil health. But when I say – yeah, okay.

And then the other one, which was a very specific request in my district, was expand three-phase power access to agriculture operations. I think the minister responsible for energy – it's the McKenna farm, where they grow the – it's the carrots and turnips. They have cooling – I guess, really, what they are is heat pumps, at the end of the day, but they're really inefficient right now, in

two-phase. They could get more efficient units, use less electricity, if they had three-phase power.

Mr. Myers: How far are they?

Mr. Trivers: I would have to get back to you in terms of the distance from the three-phase power, but I think it's very feasible. These are the sorts of guys that aren't going to ask for the world.

Anyhow, so we'll do that.

But in general, I have some great farmers in the district; in particular, a lot of dairy farms. But I also have some really amazing people who are working to help farmers, like Stephanie Arnold, who does a lot of research on how climate change is going to impact potatoes, for example.

Mr. Myers: She's on our net zero committee.

Mr. Trivers: It's in the net zero plan. There you go.

So, those are all things; I think I've seen some references to that in the Speech from the Throne, but I wanted to highlight that.

What the heck; since we're in that portfolio, I want to talk about justice, public safety, and the Attorney General requests.

I think this is happening, but we need to ensure enough emergency shelters are designated and they are adequately resourced to provide supports during emergencies. Hurricane Fiona emergency shelters were run mainly by volunteers, and supports were not consistent across emergency shelters. Some areas had organizations like fire departments; the New Glasgow Fire Department, they just stepped up even though they weren't officially designated.

I think there was some confusion where, in a municipality, they felt like they had to do it all themselves, so you had volunteers making food in their kitchens and bringing it down, when in fact if they would have asked the Province, they could have been open 24/7 with all the food provided, and enough funding.

So, please work with the minister of communities and make sure that they know that government is there for them, and there's all kinds of money to access to make that happen.

Status of women: Here's one. I got a request for the status of women. It's really about discrimination and diversity. It's not particular to the status of women. I thought that would be the good portfolio, but apparently – and this is from someone who actually ran driving schools for many, many years in a different jurisdiction – there's clear discrimination in driving tests against immigrant drivers; people of colour, for example, but people in general who are not from the Island.

So, it's something to investigate and just check into. I'm not sure of the exact method you would do that, but it was something that was brought up and I said I'd report it, but to continue to make strides for equality and judge based on fair objectivity and not on discrimination based on any particular other feature.

Fisheries, tourism, sport and culture: One of the things I hear time and time again is allow seven-day hunting on PEI. I'm hoping that legislation can come forward for that because I'm totally in favour of that. I wanted to bring it forward when I was minister of environment. I was told it was not the right time, so hopefully the right time is coming; seven-day hunting.

I think we need some help to rebuild, repair, and improve the harbour infrastructure. Stanley Bridge, of course, was devastated in Hurricane Fiona; North Rustico, as well. I have been able to meet with the new minister of fisheries and his deputy, and I think we're on track for that, but I wanted to get that in there.

We also need to increase the tourism budget to better represent the tax amounts that are collected from tourists. When you think about it, tourism plays a huge, huge role in the revenue generation in our province. The Minister of Finance would know that. Tourism is a huge, huge revenue generator, but the amount of money that we actually spend on that is not really consistent. I think there's room to increase and improve that. I think our tourism operators feel, sometimes,

a little hard done by, so I wanted to lobby for that.

Economic development, innovation and trade: I don't have a long list. In fact, the big one – and I think this is where it resided before, and everybody in this House experiences it almost every day – is when you're driving and you're talking on your cell phone, and the cell phone reception drops. I know the members from the west who are driving here, I'm sure they get most of their work done on their drives to and from work; from the east, as well.

An Hon. Member: East, yeah.

Mr. Trivers: I don't know what minister it is. I've got it under economic development, innovation and trade, but please. I wish that was front and centre in the Speech from the Throne, here: make sure we close the gaps in cell phone coverage. It would be so, so good. Everybody, get excited about that in Cabinet, and please, make that happen.

Acadian and francophone affairs: *C'est une petite liste d'items. Je parle un petit peu français, mais...*

I have a short list of items here. I speak a little bit of French, but we need to work to make Rustico a gateway hub for Acadian tourism. I've already mentioned this to the minister, but if we can really engage a large volume of tourists and we can redirect them to other Acadian sites like Evangeline – and we need to develop the Farmers' Bank of Rustico. We need to help them get an executive director, these sorts of things. There's a huge opportunity here to improve our Acadian tourism in the province.

I've talked to the minister of education about this, but also, let's work together to get a new bilingual library on the North Shore. I think the first steps have been taken, but I'll continue to work with that.

Workforce, advanced learning and population: I have a few points here. One thing is we need to continue to improve the learning paths from Holland College to UPEI. In fact, I'll go a step further: from our secondary education to our post-secondary; in particular, to Holland College and then to UPEI. I think that was in the Speech from the Throne. It was definitely in the election

platform, talking about learning paths, but it's a huge one.

Right now, there are people who, they might become an RCW and then say, "Hey, I want to become an LPN," and then say, "I want to become an RN." But our system does not support them making those transitions very well at all for it. That's just one example. I think you could look at early childhood educators as another one. There have been some really good improvements there. That would be one to look at as an example of how to do things, possibly.

Here's a really interesting one. Everyone's familiar with the Career Connect program.

An Hon. Member: Tell us about it.

Mr. Trivers: Madam Speaker, you're familiar with the Career Connect program.

Speaker: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: This allows students – not in their first year of post-secondary, but afterwards – if they accumulate the right number of hours, they can qualify for EI when they go back to school. I had a student bring this up to me.

May I preface to say, if you go around, in particular, the retail outlets – I'm thinking fast food chains, small stores and things – you'll notice that it used to be you'd see a lot of Island students who were working in those jobs, but now what we see is a lot of new Islanders, or even in some cases, foreign workers and permanent residents who are working in those jobs.

This is the reason brought up to me. They said when students qualify for the Career Connect, they no longer have to work part-time jobs when they're in school. In fact, I think they have severe limits on the amount of hours they're allowed to work, even if they chose to, because of the EI program.

This was a student who actually brought this up to me on the campaign trail who has used the program. She said she thinks it should almost even be a requirement of the program that you work a small number of hours of work.

We have a huge problem with our workforce, and we have all these students who are collecting EI to go to school. They could probably afford five to 10 hours a week. The students are going to hate me for saying that, probably, but I think it's one way we could improve our workforce, and this was brought up on the campaign trail by a very smart university student, business grad.

The other thing is we need to continue to work to expand our co-op work programs. There are some good co-op work programs. There is a little bit of red tape involved with them. I think we could streamline the process. We could get more students into the workforce more often.

We need to work – and this is something I've heard time and time again, and it's been discussed, but align the school year with the industry needs, especially in the hospitality programs. I see some folks around the room nodding their heads. If you're a hospitality student and your school year doesn't line up with the tourism season, then the tourism operators really suffer, and you suffer as well, because you don't get the work experience you need.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Potato harvest is another great example of where we can align school years with industry needs.

One thing that's worked very well, I know, in the early childhood educators section – and I'll give the current minister of education a lot of credit, it was something that started in my time as minister of education – is study-while-work programs. This means while you're working, for example, in early years at a daycare, maybe you don't have any qualifications, you can actually study and start getting your early childhood educator credentials while you're working.

There's no reason why we couldn't do that in a number of areas. So, I go to the minister of workforce and say look at some study-while-work options, because I think there are some opportunities there.

I'm going to continue to save housing, land and communities for another day.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I'm going to start on environment, energy and climate action right now.

One of the big things – and the former member from Summerside-Wilmot, he started off down this path. I think perhaps he met a political opponent that maybe he wasn't up to the task of meeting, but he tried to bring a private member's bill to the floor to look at allowing net metering across multiple properties; that sort of thing.

Mr. McNeilly: Extend the time.

Mr. Trivers: Madam Speaker, I think I would like to adjourn debate, as we have reached the time (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Do have a seconder?

Mr. Trivers: Seconded by the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to call Motion 28 to the floor for debate.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Motion No. 28.

The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, the following motion:

WHEREAS the School Resource Officers Program is a collaborative partnership between schools and law enforcement;

AND WHEREAS the program is currently available in school families in Charlottetown, Summerside, communities with a municipal law enforcement agency;

AND WHEREAS currently this program is not available in any school families not

served by a municipal law enforcement agency;

AND WHEREAS there is interest in seeing the School Resource Officer Program extended to the other parts of the province;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Assembly encourage the government to explore the feasibility of expanding the school Resource Officer Program to families of schools in rural Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Motion 28, School resource officers, is a very important motion. I think it's something that affects the whole Island and all our communities right across the Island from tip to tip.

I have to say that I think that our school resource officers initiative has been in place for several years and has been a success at the schools that it has been implemented in, but I don't think we have gone far enough. I think we need to expand it and bring more education to our students on what services are available across the Island above and beyond the school resource officer.

I can tell you, as a former police officer, I'm a strong believer in community-based policing. Back in 1984, I started policing in Woodstock, New Brunswick, and I carried that on into the Province of Nova Scotia, then ended up here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

I think we've moved away from community-based policing. I think that's one of the problems in society today. I think it's one of the problems we're seeing across the country and especially down in the United States.

I must say that community-based policing is simple. Community-based policing – and our associate Sergeant-at-Arms here, she can attest to it – it's not rocket science. Community-based policing is simply making sure that the students and our businesses and our community leaders, our residents, our constituents who are travelling through know who we are, and that they can

call the police at any time, day or night, and we're going to come help.

I can remember back when an old police officer, his name was Jim Malcolm, and he told me back – I hate to date myself, but we're going back 30-some years – he said, “Always treat today as a new day.”

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: And I still have no gray hairs, right?

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Fox: But old Jim always said, he said, treat today as a – I'd like to stop debate just for a second and acknowledge something here. I'd like to acknowledge that we have the Deputy Speaker now sitting in the chair. Congratulations to the hon. member. You look quite prestigious up there, I'll have to say that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Got a new tie just for the day.

Mr. Fox: Old Jim, he went and made a statement. He said, “Treat every day as a new day.” It's something I've always thought about. It doesn't matter if you have a good day or a bad day today. It doesn't matter if you deal with somebody in the worst light possible or in the worst possible situation, or it could be the best situation. Tomorrow, if you have to deal with that individual, treat him as if it's a new day. It's something I constantly run through my mind and I think about. If you and I have a problem today, don't take it forward tomorrow. It's something I strongly believe in.

Police officers need to build bridges. Police officers, whether it be a social worker or a doctor or a lawyer, accountant, the guy at the corner grocery store – it doesn't matter what job they're in, you need to build relationships and you need to have the trust in people and the respect of people to get the job done and help them when they need help.

I strongly believe in relationships. I've said it over and over again. I think it's so important to never underestimate the power

of a relationship that you can build, and that starts in our school system.

It starts when teachers – we have excellent teachers and student guidance counsellors – when they build their relationships with the students. Some students, they build their relationships with other students, of course, but they build relationships and foster relationships with the people within the school system. That is so important because it's going to shape their life as they go forward.

Student resource officers, they can develop an understanding and a bond within the student body and they can see when students need help or might need a little bit of guidance.

I've been very fortunate over a number of years. I can read people. I can tell when they're having good days and bad days. I did take some courses in that type of work and how to watch for it and detect it. A kind word goes a long way when a person is having a bad day, or the ability to see an individual and have a chat with them and say hello, and you catch up on something that maybe that individual is not having the best day of his life.

I think our guidance counsellors and our student resource officers can pick up on that. It's so important that that child or that student going to school, he might be sitting there, and he might be very quiet. He may not be very outgoing, but there might be something that he's trying to deal with. Having these resource officers available in our schools so that they can pick up on that and find out what's going and help that student going forward is very much.

I know that the minister of education, she cares very deeply about our students in our school system. I've seen that, I've watched it, and I think that something that – it's a characteristic that she should be very proud of. That's something that we all need to watch for, is to be there for our students and help them and give the student resource officers tools they need to foster relationships and be open as they communicate across the school system and out into the real world.

The school resource officer program also complements the good work that is being done in our schools by the Student Well-Being Teams to support our students and families.

The Student Well-Being Teams build on what the school resource officer program started, initiated, and has carried on. I think it's something that we need to build on. For several years now, the school resource officers have been in place in several schools in communities across Prince Edward Island. We need to take it to the next level.

Charlottetown Rural, Colonel Gray, and Three Oaks High School have all had these school resource officers programs in place and they have been a success. We need to take what has been learned from them and expand it.

These programs are a positive, and they do provide a benefit to not only the school, but outside the school and within the family life and within the community as a whole.

Right now, though, there are many families of schools across the Island that don't have the opportunity to participate in the school resource officer programs. Kinkora, Kensington and Bluefield all happen to be in Malpeque. Montague, Morell, Souris, Evangeline, and Westisle – we need to expand these programs into those schools. I believe that. I think we all should support that, and I think we all should make that happen as we move forward.

All of these families of schools don't have any school resource officers in place which could benefit the school and the students, and I'm going to add the family.

The family of schools where we do have school resource officers, these areas have local municipal law enforcement agencies. I've noticed over the years, we've gotten away from community-based policing. It doesn't matter what agency you talk about, whether it be municipal, RCMP, provincial police departments in other areas, we've gotten away from community-based policing.

It's not rocket science. A police officer drives down the road. He goes into a grocery

store. He takes a walk through. He has a conversation with who's in there. He stops at the bank, goes in and says hello to the teller. He stops by the school, walks the hallways, and pops in to see how the receptionist is.

Those types of activities are so important, and I will slam the police departments for it because we've gotten away from it, and we need to get back onto it. It's something I enjoyed very much when I worked in those three different provinces, was taking the time and the five minutes to stop by and have a conversation with somebody, or somebody be out raking their lawn and you stop by and you have a conversation, or the kids would be on the basketball court, and you would take your gun belt off and you put it in the trunk, and you go play basketball, or you might throw a couple of balls, or the kids could be hanging around the park bench and they just could be talking, and the police officer – I used to do it and the other guys used to do it. Guys in Summerside used to; all the time in Kensington. St. Eleanors; they would take the time to stop by the park bench or that little park and have a conversation at the picnic table with the students.

It was regular practice. I still do it today. I still try once every two or three months to take a walk through Englewood School, Somerset, Amherst Cove, and Kinkora Regional High School. I enjoy going to these schools. I enjoy stopping by. I appreciate that they know my name. I enjoy and appreciate when they take a moment and they come up you and they have a conversation. I've had that with me. I've actively given my cell phone number, and I've had conversations or calls from students, or private messages, and they wanted to have a chat. They might be having a little bit of a bad day, or they might have a question about something, and they reach out and they ask you.

I think that's what we're here for, and that's what we should strive for every day, to be accessible to not only our constituents, but especially our students.

I got a request the other day, out of the blue, from a school. They invited me into the school. It'll be coming up in the next month or so. They invited me if I'd stop in and talk

about a couple of different topics and stuff like that. It doesn't matter what's going on that day. If they give me the time and date, I'll clear the schedule and make sure I'm there for them that day, and I think that's very important.

The school resource officers, I think they've been such a success and it has created interest in other families of schools across Prince Edward Island. I think that as a government, we can expand that. These families of schools are located in both rural and urban communities, serviced by both the RCMP and local law enforcement agencies, be it Kensington or Summerside or Charlottetown. I think this is the issue of fairness for all Island students to have a chance to benefit from participating in the school resource officer program. I think that there are students and staff and families in the Souris family of schools that would benefit from taking part in the school resource program also, and I think it's actually been brought forward and the suggestion has been made.

I believe and think that there are students and staff and families in the Morell family of students that would benefit from taking part in the school resource officer program. I actually heard that one day when I was down there. I remember a couple of years ago, I was down with the Morell Fire Department, and I remember them talking about how they would like to do more stopping into the school and stuff, and showing what the fire department does and how they benefit the community.

The school resource officer program could be expanded. It doesn't all have to be about police officers coming to the school. It could be about our fire departments coming to the school. It could be about our conservation officers coming to the school. It could be about mental health people coming to school. It could be a variety of different occupations across government that could pop in and be available to them.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: You like that idea?

An Hon. Member: I like that.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: I think it could be expanded so much. It could be Tim Garrity walking in and talking about elections, and the minister and I were working on that program back last year. We had the discussion about the importance of knowing what the municipal government structure is and encouraging our youth to get involved at an early age in different nonprofit groups or organizations that are out there. It could be organizations coming in and explaining what they do, and how they benefit the community.

I think that the students and staff also in the Bluefield family of schools, they could benefit from this program.

Westisle; I know the minister is very passionate about the Westisle area and up west, and same with the member from Inverness and also from Tignish-Palmer Road.

No area across the Island should be excluded from having the ability to experience what a resource officer program could bring and give to them.

The Evangeline schools; the hon. member over there, the minister. We can't forget our French friends. We must make sure that they are part of every community or everything that we offer to them, and we do, but we need to expand it.

Our First Nations; we need to also engage and include our First Nations people.

I think that there are students and staff in the Kensington family that could also benefit from this.

Of course, last, but not least, Kinkora; Kinkora High School. It's a great high school. It's one that – they're quite a crew out there and they definitely keep me hopping some days with questions and activities and things that are going on, but I know that school could benefit from a resource officer and that program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is an area where we can make a good difference to all Islanders. As I said before, it's a program that not only helps the school and the students, but it also helps the community and the family.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that, I will pass the torch to the hon. member and let him carry out debate.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Mr. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I just went through all my notes and crossed out “Madam” everywhere where I had it so I won’t call you “Madam”.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. DesRoches: She’s been getting it for the last three days; I don’t think we don’t need to give it to you as well.

Deputy Speaker: Keep you on your toes in here.

Mr. DesRoches: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today to happily second Motion No. 28 on school resource officers.

Let me begin by saying that I’m a big booster of the idea behind the school resource officer program. The Member from Borden-Kinkora mentioned Three Oaks Senior High School and having a resources officer. Being active in the community through coaching minor sport and with the fire department, I run into a lot of these students that are in the school, and let me just tell you that it’s all positive from the students having the resource officer there. The resource officer himself, I knew a couple of them that were in there. A real good young fellow that I spoke to, and he told us some different conversations that he had with the kids, and he said it was a pleasure to be there.

Now, also, good on the City of Summerside Police Department for picking the resource officer that they had in there. He looked like one of the kids. He was a young man, clean cut, and the kids related to him, went to him. It was great setup, and it got it started, and it rolled on, and we still a resource officer in there.

I think these programs are very helpful to our youth and they bolster other programs and services for our youth.

With all the things that the youth deal with today, it only makes sense that we try and do things to provide as much support as possible. When you think about what the kids have to go through with cyberbullying and everything else that’s going on in the schools, it absolutely makes your head spin. I can think back; when I went through high school, there was no such thing as cyberbullying. We didn’t have the cell phones to do it and whatnot, so I can just imagine. I have a young daughter of my own who goes through school, and I hear some of the stories. I’m very pleased to know that when she moves out of her intermediate school and goes to Three Oaks, there is a school resource officer there.

The hon. member also made reference to taking his gun belt off and playing basketball with the kids when he was an officer. That’s what our school resource officers were doing at Three Oaks. They engage with the kids. They didn’t just sit there or sit in an office. They engage with the kids. I’m sure that every other school that has them, it’s what they’re going to do. I can’t speak for the other schools, where they’re at, but I know that the one at Three Oaks, not just the one that I was speaking to, but the other ones, they all engage with the kids and they’re an active part of their life.

Summerside Council was able to work with the schools and with the Province to establish that resource officer there, and it has been a positive change in the lives of these kids each and every day. I feel that the positive move is still paying off for students as they come out. When they’re done of school, they have that interaction that they had with the resource officer, and it just makes them that much more comfortable speaking with different law enforcement agencies when they have to do that.

I heard very good feedback from the officers who took part, and it helped them do their jobs better. It put them back in touch with the youth, and they’re able to hear and see what was going on from the ground up with the youth. They knew which ones they had to deal with and talk to and figure out what was going on. One resource officer that was

at Three Oaks, he told me, “It’s great because we know where all the prom parties are. We know where everything’s going on. We know where we’ve got to be.”

Oh. Now I’ve got to change my notes back to Madam Speaker. Here we go.

Well, Madam Speaker, I apologize in advance if I call you Mr. Speaker because I just changed all my notes to Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Keeping you on your toes, member.

Mr. DesRoches: Okay.

I’ve heard very good feedback from the students who felt that their relationship developed positive effects as well. I also heard feedback from the teachers who saw the benefits of this program and raved about it.

When my colleague, the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, approached me about this motion, I was happy to support it because I think that the other schools should have the chance to take part in the school resource officer program. It doesn’t matter what grades they house, or how many grades they house, we should be able to help this at every level.

I was glad that the idea of expanding the school resource officer program to the other schools was included in our party platform during the last election. This will be something that could make a big difference for students, teachers, and communities all across Prince Edward Island. That is why I’m putting my support behind this motion with the hon. member, and I hope that all the rest in this assembly will be able to support this motion as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It’s a pleasure to rise and follow up those good speeches and talk about this important issue.

I guess we’re talking about school resource officers. I’m the education critic. I’m also a bunch of other critics too. This affects a lot of what we’re talking about every day in schools.

Our children have faced a lot. When you look at what they went through, through COVID and coming out after COVID, it takes a while to socially interact with their own communities and with themselves in school. It’s tough for some kids, and some kids get left behind.

I was excited to see some cyberbullying mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. That’s very, very important because we’re hearing it. We’re hearing it. If you look at cyberbullying, if you look at those types of things, that’s where the real issues are, moving forward with the kids. It can be done. It’s not done face-to-face so much. It’s done online; it’s done on computers; it’s done with phones. We can’t see that. Our resource officers need to be there to build the relationships to make it comfortable enough to be able to talk to them about the issues. That’s not always easy.

If you’re saying that this is important enough for Prince Edward Island across the board, it is. But what I don’t understand is that this motion is coming forward from the Conservatives, that it’s coming forward, but at the same time, I’m reading an article on December 2nd, 2022, that states that we had to eliminate the program because of funding. It’s in Charlottetown; an article from CBC that talked about—

An Hon. Member: It’s city council.

Mr. McNeilly: – not enough staff to continue the school resource officer programs with Charlottetown police.

Some Hon. Members: City council.

Mr. McNeilly: Well, it doesn’t matter what it is. We’re in this provincial legislation.

An Hon. Member: You said Conservatives.

Mr. McNeilly: No. I said if the Conservatives are bringing forward a motion like this.

Mr. Myers: Don't expect the truth from the Liberals.

Mr. McNeilly: You can say what you want. This happened under your watch. This was taken away, and you had the opportunity to fund it, former minister of justice, or minister of justice – you still are. You had the opportunity to step in.

Mr. Myers: Former and current.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, former and current.

An Hon. Member: Us Summerside councillors (Indistinct) –

An Hon. Member: What was the date on that?

Mr. McNeilly: You had the opportunity to do something about it, and now the motion's coming up, an important one. But we've lost this resource because there was not enough funding in this.

In this article, it says: "It really came down to staffing issues and a lack of resources." It's not funny anymore because you're the Province of Prince Edward Island; we take care of their education. We have the opportunity to make this different. We had the opportunity to do something about it. This is a really timely motion. I must say, I must compliment the Member from Borden-Kinkora for bringing this forward.

There's an opportunity to go back to them because in this – and they said: "Is it the best use of policing resources, limited policing resources to put police officers in schools, or [are] there other professionals ... like social workers and such, that that funding could be used for?" Interesting. That's very interesting.

This is the police officer talking about this. What he said in the article is we need to talk more about it. We need to bring this up and talk more. But we need to ask that question: Who is the best person for those resources? Is it police? Do we want that? And if so, we need to have that conversation. Or can we do something? We have itinerant teachers that travel around in the school based on need. Have we talked about that? We're doing itinerant programs in rural Prince Edward Island where we can build that

relationship with not only teachers but social workers or different people, or police officers? Maybe they rotate. Maybe that's a program that we start to look at.

I want these police officers back. And you know what? You had a former candidate that did a darn good job of this. Tim Keizer did a great job of this, and Kristi did as well. She was in this position, too, and she did a great job when she was there.

We need to go back to this. What I'm not understanding is that this was – it's not there anymore. This motion, and I will support this motion, but I would also scold the government at this time for letting this happen; for not stepping in and providing the funding if it's that important. We talk about cyberbullying and we talk about what we need. We talk about rural communities. This is a tough time after COVID, and we need to continue to invest in these and build the relationship with the kids and with the school resource officer.

I'll talk to you about another thing too. We have an issue with diversity in Prince Edward Island, and we have to make sure that the kids who are diverse understand that police officers at a young age are there to help them. We have to make sure that that's there. If the Colonel Grays and the Charlottetown Rurals, the communities that are diversifying between all kinds of different things – you need to be able to do that.

I'm telling you this is a serious thing within the BIPOC community. The relationships are coming along, but they're very difficult. When you look at an issue like Black Lives Matter that happened, that took a while to rekindle and look and build trust within the communities. That's another thing that I'd like to talk to the Assembly about, about it not being there. We need to educate and make sure that people understand that police officers and people who are in armed forces are there for everybody. That relationship has to start somewhere, and it needs to be done.

I've spoken to the police force on three or four different occasions. I've gone in to talk to the force there about this. I've talked to kids about this. This is a serious thing.

Minister, I'll give you a compliment now. We're doing better with the Holland College program. We've talked about that. We're trying to get more people from the BIPOC community onto that force, but we still have a way to go. You have three or four?

An Hon. Member: Three there now.

Mr. McNeilly: Three or four. See, that's a compliment that I'm going to give you.

It's programs like this. It's discussions like this. It's what the police force have talked about; they want to have more discussions on it, so that's why we're bringing this up now, because there are a lot of issues, especially in the high school level, that we don't see and we're not seeing. Trust and education and being there with the right people could fix that.

The budget is coming down. Make sure that the minister can go back and talk to the police force – I know it's municipal, and I know there are some municipal things, but they might need funding –

Mr. Thompson: It's education.

Mr. McNeilly: It's education. Yeah. Well, it's your budget, and I want to make sure that those conversations are being had. Did we stop this important service because of funding? You're the provincial government, and you have a chance now to put it back in. That's kind of summarizing the importance of this, whether it's wellness teams, funding, community-based policing; diversity, I've talked about.

But we need to work together and make sure that that resource is there because this could be a very important motion, and not just passing it, but we have to do the work around it to make sure it happens in rural Prince Edward Island, and the right people are there, and it happens right across the province because this could be a very important thing.

I'd like to thank you for my time, and I'll cede the floor.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I guess I rise to speak to this not sure what to do.

I feel I don't have enough information to say whether this is the right program to go with or not. I don't know if we've evaluated what that program looks like in PEI. I only know what has been happening in other jurisdictions with this program.

I agree with the Member from Borden-Kinkora: Relationships are everything, no matter how old you are, no matter where you are in life, and in particular when you are in school. Relationships with adults are really important as you learn to make your way through this world.

So, I guess it leaves me – I have a couple of questions I know I can't get answers to, and some comments to make.

One of the questions that I ask myself – I guess let me back up here. I'm going to explain why the stuff that I've read makes me take pause with this, and that is reading various reports coming out of London, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario; Edmonton. Peel Regional Police just recently pulled it because students were feeling unsafe in their school. It didn't make them feel safer. It wasn't having the intended consequences.

They found in some places that they were ending up identifying offenders, and so the unintended consequence of this is that students who are in school – and the goal of this program was to make them feel safer – it was actually making them feel unsafe.

It brought to mind a program that the Women's Network with Community Legal Information put on in schools for grade 7 students. It was a sexting presentation. They wanted a lawyer to come in because part of the context of that is that they wanted to explain to students where their legal rights were in there, and what legal obligations they had. So, they needed a lawyer to come in, and in choosing a lawyer, they made it very, very clear that this lawyer was to come in in plain clothing, because there's such a power imbalance when you have – whether it be an officer or someone in a suit. If we were to go into a school right now, there would be a power imbalance right there, just based on the clothing that you wear.

If you are in a marginalized group, if you live with domestic violence, if you have a relationship with police officers that is not positive, if you come from a country where police officers are not your friend, then we've got some problems here. As our Island diversifies, I think that this becomes even more important for us to consider.

So, I guess what the goal with this is – and some of the stats that I've found were that these school-based resource officers are 5.5 times more likely to impact Indigenous students in a negative way, 3.4 times more likely to impact students with disabilities in a negative way, and 3.3 times more likely to impact Black students in a negative way.

I, myself, in kind of making my way through this program – because I agree. Tim Keizer; it's funny, years ago, every time I would see that man, I remember one time I was driving on the bypass on my way back from Cornwall and they were doing some sort of traffic stop, and I stopped and rolled down my window just to thank him for his work because at that time, I thought this program was really amazing and something to build those positive relationships with law enforcement. I think that that's really important. That's why I'm struggling with this. It's just that, is school the proper place to do that?

I don't agree that a special resource officer and a school counsellor – they don't have the same roles. They don't have the same skills. It's not their job to have the same roles and the same skills.

I wasn't at the education debate, but I watched it, and having a lot of teacher friends and family, I never once heard anyone mention that program to say we need more. All I've heard is we need more counsellors and we need more resources in the school. We need more teachers. We need more EAs. We need more hands-on with the kids.

So, I struggle, because I do, I think – when you see commercials on TV or you're watching something and you see a police officer hop out of the car to play basketball with kids, I think that's really beautiful. So, it's not that I don't think that – I don't think this is a bad program, I just don't have enough information, and based on what I'm

reading, I'm not sure it's the best way to spend resources.

The last point that I'll make is that – I can't remember which member. It might have been the Member from Rustico-Emerald who talked about street safety. When we consider Prince County has some of the most dangerous driving, reckless driving, I think about the fact that the police departments do have a shortage of staff, and so how that affects them, and how that affects the safety of the rest of the Island.

I guess it's not that I oppose this motion. I just don't have enough information, and based on what I'm reading, I just don't feel like I can support this motion because I don't have enough information, and the information I do have suggests this isn't the best use of resources.

Thank you for bringing it forward, and I look forward to hearing what others have to say.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Of course, any time I have an opportunity to stand and talk about our schools and supporting our students, I will gladly do so. I want to thank the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora for bringing forward this motion. I know we've had discussions regarding our school resource officers in the past, and so I really do appreciate you bringing this forward, and the seconder.

Charlottetown-West Royalty did have some facts mixed up, but that's neither here nor there. I do appreciate his comments, but certainly, it did lack some facts.

The Public Schools Branch and *La Commission scolaire de langue française*, they operate 62 public schools across the province, offering kindergarten to grade 12, as many of you know. Any time there is an opportunity to further support our students and our staff, it's absolutely worth considering.

Typically, a school resource officer is a sworn law enforcement officer responsible for safety and crime prevention in schools. They are employed by a local police or law enforcement agency, and work closely with school administrators in an effort to create a safer environment for both students and our staff.

In Prince Edward Island, our municipal law enforcement agencies in Charlottetown and Summerside have, at times, invested in school resource officers. They have seen the need in their communities and feel their students would benefit from the SROs stationed within their schools. I know there was a few names brought up here today, between Tim and Kristi; all have done tremendous work, so thank you to those individuals.

As the Department of Education and Early Years, we have worked very diligently to provide SROs with space and collaborative opportunities within our schools. They provide a great service for our students, for our staff, and we are grateful for the work that they do.

However, Madam – yeah, Madam Speaker. I had done the same as the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot and I had crossed out all of my “Madams” but here you are, you’re back, which is great to see. It’s important to note that SROs are not the only law enforcement supporting our schools. Our high schools in our rural communities have at least one liaison law enforcement officer assigned to them. These liaison officers, while they aren’t in our schools full-time, they do provide regular check-ins, they meet with administrators, they provide presentations to students, and collaborate with the schools on projects or issues that arise.

For example, Montague High School currently has two Kings District RCMP officers assigned to their school. They come into the school and do their presentations and lockdown drills with staff and students. They respond to traffic issues and regularly patrol the area around the school. They also respond to issues that the school administration brings to their attention.

We are very fortunate here on Prince Edward Island to have exceptional RCMP

and municipal police officers across the province. As an education system, we certainly believe in collaboration, and we’ll continue to work with our SROs currently in our schools and the RCMP and liaison officers throughout the province.

I do support this motion. I think we need to do some further investigation and dive deeper into the issue, but at its surface, I do support it, Madam Speaker. Anything, again, to keep our school communities safe, I’m in support of, and again, appreciate the hon. member for bringing it forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I want to thank the members for bringing this motion forward and everyone who has spoken on it so far.

Within our department, we’ve had great working relationships with our municipalities, our municipal police forces, and the RCMP. I’m proud to say we regularly meet with these groups and we have a really good working relationship with them. When we have this conversation about resource officers in high schools, it’s a great initiative, it’s a great idea, and it’s worked well in the city schools.

Where it gets a little more complicated – I mean, we’ve heard from city representatives, MLAs here in the House. I would like to hear from our West Prince colleagues who don’t have municipal police forces, that rely on RCMP. To put an RCMP officer in a high school, I think it’s – how many high schools – seven high schools across this Island in rural PEI. You have to look at that cost. But that’s something we definitely need to look at. I’ll definitely listen to the debate, listen to the department of education, and the principals across this Island on a solution, that perhaps we can come up with a solution for this.

I also believed – this is focused on not only our safety of our children, but our safety of our communities. When we talk about safety and our communities, it’s also about

wellbeing. We have put Student Well-Being Teams in all our schools. I don't know how many, exactly, people we have. It comes out of my budget; the Student Well-Being Teams.

But when that program was set up by the previous, previous government, the Liberal government, it was to take a wellbeing approach to high schools, and the resources that kids need. It's not only a uniformed officer that you need, but you need that connection one-on-one with the child that will open up to one of the Student Well-Being Teams, that can also go to their house, go to their home; it's more of a wraparound service.

I do like the idea of a resource officer, but I don't want to forget the importance of our Student Well-Being Teams. Maybe we can grow our Student Well-Being Teams to have a resource officer that floats around the Island, but not necessarily a full-time officer in a high school.

When you look at Chief McConnell's reasoning in that article, the city police, the Charlottetown city police, he questioned whether this was the best use of his officers. It is a discussion that we have to have, and I'm willing to have, and I look forward to continued debate on this, and I'll gladly meet with any MLA, any principal, and the minister in her department to see if we can come up with some solutions.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise to speak to this motion.

When I was minister of education way back when, there was this councillor from the City of Summerside that used to call me, oh, four, five, six times a year, and the main reason of the call was, "We need to keep our school resource officer at Three Oaks High School, and the provincial government needs to pay for it. This is not a municipal responsibility."

Madam Speaker, this councillor may be actually sitting in this Chamber now as the

minister of social development. I must say that what we did then is we always found the money somewhere to make it happen, and that's why there is a school resource officer at Three Oaks. The principal was always highly in favour of this. They really liked having them there. We heard from the other member from Summerside here, and you can tell, very strongly in favour of a school resource officer.

When I was minister of education, what we're hearing from the current minister of education and the minister of justice, those were the kinds of conversations that were being had. What about the Student Well-Being Teams? Shouldn't this be someone on the Student Well-Being Teams? Couldn't we just take the youth worker that's from the department of justice on the Student Well-Being Team, and maybe if they wear a uniform, maybe that'll be the same thing as having a police officer; this sort of stuff. What is it that's the difference between that youth worker and a police officer? As the minister of justice said, he was minister of justice at the time, that would be a similar conversation. This is what the RCMP superintendent is saying; this is what the chiefs of police are saying is the best use of our resources.

It's a tough one, but I think when it comes to this, you've got to look not at the budget and not at senior management. What you've got to do is look at what's happening on the front line, where it's needed, and you need to put people where the front line is requesting it. That's why when I knew that the councillors were in favour of it and the school principals were in favour of it, I said yeah, this is something that makes sense.

That said, this motion is specifically about expanding into rural areas. I think the minister of education just talked about how there already are liaison officers that work with those schools, and if it truly is about creating that relationship between police and students –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: It is a tougher decision. I know perhaps a Charlottetown Rural or a Colonel Gray or a Three Oaks might be a little easier decision than a small high school

like Kinkora, or even Bluefield, for that matter, which is a much larger high school.

Anyway, at the end of the day, I think you have to look at the people on the ground – these are the teachers and the school administration – and you need to ask them whether they think that’s something they need in their school. That’s really what should drive it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I wanted to rise to speak to this motion briefly because it is something that I have been pleading for, for probably two to three years now at Montague High School. I just wanted to speak to – the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park raised some good points. I was kind of just Googling it there as everyone was debating the motion. I think I found a CTV story that you might have been speaking to where –

Ms. Bernard: (Indistinct)

Mr. Deagle: You have a bunch. But I know in Montague, the principal and the staff have been begging for a full-time resource officer to actually be in the school. Something that we had worked out in Montague was a retired member – he’s retired now, Doug Baker – he used to be in the school full-time, actually, when he was placed on, I think, desk duty for some issues that he was having.

He was in the school, but he was in plain clothes. He didn’t carry a gun or anything like that. He didn’t have a marked vehicle with him. It worked excellent for the students and the teachers. They said that just now, with all the complexities in the school and bullying, they said that the students would actually go to Doug with their concerns, and he would be able to sort out a lot of the issues between students. Maybe a student committed theft on the weekend at a party or something, and he would be able to deal with it before it went to the courts. He kept a lot of kids out of the court system, or perhaps having to go to actually – I don’t want to say being arrested, but he was able

to solve a lot of issues before they percolated up.

I do understand what the member is saying, and perhaps part of it would be that you’re in plain clothes, or a number of different things. I know in Montague, it’s something that they do want. I hope that if there is ever some good news to come in a budget down the road, that it’s something that we can roll out as quickly as possible because in Montague, I know, behind the scenes, I’ve been asking for it. They would love to see it.

I think, obviously, the issue with an RCMP officer is that they can’t find enough of them, so take one out and put them into a school is going to be difficult. There would have to be a workaround there. The idea with Doug Baker was that he’s retired. He would do it for a much smaller fee because once you hire him out, they need a car, they need the pension, which increases the costs significantly.

I’m sure there’s probably some different options that we could look at, but I just wanted to get up and voice my opinion on coming from Montague and what we would like to do.

I know that in Charlottetown, I think the project started seven, maybe 10 years ago now, I think. The former government never funded any of that, I don’t think.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Deagle: No, no, they didn’t, but anyway.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: They just closed the schools.

Mr. Myers: It was easier to close them all.

Mr. Deagle: Yeah, you don’t need to put an officer in them when you just close them.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Deagle: But it’s a very, very important topic. I think there’s healthy debate to be had on it, as the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park brought up some good points as well. But I just wanted

to bring it from Montague's perspective that they desperately want this, and the sooner the better.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Ramsay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This is really dear to my heart, the resource officer in the schools. Since 2019, when I got elected in Summerside as a councillor, that was my first chore for the city.

I did get a hold of Brad and then I got a hold of every minister every year after that because every year I had to fight. We were never guaranteed that the officer was coming back the next year. I would spend months on the phone with the provincial government. You always came through with a little bit of help. Thank you for that.

But now, we're on our own down there. They're doing it through the municipality, which is wonderful, so we have the officer in place full-time.

Right now, it's a female. She's absolutely wonderful. She has a great relationship with the students and with the teachers. Students feel safe with her in the school. Teachers feel safe with her in the school. They build great relationships all the way around. She keeps an eye on the parking lot at lunchtime when kids are leaving and they've got five people in their car and they're supposed to have one.

There are all sorts of things – Summerside Police Services could be called up there three or four times a day to go to Three Oaks High School. Well, they don't get the calls anymore, so it really eliminated that.

One of the things we decided this year was that the officer go to all levels of schools – elementary, intermediate, high school – so that way, they're all getting a piece of that wonderful contribution that she's making to the City of Summerside.

I think that's important, too. When you talk about rural communities, it doesn't mean that that officer would only have to stay in the high school. If there's an elementary

school there or an intermediate school, they could benefit there as well.

I would certainly agree with that motion and think it's very, very important, and very proud of Summerside and what's happening at Three Oaks High School right now.

Thank you.

Speaker: I've exhausted my list, so I'll bring it back to the mover of the motion to close debate.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just want to touch on a few points here. I think one thing we have to remember is this is not downtown Toronto. This is not Ontario. Things that happen up there, we shouldn't always try to compare to the Province of Prince Edward Island.

I think that the Province of Prince Edward Island is a very special place. We have the ability here to try things where other jurisdictions never are able to try. It's as simple as that, and we should embrace that. We should give the students every resource that they need to prepare themselves for life.

I will say that that's one thing I've always thought about this House and the members in this House, before and the present – I don't know too many of the present ones – but the before, we've always been there when our students or our seniors need something. We do band together and we do put the resources available to get the job done.

I like the idea of maybe – I have some (Indistinct) here – of maybe a rotation. Maybe we try this in rural PEI on a rotation basis. We have an RCMP member maybe that can rotate through different schools periodically across our Island to introduce to it and try and see how it can be expanded and how it's embraced by the community.

We've heard from the hon. member, the minister of fisheries, that Montague wants this. I know Kinkora wants this. I know that I've heard from people in Bluefield; they want this and think it's a valuable resource.

Let's ask government – accept this motion, approve the motion – and let's ask

government to take this forward and try to come up with some kind of plan and program between the department of education and the Department of Justice and Public Safety that can be rolled out across all Prince Edward Island and all our school systems to make sure that our students have resource officers available in some aspect.

It's all about the students and it's all about making sure that they have the supports necessary to prepare themselves for life and to build a stronger community, to build stronger families, to have wellbeing across our whole system.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will end debate and ask for a vote on the motion.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The question has been called.

All those in favour, say 'aye.'

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Speaker: All those opposed?

Some Hon. Members: Nay!

Speaker: The motion passed, hon. member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We would like to call Motion 31 to the floor for debate.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Motion 31.

The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, the following motion:

WHEREAS our primary industries of agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture have been an integral part of the way of life for generations of many Islanders, and continues to be the economic lifeblood of

many communities across Prince Edward Island;

AND WHEREAS our primary industries of agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture significantly contribute to our Island economy through the direct and indirect employment of thousands of Islanders;

AND WHEREAS our primary industries of agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture also contribute to the environmental well-being of the province through sustainable practices;

AND WHEREAS these industries have weathered significant external challenges in recent years including global pandemics, natural disasters, climate change and international trade disputes;

AND WHEREAS Islanders and Island communities have stepped up and stood alongside our primary producers through adversity;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island commend the commitment, dedication and production of our Island primary producers in the valuable industries of agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture.

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

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Speaker: The hour has been called.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, that this House adjourn until Friday, May 19th, at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The Legislature adjourned until Friday, May 19th, at 10:00 a.m.