



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings**

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Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Tuesday, 19 May 2026

No. 30

The Honourable Brad Trivers, Speaker

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

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

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Thompson , Hon. Bloyce (PC)	Stanhope-Marshfield (8)	Minister of Agriculture Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General
Trivers , Hon. Brad	Rustico-Emerald (18)	Speaker
Vacant	Cornwall-Meadowbank (16)	

[The Legislature met at 1:04 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Welcome back, everyone. I hope everyone enjoyed the long weekend; it was beautiful weather. I certainly knocked off a few tasks on my list of chores that have been piling up, so that was great, and we got a little sunshine and enjoyed some time with my family. So, I hope everyone else enjoyed it.

Welcome to everyone in the gallery today. Welcome to those joining us online. It's great to be back for another week in the Legislature.

Today we mark World Family Doctor Day. This is a day that shines a light on the real steady, practical, and profoundly important work of family physicians.

[1:05 p.m.]

Family doctors are truly the backbone of our health care system. They're the first people we turn to when we have symptoms or lingering worry of some sort or even just routine questions about our health that deserve a thoughtful answer. They guide us through uncertainty, they catch problems early, and they build long-term relationships that keep communities healthy. So, I want to sincerely thank our family physicians for the dedication, the compassion, and the expertise that they bring to their jobs every single day.

Tomorrow, May 20th, is the QEH's Big Day of Giving, an important day. It's for 24 hours. The QEH Foundation is asking for donations of all sizes from donors who have either raised funds or wish to make a special gift in support of priority medical equipment for the QEH. A very important event. All of the gifts combined add up to make a significant impact on Island health care. For further information on making a donation to the foundation, you can contact the foundation themselves: 902-894-2425, or online at www.qehbigday.ca.

Finally, sadly this morning, we learned of the passing of Robert K. Irving. I extend my deepest condolences to the Irving family as they navigate this difficult time. Robert K. Irving was a respected business leader whose work, including his role with Cavendish Farms, helped shape a key part of Prince Edward Island's economy. His contributions supported communities across our province, and those contributions will not be forgotten. I hope that his family finds comfort in the legacy that he's left behind here in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope everyone has a good day.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise and welcome all those who are watching online, in particular those watching from Tignish-Palmer Road.

I'd like to welcome everyone to the gallery today. Dean MacArthur, welcome back. I see Dr. Kris Saunders, Linda, and Morgan – welcome to the gallery. Welcome to our guests here today also.

It was a great weekend. I think summer has started here on Prince Edward Island. The leaves are starting to come out on the trees, and I keep getting reminded by the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park not to cut the grass; keep the dandelions for the bees. I've kept to it so far.

I'd also like to mention that later on this week the Rotary Club of Charlottetown will host a new food festival at the Eastlink Centre. They will have upwards up 15 food trucks from the Island and from the Maritimes, and they offer something for the whole family. They have a large craft fair. They have a makers market, a kids zone, and musical entertainment there. This takes place on the 22nd and the 23rd. Again, that's at the Eastlink Centre.

I'm sure the Member from Summerside-Wilmot will be on his feet here shortly, but I will mention that it was such a wonderful season for the Summerside Western Capitals. They represented not only Summerside but Prince Edward Island with pride throughout the 2026 season. They showed heart, determination, and resilience all the way to the Centennial Cup

championship game that was held in Summerside.

While the final results didn't go their way, reaching a national final on home ice was an incredible accomplishment and a true testament to the players, the coaches, the staff, and the fans who stood behind this team every step of the way. It also reinforced what most Islanders know – and I will say it even though I'm not from Summerside, but Summerside is my city being up west: Summerside is the sports capital of Prince Edward Island. The community came together – not only for this but for many other events, but in this particular case, in an incredible way to support this team and to showcase PEI at the national level. So, congrats to all.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back to the Legislature to you, and all the people that make the Legislature work here day in and day out, and all of my colleagues here as well.

Welcome to the gallery and those who are joining us today in person, and those watching online; I hope you enjoy the proceedings today.

[1:10 p.m.]

It is Paramedic Services Week this week, with the theme being “Improving Outcomes Together.” I would like to stand and thank the many paramedics across the province who serve Islanders every day and do the incredible job that they do to respond to all of the emergencies that come up and that they have deal with to keep us all well and give us the care we need.

I'd also like to thank the local businesses who are stepping up to recognize paramedics. I know Island Hill Farm is offering free admission to paramedics and their families. I saw this morning Receiver Coffee is giving out free drip coffee and 25 percent off other goods and products in the store. Great to see that recognition for the great work that paramedics are doing for us in our province.

It's also been mentioned this morning World Family Doctor Day, with the theme being “Compassionate Care in a Digital World.” We don't often put those words together –

“compassion” and “digital.” Unfortunately, in the digital world, we often see the opposite of that. I appreciate the theme, “Compassionate Care in a Digital World,” and the work that family doctors do both virtually in a digital world but also, of course, physically in our province. Congratulations to the family doctors. I hope you get some great recognition from Islanders today and maybe a little bit more than that; maybe more than a pat on the back. Maybe a treat of some sort would be in order for our family doctors today.

Finally, Holland College graduations are taking place today. This morning at ten o'clock, there was a graduating service for aircraft turbine technology, automotive technology, carpentry, construction, electromechanical, HVAC, industrial, and more. At two o'clock this afternoon, we'll see graduates in the administrative assistants program, computer information systems, human resources, power engineering, practical nursing, and more. Just give a recognition to the hard work that the graduates from the Holland College programs are doing. Great facility, a great training school, and I hope all of the graduates have a great day.

I hope we all have a great day in here, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to say hello to everybody watching from Charlottetown-West Royalty. I hope everybody had a good weekend.

I, too, want to join in by saying happy World Family Doctors Day to all the hardworking family physicians and others in Prince Edward Island. They just work so hard for so many other people. What family doctors do, like Kris Saunders, who is here today – thank you for all your service to Islanders – and what good family doctors do is they put their family first. I want to say Linda is here and Morgan is here, as well. I look forward to making a statement about Morgan a little bit later. Welcome to the proceedings today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I wanted to recognize two constituents that are here in the gallery today: George Dignan, who's been here a lot. I know his favourite minister and MLA is the Minister of AI behind me here. But I don't know, he's spent a lot of time here this spring, so I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, if we're doing a great job or if he's here for moral support.

I do want to recognize Sam MacLeod. Sam is a great constituent who lives in behind Royalty Crossing mall. The last few times I've been through the area, he's been out tending the garden. He works on the community garden, so we thank you for that. We did see him earlier in the session, but unfortunately his Boston Bruins lost. I didn't know if we would see him again, but we do see him here. He's got the gold and the black on.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and welcome, Sam.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

I just wanted to get up, as the Leader of the Opposition said, and congratulate the Summerside Western Capitals for the run they had. They had an unbelievable season and went all the way to the finals in the Centennial Cup. The rink was packed, 4,300-plus. They had to open up some standing room. It was electric. Every seat had some noisemakers on it. When everybody got down, they folded their clappers up or their balloons. When they announced over the radio, "Let's make some noise," it was pretty wild in there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Members

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

Recognizing PEI Actress Morgan Saunders

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Acting is not being emotional but being able to fully express emotions. It gives me great pleasure today to rise in the Legislature to recognize a talented young PEI actress doing just that – Morgan Saunders.

[1:15 p.m.]

At just 13 years old, Morgan has already built an impressive acting resume and is quickly emerging as one of Canada's promising young performing talents. Known for her natural screen presence, emotional depth, and confidence in front of a camera, she is emerging as one of our nation's top talents.

Morgan began acting at the age of eight after auditioning for a Prince Edward Island potato commercial. That experience sparked her passion for performance and led to representation in Toronto, opening doors to opportunities in film and television. Many Islanders will remember Morgan's role in the Hallmark holiday film *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, where she showcased her charm and versatility. Since then, she has joined ACTRA and continues to expand her career with roles in productions including *Hailey Rose* and the upcoming horror feature *Unholy Night*. Most recently, her first lead role as Wendy in the streaming series *The Nothing Club*.

Alongside her acting career, Morgan continues to excel academically, balancing school with the demands of filming and performance work. Her dedication, professionalism, and passion for storytelling truly sets her apart.

I would like to encourage Morgan to reach for the stars, celebrate her outstanding accomplishments, and wish her continued success in the years ahead. You've definitely got this. Knock 'em dead, Morgan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Hear, hear!]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leadership on Affordability and Health Care

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

Islanders are frustrated, and they have every right to be. This government has spent years talking about affordability while the cost of living continues to spiral out of control. Islanders are paying more at the pumps, more to heat their homes, more for electricity, more for groceries, and more for housing.

At the very same time, Islanders are struggling just to access basic health care. Thousands remain without a family doctor. Emergency rooms continue to face closures and reduced hours. Seniors and families are waiting longer for care while frontline health care workers are stretched to the breaking point.

Families are making impossible choices every single day – deciding what bills can wait, what groceries can be put back on the shelf, and whether they can afford the gas to drive to a medical appointment.

And what do Islanders see from this government? Delay. Indecision. Excuses. Time and time again, Islanders speak up, experts raise concerns, and communities ask for action, but this Premier and his government refuse to listen.

Instead of leadership, Islanders get announcements without results. Instead of solutions, Islanders get studies and talking points. Instead of action, Islanders get a government afraid to make decisions.

Islanders do not expect perfection, but they do expect leadership. They expect a government willing to listen, willing to act, and willing to stand up for the people struggling to make ends meet. Right now, too many Islanders feel ignored, unheard, and left behind.

It is time for this government to stop patting itself on the back and start delivering real affordability relief, real health care access, and real results for the people of Prince Edward Island.

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

Tools to Improve Children's Futures

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Every child on this Island deserves to be loved and safe, and the chance to grow and develop into the person they were always meant to be. We know what the evidence tells us: early

childhood development shapes every outcome, including overall health and wellbeing, academic success, and social and emotional wellbeing.

When we invest in our children in the earliest years, we are building a stronger, healthier, more compassionate PEI. But when funding is cut to children and families, we are losing our very foundation. We are not saving; we are pushing the human costs further down the road and asking our children to pay the price later.

Parents are a child's first teacher and their strongest protector. Today though, when a child runs away when they are vulnerable and in danger, parents are left helpless.

Later today, I will bring back Bill 103. This bill will provide the legal tool to intervene when a child runs away from a very safe home. Parents must be able to protect and nurture their children. Too many children on this Island are still falling through the cracks. Government must invest in our children. Empower parents. Life is happening right now. Give children and families the tools they need to build a better future for us all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, this government's response to every controversy, every mistake, and every difficult decision now seems to be the same: announce another review. Islanders have watched this government study health care, affordability, land issues, school safety, red tape, and finances, while the actual problems keep getting worse.

[1:20 p.m.]

It's quite clear: Islanders are seeing a Premier more comfortable studying problems than fixing them.

IRAC (further)

Question to the Premier: What makes this IRAC review any different from the long list of

government reviews Islanders were promised would lead to action but never did?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

What makes this review different is that it's never happened for IRAC. In the 35 years in IRAC's existence, their mandate, their structure, their roles, and their responsibilities have never been reviewed by an independent external commissioner like this. So, that's what makes it unique.

I think what also makes it unique is that we've got an ambitious timeline. We've spoken with the commissioner, and we've agreed that we'd like to see a report with recommendations in six months. I'm on the record saying that I'm looking forward to receiving those recommendations and implementing them.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Islanders have now raised concerns about IRAC for years – rising power bills, rental delays, fuel pricing, land protection, and transparency. Those concerns didn't suddenly appear last week, so the obvious question is: What finally forced this government to act now after years of refusing to listen?

Question to the Premier: What specifically changed that made this government suddenly decide IRAC needs reform?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I, too, have heard questions/concerns about IRAC and its role and responsibilities. This is something I committed to during the past leadership campaign earlier this winter, and I'm just delivering on what I promised.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Islanders have noticed a recurring trend with this very tired government. When they had to investigate their own former Minister of Environment for a \$100,000 secret payout, what did they do? They hired Murray Murphy, the

Premier's trusted lawyer friend. When they ordered a review into school safety, who was consulted? Murray Murphy, this Premier's trusted Tory friend.

Question to the Premier: Have you already directed the IRAC commission to hire your trusted Tory lawyer for this review? Will you commit today to publicly disclosing every contract associated with the commission?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I haven't directed the commissioner in any way, other than giving him a mandate to perform the review that he's been asked to do. He has all the powers under the *Public Inquiries Act*. He has a budget sufficient to acquire the resources that he needs to undertake a thorough investigation. I expect him to do that in an independent way, and I look forward to his recommendations.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier says this six-month review will cost taxpayers approximately \$375,000. At a time when Islanders are struggling to afford groceries, rent, property taxes, and power bills, this government just keeps announcing another expensive review – another lawyer, another bill for taxpayers to cover. At some point, people expect government to stop studying the problems that they created and start fixing them.

Question to the Premier: Will the Premier publicly release a full breakdown of the \$375,000 review budget, including consultants, legal fees, communications, contracts, and outside advisors?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I'm not entirely clear what the Leader of the Opposition is asking. None of those expenses have been incurred yet. This is an open, transparent process, a public review by an independent commissioner, and I expect that we'll show full transparency throughout this process.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm not sure how he came up with \$375,000 then, but that doesn't surprise me that the Premier would do something without a plan.

Islanders are starting to notice a pattern. When this government gets into trouble, the answer is always the same – another review, another consultant, another politically-connected insider billing taxpayers by the hour. People are noticing the same names seem to appear every time this government finds itself under pressure.

Question to the Premier: When will you stop reviewing the problems that you created and start doing the job you've wanted for the past 18 months?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

We chose the commissioner in this case based on his considerable expertise, both in the private sector and in the public sector, his expertise in building an entire sector here – certainly very well connected, credible, a lot of expertise. I'm not sure why the Leader of the Opposition would characterize him as a politically-connected insider – certainly not.

[1:25 p.m.]

I have full confidence that this is a robust process. Many of the issues or at least some of the issues that prompted concerns about the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission itself were revelations of things that happened under the previous Liberal government. That is certainly one of the reasons the public was asking for such a review, and it's one of the reasons why we're delivering on that now.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But I never mentioned that the Premier's neighbour was politically connected to this.

The Premier is already promising to accept recommendations before the review has even started. Quite frankly, that makes Islanders wonder whether the outcome of this review is already being steered before the work is even done. It's hard to call a process independent

when the Premier is publicly embracing conclusions that have not even been written yet.

A question to the Premier: How can Islanders trust this review is truly independent when the Premier is already committing to recommendations before the work is even done?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, certainly, we often are asked by members on the other side if we'll accept the recommendations of independent reviews. Certainly, it's not a given, but I expect that this will be done in a thorough way that considers the best interests of Prince Edward Islanders. If that's the case, we'll be accepting the recommendations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It seems more and more like this Premier is just kicking this down the road.

Islanders are already frustrated with delays with IRAC – delays on rental hearings, power rates, fuel pricing, and land issues – and now this government is tying IRAC up in another lengthy review while Islanders are still waiting for decisions on issues affecting them right now. Meanwhile, the decisions Islanders are waiting on today keep getting pushed further behind.

Question to the Premier: Will this review delay decisions already sitting before IRAC, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: No, Mr. Speaker, this will not delay decisions sitting before IRAC. In fact, the mandate of the commissioner specifically outlines that ongoing decisions/issues before IRAC are out of the scope of the review. This is a review of its mandate, its structure, its roles, and its responsibilities going forward that would be implemented through recommendations of the commissioner.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This government has become addicted to reviews, panels, consultants, and working groups. Islanders keep paying for studies, reports, and outside advice while problems remain unsolved and recommendations collect dust on shelves. Taxpayers have a right to know how much money this government is spending studying problems instead of fixing them.

Status of government reviews (further)

Question to the Premier: Will the Premier table a complete list of every active government review, its cost, and the status of the recommendations before this session ends, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

This review also specifically outlines the expectation that Islanders will be engaged in this issue. I think this is a very important part of this review given that Islanders have expressed very specific concerns and asked very specific questions.

There will be a full engagement of stakeholders, of Prince Edward Islanders, to have their say in this review. That is why it is important to undertake a full, public, external independent review of this organization, and I'm very confident that this will result in improved processes and a mandate going forward that will serve Prince Edward Islanders better in the future.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But he didn't answer my question. What I did ask him was – and it's because this Premier keeps putting a review after a review after review and kicking every issue down the road – will the Premier table a complete list of every active government review, its cost, and the status and recommendations before this session ends, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Certainly, part of good governance is taking the time to review issues and receive feedback from

Prince Edward Islanders. I think in every instance that we have undertaken public reviews, we've acted quickly in implementing recommendations. I don't expect this will be any different this time.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An early years centre in the province wrote to the Department of Education and Early Years in good faith, identifying itself as one of the many centres experiencing financial hardship under the current funding model. The minister's response to that letter was to announce an audit of that particular business. The department already receives annual financial statements as part of their contractual agreement.

[1:30 p.m.]

Early learning and child care funding (further)

A question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: What exactly are you auditing for that you do not already have through financial statements?

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

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

I'll have to go back to the department to find out what that correspondence was. It didn't come from me directly. But what we have told any centre that has any issues with their current funding model – we've encouraged them to reach out to our department. We will take the time to sit down with them, go through all of their numbers, and see how we can assist them in making it work.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education and Early Years has identified that any centre that has a problem can come forward. Centres are saying that they have already done so and that they're financially

becoming more and more unstable, and the funding model is simply not working.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Why is the burden of proving financial hardship falling solely on a centre that already disclosed its situation to you in writing? They provide financial statements. Why are you simply not doing a review of the funding model?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Again –

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years, you have the floor.

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

Again, any centre that wants to approach our department, we will take the time to sit down and go through their challenges. There's a number of different reasons that centres may or may not be able to operate with the current funding model.

We've been supporting our early years centres. We've made the biggest investment in our early years sector this year at \$15.5 million. We've invested \$101 million over this fiscal alone. We'll continue to work with our centres to make sure that those needs are met, and encourage any centre to reach out.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, the answer is no, we won't be reviewing that.

The pedagogical support position and training grants being cut are a cornerstone of this province's recruitment and retention strategy for early childhood.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: What is your concrete plan for child care centres who are already struggling to fill staff vacancies when they lose their professional development and coaching infrastructure that they've been relying on to survive?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: We have made the biggest single investment in our early years sector this year at \$15.5 million. Pedagogical support came into place in 2023. We have not cut it; we have reduced it.

We have a working group stood up that actually meets this Thursday. We wasted no time in engaging the sector. We're going to have roundtable discussions with the key players in the sector to see how we move forward from this, and we will continue to support the sector in the way that we have over the last seven years.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's clear that government is shortsighted in this decision to cut the support staff to child care and aren't prepared to acknowledge that cutting the pedagogical support position will actually worsen the early childhood educator shortage on PEI.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: If centres cannot fill positions as a result of this, what plan exists to ensure that children will not lose spaces in licensed child care centres?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Again, pedagogical support is not tied to ratios in centres, full stop. We're standing up approximately 400 spaces in this budget. We will work with those affected by the pedagogical support cuts...

[Interjections]

Hon. R. Croucher: ...to ensure that they have opportunities for employment in the future. Again, we have not had one centre close in the seven years that this government has been in power and supporting the sector, and we'll continue to support those centres.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Mr. Speaker – oops.

So, the cut that happened there – the last time I asked the Minister of Education and Early Years in this House about the department's budget and what other cuts are coming, his response was that his budget will be on the floor soon. Islanders have come to understand that to be a deflection, not an answer.

[1:35 p.m.]

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years – I'll ask you again directly: Why are you unable to answer a straightforward question about your own department's spending decisions, or were you just told what to cut?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: I've been answering your questions, member. Again, we have one of the most transparent budget processes in the country. Maybe as early as tomorrow, we will have the opportunity to discuss those questions that the member has, and I look forward to answering those for you at that time.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Beyond the early years file, we are hearing reports about additional reductions across the Department of Education and Early Years.

Education and Early Years funding (further)

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Minister, will you provide this House with a complete accounting of every program, division, and service that has been reduced, eliminated, deferred, cut – whatever you want to call it – in the current budget and the rationale behind each of those decisions? Tell us, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Again, Mr. Speaker, this member will have the opportunity to ask all of those questions during the budget debate. I

welcome those. I will do my very best to explain the process and the rationale behind these decisions that were made and I encourage the member to have a conversation with me about that at the appropriate time.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, I'll get back to that again.

I will, though, raise once again the Acadian and Francophone community, who are in need of support for young families in keeping their very language and culture alive in a minority setting. We've been told time and time again that something is coming, but we were also told that there's no timeline, so the mystery seems to be unfolding for families. What we don't know is whether whatever is coming will be any good. We know that the program that has been cut is. As they say, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

French language supports (further)

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Given that you are now in negotiations with the federal government for this upcoming action plan, will you simply negotiate back in the program that supports Acadian and Francophone families on PEI?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: I can assure this member that I will negotiate as hard as I can for every dollar that we can get additionally from our federal government. In fact, on Friday, I had a meeting with our Cardigan MP, Kent MacDonald. I've got a meeting set up with Minister Hajdu and her team next week. If there's one thing that I'm quite capable of doing it's pushing, and I'm certainly pushing for every federal dollar that we can get. I encourage the members from that side of the House to join me in that fight.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have been asking Minister of Fisheries and Tourism many questions supporting our PEI oyster industry. The minister rarely answered any questions, but he did lament about how the federal government hadn't come to the table to assist the industry. He also wouldn't give any details of how the Province would spend its \$5.9 million contingency fund.

Well, two weeks ago the federal government did announce its support of \$12 million, and a few days later, the Province did announce its amount of \$5.9 million – but always, the devil is in the details. The PEI oyster relief wage assistance program announced will also provide some help, depending on how it's rolled out and who's eligible.

Oyster industry (further)

Question to the Minister of Fisheries and Tourism: Can you explain this funding announcement? Is it just employer cost of payroll deductions, or are there actual wage subsidies for growers and processors? Are both existing (Indistinct) workers eligible, or do they have to be licensed public fishers, as the previous program was?

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

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

I think I'll take that question, hon. member, just because the Minister of Fisheries has done such a great job answering your questions in this House. I'll add to the question from the point of view that when we originally announced our programming, we worked with the Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning when I was the Minister of Fisheries.

So, to your question – and hopefully I'll try my best to answer this in as short amount of time as possible, Mr. Speaker – there is an advisory committee set up with the PEI Shellfish Association, the PEI Oyster Processors Association, the Seafood Processors Association, and the Aquaculture Alliance. I believe they have completed the terms of reference on how these programs will be rolled out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Well, that's some hope here, but it would be nice to have what those criteria would actually be.

[1:40 p.m.]

In that announcement, the PEI Department of Fisheries announced the continuation of the oyster growers income stabilization program. That program, in the past, supported for losses if their farm income fell below 30 percent, based on a formula that determined average income, although that average did not consider farms that had expanded their operations in size and increased seed investment for future markets.

Question to the Minister of Fisheries on this one: Will the public wild oyster fishers on PEI – who undoubtedly will see an income decline this year with so few rivers and estuaries that still have oysters – be eligible for this funding should their income fall below 30 percent, and will an appeal process be put in place for the growers and fishers who disagree with the funding approved for their operations?

Speaker: Several questions there.

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

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

I'm not sure just how many questions there were in that question. But anyway, as my colleague had alluded to, there has been a steering committee set up with the stakeholders from the industry, which does include the Shellfish Association. They have met once, right after the announcement last week. I believe they are scheduled to meet again very soon. The criteria associated with the various programs that were rolled out – we want to have the input from the different sectors that were alluded to by my colleague.

It's important for us to hear from the industry how these should be rolled out, what criteria need to be put in place, and we will continue down that road.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: In response to questions about IRAC's calculations of gas prices earlier this

sitting, the Premier stated: “I don’t direct IRAC.” But ministers before him, perhaps ones with more confidence and leadership skills, have in fact directed IRAC to do work in Islanders’ best interest. Over a year ago, then Minister of Land, Steven Myers, directed IRAC to conduct an investigation under the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* to determine whether certain organizations – GEBIS and GWBI – were contravening the act.

Landholdings investigation

Question to the Premier: It’s been over a year, Mr. Premier. Have you heard any update from IRAC on progress or timeline for completion of this important work?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I know that there is an investigator doing the work. I expect that we’ll hear something when the work is complete.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Last week, the Premier announced a full review of IRAC with all the powers of a public inquiry in a six-month timeframe. Unfortunately, this government chose not to give that same direction and powers to the ongoing land investigation. It’s been over a year, and no updates whatsoever. The previous Liberal government secretly called off the 2018 land investigation, and it took a subpoena for Islanders to find that out years later. That was shameful, and Islanders deserve better than that this time around.

Question to the Premier. Islanders have had enough with secrecy. Will you do better than the Liberal government before you and issue a public inquiry into the Bliss and Wisdom landholdings?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Speaking of ongoing investigations, it was this government – it was me – last fall, that called on the RCMP and FINTRAC to investigate serious allegations made around landholdings in Prince Edward Island. That work is also ongoing.

I also don’t direct the RCMP, but I do hope and expect that all of these investigations will be undertaken swiftly and quickly and delivered back to the public as soon as possible.

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

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This Premier thought it necessary to do a full review of IRAC because he knows that Islanders don’t trust them and are fed up with the secrecy that they have become famous for. Despite ordering this review, this same government continues to trust IRAC to investigate one of the most divisive landholdings our province has ever seen.

Again, back to the Premier with this question: Will you, Mr. Premier, order IRAC to conclude its current investigation, hand over all relevant documents, and do a proper, transparent, and independent public inquiry?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I’ll just reiterate that this investigation is underway. This is something – as the Leader of the Third Party has indicated – this government called for. IRAC has engaged an investigator who is undertaking that work alongside the RCMP and other federal agencies that are investigating serious allegations that have been made about landholdings in Prince Edward Island. I think we should let the independent investigators do their work.

[1:45 p.m.]

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

So many of the cuts in this budget have negative impacts on children – the books, the bikes, the child care positions, the placement of the child psychiatric unit – all decisions that save this government money but cost Island children. Unfortunately, the only reason we even know about these cuts is because of the work of opposition and community groups who have been searching through the budget. This is no way to treat Islanders. It’s their money, and they deserve transparency.

Budget transparency

A question to the Minister of Finance: Will you be transparent with Islanders and table an exhaustive list of all budget cuts and reductions that came in this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

Again, I'll say that we spend more time on the estimates and the budget. We have open books. We give supplementary notes. We table those notes. We make them all public. We give more information to the public here about our budget than probably any other province in Canada. We are open, we are transparent, and we're letting the process continue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: The Minister of Finance said that this budget was filled with tough choices, and in the weeks since the budget has been tabled, Island families, Island businesses, seniors, fishers, and farmers are slowly finding out about how these tough choices will impact them.

But some cuts and reductions will undoubtedly remain hidden, even after the budget debate. It's inappropriate for Islanders to have to wait to find out a program or service has been cut until they need it.

Question to the Minister of Finance: Will you publicly disclose all budget cuts and reductions so at least Islanders know what's coming?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

All that information is in the budget. It's all there.

I will also add to that. When we talk about – you have this narrative about us going after the kids and families and seniors. We have invested significant amounts of money into that. The PEI child benefit – we started last year and enhanced again this year. We have given \$20 million just

this year alone to families in personal income tax cuts. We've boosted the seniors credit by 73 percent to \$6,500. We've raised income thresholds, especially in the low-income tax reduction, by more than 35 percent. We've doubled the children's wellness tax credit.

We have done a lot for families on affordability. We're going to continue to do it. We want to see families thrive. Let that be clear. We're doing everything we can to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

You love to talk about the good things but refuse to table the cuts. For some reason, this government is dead set on not being straight with Islanders and relying on opposition parties to find the cuts in their budget. When asked direct questions – just like this afternoon – a minister or the Premier will stand and say, "That section of the budget's coming up soon and we'll find out then," but unless we ask direct questions, we do not learn about the cuts, and even when we do ask direct questions, we still get no answers.

Speaker: Question, member.

To the Minister of Finance: Will you table a list of all cuts and reductions in this year's budget?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

A \$3.8 billion budget is super complex. There are ups and downs throughout that budget. It's not something that we can do.

I would love to do a list of the investments we're making because that would be a much more robust document, because the investments are bigger and better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are increasing concerns from educators and administrators about situations involving intimidation, harassment, and aggressive behaviours by parents and/or caregivers, in both written form and in person. It's essential that those working in our schools feel safe and supported in carrying out their roles.

Education system code of conduct

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: What supports are currently in place to support teachers and administrators with handling these situations?

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

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

This type of behaviour is unacceptable, full stop, member. It seems to be a new normal in our society that abusing educators and staff is somehow acceptable. It's not. Our *Education Act* states that parents and caregivers need to conduct themselves professionally and respectfully.

[1:50 p.m.]

I guess to answer the question, any serious incidents or issues would involve law enforcement. We do provide training and continued education on how to deal with these types of behaviours. No one in our system should feel threatened or intimidated in any way. It's unacceptable.

Thank you.

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

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As challenges within our school evolve and change over time, it is important to clearly understand the role of the department of supporting our education authorities, including both the Public Schools Branch and La Commission scolaire de langue française, in these situations.

What currently is the department's role in supporting our educational authorities in these situations?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, member.

Our role is to provide the appropriate professional development and resources to our school authorities in how to deal with these types of situations. We partnered with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection for training opportunities throughout the year.

I just want to take the opportunity to ensure our staff right across the system that I do understand how difficult your jobs are each and every day, and the care that you bring to our school system and the difficult jobs that you do.

Thank you.

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

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know that a safe, respectful learning environment depends on clear expectations and consistency across our system. That raises an important question about whether there's an opportunity to strengthen our aligned policies governing conduct in schools across this province.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Is there the possibility to create one code of conduct for all schools, English and French, that provide the expectations for students, school personnel, and parents and caregivers?

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

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

That is a fantastic question by the member. That was one of the key recommendations in the Jenkins report. I'm happy to say that we are well under way to establishing a new code of conduct for students, staff, and parents across the system. We expect to have that stood up by the start of the new school year coming. The goal for that code of conduct is to set expectations right across the board for students, staff, and parents, and a baseline of consistency for everyone that's moving through our system. I look forward to being able to announce that in the coming months.

Thank you.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today's report from the CBC highlighted a growing concern for our Island farmers. As Maritime Electric moves towards a flat rate by removing that second block, our farmers are facing a potential 20 percent spike in their power bills. In a world where margins are already razor thin, an increase of that scale was more than just a hurdle; it's a threat to the viability of family farms on Prince Edward Island.

Electricity rates (further)

A question to the Minister of Agriculture: Can the Minister of Agriculture provide an update on his department's assessment of the cost impacts that this rate change will have on our producers? What steps are being taken to prevent this rate shock from hurting our primary industries?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank the member for the question.

I also saw that article today, and it is concerning. The second block – a lot of farms can't avoid using the power in the main times. We don't farm at night; we farm during the day. That's when the rates are going to be affected. I know this is in front of IRAC, but our department has looked into this. We've come to, last year, spend \$1.2 million on helping a pilot project to make their farms more energy efficient with their motors and avoiding diesel motors as well.

We are keeping an eye on this, but it's important that we help the farmers out when this changes.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The PEI Federation of Agriculture has highlighted that many of our competitors in other provinces benefit from designated farm electricity rates. It's about making sure PEI remains a competitive place to grow and do business.

Question to the Minister of Agriculture: Is the minister in discussions with the PEI Federation of Agriculture and IRAC regarding the creation of a designated farm rate class to ensure our producers remain competitive with the rest of Atlantic Canada?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

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

[1:55 p.m.]

The PEI Federation of Agriculture are intervenors in this, and we are supportive of them in this matter. I believe IRAC has told Maritime Electric to come back with a farm rate and do a six-month project to have a better option instead of getting rid of the second block.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Mr. Speaker, as IRAC continues to work on these rate structures, it is important that the voice of the farmer is clearly heard. Facilitating a strong dialogue between the industry and all partners is the best way to find a balanced solution.

I'll probably offer this question now to the Minister of Energy: Will the minister commit to continuing to work closely with the Federation of Agriculture and ensure that concerns regarding electricity rates are prioritized in ongoing industry discussions?

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

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

Absolutely. I will work side by side with probably the best Minister of Agriculture that this province has ever had, really. As a former dairy farmer, as I know the hon. member is, I certainly hear where he is coming from, the concerns that are raised, and I absolutely will work with the Federation of Agriculture, with the minister, and with the hon. member himself.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

One component of that provincial oyster announcement that many growers thought was very positive was the oyster growers interest relief program, but once again, this government can't seem to hit the target.

Oyster industry (further)

Question to the Minister of Economic Development: Why does the oyster interest relief program, to which your department has allocated \$3 million of the \$5.9 million, only have an application date of January 2027? Why can't we provide interest relief immediately to our growers now before interest charges continue to increase and actually cost you more money?

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the hon. member for bringing this forward.

I did hear the same concern brought forward to myself later in the week, but one of the things – and as I had referenced earlier – is the steering committee that has been put in place to bring these concerns forward to deal with them.

The other thing, too, is with regard to – once I heard those concerns, they were passed on. The Aquaculture Alliance, as I understand, is getting the most accurate and up-to-date information out to the industry with regard to this. As previously, we will continue to work with all of the stakeholders in the industry to receive feedback.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Well, that was a heck of a long-winded answer of saying nothing to actually provide interest relief to our growers.

Mr. Speaker, the oyster fishers training fund was also re-announced, allowing fishers to apply for SkillsPEI supports funded by the LMDA federal-provincial agreement, but last year, the program was only eligible for active, licensed fishers.

Question to the Minister of Workforce: Will all persons impacted by the loss of the oyster opportunities be eligible this time around, including shellfish labourers, regardless of whether they work for a grower or a processor, and any licensed fisher, regardless of whether they were active in the public fishery last year or not? Will they be eligible for the SkillsPEI funding, minister?

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

Hon. E. Hudson: The hon. member has extensive, lengthy preludes, and then yet accuses me of lengthy answers. We've only got so much time, but the long and short – and I'll speak as fast as I can.

We have been there for the industry. We will continue to be there for the industry. I was very grateful to hear that there was a federal announcement. I will be tabling letters later today from the stakeholders as well as myself with regard to the federal government, outlining additional requests that are required for the industry, and especially with regard to the wild fishery, which the hon. member, knowing his background, should be fully aware is under federal jurisdiction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The ambition in the recent mandate letters from this government is quite striking, especially to the Minister of Housing. In the minister's mandate letter, it says "increase housing supply and affordability by working with partners to achieve a healthy vacancy rate of 2 to 4 percent," when the minister three weeks ago said that we were at 2 to 4 percent already.

[2:00 p.m.]

He also went on to say that he cancelled the relationship with the NGOs, taking a little pause, cancelling housing projects. The minister said, "It happens," took a wrecking ball to a curling club for \$400,000, and has stacked up tiny homes with no one living in them.

Housing vacancy rate

Minister: How do you expect to get to a 2 to 4 percent vacancy rate with all these blunders?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

We are at a 2.1 percent provincial vacancy rate as of now. Summerside is at 4 percent. He had a lot there. I'm just focusing on the main points there, the vacancy rates increasing for the first time in many years.

Statements by Ministers

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table information on the IRAC review raised in Question Period, including the budget, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Education and Early Years, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table responses to questions during budget estimates in the Committee of the Whole House for the Department of Agriculture, and I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table questions taken as notice regarding the *Community Development Equity Tax Credit Act*, which is a program of the Department of Finance and Affordability, and I move, seconded

by the hon. Minister of Education and Early Years, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter sent by myself to the hon. Joanne Thompson, dated May 14th, voicing strong support for the proposal advanced by our provincial shellfish associations to establish a shell recovery and bed restoration program, and also voicing support for the implementation of an EI approach that would recognize fishers' earnings over the past three years as the basis for future EI claims, similar to measures previously extended to the cod fishery. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter sent from my department, from the Prince Edward Island Shellfish Association, the PEI Aquaculture Alliance, PEI oyster processors, as well as the PEI Seafood Processors Association sent to the hon. Joanne Thompson, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table responses to questions during budget estimates in the Committee of the Whole House for the Department of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism, including Tourism PEI, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, that the said documents be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter from Even for One in support of Bill 103, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter to the Premier and several ministers from a child care centre regarding the funding model for early years centres and their concerns, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[2:05 p.m.]

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter to the Premier and ministers and remaining MLAs from a child care centre that I spoke about during Question Period who had concerns with the funding model, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a response from the Minister of Education and Early Years to the said letter and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the 2nd order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 2, Consideration of the Supplementary Estimates, in Committee.

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

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Speaker to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of Supplementary supply to His Majesty.

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

Hon. J. Burrridge: I do so.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Hello stranger. Can you please state your name and title for Hansard?

Jordan McNally: Jordan McNally, executive director of fiscal management, Department of Finance.

Chair: Thank you. Okay, for those who are following along, we are in the white book on page 8, and we'll start right into it.

Agriculture (Capital)

"To support implementation of the Agricultural Land Buyback Program for potato wart index fields." 1,500,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total: 1,500,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Agriculture (Capital)

"To support implementation of the Agricultural Land Buyback Program for potato wart index fields." 6,772,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

P. Bevan-Baker: Chair.

Chair: Oh, sorry.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you so much.

Hi Jordan, good to see you.

I'm looking at the... Because these are both identically worded, I'm assuming that – and different dates – it just seemed odd to me in the course of the year, only \$1.5 million was accumulated in the first, however many months that is, and then just over a month later, an additional almost \$7 million.

Can you explain the timing of those two?

[2:10 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: Sure, yeah. With land transactions, there's a lot that can happen, I guess, within a few months' span. At the time they came for the original special warrant, which would be the \$1.5 million in February, they had other land acquisitions in the hopper, if you will, but didn't feel that they would actually get over

the finish line by March 31st, which would be the cutoff date. So, they only went for a special warrant for the amount they thought they could execute on by year-end.

Then, as you can see in March, throughout the month of February, some of these land transactions became closer and closer to being closed by end of year. So, they did come for a second special warrant, if you will, for land acquisitions.

P. Bevan-Baker: Can you tell us, Jordan – I think the program's been going now for, this is the second year – how much is being expanded in total on the potato wart buyback?

Jordan McNally: In '25-26, it's a total of about \$8.27 million.

P. Bevan-Baker: And in the previous year, Jordan, do you know how much – and I realize that's not related to this but just for my own notes.

Jordan McNally: There was nothing in the prior year. This program was created and established in – I think it was May 2025. So, it was actually all during '25-26.

P. Bevan-Baker: And I know we've gone through the agricultural budget, of course, and I forget how much we budgeted this year for the potato wart buyback in the regular budget, not special warrants, of course, at this point.

Jordan McNally: I'll tell you two years; I'm not sure which year you're more interested in. For '26-27 – the current fiscal year we're in – there's \$3.5 million budgeted. In the fall last year when I was here, the '25-26 amount, there was zero budgeted but \$6.9 million forecasted. So, this has come in slightly above the forecast.

P. Bevan-Baker: And I don't know if you have this information in front of you or not, Jordan, but we were paying on average, about \$10,000 or \$11,000 an acre, is that still the case? Is that the sort of average price that we're paying?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, they are independently appraised properties when they are purchased, but yes the average is about \$10,700 per acre of what's been acquired.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm good for this section. Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

We're moving onto:

Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture (Capital)

"To purchase land and building to relocate the aquaculture laboratory and storage site to BioCommons Park." 2,100,000

Shall it carry?

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm just wondering what the rationale was behind moving that aquaculture lab to the BioCommons.

Jordan McNally: This one came up during capital debate as well in the fall. It was a bit of an opportunity, I guess, to purchase an existing lab in that BioCommons Park, and move the existing lab that's on Kensington Road. That staff has noted that it wasn't a suitable location long-term, they needed more space, they could increase the number of testing results. So, this is an existing lab on Kensington Road, the plan is to move them to the BioCommons Park under this new location.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, I'm good chair.

Chair: Okay. Shall it carry? Carried.

Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture (Capital)

"To fund expenditures related to the acquisition of land and buildings related to the Elmira Railway Museum." 385,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Capital: 10,757,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

PEI Agricultural Insurance Corporation

"To support insurance claims resulting from drought conditions during the 2025 growing season." 62,400,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

[2:15 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Obviously, this is a huge amount, hopefully an unprecedented amount, we're not going to go back there again. I note that the revenue offset is half of what came in; is that the federal funds that we're expecting to reimburse the provincial coffers from.

Jordan McNally: No, it's actually the re-insurance that Agricultural Insurance Corporation purchased. Agriculture Insurance Corporation, if the claims go over a certain amount, they have actually purchased re-insurance to cover some of the costs. Given the amount that it went over on their claims, it actually triggered re-insurance. Now, anything over and above what you're seeing there, the \$62 million, is 100 percent offset by re-insurance. It's basically a way to mitigate a little bit of one-year anomaly like this would be.

P. Bevan-Baker: That's an interesting discussion. I don't think I've heard that before. That's insurance on an insurance program, is that right?

Jordan McNally: Yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: Do we have any sense, Jordan, about what the payout which had to be made this year is going to do to future premiums?

Jordan McNally: I don't have that information.

I know when AIC – Agricultural Insurance Corporation – was on the floor, I know in budget discussions, it was talking point of: okay, if you're experiencing this level of payout for claims, is that something that historically has happened or is it an anomaly? They would say based on the last number of years, it is an anomaly type of year, the drought conditions they experienced. They've kind of aligned their expenditure or the payout of claims with what they've experienced historically over the last five to ten years.

Could it happen again? Certainly, but they still do have that re-insurance in place, not to mitigate it all, of course, there's still a net impact of \$31 million but it certainly mitigates the one-time cost to government.

P. Bevan-Baker: It's sometimes very difficult to attribute costs directly to climate change, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't attempt to do that.

I'm just wondering if there is any part of government that looks at, for example, the drought expense related to last year's potato crop – well, other crops, too, but principally potatoes and accumulates at the end of the year what the approximate or what the estimated cost of climate change was to Prince Edward Island, whether it's coastal erosion, whether it's problems with, whatever, all of the things that can be associated with climate change.

Hon. J. Burridge: I don't know if there is a formal list of that taken over the year. It's not a bad idea; I'll definitely take that back.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that.

Hon. J. Burridge: No, it's a good idea to have that lens on it, absolutely, even going from the drought and the irrigation that a lot of farmers are looking for it could be attributed to that as well. Yeah, I hear you on that, that's a good point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Just a comment. I really appreciate that, minister. I think it would be a really useful thing to do, even though I understand it's an inaccurate best guess but it's better than not trying to calculate it at all.

Thank you, Chair. I'm good with this section.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Innovation PEI

“To fund expenditures related to the PEI Tax Incentive Program.”

Total: 6,400,000

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Do you have a list there, Jordan, of the companies for which that tax relief was given? Is that in addition to existing tax incentives that we offer or are these new companies who are benefiting from it?

Jordan McNally: These are existing companies. The agreement that's in place has been in place for a number of years. I believe it goes out to possibly 2028-2029. The big driver of this would be Standard Aero is the company that receives that. There are other ones, Action Aero and a few other smaller ones but it's been Standard Aero driving the pressure in this.

Just a note on that, that pressure, typically it should be a flow through of corporate income taxes. What we did this year during budget 2026-'27 is really take a good look at, okay, what are we budgeting for these specific companies in CIT revenue and tax rebate revenue and they should be equal. Even if there is a pressure in the next year, it should be totally revenue offset. It's a bit of a right size as well.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm good with this section.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

La Commission scolaire de langue française

“To fund expenditures related to salaries for substitute staffing, retroactive pay for collective agreement settlements, and related payroll benefits.”

Total: 900,000.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

[2:20 p.m.]

Hi Jordan. I'm just curious – the salaries for substitute staffing. The department would be given an allotment for budgeting for subs throughout the year. Are you able to tell us of that \$900,000 how much was the overspend on substitutes?

Jordan McNally: Because of the smaller number, I just have the breakdown of the next section which would be the PSB of the \$5.1 million. I don't have a detailed breakdown of the \$900,000.

C. Simpson: Do you have a rough idea?

Jordan McNally: What I could say is – kind of skipping ahead – of the \$5.1 million in PSB, it's about \$500,000 for substitute wages, so I would probably just extract that percentage.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Public Schools Branch

“To fund expenditures related to salaries for substitute staffing, retroactive pay for collective agreement settlements, and related payroll

benefits as well as maintenance costs for school properties.”

Total: 5,100,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you. You’ve already answered question; it’s \$500,000 for that. The same sort of idea for the maintenance cost for school properties. Are you able to tell us what the overspend was there?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, and lumped into that number is electricity, waste removal, janitorial, snow removal, a bunch of things, but of that \$5.1 million total, it’s about \$1.4 million is due to school maintenance.

C. Simpson: Jordan, would that be because the cost for those services simply went up over what was budgeted the year previous or were there extra things that needed to happen in the school year?

Jordan McNally: It does have to do with some inflationary pressures, for sure, things that are tied to increasing rates. I think that’s the main driver. I think every year, the cost is what the cost is. When we’re looking at a \$1.4 million pressure, I think you’ll see that a lot of that has been captured in PSB’s ’26-27 budget to kind of – so that you’re not in the same position next year. But, of course, with fuel prices and everything changing, it can be a challenge, no question.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Tourism PEI

“To fund expenditures related to Tourism PEI operations.”

Total: 1,800,000

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

Can you tell us what that expenditure was for, Jordan?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, there’s a few things. Operational cost of golf courses – increase of sales of product, if you will – cost of goods sold,

that’s about \$500,000 of the \$1.8 million. The Mark Arendz Park, increased cost of utilities, fuel, repairs, maintenance – it’s about \$300,000. And then the other parks in general – utilities, field supplies, vehicle costs – that’s about \$550,000. The last pressure would be marketing expense, which was about \$400,000. I think that reconciles roughly to the \$1.8 million.

Hon. J. Burrige: I think the important one there, too, is it’s completely offset.

P. Bevan-Baker: That was going to be my next question. Did we calculate that all of those things, especially the amount that was spent on marketing, is going to be offset?

Jordan McNally: In fact, there’s more than the \$1.8 million in additional revenue but the policy that the Auditor General and the Department of Finance and Treasury Board have come to is that you can’t, in this process at least, you can’t really account for more revenue than your special warrant, i.e., the most you can do is completely offset it.

Between golf, parks, and Mark Arendz, there was quite a bit of additional revenue. I think those alone contributed to about \$1.3 million, and then the marketing, for example, that was a bilateral agreement with ACOA to get some federal funding offset. Between those two things, it equates to more than offsetting the increased costs.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I’m good for this section, thanks.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Health PEI

“To fund expenditures related to the operation of Health PEI.”

Total: 67,297,500

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Would you consider \$67 million in special warrant a little bit high?

Jordan McNally: It’s high, yeah.

[2:25 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: – It's because they do have a \$1.2 billion budget. We see this happening time and time again. I'm concerned about the sustainability of seeing special warrants in here for almost \$70 million. What are we doing to curb this number into the future? I think I ask that every time. But what are we doing this year differently so we don't see \$70 million in special warrants in the future for Health PEI?

Jordan McNally: I think you'll see – I know they're on the floor now with their budget – there's a few things that are going on with Health PEI that the CFO could definitely speak more educationally on.

But the things that I'm aware of, one is that they're doing a program review, both of management level staff and just wider in general, their program review. I think the other things is every year that we see these pressures, they certainly get incorporated into the planning for next year. It does seem, even though when we try and right-size some of these departments, it still exceeds even the expectations.

With Health PEI, historically, there was also a factor in their budget for the likely event of delayed implementation of initiatives. Allotting the money is almost the easy part but getting people in place and people hired and filling vacancies is obviously the hard part; you can't create people out of nowhere.

I think throughout the year, they did a lot of initiatives to try and fill a lot of those vacancies and bring their number down, including the use of agency staff to fill those gaps. All that, basically they fully utilized their budget and then some.

Now, going into '26-27, I would say that there isn't really a factor for any delay of implementation. It's kind of – they're budgeting some for agency staff now with the hopes that they'll reduce the dependency on them but also depending on what comes from their program reviews. They're not like any other department where they were tasked with finding efficiencies where they could, cutting down on discretionary funding as long as it doesn't impact program delivery, and then a few other things.

Part of that \$67 million is the self-managed care program, which was underfunded last year compared to the uptake. That's now been fully funded based on last year's uptake. Collective agreements are another pressure that we now

have a few unions that have settled so we know what their pattern is likely to be for some of these unions.

Hopefully, with all that in mind, we won't see that level of special warrants going into the future but I know health care is a challenge across Canada for sure in terms of predicting the outcomes.

G. McNeilly: I appreciate that answer, Jordan. I know it's difficult but in a lot of these, we still have the nurses' contract coming up that's going to be very, very important.

My question is, when you put all the agency's staffing together – I know it's not just nurses, it's more and more is coming onboard – how much did we spend? Can we get a breakdown of how much of this \$67.2 million was done in each of those travel agencies? It might be RCWs, physios, travel nursing, everything kind of outside of locum doctors, I guess.

Jordan McNally: Of this \$67 million, the pressure due to agency staffing was about \$23 million. That's just kind of the net pressure. In total, what they spent might be more but that's all they needed in terms of additional special warrant for this \$67 million.

In terms of a breakdown, with Health PEI being on the floor right after me, that might be a great takeback for them.

G. McNeilly: I'll see if I can ask the CFO. She's doing a great job here but we'll ask – I think I did ask for that, actually – but we'll continue on.

One of the pressures that I didn't expect to see in November was in special warrants in November – I'm not sure it's in here, to – was the food costs are going up exponentially in hospitals and other areas. Is there food costs in this special warrant or would that just be in the capital one?

[2:30 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: No, there would be food costs. I mean, it's not food but like an example of a large pressure is on supplies for med surg and lab. It was a \$6 million pressure within that \$67 million.

I know when Health PEI submitted their budget, those are the type of line items that they look at in terms of where we're currently underfunded and, not only that, what would an inflationary

factor be for the upcoming year, anticipating increased costs there. So, it's hard to say everything's been fully addressed – the year will tell – but it certainly plays a huge factor into planning for the next budget year.

Hon. J. Burridge: I would add just briefly to that. Procurement within the health care space is something that's on the minds of all Atlantic provinces and finding ways to work together to maybe bulk purchase and find some savings. Health PEI is already doing a little bit of that with other provinces – and actually, there's national procurement channels as well that they can maybe go on and get better pricing. So, that's certainly a focus: the procurement side and seeing what savings we can find through regional approach.

G. McNeilly: I had more questions, but that's okay now. Thank you.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Justice and Public Safety

“To fund additional expenditures related to the ratification of the UPSE Civil collective agreement and the Terms & Conditions of Employment for Excluded Supervisory and Confidential Employees.”

Total: 3,025,000.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

Jordan, this – and there will be a similar question for the next category, which is almost the same thing. Is there any extra expense to government when you have open agreements like this that continue to negotiate for some time after the previous one has expired, or would be end up with this exact same cost if the agreement were negotiated and completed right after the expiry or perhaps even before the expiry of the existing agreement?

Jordan McNally: Overall, the cost would be the same. The difference is when agreements last longer, it's difficult for any entity, including Crown Corporations, to accrue – accounting term – in any given year how much to allocate for wage increases because without a settled agreement, you basically have to guess what the accrual....

Imagine an agreement ends on March 31st, 2024; it lasts for a year and a half. In the '24-25 fiscal year, they need to account for something of the increase. So, what could happen is that the accrual is understated in that year and therefore you have to account for more in the following year when it gets settled. Overall, the cost would be the same; it's just that you certainly run a risk having special warrants in the year that they're settled if you didn't – not properly accrue, because it's hard to predict something that isn't settled – adequately accrue in a previous year.

In this case, it's actually similar to what's going on. The agreement expired April in 2025, I believe, and it got settled in this fiscal year. So, you're really accounting for a full year and then some.

You'll only see two departments where this is impacting. The reason you're not seeing it in every department is that those departments were able to absorb some of those larger increases that happened throughout the year. Whereas, as you can imagine, Social Development and Seniors was already extended because of their social assistance and AccessAbility programs. Justice – similar idea with their correctional facilities; they were already at the limit of their budget before the collective agreements were settled.

Otherwise, departments were able to absorb with other savings and that's why you're only seeing it in these two.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, again, I always appreciate how clearly and concisely you explain very complicated things like that, Jordan. Thank you.

I hope I'm understanding it correctly that the special warrant that we're seeing here in these two departments – although it doesn't account for the entire extra expense across government for the reasons you've just explained – but is this the difference between the estimated accrual and the reality of the negotiated settlements at the end of the day?

[2:35 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: Yes, in this case it would be. Every department allots a pattern, if you will, consistently across all departments for some sort of an increase next year, but if there's no collective agreement in place, it is just an estimate.

Now, what we do to try to mitigate large fluctuations is every department bakes in a certain increase – let's say two percent just as an example – and then, in general government, we could typically keep a contingency for maybe settlements that go over and above that two percent so that you're not just always automatically going for a special warrant.

In this case, the settlement for these two was higher than what we had even accounted for in general government. It was a larger settlement. Otherwise, you typically wouldn't see a special warrant if all things were equal because general government would be covering that difference. But you are right, this is just the gap between what was budgeted and what was settled.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm good for this section.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Social Development and Seniors

"To fund additional expenditures related to the ratification of the UPSE Civil collective agreement and the Terms & Conditions of Employment for Excluded Supervisory and Confidential Employees and compensation costs for Residential Services group homes to support care demands and complex needs of children in the care of the province."

Total: 3,032,800

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Do you have a breakdown there of where it says the compensation costs for residential services group homes to support care demands and complex needs of children in care of the province?

Jordan McNally: Yeah. The portion that would relate to that specifically is about \$1.35 million.

K. Bernard: Would that be in the form of human resources, like people to act like staff or would that be...?

Jordan McNally: That is typically grants out to organizations that provide the care. It wouldn't necessarily – group homes, I guess, would be one. If it was group homes-related, then yes, it would be staff of the province through

compensation, which I'm just kind of reading my notes as I'm talking here. I think that is actually the primary reason for that \$1.4 million is staffing requirements for group homes.

K. Bernard: Do you know, Jordan, if that is because of just sheer high numbers of young people in the system or is that just kind of not higher numbers just needs more complex?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think it's complexity, too.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, it both. It's the current care demands and the complex needs of the children in care. It is a bit of both.

I do know, also, that they're adding group homes. They're in a bit of a build phase with SDS so the timing of when those come online can play a factor but what they're noting in terms of the reason for the pressure is the current demand and the complex needs of the children in care.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just wondering, too, does this cover – because I understand that the group home is where a child lives – but does this cover off any of the day programs where some of the complex needs? I'm thinking of children who aren't able to be in school full days or at Camp Gencheff, for example. Does that help offset costs there as well?

Jordan McNally: This specific pressure is just noted as the compensation costs due to group homes. They would have budget within their department, SDS, to help with some of those organizations but they didn't experience enough of a pressure to warrant a special warrant request. They're tying it directly to compensation costs for group homes.

C. Simpson: I know you've answered this, the member asked, but I'm unclear. It's children with complex needs, so additional staff required on a more permanent basis and/or back pay due to a contract negotiation or both?

Jordan McNally: There are two components. One is overall for the entire Department of Social Development and Seniors, they were

impacted by the recent UPSE and excluded contract agreement. That portion of the special warrant is about \$1.7 million.

What the other member was asking about was just related to residential services. It's about \$1.35 million. That's related to additional staffing requirements to meet the current demands at the group homes.

C. Simpson: That was additional so I'm assuming, then, that that rolled over to the department budget that's gone through for the department.

Okay. I'm good. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[2:40 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly

"To fund expenditures related to by-elections in District 2, District 9, and District 15, as well as preparation activities and associated costs in case of a general election."

Total: 427,700

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

That works out to about \$142,000-and-a-bit per by-election. Is that the total cost? In other words, does Elections PEI have a contingency fund for by-elections, or is this the total amount?

Jordan McNally: I don't know that for sure, to be clear. I know that the three by-elections were not anticipated in the original budget, whether they have a small allotment every year, I don't actually know that. Possibly when they're on the floor with their budget, they might be able to answer that.

P. Bevan-Baker: And I know the next line is the total of all the special warrants for the year, and I know I asked this question at the end of last year's supplementary estimates and last year I think the cost had gone up by 50 percent on the previous year and you felt confident, minister, that this year we were going to get it under control, but again, it's gone up 33 percent this year.

I'm wondering how confident you are that you're going to get it under control in the coming fiscal year.

Hon. J. Burrige: Yeah, I think it's no surprise to anyone in here the pressures that we're seeing, and I think you can go through this book and see that there's nothing here you'd want to not fund. Truly, these aren't frivolous; this is government doing what people would expect government to do, to come in and fill gaps.

The special warrants process, when they come to Treasury Board, I would say that it's pretty rigorous the questioning that they get to ensure that what does come through the other side, are core needs; and you'll see that here in the details and all the answers Jordan has given.

Health care is a pressure that's there and you can't not fund acute care over capacity. When they come and they say, "We need \$4 million, \$5 million because we're in acute care shortage and we need extra hands", or whatever it is, there's no decision there. So, it's very difficult.

But I think what – and Jordan spoke a number of times to this – is when we see this, we're applying that new level in the '26-27 budget. So, in a lot of these you won't see the budget staying the same, we've tried to account for these new pressures into '26-27, and we'll keep moving on.

It's funny when you sit at the national tables like social development, health care; every province is seeing the same pressures and the same places regardless of whether you're Alberta or Prince Edward Island. It's difficult times, but I think, it's hard times, but I think if you dig into the details of this and how we're spending those extra dollars, which is, I guess, \$127 million, on a \$3.5 billion budget, I think if every Islander could dig into the details of this and see this debate, they would understand and appreciate that there's nothing frivolous here; this is government stepping in and doing what government should be doing in hard times.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, I don't think I have another question, Chair. But I do understand, minister, and I appreciate you saying that. And I didn't mean at all in my question to suggest that there was frivolous spending going on here, not at all, and I hope it didn't come across that way, and I don't think your answer suggested that, but just want to be clear on that.

One thing I do want to check on though is that there was an Auditor General's report from I think two years ago, maybe three years ago, about improper process being used for special warrants where the money was spent before, proper application had come through to Treasury Board.

Can you just assure the House that we're following proper process for all of the expenditures that we see in front of us today?

Hon. J. Burrridge: Yeah, we may have made improvements there, and Jordan can probably explain this better than I can.

[2:45 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: A lot more stake was put into Q3 results when they came in, and tying special warrants to what the forecasted spend was at that point, which would be our most accurate forecast at the time. I think I'm pretty confident in saying that will there be – and I think what you're speaking to is the number of late special warrants, if you will, so special warrants that occurred after year-end. I think we'll see a sharp decline in those.

I think what you'll maybe see is small amounts where a department might have forecasted to be \$100,000 under and they came in \$100,000 over on a multi-million-dollar budget. Those are pretty minor.

I think those are more of the special warrants that we might see come in after year-end, which would be any time now. But they would be certainly minimized compared to last year from the early indications I'm getting from public accounts work that they're doing.

P. Bevan-Baker: One of the suggestions – I think it flowed from that AG report – was the possibility of creating a second supplementary estimates to be delivered midway through the year.

Is that something that is being considered by the department? I may be off on that, but I seem to remember a suggestion of additional supplementary appropriations coming forward rather than waiting until the very end of the year when we see them.

Hon. J. Burrridge: We do two now.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Hon. J. Burrridge: We did one – did we not do a fall supplementary and then a spring supplementary?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, we do look at Q2 or fall fiscal pressures as well to see where the early indications of pressures are. There was a round of special warrants, if you will, prior to the fall sitting of the Legislature and then a Q3 special warrant run as well prior to the opening of this session.

I think there's always the possibility of tabling an actual *Appropriation Act*, that's what you're pointing to. I think we've discussed that in the past and I'll have to say it's really a government policy decision; it's not really to me at all.

But the only challenge I would note on that is if Social Development and Seniors, for example, were running out of budget room to execute on social assistance, for an example, they may need that appropriated for prior to the Legislature actually opening in the spring. The timing of certain ones – and I know there was legislation passed this session that added the word “urgently” I believe, to the description of special warrants – I guess I'd say it's certainly possible. It would just be more on a case-by-case basis depending on the nature of the need of the special warrant.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm good.

Thank you, Chair. Thank you Jordan.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Current: 150,383,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Special Warrants: 161,140,000

Shall the Supplementary Estimates carry?
Carried.

Hon. J. Burrridge: Madam Chair, I move that the Speaker take the Chair and that the Chair make a report to Mr. Speaker.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House, I wish to report that the committee has gone into supplementary supply to be granted to His Majesty and has come to certain resolutions thereon which said resolutions I am directed to report to the House whenever it should be pleased to receive the same.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burridge: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, that the report of the committee be now received.

[2:50 p.m.]

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Speaker.

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the committee be now adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the 26th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No.26, *Supplementary Appropriation Act 2026*, Bill No.27, ordered for second reading.

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Clerk: Bill No.27, *Supplementary Appropriation Act 2026*, read a second time.

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Speaker to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *Supplementary Appropriation Act 2026*.

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

Hon. J. Burridge: I do.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Could you please state your name and title for Hansard?

Jordan McNally: Jordan McNally, executive director of fiscal management.

Chair: Okay, we'll open the floor for general questions.

Seeing that there are no general questions.

Shall the bill carry? Carried.

Shall the schedule carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burridge: I move the title.

Chair: *Supplementary Appropriation Act 2026*.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burridge: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: May it please Your Honour, be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burridge: Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

[2:55 p.m.]

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *Supplementary Appropriation Act 2026*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Quick question, Mr. Speaker, before I (Indistinct) the next order. I'm just wondering, in your protocol, when do I use Rule 26? That's for a later time, but....

I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the 1st order of the day be now read.

Speaker: I'll take that under advisement, minister, yes.

Shall it carry? Carried.

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

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'd like to call on the Deputy Speaker to chair Committee of consideration of grants of supply to His Majesty.

Thank you.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

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

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

Hon. C. Deagle: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Whenever you're ready, if you can just state your name and your title for Hansard?

Christine Sewell: Christine Sewell, chief financial officer, Health PEI.

Chair: Okay, for those of your following along, we are on page 109 of the book.

Community Specialty Services

"Appropriations provided for the delivery of a wide range of programs and services including: program development, Midwifery, SHORS, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Perinatal Health, Renal Care Services, and Colorectal and Cervical Cancer Screening." Administration: 197,500. Equipment: 300,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 3,573,200. Professional Services: 200,600. Salaries: 18,522,400. Travel and Training: 76,100.

Total Community Specialty Services:
22,870,300

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

I noticed that you were underspent on salaries but there's a collective agreement coming. I guess that would explain the additional \$2 million but what were the areas – was it renal care? – where were the gaps that we're having trouble staffing in this budget line?

Christine Sewell: The decrease in the forecast in salaries reflected delays related to CPAC physicians and filling our midwifery positions. CPAC is an agreement that we have with the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. There were delays staffing those positions and midwifery.

[M. MacKay in the chair]

G. McNeilly: CPAC, okay. Obviously, I'll ask questions about that maybe later. There were some announcements in here about IVF training within the department. If you explore that, it gets into a little bit more where Health PEI is going to have to be a partner in that potentially if – because the Premier talked about having a

specialty clinic here or doing different things here. Has there been any discussion with Health PEI and/or the department about execution of an IVF, any type of IVF partnership into the future?

[3:00 p.m.]

Christine Sewell: Not with IVF specifically, there are programs that Health PEI has that of course would support women's health. So, women's health initiatives, ultrasounds, those types of operational pieces is how we would support them.

G. McNeilly: Can you just talk to me about the Purchase Service - General? What does it mean by Purchase Service - General, and who are we staffing in that budget line? That's in the big book on page 5.

Christine Sewell: Under Purchase Services - General, we have project management support for those CPAC initiatives. We had some consulting services also for CPAC and then there was an amount with the Lennox Island health centre relating to the culturally safe care statement of work that is part of that CPAC.

G. McNeilly: That's it for me for right now. Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair, and welcome back Christine and minister, of course.

Under the renal care line, is there anything in the budget that could either enhance or diminish the current level of renal care services in the province?

Christine Sewell: There are no changes contemplated to the renal care program.

M. MacFarlane: So, is Health PEI's understanding that renal care services are being met – the need is being met currently with the appropriation allotted for it?

Christine Sewell: Yes, we're providing in-centre hemodialysis, home based peritoneal dialysis, home hemodialysis, and transplant support. Yeah, all those programs to support renal.

M. MacFarlane: And I see that the colorectal screening is not getting any increase, but we've reduced the age to 45, and I think the top age

range is 75 for the fit testing. Does that not require additional budget given the age drop from 50 to 45?

Christine Sewell: So, the increased cost for dropping the age is between \$40,000 and \$60,000 with the majority of that being physician costs, between about \$37,000 and \$49,000 would relate to physician services for performing colonoscopies. The amount related to the fit cost annualized would be about \$2,500 to \$9,600, and you would see in the forecast that we didn't quite spend the '25-26 budget. So, the budget that we have in '26 we believe will be sufficient even with a lower age.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that.

What was the consulting fee that was not budgeted for?

Christine Sewell: I have perinatal health review.

M. MacFarlane: So, will that result in a report that's publicly available?

Christine Sewell: I don't have any further details on the review itself.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Would this be the section where we might find funds for a new lung cancer screening program?

Christine Sewell: Yes, it is. That is one of the initiatives that I mentioned under CPAC, is a lung cancer screening program.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Just a couple of questions on midwifery, Christine. How many midwives do we now employ across the Island?

Christine Sewell: We have a full complement of 4.5 clinical midwives, which was completed in January 2025, which is the Charlottetown team.

P. Bevan-Baker: I think there was a new unit to be established in Summerside to service the western part of the province. Do we have a goal date for that being established?

[3:05 p.m.]

Christine Sewell: You're correct, we're actively recruiting for midwives for Summerside. It's very competitive, the market for midwives; we are having challenges with the recruitment. So, we don't have a target date, but we are actively working on the recruitment to establish that team for Summerside.

P. Bevan-Baker: Do we have a sense of how many midwives we need in that western centre in Summerside when it's established?

Christine Sewell: I believe four is the target number for the program.

P. Bevan-Baker: A more general question on Islanders, what's the uptake of the availability of midwifery being on the Island. I mean, anecdotally, I can tell you I've heard great stories but I just wonder what the figures are.

Christine Sewell: Yeah, in the first year, when they were still establishing in 2024, even without a full complement, they had 37 births attended. And then in 2025, there were 92 births attended. That's 129 total births attended. At present, we have 45 prenatal clients in care with upcoming due dates and then 15 post-partum mother-baby pairs.

P. Bevan-Baker: Beautiful. Thank you, Christine.

I'm good, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Community Specialty Services:
22,870,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

Home Care, Palliative, and Geriatric Care

"Appropriations provided for the operation of the Home Care and Support Program, the stand-alone Palliative Care Facility, the Provincial Geriatrician Program, and Mobile Integrated Health Services." Administration: 459,700. Equipment: 68,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 1,987,800. Professional Services: 2,641,900. Salaries: 43,064,100. Travel and Training: 1,376,400. Grants: 10,372,800.

Total Home Care, Palliative, and Geriatric Care:
59,971,200

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Could you take us through the grants line on this and explain the variances and the new budgeted amount?

Christine Sewell: That grant line relates to the self-managed care program. Maybe I'll just highlight the number of clients that we had. When the program started in '24-24, we had 67 clients. That grew to 214 in '24-25, and then in '25-26, we were at 363 clients. So, really, it's the growth in the number of clients supported by the self-managed care program.

M. MacFarlane: Are the terms and parameters of that program changing at all? Is that why the uptake, or...?

Christine Sewell: No, the terms and parameters are not changing. It's still providing the same \$22 an hour for personal care and respite care for eligible individuals who meet the criteria that are assessed, at least through home care.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. With the new budgeted amount of \$10,372,800, I believe from your responses, you anticipated that that will all be absorbed with the program or utilized under the program. How many clients or people would be expected to be supported with that amount?

Christine Sewell: Between about 350 and 400 clients. We had, as I mentioned, 363 clients in March. That was just over \$9 million so with that growth to the \$10 million budget, probably get closer to about 400 clients.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that.

On the salaries line, I know there's always the annual adjustments to the salary line, but is there any new frontline support being hired?

Christine Sewell: There are no new positions being created with the salaries line. In the budget, it's the collective agreement but it does include some new investment for home-based restorative care as well.

M. MacFarlane: On the mobile integrated health line, it looks like less than half was spent and we're budgeting back up to the same amount. Could you explain the variance?

[3:10 p.m.]

Christine Sewell: The mobile integrated health line is the Island EMS agreement for paramedics providing palliative care at a home. It's a utilization-based – individuals receiving palliative care would sign up for the services and then they can call the ambulance to administer treatment based on their care plan. It's volume-based and, again, individuals would sign up for that program but we've not made changes to any of the eligibility.

M. MacFarlane: So, the budget is holding constant from last year in the hopes that, or in the outcome that there's the uptake necessary, you've got the funds allotted for it and there are no changes to the parameters of that program?

Christine Sewell: Correct.

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

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Home Care, Palliative, and Geriatric Care:
59,971,200

Shall it carry? Carried.

Long-term Care

“Appropriations provided for the operation of the nine provincially owned manors.”
Administration: 1,681,100. Equipment: 302,900.
Materials, Supplies, and Services: 10,092,100.
Professional Services: 4,578,700. Salaries:
96,341,000. Travel and Training: 349,300.
Grants: 807,500.

Total Long-term Care: 114,152,600.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, Chair.

How many beds do we have registered for public long-term care? How many beds do we have in total?

Christine Sewell: There are 600 operating beds in the nine public manors. That is including 459 nursing care, 129 dementia care, and 12 respite, and then in the budget we also – oh, sorry, I'll leave it there.

G. McNeilly: Okay, that number changes all the time.

Hon. C. Deagle: Member, I think you usually ask it every year.

G. McNeilly: Yeah, I do ask it every year. I get a different answer every year too.

Salaries here – when you're looking at \$79 million, and it's going up to \$92 million. What is the increase in there? Was it collective agreements, or was it that you added positions?

Christine Sewell: In the salaries line in the forecast, it reflects the number of filled positions. When we established the '25-26 budget, we did have a conservative estimate of Health PEI's ability to recruit, and you heard Jordan speak a little bit about that with the special warrant.

With the vacancies, we made sort of measured estimates about how fast we'd be able to recruit. We exceeded the pace that we thought we'd be able to recruit. So, it's not creating new, but it is filling more positions than we had anticipated relative to budget. That was the increase in the forecast because we continued filling those positions.

Then, in the budget, that increase will maintain the funding for all of those positions that we successfully filled, and also reflects the collective agreement increases.

G. McNeilly: Then if that's the case, I'd like to see that, but then in the purchase service, we've got almost \$10 million in purchase service. So, it's hard to say that, okay, we've filled the staff because that's not what's happening necessarily on the ground.

The purchase service, you missed that with nursing. So, there's supposed to be \$3 million, and it was \$8.5 million just in the book, and it's budgeted again for \$4 million. Are you expecting that to decrease by half?

Christine Sewell: That is agency staffing line. So, similar to strategies that we are using for filling the acute care positions focusing on recruitment, retention, and mobility, we would hope to see the same success in reducing the agency staffing. This line was, I think, really, the exception last year where there was a budget of \$3 million for agency staffing, it was one of the few lines where any agency staffing budget was, and we have increased that to \$4 million this year.

G. McNeilly: So, that being \$4 million next year, is that what Health PEI is targeting? Because it's going to be a lot more than that the way things are going where we're getting our purchase services for different things.

I guess I don't really have another question. The numbers kind of speak for themselves.

[3:15 p.m.]

In the budget book, the minister talked about adding 31 beds. Is that reflective in the number to whether it be respite beds...? There are seven additional ones. They're supposed to be temporary. Where would we find those? I think there's seven to eight in Beach Grove.

Christine Sewell: There was the reference to relocating some of the adult day programs out to create additional beds. That (Indistinct) we've paused, but there were some beds created for over-capacity by doubling up.

We created 13 over-capacity beds in public long-term care, seven in Beach Grove Home, three Margaret Stewart-Ellis Home, on Colville Manor, and then two in Summerset Manor. Again, we had those others that were going to be non-conventional that we've paused on. Those over-capacity beds are temporary measure not intended to be permanent but do recognize that sometimes in the long-term care, the stays are longer than they would be in maybe in other centres.

G. McNeilly: I appreciate that information. I'm just wondering, are the seven beds reflected in staffing because that's going to take a lot of staffing in that section? Was it reflected in here in the staffing numbers?

Christine Sewell: We didn't create new permanent staffing positions to address those over-capacity beds, no. We would treat those as a temporary cost until the over-capacity eases, and then where we do see the other investment that will help, that is the 85 beds in the private long-term care. As those beds come online, those beds we have budgeted for, that would provide a higher capacity that is funded, yes.

G. McNeilly: Okay, thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Just further to that discussion, there was a commitment made to increase our public long-term care beds by 50. Is that still what's contemplated? I know there could be some capital money put towards that as well.

Christine Sewell: It is capital, yes, but I do have the

Hon. C. Deagle: We can answer that in November.

M. MacFarlane: She's looking.

Christine Sewell: I do have the number. My apologies; I can't find it. There are two homes where we are looking at expanding the beds.

Hon. C. Deagle: Tyne Valley and Souris.

Christine Sewell: Yes, correct, but they're in design right now. They're capital projects in the design phase.

Hon. C. Deagle: Tyne Valley and Souris.

M. MacFarlane: Those are the two, Tyne Valley and Souris.

Just on the salaries line there, are there any increases in staffing or in salaries? Is there an indication of how much the increases would be to the frontline deliverers of the service?

Christine Sewell: Increase in wage or increase in volume?

M. MacFarlane: Both, as applicable.

Christine Sewell: Maybe on the staffing number, we were able to fill 226 positions in the '25-26 year, which is what contributed to that increase. For a compensation level, I don't have a percentage.

M. MacFarlane: The 226 positions that you say were filled, are they frontline positions within the facilities?

Christine Sewell: I believe that they are, yes.

M. MacFarlane: Looking at the purchase service line for occupational therapy, can you explain how we only budgeted \$100 but spent \$580,000?

[3:20 p.m.]

Christine Sewell: I think this is another area where you've done a good job identifying where maybe we need to take a look at some of those other trends in the increase where we might have a few years, and maybe we haven't adjusted the budget well enough.

M. MacFarlane: Well, we've doubled the budgeted amount from last year from \$100 to \$200 but we've got a long ways to go to get to \$580,000 at this rate. I guess the question I'd have, my final question in the section, Chair, would be is it anticipated that we will continue to require the purchase service of occupational therapy?

Christine Sewell: Not anticipated but that we will use as needed.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Long-Term Care: 114,152,600

Shall it carry? Carried.

Grants to Private Nursing Homes

"Appropriations provided for the payments made to private nursing homes for health care services provided to all residents and for accommodation subsidies for qualifying residents." Private Nursing Home Grants: 80,258,400.

Total Grants to Private Nursing Homes: 80,258,400

Total Community Health and Seniors Care: 359,641,000

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

I think this section is presented very much the same way every year where there's a total line for grants and we see the private nursing homes and the number of beds but we don't have any additional detail. Can that detail be provided as to which of the homes received how much of the grant?

Christine Sewell: I would want to check just in case there's some reason that it hasn't been published. Maybe what I could share is that we pay these according to occupancies. We have the health care rate of the upcoming budget has increased to \$236.52 and then the

accommodation rate is \$119.30. Those are the rates that we pay. We pay them based on the occupancy.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Is that how the fund is structured then, based on number of beds and that contribution?

Christine Sewell: Correct.

M. MacFarlane: There's nothing else that goes into it that's not....

Christine Sewell: There is a designated safety bed or a dementia bed, so we do provide additional funding for a dementia bed as well – \$36.05.

M. MacFarlane: I expect that Hansard would show these questions. Maybe you asked last year, too, but I'll ask again, when it comes to coming out with these grants, does the department look at any of the financial information of the homes?

Christine Sewell: Yes, all homes are required to provide their financial statements to the Department of Health and Wellness within 180 days of the home's year-end. The home can request an extension and then the manager of private long-term care and the director of finance for the Department of Health and Wellness work together to ensure that the homes meet the terms and conditions of the agreement.

M. MacFarlane: You have access to the financial records but do those records and either profit margins or dividends out to shareholders, does that factor in at all to how much of the public money goes to the facilities and the operators?

Christine Sewell: I wouldn't be able to speak to the review that the department does, only that the statements have to be provided to them.

M. MacFarlane: Is there an additional – we're bumping the grant money from \$68 million to \$80 million. That additional \$12 million, is there anything anticipated in response to that additional grant to these facilities?

Christine Sewell: The additional grant includes the extra beds that are coming online, so a budget to accommodate for the 85 additional beds, and then those rates that I mentioned have increased 2 percent from the prior year.

[3:25 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: I guess my last question, then, would be as to the accountability measurements that government might look at to ensure that the funding achieves, whether it's the additional beds or what other purposes it might achieve.

Does government look at that and factor that into decision-making for future grants because it does seem it's pretty much a mathematical process based on the rate and the number of beds without accountability metrics for meeting certain goals or targets with the funding? Does that make sense, minister?

I guess my question is: Are there accountability metrics – inspections – to see how the money was used to performance measures?

Hon. C. Deagle: We could probably find that out and take it back. To be honest, I'm not sure.

M. MacFarlane: Alright, if you could. Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: How many provisional licences are there?

Christine Sewell: I do not have that information. I'd have to bring that back for you. Provisional licences for – I do not have it.

G. McNeilly: There was an overspend last year from \$68 million to \$71 million, about a \$3 million overspend. But these are contracts, so I don't know how....

Was that \$3 million for additional beds or was it for cost overruns?

Christine Sewell: We had budgeted based on a 97 percent occupancy, but the actual was closer to 99 percent occupancy.

G. McNeilly: Okay, so it was 99 percent capacity. Yeah, it makes sense.

When we had 85 beds that are coming on – when are those beds exactly coming on? Are they coming on in the fall of this year? So, they'll be done in the fall and then they'll be fully operational. All 85 beds will be operational in the fall. They're coming on all at once?

Christine Sewell: They are coming online in the fall, but I imagine it would be a phased-in....

Hon. C. Deagle: The Murphy's beds – is that...? I was talking to him. I asked him that exact question. I said, "Are you hoping to have them open by Christmas?" and he said, "Yes." I said, "Oh, and will there actually be people in them?" He said, "Well, that's our goal, but...."

So, hoping by December/early winter. I don't know; it's hard to put a timeline on it. It's also not – it's a private build and everything. Everyone runs into hiccups along the way, so we'll see, but I think that's their goal.

G. McNeilly: Yeah, I mean, it's hard to ask questions on this. I appreciate the minister doing that. It's just 85 beds are a lot of staff, and how are they going to staff, but it's kind of....

Hon. C. Deagle: I feel like if they're going to build the beds, they probably have a plan to try and staff it. They wouldn't just build it and then pray. (Indistinct)

G. McNeilly: I know, and I appreciate that there has been some change in this section.

The numbers of beds have been put in here from the past years. Before, it was just the number of beds, so that's very helpful. But the last line – it's always \$150,000; I forget what that's for – for the private home capital replacement fund. It did fluctuate in the past a little bit. Why would that be in an operational budget? What is that number?

Christine Sewell: It would be in the operational because the asset isn't the government's, because it would be a private facility, so it's not our capital asset. We can't capitalize it, but they would have to use it for capital purposes. This is established. It can purchase needed equipment, replace or repair infrastructure; operators would provide documentation to support a request.

It's limited to 50 percent of the total capital cost of the project. Maybe we could approve to exceed the 50 percent if it was a special medical or a personal aid for an individual. If it was something like an oxygen concentrator for one person, we might approve funding 100 percent of that capital cost for that home for that patient.

G. McNeilly: Very helpful. Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Community Health and Seniors Care:
359,641,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Mental Health and Addiction Services

Acute Programs

[3:30 p.m.]

“Appropriations provided for the delivery of specialized acute treatment and rehabilitative services, under psychiatric supervision primarily at Hillsborough Hospital, to Islanders who have serious and persistent mental illness and to psychogeriatric patients.” Administration: 462,600. Equipment: 61,600. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 3,161,400. Professional Services: 2,729,500. Salaries: 31,965,400. Travel and Training: 74,700.

Total Acute Programs: 38,455,200

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

This may be found in the next section, but I'll ask it here just in case. My question is about support for families of an individual who is suffering a severe mental illness and needs to be in hospital. When I raised it at committee, Health PEI stated then that there would be additional supports or supports in place to look at navigating for families and listening to families and supporting the families who are trying to support a person living with severe illness.

Is that found in here with additional supports for family?

Christine Sewell: There's no incremental new budget investment with respect to that. There are the patient navigators that are up in the corporate services area, but they're more general, not specifically related to mental health, and there is no new budget for that kind of support.

C. Simpson: Patients require care outside of Hillsborough Hospital, but all the beds will be in Hillsborough on a go-forward – is that the intent? Because Unit 9 doesn't exist in the way it did anymore. Am I accurate with that?

Christine Sewell: The new acute care facility is under construction.

C. Simpson: Sorry, for clarity, I mean for right now. Unit 9 as we knew it, as I understand it, is no longer operational in the way that it was, but that the patients are now being treated at Hillsborough Hospital. Am I accurate with that?

Christine Sewell: I apologize; I don't have the patient specifics from Unit 9 transfer to Hillsborough. I'd have to look into that one for you. I'd have to follow up.

C. Simpson: I don't think I'm being clear. Is Unit 9 still operational for adults with a mental illness or are all adults now being treated at Hillsborough Hospital?

Christine Sewell: Unit 9 in the QEH?

C. Simpson: Yes, thank you. Sorry, I should have clarified that.

Christine Sewell: Unit 9 in the QEH I believe does still have some patients there where they are looking at options to provide maybe care in a more suitable setting, but I don't believe that any of those moves have happened. So, I believe there are still a couple of patients there.

C. Simpson: Thank you for that.

Have we increased the number of psychiatrists who are able to be working here and helping people?

Christine Sewell: The only increase in the budget that I have is for one additional psychologist.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: On that last question, is that a general psychologist or a children's psychologist?

Christine Sewell: I don't have the specificity.

M. MacFarlane: The movement of the child psychiatry unit has come up in here before. Is there money allocated further to that move and maybe to help address some of the concerns that have been raised?

Christine Sewell: The cost associated with the move was a capital project, and I know that I have on my takebacks, a timeline and

confirmation of the plans for that one for you. I don't have any of those further specifics with me yet. It's capital, yeah.

M. MacFarlane: But you say you have it as a takeback, do you?

Christine Sewell: I have, as a takeback, additional information for you on that move, but the cost is budgeted in capital. The timeline I don't have; I know it was a request.

M. MacFarlane: Okay.

Just looking at the security line, there's quite a bump up: about \$1 million in increased funding for security. Where is that \$2.5 million in security anticipated – or where is it going to be utilized?

[3:35 p.m.]

Christine Sewell: When the new wellness and transition centre opens later this year, we have some of the programs – PATF, the Provincial Addiction and Treatment Facility, has both acute and transitional programs operating right now. Their transitional programs will move into the new building in 2026, and then we'll have to do security at multiple sites until everything is consolidated. So, it's some extra security for that....

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, it's interesting because the description for this section seems to focus – it says primarily at the Hillsborough Hospital, but there are multiple sites that funding in this section goes to. You mentioned, Christine, the security one as well.

What funding is here for...? I understand that Mount Herbert facility is going to be shuttered once the new mental health hospital is fully operational. If I'm wrong on that, feel free to correct me, but my understanding was that those beds weren't going to continue to be operationalized but there continues to be funding in the budget presently for Mount Herbert's operations.

Christine Sewell: Yes, because not all of the programs in Mount Herbert move when the transition centre opens in 2026. Some of those transitional programs will move. Then I believe some of the other programs aren't slated to move until the new acute care mental health building opens in 2028. Then I don't have plans

on the PATF. I know Hillsborough is scheduled to be decommissioned. I don't know if PATF is.

M. MacFarlane: Do you know how many beds are currently available at the Mount Herbert facility, or has there been a change? It used to be 16?

Hon. C. Deagle: I think it's 16.

M. MacFarlane: No change.

Christine Sewell: There aren't any changes that I'm aware of. I'm hearing loudly 16 from everybody so there weren't any.... Yeah, 16 beds; yes.

M. MacFarlane: The mental health ER department has been going now for a year or two years now. Is there data being kept on the wait times for that?

Christine Sewell: I might have wait time data. I know that mental health admissions to hospital have declined. In '23-24, there were 1,277, and then in '24-25, there were 994. Those have been declining. The wait times, I think I have.

I know I have it. I apologize; I can't find it.

M. MacFarlane: If it could be a takeback, that's all I'd have.

Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Acute Programs: 38,455,200

Shall it carry? Carried.

Community Programs

“Appropriations provided for mental health services which focus on community mental health teams, counseling, support, after-care, community outreach, community maintenance programming, and special projects focusing on improving access to a continuum of services, and on research and quality standards.”

Administration: 532,000. Equipment: 87,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 397,000. Professional Services: 1,015,800. Salaries: 31,677,500. Travel and Training: 655,000. Grants: 1,339,200.

Total Community Programs: 35,704,000.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Yeah, just on your salary line, you budgeted \$27 million, you only spent \$23 million, and next year you're budgeting for \$31 million. That's going up and down like a Grand Canyon of spending. Can you just talk to me about what the discrepancy is for those three lines?

[3:40 p.m.]

Christine Sewell: So, our decrease in the forecast was a result of position vacancies for RNs, social workers, and psychologists. Then the increase in the budget reflects continuing funding and trying to recruit those positions along with the collective agreement. And then there are also some new investments related to the ADHD program, which transitioned from UPEI to Health PEI in '25-26, and that ADHD clinic is \$1.5 million and includes salaries for 11 FTE. So, that also accounts for the increase in the

G. McNeilly: Why was that program moved from UPEI to Health PEI?

Christine Sewell: It will help us better coordinate and integrate care with the other mental health programs and supports that Health PEI runs.

G. McNeilly: I mean, that's good.

You mentioned RNs, social workers, and psychologists. Do you have a breakdown of each, vacancies in those positions?

Christine Sewell: I don't have specific numbers on those. I'd have to take that back for you.

G. McNeilly: I think that your grant has went from \$700,000 – you spent \$1 million, but that's not including the UPEI over to Health PEI for the ADHD clinic, but you're looking at increased grants for next year. What's that increase going to be?

Christine Sewell: In the forecast that increase relates to the community addiction medicine Queen Street clinic. That was renegotiated in '25-26, and then the budget increase includes ongoing investment in the community addiction medicine agreement and also an investment in transitional housing and support.

G. McNeilly: Transitional housing and support in this.... So, that would be supports to the various transitional housing facilities that are going to be up and coming, is that correct?

Christine Sewell: The transitional housing support – the number of clients using the service has increased 60 percent, and I do have the provider as well. Oh sorry, it's just the Canadian Mental Health Association transitional housing support.

G. McNeilly: Okay, but we're providing care into those facilities, is that correct? Do we do it with other ones? There's other transitional housing, but it's just a partnership with the CMHA?

Christine Sewell: Correct; it's a partnership with them.

G. McNeilly: Is this the section that we would have the support for the health facilities or the health supports at the Community Outreach Centre? I know they do a clinic. Would it be in this section, and is that funding going to continue?

Christine Sewell: Yes, that's the Queen Street clinic. I apologize because I did just find it and would like to share the transitional housing support. That one has transitional housing for 10 clients. Under our new contract we'll get an extra room, and then they do case management services to support an extra 24 individuals across PEI. So, those are the supports that are being provided there.

G. McNeilly: Just the outreach centre – is that this section? Because I don't know who pays for that and I'd like to see that program continue at the outreach centre. I know Health PEI does a great job of supporting our most vulnerable, and I just want to know what the outcome of that is.

[3:45 p.m.]

Christine Sewell: Yeah, so that one, under the Queen Street addictions clinic, we have opioid agonist therapy, using rapid access harm reduction. It's operated by Atlantic Properties. It's aimed at improving access to opioid replacement, and then it's located in Charlottetown which helps mitigate that transportation challenge, maybe, out to the PATF for that in Mount Hurbert.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much. We're just talking about two different things, but thanks for that.

Yeah, that's good, Christine. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thanks, Chair.

Just a general question further to some of the programming that was brought up in the previous answering. We've heard government say they want to move more towards community mental health and external programs outside of the bricks and mortar facilities and that's why we're not seeing a big increase in beds at the new mental health campus.

I guess I'm wondering how the budget furthers that goal of providing more supports in the community. I'm looking at the total line. It does like look like we're propping it up by another \$5 million, but I'm just wondering how the appropriation in this section does further advance that community external programming.

Christine Sewell: Maybe what I'd offer is the strategy around the mental health with the new acute facility, then the new transition facility, and then providing services in the communities as part of the community health centres. We know that we have the mental health supports in two of them. And then there are three community health centres that we have underway.

Maybe Summerside is the best example of a facility that's about to open that has a really strong presence of mental health supports in the community. And then we have other facilities being planned in Montague, on that site. We would take a similar approach, again, to take those mental health services, put them in the community health centres, and provide the access that way.

M. MacFarlane: Just beyond the bricks and mortar facilities that you've described, is there an intention to either prop up the grants to NGOs and other third-party community organizations to help deliver some of this programming, outside of these government facilities and clinics?

Christine Sewell: There are no new grounds or no funding in this budget to enact something like that.

M. MacFarlane: I guess my last question, then, to finish that out. Just from your answer, Christine, I take it that it's still the intention to deliver these programs and services through government clinics and facilities. Maybe I misunderstood the direction was going to be sort of what the work the Alliance for Mental Well-Being was going to do to get money out into community organizations to help support people in their recovery and with their mental health needs.

But it's seeming to me that your answers are that that's not the case, that it's not going to be third-party delivered, it's going to be government-delivered through facilities across the province as opposed to maybe consolidated or centralized in Charlottetown. Is that fair?

Christine Sewell: Well, from a Health PEI perspective – I don't know if maybe the minister through the department in the strategy and, again, because I think at that committee meeting with the mental health sort of what was discussed was roles and responsibilities for setting out that broad strategy.

Government sets broad strategies, Health PEI, we do sort of the implementation. We have our programs and our staff and our facilities that we're providing out of but direction and priorities that are set by the government, we will implement them.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Community Programs: 35,704,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Transitional Programs

"Appropriations provided for policy and program development, and delivery of community, inpatient and specialized provincial programs including withdrawal management services, rehabilitation and reintegration, prevention and early intervention, and services to support individuals and their families by offering treatment and counseling related to alcohol, tobacco, and other substance use and gambling concerns." Administration: 353,700. Equipment: 55,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 1,396,300. Professional Services:

1,098,500. Salaries: 16,195,000. Travel and Training: 136,800. Grants: 1,705,000.

Total Transitional Programs: 20,941,100

Total Mental Health and Addiction Services: 95,100,300

[3:50 p.m.]

Total Health PEI: 1,241,970,500

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thanks very much.

I just want to say thanks a lot for all the incredible professionals who work in the last two sections. We just were looking at passing \$55 million of stuff, and there's a lot of people behind that really work hard. I want to just say thanks for all the hard-working staff there.

Under your salaries, you're looking at a \$3 million increase. What is that for? Is that for contracts?

Christine Sewell: Collective agreement, yeah.

G. McNeilly: I thought we were understaffed in this area but the forecast was pretty near bang on to what was spent. Are we understaffed in these areas? Is there anything that is striking that we're...?

Christine Sewell: We did bring in some casual labour in '25-26 which would have incurred an unbudgeted expense, which would have sort of gone against some of vacancies, which is why it looks like it's....

G. McNeilly: Casual – so that wouldn't be agency staff?

Christine Sewell: No, that would be just be short-term Health PEI employees.

G. McNeilly: This is the addiction treatment; I see it. It just offers counselling and the different.... Is there a wait time associated with this? What we hear is that it's very difficult to – the people, when they need help, they need help at the time they need it and it's not always there. Are you finding the same thing? Do you have any information that – are those numbers coming down?

Christine Sewell: What I do have is that the priority of admissions for withdrawal management can happen within days but less urgent cases could extend a few weeks. Our wait lists typically range between 30 and 40 patients. The wait time for those individual patients, it will vary according to their triage. Again, more urgent would be in sooner than less urgent. Clients waiting for treatment do get information about immediately accessible community-based services and out-patient withdrawal options.

G. McNeilly: Thanks a lot for that information; that's really helpful information. I appreciate it, Christina.

But this is there any discussion – obviously, you just pointed to the need is there in the community. Wait times are long, 30 to 40 patients are waiting to get in. Is there any discussion or is there anything in this budget about increasing the amount of beds?

Christine Sewell: No increases to beds in this budget. I could highlight total admissions in '24-25 was 860 and then in '25-26, it was 760. We did see a decline in the total number of admissions.

G. McNeilly: Is that because of more – would that be attributed to open access? Would that be attributed to more programs in the community? I don't think that a decrease of 100 people is what we're seeing –

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: Yeah, on the front or what's happening on Prince Edward Island. Do you know why there was a decrease? Is it just because people can't get in when they need to? Do you know?

Christine Sewell: Again, maybe I know there was the discussion at the standing committee that did focus on the community and sort of those care models and the best practices and working towards not necessarily as much in-patient treatment.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Just a general question. I don't think I heard it being asked: Any new programs being funded in the budget for addiction support, either specifically or generally?

Christine Sewell: No, not in this budget, not in Health PEI.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. And I know I asked about provincial addictions treatment facility in the previous section. I perhaps should have held them until now but nothing new being offered by way of additional funding, other than maybe just salary increases.

[3:55 p.m.]

Christine Sewell: Yeah. I think the staffing up of some of those programs has happened over the last several years getting ready to open the new wellness and transition centre. Really, with it opening in this fiscal, I do have information on what was provided over the last three years for that because I think that that's – that one might be a good context.

Just because it's not in this budget, there was a total investment of \$2.1 million over three years. That was across addition services, community mental health, acute mental health, and that was 20.7 FTE. But those investments really have largely occurred, as I mentioned, in '24 and then '25 so that we'd have the staff in place, and then those staff are ready to move into the new facility when it opens. So, you don't see that staffing up this year when it opens, we've already done the investment and the staff-up.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, just trying to be quick with time, Chair.

There's been advocacy in the past for a facility in Summerside, is there anything in the budget for planning for a potential Summerside detox facility?

Hon. C. Deagle: That'd be capital budget, wouldn't it?

Christine Sewell: It would be capital.

M. MacFarlane: I used the word planning.

Hon. C. Deagle: That's capital as well.

Christine Sewell: Yeah, our planning happens in the capital as well.

M. MacFarlane: Okay.

We hear a lot about increases in gambling addiction including with online sports betting being a big issue nowadays, primarily in the

younger male demographic. Are there any targeted programs or funds that would look at dealing with that particular increase as a problem?

Christine Sewell: There's nothing new in the budget that would, but I may have information on some of our existing programs. Give me just one moment, please.

If I may, maybe I can do a takeback to just give you a listing of the programs. It's just....

M. MacFarlane: No, that's fine. That's all I have. Thank you.

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

K. Bernard: Thanks, Chair. I just have two quick questions. I think they're quick.

Under the explanation of transitional programs, I see reintegration. Do you have any examples there of what government would do for reintegration, what supports might be offered?

Christine Sewell: I don't have the details, and I don't want to do a disservice by guessing something. So, if it's okay, I can take that on to share back with you.

K. Bernard: Sure.

I'm just looking here in the big book, and it says: "Youth Addictions – Supervised Housing." There's not a large budget attached to it, but what is that? It's under Purchased Service – General.

I guess two parts: Where is this housing and what would that be for?

Christine Sewell: I don't have any additional detail on which building that relates to, so I'd have to get that for you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Mental Health and Addictions Services:
95,100,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Health PEI: 1,241,970,500

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. C. Deagle: (Indistinct) just before Christine leaves. That was her first time on the floor of the budget....

[Applause]

Hon. C. Deagle: She's only been with Health PEI for just over five months, so that's pretty impressive.

Mr. Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[4:00 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration the grant of supply to His Majesty, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Recognition of Guests II

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

I'd just like to recognize Frieda Billard, a wonderful civil servant and a great friend of mine and a neighbour. I want to welcome everyone else in the gallery, but I especially want to wish Freda – enjoy the rest of the session.

Thanks.

Orders Other Than Government

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the 28th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 28, *An Act to Amend the Child Youth and Family Services Act*, Bill No. 103, in committee.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'd like to call upon the Deputy Speaker to chair Committee of the Whole House.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Child Youth and Family Services Act*.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, I do. I have two.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Welcome to you both. Could you just state your name and your title for Hansard?

Dr. Janet Payne: Dr. Janet Payne.

Madison Ranta: Madison Ranta. I'm the director of policy and public engagement for the opposition office.

C. Simpson: I'd to just take a moment just to recognize the guests who are here with us today. I'd like to start with Bailee Muttart – who is actually Janet's daughter who's joined us – France Young, Jenna Banks, Pat Banks, Carolyn MacArthur, Wanda Purdy, Jessica Burke, Bill Rose, Frieda Billard, and our leader, Rob Mitchell. My apologies if I missed anyone.

Also, Chair, if I may, each of the two women who are supporting this bill have very short statements to make from their experience between when we were first here and the two weeks since, and us being back to today, if they may.

Dr. Janet Payne: Thank you for having me back. Over the last two weeks, I have heard from more Islanders than I could imagine. Thank you.

I don't like being vulnerable. I hate being vulnerable, but I decided that it was the only thing that I could do. Because of my vulnerability, I heard stories from Islanders all across this Island. I can sum up their stories in four categories quickly.

[4:05 p.m.]

The first group included families just like mine, families that are desperate, as well as police officers, those who work for the RCMP, youth workers who feel like their hands are tied.

The second group was unexpected where people reached out to me who were adults, who were children who were left to live on the street on their own and the trauma that they experienced is lifelong.

The third group only consisted of two people, but I thought it was noteworthy. There was a mom who is concerned that this change to the legislation could impact custody arrangements. I said that this was not what this amendment was about. The second was a gentleman who was a youth who was on the street as a young person. He said I came from an abusive family, and I was glad they didn't make me go back home. I said this amendment protects for people in your situation.

And then the fourth group, the final group included Islanders who were outraged that this legislation was ever adopted in the first place. I received message after message from people who wondered what government was in power when this change was enacted, who was in charge? My response was pretty straightforward. We can't fix the past. We can't overlook the trauma that this legislation has impacted on so many children and families, but when we know better, we can do better – we can do better now. This is what amendments are for, to adjust legislation when the rules do not make sense.

You know, it's pretty ironic that as a society, we don't let children attend movies when it's an 18-plus, but we let them live that real-life trauma in their own real live settings. Jenna knows. Rules are important sometimes.

It's been said by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate that this amendment would limit children's rights and put parent's rights ahead of children's rights. I say, yes, that's exactly what we're asking for – to align children's rights with the responsibilities that they are developmentally capable of, and to return rights to parents so we can do our jobs as parents and make decisions for our children until they are developmentally capable of doing so on their own.

Thank you.

C. Simpson: I will read Jenna's remarks:

"Hi. My name is Jenna Banks. I would like to start by thanking all members who have stayed for this potentially life-changing vote today.

"To the Islanders, to those in the Island that I love, I have over 92,000 views so far. The issue has resonated with so many people. The hundreds and hundreds of messages that I have received that I can't keep up with all with the same messaging – I felt so alone; I wished I had a mom like you when I was young; and we need to stand with you; we stand strong. We have an army to fight.

"The question is clear: What do we do when the system in place to protect children doesn't have the right tools? That's your choice and decision today. Canada is watching this beautiful province hopefully make change for them as well.

"Please take the ten seconds right now and that's what I'll ask. Think about your child, your grandchild, your niece or your nephew, and you have a choice. The vulnerable youth need direction. My daughter is watching intently on this outcome. Please, as decision-makers, make the right choice for our future to protect our children"

I would just like to add, too, a correction, if I may. The last time I was here, I spoke of the Bridges program. I ought to have said the Bridges situation table. I just wanted to make that correction.

I look forward to the questions that members may have today. I, too, heard from hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people. Basically, the same messaging that this was a move in the right direction.

Those that were concerned were similar to what Janet talked about: what about protecting children who are in an unsafe home? This bill absolutely will not impede that. As a matter of fact, the moment that a child would indicate that their home is not a safe place, I trust the Department of Social Development and Seniors would do what they need to do to protect children.

It starts somewhere. There's always a first call. That first call is from the child. That's just as important, just as critical to keep them safe.

To that, thank you.

Chair: We will open this, I think it was general questions before, and we'll continue with general questions.

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, mover, and guests.

[4:10 p.m.]

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to be here two weeks ago when you first brought this in but I went back and listened to it. This is a strong movement that is critically important to everyone that has children. I do agree with the strangers' comments today and the comments from two weeks ago. It is powerful and it is scary.

I want to thank you for bringing this bill to us today. We've had lots of discussion over the past two weeks about it through caucus. We are going to support this bill.

We just have a few concerns that, as legislators, we have to make sure that the laws we are creating actually work. There are a few details that we have to work out, one being the police asked to work with – let them be part of the process to figure out this legislation. We are asking them for a lot and not including them is probably not right. If we can find some more time to go back and just reach out to them and

say how can we make this even stronger than it is now? I ask that.

C. Simpson: That's an excellent point and thank you for that, minister.

We had a follow up meeting with the RCMP ourselves. The concerns that they had specific to issuing of warrants and entering premises and so forth, and the time and detail it would take to get that hammered home to be to what it needs to be to make sure that everything is done the way it needs to and with the intent.

As I said to them, I'll say again, that finds itself not in the bill itself but in the work that happens once it goes back to Social Development and Seniors and in the drafting of policies and in the drafting of regulations.

They asked me to be part of that. I did say absolutely, that would be something that government would very much be welcome to that, should this bill pass, it's going to take months if not a year or more to get the work done that needs to be done.

Hon. B. Thompson: I appreciate you understand that.

C. Simpson: Yeah, absolutely.

Hon. B. Thompson: The other issue I have, and believe me, I don't always agree with the Child Advocate, but he is very passionate about this one, even more so. I don't know if we'll ever be able to please the Child Advocate on this the way it's written but if we can just maybe sit down with him and see if we can come to a common ground with him. I know I'd be interested if you're evening planning that.

C. Simpson: That's also an excellent point. The Child and Youth Advocate and his office has a role and a role within the province that is critical to provide guidance, input, and direction on behalf of children and youth in this province. He and I will have to agree to disagree on this one.

His primary concern is that children could be returned to a home that is not safe. Arguably, that is absolutely not the intent in any size, way, shape, or form. A child that has away and is stating that their home is not safe, Social Development and Seniors will do what they do well, and Child Protection and all the responsibilities there will absolutely kick in.

With due respect to the stance that he's taken, I respect it. I absolutely respect it and I've made it abundantly clear that is not the intent. I trust the department will do their job to protect children.

Hon. B. Thompson: Yeah, and I agree with you.

I think maybe that might be the wording – “a safe home.” If we can define that in the regulations, that might be able to – like you say, we're never going to please them and we maybe agree to disagree on that, but I think we have to try to massage that just a little bit, and “safe home,” the definition is the key there.

[4:15 p.m.]

C. Simpson: I totally agree with you. When this amendment was being drafted, we deliberately did not want to interfere with any of the current definitions that are found within the act, understood that the regulatory power and policy power that exists after the fact, all of that can be hammered out during that process over the coming months, year, that it is going to take.

Hon. B. Thompson: Saying that, I want to get this passed and get this to a vote. I'm going to make an amendment so that I can put an approximation clause in it so it gives us time to get this work done and then we can proclaim it. To do the proper justice to everyone involved, I just need a little more time.

Chair, I move that Bill 103 is amended by addition of the following after section 1: “The act comes into force on a date that may be fixed proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor in Council.”

C. Simpson: Chair, if I may acknowledge Adelee MacNevin, who has joined us in the gallery from Even for One.

Chair: You may.

Seeing that everybody has received the amendment, is there discussion on the amendment?

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: If I could just ask the mover of this motion why he put this amendment in when it states that it may be fixed by the proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Why

would you say “may” instead of the word “shall”?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam, that's a question for the person who wrote this. I can go back.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much. It was a good question. I just want to know why put this forward when it doesn't really have any teeth to it?

Hon. B. Thompson: Do you want to amend it?

Hon. H. Perry: It's your amendment.

I'll ask the promoter of the bill if she's comfortable with this amendment.

C. Simpson: May I ask, before I answer that – “may” does leave it wide open. What's your intent behind “may” versus “shall”?

Hon. B. Thompson: I guess “shall” might be the better approach if we want to amend the amendment.

Chair: Okay, if you'd like to have something to say, I'm happy to ask you to speak.

C. Simpson: If you're open to that, that's makes some – it still, does it take away from what you're trying to do? I don't think so. I think it gives you the time to do it.

Hon. B. Thompson: I'm just asking for time, I'm not asking for anything else.

C. Simpson: Yeah, absolutely. To answer your question, I am not opposed to giving the time because I think that due diligence is critical. I do see, though, if the minister is open to the word “shall,” it won't – but once that time is granted and the work is done – it shall be proclaimed to amend the amendment, if the minister is open to that.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Therefore, can I put a motion forward to amend to amendment removing the word “may” and substituting it with the word “shall.”

Chair: Discussion on the new amendment to the amendment.

[4:20 p.m.]

Shall the amendment to the amendment carry with word “shall” instead of “may?” Carried

Shall the amendment as amended carry? Carried.

Shall the bill carry? Carried.

[Interjections]

C. Simpson: I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act.*

Shall it carry? Carried.

C. Simpson: I move the enacting clause.

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

Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

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

Speaker: A recorded division has been requested.

I'd like to ask that the bell be rung.

[The bells were rung]

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

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

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

Speaker: It seems we are ready for the vote, members.

I would ask all of those voting against adopting the report of the committee – which would be against the bill – please rise.

All those voting in favour of the report of the committee and for the bill, please rise.

[The Clerk calls the roll]

YEAS

Bell
Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Burridge
Compton
Croucher
Curran
Deagle
DesRoches
Dillon
Dollar
Henderson
Hudson
Lantz
MacEwen
MacFarlane
MacKay
MacLennan
McNeilly
Perry
Redmond
Simpson
Thompson

[4:25 p.m.]

Speaker: Members, the report of the committee has been adopted, and the bill has passed unanimously.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the 28th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

C. Simpson: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said bill be now read a third time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Bill No.103, *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, read a third time.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said bill do now pass.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

This is a bill introduced by leave of the House, read a first time, read a second time, committed to a Committee of the Whole House, reported agreed to with amendment, read a third time and it is now moved that the bill do pass.

I'll ask again, all those in favour say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

Speaker: Contrary, nay.

The bill has carried and passed third reading unanimously.

Motions Other Than Government

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

G. McNeilly: At this time, I'd call motion 35 back to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, motion 35 is currently under debate, and debate was adjourned by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Speaker: Members, I don't have anyone on my list right now. I would like to go back to the mover of the motion, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty to close debate.

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

I might just speak to this for a few minutes to let everybody know where we are with it.

Motion 35 is to protect and restore the restoration of adult day programs in Prince Edward Island. Lots happened this spring regarding this motion and we're talking about day programming in facilities, which is a place where people can go when they need the essential services that are provided in Prince Edward Island.

In my area, it's Brecken House. It's a facility that a limit of right people can go and get services, social, physical, their mental needs met, bathing facilities, different things when they need them the most in their lives because the people that attend these day programs live at home, and that's the direction our province is trying to go into; get people to stay in their homes for longer and be supported in their homes for longer.

But with that, the burden on the caregiver becomes extraordinarily great. You can imagine how difficult that is for some. Yes, there's services that come into the home and give that relief, but you need a place to go, and these services are incredibly important.

At PE Home, they do such a great job, whether it be lunch, whether it be greeting, whether it be – and we joked around a little bit about the doorbell the last time we were talking and what it's like, but everybody should go and try to go and visit these places where you'll see the incredible service that the staff provides and the essential services.

So, when the hospital got over capacity this year in January and the timing around that, I was watching the timing around that, I think it was over capacity around January 2nd, the memo didn't really come out until January 11th, and by then, we realized that our services at our hospital are beyond what we can do, what our professionals there can do. So, the immediate thing to do is they formed a committee, which was actually formed the year before, and they had a similar issue.

[4:30 p.m.]

But this year, this year was an extreme scenario where they had to form a committee and a committee inside the hospital and various, great professionals, said we are in a crisis point in the hospital. That means that people are in hallways,

that means that people are in places around the hospital setting that they should not be in. What we do from a hospital capacity to try to decant people in the hospital that are staying in ALC beds – alternative level of care beds – in the hospital?

That's part of the problem but that's not necessarily all the problem. This is where they said let's look at what we have across Prince Edward Island. They're looking to the public system, places like Brecken House, because they know that the people coming out have and need that care.

The Leader of the Opposition and I, we did talk about it in Question Period, different levels of care four, five, what are those different levels of care? You can go community care, almost private care, and then, when you need the most help in your life, you need public long-term care. There are only so many public long-term care beds in Prince Edward Island.

Today, when I was asking questions, that was my first question. It's my first question every time in the public long-term care section: How many public long-term care beds do we have in Prince Edward Island because right now, they're operating at about 98-99 percent capacity? That wasn't enough to help the hospital out at the time.

Our private long-term care beds are operating at 99 percent capacity is what I found out today on the floor of the Legislature. Both the public system, which takes the most difficult cases because that staff in the public system – and private system, public system, they all work very hard – but in the public system, they have the expertise to handle people that need that level 5 care and they do such a great job.

But their capacity in their system cannot take another seven beds. Their capacity in the system cannot take another four beds. They're to the point where it's a crisis point, not only in the hospital, but now you have a crisis point in private long-term care, you have a crisis point in community care, which the member of the official opposition talked about in his community, and now you have a crisis point in public long-term care. Those are the dementia wings, those are the general wings, and now this government said to itself what do we do – and I can go through each and every bed from the sheet that was provided.

What they did was the first thing that was done was that they took a section, it's called Meadow. It's a Meadow section; it's a closed unit at Beach Grove Home and it's full. What the first plan was to add extra beds to that unit. When you add extra beds to a unit, like seven extra beds, what you do is you take somebody, you take a room – I laughed because it's funny because during COVID, the government was told you can't put two people in these rooms; you can't. So they made them single rooms, which they should be.

But because the hospital formed a committee and said where can we get capacity, they put people back in those rooms. Now there's two people in basically rooms that are meant for a single person. This was documented in different reports and the government actually did that. It went from having one bed in one area with one bathroom, now you have two people in a space that some people – it might not be suitable.

But that's not the only thing is when you take an extra seven beds and you them in Meadow, it does something to the staff. It adds that much more duties to the staff who are already taxed because the facility was at 98 percent capacity before. And they don't complain; the staff there, they don't complain. They do their job, but it burns them out.

[4:35 p.m.]

It's like you're running an engine. If you've ever driven a standard car, if you just stayed in third gear and you tried to go 100 kilometres an hour again, you're going to burn your engine out, and now we've just almost put it down to second gear and we've just hit the gas. That's what it's like in long-term care for people working there.

That's why there are people every week leaving our facilities to go to places like home care. Not because they don't love their job; because they love their job and because they can't do it anymore. They want to stay in that sector, but the conditions that we've put on them are too extreme, and that's what people in the system are saying.

This motion talks about the restoration of adult programs in Prince Edward Island. What I did and I started to say is that the decanting of the hospital had to identify 30 beds across Prince Edward Island that they needed.

So, that's where they started. They started in the seven beds I just spoke about at Beach Grove Home. Then they said, okay, let's look at where we have day program capacity in Riverview Manor – which I have been in and toured recently – and Breckon House, and Colville Manor. So, between those would have been 12 beds – four, four and four.

We know what happened with Colville Manor. The MLA said, “Well, we're not going to do that here”. That was more common room space. That was a little bit different – more common room space where people gather and do exercise, but they were going to take that space and just make it bedding.

In Summerside in Summerset Manor – it's called the beehive. The beehive is a room where they do activities. Beehive – everybody's buzzing around. On the door it's got a beautiful diagram of bees where they're supposed to provide activities. It's an active place.

But when I was there, they were putting them in two beds. So, there was no more activity; it's just two beds. They were trying to get three into that facility into that space, but the problem is the doors slide open. I don't know if anybody saw it, but when you go into the beehive, they slide open like this. There's one bed on the left and they put one bed on the right, but the third bed would have been right in the opening of the door. That wasn't going to work, so they quickly went down to two beds. It would have been good if people had gone and checked out that space before.

That was the mission and the goal, and I'm not sure how things are right now. But that space – and what people there said is that it's not in an area that staff are working around.

When you put somebody in a different area, if it's 14 beds and you try to get 15 beds, there's staff there. But if you put two beds in a place that's in an entranceway, there's no staff there. So, now you have to get a staff outside, you have to monitor them all the time, and that means the facility is not.... They can do it because long-term care staff are basically superstars, but it's not ideal and it's not conducive, and it's not a plan to deal with a crisis because you think that you're dealing with this in January, February, March – this is going to be our future.

By providing 85 long-term care beds – which the levels max out on. I don't know if anybody understands that: the levels max out in private beds. The hardest cases have to go to public long-term care and that's the problem. That is where they need the most care. They can't be anywhere but our public system. That's why we should always see an addition to public long-term care beds in our province. That's what we need. We need that capacity to increase.

[4:40 p.m.]

Yes, the privates – it's definitely going to help, but you're just buying time. You're buying time, and this is coming at an exponential rate where people need more care because – this government did the right thing by moving to home care supports. We just debated the budget, and I just saw the numbers, there's a ton of good things happening in home care. It's true.

It's there, but home care always stops at a certain point where you can't do it anymore. The person gets to the point where – and it's usually a trip to the hospital or the emergency room comes in, and they just one day, all of a sudden, “I've done my best,” “I've done my best for my grandfather,” “I've done my best for my mother,” “I've done my best for my spouse,” and they need more support.

This is where we're getting in PEI. These plans are all going to buy time, and we don't have the time anymore. We need to have a better strategy how to deal with the long-term care crisis for people that's coming in Prince Edward Island because this government was told about that in 2021. It said you needed 400 beds there – delayed; didn't build anything. Had a 175-bed contract to build; that got delayed.

Now we're at this position where we're awaiting these 85 beds that will not help the Leader of the Opposition's situation, will not help the people at Summerset, the staff at Summerset who are incredible, the staff at Riverview, the staff at Beach Grove Home, the staff at PE Home – I just listed off probably about 400 and some-odd long-term care beds, and those are the places that we need to support.

We need to get out there and listen to the staff because the numbers in your budget book, with the amount of travel nursing – you wonder why we're spending money on travel nursing. You wonder why? It's because you can't retain the staff that we have. We've lost great staff to

different areas, and if you keep ignoring this, you cannot – the Minister of Finance, this is the one budget line that needs action and attention right now.

Yeah, you can jump up out of your chair.

[Interjection]

G. McNeilly: I know you are. It's coming.

The Premier said once that we're fixing the plane while we're flying it. I don't know if that's the exact quote, but we're definitely in the air with this, and there are some serious mechanical issues at the time, so we need to get out there and fix this. It's going to take a lot of hard work and it's going to take some people in....

You have to maintain and bring back the people to long-term care. It's their true love, and you've got to get out there and communicate with people. The only people that do it better – well, they don't really necessarily do it better – but they are the people that are working in the day programming. They are an incredible staff with RCWs, nurse practitioners, there are nurses that work there – people with a long history of caring for people.

This motion was not something I wanted to bring forward. It's "Protection and restoration of adult day programs in Prince Edward Island." I would have rather said something like "Promote and build the capacity of day programs in Prince Edward Island to meet the need of our future." That's what I should be – but I'm having to use the words "restoration" and "protect."

I'm worried about what that means when we're at the same situation next January and we're at the same situation when – as the Minister of Health did say, RSV did not hit Prince Edward Island this year. What happens when that does? What happens when you mix in something that's....?

There was nothing out of the ordinary this year. Our great staff – we had people using vaccines. There was nothing out of the ordinary except the amount of people that needed more care, and our capacity to deliver that in Prince Edward Island wasn't there.

[4:45 p.m.]

So, then this government starts to do things like put level 4 cases in community care. If you

know anything about it, you cannot do that. You just can't do that to the staff.

The biggest thing when you're talking to employees about – "I want to be in control of the things that I know." Once you start to do that with a level 4 in community care, you take the control out of the staff, and they're trying to just manage hour to hour. They talk and it goes around pretty quickly that people who are making decisions aren't really caring about the patient and the person at the heart of those decisions.

These are all things that we're looking at when you talk about long-term care.

I mean, when you talk about the day programming, what I'm told is the reason why you have day programming in a place like PE Home in Riverview is because there are eight people that go in during the day. They get dropped off at 8:30 in the morning or nine o'clock and then they're greeted, they're going to have a great day. They're well taken care of. They feel refreshed. They're coming out of there. They're treated with the most amount of dignity.

That process of them entering into a long-term care facility is where they could get to be in the very near future, some people. You're almost practicing bringing them in and getting them accustomed to the facilities and to the staff and to meet people because that's where the process begins is getting people ready for that process. That's what they said both at Brecken House, well, PE Home is really hard to get into; the wait list is incredible. It's hard to get into PE Home and Beach Grove, well, all the facilities.

But a place like, if you're talking about Riverview Manor, they want to be there to say, hey, you're welcome here. This is it. We're used to you. I'm going to go see you. I'm going to keep those familiar faces going because every time you move somebody in long-term care, you take away days in their life. It's that difficult on people. You try to transition people. You try to make them feel at home, and you try to just support them as best you can. This is what our long-term care experts do; this is what they do best.

When you look at a place like Brecken House, the ceilings are 45, 50 feet high. It's slanted at a – there's all kinds of natural light. The plan was to divide up the rooms in four. But then you

have an issue with bathrooms. Everybody should have their own bathroom space in long-term care. That goes out the window.

Call bells are another thing. You have to rewire. They started to look at that process about rewiring call bells, which is the bell that you hit when you need service and you need assistance. That's something that – when you talk to a long-term care worker, they'll rattle off things right away, and call bells is always on there. Is the call bell not working? You've got to have these things working. They can't come down, necessarily hanging there from the ceiling. It's got to be integrated. That's why it's kind of so expensive to build long-term care facilities – the amount of wiring and the amount of different things within each of the rooms.

But you can't change the designs of the place because – for a temporary reason. Once the day program and beds are gone, they're not coming back. As much as you wanted to say that they were, they wouldn't be coming back.

You either plan two things – and I said this three years ago. I started talking about this after Brecken House.... I said, look, if you want day programming to continue, we need more capacity. Take Brecken House out of PE Home and put it as a standalone facility but build it right. Put it in your capital budget, predictive of the future, and say, hey, you know what? It can be a standalone facility attached to PE Home. We have the land; it's there. It's being done. If you need that space for other reasons, great, but you've got to plan for it.

When an organization that makes these decisions in January and says that we're going to move the day programming people out of there within the next months because our hospital is over capacity, that's not enough time to plan. You should be planning those things now so I'm very much looking forward to the November budget for the capital budget because I want to see a day programming standalone facility in the capital budget that could triple the capacity. Instead of eight, you move to 24. Same thing in Summerside.

[4:50 p.m.]

These are things that these should be capital budget and seen in the capital budget for day programming. Then you can start to look at a plan where you can utilize the space at PE Home that we have. I would much rather see it used for

activity purposes than actual beds, but if you want to build more beds and capacity, that's going to take some engineering, both with the move out and with the future there. That's how important four beds are, eight beds are, 12 beds.

But the other thing is that you start doing this – and I'll tell you what, people value these facilities. People value the sacredness of these facilities – Colville Manor, Riverview, the great work that's being done in Tignish and O'Leary. The communities value these facilities, and if you start to make too many changes or you start to provide the community – telling them what's going to happen, they're not going to be very happy; nor were they very happy with this as we go going.

I ran into one person who was going into PE Home and he was coming in to work on his respite bed. He was coming in to talk to the staff about his respite bed because respite beds are – he knows that he has put a burden on his wife. She does it unconditionally. She wanted to go away for a seven-day trip with her friends somewhere, and he was going in – that's all he wanted. He wanted to go into PE Home and the respite bed, and had it organized for seven days so his wife could have the trip of her lifetime with friends to celebrate an anniversary.

I walked in with him and he said: "I lost my respite bed. I'm going to be a burden on my wife because we're in this situation." He wasn't happy about it. He understands what's happening, but these decisions with long-term care affect lives. I'll never forget the way he talked about that.

So, when you look at it like we're gaining a bed with a respite bed at Beach Grove or at PE Home, that's a big decision to take one of those beds out of there, two of those beds out of there, an activity room out of there, and day programming. This plan isn't going to work. We heard today that the private sector is at 99 percent capacity in the private nursing home area.

The public sector is basically the same: 98-99 percent. You can't get much higher than that because there has to be a transition between people leaving rooms and different things, and different circumstances change. But that's a profound amount of people and our whole long-term care system....

The money is there. The problem is it's not being used efficiently because we're having to get agency staff. And I'm telling you right now, for the record: travel RCWs will be another line that will start to grow out of control in the future if we're not – travel RCWs, travel physios.... Basically, these are agencies that are for-profit agencies or businesses that hire nurses, that hire RCWs, and they work for that agency. That agency sells the services of the travel people to PEI, and we pay three times as much as hiring our own nurses, our own RCWs, our own whatever.

So, you pay a premium for a service because you're trying to fill a gap; you're trying to fill a hole. But the problem is that the hole goes from two weeks to three weeks, from \$100 today like the Leader of the Third Party said – you're budgeting for \$200 with that line but guess what, it's \$500,000. That jumped in a hurry, and that's where you run into problems. It's unsustainable. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have all developed their own plans how to not do this.

[4:55 p.m.]

And you see it in PEI; people are starting to profit. We're doing this so much that people are starting to profit by selling out their homes to travel nurses. You have ads on Facebook that people are like, "Are you a travel nurse? Here is a great spot for you," because guess what – we pay for their expenses of living here, too. They're three times the salary.

They're great nurses. I've chatted with a bunch of them. They're wonderful people, but it's costing us too much.

And then, what the Nurses' Union says is that the morale isn't there. They have to work alongside of somebody making a third as much as a travel nurse and getting accommodations and everything to boot. Those are meant to fill a gap and we've got to figure out – and this government has to figure how out – how you reduce that number because we see it, we just saw it.

We just approved a \$67 million budget line today for Health PEI and \$23 million of it was – just in that one section – \$23 million was travel nurses. We could have had hired – I don't know, I can't do the math on that right now – we could have hired a lot of nurses that would have been there to support us in their time of need and they want to, and they will be there.

I appreciate the fact that I'm able to speak to this because I am passionate about it because I see people's faces and I know how hard they work in each of the sections at Beach Grove and PE Home, whether it be Lupin, whether it be Meadow or Sunrise or these different units are – both the people that live there and the staff that work there – are absolutely incredible. The people that work in the day programming are beyond.

They were scared and nervous three months, they were very, very nervous about the direction. They have since, when I go in and talk to them, they're feeling better about things. I'm glad the government has backed off on this, but this only gives you time. I want you to remember that this gives you time to figure out a plan because January 2027, we're going to be in the same situation and a different committee is going to be – and I don't want them looking at the same document that said all these things were a good idea because it's coming again in the very short time.

This summer, I think, we're going to have issues with staffing hospitals and I think we're going to have issues with staffing emergency rooms in KCMH and a few different other places. I'm very worried about that. I'm worried about the staffing in long-term care as well, but nothing is going to hit like it will next January.

I'm asking you to do everything that you can to make sure that you're planning for this because this motion is important. I appreciate the amount of time I've taken to speak about this and to close this motion.

I will be here on watch for the good people in long-term care as always. Like the Leader of the Opposition, that means a lot to us that people are well taken care of, and it's their home.

At this time, I'd like to call for a standing vote and adjournment.

Speaker: The debate has been adjourned on the motion by the mover. A recorded division has been requested. Please ring the bell.

[5:00 p.m.]

[The bells were rung]

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

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

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

Speaker: All those against motion, please rise.

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

[The Clerk calls the roll]

YEAS

Bell
Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Burridge
Compton
Croucher
Curran
DesRoches
Dillon
Dollar
Henderson
Hudson
MacEwen
MacFarlane
MacLennan
McNeilly
Perry
Redmond
Simpson
Thompson

Speaker: Members, the vote is in. The motion has passed unanimously.

Hon. Z. Bell: Call the hour.

Speaker: The hour has been called.

The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Hon. Z. Bell: I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal, that this House adjourn until Wednesday, May 20th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

[The Legislature adjourned until Wednesday, 20 May 2026 at 1:00 p.m.]