



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings**

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Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Wednesday, 20 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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Bernard , Karla (G)	Charlottetown-Victoria Park (12)	Third Party Whip
Bevan-Baker , Peter (G)	New Haven-Rocky Point (17)	Third Party House Leader
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Compton , Hon. Darlene (PC)	Belfast-Murray River (4)	Minister of Land and Environment
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Dollar , Hon. Kent (PC)	Brackley-Hunter River (15)	Minister of Housing and Communities
Henderson , Robert (L)	O’Leary-Inverness (25)	Opposition Whip
Hudson , Hon. Ernie (PC)	Alberton-Bloomfield (26)	Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy

Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
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MacEwen , Sidney (PC)	Morell-Donagh (7)	
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MacKay , Matthew (PC)	Kensington-Malpeque (20)	Government House Leader
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McNeilly , Gordon (L)	Charlottetown-West Royalty (14)	Opposition House Leader
Perry , Hon. Hal (L)	Tignish-Palmer Road (27)	Leader of the Official Opposition
Ramsay , Hon. Barb (PC)	Summerside-South Drive (22)	Minister of Social Development and Seniors Minister responsible for the Status of Women
Redmond , Hon. Jenn (PC)	Mermaid-Stratford (5)	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence
Simpson , Carolyn (L)	Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park (9)	
Thompson , Hon. Bloyce (PC)	Stanhope-Marshfield (8)	Minister of Agriculture Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General
Trivers , Hon. Brad	Rustico-Emerald (18)	Speaker
Vacant	Cornwall-Meadowbank (16)	

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

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Welcome back, everybody, to another day in the Legislature Assembly. Welcome to those in the gallery – we’ve got a good group in the gallery here today – those watching online, my colleagues, staff, Pages. Beautiful day in Prince Edward Island; a great day to be back in the Legislature.

[1:05 p.m.]

Again, I want to welcome everyone in the gallery. I see some very familiar faces – Rob MacAdam, Tracy Beaulieu. My friend, Sarah Brown, and her daughter, Molly, are here. Molly is a national wrestler, a real competitor on the national wrestling scene. It’s been great watching her through Sarah. You’re doing great, Molly; it’s great to see.

I also want to recognize Ernie Gallant and his partner, Julie Allen, who are here today in the gallery with us. Ernie is a former volunteer firefighter and first responder who has given several presentations where he describes his own experience with his mental health challenges, and it’s entitled, “Left Turn: My journey living and healing from PTSD.” By sharing his story, Ernie is helping others deal with their own challenges, and I want to thank Ernie for his work encouraging action, awareness, and acceptance of mental health challenges. Thanks for being here with us today.

As mentioned yesterday, Holland College graduations are happening this week. I want to extend my sincerest congratulations to all graduates. I hope everyone takes some time to celebrate and be proud of all your hard work and determination. Once again, congratulations to all of our graduates.

Finally, this week marks National Paramedic Services Week, a time when communities across Canada honour the dedication, courage, and life-saving work of our emergency medical personnel. Paramedics are often the very first on the scene, stepping into unpredictable and very

challenging situations to save the lives of others. I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all paramedics for their unwavering commitment, their professionalism, and service to Islanders.

Thank you. I hope everyone has a great day here.

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 and in particular, those from Tignish-Palmer Road. Welcome all those to the gallery today. Phil Taylor is a regular in here, but I think this is the first time his wife has accompanied him, so welcome, Kim, to today’s proceedings.

I’d also like to welcome Michele Beaton, a former MLA, to the gallery, and to each and every one of you who are joining us here today.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of work to do, and I look forward to having a very productive day in here.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon to you and all my fellow members in the Assembly here today, and clerks and staff and Pages and everybody joining us in the gallery. Great to see a full gallery here this afternoon. I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

I would like to recognize former MLA Michele Beaton. Thank you for coming out – and I think you have with you today, Michele, Jacqueline Briggs, a friend of yours from Oregon who might be a relative of the Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, perhaps. Welcome to PEI, Jacqueline, and I hope you enjoy your visit.

I hope everyone enjoys the proceedings here today.

Just a few events I’d like to touch on briefly in my greetings this afternoon:

Cycling PEI and the Town of Cornwall have partnered to present a HopOn kids cycling course for kids aged six to 13. The program

starts this Saturday, May 23rd, and continues May 30th and June 6th, from 9 to 10 a.m. at the Cornwall Town Hall. The HopOn program is a games-based program that introduces kids to cycling in a fun, safe environment with trained coaches. Participants are encouraged to bring their own bikes and helmets if they have them, but Cycling PEI will also have bikes to lend to those who need a bike. More information – and to register – at the Town of Cornwall website.

Tonight at 6 p.m. is the annual general meeting for the Charlottetown Area Watershed group. So, if members would like to hear a different MacFarlane present, my sister Rosie, a freshwater fish biologist from the Department of Land and Environment, will be one of the guest speakers, along with Taylor Dall, the environmental project coordinator, environment and sustainability with the City of Charlottetown. That's tonight at 6 p.m. at Beaconsfield Carriage House.

As was mentioned, I believe, yesterday, today is the QEH Big Day of Giving. There was lots of radio airplay this morning I know, on the drive in, promoting the QEH Big Day of Giving. I'd like to thank the foundation for the great work they do, John Scales, the many donors, and of course the volunteers that help keep the hospital running smoothly. As of midday today, the total raised is \$431,998.

[1:10 p.m.]

Finally, the QEH Auxiliary held their volunteer appreciation dinner. Eighteen people who have volunteered 500-7,000 hours over the years were recognized for their volunteer efforts. A special mention to Merle MacBeath, who has volunteered an incredible 13,000 hours of her time and energy to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Thank you to Merle for that incredible contribution, and all the others in the auxiliary for supporting the foundation and the great work they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish everyone here a great day of debate.

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

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

I had the privilege of attending the paramedic services awards at UPEI last night as I watched

many of my friends and colleagues receive awards and recognition for the important work that they do every day for Islanders.

I was also a proud dad as I watched my two daughters, Jenna and Lesley, receive the stroke care award. This award is for proper assessment of a CVA and on-scene time of less than 20 minutes, and appropriate life-saving measures both pre-hospitally and after arrival at the hospital, giving those patients a real chance at a successful outcome.

I was also proud to be recognized and awarded last night with my 15-year service bar. As we celebrate –

[Hear, hear!]

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you. As we celebrate Paramedic Services Week, I want to thank our Island paramedics for the critical work that they do day and night, 365 days a year. It is a true honour to be a part of a group of some of Prince Edward Island's most kind, caring, and compassionate professionals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to rise, too, and welcome back all my colleagues and those in the gallery, especially my former educators, Tracy Beaulieu and Rob MacAdam, and those watching online.

I also want to mention a special person in the gallery today. Her name is Jackie Briggs. The world is a small place; let me start with a short story to explain just how small it is. Jackie grew up on the west coast, moved to the east coast and attended UPEI, met lots of Islander friends, and moved back to the west coast and met my cousin in Calgary, where they lived, married, and moved to Oregon.

She returned this week to a celebration of life of a friend who had passed away, and as she's staying with – and Mr. Speaker, I think if you want to hear more, you're going to have to wait for the book. I do want to say thank you for having supper with us the other night. It was really nice to see you, and I hope you enjoy your stay on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I would like to welcome back staff and colleagues, and Jorja and Nate, our Pages today, and everybody joining us in the gallery – Rob MacAdam and Tracy Beaulieu and Michele Beaton and everybody else. Thank you so much for being here. It's great to have a full gallery.

I just wanted to briefly also say hi to everybody watching online, and a special hi to Tammy MacKinnon. She's the executive director of Hope House in Summerside, which is a home that keeps babies and moms together, and offers moms who may be struggling with various issues life skills and tries to get them on their feet healthily and safely so that they and their baby may stay together and live a happy, long life together.

So, I just want to say hi to Tammy and thank her and her staff for all the incredible work they do. They are not government funded at all. It's solely donations, so way to go, and hopefully government will fund a little bit.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hello, everybody, and welcome to the proceedings, everybody who's here.

Earlier today, I had the opportunity to present a certificate of achievement to some members who are here in the gallery. The Island Wrestling Academy out of Charlottetown attended on April 24th-26th in Grand Prairie – they were there for the Canadian Wrestling Championships. It's truly remarkable what they did.

We have some members here today, and I want to acknowledge them:

Alexsa Matheson. Get this: Greco national champion and national bronze in freestyle. She pinned Kai Pare in the first round. Pare was a member of Team Canada and won bronze at the Pan-Am Games.

Molly Brown – national Greco silver medalist and national freestyle bronze medalist. Congratulations.

Ben Reid, who's not here today, was the national Greco silver medalist and fifth place in freestyle, and Liam Matheson, national fourth-place freestyle finish.

They were coached by Gary McQuaid and assistant coach Wallace Roach.

I want to say congratulations. You have done our whole entire Island proud. You can show those medals off before you leave today. Way to go. Keep up the good work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to welcome all those joining us here in the gallery and at home. A special nod out to Tracy and Rob here from the PSB.

[1:15 p.m.]

This morning, I, along with two of my colleagues here, were at St. Jean's Elementary for the St. Jean's writing celebration. Just to let you know, it was spectacular. Children from kindergarten through grade 6 – the whole school was there, proud to show their work. It was a wonderful day, and I appreciated being there.

To that, I hope we have a wonderful day. Let's stay cool and enjoy our afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: I just wanted to rise quickly as well and just recognize Ernie Gallant. He's a long-time friend of mine and he does a lot for his community. Maybe someday we'll even get that hill on the Millvale Road paved for you.

Statements by Members

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

Status of Women Equality Report Card

K. Bernard: Thank you.

The *Equality Report Card* assesses the Government of Prince Edward Island's progress toward gender equality goals. It was initiated by the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women in 2007, and it was released this morning.

Government gets a B minus, down from the B plus they received in 2022.

It's also important to note that the process was completed prior to the release of the 2026-2027 operating budget, where we saw cuts to children, child care, and non-profits which will have an undeniable impact on gender equality goals.

Supporting caregiving, eliminating poverty, women's health, and women in decision-making roles remain critically behind. This report card shows a government that can meet the bare minimum, not showing any areas where they've gone above and beyond.

The process of gathering information from the community and government in the creation of this report is extensive. It is more than a document; it is a catalyst for systemic change. I encourage government to take this report card as a challenge to do better, to match your words with action, and to rethink where you are cutting funding in this budget.

I would like to thank the Advisory Council on the Status of Women council and staff for taking on this crucial work for the community. The progress being measured in this report are the very things that will make this world better, safer, more equitable, and more inclusive. They are the solutions to some of the bigger issues in society that we are facing, and the sooner government realizes that, the better this province will be.

Thank you.

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

Reflecting on Recent Government Decisions

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

When I took part in Hospice PEI's Dancing with the Stars a few years ago, I danced – or perhaps more accurately, I wobbled and tripped my way through – the quickstep. That's the dance that goes slow, slow, quick, quick, slow. Even after

months of practice, my aging and clumsy body really struggled to do it in any way elegantly. The results were as predictable and as disappointing as this government's recent efforts have been to manage our dear province.

Let's look at this government's version of slow, slow, quick, quick, slow:

Slow – slow in any sort of decisive action to improve access to health care. Of course, the patent registry grows every year.

Slow in getting supports out to our oyster fishers who are in immediate and desperate need.

Quick: government sprinted to ram through a bill – some might say a half-baked piece of legislation – that would have gutted our province's *Conflict of Interest Act*.

Quick again to cut programs for children, housing, education, and the environment.

And slow – really slow, as slow as a drugged sloth – to make any significant efforts to balance our budget.

I've previously described this budget as stumbling and lurching around without any clear idea of where they're going, which sounds like a pretty accurate description of my dancing, for which I would like to inform this House I did not win any prizes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This government spent years pushing Islanders towards heat pumps, electric vehicles, electric bikes, and greater electricity use. Now government is warning Islanders that the electrical grid is under growing pressure. Demand is rising and the system is struggling to keep up. Somehow, in the middle of all that, this government decided it made sense to cut one of their very programs helping generate more local power and take pressure off the grid. Islanders are looking at this decision and wondering

whether this government has any idea of what it's doing anymore.

[1:20 p.m.]

Energy supports for Islanders

Question to the Minister of Energy: How does cutting solar supports make any sense when Prince Edward Island is already facing serious pressure on its electrical grid?

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

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

Certainly, you look at the initiatives, though, that our government is taking and will continue to take with regard to ensuring that we have a reliable energy system going forward. Just one example of that is preliminary work/representation to the federal government with regard to additional cables under the Northumberland Strait so that we do have that reliable, consistent supply of energy to PEI.

Another thing that I think that we need to look at and have started discussions on is a Maritime energy – working together collaboratively with our other two provinces here in the Maritime region, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. It has to be a coordinated approach.

Again, I'm sure that we all want all Islanders to have that reliable energy system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Out of respect to the position the Minister of Energy is in, I asked him this question, but I knew that he would not answer the question, so I'm going to ask somebody else this time.

This government found millions for the NHL, for advertising, for luxury events, and expensive government reviews, but suddenly there is no money for programs that actually help Islanders lower energy costs and reduce the pressure on the grid.

Islanders are looking at this budget and wondering whether this government has any idea of what its priorities are. Quite frankly, it's starting to look like this government either doesn't know what it is cutting or does not want Islanders to know what they are cutting.

Question to the Premier. Now, it's all about making good decisions. Why is this government protecting wasteful spending while cutting programs that actually help Islanders lower energy costs and reduce pressure on the grid?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

There's a lot to talk about in that question. Obviously, Prince Edward Island has electrified at quite a rate here over recent years, but the good news is that's reducing our dependency on fossil fuels which, of course, right now are increasing in costs at an unprecedented rate.

I was pleased recently to see the announcement from the federal government on their national electricity strategy. I've spoken to the Prime Minister about our priorities, which is replacing our cables to the mainland. That is part and parcel of exactly what the national electricity strategy is intending to do: to connect this country, to expand our electricity infrastructure, not just transmission but generation.

This is a priority of ours through our four pillars of health care, energy, affordability, and land. We'll continue to work on the energy file so that we have abundant, reliable energy here on Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So, again, no mention of solar supports.

This government spent years encouraging Islanders to buy heat pumps, electric vehicles, electric bikes, and cleaner technologies, but now, as I mentioned, the grid is under pressure, electricity costs are rising, and this government is cutting one of the very few programs that actually helped ease the demand that's on the system. Honestly, Islanders are struggling to understand the logic here.

I'm going to go back to the Minister of Energy. He had some time to think about this.

Before cutting this program, did government conduct any analysis on how much these solar installations were helping to reduce pressure on PEI's electrical grid, and will the minister table that analysis today?

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

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

Now, I think you have to look. Since our government came into power, the number of dollars that we have put in – the hon. member had mentioned with regard to heat pumps, but right across the board, working in consultation with the federal government – is well over \$300 million, and of that amount, well over \$200 million being provincial dollars that have been put into Islanders to improve their efficiencies with regard to heat, with regard to electricity consumption.

You look at the programs that are in place right now to improve the insulation of our houses for Islanders. There has never been a government in the history of this province that has put so much into programs along that line that not only have helped Islanders but have also reduced emissions.

Thank you.

[1:25 p.m.]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: So, basically, what I heard from that is no; they did no analysis on the solar installments.

Islanders did exactly what this government asked them to do. They invested in heat pumps, electric vehicles, and cleaner technologies because government told them this was the direction Prince Edward Island needed to go. Now government is cutting supports, removing rebates, and making electricity more expensive while Islanders are already struggling with the cost of day-to-day life. Frankly, this government's energy strategy is starting to look completely disconnected from reality.

Question to the Minister of Energy: What message does this send to Islanders who trusted this government's direction but are now watching affordability supports disappear?

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

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

It sort of – I'll be honest – disappoints me that the Leader of the Opposition wasn't listening to my responses before. As I said before – maybe he will listen this time – there has never been a government that has put more into programs with regard to energy, with regard to the reduction of energy consumption, with regard to the reduction in the usage of fossil fuels in this province of ours.

We will continue. We always have to re-evaluate programs. Any program that is put in place – is it going to be there for decades/centuries? Most likely not. They're put in place until they achieve what they were originally intended to achieve.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'm not sure what their goal was to achieve because they definitely have not achieved anything when it comes to solar supports here on Prince Edward Island.

Enough is enough. Islanders are calling our office and they're asking what programs are being cut or reduced, and they're doing this on a daily basis. This government still refuses to give them a straight answer. After delaying the budget for an entire month, the Premier and his Minister of Finance still won't tell Islanders exactly what they're cutting, and that's unacceptable. Islanders shouldn't have to drag basic answers out of their own government.

A question to the Premier: Will the Premier finally direct his Minister of Finance to table a complete list of all cuts and reductions in the budget, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

The Leader of the Opposition seems to have a fairly comprehensive list available to him already.

I would just point out a few things about our energy strategy here. First of all, obviously, capacity is becoming a critical problem here on Prince Edward Island. Certainly, solar is a component to that, but the sun shines brightest in the summertime in Prince Edward Island; our highest demand, our peak loads happen in the wintertime.

One of the most effective methods, which we are still fully supporting, for demand management is insulation. We're still fully funding that program. Our heat pump program – there are more than 1,000 applications in the pipeline that we have fully funded so that they will be processed through this budget.

The Leader of the Opposition is talking about pulling away affordability measures. Absolutely not. That is a priority of this government, and our signature program on that front is the Island essentials benefit. Islanders are going to start seeing cheques in about six weeks. They can spend that money and use it to offset their growing expenses in any way they see fit.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we head into another busy summer tourism season, Islanders are already worried about emergency room wait times, staff shortages, and temporary service reductions across the province. Frontline health care workers are stretched thin, and demand is only about to increase as thousands of visitors and seasonal residents arrive in Prince Edward Island.

Summer health care coverage

Question to the Minister of Health: What specific measures has this government put in place to ensure emergency rooms, hospitals, and frontline staff are properly supported heading into the summer months?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly, a good question as our population usually tends to explode in the summer. Obviously, our staff, our frontline staff in the ERs, work extremely hard. They're dedicated, passionate staff. I believe we've hired a new head of the ER for the QEH. I do believe there might be one or two new physicians, ER documents, starting at the QEH. One might be PCH.

[1:30 p.m.]

I actually talked to a few of the residents that we have here on PEI, and I know one of them wants to work at the PCH in the ER, so that's good news. We'll also be adding a CT scanner in the ER at the QEH, which will help with recruitment and with patient safety as well.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, last year there were 95,000 people that attended the ER, so I think we're going to need more than one or two doctors. We need a plan is what I'm saying.

Islanders have watched emergency rooms close repeatedly, particularly in rural Prince Edward Island, while health care workers continue to sound the alarm about burnout, staffing shortages, and challenging work environments. People deserve confidence that emergency care will actually be there when they need it in the summer.

Can the minister guarantee Islanders that there will be no further emergency room closures or service reductions this summer, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Well, no, of course I can't guarantee that, Mr. Speaker. I'd be lying if I said yes.

Of course, there are issues staffing the rural ERs in Montague and Western Hospital. I think they've tried to minimize as much as possible those closures, which I think they've done a good job of the last several years. We did see an early closure, I think last week, at KCMH. They were short-staffed.

At least in Montague's situation, at the KCMH, I know that that issue is more so with physician coverage, not nursing coverage. They do have the nurses available for the ER, but it's physician coverage of course. It's a very demanding job. Not as many family doctors want to work in the ER anymore just due to the hours and the demands that they have on their jobs, which is completely understandable. Our investments of a CT scanner at the QEH in the ER, KCMH in the ER, and Western in the ER will help recruit physicians to those facilities.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the emergency department at Kings County Memorial Hospital, which the minister did mention, now has been closed on weekends for 16 months under what government continues to call a "temporary closure." The minister just pointed to why, but at some point, Islanders stopped believing the word "temporary." You've had enough time to open that up.

Kings County Memorial Hospital (further)

Question to the minister: When does this government realistically expect weekend emergency services at the KCMH to fully reopen?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I wish I could make this happen tomorrow, of course – obviously, being in my own district and something I've asked many questions on as a backbencher before I was a minister. Obviously, the issue comes down to physician coverage. If we don't have the physicians to cover the shifts, we can't open on the weekends. Obviously, safety has to be a number one priority as well; we can't stretch our physicians too thin.

I know that one of the residents that we do have has an interest in working at the ER in Montague, and I met with another ER physician that's looking to relocate here from I believe Ontario, that wants to pick up shifts at the ER at the KCMH as well. Will that mean it's going to open on the weekends? I can't say that for sure. Obviously, that would be our goal, but there has to be a huge push on recruitment.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Yeah, and I agree, but we could start by unpausing the MOA and getting that signed for doctors as soon as we possibly can. That would be a start.

Islanders in eastern Prince Edward Island are growing frustrated with the lack of transparency around the future of the emergency services at the KCMH and across Prince Edward Island. We understand the challenges that our system is facing, some of them the minister just talked about; however, one thing that shouldn't be a challenge for this government is to be upfront with Islanders. Right now, they're not being straight about calling this a temporary measure. Families deserve clarity instead of ongoing uncertainty and vague timelines.

Question: Will the minister finally admit that this is no longer a temporary closure and tell Islanders whether the government is moving towards a permanent Monday-Friday emergency room model at the KCMH?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I think the staff at the KCMH, particularly in the ER, would tell you that it's not simply somewhere you stop to get a Band-Aid put on; they save lives there. There are heart attacks, et cetera. They do save lives there. It's an extremely important service for rural PEI, in my district and all of Kings County in particular.

We want it to be temporary, of course. We don't want it to be permanent. Like the member said, this has gone on now for, I think, 16 months. It was early in 2023 that this was announced, to much frustration to myself and other MLAs in Kings County.

The member did mention the MOA and to unpause it and get going. It was the Medical Society and the physicians that have asked us to pause the MOA, so I'm not sure why the member is against the Medical Society and all the physicians on Prince Edward Island. It would be nice if...

[1:35 p.m.]

[Interjections]

Hon. C. Deagle: We have a good relationship – an excellent relationship – now with the Medical Society of PEI, and we’re rebuilding that relationship with the doctors. I’m not sure where the hon. member is coming from.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Seafood 2000 is a major oyster processor and employer in eastern Prince Edward Island. It’s now under creditor protection, and the ripple effect is already being felt. Oyster growers and suppliers across the Island who delivered product in good faith are sitting there wondering if they’re ever going to see their money.

Before this government starts talking about what it might do to help Seafood 2000, I’d like to know what it’s done already, if anything.

Oyster industry (further)

Question to the Premier: Has your government provided, committed to, or even discussed any financial assistance, loan guarantees, or support measures for Seafood 2000, and what, if anything, has been considered for the oyster growers and small suppliers who delivered oysters to that company so they get paid first?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Through a court process, the government has put itself in a position of holding first security on Seafood 2000. We are in a position to finance the company so that its payables to fishermen that it’s already bought product from will be fulfilled so that lobster fishermen and oyster fishermen will be in a position to be paid for the products that they’ve sold to the company.

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

R. Henderson: Well, I admit, that’s helpful, Premier. I really appreciate that.

But when a big company gets into trouble, government gets pressured to step in. Sometimes it’s the right call. Jobs matter, and communities depend on these facilities, so I understand that.

But I’ve had a hard time explaining to a family oyster grower in my constituency why this government moved quickly to support a large processor under court protection while that grower is still waiting to find out whether they get money.

These small operators can’t file for credit protection as easily, and they don’t get a stay of proceedings; they just get left holding the bag.

Question to the Premier: What criteria is this government using to decide whether Seafood 2000 gets public support? Will those same growers and small suppliers and other processors that are in a similar situation get support as well?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for his question and certainly his advocacy for a real important industry here on PEI.

What we are doing is helping the fishers that do process through that plant. The idea is to ensure that they do get paid for the hard work that they’ve done. It’s not about standing up a company that’s struggling. It is about helping the fishermen that are there.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Well, that’s good that you’re going to help Seafood 2000, but there’s another processor in my district that’s in a similar situation, and those growers haven’t been paid.

Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. Here’s the rub. A grower goes out, harvests oysters, delivers them to a processor – they do everything right. The processor takes the product, sells them, keeps the oysters, keeps the money, and then moves on. Then, that grower – this is the grower – applies for the oyster loss mitigation program, the program this government set up to help people exactly in the same kind of trouble. They can’t claim those sales because they didn’t actually get paid. So, the program seems to set up an income that was never deposited, and the grower gets shortchanged again.

I'm sure this looks good on paper, but question now to the Minister of Fisheries: How many growers are sitting in this situation right now – delivered their oysters but never got a cheque – and the mechanism for them to get compensation through the program doesn't exist?

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

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

I do appreciate the question that the hon. member has brought forward. It is an excellent one. You look at the mitigation programs that were in place before. Did they fulfill every need that was out there? I'll be honest; as minister, as an MLA from an area that has a very large oyster grower/processing –

R. Henderson: Correct it.

Hon. E. Hudson: Well, that's the thing, too. I hear the hon. member say: "Correct it." You look at the announcement that was made last week. That is part of the process.

But I think one of the most important things that came out of the announcement last week – in addition to the millions of dollars that government is putting in – is the steering committee that is meeting every week, sometimes two times a week, comprised of not only representatives from my department but from the stakeholders right across the board, to hear what that need is, to hear that type of feedback, and for us to act upon it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

[1:40 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: The 57 Island families who live in Evergreen Village in Summerside have been waiting for almost two years for help saving their homes. Some of the residents are seniors. Some are families with children, and many live in homes that represent their entire life savings.

I've been asking now four different Housing ministers to help these families and have gotten nowhere. This issue is going to take a leader who is bold enough and confident enough to act.

Evergreen Village mobile home park (further)

Question to the Premier: Will you, Mr. Premier, be that leader and finally, once and for all, take the action necessary to save these Islanders their homes?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

It's certainly a very unfortunate situation the people of Evergreen Village have been put in. I received an email the other day from a resident. It outlined just how difficult this process has been for the residents of the park. It is unfortunate that the property owner, the landowner, has not been cooperative throughout this process.

There is an application before IRAC at this time. The Leader of the Third Party is asking for action. He's not specifying any particular action, and I think that underscores the difficulty of this situation. But the government has been at the table, the government has made offers of assistance, of help, of different options on how this can be resolved, and we'll continue to engage with them to help the residents of the park get through this.

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

M. MacFarlane: These residents, Mr. Speaker, have been living in a constant state of uncertainty for almost two years now. That is unacceptable. They tell me they've received almost no help from any of the Housing ministers over that time, and even their own local MLA has stopped communicating with them.

Question to the Premier. The eviction date for these 57 families is now five months away. The Premier wanted a specific course of action that he could pursue. Here's one, Mr. Premier: Will you expropriate the land and save these homes for these families?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

As the member knows, we can't expropriate this land. It wouldn't be for infrastructure needs for

the greater of the province. I do recognize the challenging times that these people are in. I do recognize it, but it's between the landlord and the tenants. It is with IRAC right now. I encourage them to follow the process with IRAC.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, the Premier referenced a letter in his earlier response. I beg your indulgence. I'm going to read a passage from that letter that he and I received last week from one of the residents of Evergreen Village. Here's the passage I'm going to read:

"I cannot adequately describe the emotional toll this has taken on our community. People are living in constant fear. Families are struggling to function under the pressure of uncertainty. We are doing everything we can to prevent a completely avoidable housing disaster, but we are running out of options, resources, and time. We are asking for your help. We are asking the Province to intervene in whatever capacity possible before 57 households are permanently displaced."

That's the passage. I'm going to ask this Premier again: Mr. Premier, IRAC is not going to solve this problem for these residents. Will you take the action necessary, use the legal tools readily available to you – including expropriation, which is a legal remedy available to you – and save these homes for these 57 families?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

As I stated before, I think it's a must that they follow the process with IRAC. I think they're in a good position. I can't give sound legal advice, but I'm sure you can. This is the process. This is what the *Residential Tenancy Act* is in place for. It's there. The City of Summerside has publicly said that there are no rezoning applications. There would have to be demolition permits issued for the landlord for the change of use of the property. They need to follow the process.

I do know the stress that they're under. I do feel for them. But we can't go out and buy and

overpay for a piece of land because the landlord is putting leverage on its residents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It's been over two years since the infamous property in Point Deroche changed hands following years of controversy and public outcry. The new owner, Tim Banks, bought the property in 2023 for \$2.3 million. Some parts of the existing steel structure are only 35 feet from the top of the rock wall, which is a clear violation of the *Planning Act* setback requirements, which require at least 75 feet.

[1:45 p.m.]

The only time a variance like this can be granted is if the property is simply too small to allow for the 75 feet, but of course, in this case, there are 17.5 acres going back almost a kilometre.

Point Deroche properties

A question to the Premier: You were the minister responsible for this file back at the time of the variance. Why was a variance granted given that there is all kinds of room for a proper setback in compliance with the requirements?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

This is certainly a blast from the past, and I'd have to refamiliarize myself with the details of this. But I do recall standing in this Legislature and explaining to the member that this was in accordance with the act. He describes it as in contravention of the act.

The Land division explained this thoroughly at the time. I'm happy to revisit this. I'm happy with the facts of the case and how it was handled by the division, but I have to refamiliarize myself entirely with the facts to answer this question very specifically.

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

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

I'm not (Indistinct) everybody in this room shares your joy at the way things were handled, Mr. Premier.

You were also responsible for the file when the previous owner, Jesse Rasche, obtained the 47-acre property right next door. Buying it under his Island contractor Nicholas Jay's name meant that the purchase didn't have to go through IRAC. Then, when the sale of both of those properties at the same time to Mr. Banks happened, all of the funds went directly to a company owned by Mr. Rasche.

To the Premier: It's now absolutely clear that using Mr. Jay's name was nothing but a front. You argued in this House when challenged about that sale that this was all fine – there's nothing to see here. Do you still feel that way?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, I wasn't there at the time, but the department was, and I rely on the department for the answers that we get. They're the knowledgeable people and we look to them for advice and make our decisions accordingly.

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

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

Mr. Banks paid \$2.3 million for those two properties. An online check shows that the appraised value of the property for tax purposes is not \$2.3 million but \$151,000, less than 7 percent of the market value. Now, of course, it's not unusual for there to be a variance between the market value and the appraised value, but it's certainly not normal for one to be 15 times the other.

A question to the Premier: Why, after more than two years, is Mr. Banks' property tax bill for Point Deroche still based on evaluation of \$151,000 rather than the \$2.3 million that he paid for them?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

The tax that is charged on a property is on the assessed value, not the market value, and I guess that's why, but it's something I could take back and look into, absolutely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Physicians across the health care system are continuing to raise concerns about the growing administrative burden that they're facing: the hours spent on paperwork, documentation, and system navigation that take away from what matters most – caring for our patients.

Reducing unnecessary administrative work is an important part in strengthening our health care system. It improves physician wellbeing, supports retention and recruitment, and ensures more patient-facing time within our existing workforce.

Administrative burden in health care

A question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: What steps are currently being taken to reduce administrative burden to support physicians and health care professionals in delivering care?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

It's good that the Member from Georgetown, after seven or eight weeks, has asked a health care question.

What I would say is that we have reduced the number of fee codes down – I think it's down to 25-ish now. I can't remember the exact number. We have AI scribe, of course, which is in its pilot infancy stages now, but I think that helps speed things up a little bit.

Now, of course, things are slower because of electronic medical records and how that works. A lot of the paperwork that physicians – family doctors in particular – are tied up with, and specialists as well, is a lot of requests like disability support, a lot of federal programs; patients might need that paperwork filled out, and the physician is required to complete that

paperwork. But a lot of it is under federal jurisdiction, some of that paperwork.

But we have tried to take many steps to reduce that burden on physicians.

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

[1:50 p.m.]

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the minister mentioned, new technologies are being introduced into the health care system at a rapid pace. Whether it's an integrated electronic health record, as he's mentioned, or streamlined referral pathways, it's important to understand how these tools are being used specifically to reduce administrative workload while supporting patient care. We want to ensure that technology is a bridge to better care, not a barrier.

A question to the Minister of Health: How is the health care system using new digital technologies to reduce administrative workloads for providers while supporting more patient-focused coordinated care?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: I'm not sure if the member was listening last week, but the Member from Summerside asked, I think, some of these exact same questions. AI scribe would be a pilot project that we're currently in. We'll be reviewing that when it's completed.

I know that Health PEI and the department work closely – I've actually been in meetings lately where we've discussed how we can reduce that administrative burden, further ways that we can reduce it. I know Nova Scotia has done a really good job at that, and I think there are more steps that we can take provincially to help reduce that burden as well.

Thank you.

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

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Reducing the administrative burden on our physicians and our health care professionals is

very key in recruitment and retention, and also, the Minister of Health has risen in this House on a number of occasions about the construction of the new Kings County Memorial Hospital and how that will help the recruitment and retention of health care professionals across the province.

Kings County Memorial Hospital (further)

The minister likes to pat himself on the back, but would he mind updating the House on the progress of the KCMH construction please?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: I need Mark McLane's rearview mirror, Mr. Speaker.

We do have the sign up for the site at the new hospital. That's a start. That's action.

I believe this summer the infrastructure will be installed – the road, water and sewer, et cetera, will go in – and then the first building that will be built will be the new community health centre, and then the hospital will come after that. That's all part of the capital budget that's been laid out in the fall. We're looking very much forward to that. It will be a huge help in recruiting staff and physicians to Kings County.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, rumour has it around the community that we're about to lose a key piece of our local health care. For a while now, folks have been hearing whispers that Dr. White is planning to leave his practice. In a small area like ours, news like that travels fast and it creates a lot of genuine worry for families who have relied on him for years. They're not looking for gossip. They're looking for the facts so they can start planning for their own health care future.

Access to primary care (further)

My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Is there any truth to these rumours, and can the minister confirm today if the department has received formal notice regarding the closure of Dr. White's practice?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I can – well, I guess not assure the member, but I can tell the member that no, it's not rumour that Dr. White is leaving his practice. They've decided for personal reasons to move and be closer to family. I believe that notice will go out to his patients this week. It might have already gone out. Health PEI has notified his patients.

Certainly, we don't want to lose any doctors, of course, but that's a decision they made. They have asked for privacy with this decision, and we'll respect that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, first supplementary.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about a small handful of people here. Dr. White has approximately 1,375 patients. That is over 1,300 people who are suddenly going to be looking for answers and likely headed for the registry. Our community is small, and a hit like this is felt by everyone.

To the same minister: With nearly 1,400 patients potentially losing their primary care provider, is the department looking at any specific community-based solutions to ensure these people aren't just left hanging?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

[1:55 p.m.]

I wish I had a better answer to give, that we had someone lined up to backfill Dr. White's position, but we don't. It's an extremely difficult market to recruit family doctors, and in this case, they're choosing to leave for completely personal reasons, and that's understandable.

What we have to do better at is recruiting, specifically family doctors. I think that started last week. We have so many residents here on PEI; we have to do a better job of keeping those physician residents on PEI. If you can believe it or not, some of them were never even reached out to, to stay.

So, that is changing now. They have to feel valued and want to stay here on PEI, so that's what we're doing now. Do I have good news for the member right now? No, but I think with outreach to the residents that we do have, we can see a good return in the future in keeping them here in PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, we know that finding a new family doctor doesn't happen overnight, but we can't just sit back and wait while 1,375 people struggle. We need to be a bit more creative in how we fill the gap in the meantime so the pressure doesn't just boil over.

Question to the same minister: Will your department work with Health PEI to bring a nurse practitioner into the community to help manage this patient overload and provide that essential care until a permanent family doctor can be recruited?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Of course, we would love to get a nurse practitioner and a physician as well and recruit them to the community. I wish we could tell a doctor or a nurse practitioner that this is where they are going. What we can do, though, is when we are recruiting, we can offer what we do have available, whether it's in Kensington, Montague, Souris, Tignish, Summerside.

We have to do a better job when we're recruiting to let physicians and nurse practitioners know that these are the options we do have. This is what the compensation is. Yes, we know PEI's a great place to live and work, but we've got to do a better job of selling what we can offer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I know of two oyster processors on PEI – one of them is in my riding – who haven't paid some of their fishers. It could be more.

Now, here's the interesting part: the minister's department pays these processors, and the Premier just said that the growers will be paid. The department has real leverage here, the kind that doesn't require new legislation, a task force, or a working group that reports back. It just requires someone to decide that maybe these processors should either settle up with their fishers before the next government cheque goes out, or it's important that the government directly pay those growers before they contribute any money to that processor.

Oyster industry (further)

Question to the Minister of Fisheries: Are there more than two processors who have been identified as not paying their growers or fishers, and will the minister use this funding relationship his department has with those growers to make sure that they get paid?

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank the hon. member for the question.

Can I state here with complete confidence the numbers? I cannot. I will go back though, certainly, to the department, find that out, and, as well, have the discussions with my department staff to see how we can address this concern that has been brought forward.

Again, thank the member.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

This government has committed a fair amount of time telling Islanders that they're committed to electric vehicles and green infrastructure, so I thought about our provincial parks – Cedar Dunes and Jacques Cartier in western PEI – and I figured there should be some fast-charging stations there. I know there are requests for that, but there aren't.

Look, there aren't people here coming to Prince Edward Island just with a regular EV anymore. Plenty of them are pulling RVs with an electric towed vehicle behind them. They arrive, or after a long drive, they need a charge in a rural park.

EV charging infrastructure

Question to the Minister of Tourism: Will Parks PEI be putting fast-charging stations at Cedar Dunes and Jacques Cartier Park – which is in his riding – this season, or will this be just another idea that never materializes?

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

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

It really pleases me to hear the hon. member have concern for Jacques Cartier Park as well. Generally, what I hear from him is with regard to Cedar Dunes, and that's certainly – I appreciate that as well.

[2:00 p.m.]

With regard to charging stations, it is something that I have had discussions with staff on to move forward on this. I do agree with what the hon. member is putting forward, certainly not only with regard to tourists – ones who may be coming to our beautiful province by way of electric vehicles – but also, certainly, we do have residents as well that stay there pretty well year-round. I've heard that. I'm sure the hon. member has as well. So, again, it's a discussion that I've had with staff before.

Thank you.

Statements by Ministers

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

Progress on Jenkins Report

Hon. R. Croucher: Mr. Speaker, in February, former Chief Justice David Jenkins delivered his much-anticipated report titled, "Student Safety in Island Schools: Handling of Complaints and Incidents of Staff Sexual Misconduct."

I commissioned that report after two incidents that put the safety of Island students at risk. The report examined those incidents and made more than 60 recommendations aimed at improving safety for students, teachers, administrators, and other school staff.

The report was delivered to me on February 10th and released to the public immediately and

without delay. From the moment we received the report, our message has been clear: we take these recommendations seriously, and we are committed to their implementation.

The work to address these issues and make our schools safer started long before we received the report, and much of what we did in the interim, in partnership with the two education authorities and other government departments, was reflected in the recommendations in the report, like improved background checks and hiring practices, and the development of a new sexual misconduct policy for all Island schools. And indeed, that work continued and expanded after we received the report and distilled the recommendations within it.

I'm pleased to report that the implementation of the recommendations in the report is progressing at a fevered pace. Staff in my department, in our two education authorities, in our schools, and in government departments have done an incredible job identifying the recommendations and building the policies necessary for their implementation.

As of today, 58 of the 61 recommendations contained in the report have either been implemented or are in various stages of progress.

Among many others, they include:

- Developing a sexual misconduct policy for Island schools;
- Ensuring both education authorities are meeting or exceeding incident reporting requirements;
- Completing a jurisdictional scan for additional safeguards for background checks beyond vulnerable sector checks;
- Ensuring all staff complete a criminal record check and a vulnerable sector check prior to hiring and requiring updates every three years thereafter;
- Ensuring an annual offence declaration for all staff, including immediate disclosure of new offences;
- Developing a new code of conduct for all Island schools;

- Improving training, mentoring, and support for school administrators and staff;
- Continued meetings between the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, our department, our educational authorities, and seeking advice in various areas including reporting flow, language use in policy, grooming training, and use of a central reporting system; and
- Developing a comprehensive incident tracking system.

In just a few minutes I will table an up-to-date action plan that outlines our progress on these and all other recommendations. That's something I promised the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park a few weeks ago, and I'm happy to follow through on that today. We would have tabled it sooner, but the work is progressing so quickly that the document required many updates before we were comfortable tabling it.

I firmly believe Island schools are safer today on account of the excellent work that's being done in the system. School staff, administrators, department officials, and the staff at our two education authorities deserve our praise for the efforts they've put in prior to the publication of the report, and since.

Director Tracy Beaulieu and assistant director Rob MacAdam are here today from the Public Schools Branch, and I know they and the CSLF share my commitment to these recommendations and to student safety. The work they've done and continue to do has helped to make our schools safer for all and has set the foundation for further improvements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for this announcement today and this statement. I very much look forward to the action plan.

As the minister has said, a huge thank you to the staff at the Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board and at the department for all the work that they have done to move this forward.

[2:05 p.m.]

The Jenkins report highlighted serious concerns within our education system – concerns about student and staff supports, communication, inclusion, safety, and the overall learning environments in our schools. These are not just simply abstract issues; they affect students every single day in classrooms across our province.

Parents want confidence that their children are attending school in safe environments, where they will be receiving the support they need to succeed. The teachers and educational assistants want to know they will have the resources, staffing, and classroom supports necessary to do their jobs effectively. Students deserve learning environments where they feel safe, supported, and able to thrive.

The updates are important; implementation is what matters. The real test will be whether government follows through. I look forward to the action plan with sustained investments, transparent timelines, and clear reporting outcomes. Now is not the time to cut.

We also know that many of the concerns raised in the Jenkins report cannot be resolved overnight. Addressing student safety, improving access to specialized support, recruiting and retaining the staff, and strengthening school culture will require long-term commitment, collaboration, and no cuts.

As the official opposition, we support meaningful action that improves outcomes for students and supports the dedicated professionals working in our schools. Islanders are not looking for more announcements alone; they are looking for measurable success and progress and accountability.

At the centre of this discussion must always be the students, their learning, their wellbeing, and their future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I'd like to thank the minister for that update. That was a kind of a crazy blip in time when it comes to education. While a lot of those gaps that were identified in the Jenkins report – happy

to hear that 58 of 61 of those are completed or nearing completion. I really look forward to seeing how those work out operationally.

I heard the minister reference the incident reporting. I know that one of the issues that I hear about regularly is – of course, not as it relates to sexual misconduct, but when complaints are filed, when issues happen and they are passed on, there is very little follow-up. There doesn't seem to be a connection between the incident being reported and figuring out what that looked like.

I look forward to seeing what this looks like operationally. I hope that some of those kinks have been worked out. When I did my consultations with the PSB, I mentioned those to them. They had said that they had heard them before. Those consultations – I felt very heard throughout those consultations. I heard that from a couple of other people.

I anxiously await the rollout of all of these to see what they look like, to see how they work. I hope that that's something that people will be keeping a close finger on because these processes are pointless if they're not ironed and they're not working properly. I assume that is part of the plan.

I heard the minister reference the action plan coming. I can't wait to look at that. The one that I keep asking you for is actually the inclusion model review action plan because a lot of the issues that were identified – I know that Justice Jenkins identified bullying; inclusion report identified violence. Those are things in our school that they identified as a bigger problem in terms of the amount of times that they happen.

We really need to incorporate that inclusion review action plan side by side with this. They don't stand alone.

Thank you.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table an email from Reasha Walsh dated May 13, to the

Premier and the Minister of Housing and Communities and to myself, outlining the serious concerns that she and 56 other families in Evergreen Village park have over the pending loss of their homes and their community, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a CBC web story dated May 18, 2026, entitled: “Is PEI behind the curve on sick notes? Labour expert says other provinces have moved on.” I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

[2:10 p.m.]

The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table an up-to-date action plan that describes the progress government and our educational authorities are making on the recommendations contained in *Student Safety in Island Schools: Handling of Complaints and Incidents of Staff Sexual Misconduct*, also known as the Jenkins report, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table *Prince Edward Island Equality Report Card 2026*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the background report results from focus groups and community consultations, which does a breakdown of where they got their mark for the Province comes from, and I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you once again.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the 2026 *Equality Report Card* assessment model, which shows the process and model that the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women used for this report card, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

And just to be sure, the previous document – shall that carry as well? Carried. I just wanted to make sure.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Orders Other Than Government

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

G. McNeilly: At this time, I'd like to call Bill 109.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 29, *An Act to Amend the Petroleum Products Act*, Bill No. 109, ordered for second reading.

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

G. McNeilly: By leave of the House, I'd like to call this bill back for second reading, a move

seconded – Committee of the Whole – seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[Laughter]

Speaker: That was a good try. We're going to get you the script here, member.

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Bill No. 109, *An Act to Amend the Petroleum Products Act*, read a second time.

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

G. McNeilly: 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 on the Member from Kensington-Malpeque to chair Committee of the Whole.

[M. MacKay in the chair]

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

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

Hon. H. Perry: Yes. I do, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

[2:15 p.m.]

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

Madison Ranta: Good afternoon. My name is Madison Ranta. I'm the director of public affairs and public engagement here at the opposition office.

Chair: Thanks, Madison.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

Hon. H. Perry: I do. Thank you very much.

I'm very pleased to bring this amendment forward. It's a piece of legislation that would bring Prince Edward Island in line with the rest of Atlantic Canada by adopting the New York benchmark pricing model for fuel regulation.

This bill is about something very simple: transparency, consistency, and fairness for Islanders. For years, Islanders have been told that fuel pricing on Prince Edward Island is regulated in a way that protects consumers and creates stability. Yet, despite that promise, Islanders continue to feel frustrated every single week when they pull up to the pumps.

They look across the bridge; they look to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and they compare the prices, they compare systems, and many are left asking one simple question: Why does Prince Edward Island continue to do things differently? This legislation attempts to answer that question.

Right now, Prince Edward Island uses the Charlottetown rack price as the benchmark for setting fuel prices here. Other Atlantic Provinces use the New York Harbour benchmark model – the pricing system that's tied to a broader North American commodity market and one that is viewed as more transparent.

The problem is not simply that PEI is different, the problem is that the current system has created confusion instead of clarity. It has created skepticism instead of confidence, and it has created a process that many Islanders simply do not understand.

The report commissioned by IRAC in 2023 states that a benchmark pricing system should satisfy four basic principles: it should be competitively determined, it should be relevant, it should be timely, and it should be transparent. Those are common sense expectations and I agree with them. In order to be effective, the benchmark system that we use must provide market relevance and transparency while balancing regulatory stability.

Unfortunately, the current Charlottetown rack system has increasingly failed to meet those expectations, and the reality is Islanders do not see any transparency in the current system. They see unpredictability, they see explanations that change depending on the week, and they see a few prices moving in ways that often do not

align with public expectations of global oil markets or what is happening elsewhere in the region. Our region is too small to silo itself. Perhaps most importantly, Islanders see Prince Edward Island standing alone while every other Atlantic Province uses the same, which is the New York Harbour benchmark model.

The bill simply proposes making our benchmark pricing for fuel consistent with our neighbouring provinces here in Atlantic Canada. Our regulatory body still has an important role to play. The broader review currently underway at IRAC can continue and address the other areas that may require modernization or reform, but this legislation is focused specifically on benchmark pricing.

The amendment also recognizes that fuel pricing is complicated. Petroleum pricing is influenced by global commodity markets, refining costs, transportation costs, taxes, wholesale and retail margins, supply chain pressures, and geopolitical instability.

We understand that no pricing model is perfect, but when a system becomes so complicated that ordinary Islanders lose confidence in it, legislators have a responsibility to act. Our hope is that adopting this benchmark model will show Islanders that we are serious about fairness, consistency, and transparency right across the board.

We continue to hope that IRAC will become more transparent in how fuel prices are set. We believe this legislation is a step in the right direction.

The world today is facing enormous instability in energy markets. We are seeing continued uncertainty because of the conflict in the Middle East. We are seeing supply chain volatility and shifting international demand. Islanders are feeling the consequences of that instability every single day.

For many families, fuel is required. People need to drive to work. They need to get their kids to school. They need to attend medical appointments. Small businesses rely on manageable transportation cost. Farmers rely on fuel. Fishers rely on fuel. Tradespeople rely on fuel. And when fuel prices rise unexpectedly, it ripples through every part of Island life. That's why transparency matters, that's why predictability matters, and that's why

consistency with the rest of Atlantic Canada matter.

[2:20 p.m.]

Our Atlantic Provinces have already adopted the New York benchmark model because it reflects a broader and more widely recognized market reference point. It is publicly understood, externally referenced, and provides continuity across the region. So, the question becomes: Why not us? Why not us on Prince Edward Island?

Prince Edward Island should not continue operating on a separate benchmark system that leaves Islanders asking more questions than answers. The IRAC review itself acknowledges that other Atlantic jurisdictions rely on New York Harbour pricing and apply adjustments around carbon compliance and transportation costs within their pricing formulas. This bill recognizes that PEI can modernize its benchmark system while still maintaining regulatory oversight and consumer protections.

I also want to be clear: this legislation does not promise overnight reductions in fuel prices – anyone who says there is a magic wand when it comes to the global petroleum market is simply not being honest – but what this legislation does promise is a more understandable and regionally consistent framework. It promises a system Islanders can better follow, better understand, and better evaluate for themselves because ultimately, public confidence matters. When Islanders do not trust how prices are set, that undermines confidence in the entire regulatory system.

This House has a responsibility not just to regulate but to ensure the systems that we create are understandable to the people that we serve. Government should not hide behind complexity. Regulators should not operate behind a curtain of technical language that leaves ordinary Islanders disconnected from decisions that directly affect their wallets. Transparency should not require a consultant's report to decipher. Islanders should not need to become petroleum market experts just to understand why they're paying what they're paying at the pump.

This legislation is about modernization. It's about regional alignment. It's about bringing Prince Edward Island in line with the rest of Atlantic Canada. Most importantly, it's about rebuilding public confidence in a system that

many Islanders increasingly feel disconnected from. We believe it is our responsibility as legislators to bring forward measures that improve clarity, improve consistency, and strengthen public trust. That is exactly what this bill seeks to do.

I encourage all members of this House to seriously consider the intent of this legislation and the broader conversation Islanders are asking us to have about fuel prices.

Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: Thank you, Chair.

I guess my first question would be: Can you show the math that compares your differences in the New York Harbour versus the Charlottetown rack?

Hon. H. Perry: Can we show the math that shows the differences between the New York and the...?

Hon. K. Dollar: Yeah. So, how are you sure that this is going to be a better model than what we're currently using?

Hon. H. Perry: Well, the New York Harbour benchmark represents one of the largest and most liquid delivery points for refined products, based, obviously, out of New York. It's a highly reliable indicator of baseline costs for suppliers.

Those who are using the New York Harbour benchmark are using a price that is – the wholesaler is determined by the New York benchmark. They have a wholesale price, basically, is what it is.

Here in Charlottetown, the rack price refers to the wholesale price, again, of fuel, but it is basically from our wholesaler, which I can say is basically the Irvings, that sell here to Prince Edward Island. They set a price, and Islanders basically.... There is a price within the formula; all the rest of it remains the same, but those two prices can differ.

[2:25 p.m.]

We all know we can go online and check what the New York Harbour benchmark price is – cents per litre – at any given time, but we can't find the Charlottetown one online. You have to do some serious asking about it. And there is a difference in the price. We've seen it over the years; we've seen it anytime you leave the Island that there's a difference in the price at the pump. Within the rack price, when we do find out what the rack price is, there still is a difference there in the cents per litre that is not accounted for.

So, we're asking for more transparency where the New York benchmark gives transparency on what the wholesale price is and Charlottetown doesn't.

Hon. K. Dollar: When you're looking at the New York Harbor price and the Charlottetown rack price, are you taking into consideration the clean fuel regulations from...?

Madison Ranta: Is that in relation to the ethanol content in the fuel, do you mean?

Hon. K. Dollar: Well, I think the clean fuel regulations get added. I think you should be telling me, shouldn't you?

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. I'll give you something right here.

This is how the price of gas is determined here on Prince Edward Island right now:

Basically, you have the rack price, which comes from the wholesaler. Your rack price is set there, and that's cents per litre. Then, you have the wholesale margin, which is five cents per litre. You have a federal excise tax, which is ten cents per litre on it. You have the provincial gas tax, which is 8.47 cents per litre. Then you have – there's a federal fuel charge on it. I don't think right now it is on it though, to be quite honest – not at the moment. But then, of course, you throw HST – 15 percent – on top of that, and that gives you your retail pump price.

Hon. K. Dollar: So, this is for all petroleum products. Is propane included or not?

Hon. H. Perry: This is for gasoline, diesel, and home heating fuel.

Hon. K. Dollar: Okay. So, what are the price variances today in our gasoline, diesel, and home heating oil?

Hon. H. Perry: I'm not sure what they are today, but I can give you a price of what the gas is today.

So, we can give you – the wholesale difference on it is.... We can't give it today. I can go online and get it, to be quite honest, for what it is in New York, but I can't give you today's.... That's what this bill is for. It's about that transparency. I can't give you what the rack price is here for Prince Edward Island, but I can give you the New York Harbor benchmark price because you can get it online on a daily basis.

Let's go back to May 15th; that was the last time I could find the Charlottetown rack price. It was \$1.60.3 and the New York Harbor price on the same day was \$1.45 to \$1.48.

Hon. K. Dollar: Okay. So, today diesel in New Brunswick is \$2.31 and PEI is \$2.29, heating oil is \$1.71 on PEI and New Brunswick's is \$2.24, supreme gasoline is \$2.18 in New Brunswick and it's \$2.17 in PEI. Where we get into the difference and the variance in price is with regular and the medium blend, which has ethanol in it, which reduces the cost with the clean fuel regulations and so on. That's where the variance is.

With what I'm looking at the numbers today and knowing ethanol is the biggest variance, I don't think we should move from the pricing model that we're doing now because we're actually cheaper when you take the ethanol out of it.

Hon. H. Perry: So, of course, ethanol blended gasoline – Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have a lot of that, but on Prince Edward Island, we have very little on it. I guess it's primarily because of the shipping process of it coming in by boat to Prince Edward Island, let's say. The ethanol in the water – not that they mix together, but I think that the water – the moisture or whatever it is...

Madison Ranta: The chemical reaction.

Hon. H. Perry: ...changes the makeup, and it puts the.... One of them is heavier than the other; I can't remember which one it is.

Madison Ranta: The ethanol will blend with the humidity and the sea air and sink and separate.

Hon. H. Perry: So, that is the difference there. But right now, there is sometimes a ten-cent difference between PEI and Nova Scotia, let's say, but it really should only be two or three cents for the transportation part of it.

Chair: The Minister of Transportation and four others.

[Laughter]

[2:30 p.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you very much, Chair.

Proponent of the bill, I do want to thank you for bringing it forward. I think that everybody in this Legislature, we want the best – the lowest possible – prices for our industry, whether that's agriculture, whether that's fisheries, whether it's for Islanders who are travelling. We absolutely all want that. We do realize that there are so many things that are outside of our control.

One of the things, too, though, that I would love to see is just over the last number of months – number of years as well – what the difference in price would be between the process that we have now, the Charlottetown rack, and the New York Harbour.

Do you have any information on that at all, comparisons over the last number of months or years?

Madison Ranta: There was a report that was prepared for IRAC. It's available on the commission's website. It was prepared by Signal Energy Consulting. The consultant who prepared the report has a few graphs which chart over the period of time the differences between using the Charlottetown rack price and the New York Harbour benchmark. What we're seeing is consistently that the Charlottetown rack price over time is several cents higher than that New York Harbour benchmark.

Hon. E. Hudson: With that, was that just for regular gasoline? Was that across the board – furnace oil, diesel oil, high-grade/test gasolines – or was that just one particular fuel type?

Madison Ranta: I don't have the entire report here in front of me. My understanding, though,

is that it would be for the various different types of – understanding that over time, there may be different market factors that impact the price, but that generally speaking, over time, the prices based on the Charlottetown rack are consistently higher than those based on the New York Harbour benchmark.

Hon. E. Hudson: One of the things that the proponent of the bill had mentioned in his opening comments was with regard to – our primary industries are certainly agriculture and fisheries – the reliance on fuel, and the majority of that cost, to be honest, as we both know or as we all know, is diesel.

Hearing the comparison that my counterpart here has made from Housing and Communities where diesel is actually a bit cheaper here in the province, could you comment on that? Is there a reason for that? Because New Brunswick uses New York Harbour, but yet they have a higher price right now for diesel, which would have a negative impact on our primary industries.

Hon. H. Perry: Absolutely. It can fluctuate. It's not every day that it's cheaper, but over say a period of time, over the year, we've seen that the prices are lower, and lower in the other Atlantic Provinces that use the New York Harbour benchmark for it.

Today may be a day that, of course, diesel might be a little bit higher to purchase here. This is why we're trying to bring in this amendment: to make it a little bit more clear to Islanders as to how and why the pricing is different between here and the other Atlantic Provinces. Not knowing exactly what the wholesale price may be at the time of price adjustments, it's difficult to answer that question.

Hon. E. Hudson: I certainly appreciate your honesty on that, that it's difficult to answer the question. I guess it goes back to my first question just with regard to information that you might have over the last number of months/years, and not only for gasoline but, again, for furnace oil, for diesel fuel, certainly, for our primary industries.

[2:35 p.m.]

As I had said in my opening comments, I think – I know – everybody in here wants to be able to have a system in place that does provide the lowest cost to Islanders and to our businesses on the Island. It does concern me that potentially –

and I'll stress that word “potentially” – by approving this amendment, we ultimately could see higher prices over the next month, number of months, number of years, and the impact that that would have.

I don't know if you have a comment on that.

Hon. H. Perry: I'll just comment on it, and thank you for the question.

What we hear from Islanders, and we hear it a lot, is: Why is there such a difference in the price of fuel here on Prince Edward Island? Compared to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in particular, because (Indistinct) many would travel. This is what we're trying to address; there are many questions. IRAC is the regulatory board for fuel pricing here on Prince Edward Island, and unfortunately, Islanders have lost confidence in IRAC because they don't understand how these prices are set, and the changes in it.

At one time the price was set at the first of the month or at the end of the month – whatever – and then it was one more time in the middle. You could almost rely on that. Now, it's so sporadic; you don't know if it's going to be two in one day or three in a week.

Islanders really want to have a better understanding, and they should have that transparency of knowing how the price is set and why. That doesn't mean it's going to be consistently lower than other provinces – there are other factors that may be involved – but overall, we've seen that the price is lower in our sister provinces than it is here.

I'm going to go back to what I said earlier – that the industry gets to set the Charlottetown rack price. So, they get to set that basically every day, but that information is not given out to everybody. It's not given out to Islanders, where the New York benchmark – everybody knows because it's posted online. We know what that wholesale price is. I think that's more transparent and more fair to compare gas prices if everyone is using the same benchmark within the Atlantic Provinces so it's basically apples to apples.

Unlike the New York benchmark, the Charlottetown rack price doesn't benefit from – I started by saying this earlier – a highly liquid market that's characterized by large volumes with many sellers and many buyers. So, those

primary wholesalers are based off of New York Harbour and not the Charlottetown one, and there is some variance within that pricing wholesaler that we are not aware of. So, I'm not sure how that plays. That's what I'm talking about – the transparency and the consistency part.

The Charlottetown rack doesn't allow that transparency, and Islanders have a lot of questions, where the New York Harbour benchmark would give that transparency to Islanders so they have a better understanding of why these fuel prices are what they are today.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, member, for the bill, and Madison for being here.

Madison, in a response to an earlier question, you referenced a report or review that was done on petroleum prices a few years ago. The Signal report, I think you may have said that it was. I brought that up just because I'm interested in the discussion on the fluctuation and the variation.

As I read the graph that you might have been referring to, Madison, it goes back to January 2012 and comes forward to July 2021 – so, quite a period of time – and it shows a consistent price difference of between five to ten cents per litre between the New York Harbour versus the Charlottetown wholesale gasoline pricing.

So, to be clear, it shows that the price for the Charlottetown rack price is consistently between 5 to 10 cents per litre higher over a period of nine years. Is that consistent with what your research has shown in the preparation for this bill?

[2:40 p.m.]

Madison Ranta: Yes. Just looking at, as you mentioned, the Signal Energy Consulting report – and there had been a previous report prepared, I think in 2023, by the Gardner Pinfold group as well, for IRAC, looking into this issue about the New York Harbour benchmark and the Charlottetown rack price – that's our understanding in reviewing that research. There's been that consistent price difference.

M. MacFarlane: Right. So, I think, member, you were a little hesitant in your response about

that it would result in cheaper gas prices, but I think we've got a period of nine years here where actually the research shows that there would be a price reduction for Islanders of between five and ten cents per litre.

I just wanted to point out that it does seem evident on its face when we're talking about wholesale gasoline price that it would result in quite a drop in price – five to ten cents per litre – at least up until very recently. I know we fluctuate our prices here more often than other provinces, so it does take time to show a trend.

I think if we just do a point-in-time look at the price of gas now, it might show a variation of a certain amount, but if we look at it a week from now or a month from now or if we average out a year, which is what this graph does, it does seem to show that there is a price reduction by moving to the New York Harbour benchmark price. I'm just not sure if just taking a snapshot of the price of gas as we're driving by today and comparing it with Port Elgin would be the best way to determine if this would make a difference.

Do you know, member, the bill you're bringing forward, is this all that would be necessary to compel IRAC to make this change in pricing gas or would there be something else further necessary by way of regulations or something? Will this do the trick?

Hon. H. Perry: First off, I will say thanks for the question and, yes, that does make sense because the New York benchmark pricing is historically cheaper than the Charlottetown rack price. We know that.

In New Brunswick, it can change because their formula is a little bit different. Our formula is set over here by IRAC. The only thing that's going to change in the formula here on Prince Edward Island is that price; the rack price is the only thing that's going to change here. But each one has their own formula for that.

With that, yeah, I'm sorry we didn't have that information because we're kind of – I know you have to know the history to bring it here, but to move forward – basically, from what we have in this legislation, it's quite simple when you look at it. It's just a substitution of the words, basically, by taking out the Charlottetown rack and putting in the New York benchmark and that's it.

But I'll let this go to our legal expert, regarding if there's any other legislation that's required after any other – what's required after this legislation, or is this piece of legislation, this amendment, what will change the formula.

Chair: Maybe just before we go there, Madison, we have an intervention from the hon. Finance minister regarding.

Hon. J. Burridge: It's just to clarify the gap that the Leader of the Third Party is talking about, over time. The New York Harbour price is the landed price at New York. You still need to factor in that the fuel still needs to arrive in PEI. The New York rate is just landed at New York Harbour. Beyond that, and what closes that gap, is the transportation costs and the shipping costs to get it to PEI. By the time it gets here, the gap isn't as big. There's shipping and there's lots of other related costs that come in there.

That gap that the Leader of the Third Party is talking about is typically closed through those shipping and transportation costs that are added on from getting the fuel from New York to Prince Edward Island.

Hon. H. Perry: This particular amendment – did you want to address the question from the Leader of the Third Party regarding if this is enough?

Madison Ranta: Sure. I would just say this amendment – right now, section 31 of the *Petroleum Products Act* effectively gives IRAC complete discretion over how they're going to determine the pricing.

The effect of this change is saying that subject to using the New York Harbour benchmark as a starting point, IRAC would still have discretion to determine the rest of their formula that they use to ultimately arrive at the price.

Our understanding is that IRAC may have some internal policy work that they would have to do to update their formulas or their pricing models to align with the New York Harbour benchmark over the Charlottetown rack, but our understanding is that there wouldn't necessarily have to be significant regulatory work done.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

[2:45 p.m.]

The transportation cost is an interesting angle on it because, as we know, my district includes Borden, right at the bridge. Port Elgin is a half an hour drive away, but the price there is consistently lower than what it is on the PEI of the bridge. The shipping distance is really not that significant, just to come across the bridge; the price now is down to \$20.

From what I'm hearing from people in my district who operate landscaping companies, heavy equipment operators – they're filling tanks, they're driving over the bridge to Port Elgin, filling tanks with diesel, and driving back because the price differential is such that it makes business sense for them to do that. That's the hurting the three – I guess maybe soon to be four – gas stations in Borden because people are driving over. That's not helping the local economy any because they're getting petroleum, they're getting diesel cheaper over across.

[Interjections]

Chair: Quiet, members.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: I'd be interested in any thoughts about the transportation element to it, but I guess that's my last question, Chair.

I mean, I fully support the bill. I've asked the question of the Premier as well in Question Period, asking him for this (Indistinct) change to be made. I appreciate you bringing the bill forward.

Hon. H. Perry: I just want to comment on that because I would say the transportation costs need to be clearly outlined, and right now they're not clearly outlined. That's what this bill will do.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burridge: I hear you on the transparency. I think that that sounds like that's almost a bigger issue to you than – it's the transparency of how that Charlottetown rack is built. I can absolutely see that. I think that can be fixed.

But to take away, I think, the flexibility and hook us into the new – like, right now, we have flexibility to then.... If you put New York in there and basically tie us to that, then given everything that's going on and around the world

– it's tied to U.S. currency, it's tied to geopolitical conflict and what's going down south of the border – I think it's best, and I think this is basically what the report tells us, which was done by Signal Energy Consulting put out March 31st, 2026; they're experts in downstream petroleum sector and their recommendation is: "We recommend that the Commission continue using a rack-based benchmark, without changes to its current approach. The rack-based benchmark has clearly demonstrated an effective balance between benefits and manageable risks."

I guess what I'm getting at, south of the border, is that there is more and more risk every day. To be able to get that pricing closer to our shores minimizes a bit of that risk. This has been a critical tool in meeting the regulatory objectives. I guess I would just want to put that to you what your thoughts are on the recommendations within the report.

Hon. H. Perry: There are a few things. Charlottetown is also at the whim of international markets basically. They, too, are, so they're not.... The issue is that with Charlottetown, it's secretive; we don't know what those costs are.

But if you're talking about the formula and.... Well, I can put it back to you. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland all use the New York Harbour benchmark. So, I guess I could put it back to you or to whomever because these are the questions that – I don't have questions on transparency alone; this is from talking to Islanders over and over again. This didn't just happen yesterday; this is over a long period of time. I'm sure everyone in this room has heard people, whether they're constituents or coffee shop talk, about the price of fuel here on Prince Edward Island compared to what it is in the mainland, and wondering why it is – and they always say cheaper – cheaper across.

That's why this amendment is being brought forward by us, because we want to make it less transparent and give Islanders an opportunity to know how gas pricing is made and that's our primary concern.

Did you want to talk about the report, the Signal report on the recommendation?

[2:50 p.m.]

Madison Ranta: Sure.

The only thing I would add to that with respect to the report is that my understanding is that at the beginning of this month, IRAC had sent back a list of interrogatories to Signal with a number of different questions that they had with respect to the final recommendations of the report to stick with the Charlottetown rack price. I'm not aware that Signal has responded to the commission with its answers to those interrogatories, but my understanding is that IRAC has some questions about that conclusion, it seems, based on the interrogatories that they had for Signal.

Hon. J. Burridge: I think what we're doing here is we're making this exceptionally rigid in a time where we could absolutely use flexibility to manage risk going on around.

The way it is right now, I think there is that flexibility there, but if we code into the *Petroleum Products Act* that we're to base it off the New York Harbour rate, that ties us to that when I think we could manage risk a little bit better and maybe get better pricing with a little flexibility.

I'd be really interested to hear your thoughts on the loss of flexibility that we would have today that we lose if this bill is passed.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm not sure what you mean by the loss of flexibility or the risk. Can you just elaborate on that?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think it's pretty clear.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm not sure what you mean by the loss of flexibility, that we will lose flexibility. We were to use within the formula, the New York Harbour benchmark price, that's the only thing that's changed here. How does that change the flexibility and how is that more of a risk whenever – or even less of a risk – whenever the New York benchmark has such a huge volume whereas, in particular where we're buying now from the Irvings would be less than that? So, I'm not sure where that risk that you're talking about comes from and I'm not sure why you're questioning the flexibility when the formula – the only thing that changes is that price, wholesale price.

Hon. J. Burridge: I think, yeah, you've mentioned a couple of times that you've been talking to Islanders and, of course, that's what we base our legislation to. Have you talked to

the retailers? Have you done consultation with retailers?

Hon. H. Perry: Do you want to give the consultation?

Madison Ranta: Sure. I'll say that we did. We reached out to the PEI Trucking Sector Council for a comment. We understand from them that they're available. They purchase gasoline at a different wholesale price.

This amendment wouldn't necessarily affect them, but we did also reach out to the PEI Retail Gasoline Dealers Association. They had previously provided submissions to IRAC on fuel pricing. But after reaching out, we understand the group hasn't been active in a number of years. We did exchange some emails with the past vice president, but he didn't have formal feedback for us on the bill, I should say.

Hon. J. Burrridge: That's good for me right now.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Chair.

Just a couple of questions there. With the wholesale price where the Leader of the Third Party said typically over the last number of years, we've seen it was a reduction in price.

But the ethanol content on our Island gas – it's not there. They can't get ethanol in our gas on the Island. I've been told that no matter what rate we go that PEI gas will always be five to eight cents more than New Brunswick because they have no clean energy tax because they use ethanol, which makes it cheaper.

We don't have ethanol in our gas because it can't come here by ship because it breaks down and separates. We pay a federal clean energy tax, which is in the Charlottetown rack rate. Where you're saying Islanders want it cheaper – and don't get me wrong, if it makes it cheaper, I want it, too, member. I'm just like you. I drive a truck that I have to drive. I haul trailers and horses like yourself, and I'm not going to put them behind an electric or a car. I feel the price when the gas goes up.

But is there any truth to the fact that our clean energy tax will always make the gas five to eight cents higher?

[2:55 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: Well, I can tell you this that Nova Scotia price is also not based on ethanol-blended gas, and it's still lower than PEI. It's not based on ethanol-blended gas, so I'm not sure.

T. DesRoches: But the Nova Scotia price – they have an ethanol blend in their gas. They can have it and they don't pay that clean energy tax.

Hon. H. Perry: Well, right now.... Okay, let's just say – there's a ten-cent difference is what we found, primarily, in the price of that fuel between Nova Scotia and PEI, and it should only be probably two to three cents. So, I'm not sure if that's transport costs for bringing it here to PEI or what it is, but that's too much. But we just don't know what it is. We don't know what it is. That's what this bill is asking for. It's asking for some transparency and a better understanding of how our prices are set here on Prince Edward Island.

Each province has a different regulatory board, and they set the formula for each one.

T. DesRoches: In a way, I agree and I disagree.

This bill isn't asking for transparency; this bill is asking to change from the Charlottetown rack rate to the New York rack rate. If that results in transparency, yes, but it's not asking for that. It's asking to change from the Charlottetown rack rate to the New York rack rate.

You say that you believe that it should only be two cents in the difference from Nova Scotia to PEI in your preamble that you just gave, but from the different people that I've talked to, they've said that there will always be a five- to eight-cent difference because of the ethanol.

Hon. H. Perry: Like I just said, Nova Scotia does not use that.

Their price is not based on ethanol-blended gas and it's still lower than PEI, so I'm not sure what you're getting at with that because Nova Scotia does not base their price on the ethanol-blended part of it.

T. DesRoches: I'm just wondering how you're saying Nova Scotia is not based on it. They don't get charged the clean energy tax, so why would they base their price on it? We get charged the clean energy tax because we cannot use ethanol, so we have to base our price on it.

Hon. H. Perry: As I said earlier, every province has a different regulatory board that has their own individual formulas, so they have a different formula than what we would have on Prince Edward Island. It would be very similar, but they would have a bit of a difference. That's IRAC, on Prince Edward Island, and the other regulatory boards that would determine what that formula is. It's primarily based on, though – all we're asking for in this bill is to change just that one line, and that's the rack price to the benchmark price, and then everything else in the equation here on Prince Edward Island will stay the same.

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you, Chair.

We've certainly heard the hon. member reference a number of times, transparency, and I think that we would all agree with that. Summerside-Wilmot has mentioned that; the Minister of Finance and Affordability has as well.

Just a quick question, and it goes back to your preamble when you brought the bill onto the floor for second reading. You did reference the importance of our primary industries – agriculture, fisheries – and the tremendous impact that fuel prices does have on those industries and the importance of them to PEI, to our economy.

When you talked about consultation, was there any reach-out to any of our agricultural sectors – whether it's the Federation of Agriculture, Fisheries, PEI Fishermen's Association – to see what their feedback is, if they have any research/background information that could have been or might have been supplied to you as well?

Hon. H. Perry: We did reach out to the PEI Retail Gasoline Dealers Association, so that's from the dealer itself, but we understand that group is not active or hasn't been active in the last couple years. There were some emails exchanged with other associations. We didn't specifically speak to – we reached out to the Trucking Sector Council.

[3:00 p.m.]

But as far as going to individual farmers, yeah, I've talked to them, and fishers, for sure.

Hon. E. Hudson: We all do, certainly in rural areas of the province, talk to our farmers/fishers on a pretty well daily basis, but I was just wondering specifically with – and again, using the example – the Federation of Agriculture or the PEI Fishermen's Association to see what their opinion was, if they may have, at any point over the past, done any type of background work/research to see just what impact it might have on our primary industries, such a change.

Hon. H. Perry: We didn't consult with them because it wasn't a consideration. I would doubt they would argue with anyone that would help give a little bit more transparency in how the fuel prices are adjusted or how they come to. I don't think there would be any debate on the transparency part.

All we're doing with this particular piece of legislation is just changing that one line, and that's from the rack price to a benchmark. That's simply what the amendment is. It's just a simple amendment that would go into the formula for IRAC to make their decisions on what the price of gasoline is, or any fuel.

Chair: Hon. members, I have exhausted my list. I will now call the question.

Shall the bill carry?

[Interjections]

Chair: Better do that one again.

Shall the bill carry?

[Interjections]

Chair: Sounds like the no's have it. The bill has not carried.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill not recommended.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Petroleum Products Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and does not recommend

same to the Legislative Assembly. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry?

A recorded division has been requested. Please ring the bell.

[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.

Speaker: I don't think it can hurt to just go over the logistics of the vote again. We're voting on whether or not we adopt the report of the Committee of the Whole.

[3:05 p.m.]

The committee's report said to not recommend the bill, which means if you're voting for the report of the committee, in favour of adopting the report, you're voting against the bill.

If you're voting against the report of the committee, you're voting in favour of the bill.

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

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

[The Clerk calls the roll]

NAYS

Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Henderson
MacFarlane
McNeilly
Perry
Simpson

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

[The Clerk calls the roll]

YEAS

Bell
Burridge

Compton
Croucher
Curran
Deagle
DesRoches
Dollar
Hudson
MacEwen
MacKay
MacLennan
Ramsay
Thompson

Speaker: Members, the report from the committee has been adopted and the bill has not been recommended.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the 28th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I would like to ask maybe the hon. Member from Morell-Donagh to chair Committee of the Whole.

[Audio malfunction]

Speaker: ...properly, for the record.

[3:10 p.m.]

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, when you're ready.

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the 28th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant: Order No. 28, *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*, Bill No. 106, in committee.

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

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that 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.

Once again, hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, thank you so much.

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intitled *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*. This bill is currently under debate.

Promoter, do you have a stranger that you'd like to make a motion to bring to the floor?

M. MacFarlane: I would so move.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Welcome back. Could you state your name and title for Hansard, please?

Dr. Kay Dingwell: My name is Dr. Kay Dingwell.

Chair: Thank you, Dr. Dingwell.

Hon. member, we were in the middle of general questions. Do you have anything to start off with?

M. MacFarlane: Maybe just an update, Chair.

Chair: Sure. Absolutely.

M. MacFarlane: This is the continuation of the debate on Bill 106. I know there was just some confusion there, and just for clarification, Chair, since the debate last proceeded on Bill 106 and hearing the concerns from some of the members, the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning and the Member from Summerside-Wilmot – I heard those concerns, so that resulted in the tabling for first reading of an additional bill, Bill 110.

Bill 110 is an amendment to the yet-to-be-proclaimed amended *Employment Standards Act* because of the concerns we heard during debate last time on Bill 106 was that it could create confusion, amending the legislation that's currently on the books but not amending the yet-to-be-proclaimed amended *Employment Standards Act*.

That's why Bill 110 was brought forward which, should Bill 106 pass, then we would be seeking to bring Bill 110, which would amend similarly the amended but yet-to-be-proclaimed *Employment Standards Act*, which would also address the concern raised by Summerside-Wilmot in that it would then have application to organized labour, to unions under collective agreement, because that was a concern we've heard.

In the attempt to address those concerns, that's why Bill 110 was brought.

I don't have anything else to update further to the debate last time, unless you had any.

Dr. Kay Dingwell: Mostly just – if I may.

M. MacFarlane: Yes, please.

Dr. Kay Dingwell: So, after I'm done here, I'm heading to work in the emergency department until two in the morning. I'll be working in a system where the administrative burden is absolutely choking out the ability of health care providers to deliver the care that Islanders have a right to access.

Addressing this massive burden on our health care system and ensuring that we modernize our health care system in such a way that health care providers are supported and facilitated in delivering that care is going to require a lot of changes.

[3:15 p.m.]

This particular bill is not going to fix everything that is wrong with the health care system. It is not going to address the entirety of the administrative burden that is causing family doctors to flee longitudinal family practice.

What this bill does is it removes an absolutely ridiculous, outdated practice of employers being able to ask for work notes which verify nothing. These do nothing to prevent individuals from using a sick day when they're not sick. What this does is it shows that this government is willing to listen to health care providers who are saying we need help with the administrative burden.

It is going to take many small, practical, common-sense changes to address the massive burdens on our health care system. The use of the health care system by private employers for the purposes of policing employee attendance is outdated, unacceptable. In this day and age where many other provinces have passed legislation similar to this, it is approaching the point of unconscionability to continue to allow employers to force sick Islanders into environments that they don't need to be in or utilize the health care system as a barrier to preventing sick people from staying home when they should.

I ask you to pass this bill and ensure that you're demonstrating to our health care system and to islanders that you're hearing their concerns around inappropriate use of the health system and around administrative burden on health care professionals.

Chair: Okay, hon. members, the last time this bill was being debated it was opened for general questions on the whole bill. Is that still the wish of the committee? Alright, we'll do that.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, member, and thank you very much, Kay, for bringing this forward, starting with that opening statement.

Today I asked questions about the emergency room across Prince Edward Island, the burden that is being placed on you, and I appreciate the work that you do down in Summerside. I think last year, between 2024 and 2025, the amount of emergency room visits are up 6,000 people. It's almost approaching 96,000 people per year. I can't imagine what that does on the inside.

Just a question. When you're working and somebody comes in – I mean, imagine the work that you have, and somebody comes in with a sick note in the emergency room. What happens in there? How much time does it take to deal with that situation itself? I guess I'm asking you for an inside perspective. What's the burden on you? What would something simple like that do to you?

Dr. Kay Dingwell: It's not just myself. People sometimes think that it's 30 seconds for you to scrawl your name on piece of paper. That is absolutely not everything that's involved here.

This individual, when they arrive at the hospital, they register; paperwork is generated. We have an occurrence in their chart that causes a chart to be made. It goes to the triage nurse. This individual takes up 10-15 minutes of the triage nurse, and then because this individual is going to be waiting a long time because they're very low acuity, meaning they don't have a serious life-threatening illness, they may be waiting 14 hours, say. My last couple shifts, we had waits up to 20 hours because I had 30 people in my waiting room.

These individuals are very low acuity, so they wait a long time. Every two hours, they have to be reassessed by the triage nurse. Triage nursing is an extremely difficult, time-consuming, intensive job, and these triage nurses are having to re-check vitals and check in on this person every two hours. That's seven occurrences over the course of that individual's wait while they wait 14 hours in the waiting room, and then they're brought in, and then they're seen by a side rooms nurse who then reassesses them, re-checks their vitals.

Each of these contacts with health professionals throughout this pathway provokes pages of paperwork in the system that go to – if they have one – their family doctor, who then has to review them. And every time that they have contact with a health professional, they then have to go enter everything in the chart. So, by the time this individual sees me, and they tell me they have a cold and their boss won't let them take a day off without a note, they've probably taken up 40-60 minutes of health care time.

On average, if you look at CIHI numbers – that's the Canadian Institute of Health Information – a low-acuity ER visit is around \$200 of system cost. So, this person has taken up nearly an hour of health professionals' time,

they've taken up hundreds of dollars, to sit there, tell me they have a cold, and I write this on a piece of paper. So yes, it is five minutes of my time, followed by the five minutes I then spend charting. Yeah, it's very easy for me to write that piece of paper, but they've consumed a massive amount of resources over that period of time.

[3:20 p.m.]

Even if they log on to Maple, the individual they're seeing on Maple – that's 50 bucks or so from the health care system for the purposes of their employer wanting to put up a barrier to them using a legislated sick day.

Every single one of these notes, for the thousands and thousands of these notes that employers request across this province every year, we're incurring the use of public resources to a fairly high degree for the purposes of acting as human resources for employers. That's not what we're there for.

It's not just the couple minutes of my time for this individual to tell me that they're sick and for me to write that down; it's a massive system use. We can't be looking at everything in silos. To address the massive issues that we have with the administrative burden in the health care system requires taking a systems view. The way we address the system is we ensure that they system is we ensure that the system is optimized for its purpose, which is to deliver health care.

When we do see these people, we're not testing anything. If they tell me they have a migraine, I believe them. I'm doing nothing to prove that they're sick. The employer saying they need proof that they're sick so that they don't misuse their sick days is nonsense. I'm not doing anything to prove that they're sick. It's just their employer putting up a barrier to try and make it difficult for these individuals to use the days that they have legislated for their use.

G. McNeilly: Thank you for that answer, for bringing us inside of what happens within the system.

Looking at the numbers, the CIHI numbers – I was looking at those today and I was looking at the Health PEI annual report today, and the numbers are going up and the low acuity stuff needs to be reduced. I think this is just a simple way that we could do it.

I don't see any way that we can't support this bill because it's a step, like you said. It's a step in the right direction. We have to protect our ER so that you can do the good work that you're going to do.

My final question is: During the course of – I could pick a time period – but how many people would you see that are coming in looking for this or something similar? You can pick the time frame, a month or....

Dr. Kay Dingwell: Many patients will leave without being seen and frankly, are leaving without being seen numbers – I believe PEI is the worst province in the country for that.

G. McNeilly: We are. I had these questions today.

Dr. Kay Dingwell: A lot of these patients are leaving without being seen. But in a single shift for me, I'd see generally at least two people requesting a work note, and I'm one doctor. We have five physician shifts per day. I work a lot of night shifts. People tend to come in for these less during night shifts than they would if I were working a day shift so my day colleagues probably see more of them.

But they're also presenting to walk-in clinics. If they're fortunate enough to have a primary care professional, they're presenting to their offices if they can get in same day, which, basically nobody can for a low acuity issue despite the best work of our primary care professionals across the board. Or they're going in to walk-in clinics, which are absolutely overburdened and nearly impossible for people to get into for things that they actually require health care for.

These patients know they do not need to be seen by a health care professional. They do not need to be assessed, they do not treatment, they need paper work for their employer. This is something that this House can prevent.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you very much, Chair.

I do want to thank the promoter and the stranger for coming. I appreciate your comments at the start, hon. member, with regard to the confusion

that I had talked about there the last time that this bill was on the floor.

I don't think I have a lot of questions. I guess one question that I would have for the promoter, Chair, is: You talked a little bit about – I know the angle that you're coming from is the burden on the health care system. So, actually, I believe it was the stranger who talked about this, but I'm curious about the promoter's and then I'll ask for the stranger's comments on it as well.

A lot of jurisdictions have moved to restricting the use of sick notes and also by expanding that scope of who can provide a sick note. With that move to five days, which is in the *Employment Standards Act* that's yet proclaimed, and expanding that scope, do you feel that that would reduce the burden on the health care specific?

M. MacFarlane: I'm not sure if I see a connection between the two parts to that question, minister. I'll defer to Dr. Dingwell to speak to the broadening scope of – which I understand the question probably to mean, minister, that other qualified health practitioners and providers would be in position to write the note.

[3:25 p.m.]

My quick opinion on that would be that that's simply spreading an existing problem out amongst more frontline health care providers, including pharmacists, who already have quite a bit downloaded onto them in their retail practices in the community. They're community clinics, and can be community practices, and I'm not sure that would be a welcomed addition to their scope of practice, to have that burden on them, but I would defer to Dr. Dingwell to speak to that.

As far as the – sorry, the other part of your question was the alignment with the other jurisdictions. Yes, Ontario and British Columbia have already moved in this direction, to eliminate the sick note requirement, so we're not creating a new wheel here when it comes to moving in this direction. Other provinces have already made a similar step forward. The new yet-to-be-proclaimed *Employment Standards Act* doesn't change the number of paid sick days, and I think it might add one unpaid sick day to the mix, so I don't think there's an apples-and-oranges situation here, minister.

But I'll defer to Dr. Dingwell, if you have any comments on that.

Dr. Kay Dingwell: Minister, as I had pointed out the last time I was here, making an inappropriate use of the health system available to more people does not make it an appropriate use of the health care system. Whether it is a pharmacist – our pharmacists work incredibly hard and have so many demands on them. What I hear from my colleagues is absolutely astounding.

But regardless, these notes do not do anything. They do not prove anything. I am not following an individual to the bathroom to confirm their symptoms. I'm not doing any tests on them. This note serves absolutely no purpose whatsoever to prove that an individual is ill. So, the concerns of employers, where they say, "I need this as a tool to manage attendance and ensure that people are only using sick days when they're actually sick," is nonsense. It does not actually follow that – a note which does not prove that an individual could then prevent them misusing their sick days.

I have no test for a migraine, but a migraine is absolutely disabling, sometimes for a couple of days. I have no test for a mental health crisis, for an individual needing to stay home, and I'm certainly not going to waste even more health care dollars by doing a PCR to confirm that someone has rhinovirus and shouldn't cough on their colleagues for a few days.

Ultimately, these notes do not do anything. They are an outdated practice that thankfully other jurisdictions have had the good common sense to do away with. We're talking about minor illness, not prolonged disability, which does require a health care provider to be involved. We're talking about the minor illnesses that everyone goes through which do not require health care assessment or treatment.

So, you're asking: Why shouldn't we do away with a useless thing? I'm saying please stop asking any of my colleagues to have to do something that serves no purpose.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, promoter, and thank you, stranger, for your comments on it.

Again, you've talked about how some jurisdictions have moved that way. I want this new *Employment Standards Act* proclaimed. When I came into this role, that was the first

discussion that I had with my deputy minister before I was handed my briefing book. I said: “When are we proclaiming the *Employment Standards Act*?”

It will be proclaimed next month, and like I said, what is in that new act will move from three days to five days. There was a two-year extensive process that looked at everything that is included in this new act. We’re going to move similar to Nova Scotia, with the extension from three days to five days – five consecutive days.

I think the most important thing, too – and I do hear your concerns, Dr. Dingwell. The other part of it is in the change that you’ve proposed in Bill 110 – and I know we’re talking about Bill 106 right now – is “shall require.” The wording in the new *Employment Standards Act* is “may require.” So, an employer may require a sick note. It’s not a requirement; it’s the business, if they want to ask for it.

[3:30 p.m.]

he other little piece I just wanted to add is the expansion of who can provide that – and that’s why I did want to ask that question: a regulated medical health professional who is able to provide at outside. I don’t want to see – the stranger talks about having people coming into the ER. I don’t want that either. If another regulated medical health professional can do that, that’s what I want.

Then, the last piece before – I don’t think I have a question, Chair. I just want to have a big piece on the education. I think that that is one of the biggest pieces, maybe. The employers and the employees sometimes don’t know exactly what, I guess, their rights are, or when they do require a sick note. When this is proclaimed, that is going to be a big part that I’ve already talked to the department about, is making sure that the education piece goes behind this.

That’s all I have, and I don’t have a question, Chair. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

M. MacFarlane: I might just offer a response to that.

Chair: Sure.

M. MacFarlane: I mean, if we’re talking about education, minister, that’s completely within the

purview of your department, to include a fulsome education package to go out to employers and employees that covers all aspects of the yet-to-be-proclaimed amended *Employment Standards Act*. I heard nothing, I guess, in your statement, minister, that would prevent you and your department from including an educational component on the subject matter of the bill that’s before us, and also on Bill 110.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I want to start by thanking Dr. Dingwell for being here again, in what I know is an incredibly busy life that you lead, both within your work and outside your work. So, the fact that you have taken time twice to be here to so passionately defend the bill before us speaks volumes about your commitment to this cause.

My question relates to the fact that the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians has come out very clearly in favour of the position that this bill presents; i.e., doing away with sick notes. The Canadian Medical Association has done the same thing. A recent survey of businesses on Prince Edward Island – the majority of those who responded were in favour of doing away with sick notes.

I’m wondering, who is left? Who actually thinks this is still a good idea?

Dr. Kay Dingwell: I can only speak to who is bringing me the requests for sick notes. This is often people who are at the periphery. This is people who are earning the least, have the least protection in their employment. Many of these are temporary foreign workers who are coming here to support our industries. These are people who have no power against their employer.

I’m strongly doubting any of you in this room require a sick note if you have a cold.

So, it’s the employers who treat the *Employment Standards Act* as the maximum that they will offer who seem to be opposed to changes like this. My view is that the handful of employers who still require these – because the majority don’t – use the sick note not as a way to prove illness but as a way to try to force sick employees to work – that’s my personal perception – because many people are unable to access care. They wait for 14 hours and then

have to go home because they're sick and they need to be at home.

Ultimately, it is a small number of employers who want to keep this because it allows them to, in my view, push their employees around. That seems to be what I see.

I'm an employer myself. I never required a sick note. I think most businesses want to treat their employees well. I think most businesses don't request these. It really seems to be just a handful who still push for this, and then I see those patients very desperately in my emergency department after they've waited 18 hours to get me to sign a piece of paper.

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, I appreciate your response, Dr. Dingwell.

[3:35 p.m.]

We've heard some – from my perspective, anyway – extraordinarily compelling arguments as to why we should pass this bill today, as we did last time. You've just answered my question about who still wants this – a small, perhaps, number of employers who are doing it for the reason you just stated.

I've listened to you on *Black Coat, White Art*.... I've got that the wrong way around, haven't I? *White Coat, Black Art*, with Brian Goldman. There was an excellent interview on CBC locally done by somebody just the other day, again, presenting extraordinarily strong arguments as to why sick notes are something that we really need to do away with.

Have you come across any strong arguments – persuasive arguments – to the contrary? You've just told me why, perhaps, we still have it in place – because of the desires of a few small employers, but are there any strong arguments at all out there in favour of keeping the requirement for sick notes?

Dr. Kay Dingwell: I'm an individual who always tries to see all sides of an issue. I understand that for businesses, employee absence is a major cost and concern. They want to ensure that their employees are showing up for work and doing the jobs they hired them for, and I can completely understand that. It is important to have your workers there to be able to plan your day, to plan your workforce numbers.

But illness is something that occurs to everybody, and in the same way that everybody needs bathroom breaks and meal breaks, people need sick days because to get sick is a normal, human experience. So, the only argument I have heard against these that keeps getting brought up is, "We need to be able to ensure that people aren't misusing sick days." That seems to be the only response I've ever heard to this.

But ultimately, these notes don't prevent people from misusing their sick days. So, I have yet to find a robust argument with evidence behind it that would support this practice.

P. Bevan-Baker: I have no further questions, Chair.

M. MacFarlane: I might just add, especially when the legislation statutorily entitles employees in Prince Edward Island to these days in the first place, it becomes a real administrative redundancy that Dr. Dingwell has explained far better than I could.

Chair: I've exhausted my list, hon. members.

Shall the bill carry?

[Interjections]

Chair: The bill has not carried.

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill not recommended.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

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

Speaker: Members, a recorded division has been requested.

Please ring the bell.

[The bells were rung]

[3:40 p.m.]

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

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

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

Speaker: Members, we're voting on whether or not we adopt the recommendation of the Committee of the Whole, the report. The report does not recommend the bill, so a vote in favour of the report is a vote against the bill; a vote against accepting the report is a vote in favour of the bill.

All those voting against the report, please rise.

[The Clerk Assistant calls the roll]

NAYS

Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Henderson
MacFarlane
McNeilly
Perry
Simpson

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

[The Clerk Assistant calls the roll]

YEAS

Bell
Compton
Croucher
Curran
Deagle
DesRoches
MacKay
MacLennan
Ramsay
Thompson

Speaker: The report of the committee has been adopted, and the bill has not been recommended.

[Interjections]

Speaker: Members.

Motions Other Than Government

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

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

I call Motion 66 to be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Motion No. 66: Calling for government to dismantle the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party moves, seconded by the hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, the following motion:

[3:45 p.m.]

WHEREAS the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission (IRAC) was established in 1991 with the amalgamation of the Public Utilities Commission, the Land Use Commission, and the Office of the Director of Residential Rental Property;

AND WHEREAS IRAC's mandate is broad and diverse, and includes regulatory, enforcement and appellate functions, as well as administering the *PEI Lands Protection Act*;

AND WHEREAS recently it was discovered that IRAC's 2018 Land investigation report pursuant to its two-year investigation under the *Lands Protection Act* never existed;

AND WHEREAS IRAC refused to provide this information to Islanders or at the request of a Legislative Committee, thereby forcing the committee to use its subpoena powers to obtain the information;

AND WHEREAS this process has raised serious concerns about IRAC's processes, independence, and effectiveness in doing its vitally important work on behalf of Islanders;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly call on government to remove the administration of the *PEI Lands Protection Act* from IRAC and place it with an independent commission that reports to the Legislative Assembly, and whose members are appointed by the Legislative Assembly;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly call on government to begin systematically removing

the other responsibilities from IRAC, including the regulation of our public electric utility, and placing them with independent, focused boards or commissions, as was done prior to IRAC's creation.

Speaker: Thank you.

I'd like to call upon the hon. Leader of the Third Party, the mover of the motion, to open debate.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion in the time that we have remaining today.

This was a motion that I had considered earlier in the sitting and had put it together in draft, but then more recently, we heard the announcement from the Premier that there was going to be a review conducted of IRAC, which I indicated at the time that I didn't feel was sufficient, given what we already know about the deficiencies with the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission.

Based on that, I felt compelled to bring this motion forward, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to it because what we don't need in this province right now is something else that needs to be acted on and actioned but is simply going to get a review and is simply going to be another can that gets kicked down the road.

The list is getting longer all the time of reports that have been done. Every week, it seems these days, we get either another committee established or report or study commissioned to go up on the shelf to collect dust with the inclusion report, multiple gas pricing reports that IRAC has already done, some sort of a study being done, apparently, into Health PEI bureaucracy; I don't know what the terms of reference are for that. There's more; I could go on, I think, for the balance of my time on what this government feels compelled to study as opposed to actually doing something to fix what is a well-known problem in our system.

I think what we have is if we had a government that knew its job was to lead and to make positive change for Islanders, we would see that. We would see decisions being made, and we would see action being taken. But when you have a government that has lost the plot, when we have a government that doesn't know how to respond to the concerns of Islanders, when we

have a government that has become tired and lazy and has given up the ghost on governing in this province, then we see what we see now. We see reviews, we see committees, and we see a can kicked down the road, and then we get to the can, and we kick the can down the road again.

Then all of a sudden, lo and behold, it's election time, and nothing has been done, and the heads have been kept below the trenches –

[Interjections]

Speaker: Order, members! Order!

M. MacFarlane: That's what we see. That's what we see, Mr. Speaker.

I know government is sensitive to have the truth put out on display here, but that's where we're at.

[3:50 p.m.]

We know what's wrong with IRAC. Anybody who's been around since 1991 can see how IRAC has devolved to the point where it's at and has lost trust with Islanders.

It may have been a good idea at the time. We're going back to 1991. We amalgamated multiple different regulatory bodies: we amalgamated the Public Utilities Commission, we amalgamated the Land Use Commission, Office of the Director of Residential Rental Property, and it all got put in together. Then, over time, more and more tasks and duties got placed onto IRAC.

We see the *Lands Protection Act*, *P.E.I.* try to keep up with the needs of Islanders and the demands on our land, and we see amendments scotch taped here and scotch taped there, and here we are. We're left with this Frankenstein monster of a corporation that really does not resemble the parts that came together to form it in the first place.

There are so many challenges with the organization that we get a review, and what's the review – the review is costing \$375,000 for someone that the Premier has handpicked, and to have an executive support to the commissioner.

Even if I was to admit that a review was necessary, which I do not admit that the review that's been undertaken is necessary, the Premier needs to learn about the word "independence" when it comes to appointing people to do these

reviews. He can no longer continue to appoint friends and neighbours, even if those friends and neighbours might be qualified, as Mr. Francis may well be.

The optics are poison, and it'll undermine from the time that it's started. It undermines the public perception of these reviews being taken, whether it's the wetland permit business in Summerside and who the Premier had appointed for that....

We can go on, but if we're going to try and have faith in these investigations that the Premier and the government insist on doing, then we need to have a more transparent process right out of the gate on who's doing these things.

Let's look at where IRAC is at right now, as far as how it's constituted. We have political appointments, some of which are for a ten-year duration. Others are for a five-year duration. No transparent hiring process, no competitive process, no ability for Islanders to apply for these positions – handpicked, non-competitive process for the top senior positions in IRAC.

That may have flown years ago, but Islanders at this point are no longer prepared to tolerate the Premier's office handpicking people to go into these senior, high-level, executive-level positions where so many of the decisions are made that impact the day-to-day lives of Islanders. Every one of us in this room has heard from Islanders who say that is no longer the appropriate process that needs to be taken when we're talking about some organization as powerful as IRAC.

The decisions that come out of IRAC – we know what they are. We had a bill this afternoon on gas pricing; affects day-to-day lives. There's been no other issue other than perhaps health care in the last few weeks that I've had brought to my attention as affordability and the price of gas and why we're paying so much.

Again, it calls into question why IRAC decides things the way that it does, and then people go back to, "Well, look at how it was constituted. Look at how the people at IRAC were appointed to these positions," because that undermines the discussion right out of the gate – completely undermines the discussion. Even if IRAC was following a proper process, when we have the senior executive level of IRAC who are handpicked by the Premier, it completely undermines the process of that forum.

[Interjections]

[3:55 p.m.]

Speaker: Members, if you want to, you can get on the list; you can speak to the motion. Let's have a controlled discussion in the House. The hon. Leader of the Third Party has the floor.

You may continue, member.

M. MacFarlane: It doesn't bother me in the least, Mr. Speaker. I know others have a hard time hearing, but it doesn't bother me if the Minister of Health wants to say some things.

So, when we have Maritime Electric also under the purview of IRAC and when we have multi-million-dollar applications coming forward that will have direct impact on our energy grid, on rate affordability for Islanders, on the sustainability, on our challenge to achieve net zero – again, all of that rests with our Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission. I already mentioned gas prices. But perhaps the one that affects me, that I take umbrage with the most, is on our *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*

That's where darkness really thrives, under our *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*, because there is simply no light that shines out of the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission when it comes to the administration of our *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*, which is one of the most critical pieces of legislation that we have in our province and which is struggling constantly to keep up with the demands on how our land is being bought and sold and utilized and developed.

We need to change the way that the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* is administered in this province to avoid the challenges that have been culminating for decades now. Various legislators in this Chamber over the years have tried to keep up with the act by making changes to it, but the act is only so good as the body is that's in charge of monitoring and administering the legislation, and that's where things need to become more transparent.

That's a word that I use a lot. It's a word that's often getting tired from being used in this Chamber because there is so little of it. It comes up all the time, and it comes up especially in the motion that we're talking about here today. When someone applies to buy land in Prince Edward Island, whether it's a corporation, a non-

resident corporation or a non-resident individual, they have to go through this process, and the process requires filing a certain form depending on who you are as a purchaser looking to buy this property.

It's beyond me why this has not been more fully litigated in the past, because the purchaser gets completely shut down, gets denied, and that's it – no reasons given. That option that that person had to come into our province and buy should have the right to know what were the grounds for the denial. It's a fundamental principle. It's a fundamental principle of natural justice and administrative fairness for decisions in writing to be given to someone who has been denied an option such as what we're talking about here today.

I brought a bill forward that would have provided a little bit of transparency on the land side so that recommendations to Executive Council based on IRAC's review of the file could be made available, which could have provided an opportunity for light to have shined on the process. That's a bill that needs to come back, and maybe I will bring that back, because it's something that's important to me – that we have transparency for Islanders and for people who want to call Prince Edward Island home.

The other concern, of course, is the lack of accountability when it comes to the performance of IRAC. Is IRAC doing what it needs to do? There are no performance measures. What are the benchmarks that we expect IRAC to achieve?

[4:00 p.m.]

This is a situation across government where we throw money at an organization and not demand any sort of feedback. There are no strings attached, no accountability measures. That's part of the reason why the financial situation in this province is the way it is – when you continue to throw money at organizations and not expect a proper accounting for that money and what the measurables might be.

With that, Mr. Speaker, looking at the hour, I'll adjourn debate, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Speaker: Minister.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'd like to call on the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to chair the Committee of the Whole House, considering the grant of supply to His Majesty.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

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

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

Hon. K. Dollar: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

An Hon. Member: Please state your name and title for Hansard.

Chair: You know it.

Matthew Praught: Matthew Praught, director of finance.

Chair: Good afternoon. Could you please state your name and title for Hansard? [Laughter]

Matthew Praught: Matthew Praught, director of finance.

Chair: Thank you.

[Interjections]

Chair: Don't listen to all the people around you.

[Laughter]

Chair: Okay, we are on page 116, for those that are following along in the book.

Minister and Deputy Minister's Office

Minister and Deputy Minister's Office

"Appropriations provided for operation of the office of the Minister and Deputy Minister."
Administration: 18,500. Equipment: 10,000.
Materials, Supplies, and Services: 5,700.
Salaries: 491,100. Travel and Training: 29,500.

Total Minister and Deputy Minister's Office:
554,800

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Just one question in this section, I think, and it's regarding travel and training expenses for the current year. I see that we're more than double what was forecast or what was estimated. Can you explain what the extra money is for, please?

Matthew Praught: Yeah, these would have been in the big book there, the handouts that were provided. There were a few trips that were taken by the minister at the time, and deputy minister. Some of these would have been related to both the current portfolio. As well, a few of the different purposes were – while we still had the land portfolio, these costs were recorded under the deputy minister and minister's office, so those would be kind of in that section.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, just to clarify, the extra expense was in travel for various conferences.

Matthew Praught: Yeah.

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

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Minister and Deputy Minister's Office:
554,800

Shall it carry? Carried.

Corporate Services

Corporate Services

"Appropriations provided to support functions and services related to policy, legislation, planning, program development, evaluation, quality improvements, performance, and Federal/Provincial/Territorial relations."
Administration: 23,400. Equipment: 25,000.
Materials, Supplies, and Services: 83,000.
Professional Services: 150,000. Salaries: 1,218,200. Travel and Training: 14,000. Grants: 400,000.

Total Corporate Services: 1,913,600

[4:05 p.m.]

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks again, Chair.

First question is regarding the materials, supplies, and services, which was budgeted very low last year at \$3,000 and came in at \$128,000. What was that?

Matthew Praught: The department did a bit of advertising last year for our housing programs and to kind of promote some housing awareness initiatives that were going on during the year, so we did spend a bit there last year. We've left a bit of budget in that section for anything that may come up in that vein this year as well.

P. Bevan-Baker: In the big book, I see that – I'm moving now to the professional services line of \$150,000; last year it was budgeted \$150,000, came in at \$120,000. In the big book here, when I add up all of the listed costs, it comes to \$60,000. I'm just wondering where the extra is. I have no particular issue with any of the items listed, I'm just wondering why it's only \$60,000.

Matthew Praught: These would be costs to the end of February. At the time that the budget would have been created, we may have been anticipating some additional costs in there. This section – if you do happen to have some consulting costs and those sorts of things or if there are any legal costs that come up, they can get fairly costly fairly quickly, so we did leave some forecast in there. I don't believe that they have materialized, but at the time that the budget was created, we would have had some budget left in there for that.

P. Bevan-Baker: One of the professional services costs is the MGA review facilitation, survey, and reporting. Was that \$22,000 the full cost of the MGA review?

Matthew Praught: It would have been the full cost to February. I don't think there was anything significant beyond that. I don't have the final number quickly at my fingertips, but there wouldn't have been, I don't believe, anything significant over and above that amount.

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

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

Welcome back to the floor.

You mentioned advertising. Why wouldn't it show up in the big book? How much was the advertising for?

Matthew Praught: These would have been under materials, supplies, and services. In your big book, that would cover professional services.

G. McNeilly: How much did we spend on advertising?

Matthew Praught: Our forecast was \$125,000. We came in somewhere around that amount. I don't have the exact number there, but it was in that neighbourhood.

G. McNeilly: So, spent \$125,000 on advertising, and people struggling to find a place to live; I don't necessarily get that. How much are we forecasting for next year on that?

Matthew Praught: Well, the campaign that we were running at the time would have run until the end of the fiscal year. We did leave about \$80,000 in there for potential promotion. I don't believe that there's a campaign running at the moment, but if there are some initiatives that the department does want to put forward, we have a bit of room to do that.

G. McNeilly: A few questions here on the Islanders Experiencing Complex Issues; that's a consultant. We spent a lot of consulting money on that over the last few years. What is the \$3,500 here for, and who did it go to?

Matthew Praught: That one was to DB Consulting. I believe that one would have been.... It kind of would have been around a number of different items, I believe. There was a community action committee that was being initiated and just some general work on just different partnerships and the housing initiatives that we have.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Minister, will you be willing to release the findings of that report?

Hon. K. Dollar: Sure.

G. McNeilly: Great.

[4:10 p.m.]

Chair: The minister of action.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I missed what you were – what report were you asking about, sorry?

G. McNeilly: Islanders Experiencing Complex Issues.

K. Bernard: Okay. I'm just looking at the legal fees. There's one for Community Outreach Centre, and human resources. Those are not big amounts, but just wondering what those are for.

Matthew Praught: The Community Outreach Centre one just would have been some external resources on the site there and permitting matters around that. The human resources one would have just been an internal human resource matter that they just needed some outside consultation on for an opinion on.

K. Bernard: Moving over to the grants, under the Turner Drake and Partners Ltd. for the housing needs assessment – kind of a two-part question. It says housing needs assessment, land use governance in globally.... Is that one thing, or are those two different things?

Matthew Praught: This is on the Turner Drake, you mention?

K. Bernard: Yeah.

Matthew Praught: My note here is that it was around funding for the housing needs

assessment project, which was Infrastructure Canada's research and knowledge initiative. So, this would have been a collaboration between industry and policymakers.

Hon. K. Dollar: Charlottetown-West Royalty, the report is online.

G. McNeilly: Okay.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I do remember talking about this report. Do you know what part of the Island it was for, or was it Island-wide?

Matthew Praught: I don't have that specifically.

K. Bernard: You don't have that. Okay. I'm wondering, is that the end of that report? Is that report made public?

Matthew Praught: I don't know if that one's public or not. I don't believe at this moment that there's anything more committed to that for the current year's budget. I would have to check on that, but I don't believe.... If it's public, it may be out there, but I'm not positive.

K. Bernard: Okay, I guess you can guess my next one: if that's not public, would you make that report public as well?

Hon. K. Dollar: Sure.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

First question, and I think it's just a silly one. It's regarding the very top line in the big book on page HC-2. It says GADC development strategic plan. I'm assuming that's CADC, is it?

Matthew Praught: I believe it may be Georgetown.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, it's Georgetown. Okay.

Matthew Praught: Yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, that's fine. That's the only question on that, Chair.

Hon. K. Dollar: Charlottetown-Victoria Park, the report is not finished yet, and it will be public once it's done.

[M. MacKay in the chair]

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I'm looking at the line item for the Community Legal Information Association, the Renting PEI project. Can you tell us what that is?

Matthew Praught: Yeah. Their Renting PEI project is just kind of in general legal support to both tenants and landlords. There'd be guides that they put out, and they advise people on matters regarding the *Residential Tenancy Act*, so we provide some funding for that organization on that one.

P. Bevan-Baker: And they do fantastic work. I appreciate the fact that we have CLI there for situations like this where people can get professional legal advice in a very complex situation.

So, none of that is for the creation of a rental registry?

Matthew Praught: I don't believe so.

P. Bevan-Baker: Is there anything in any of these line items to suggest that we're actually working on a rental registry? I know it's been an on-again, off-again thing in government.

Matthew Praught: Like, in the grants section, or just in general?

P. Bevan-Baker: Anywhere. I couldn't find anything, so I'm just wondering if there is money set aside for the development of a registry.

Matthew Praught: I don't believe there is specifically. Again, we do have a little bit of room in our grants sections and our professional services sections, but not specifically identified.

P. Bevan-Baker: Which makes me wonder if there is actually any work being done on the creation of a rental registry. Maybe the minister could – it's a yes or no.

Hon. K. Dollar: Since my time becoming minister, I haven't been briefed on it, no.

[4:15 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm looking at the last line item, actually, in the grants section. It's the University of PEI – land use governance in globally comparable island jurisdictions. Can you tell me, was that the conference at Crowbush, or is that something else?

Matthew Praught: No, I don't believe it is. It would have been a different study that they were working on.

P. Bevan-Baker: Was that grant to UPEI – when I see things like Island jurisdictions, I'm wondering whether it's going to the Institute of Island Studies. Is that where the grant ended up?

Matthew Praught: I just have University of Prince Edward Island on it. I'd be guessing if I said it was or wasn't.

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

G. McNeilly: Thanks very much.

The University of Prince Edward Island – it was announced a couple of years ago there was a survey done. It was announced as a \$75,000 housing initiative in joint with the council at UPEI. Is that this line here, minister?

Matthew Praught: I don't believe it's specifically housing-related, but again, I can't say if it's that one for sure.

G. McNeilly: It makes it hard to question a budget line when we don't even know what that is. If that is, what my question would be was that that was supposed to be a \$75,000 grant to complete that work.

At the time, I didn't even understand why it was happening because why did you not just give the students the \$75,000 who couldn't afford to live, but we had to do a survey with that money. I'm just wondering if that is – I have no idea if that's it, because I would have a lot of questions on that.

Matthew Praught: If my memory serves me correctly, this was meant to be around \$50,000, so I don't believe it's the same one that you may be thinking of, that's \$75,000. Again, this would

have been a last year spend, also. This isn't a line item from the upcoming or the '26-27 budget either.

G. McNeilly: Maybe we'll get the information back on that because every dollar is precious, especially what I've heard a lot. A lot of students live in my district, and I want to make sure that.... I know the Department of Housing has support for students, but I would have some questions on the direction of future money. I'd like to see them get as much as they possibly can because they need it. Maybe we'll bring that back, if you could.

Hon. K. Dollar: I can bring that back, for sure.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just wondering: In your notes, are there any significant cuts that have been made to this section?

Matthew Praught: No, not significant cuts.

You can see in the book, we did reduce grants by \$100,000. We did have specifically Community Legal Information that we have a commitment with them. But we do have some discretionary grant money in there that allows us to address some matters that come up through the year, so we did decrease that one by \$100,000, but that would be the only item.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Corporate Services: 1,913,600

Shall it carry? Carried.

Municipal Affairs

“Appropriations provided for the oversight of municipal government, advisory services and training, including equalization grants and municipal services tax credits for municipalities.” Administration: 14,200. Equipment: 6,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 33,500. Professional Services: 100,000. Salaries: 916,300. Travel and Training: 15,500. Grants: 50,006,900.

Total Municipal Affairs: 51,092,400

Total Department of Housing and Communities:
53,560,800

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

[4:20 p.m.]

My first question is – I think almost all my questions here are on the grants line – the transitional funding to the Town of Three Rivers. I think it was 2018 that they were incorporated. I do remember the discussion at the time sort of sweetened the pie by increasing their share of the gas tax. I'm thinking that seven or eight years afterwards.... I guess my question is: How much longer is that transitional funding going to continue?

Matthew Praught: We're getting closer to the end of that. We have an agreement that outlines the amount that they do get annually. It's a little over \$110,000 that's in this amount, but we are coming closer to the end. I don't have the exact year that it completes, but we're on kind of the tail end of it.

P. Bevan-Baker: Just for my own benefit – we've had a couple, not a huge amount, but a couple of other larger municipalities established since then. In my own district, I I'm thinking of the Rural Municipal of West River. But I'm not aware and I don't see a budget line here for any transitional funding for them, who would have gone through a similar sort of process to what they did in Three Rivers.

Is there or was there transitional funding for other new municipalities when a number of municipalities amalgamated to form a new municipality, or was it only given to Three Rivers?

Matthew Praught: At the moment, we do have a few that are sitting anticipating some potential funding. It doesn't necessarily mean that whatever the process that they would be going through will move forward. If a municipality is looking at restructuring or amalgamation, they would be eligible for some funding in here. I don't think we have specific amounts for those in particular, but there is some funding within that line item.

P. Bevan-Baker: Moving down a little bit, I see there's the Rural Municipal of Murray Harbour,

support for a legal matter. I'm assuming that's to do with the John Robertson situation and – I can't remember exactly – the masquerade hoax, or that he claimed was a hoax? Is that what that's for?

Matthew Praught: This would be in.... Sorry, you're talking in professional services?

P. Bevan-Baker: No, municipal affairs.... Actually, I don't see a heading. It's just under municipal affairs. Support for a legal matter. It's in the big book; it's about \$8,000.

Matthew Praught: Support for a legal matter.... I see that in....

P. Bevan-Baker: Rural Municipality of Murray Harbour.

Matthew Praught: Is that in the current year's book?

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, HC-3.

Matthew Praught: I'm not seeing that specific item that you're mentioning, but.... Oh, in grants. Okay. Sorry.

I would have to find that item here. I don't have any additional notes on that one. Sorry, I heard legal and was thinking consulting.

P. Bevan-Baker: In the municipal equalization grants, it just mentions various municipalities there. I'm wondering if you have a breakdown of that. Again, under the grants section – it's just over \$9 million.

Matthew Praught: Yeah, in municipality? The equalization?

P. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Matthew Praught: Yeah, I do have the breakdown of that for the prior year. Is there a specific one that you're wondering?

P. Bevan-Baker: I don't know if this is where I would find that, but the situation that Rustico finds itself in because of the dramatic overspend on the arena there – is the Province helping them out in any respect, and if so, where would we find that?

Matthew Praught: Well, equalization would be kind of formula-based, based on assessments and population, so that wouldn't be a specific

equalization matter. I don't believe there's anything in here specific to Rustico. I know that there were matters that they had dealt with in previous years, and I believe there's funding being dealt with in a different department, but we didn't have any specific budget allocation for them related to that matter.

[4:25 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, the next line down, not the equalization grants but the agreement grants, \$27 million – considerably more. I'm just wondering if you have a breakdown on that.

Matthew Praught: Yes, those are the real property tax credits. Again, those ones are all based on assessment growth and the different credit rates that we have for all the different municipalities. That's a flow-through from the *Property Act* tax collection. The \$27 million would be across all municipalities.

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

G. McNeilly: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'll ask the minister again – the support for the legal matter, maybe he knows, for the Rural Municipality of Murray Harbour. That went to a Drake lawyer. Is that what this was for, the lawyer, Drake? I can't remember his first name. Is it Michael? Michael Drake. Yeah, is that what...?

Hon. K. Dollar: I don't know which lawyer they used. It was for this situation in Murray Harbour, though, yes.

Matthew Praught: It would have been paid to the municipality directly.

G. McNeilly: But didn't the Premier at the time issue that over to Mr. Drake to...? Was that the report? Did the report come back to this government or did it go to the municipality?

Hon. K. Dollar: I believe we funded the municipality.

G. McNeilly: But there were findings that the province was supposed to get back on. What role did the province have in that? Did you complete your work? Did the minister at the time...? I don't know how many ministers ago, I think it was –

Chair: Budget question, hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Was that all the money that was spent on this? Did the province...? I don't think the province tabled the results.

Hon. K. Dollar: We supported the municipality in this situation.

G. McNeilly: Then there would be another budget line. Is there another budget line here for the provincial work that was done with that? Because it wasn't really a municipality issue. Is there another budget line in your budget? Because I don't see it.

Hon. K. Dollar: I don't believe so.

Matthew Praught: No, and there would be nothing in the current year's budget for it.

G. McNeilly: Can you release that report publicly? Because the Province paid for it, the Province issued it, the Province had responsibilities, and we never saw it.

Hon. K. Dollar: We supported the municipality; it's not our report.

G. McNeilly: Well, if it's not your report why did you...? Did the municipality come and ask you for that?

Hon. K. Dollar: Yes.

G. McNeilly: It is your report. It has to be your report because a previous Housing minister said it was going to be your report and you were going to release that to Islanders. We're kind of waiting because at the time, if you remember, it was going to court. You said you couldn't talk about it then. That court case is all done and Islanders are left without knowing what's happening.

Will you release that report?

Hon. K. Dollar: I'll take it back.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm looking at the list of the different positions because I'm thinking about Housing First. Do you have information on what the Housing First

team looks like or any information at all on where we are in the province on that?

Matthew Praught: Well, there wouldn't be anything budget-related in Municipal Affairs or —

K. Bernard: Are we still in Municipal Affairs?

Matthew Praught: Yeah.

K. Bernard: I'm sorry, Chair. Are we not on Housing Corporation?

Chair: No.

K. Bernard: I'm getting ahead of myself, I'm sorry.

Chair: That's alright.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

I'll just go back to the line of questioning regarding the Murray Harbour situation.

As I understand it, the judicial review was dismissed at a provincial level. But given the vigour, if I could put it that way, of the individual involved here, is there any concern that this may be brought up to a Supreme Court of Canada level, which would, of course, incur significant more costs?

[4:30 p.m.]

Chair: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, I'm trying my best for this one, but can we get to a budget question somehow?

P. Bevan-Baker: Sure. Has any money been set aside in a contingency fund for potential further legal action related to the Murray Harbour situation?

Matthew Praught: I would say not specifically to that, but that we do have our consulting and legal budget lines. If something was to come up, we may have some room in there, but it's not specifically identified in our budget numbers.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Of course, there's been — for as long as I've been around and probably long before then — concerns about the formula by which municipalities get funded. I'm

wondering — and it's their sort of perennial, number one ask when elections come around, to review the funding formula for a fairer distribution of funds of the property taxes.

The current CEO, Satya Sen, has been very articulate about changes they would like to see. I think we're in a transitional funding arrangement at the moment which was going to last two years, and I think this would be the last of those two years, so I'm assuming there are ongoing discussions with the PEIFM on what a new formula might look like.

Is there money set aside anywhere here in municipal affairs to facilitate those conversations?

Matthew Praught: We would be having those conversations with existing staff in the department between the corporate services group and municipal affairs team. You are correct that the current agreement does end March 2027, so we'll be looking at what the next funding model does look like.

P. Bevan-Baker: I know in other jurisdictions, other provinces, there are other potential ways that municipalities can raise funds other than by being given a portion of property taxes. Is that something that's being considered here?

Matthew Praught: There are not budget dollars specifically for a matter like that. Again, we would do that type of work with the department staff and how we currently operate, but that's more of a decision on the conversations that will happen.

P. Bevan-Baker: We've talked a little bit about municipalities that have come together to amalgamate and form larger ones, but there's also a number of dissolutions of municipalities. A couple of questions on that.

What sort of costs, on average, are incurred for the Province when a municipality dissolves, and secondly, what are those numbers increasing? Anecdotally, it seems to me that the smaller municipalities are struggling increasingly, which would suggest to me that more and more of them will be perhaps looking at dissolution.

Hon. K. Dollar: We're currently doing an MGA review to kind of make things a little bit more affordable for the smaller ones, so they can stay as is.

P. Bevan-Baker: Minister, that was the review that I talked about in the previous section, the MGA Review Facilitation, Survey? Is that correct?

Hon. K. Dollar: That would be part of it, yeah. We already did that, so now the department is working on it to go back with a....

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, I'm trying to relate this to the budget, Chair....

Hon. K. Dollar: So, under the new formula, the least amount was \$15,000 I believe, wasn't it, that a municipality got? No matter what size, no matter what services they offered, they all got at least \$15,000 and upwards on (Indistinct) depending on the services that they provided. That would be the first year for that?

Matthew Praught: Last year would have been, so this would be year 2 of that agreement.

P. Bevan-Baker: It strikes me that there were some time limits on the MGA about when certain sections of it would become enforceable and that municipalities would have to comply with certain things. More and more of those are kicking in as the years go by, and we find municipalities – in my own district I can think of a couple of small municipalities – again, who are struggling to supply the mandated services that the MGA imposes on smaller municipalities.

[4:35 p.m.]

So, I'm very interested in the minister's comment that we're trying to do some things to make it easier for these smaller municipalities to –

Hon. K. Dollar: Well, we're looking at shared services so municipalities can use shared services. I think a lot of these smaller municipalities that you're thinking of – yes, they are struggling, but I think they want to keep their identity the way it is. They want to stay the way they are, so that's what we're trying to do.

So, that kind of was the purpose of the MGA review, and now we're taking the feedback we got from that and we're going to act on it.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. I mean, I'm happy to hear that, minister, because again, I followed – not just in my own district, but outside. This is a portfolio I've had for a very long time now, going back to before the MGA came about.

Anyway, shared services, I don't think, is a term that you will find in the MGA. I could be wrong on that.

I'm assuming we're talking about some legislative changes in order to accomplish that. Is there money set aside here this year to create those – if that's what's coming – legislative changes to create the provision for shared services?

Hon. K. Dollar: I'd say you would find that money in the salaries, wouldn't you?

Matthew Praught: Well, again, through our normal staffing – and if we do have to go outside for any sort of consulting work, it would be from within the budget that we do have.

I think the key point here, too, is that we do have existing agreements with all of the municipalities through to the end of March 2027. The amounts that are in budget at the moment are established already with existing agreements, so maybe next year, depending on what the next round of those agreements look like, there may be some differences, but at the moment there's an established agreement with each of these municipalities for their funding.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Department of Housing and Communities:
53,560,800

Shall it carry? Carried.

Page 119.

PEI Housing Corporation

General

“Appropriations provided for the operation of emergency, transitional, supportive and social housing along with programs to support acceleration, affordability, first time homeowners, home renovation, and the most vulnerable Islanders across the housing continuum.” Administration: 2,903,100. Debt: 413,00. Equipment: 45,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 9,518,400. Professional Services: 3,260,600. Salaries: 10,153,700. Travel and Training: 399,700.

Grants

Affordable Housing Initiatives: 6,340,600.
Family Housing Boards: 2,200,000. Home
Heating Program: 7,278,600. Home Renovation
Program: 5,150,300. Shelter Supports:
10,646,700. Rental Supports: 14,721,600.

Total General: 73,031,300

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, Chair.

The number that jumps out at you when you turn
the page and look at this under grants is the
affordable housing initiative. It went from being
budgeted at \$15.5 million. You almost took \$9
million out of that, and it's only at \$6,300,000.
Affordable housing initiatives are being cut by
\$9 million. In a time where people can't afford
anything, how is this even possible?

Can you tell me the reduction – this number
jumps out at you – and why that is?

Hon. K. Dollar: This one's been well debated,
member. It's the CHEP program. That's the
difference there. Am I correct in that?

Matthew Praught: Yes, it is.

G. McNeilly: Congratulations on getting your
answer right, but this is not a good thing.

[Interjection]

G. McNeilly: I do, and I'm going to ask them.

How did you just pick this program out when we
need affordable housing in Prince Edward
Island? You've reduced this greatly. How much
debate was put into reducing affordable housing
initiatives in PEI by over \$9 million?

[4:40 p.m.]

Hon. K. Dollar: Member, as you know, we are
under financial restraints here. You guys have
asked many questions on this. This is a program
that we stood up. We put \$10 million into it two
years in a row. Our partners have gained 250
units from this program. They now have that
leverage to go out and build their inventory by
even more. It's on pause. It was a very good
program, but that's where we find ourselves
today.

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

Yeah, you started a program, paused it, and now
how long is the pause? Is it a year-long pause,
minister? What is left in the \$6.3 million? Of
that, what's that made up of? What's left in this
dwindling fund?

Matthew Praught: I do have a breakdown.
They would have been programs that we would
have had in previous years. The biggest
components to this would have been the
programs that Finance PEI offers that we cover
the interest differentials on. That's the Housing
Challenge. There's the subdivision financing
program, and a rent-to-own program also. Our
closing cost program is also within that number.
That would be the bulk of what makes up the
remainder.

G. McNeilly: Under the Salvation Army is a
support line for \$1.9 million. Under various,
there is a shelter support line for \$700,000.
There is only shelter support line, but there
seems to be two lines. I asked the minister about
this in the Legislature. The various one seems to
be a new line. What is that for? It says
transportation. Please describe the entire line.

Matthew Praught: Yes. That's the line that was
about \$690,000, I think, that you had mentioned.
That would be both cost for – the shelter support
line would provide these resources to people
who were calling who require shelter. There are
certain individuals that can't go straight into our
emergency shelters. Typically, these would be
people with children/families that need shelter.
For that, we do put them up in accommodations.

The bulk of that number would be emergency
accommodations for people who can't be put
directly in either our shelters or the ones that we
partner with, with community organizations.

There is a small portion of that that's
transportation, it's about \$100,000. That would
be for making sure that those people can get to
the shelter, if they need to go to appointments or
things like that while they're in those
accommodations, but it's definitely not all
transportation.

G. McNeilly: You would know that I've been
here – this is the first time I've seen this split.
The secondary one, the shelter support line
emergency sheltering/transportation does not
meet the description what we just talked about.

There's nothing in here that.... I see two lines now and that's the first for that. The shelter support line used to be Bedford MacDonald House. It was operated by them. New Roots has Bedford MacDonald House, and then that shelter support line is under them. That's what that budget was always about.

Now, the secondary line – is Bedford MacDonald House and the Salvation Army operating that shelter support line for \$600,000? You just mentioned it was a split, but is another organization operating it?

Matthew Praught: The line item that has Bedford MacDonald House and the support line, that would be for the operation of the line itself is built into that agreement. That's who they would be contacting.

The additional line – if it does say shelter support line, these would be the accommodations that are kind of obtained through that line. You can see there is emergency sheltering and transport in that line.

G. McNeilly: That's not a support line, that's not transportation; that's actual accommodations.

Matthew Praught: Yeah. There is a chunk of that that's accommodations, which I had mentioned are for individuals who can't go directly into one of our shelters for various reasons, and also, transportation to those shelters as needed.

G. McNeilly: How much are we spending? How much money do you have there have we spent in taxi cabs from Summerside to Charlottetown, and Charlottetown to Summerside in this budget?

[4:45 p.m.]

Matthew Praught: I don't have specifically Summerside to Charlottetown and Charlottetown to Summerside. I do have a breakdown of various suppliers, but in total, again, the total in the transport number is about \$100,000 in that year-to-date spend that we have.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going just start by asking if there are any significant cuts in this section, other – we just talked about the CHEP program, but....

Matthew Praught: No, again, we've discussed CHEP a lot. That's kind of the big highlight on that one.

K. Bernard: I'm going back to the Housing First questions, just looking through the position titles. I guess any information that you have on where government is with Housing First – is there anybody on this list of positions that would be working on that? Where are we with that?

Matthew Praught: I mean, Housing First is kind of a model. Obviously, it's right in the name that housing becomes the priority. We would have various staff through the department that would be working on those types of matters.

In particular, we have Weymouth Street, a 13-unit project that's opened there now. We would have staff that would be working with that group and the operator that we have there also. In terms of these three people are specifically on this item, no. It's kind of a team approach.

K. Bernard: I'm not going to spend too much time on this but I'm just curious because it's a very – people would need different things.

Hon. K. Dollar: I think I know what you're getting at, member. I think you're wondering is there any money set aside for the development of the Housing First strategy going farther. Is that what I'm kind of getting?

K. Bernard: You can answer that one and then I'll....

Hon. K. Dollar: I'm sure you'll correct me if I'm wrong and if I'm not going where you want or what you're thinking but what I'm thinking is, you're looking as if we're going to expand the Housing First, is what I think you're getting at.

We've opened our first 13 beds. We're monitoring how that works and how that goes and we're trying to learn from those 13 beds. Going beyond that, we'll pivot if we have to or if we can to go farther with....

K. Bernard: That is part of it, but Housing First is not necessarily everybody living under one roof. It's people having a home and then getting the supports taken to them that they need. That's always been my concern with government that

they may not fully understand the Housing First model or not implement it correctly. I feel like I'm hearing that.

Hon. K. Dollar: Well, if I understood what you just said there, you are a single home for –

K. Bernard: A housing unit.

Hon. K. Dollar: A housing unit?

K. Bernard: Yeah. It's not necessarily under one roof. Anyway, that's not the budget. Okay, we'll dig in there later because I don't think we're going to get anywhere budget-wise with that.

Moving on to the security services, the fire watch at Champion Court – I'm very hesitant to bring this up because what's come as a result of the place potentially catching on fire is that there is security there. For the first time in many years, the seniors who live there feel safe because there is security there.

Is there an update on how Champion Court is doing and how long they'll need that fire watch?

Matthew Praught: I think what I would say here is the fire watch is probably a bit of a typo. It is security services there. It may have been solely fire watch at one point and that's how it's continued to be processed, but in terms of how long it's needed and those kind of things, I don't have a specific answer on that.

K. Bernard: I understand the context of that and I can appreciate that.

I guess I'm going to use this opportunity to really advocate hard to keep that there because it's made a significant difference. I had asked some questions about Haviland Court and potentially getting security there because our inner city seniors homes are increasingly becoming hubs where people find ways in and live and do their laundry and all that stuff.

Is there any money in the budget to potentially extend security services for other Charlottetown-area seniors residences?

[4:50 p.m.]

Matthew Praught: We don't have anything added for that in this budget at the moment. Again, we kind of look at all the situation, all of our different houses and the needs of the

residents, but I wouldn't have anything earmarked specifically for new properties – or I should say new existing properties to get new security services.

K. Bernard: Under the grants, I'm looking at the various and the closing costs program, \$614,296. Two-part question: Is that program continuing? What has the uptake been like on that?

Matthew Praught: That program is continuing. We do have \$375,000 in budget this year. Last year's budget was \$250,000. We have increased the budget on that one compared to last year.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I'll follow on exactly from where Charlottetown-Victoria Park was there. Closing cost program, I understand, was up to a maximum of \$2,500 per person or family going through that. If I do the math on that, and I don't know if everybody gets the maximum or not, but it's around \$200, \$240 for the \$614,000. Does that square with your figures, Matt?

Matthew Praught: Yeah, it's fairly close. There may be a few that didn't quite get the maximum, but generally, most of them do.

P. Bevan-Baker: You say that we've budgeted \$300,000, was it, this year you said?

Matthew Praught: \$375,000.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, you're anticipating fewer people will take advantage of that this year, I'm assuming.

Matthew Praught: Yeah. I mean, it's tough to know exactly how many are going to apply and qualify for it. That's the budget number that we have in there. As we go through our forecast process, we'll look at where those numbers are coming in, see if we have to move a few things around, and that's.... But at the moment, that's our budget for that line.

P. Bevan-Baker: The other program that got a lot of attention when it was announced was the rent-to-own program. I see that the total cost, at least up to the end of February, was less than \$70,000. There were some concerns about the eligibility criteria for that. I'm wondering

whether we budgeted for more than that and underspent on that rent-to-own program.

Matthew Praught: The difference you would see there is, if I remember correctly, there were only two payments that had been processed as of that February 28th date. There would have been two payments that came afterward. The number was a little bit less than we had budgeted just based on the uptake. But also, because that program is a Finance PEI-run program and we're just paying an interest differential, when the interest rates change – and they have come down a little bit from when these were initially set up – the cost does come down to us also.

P. Bevan-Baker: Matt, do you have the number of participants for that program, for what that \$70,000 or so represents?

Matthew Praught: I don't. We just make a payment to Finance PEI. They provide us with our disbursement and their interest rates. That would be a question on their end.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'd really love to see the number of participants. You can't bring that back, but I should ask Finance is what you're saying.

Matthew Praught: Well, it would be – that's under the Finance PEI Crown; it's not Department of Finance.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm looking down at the home heating program. I see in the budget book, last year the estimate and the forecast were identical, \$7,636,000. But in the big book here – and this is to the end of February, I believe – we've got \$3.5 million. It really surprises me that – unless we're going to spend the other \$4 million in March.³

Matthew Praught: This one is payment timing, so we would make our payments directly to our provider on that one. The full amount, \$7.6 million, did end up getting dispersed by the end of the year. They would give periodic payments. Our actual expenses don't line up as the applications are coming in; we're providing it to our partner.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

The Summerside shelter budget for 11 months last year was \$860,000. What is their allocation for the next year?

[4:55 p.m.]

Matthew Praught: The Summerside shelter – their budget for next year is \$902,000.

G. McNeilly: They were open on various days throughout the winter. How many days were they open? Does the budget reflect that? What's the plan for next year? They were open a bunch of days in the winter, 24 hours a day, but that costs a lot of extra money. Was that incorporated into that?

Matthew Praught: This number would be based on agreements that we have with them, and I believe that one expires in March 2027. So, this would be an established contract that we have with them.

G. McNeilly: If it's an established contract, and it doesn't say – because I've seen the contract and it doesn't say 24 hours a day, and now the government is asking them to perform 24-hour-a-day services. Where is the difference in the cost?

Matthew Praught: I don't have information on that. I haven't been part of any 24/7 conversations with them. I know we have an agreement with them for about \$902,000.

G. McNeilly: So, when shelters are full, is there an additional payment if they're over capacity and they have to take care of additional people rather than the ten people that they're supposed to take care of?

Matthew Praught: I'd have to go through the contract. I wouldn't want to speculate on whether there is or isn't. I know what the value of the contract is, but...

G. McNeilly: Understandable. Maybe I should be asking these questions to the minister.

Weymouth Street is not located in here. It's up and going.... What is the payment for Weymouth Street for the operations of Weymouth Street? It was not brought on board until March 1st, maybe. So, what is the payment going to be to the operator of that facility?

Matthew Praught: Again, the grant numbers would have been last year, so you're right; there

wouldn't be anything in there for that. We have \$696,600.

G. McNeilly: And just with Housing First, that is a good example of what Housing First should look like, but it's only one building, and it's basically transitional housing into supportive housing. I compliment the government for finally getting that up and going after two years of delays, and I want to compliment the federal government for basically funding the project as well. But it's a good project.

How long is that contract for with the operator?

Matthew Praught: That one I believe expires in March of 2027, and then we would revisit.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

I'm looking at the rental supports here. That would be, I'm assuming, both the mobile vouchers and the rental supplements. Is that correct?

Matthew Praught: Yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I don't think I've ever seen a year where we underspent on that, and almost every year it seems that that's a cost that exceeds what we have budgeted. I know it's not down very much, but is there an explanation?

I guess what I'm looking for here: It strikes me that the CHEP program that we've discontinued or paused would have been a vehicle where some of the folks who might have been requiring rental supports – either mobile vouchers or rent supplements – would have moved into affordable housing and therefore taken some of the pressure off those support costs. Do you have any data on that?

Matthew Praught: Well, in previous years – we have a couple of agreements on the mobile rental vouchers. There are a few different components – Canada housing benefit and victims of gender-based violence – so we budget those based on the agreements that we have for funding on those.

In prior years, I would say our numbers – we would love to be able to spend every amount of this; it means we're helping to support Islanders who need it. It is application-based, so there

would be nobody that would be eligible that would be denied for it, but we kind of looked at where the numbers have been coming in. If you were to look at our forecast on the mobile rental vouchers last year, it was around \$7.6 million, and that's where we've budgeted for fiscal '26-27. So, we've kind of looked at the application rates for those mobile rental vouchers and budgeted accordingly.

[5:00 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Can you tell us how many people that represents? Well, the total payment for the mobile and rental supplements is \$13.6 million, but I guess not individuals always; it would be families or....

Matthew Praught: I would say in terms of mobile rental vouchers, we have about 1,600, I think, that are active at any given time. The number – we supported about 2,700 as long as these have been active that we've had mobile rental vouchers, but it's around 1,600 that are active.

P. Bevan-Baker: I call the hour.

Chair: The hour has been....

Hon. K. Dollar: Can we extend the hour to finish this so Matt doesn't have to come back tomorrow?

Chair: There is a request to extend the hour to get this section through.

P. Bevan-Baker: I personally have a fair number of questions here. I don't know if anybody else does. If it's just me....

Chair: You're the only one on the list, hon. member. Is it your wish to extend the hour until this section passes?

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Chair: Sure, okay. Go ahead.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

On this section, minister, the tiny homes have been talked about. I'm not going to re-plow any ground that we have already discussed here. However, I am going to ask: Those assets are

sitting there unused currently. What is the plan for however many tiny homes that are not going to be used for what they were originally purposed?

Hon. K. Dollar: They are going to be used for their original purpose, to be homes. The location is going to probably different than we were looking at, and there's work.... I ask this question every day: Where are we at? Where are we at? We're getting very close to having them being moved.

P. Bevan-Baker: The reason I ask the question, minister, is that I've been approached – and I don't think the only MLA in this situation – by a constituent who would love to purchase one of these tiny homes that's not currently being used. Is that a possibility that they are going to be available for Islanders to buy?

Hon. K. Dollar: I'm not ruling anything out. I'm encouraged by the interest in them really, so I'm not worried about it to that point. We'll be going out with an expression of interest of some kind. Some of them are going to be used for social housing to take off the registry. I hope to have more information soon. The staff knows that I'm on this.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, I appreciate that, minister. I like the fact that you're pushing on that. I hate to see assets not being used and people not having homes. We should be able to put those two things together.

The Premier recently made some comments around the improving vacancy rate that we have on Prince Edward Island, and it's a good story. However, the affordability of many of those units just does not match the incomes of Islanders who are looking for homes, and that's where the rental support programs come in.

He mused about perhaps changing some aspects of the RTA. I'm just wondering whether there is.... I realize this is more a policy question, let me see if I can frame this in a budget way.

I would love to see the amount – you said it's nice, Matt, that we're supporting people and giving them homes. I agree, absolutely, but I would love to see a bit of work done before we make any changes to show that the money that we are currently outlaying on our rental supports, whether they're mobile vouchers or straight rental supplements, that we will actually be reducing costs to the public purse as we look

at all of the various ways that we can provide housing for the folks who need it.

I'm not sure if there's a question there. His comments really caught me.

Hon. K. Dollar: We're not looking at making any changes as of now.

P. Bevan-Baker: The John Howard Society here, I know that there were concerns that their budget was perhaps cut. Is that \$45,000 that we see there – this is for case worker services – does that represent a cut to the John Howard Society?

Matthew Praught: No, we wouldn't have cut anything in this budget. That may have just been, again, payments to that point in the year.

[5:05 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: I think those are all the questions I have. Everybody will be delighted to hear, I'm sure.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total PEI Housing Corporation: 73,031,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

Chair: The hour has been called.

Hon. K. Dollar: Thank you for allowing us to finish that up so Matt doesn't have to make his sixth trip down here tomorrow.

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.

[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.

The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, that this House adjourn until Thursday, May 21st, at 1:00 p.m.

[The Legislature adjourned until Thursday, 21 May 2026 at 1:00 p.m.]