



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings**

(Hansard)

Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Friday, 22 May 2026

No. 33

The Honourable Brad Trivers, Speaker

Published by Order of the Legislature

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

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

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Bernard , Karla (G)	Charlottetown-Victoria Park (12)	Third Party Whip
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Compton , Hon. Darlene (PC)	Belfast-Murray River (4)	Minister of Land and Environment
Croucher , Hon. Robin (PC)	Souris-Elmira (1)	Minister of Education and Early Years
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Henderson , Robert (L)	O’Leary-Inverness (25)	Opposition Whip
Hudson , Hon. Ernie (PC)	Alberton-Bloomfield (26)	Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy

Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
Lantz , Hon. Rob (PC)	Charlottetown-Brighton (13)	Premier Minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs
MacEwen , Sidney (PC)	Morell-Donagh (7)	
MacFarlane , Matthew (G)	Borden-Kinkora (19)	Leader of the Third Party
MacKay , Matthew (PC)	Kensington-Malpeque (20)	Government House Leader
MacLennan , Hilton (PC)	Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke (23)	
McNeilly , Gordon (L)	Charlottetown-West Royalty (14)	Opposition House Leader
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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 10:03 a.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Welcome back, everyone, on a Friday morning and a beautiful spring day in the Legislature. I want to welcome my colleagues, staff, Pages – everyone; I hope you all have a great day. Welcome to the guests in the gallery. I understand we've got a large group here representing the Early Childhood Development Association; thank you for being here. Thank you for all you do. I had a productive meeting with your leadership recently and look forward to more discussions with you.

On Sunday, May 24th, the Allan and Tracy MacKenzie Memorial Walk/Run for Autism is taking place, beginning at the Charlottetown fire hall on Kent Street. This is a walk that supports Project Lifesaver PEI, a non-profit provider of 24/7 radio tracking bracelets for individuals with autism, Alzheimer's, dementia, or Down syndrome, and ensures that they can be quickly located if they wander.

[10:05 a.m.]

Registration opens at 9 a.m. with the walk/run beginning at 10 a.m. Participants can look forward to door prizes and a barbecue to wrap up the event. To learn more about how you can register and get involved, you can visit their Facebook page. It's the Allan and Tracy MacKenzie Walk/Run for Autism.

Also, last night I had the pleasure of attending the Junior Achievement PEI dinner and brought greetings on behalf of government. We heard some really inspiring stories from Harvey Stewart, a true Island success story; and Kathy Hambly, whose leadership helped shape our business community.

Events like this give students a chance to learn directly from these leaders and see what's possible. I think what we really heard last night – which I think the students should really appreciate hearing – is that success as an entrepreneur or as a businessperson is not always a straight line. Success is never

guaranteed, but what is always guaranteed is ups and downs and challenges. The real key to success is persistence, perseverance, and hard work. We certainly heard that.

But we also took the time to honour the life of Robert Irving, who was honoured posthumously last night. Mr. Irving's impact on Prince Edward Island will obviously be felt for a very long time. I express my sincere condolences to his family, his friends and colleagues who were there last night, and Ron Clow, who accepted the award on behalf of Mr. Irving.

It was a wonderful event. I want to congratulate all the inductees and thank them for their contributions to our province.

That's it, Mr. Speaker. I hope everyone has a great weekend. Looking forward to a productive day here in the Legislature.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome all those who are watching online, in particular those watching from Tignish-Palmer Road, and welcome to everyone who is joining us in the gallery today from ECDA, and whoever else.

I recognize one face in there: Shirley Jay. I know Shirley from the Home and School Association, as I'm sure every Islander would know her, and her bluegrass interests across Prince Edward Island. Welcome, Shirley, to today's proceedings.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I wish everybody a great weekend. We have work to do, so let's get at 'er.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I might take a little more time than the Leader of the Opposition this morning. I appreciate the opportunity to deliver fulsome greetings every day the Legislature sits.

Welcome back to everybody in the Legislature today and watching online, and everybody in the gallery. It's such an incredible, full gallery today. Trying to keep track of people I recognize

coming in – I know I saw Cecilia Williams coming in from Fusion Charlottetown; Madeline Bisio with the chamber and with Fusion as well, Shirley Smedley-Jay, and Tom Deelstra, new president of the Home and School Federation. Welcome.

As the Premier noted, we have a large contingent from the Early Childhood Development Association here today, and I would like to recognize those who have taken the time to come out today.

We have executive director, Jennifer Nangreaves here today; Laura MacNevin, the board chair; Darla Farquharson; Keysha Fife; Jenn Arsenault; Hanane Abdelqaoui – I may not have gotten that name quite right; Mandy MacNevin Reynolds; and staff from the association including Julian Taylor here and others, and at least one Megan that I recognize who is here today. Thank you all for coming in, taking the time to join us in the gallery today. I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

A couple of events I did want to highlight:

This summer, CreativePEI executive director Jane Ledwell will be holding open office hours at arts and culture venues across PEI starting today in Summerside. Anyone in the area can drop in and meet Jane at the Lefurgey Cultural Centre between 9 a.m. and 12 noon or at the Harbourfront Theatre between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. today.

Yesterday I mentioned that the East Coast Music Awards weekend was beginning. I would like to offer congratulations to well-known Island singer-songwriter Lennie Gallant, who last night won the Folk Release of the Year. Congratulations to Lennie, and of course, we're hoping to see more Islanders recognized as the weekend progresses.

[10:10 a.m.]

Also, tomorrow evening, out my way in Augustine Cove, Camp Abegweit will be celebrating their 80th anniversary – 80 years of providing a wonderful camp opportunity for children. I had the opportunity a few years ago to attend Camp Abegweit and enjoyed the experience; so many children have since then. So, tomorrow evening at five o'clock – fundraising spaghetti dinner held at the camp. I'll be walking down for that.

Also, I know we've been celebrating the success of the Holland College graduates over the week. Today at 10 a.m. – which is underway now – the various groups are getting their certificates in culinary arts, hotel and restaurant operations management, tourism and travel events management, pastry arts, energy systems engineering technology, and heritage retrofit carpentry. Congratulations to everybody in these classes who are seeing the fruits of their labour and their hard work paying off by getting recognized and getting their diplomas today.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat, and I'll wish everyone a great day of debate here in the Legislature.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome to all of those here joining us here in the gallery – in particular, to the members of the ECDA and the board of directors and staff. It's great to see you. To Shirley and to Fusion, it's great to see you all, and to those watching at home, particularly in District 9 Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

I'm a lifetime member of the Early Childhood Development Association. I have advocated on behalf of children and families for 43 years in my career, and three years since I retired; that's 46 years. Yes, I'm that old, and I will continue to advocate on behalf of children and families until I take my last breath.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's nice to be up on my feet today and welcome all my colleagues back for a great day of debate – and those in the gallery, and those watching from District 11, and maybe my mom is watching today because apparently she's picked up and thinks it's pretty interesting.

I want to say that last weekend I had the opportunity to partake in the Proude's Shoes sale. They had their 61st anniversary sale. I can't be outdone by the story that I was told there

about the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point buying a pair of shoes because he couldn't get home in a snowstorm and how he got up and spoke about his shoes from Proude's Shoes.

I have to stand up and outdo him today by saying on the weekend I was so happy to buy a pair of shoes from Proude's Shoes and the great service I received from Kevin and all the staff at Proude's Shoes. Thank you for all that you do and all you have done for 61 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, want to welcome those in the gallery and acknowledge one of my former colleagues here, Wes Sheridan. His daughter is in here, Megan Drummond. Great to welcome her here; Wes was a great member of this Legislature.

I want to acknowledge Harvey Stewart for his recent induction into the Business Hall of Fame for Prince Edward Island. He's a tremendous entrepreneur who comes from the riding of O'Leary-Inverness and he's a real role model for many entrepreneurs across Prince Edward Island and West Prince.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'd like to say good morning to anyone that might be watching in District 1 Souris-Elmira today. I'd also like to welcome Shirley and Tom from the PEI Home and School Federation. They are great collaborators, great advocates, and great partners in moving our education system in the right direction every day.

I'd also like to recognize the members of the ECDA. As the Premier stated, we did have a very good and productive meeting with Jenn and Laura. They're great advocates of the sector. I appreciated the time that we spent talking.

I'm anticipating I might get some questions today, so with that, I wish everyone a great day.

Thank you.

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

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

I'd like to also welcome everybody to the gallery this morning. Hi. Nice to see you all.

This week, May 19th to 23rd, is Indigenous Awareness Week here on Epekwitk. It's a week to celebrate Mi'kmaw language, culture, and the ongoing efforts at reconciliation. The Province and L'nuey have been working since 2020 to increase the number of Mi'kmaw names across the province, and two were just added as part of this week's celebrations: Pita'q Jipu'ji'j, which is Long Creek – happens to be in my district – and Niwejk, which is Nail Pond. That brings the total to 47 place names being recognized in the Mi'kmaw language here on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[10:15 a.m.]

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I would like to welcome back all colleagues and staff and our Pages today, Giselle, Jackson, and Eva, and everybody joining us in the gallery. It's nice to see a full gallery. Thank you for coming.

Last night, the Junior Achievement awards were – it was a great evening, and those entrepreneurial skills are life-changing. I want to thank Junior Achievement for their work and congratulate the people inducted last night.

I just want to mention quickly – on Sunday, Hope House Mother's Home is hosting an afternoon tea fundraiser from two to four at the Credit Union Place in Summerside. I'm hearing they've got lots of people signed up. It's a great cause. If you have some free time on Sunday, I hope to see you there.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Kwe', everybody, and hello to everybody watching from Charlottetown-West Royalty, District 14. I want to say hello to Cecilia Williams, too, and Madeline Biso, who are here with Fusion Charlottetown. Looking forward to asking them a couple of questions; thank you for coming today. And good friends Darla Farquharson and Mandy MacNevin – I look forward to coming back to the centre to do a little activity with the kids.

Thanks a lot, Mr. Speaker; appreciate it.

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

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

I want to welcome everyone to the gallery today, all the early years folks.

I did something that I might regret on Monday. In January, I went to read to a kindergarten class at L.M. Montgomery. At the time, I was the Premier. They didn't care about that. They were more excited I was a farmer, so I invited them to my farm for a tour someday. Well, I thought it was 15 – a class of 15. It's all of L.M. Montgomery's kindergarten classes coming to my farm Monday, and Monday we're letting the cows out for the first time.

It's going to be quite a performance, so I hope I can report back a lot of excitement Tuesday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Members

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

Remembering Marilla Millar

R. Henderson: A life well lived, as it states in her obituary, is not measured in years but in love that is shared, joy that is given, hearts that are touched, and lives that have been changed by one's contributions. There is a constituent of O'Leary Inverness who did her best to make that her mantra. Marilla Millar of Ellerslie was one who dedicated her life to her family, as many do, but Marilla made it a point to support those who were not as fortunate.

After raising six children who all became successes in their own right, she and her late husband, Pete, opened their home to foster children. Although there is no title for foster mom of the year, Marilla cared for 139 children – mostly infants and preschoolers – over 40 years.

Yes, her recognition for her profound legacy of love, compassion and her impact on the community has been awarded with an honorary degree from UPEI. She was selected as the Volunteer of the Year by the local Credit Union, the Tyne Valley Oyster Festival, and the Prince County Hospital Foundation. She was a staunch advocate for the Ellerslie Legion and Tyne Valley fire departments. She established the local chapter of the Caring Cupboard Food Bank and was the first chairperson of the Tyne Valley/Ellerslie Community School.

As her son Rod said, if there was anything to volunteer for in our community, Marilla would be the first person to raise her hand.

For a pastime, she and Pete would go to ballroom dancing or to political events. I recall one of my first Liberal organizational poll meetings after I entered into politics was at the Millar home, where Marilla was just as graceful welcoming people into her home as she and Peter were on the dance floor.

Marilla did live a fulfilling 95 years of life in our community, and the legacy of 19 grandchildren, 32 great grandchildren and the families of 139 foster children prove Marilla Ellands Millar lived a life well lived.

Thanks.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Downtown Summerside Community Cleanup

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today once again to highlight a couple of Summerside businesses that continuously give back to our community and city. These businesses are Downtown Summerside Inc. and Evermoore Brewery, both in the heart of downtown and ready to whatever they can to improve Summerside and community life.

Downtown Summerside is a major proponent in the Witches on Water Street in October and play

host to the classic car show every Friday night over the summer, weather permitting. Evermoore is a local shop that gives back in many ways as well as a stop during the Coldest Night of the Year Walk in February.

Both of these businesses, along with the City, are partnering up this weekend so that they can breathe a little fresh air in the downtown part of Summerside. They are doing this by holding a community cleanup starting at 9 a.m. at the gazebo off of Heather Moyse Drive. There will be shirts given out to all the volunteers to wear and bags available for the garbage.

[10:20 a.m.]

The cleanup will be taking place from 9 a.m. until 11, working their way through the Confederation Trail and downtown, ending at Evermoore Brewing. Finishing at Evermoore around 11 o'clock, working up an appetite, Evermoore owner and operator, Alex Clark, will be holding a barbecue on the back side of Evermoore along the Confederation Trail.

So, Mr. Speaker, with the weather getting nice and tomorrow going to be another great day, I hope to see all residents that are able to help down at the gazebo off Heather Moyse Drive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Government Investments

M. MacFarlane: This government would like Islanders to think they are somehow a new government, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Islanders are quite aware that there is nothing new about this government, and certainly no new ideas. The truth is these folks have had their hands on the levers of power for seven years, with ample opportunity and resources to put forward a vision for the province that would benefit generations to come. Instead, they've spent these seven years frantically running from one crisis to the next, never once stopping to ask: "What kind of government do we want to be?" or "What kind of legacy can we build for our children and our grandchildren?"

This spring sitting laid bare that this government isn't interested in making positive changes for our province. To put it simply, they are the dog

that caught the car and then didn't know what to do with it.

A government with vision for our future would put forward legislation in health care, housing, affordability, and education that would actually improve the lives of Islanders. It would invest in those with the smallest voice and the most to lose if we don't get this right – the children and youth of our province. It would invest in the programs that directly impact children's development in a sector where the majority of the majority of its workers are women – in childhood education. It would invest in climate change programs to protect our planet for future generations. Islanders deserve a government that is focused, hard-working, and knows above all that it serves the people of this province.

The goal of every government should be to leave this place better than when it first took office. That goal will now have to fall to the next government to fulfill.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The longer this government talks about energy reform, the clearer it becomes that they still do not have a real plan. The grid is under pressure, solar programs are being cut, Maritime Electric still has not been properly regulated, and Islanders are paying more and more every month. Quite frankly, this government is starting to look completely like it's in over its head with energy.

Energy infrastructure

Question to the Premier: What specific action has this government actually taken to strengthen Prince Edward Island's electricity grid since the Premier promised immediate reform?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

In fact, there is a process underway to review our regulatory environment here. We're taking

steps, and I fully expect us to bring regulatory changes and legislative changes here in the fall.

We also issued an expression of interest for backup battery storage power here on Prince Edward Island, and the response has been incredible. Those responses are being evaluated right now. I look forward to evaluating those and moving forward with that project.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Everything is a review. Everything is kicked down the road. Nothing for now.

This Premier has spent months travelling to Ottawa and talking about his role as chair of the Council of the Federation, but Islanders are still waiting to see what has actually been delivered to Prince Edward Island.

At a time when our energy system desperately needs major infrastructure investment, the Province still does not have a project approved through the Major Projects Office while other provinces are already moving ahead.

Question to the Premier: What is the current status of PEI's transmission line project, and has the federal government given any indication this project is actually moving forward, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Based on all of my conversations, I have absolute confidence that this project will move forward. In fact, I think the scope and the regional participation in electricity infrastructure will expand here, based on what I know. I know that our federal partners have reached out. I believe we're organizing a meeting between Minister Hodgson and the three Maritime premiers to discuss regional collaboration on electricity issues. As you know, the federal government just released their national electricity strategy, and this discussion would be a part of that strategy and that vision for an interconnected Canada where we're meeting our capacity needs here.

[10:25 a.m.]

I look forward to those further discussions, but as I've said here before, we've already

submitted our application for the pre-development work to replace the cables under the Northumberland Strait. I look forward to having that project approved and announced and moving forward with more regional collaboration to secure our energy future here.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

We haven't seen any progress. Maybe those cables are going to go in the tunnel that you went up there with a priority for.

Prince Edward Island only gets the opportunity to chair the Council of the Federation once every decade or so, and Islanders expected the Premier to use that position to build relationships and to deliver real results for this province, especially on energy infrastructure. Instead of building stronger relationships with Ottawa and delivering results for Islanders, this government seems more interested in political posturing while other provinces move ahead on major infrastructure projects.

Question to the Premier: Why does Prince Edward Island still not have a project approved through the Major Projects Office while other provinces are already moving ahead?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yes, in fact, last night I had a conversation with our Charlottetown MP about this issue, and he assures me that he's working on our behalf to help get this project approved. He has spoken with Minister Hodgson about it, and as I said, Minister Hodgson has reached out to my office to arrange a meeting with the Maritime premiers to advance our energy infrastructure here and plan for our energy future. All of this work is advancing. It's hard work, and we're getting it done.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm not sure what he's getting done, Mr. Speaker, because we don't see any results.

I'm going to go back to a question that I asked last week, and it's about vulnerable seniors in community care facilities who are left without reliable access to prescription renewals because they no longer have a family doctor. In

particular, I talked about the Tignish seniors co-op, which has 30 of its 51 residents without a family physician, and do not have any ability, other than to maybe get on a bus and go to the nearest ER, to get a prescription refilled.

Prescription renewals for seniors (further)

I'm asking the Minister of Health once again because families are scared, staff are overwhelmed, and seniors are left without reliable access to medications. You said you would go back to Health PEI and look into it. You haven't come back to the House with anything yet. Can you give me an update today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As the hon. member mentioned, this is actually a very serious issue. We have folks that are in community care that are actually a level 4 and require more staffing, and staff with that scope that can care for those individuals.

What I will commit to is I'll meet with the community care association and see if we can find a path forward to support them because right now, they have to try and find resources and hire more staff that can actually care for these patients. So, we do have to find a way forward in how we can support them.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, but that's not the question that I asked. I asked about prescription refills.

These 30 residents of 51 in the Tignish Seniors Home alone – and I've spoken to other community care facilities who also have residents who do not have a family doctor – they do not have access to prescription refills. There was a doctor in Tignish that was doing it. He was doing it on a locum. Health PEI stopped that. Dr. Blackmore, who's the new doctor in Tignish, cannot take these patients on because Health PEI said they can't. So, now these 30 patients are left without any access to get prescription refills unless they go to the ER.

I'm going to ask the minister again: Can you give me an update on that question?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I don't have an update here right now, but I can go back and check again to see if we have found a solution. It is a serious issue, if what the hon. member says is accurate. We don't want these folks going to the ER to get prescription refills, so I'll certainly look into it and see what I can do.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

During the budget estimates yesterday with the Department of Justice and Public Safety, it was identified that coroner services will be receiving \$200,000 less than they spent last year on said services. Now, PEI has a growing population, and the law of averages – more people, more fatalities.

Coroner services

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: What measures has your government implemented that would lead you to believe that fewer calls for coroner services will be required on PEI for the coming year?

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

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

[10:30 a.m.]

The coroner's office – we did a deep dive into that a few years ago because it was probably ignored for a long time, and it needed extra support. So, last year we pumped in some resources to boost up the coroner's office. We're adding a coordinator to that office this year right away – it's going out – to help Dr. Webber and his team provide the best and most efficient service they can on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Well, you did add another administrative person, and that is helpful; appreciate that.

But it's not that our health care in PEI is any better. It's not that our highways are safer. It's not that our ambulance response times have gotten shorter. When someone dies outside a hospital setting, a coroner is required to conduct a review of the scene and determine the cause of death. But here's the problem: already, our volunteer first responders are challenged for time; when they arrive on the scene, they must wait for the coroner before they leave the death scene.

Question to the minister: Has your department received any feedback from our volunteer first responders about how long they must wait for a coroner to arrive?

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

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

I haven't heard from the firefighters about this. The police sometimes wait at the scene of some of these incidents. But we've boosted the coroner's office with three new vehicles. We added – I think we have seven coroners now and now we have an executive person in the office to coordinate things. We're trying to make it the most efficient office possible.

When we talk about budget, they take a five-year average of the budget; that's how they budget. They can't predict deaths, but they can go over a five-year span and make the best estimate they can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: I can't imagine it's getting any cheaper because gas has gone up, the cost of transportation – there's a whole lot of issues that our coroner's office is going to have to deal with.

But this government seems to have decided that it's going to implement budget reductions on the more vulnerable. They've done that with children, it's done it with EDA workers, and now the deceased, and now impacting our volunteer firefighter first responders.

Question to the Minister of Justice: Why would you believe that after spending over \$1 million on coroner services last year, \$800,000 would be sufficient for this coming year?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, the member is reaching today; he is reaching. We budgeted the same amount as the year before, and the year before. It's a five-year average. We can't predict how busy the coroner is. We pray that they're not busy, but we can't predict. If they need more money, there's always more money for the coroner.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education and Early Years stated that pedagogical support is not tied to ratios in centres, and that is technically correct. But the recruitment and retention of qualified ECE educators is directly tied to professional development infrastructure that pedagogical support provides.

Early childhood educators have fought for decades. Many are in this room today. This isn't just a cut; this is a significant loss and a step backwards.

Early learning and child care funding (further)

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Can you please point to any evidence that said to you that making this absolutely devastating cut to this sector was anywhere reasonable to be made? Do you understand, minister, the impact to these people and everyone in this sector?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for her advocacy. There's no doubt she's a great advocate for the sector.

This government has made record investments in our early years system. We're very, very

proud of that. We had to look at where we could find cost savings, and this was one of those areas.

Again, I'm going to state that this advocacy and this pressure need to be placed on our federal partners in this. Last year alone, it was a \$5 million shortfall. This fiscal, it's a \$17 million shortfall from the federal government in the Canada-wide agreement. The Province has been shouldering that for the last two or three years.

We'll continue to support the sector in every way we can.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[10:35 a.m.]

The Minister of Education and Early Years has told Acadian and Francophone families on several occasions over the last few weeks that something is coming, but without a timeline or without any details. In the meantime, the program that was working has been cut. If whatever is coming doesn't compare to what they lost, surely government can acknowledge that they have created a gap in service for one of the most vulnerable linguistic communities in the Island.

French language supports (further)

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Can you finally tell the House what specific supports are coming for Acadian and Francophone families, and when?

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

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

As I answered the last time, no. There are still conversations happening between both of our departments. They will continue, and we'll come back with what we have when we have it.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, alongside the MLA for Charlottetown-West Royalty and our leader, Robert Mitchell, we met with Fusion Charlottetown to discuss a wide range of issues, one of which was support to small businesses. Since January 2024, there's been a downward trend with around 1,300 businesses created and 1,700 that closed. In PEI alone, 400 more businesses have closed than opened since 2024, the same month the government began winding down the Startup Zone.

Support for small businesses

Question to the Minister of Economic Development: Will the minister acknowledge that removing the province's most accessible entrepreneurship hub at the very moment this downward trend began was the wrong call for Island businesses?

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

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

Certainly, we did discuss this a couple weeks ago within the House in regards to small businesses and the growth of that. There is a bit of a trend on a decline, and we certainly don't want to ever see that. We do have programs in place to help support. We would always encourage anyone that's either in the small business industry now on PEI or looking to get in it, to please reach out. We do have programs to help support and we're ready to help them if they need it.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Startup Zone was a wide-ranging service that would welcome any form of small business or startup, from food service, tourism, and other general small business sectors. Many of these sectors do not appear in LaunchPad's eligibility criteria according to the LaunchPad website. That leaves out many other small businesses.

Question to the same minister. Please explain to Islanders working outside the approved sectors exactly where they should go to receive this

same early-stage incubation support that the Startup Zone once provided.

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

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

Through Innovation PEI, all services are still in existence to help support those that would like to start a business, or again, that are in the business, whatever level they're at – entry, midway, or finding themselves struggling. Again, we are here and ready to talk. There are staff that are ready to help. There are a number of services and programs that are available at Innovation PEI to help ensure that.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's a clear need for additional services to support new businesses to grow, and Islanders looking to start businesses need to see that they do have a partner with this government. The minister talks about what's available, but question to the minister: Will you commit today to finding new and innovative ways – because clearly, losing 400, the supports that are there aren't helping – to help the creation of small businesses in this province, and will you expand LaunchPad's mandate?

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

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

Certainly, we continue to work with our small businesses, and survey to see that we are meeting their needs. We know how important entrepreneurs are to Prince Edward Island, and we're proud of those that are out there doing their passion in their businesses. We do have a mentorship program that will help small business owners ready and available. They can certainly reach out to Innovation PEI to access that program.

Thank you.

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

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

Well, if you're going to have trouble starting up a business, young entrepreneurs and Fusion Charlottetown have said this too: they're having trouble finding a place to live. Everything is going up in the province – gas, home pricing, and other basic needs – but the thresholds for important programs are not keeping pace.

Fusion Charlottetown has pointed this out, and they pointed out a program – the down payment assistance program was updated to raise income thresholds to \$110,000. So, the down payment assistance program gives families and young people opportunities to purchase a home. That program caps out at \$350,000, and your income is \$110,000.

Down payment assistance program

Minister, you know these thresholds are way too low to be effective. Will you look at changing both the income qualifier and the price of the homes? Because they don't work for anybody.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

[10:40 a.m.]

We do have the down payment assistance program. We also have the closing costs program, and we also have to rent-to-own program. Last year, we've seen the uptake in the down payment assistance program to an all-time high. It's the highest it's ever been at 141. We have just recently increased the income thresholds from \$100,000 to \$110,000. I do know it doesn't fit everyone, but there seems to be some uptake.

But further to that, we have three different programs helping first-time homeowners. I have had questions when I've been in my briefings since becoming minister, and I am looking to see if we can make them more efficient because it's a lot of the same applicants for all three.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: The minister of cut, cancel, and communicate is at it again.

This is a very serious problem here. Your cap at \$350,000 is not there, minister. People cannot afford that. That means that you have to find a home that's under \$350,000 to qualify for the program.

Minister: Will you look at raising that number to \$385,000-\$400,000 at the immediate time? Because people can't afford houses anymore.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

Certainly not in Lewis Point, there wouldn't be too many at \$350,000. Like I said before, I'm always looking at the programs. I'm always looking to leave things better than I found them. Again, I'll remind the member that two of these three programs didn't exist very long ago. So, we are working. We are helping. We're going to continue to do so.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Educators, parents, and child care operators across the Island have been sounding the alarm after this government cut funding for pedagogical support staff. The 2024 PEI early learning and child care workforce surveys identified this program as one of the most impactful supports for recruitment, retention, and quality in early learning. Later today, I'll be tabling a petition prepared by the Early Childhood Development Association with over 2,458 signatures calling on government to reinstate this funding.

Early learning and child care funding (further)

Question to the hon. Premier. The frontline experts are once again telling your government that you're making a mistake. Why, once again, Mr. Premier, are you ignoring the expertise of our frontline professionals?

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

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

I'm just going to throw a few numbers out here: \$39.8 million increase in our budget for education, \$15.5 million of that to early years alone. We're supporting our early years sector like no other government in history. We are having very productive conversations with the leaders in the sector. We're going to continue to do that. We're going to try and find a path forward here.

I know he's got a petition to table. This is not where the work gets done. It's out having those productive meetings and conversations. The Premier and I are committed to doing that, as is my staff. We're going to continue to do that.

Thank you.

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

M. MacFarlane: The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that these cuts will almost certainly result in job losses in a workforce made up of approximately 95 percent women, not to mention that a lack of quality, accessible child care disproportionately impacts women being able to enter and stay in the workforce.

Question to the hon. Premier: As the leader of this province, Mr. Premier, do you not feel it incumbent on you to ensure that the decisions your government makes do not have such a negative and disproportionate impact on such a large percentage of our population that does such critical work for our province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

As a former minister, for a short time, of Education and Early Years, I've learned a lot about the sector. I attended FPT meetings where other provinces looked to Prince Edward Island and our system here. We are very much the shining star in this sector in the country.

We have grown this sector substantially, very rapidly. There's a lot to be proud of in this sector, and we will support this sector for continued growth, but perhaps we are somewhat a victim of our own success here. We do need our federal partners to continue to grow their

contributions at an equal rate so that we can continue to expand at that rate.

[10:45 a.m.]

But the entire point of growing this early years sector – \$10/day day care, making it financially feasible for, primarily, women to re-enter the workforce – is an advantage to women in Prince Edward Island. This is part of the rationale for investing in this, for the early childhood development.

But again, this is a sector that is leading the country. We'll continue to support them, continue to invest, and work with them to find solutions to move forward and keep growing the sector.

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

M. MacFarlane: Again, Mr. Speaker, we see the government pointing to the federal government for services and programs that this government needs to deliver to Islanders. They're not investing in the program. They're cutting the program. The numbers speak for themselves.

The Minister of Education has made it clear today and several times throughout the course of this sitting that he will not reinstate the funding for the pedagogical supports, even with so much evidence and so much opposition from frontline professionals and the families who rely on child care.

Question to the hon. Premier. We need a leader on this issue, Mr. Premier, that will listen to the experts and that will commit to reversing these cuts and restoring full funding for pedagogical support positions. Will you be that leader, Mr. Premier?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: I would argue that we have been the leaders in early childhood education over the last seven years and still continue with a \$15.5 million increase in the investment this year alone for early years.

I would encourage the members across here – as I've said before, a \$17 million shortfall over the last two years from our federal partners. I had a meeting with my own MP last week to discuss

this very important topic, and I had a conversation with the MP for Charlottetown, who is the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park's MP. I asked him about pedagogical support: "What are you hearing?" You know what he told me? "Just what I'm hearing on the street."

We need to advocate with our federal partners to come back to the table, to get those numbers back up so that we can continue to be the shining star of early years from right across this country.

Thank you.

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

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

We have dozens of shale pits throughout Prince Edward Island, and their operations are regulated by the Department of Land and Environment. A situation in my own district recently came to light, where a pit that has been used since at least 2020 has been repeatedly told by department officials to stop operations as a result of a number of violations, but it continues to be used. Neighbours have reached out to the department repeatedly over the last four years to express their concerns and to point out a number of violations.

Shale pit violations

A question to the Minister of Land and Environment: How close to adjacent properties can a shale pit operate, and can shale pits be used to dump materials – essentially to be used as landfill site?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, I'm not sure how close to a property a shale pit can be operational. That's more than I can tell you, but I will bring it back from my department.

Whether it can be used for disposal of potatoes, that would be something that would be worked through, I would say, a farmer and the department. But in this particular case, they are

working with the department, and the department will continue to work with them.

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

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

Pits that are strictly for private use, where the material is not sold commercially, are exempt from the provincial regulations. However, it's clear from the amount of traffic over the years – and the department's own evaluation, actually, of this pit – that it is truly a commercial venture and therefore subject to the regulations governing shale pits.

To the same minister: How does your department determine whether or not a shale pit is solely for private use?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, you're definitely digging into the weeds here. I'm not sure that I have the answer for that, but I'll be happy to bring it back. I'm not sure what determines personal use versus commercial use, but I can assure you that the department does, and I'll bring that information back.

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

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

The pit has been shut down numerous times, but it continues operations to this day, despite the department stating clearly in December of 2021 that this is indeed a commercial operation; they have decided that's the case. The various allegations about violations include operating far, far too close to a neighbouring property and dumping various organic and household waste items to be buried and sometimes burned.

[10:50 a.m.]

I'm going to ask the same question to the minister as my constituent asked to me: Why would anyone bother getting a permit if you can just do whatever you want and then say it's for private use?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, I know there are a number of instances where people seem to just take the law into their own hands and decide that they're going to do what they want to do. It's really difficult. We don't seem to have enough enforcement to deal with a number of those problems, whether it's unsightly properties.... There's quite a list through Environment.

But the department will work with the neighbours if they have a concern, and if the shale pit is closed down, then it should remain closed down. If it's being used commercially, then I will come back to the department with that. If you have information from some of your neighbours, please forward it to me and I'll be happy to deal with it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week I asked questions around the container recycling fee that constituents were asking me. After some of the answers, I had people reaching out looking for a little more clarity. Back to the Minister of Land and Environment.

Beverage container program (further)

Minister, residents feel like a fast one was pulled on them with the container recycling fee. Why was this not portrayed, or, as many believe, not even advertised that this add-on would be charged? People are simply just paying more with every drink they take.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, we've had this discussion about refundables and the fact that the Province is working with Encorp Atlantic. We'll continue to do that. Hon. member, if some of your

constituents have concerns, they can forward the concern to my department.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to that same minister.

Minister, you stated that government wasn't in the process of the container recycling fee, and people are asking: If government is not in the process, and the stores are charging the fee of container recycling fee, is the repayment going back to the companies, or are the big box stores just making more on the backs of consumers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, we discussed this before that there is a fee that is implemented through the beverage producer and that is dealt with through the producer and the retailer. So, the Province will work with Encorp Atlantic to make sure that they're adhering to that, but it's up to the producers themselves to decide how they want to embed it into the price or whether it's listed on the receipt. It's really between the producer and the retailer.

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

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The next supplementary will be around that: embedding it on the price or on the receipt. Back to that same minister.

Minister, the question is the amount that is being charged for the container recycling fee. The consumers are trying to figure out if it's a plastic bottle, if it's a PET bottle, or what the CRF will be, or if it's built into the price. Can we mandate that the CRF will be listed so a consumer knows what they will be paying ahead of time?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, I tabled the chart on what the fee is, and it averages around 2 cents, depending on

the bottle. So, consumers are getting more back than they did before. It is a not-for-profit, Encorp Atlantic, but they are there to implement the recycling fee and to make sure that what is being charged goes back to actually recycling that product.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial parks are more than just a place to pitch a tent. They are the heart of our rural communities during the summer months. For small businesses in areas like Summerside and Tyne Valley and surrounding areas, busy parks mean a busy general store, a busy restaurant, and busy gas stations. As we head into the 2026 season, it is vital that we continue to invest in these areas to ensure they remain world-class destinations for both tourists and locals alike.

Provincial parks

Question to the Minister of Tourism and Rural Development: Can the minister provide an update on the department's preparations for the '26 park season and the importance of these sites to our rural economy?

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

[10:55 a.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member for the question, and also for his passionate seconding of the motion yesterday – Motion 30 – with regard to the importance of our provincial parks. It was quite evident yesterday of his passion for Green Park in his area.

But with that, yes; as the Minister of Tourism, I certainly completely realize and appreciate the importance of our provincial parks, whether it's our day parks or any of our parks. The parks will be opening this year on June 5th with the exception, as I understand, of one park, and that is Kings Castle, which opens on May 29th.

Thank you.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Anyone who has been to a provincial park lately knows that the expectations of campers are changing. They aren't just looking for a patch of grass; they're looking for modern amenities, diverse recreation, and unique experiences. To stay competitive with other jurisdictions, our parks need to keep evolving. When we invest in our parks, we aren't just buying picnic tables; we're investing in the quality of life for every Islander who spends their weekends there.

Question to the Minister of Tourism and Rural Development: What specific steps is the department taking this year to modernize our provincial park facilities and ensure we are offering the best possible experience for families across the Island?

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

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

The hon. member is absolutely right that we cannot stand still. We always have to be looking at improvements within our park system. Examples of that over the last few years have been expansion in the number of serviced sites at Jacques Cartier Park and improvements at Bloomfield day park. This coming year, there are going to be improvements carried out at the Panmure Island campground. There are going to be improvements carried out at Cedar Dunes Park in West Point, and also at the Red Point campground, Brookvale, the Kings Castle day park, and Basin Head.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaking of family experiences – we do have a real gem in District 23, as noted yesterday – I've heard from some young people in my district, and families, who have very specific requests. They've seen splash pads at other parks and they think it's high time Green Park got into the action.

Question to the Minister of Tourism and Rural Development: Will the minister look into adding a splash park to Green Park this season so that families and tourists can have some fun on these very hot summer days?

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

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

Again, I thank the hon. member for his advocacy for this park which is obviously so near and dear to his heart – and not only to him, but certainly, it's one of the gems that we see right across this province within our park system.

With that, as I mentioned, there are a number of improvements being carried out at various parks across the province this year. I would be more than happy, though, to sit down with the hon. member, with ones from the parks/tourism department and also rural development, to see just how we may be able to move ahead on this.

Certainly no guarantees for this year, but if it was possible, absolutely. But also, let's look towards the future and how we can make improvements there.

Thank you.

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

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

Parks are important to young families, and Fusion Charlottetown is here representing younger people in the community that we need to maintain and keep in Prince Edward Island. Also, getting a family doctor is very important to young families as well. When they come to PEI, they see there are a few thousand people on the patient registry.

Access to primary care (further)

Minister of Health: What are you doing to ensure that young people have access to primary health care in Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Yes, it's unfortunate that the patient registry is at 33,000-34,000 now, give or take. When you want folks to move to PEI and raise a family, obviously they want access to health care.

[11:00 a.m.]

I think our government has made investments. Are we going to see the results of some of those investments right away? Most likely not, but we have the UPEI medical school where we're training our own physicians here on PEI, the new PACE clinic that we've reached an agreement with, with Nova Scotia, where we can send physicians that come from other jurisdictions to work with a physician in Nova Scotia for 16 weeks and come back here and practice as a full family doctor.

So, we are making those investments. I wish I could wave a wand and reduce that registry to zero right away, but unfortunately, that's not the case. But I think we're making those significant investments along with the physician services agreement to do that.

Thank you.

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

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

One of the things that is slow to start but will and needs to be a pillar is, at UPEI, the new patient medical home. The minister got up and said that's moving from a 10,000-person medical home to a 15,000-person medical home, which I found pretty extraordinary when we're struggling to get 500 people in that medical home right now.

Minister, what are the numbers of affiliated people to that patient medical home? It's taking too long. When is it going to get to 15,000 people?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

What I would say is that I think right now there's one physician; I think there are nurse practitioners that have started practicing there. When I did tour the facility a few months ago, there was just the one physician. I believe at some point this summer, there will be up to five NPs practicing there, with another physician starting in September at the UPEI patient medical home.

The goal is to reach 15,000 at some point. Obviously, we need the staff there to do that. We can't just assign 15,000 people to a patient medical home if they don't have enough staff to support that, but that's the goal we're working towards.

That UPEI patient medical home is kind of the carrot to help attract new physicians to PEI, or physician residents that are here, to work in that collaborative model. I think we're starting to see the results from that in physicians and nurse practitioners wanting to work there.

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

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, I'm getting grey hair with the amount of differences...

[Laughter]

G. McNeilly: ...in the plans here that are coming out of this government.

The Minister of Health talked about cutting middle management when he really should be listening to the official opposition and looking at the executive leadership of Prince Edward Island, because there are some merger opportunities there and you can look at the executive leadership.

Health PEI leadership (further)

Minister, why are you looking at middle management when young Islanders can do those positions? Will you take a look at merging the key executive positions there? Because it's bloated at this time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'm having a hard time finding the hon. member's grey hair, but...

[Laughter]

Hon. C. Deagle: I'll have to get a little closer up to take a look at that.

The member does raise a good point. What we've done, actually – just very recently – with the top leadership at Health PEI is we just passed a new leadership structure or format.

We're reducing the number of chiefs by one; reducing the number of executive directors from, I think, 14 to 11. We want to lead by example.

Yes, I also do believe that there's also too much middle management. The focus has to be on the front lines.

I just want to list off a number of the investments that we've made in health care since our government came into power in 2019. I really just want to do this because this hon. member voted against the UPEI medical school, which is extremely unfortunate.

We have the UPEI medical school; expanding scope of pharmacists; the Marion Reid grant; the new physician services agreement – a gold standard across Canada; the adult short-stay mental health unit; more nursing seats at UPEI; nurse practitioners will move from fee-for-service in 2027; the new Kings County Memorial Hospital; the new health centres in Summerside, in your district, Mr. Speaker; in Montague, we're going to start building one next fall; the mental health and addictions campus; free tuition for paramedics...

Speaker: Minister –

Hon. C. Deagle: ...over 300 new long-term care beds over the next few years, more supports –

Speaker: Minister, you may want to consider tabling –

Hon. C. Deagle: I can table all these record investments, Mr. Speaker, because for years, the Liberals didn't make any investments in health care.

Statements by Ministers

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

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

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

Pursuant to rule 110(9) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, I am pleased to respond on behalf of government to the recommendations by the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth

in its second report of the Second Session of the 67th General Assembly. 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.

[11:05 a.m.]

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to rule 110(9) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, I am pleased to respond on behalf of government to the recommendations by the Standing Committee on Health and Social Development in its second report of the Second Session of the 67th General Assembly. I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Pursuant to rule 110(9) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, I am pleased to respond on behalf of government to the recommendations by the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability in its second report of the Second Session of the 67th General Assembly. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table additional signatures – which brings the total to over 2,800 – obtained for pedagogical support that I had online. I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

Hon. J. Burridge: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to rule 110(9) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, I am pleased to respond on behalf of government to the recommendations by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in its second report of the Second Session of the 67th General Assembly. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Land and Environment, 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 petition prepared by the Early Childhood Development Association of PEI, which would have been tabled in the section on tabling of petitions, but the prayer had a slight issue with it that we weren't able to rectify. So, we're going to table it this time as a document.

The petition has 2,458 signatures of concerned Islanders across the province, and the reasons for the petition are as follows:

Pedagogical support staff play an essential role in Prince Edward Island's early learning and child care sector. These certified early childhood educators provide critical support to children, educators, directors, and families by helping maintain stable, high-quality learning environments within centres.

Pedagogical support staff strengthen educator working conditions, support children during challenging moments and transitions, provide mentorship and consistency within centres, and allow educators time for planning, documentation, and family communication.

The 2024 PEI early learning and child care workforce surveys identified pedagogical support as one of the sector's most impactful workforce initiatives supporting recruitment, retention, quality, and sustainability across centres.

Recent reductions to pedagogical support funding will disproportionately impact PEI's early learning and child care workforce – which is made up of approximately 95 percent women

– through reduced hours, job loss, and increased workplace measures.

The signatories to the petition respectfully request that the Government of Prince Edward Island reverse the reduction to pedagogical support funding and maintain full funding for pedagogical support positions within early learning and child care centres across Prince Edward Island.

And I do 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, in conjunction with the previously tabled petition, 17 letters in support of reinstating pedagogical funding in Prince Edward Island. These letters include a letter from the CEO of the Canadian Child Care Federation, Don Giesbrecht; Mary Hewitt, professor and international pedagogical leader and an early child care specialist; the Manitoba Child Care Association; Jessica Karpathios, pedagogical leader and educational consultant; and many concerned Island parents across Prince Edward Island with respect to these funding reductions for pedagogical support.

I do move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the said document, comprising 17 letters, be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

[11:10 a.m.]

Members, just a reminder that when we are tabling documents, it should be a summary of the document as opposed to the full contents, but I think we all understand that, and I understand the hon. Leader of the Third Party's situation today.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Speaker: Minister.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'd like to call upon the Deputy Speaker to chair Committee of the Whole in 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 would like to bring on to the floor?

Hon. D. Compton: I do, thank you.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

If you'd like to state your name and title for Hansard, please.

Kelli Bulger: Kelli Bulger, director of finance.

Chair: Okay. Yesterday, we left off on page 137.

We already read inspection services, so I'm going to open the floor for questions.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair. Welcome back, Kelli; good to see you again.

My first question in this section is on the salaries line. There was quite a large underspend last year, and this year, it's gone up again but it's still less than the forecast for last year. Is that to do with the reorganization of the department?

Kelli Bulger: It is not. The salaries line in '25-26 and '26-27 had temporary funding related to the federal-provincial codes acceleration fund. We intended to hire temporary staff to support that implementation; instead, we utilized existing staff to support that work. That's the reason for the savings in both.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks for that explanation. I'll ask about that code acceleration program, which was \$115,000. Can you explain exactly what that is, please, Kelli?

Kelli Bulger: I can try. It's pretty new to me.

P. Bevan-Baker: Or approximately what that is.

Kelli Bulger: Yeah. The PEI code acceleration provides funding for the foundation needs, to planning, staffing, and training required for the addition of the code acceleration to existing building code processes.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. So, it's to do with the adoption of the national building code standards. Is that correct?

Kelli Bulger: Correct.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, I didn't get that from the word "code," but I get it now. Again, I appreciate your explanation there.

Last evening, I think just before we closed, there was a question about the Lean Six review. It's a lot less money, but I'm wondering if that review resulted in any recommendations within the department.

[11:15 a.m.]

Kelli Bulger: Yes, the Lean Six review was to complete a process for the various work units under inspection services, with the goal to identify process efficiencies in that sort of process – how the inspectors work in the field, how they feed information back to the office.... It's a process improvement contract.

P. Bevan-Baker: Alright. I am good for this section, please.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Perfect.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: I've got just two questions on inspection services. I'll probably start off with the easiest one: petroleum storage. Is this the same section where the person would come and test to see that people are using marked fuel or clear fuel and those situations in their vehicles as the.... I don't know if that might be Finance; that's all I'm just enquiring, I guess, about.

Hon. D. Compton: Hon. member, I don't believe that this is where you'd find that, but we can bring back where you would find it.

R. Henderson: Okay. So, then, my other issue is this unsightly properties issue. It's been quite a thorn in my side as an MLA. I had a call on the weekend about – neighbour of an unsightly premises. How many inspections have actually occurred, and how many actually were given cleanup orders?

I know it's a fine line in determining – beauty is in the eye of the beholder, as the saying goes, and I say that to many properties, but when people are being infested with rats and mice and vermin and things of things nature, and the next-door neighbour doesn't cut their grass and lets their house and property get in really bad repair, there needs to be something done there. I remember the previous minister had talked about trying to tighten that act up, as well as I think your department reached out – I'm going to say in the winter time – to identify some properties that we can keep an eye on.

Could you maybe give me an update on where that's at, minister? Are we seeing any tangible results from cleanup orders?

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you for that question. If you know me at all, this is one of my big bones of contention. I've had a number of discussions with my deputy about this, and I can bring back whatever information we have as far as the number of inspections and what's done.

It's very costly. There was one done on Route 3 just in the last couple of months, and it cost \$50,000 for the Province to clean it up. It's totally gone – it was an old, derelict house – but it costs a lot of money. There are a lot – I've got an order out right now in my own district. I've

done a drive by and there has been nothing done, and they have until the 1st of June, and that's just one of many. A lien does go on your property if the cleanup is done. It's very difficult to make people clean up because, like you say, beauty is in the eye of the beholder – but when you've got vehicles that haven't been driven and aren't registered and are derelict, it just all adds up.

When I was minister before for a very short time, we doubled the budget at that time, which still was nothing, and it still is not much. In the grand scheme of things, I guess we have to decide what our priorities are, but it's something that you can be guaranteed I will keep pushing with the department because it's something that really.... I think when we were asked back in – whenever it was, identified 23 properties in my district that really could use some work. So, you can rest assured that I'll do whatever I can to clean up the Island.

R. Henderson: I'm happy you clarified a little bit about – there is an upfront cost, but you do get to put a lien on the property, and you could acquire the property back on tax sale and get your money back at some point on that. But I think you really look at a situation where – does an issue in an incorporated municipality have more weight than an unincorporated area?

I know municipalities can do their own bylaws around that, but I have had a number cleaned up in my district in past, and it does seem to be a huge difference if it's an incorporated municipality because they can write letters of support that the municipality has agreed that that property is unsightly.

[11:20 a.m.]

I think we even got some letters of support from fire departments because I think the fire department was called about three or four times, because somebody tried to burn the thing but it never burned.

I'm just wondering: Would you advise those that are in incorporated municipalities for those people to work within their municipality to try to get a designation of unsightly?

Hon. D. Compton: I would say, yes. Organically, there would be more pressure because you've got a municipality who is hearing the same things that government is hearing. I guess the more information you have or the more influence you have or the more

complaints you have, the more likely something is to be cleaned up. But again, it comes back to the Province, basically to make sure that's done.

R. Henderson: I know we're probably stretching it a little bit on the budget questions here on this, but my other one is around people not cutting their grass. Basically, what the issue is becomes a fire hazard. If you're two, one-acre lots side by side, one is not cutting the grass and the other is and there's this potential fire hazard, is there any authorization that unsightly premises can say you have to cut your grass to a certain height level or a certain distance from your home because it becomes a fire hazard with wildfire potential? There are all kinds of problems that can be created there.

Hon. D. Compton: I would say that we have no ability to tell people how short their grass needs to be as much as you and I – I think we're both on the same page here; we'd like to see everyone look after their property – the Province can only do so much.

R. Henderson: Yeah. That's it, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Technical Services and Standards:
5,172,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

Land Use Planning

“Appropriations provided for the administration of the *Planning Act*, *Lands Protection Act*, and their regulations. Land use planning is the process of regulating the use of land by a central authority to promote social and environmental outcomes, as well as a more efficient use of resources.” Administration: 9,600. Equipment: 9,900. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 11,700. Professional Services: 200,000. Salaries: 722,100. Travel and Training: 18,700.

Total Land Use Planning: 972,000

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

It's a perennial question about when and if we're going to get a province-wide land use plan. I know the timeframe on that is changed almost continuously. Is there – I think the last minister

I, when asked this question, said that the province-wide land use plan would be ready later this year, 2026. Is that still the working timeline to have that done?

Hon. D. Compton: Yeah, I think we're in the second iteration of consultations right now. I don't know if there's actually a time set for when we will have that ready, but we continue to work on it. We want to make sure that we do the consultations that are necessary.

P. Bevan-Baker: I see there's specifically public consultation money, over \$100,000 set aside. Has that been completed yet, that second round of public consultation?

Kelli Bulger: I believe so, as we're waiting for more on the report.

Hon. D. Compton: Yeah, I think it has been completed and waiting for the report, is my understanding.

P. Bevan-Baker: But just to be clear, there is no goal for the production of a province-wide land use plan at the moment in the department.

Hon. D. Compton: There is no timeframe, I would say. I think there was a goal, but again, stay tuned.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I've been tuned to that channel for a long time now and nothing is happening. Anyway, I'm glad that second round is complete.

I also see that there is a pilot project here for land identification. Maybe that's not related to land use planning itself but could you explain what that is, please, Kelli?

[11:25 a.m.]

Hon. D. Compton: It's the Leads program. There is a pilot out right now to look at land use planning through the lens of agricultural production, climate change adaptation – everything that would pertain to any land that we're looking at. The plan is to do it community by community. Right now, there is a pilot project going on, and it's actually in the Belfast area, but this happened long before I was the minister.

I think it will give us a really good framework around what the land should be used for, whether it's agriculture, whether there is flood

mapping – all of those things. There will be guard rails around land.

P. Bevan-Baker: This is a more esoteric question, if I can put it that way, but IRAC administers the *Lands Protection Act* but can you explain how the department – because there is money set aside for the administration of the LPA here – how the department works with IRAC or what the relationship is there? It's always been a thing I can't get clear in my head.

Hon. D. Compton: I'm not sure that I can either, to be truthful. Whenever we have questions, we can reach out to IRAC, and they're very good at providing answers if we have questions about any part of the act that would pertain to them, but I really can't say. I can bring back whatever we've got.

P. Bevan-Baker: Do you know if there's any LPA work or amendments under way within the department this year? There's been talk about increasing transparency around land acquisitions and transactions.

Hon. D. Compton: I will say since I became the minister that I have my to-do list and that will hopefully result in legislation for the fall. That's my plan. I'm still working on that through the department because I want to have a robust discussion with all parts of the department on what we can do and how we can do it and find a way. So, that's all I'll say.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm not 100 percent certain it falls in this area, although it's land administration so I suspect it does. It's to do with the fund related to.... I'm sorry. I've lost my mind here.

[Laughter]

P. Bevan-Baker: Some would say that happened a long time ago.

Hon. D. Compton: Sorry. We can go to someone else.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. Sure. If you wouldn't mind doing that, come back to me and I'll try and get my thoughts together here.

Chair: Okay.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

[Laughter]

Sorry. There isn't anyone else on the list.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, no.

It's the situation in Summerside with the...

Hon. D. Compton: Golf course.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. Exactly.

Chair: We could always make it a question set.

P. Bevan-Baker: No, I think I've got my stuff together enough to ask a question. Thank you, Chair.

It's regarding the fund into which people pay when a violation...

Hon. D. Compton: That's not in this section, member.

P. Bevan-Baker: It's not. Where would that be?

Kelli Bulger: Environmental land management, close to the end.

P. Bevan-Baker: Great. I have time to actually ask a coherent question.

Chair: Shall this section carry?

Development Control

"Appropriations provided for the administration of the development control function of land use planning. This section manages and regulates property and subdivision development to ensure all development conforms to a pre-determined set of regulations, policies, and standards."
Administration: 8,800. Equipment: 4,800.
Materials, Supplies, and Services: 7,000.
Professional Services: 32,500. Salaries: 1,547,400. Travel and Training: 35,000.

Total Development Control: 1,635,500

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Is this the section where wetland compensation would be discussed?

Kelli Bulger: No.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm sorry. I missed the name of the...

Kelli Bulger: Environmental land management. It's under environment regulatory division.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'll get to that. I do have other questions though, Chair, on this.

I see that there's a little over \$30,000 in professional services. Is that for legal fees? I can only see in the big blue book \$3,000, approximately, for development control legal services.

[11:30 a.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: I just want to ask about a specific subdivision in my – well, it's sort of borders my district and Cornwall. It's in the Clyde River area, I'm not sure how familiar you are with it, minister, but Cornwall has been trying to annex land from the Clyde River municipality. It's been sort of back and forth. I haven't heard anything for a while but administrators in Clyde River and some of the council reach out to me on a regular basis.

Can you give us an update on what the status of that proposed annexation is?

Hon. D. Compton: I can't. I did discuss it probably a month ago, but I don't have an up-to-date status but I could bring that back.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, that's fine. I's appreciate if you could bring me back an update on that.

That's all I have for this section.

Thanks.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Planning and Development: 2,607,500

Shall it carry? Carried.

Forest, Fish and Wildlife

Division Management

“Appropriations provided for the management and administration of the Forests, Fish, and Wildlife Division.” Administration: 17,700. Equipment: 3,000. Materials, Supplies, and

Services: 17,200. Salaries: 346,000. Travel and Training: 5,800. Grants: 11,100.

Total Division Management: 400,800

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

I have a large number of questions on the forestry commission report that was given a couple of years ago. It could fit in any one of the next three or four sections. I don't know if you want me to ask questions on the commission's report now or whether you would want to wait.

Hon. D. Compton: Yeah, this is fine.

P. Bevan-Baker: Now is good? Okay.

Firstly, I want to thank all the commissioners for the work that they did. I feel that we haven't really spoken enough about this. I did ask one series of questions, I think, and some more last fall, but I just want to give a little bit of attention to this report. It may take a little while to do it this morning, but I think we've not had sufficient on discussion on the commission's report, which was such a comprehensive and really great piece of work. I'm just going to read into the record, the names of the commissioners for this report because, again, I'm not sure that's actually been done:

Jean-Paul Arseneault was the commission chair, Reg Conohan, Jerry Gavin, John MacQuarrie, Keila Miller, Gary Schneider, Sarah Wheatley, Marcel Arseneault, Sean Craig, Matt Hughes, Kathy Martin, Krystal Pyke, and Zora Wendt, a really high-powered group of people.

From their report –

[Interjections]

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah – incredible work they did.

They did some interim reports and then the final report came out in October 2024. There are 14 recommendations. I'm just going to go through each of these. Again, it's going to take a while, and I will have a question on each of the 14 recommendations. We could split it up between the three or four divisions if you wish but I'm looking for the status of the implementation of each of these recommendations. Can't do that in

Question Period because we don't have time. I'm just looking that that's amenable.

Hon. D. Compton: Would you be happy, member, if we brought back the status of each of those issues that were brought up in the report? I mean, I could do that. It would maybe give you a more knowledgeable and lengthy answer than myself.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, I would, actually but just to be clear, there are 14 very specific and unique suggestions. I get it, it would take a fair time for me to ask the question, and you're not really prepared to give the level of detail I am interested in. But if I could be guaranteed that I will get a takeback of specific updates on where we are with each and every one of the 14 recommendations, I would be satisfied with that.

Hon. D. Compton: Absolutely. I'll make that commitment for sure.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Chair: I think that's a great solution.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Just under division management there, you have the Maritime Lumber Bureau, financial assistance, three-year business plan. I know that was about issue was to try to get the stamps and get people trained so that these sawmills can stamp lumber.

[11:35 a.m.]

Can you give me an update on how that has worked, and are there enough people who can grade and stamp lumber on Prince Edward Island?

Kelli Bulger: I don't have any information to respond to that particular question.

R. Henderson: Well, I know that was a big issue in the respect that when we changed the building codes it was to have stamped lumber in a lot of construction, and there wasn't, at the time, a lot of sawmills. I mean, I have a couple in my district, and I do believe one of them has got their stamp back and they're able to do that, but I just wonder – across the Island. Maybe if you could bring that back, it would be appreciated.

And the other question I have: the PEI Woodlot Owners Association with \$72,000 – that's going to continue, I'm assuming, for the coming year for that woodlot association? I know they're trying to get organized. They're probably still struggling a bit with that and I think they're trying to find their identity, but I do think giving them an opportunity to organize and get better ideas of how they want to represent the woodlot industry or those owners of woodlots would be helpful. I'm assuming that's continuing.

Hon. D. Compton: It is, through the PEI Woodlot Owners Association and the Sustainable Forestry Alliance. Both of them are doing great work, and there have been grants issued to both of those organizations. We continue to work with them. It's important.

R. Henderson: Just one other. Obviously, I asked you questions before regarding harvesting woodlots or woodland in designated wetland. That seems to be always a contradiction, and it seems to be – you know, I struggle with that, why you can't harvest some of those trees and then replant them. I don't see what the big change is in all of that. – or at least a policy....

Are you getting anywhere on that particular initiative, or do you even want to do anything on being able to harvest wood on designated wetlands?

Hon. D. Compton: I can't say, anecdotally, that we've received any concerns around that. I've heard concerns around building – people who don't realize that they have a forested wetland. I have one in my district who purchased a lot that is forested, but it is a wetland. They bought it to build their forever home and now are facing the challenges around that. That seems to be more of an issue than harvesting trees in wetlands, but the department is willing to work with anyone who has an issue with it for sure.

R. Henderson: So, do you want – I mean I've had a number in my district. I would also comment that it's probably very district-related because in my riding it's, I'll say, lower, flatter land. I drove through your riding the other day and there seems to be lots of rolling hills; it's a little different dynamic on it.

But anyway, you're looking to create a lobby for that? Or what do you need to have somebody look into that within your department or to try to develop new policies? Or do you need the woodlot association to make a decision and

make recommendations? I'm just struggling with where to go with this based on my constituents' issues.

Hon. D. Compton: I'd say if you brought it to the Woodlot Owners Association or to Sustainable Forestry Alliance, that they would be more than willing to work with anyone who has that concern.

R. Henderson: My only other comment, just regarding the general state of our wood harvesting industry – because we've been hit by tariffs; there are tariffs on lumber. I'm talking to some of the wood processors in my riding, and they're struggling.

Is there any kind of a thought that you're getting that same feedback to your department? And is there any sense of – I'm not saying you have to compensate anybody or anything of that nature, but I do think that we have to look at this industry and sort of say: Do we want it to continue? And what do we do to try to make it as healthy as we can?

One of the factors has been, with the over-electrification of heating now, the market for wood has declined and I can only see that continuing to decline. If we're not going to manage our woodlots or have a reason for commercial use of our woodlots, then we lose an industry, basically, over time.

Can you give me any kind of feedback on where you see this industry going and whether it's going to require significant impact and help?

[11:40 a.m.]

Hon. D. Compton: Well, I guess I'm just giving you my own opinion, but I realize how important the industry is. Through the department we've endorsed using sustainably harvested biomass, but that brings on a question – one of my pet peeves is the PEI bonsai, I call it. You know, cutting underneath the powerlines – why couldn't we harvest all that and use it as biomass? I'm told that's not sustainably forested biomass. But, you know, what makes sustainably forested biomass?

That's just one aspect. I think, also, sustainably foresting – anyone who has a woodlot, if they're willing to sustainably forest it and keep the trees that should be there and not clearcut.... I think there are just a lot of issues. I'm no expert, but both of those organizations have been lobbying

fairly hard with me and with the department to help any of the harvesters.

R. Henderson: Just to add on to that, even for my own situation, I don't even know who I'd – is there even such a thing as a biomass harvester in, say, the western end of the province? I do know that we do provide biomass (Indistinct) the hospital in O'Leary and places like that, but I've asked around some of the woodlot processing companies and they say they don't know of anybody that's harvesting and doing biomass – other than, say, Arsenault's in the eastern end of Prince County. Transportation becomes a factor in that too.

Maybe you need to look at more biomass heating units in institutions that the government owns. I think it might be able to help clean up these forests that have been damaged so significantly. If I look at my woodlot, so much of it has blown down and is now dying because there's some bug or something in the spruce. Nobody wants to pay anything for any of that and nobody wants to harvest it for biomass, so I'm kind of left with – a fire risk is what I'm dealing with.

Hon. D. Compton: I feel like we should take this conversation offline because...

Chair: It's not really on the budget.

Hon. D. Compton: ...I feel like it's really something that both our districts are concerned with. But I will say that we can get the list of who does biomass harvesting and provide that to you. I know it's an issue. Any suggestions you have – I'd be happy to have a discussion offline.

R. Henderson: Thanks.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: I just have one question and it is related to the commission report, but it's a specific question. The first recommendation was to develop a new forest stewardship act as part of the new forest policy because the old one is 20 years old now. I'm wondering if you can give us some sense as to whether there's work being done on that, and if so, when we might expect to see it.

Hon. D. Compton: That would be part and parcel of the act; there would be work done on it. I don't have the timeline as to when – I think

it's going to be this fall for the new act. That's my understanding.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, alright.

Hon. D. Compton: I think. I'm not misspeaking, am I?

Kelli Bulger: No, that's my understanding.

Hon. D. Compton: Yeah, this fall. So, again, stay tuned.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I look forward to seeing that.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Forest Fire Protection

"Appropriations provided for the costs associated with forest fire prevention and suppression on private and public lands."
Administration: 19,400. Equipment: 306,200. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 74,300. Professional Services: 103,500. Salaries: 813,500. Travel and Training: 234,200. Grants: 424,000.

Total Forest Fire Protection: 1,975,100

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Part of this division is prevention and suppression of fires, and there's just so much.... I mean, everywhere you drive across the province you see the Fiona cleanup is – we've just barely scratched the surface. Is there any extra funding this year to continue with that Fiona cleanup – related to suppression of potential forest fires? That's why I'm asking it.

Kelli Bulger: Not in this section. There is in the forest enhancement program and in the field services sections.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I have quite a few questions on the forest enhancement program. I realize that comes later, but that's where funding for Fiona cleanup would be found? There isn't any specific...?

Kelli Bulger: That's right.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

[11:45 a.m.]

Obviously, the risk of forest fires varies from year to year. We've been pretty lucky so far compared to many Canadian provinces – including our immediate neighbours, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia – but sooner or later our luck is going to run out.

I'm wondering if there are any efforts – I do see that there's a weather monitoring service in here for \$8,000. Is that specifically to sort of try and figure out what our risk is for a particular year? I'm thinking this year – because of the super El Niño. It's been hyped up a little bit and I'm not sure what the implications of that are, but it's certainly suggesting that we could have a hotter summer than typical here. Is that what that weather monitoring service is about?

Kelli Bulger: Yes. It is a contractor that provides fire weather index calculations and weather forecasting, for fire in particular.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. And I don't even know what the scale is that we measure that on, but what are they thinking about PEI for this summer in terms of forest fire vulnerability?

Kelli Bulger: That's not information that I have with me.

Hon. D. Compton: Yeah, and I don't have that either. Sorry.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. There's a pretty large increase in salaries in this section. It's pretty well double what the estimate was for last year, although we spent a lot more in this year as well. Can you explain what that increase in salaries is?

Kelli Bulger: It's a combination of factors. We have established wildfire student crews, a complement of six, and we've also supplemented the standby callback budget lines because of the longer fire season.

P. Bevan-Baker: We did some really high-definition LiDAR imaging of the province following Fiona – we do it regularly, but there was a really good study done or bunch of pictures taken – and I'm wondering whether the analysis on all of those LiDAR pictures has been completed. If so, do we have particular areas where – I'm thinking an analogy to this would

be how we know particular areas where fish kills or river kills are likely because of the topography, the lay of the land and the proximity of fields and stuff like that.

Are there hot areas or places where we imagine we have more risk of forest fires than others?

Hon. D. Compton: I would say, because of Fiona, we've updated the fire risk mapping for PEI. So, the department would have that as far as what the hot zones are. After Fiona, they did do that work. I can't tell you what they are.

P. Bevan-Baker: You don't know where they are. Okay. Alright.

I think the final one for me on this section is the very large increase in grants. I'm wondering what that funding is going towards.

Kelli Bulger: That is for grants for community wildfire prevention and mitigation, so it's the FireSmart program.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

I'm good for this section. Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Production Development

"Appropriations provided for the production of trees and shrubs for forest management on private and public forest lands, watershed enhancement, local landscape nurseries, and the tree improvement and seed production program." Administration: 52,600. Equipment: 12,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 478,500. Professional Services: 6,500. Salaries: 1,293,800. Travel and Training: 18,500.

Total Production Development: 1,861,900

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

This is where the tree seed production program sits, and I know – again, I'll probably get a written update for this, based on the conversation we just had – the big emphasis in the commission report was to shift more towards hardwoods. Do you have any data on that?

Are we spending more money on hardwood seedlings than we used to, and if so, how much?

Kelli Bulger: In '25-26, there was \$70,000, and – sorry, I should be using calendar years.

In 2025 there was \$70,000, and in 2026 there will be \$82,000.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. And I don't know; compared to the softwoods, it's probably still a very small percentage. It was less than 10 percent, I think, previously.

[11:50 a.m.]

Kelli Bulger: Yeah, it's about 5.9.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. Again, I'll wait until I get the written update on that because I'd really like to see that balance moved substantially towards hardwoods. I know it takes longer and it's more expensive, but it's what our forests need.

I wonder, is this the division that is responsible for watershed enhancement?

Kelli Bulger: No.

P. Bevan-Baker: No, that comes later. Okay, I'll keep my questions on that. That's all I have for this.

Thanks, Chair.

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

R. Henderson: Just on the field services. I certainly want to commend a lot of the forestry technicians that you have. I know I've been into the location at Wellington, and it went pretty good. But at the Woodlot Owners Association, one of the comments was that there weren't enough supports for finishing off wood roads and for bridges and things of that nature.

Oh, am I in the wrong section?

Hon. D. Compton: You're jumping ahead there.

R. Henderson: Okay, sorry about that.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Field Services

“Appropriations provided for the sustainable management of 75,000 acres of public land and financial and technical assistance to private woodlot owners.” Administration: 32,700. Equipment: 13,600. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 478,300. Professional Services: 200. Salaries: 3,084,200. Travel and Training: 201,800. Grants: 2,431,200.

Total Field Services: 6,242,000

The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Like I say, I’ve got a little premature there on that one, but anyway....

Is that still going to be enough? Because I know at the woodlot owner’s meeting, there were certainly lots of complaints that there just wasn’t enough money to get a lot of the work done in forestry enhancement as well as to do some of the infrastructure that was required on some properties. You do have a slight increase in your grants, but it’s very slight. I’m just wondering what your thoughts are on that.

Hon. D. Compton: Never enough.

R. Henderson: Never enough.

What’s the priority, then? Is it applications that already exist or are you looking at ...? Because the other scenario is that money may already be spent if it’s on applications that didn’t get funded last time. So, really, there’s no opportunity for new applications.

Hon. D. Compton: I can’t really comment on.... I mean, we’ve got a number of priorities in the department as far as woodlot enhancement or forestry harvesting, roads – it’s really difficult for the Province to provide the amount of funding that we need in that.

R. Henderson: Right.

Do you have any issues with contractors, to get contractors to do some of this work? Because it’s not easy work by any means, and from an opportunity – and I know some of the forestry people who thin trees and plant trees are getting a little older. You wonder where that’s going to go in the future.

But do you feel there’s any concern about that?

Hon. D. Compton: I’d say just probably as much concern as every other industry on PEI.

We need secession planning. We need people who are willing to take it over. So, yeah, it’s concerning.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Would this be where I would find the funding for the forest enhancement program?

[Interjection]

Yes? Okay.

P. Bevan-Baker: I see last year it was \$760,000 – or in the large book, at least. There’s no breakdown for the grants this year. I know, as O’Leary-Inverness just said, it went up, but minimally – only \$6,000, I think, difference.

How much are we devoting to the forest enhancement program this year?

Kelli Bulger: It’s \$1.3 million.

P. Bevan-Baker: What was the total last year? Are you including the 2 Billion Tree program in last year’s?

Kelli Bulger: No. It was \$1.3 million in ’25-26, and it’s status quo in ’26-27.

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, that’s perhaps from a financial point of view, the commission report – that was their central ask was that the FEP be substantially increased for the reasons that O’Leary-Inverness in part just talked about, that private woodlot owners just can’t do the work or can’t access the services because there aren’t people, there’s not enough money to pay for the services. It’s kind of disappointing to see that it hasn’t gone up.

[11:55 p.m.]

I do understand the budgetary constraints, of course, across government, but again, that was the central.... I guess I’ll get a written response perhaps on that, but to know that it hasn’t gone up is disappointing. This covers the management of 75,000 acres of public land –

Hon. D. Compton: Member, we just have a response here from the stranger.

Kelli Bulger: I just wanted to share that since '21-22, the budget has increased by \$550,000 for the forest enhancement project, which is about 73 percent. I just wanted to share that growth.

P. Bevan-Baker: I don't have the figures in front of me.

I'm not disputing that, Kelli, but I know if you look back historically, the FEP was actually at a much higher rate, if you look at CPI dollars over time, than it is now. I know there have been some increases recently, but we're still quite a long way short of historically what the FEP was offered.

Again, I just know there's a lot more money needed to carry out the proper functions...

R. Henderson: A greater need.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. A much, much greater need.

I do note that it says in the heading of this department that it's for 75,000 acres of public land, but do you have a sense of how much private land is money being set aside for? As we know, 90 percent of the forests are in private hands, not public hands.

Kelli Bulger: Yes. Yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm sorry, I missed....

Hon. D. Compton: Sorry, I didn't hear the question.

P. Bevan-Baker: There's the money in the field services grants here – it's to cover the sustainable management of 75,000 acres of public land, but I'm wondering how many acres of private forestry will be sustainably managed through the FEP or some other funding within this division.

Kelli Bulger: I have hectares: 58,653.

P. Bevan-Baker: These are hectares, right? Not acres.

Kelli Bulger: Yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: Alright. It's a little bit more than the public land but considering 90 percent of the forests are in private hands, that's a pretty small proportion, but it's something.

I'm wondering if you can give us an update because I think at the federal level, the 2 Billion Tree program has received some pretty significant cutbacks recently, but I may be wrong on that. Are we going to receive the same sorts of grants from the feds for that as we have done in previous years?

Kelli Bulger: Yeah. So, we have a plan – an agreement – with the federal government out to 2030-31. The total value is \$14.4 million, and the federal government is providing \$7.6 million.

P. Bevan-Baker: Does the money from the MacPhail Woods project – does that come through that, or in part through the 2 Billion Trees program, or is that fully funded by the Province?

Kelli Bulger: That was 100 percent provincial funding in '25-26.

P. Bevan-Baker: I think last year it was \$100,000. Is that right? Yeah, \$100,000 in the big book, anyway. Has that increased or decreased this year?

Kelli Bulger: It was \$100,000 in '25-26, yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: We get incredible value for that \$100,000. The work they do is unbelievable.

Chair: Shall the section carry?

Resource Inventory and Modeling

“Appropriations provided for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of land use inventory information and trends.” Administration: 4,800. Equipment: 6,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 4,700. Professional Services: nothing. Salaries: 535,100. Travel and Training: 11,500.

Total Resource Inventory and Modeling:
562,100

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

[12:00 p.m.]

This is where we collect statistics on land use trends and inventories. The loss of farmland here on PEI is something – the numbers around that have been federally – if you go to the federal

statistics, Statistics Canada, there it's listed we're losing, on average, 39 acres a day, or 14,000 acres of farmland a year here on PEI, but the Agriculture minister has always stated that that's an exaggeration.

I'm wondering – given that there's funding in here for us to analyze and get our own inventory here on PEI – whether we have a provincial estimate of how many acres of agricultural land we're losing each year, because although he contends the federal figures, I've never heard any provincial figures as to what the loss actually is.

Kelli Bulger: The last we would have would be from the 2020 corporate land use inventory, which is done every 10 years. We have a capital project starting in the '30-31 year for the next corporate land use inventory, which will identify gains and losses in land.

P. Bevan-Baker: That's interesting. So, we only do a survey every 10 years, and from that we can extrapolate what the yearly loss is or averaged out over that time. Okay.

I noticed that the division here is getting a decrease in funding. Can you tell us why that is the case?

Kelli Bulger: These were moderate adjustments of about \$11,400 from '25-26 to '26-27; operating budget adjustments that we made based on a four-year average spend. So, this was to align with our budget target.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, I get it.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Fish and Wildlife

“Appropriations provided for the administration and management of various programs designed to conserve, protect, and enhance the province's fish and wildlife resources as well as financial support to community-based organizations through the Watershed Fund Management.”
Administration: 25,500. Equipment: 15,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 114,000. Professional Services: 7,500. Salaries: 1,724,800. Travel and Training: 60,300. Grants: 3,905,400.

Total Fish and Wildlife: 5,853,000.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: I guess, obviously, the grants to our watershed groups – I have four in my district. How knowledgeable are they that you're taking basically \$600,000 out of their grant money?

Kelli Bulger: There's no change year to year for the watershed management fund.

R. Henderson: Well, it has on here \$4,580,000 and some last year, and you're allocating \$3.9 million this year; that looks like a cut to me.

Kelli Bulger: There are multiple different grant lines in there.

R. Henderson: Okay, so where's the reduction then?

Kelli Bulger: It's primarily related to federal-provincial programs that ended March 31. The major one, the most material one, I would say was the Canada Nature Fund – forested landscape priority place.

R. Henderson: I've never heard of that one. So, ultimately, the watershed groups are getting the same money they would have gotten last year?

Kelli Bulger: Yeah.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

That was my first question, so I appreciate the clarification on that.

The Watershed Alliance – I see that's a very bottom part of a long list of watershed groups on the Island; their operating grant is \$45,000. Do they get any other funding, or is that the entire funding for the Watershed Alliance, the sort of umbrella organization?

Kelli Bulger: Just because I recently saw an agreement come across my desk, there is funding under the 2 Billion Trees program for the Watershed Alliance. So, that is in '26-27 in fiscal '25-26. Other than what's in this section, I can't recall anything in another section off the top of my head.

P. Bevan-Baker: You mentioned, Kelli, that the budget envelope for the watershed management fund is the same as last year. Is the distribution

within that for each watershed group – does that stay constant as well?

[12:05 p.m.]

Kelli Bulger: It is dependent on the formula for calculating, but I wouldn't expect it to fluctuate by watershed group too much.

P. Bevan-Baker: I know that the Watershed Alliance – there's so much expertise in that organization on a number of levels, one of them being regarding wetlands. They do – oh my gosh, I can't remember – hundreds of educational exercises each year, whether it's in the schools or communities or to community groups, to talk about the importance of our rivers and estuaries and streams and ponds, and also specifically around our wetlands.

I know that the money – the famous \$100,000 related to the Summerside situation – was to have gone to a group in Evangeline, Comité Diversité et Équité. I don't see them listed here, and I know that money never went there, but the idea was that was for wetland education and enhancement, I think, was part of it. I don't see them listed here.

Do they typically receive funding in the watershed management fund for any work that they do?

Hon. D. Compton: No.

An Hon. Member: They're not a watershed group.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, that's what I thought, which is the whole point of – why were they...? Again, I'm just saying these watershed groups that are full of experts who do fantastic work are working on a shoestring budget here to –

Chair: Member, do you have a question?

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. A 5 percent increase – the \$100,000 would have represented a 5 percent increase, essentially, to their budget – would have enhanced the work that they do for the Island and for our environment immensely. I really hope that that watershed “fund” – and I'm using the wrong terminology here, minister, but any money that does come in from –

Chair: Member, we need a question.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, sure. I'm hoping that any money that does come in – and we should always remember that the last resort is compensation, we shouldn't touch wetlands if we possibly can, but money from that – would you consider enhancing the grants to the Watershed Alliance and the various watershed groups, considering the work that they do and the expertise they have, any time that you might get more funding into that wetland fund?

Hon. D. Compton: Hon. member, I'll say – and you can go back and watch the questions from the very beginning of this sitting – that \$100,000 had nothing to do with the department. If there is an application that comes forward, if there's funding that needs to be collected, we will collect that, and it will go towards wetland enhancement. That's where any of the funds that are collected through the department go – to restoring or enhancing wetlands.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Chair: Do you have a question on the budget, member?

P. Bevan-Baker: I have no further questions on the budget for this particular section.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Just looking at the grants. I'm looking at the Council on Invasive Species. Am I asking the question in the right section there? That's LE-8. I want to make sure I'm on the right section, Chair. I want to ask on the grants – I'm jumping in here.

It's specifically the Canadian Council on Invasive Species.

Kelli Bulger: Right, yeah.

M. MacFarlane: Sorry, I just noticed as I'm saying it out that it's the Canadian Council on Invasive Species. Where is the grant money, or is there any, for the PEI Invasive Species Council, or are we talking the same thing?

Kelli Bulger: I'm not sure if there is a PEI invasive species council.

Hon. D. Compton: Yeah, it's not listed here, member – a PEI council for invasive species – so I'll have to bring that back. We obviously have a Canadian council. I can't answer that question, whether there's a PEI council.

[12:10 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: I guess my question was going to be – until I noticed the word “Canadian” there; and maybe I'll do some research while another member is asking a question. My question was going to be: Is that all the funding that's provided for invasive species protection on Prince Edward Island, given it seems we're seeing more invasive species threat, whether it be the emerald ash borer or the woolly adelgid or all of the different plant matter that's growing up along the estuaries – the names escape me now.

Hon. D. Compton: I'm sure, member, that the department monitors that all the time and if there is more funding needed, it would be brought to the management plan.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

I'm wondering if there is any money set aside here for species at risk.

Kelli Bulger: The forested landscape priority place fed-prov that I said expired at March 31 – that was mostly to support grants for species at risk. Other than that, it's not possible to separate species-at-risk funding in this section because all the provincial biologists – that's the focus of their job duties.

I do have a little note about that though:

In addition, the Island Nature Trust – we fund them annually for land acquisitions through our operating budget. We also have capital budget to purchase land as well – the buffer zone acquisition program. We have a base to the Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre to support species at risk. Obviously just mentioned the fed-prov agreement that just expired as well; that was total funding of \$3.6 million over seven years.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, so yes, there is, in various places. Thanks.

My question – and I'm not sure that you could describe this necessarily as an invasive species, but ticks are becoming more and more of an issue. We have the emerald ash borer or green crabs or Japanese knotweed – there are a bunch of things. Ticks are increasingly a problem here. I'm wondering whether there's any money specifically set aside to collect data, if nothing else, on the number of tick exposures and health issues relating to that here on Prince Edward Island.

Hon. D. Compton: I'll have to bring that back, member. I don't have that at the top of my head. I know it's been raised in my district quite a bit. We'll see what we can find out.

P. Bevan-Baker: I am good for this section.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: I just did check; there obviously is, as I think we all knew, a PEI Invasive Species Council. So, just further to my last questioning, Chair, if the minister was able to bring back if there is funding for the PEI Invasive Species Council because what's in the big book says Canadian Council on Invasive Species – \$30,000. That's one of my questions on that because I know Clay Cutting and others with the PEI council do great work – and a lot of work – on that issue.

[M. MacKay in the chair]

I guess my next question would be – and I think the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point was getting into the protected areas fund: Is that the goal of 7 percent that we're trying to achieve for protected areas? Is that the fund?

Kelli Bulger: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: And I think, Kelli, you mentioned that in addition to the \$950,000 here, there's money also in the capital budget as well. I guess I'm wondering what the total is.

Kelli Bulger: It's \$500,000 in the capital budget per year.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, plus what's here, and that constitutes the full government contribution towards getting to that 7 percent protected area fund?

Kelli Bulger: Correct.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Further to the wetland compensation fund – I guess that’s what I’m calling it; I’m not sure if there is such an actual fund for wetland destruction compensation – I see there’s the PEI Wildlife Conservation Fund.

[12:15 p.m.]

I guess my question is: When people are paying in to that fund for development on wetlands, does that money go across a lot of the different organizations we see here or does it go to – often/sometimes – Ducks Unlimited? I guess I’m wondering who the recipients are when I look at some of these organizations.

Hon. D. Compton: Member, that’s in a different section, if you want to wait on that; it’s in environmental land management.

M. MacFarlane: Oh, it is. Sorry about that.

That’s all I have, thanks.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: I just have one question – well, maybe not a question, but a request. When I was asking for a written update on the Forestry Commission report – I know, I keep coming back to that. But I seem to remember when the report came out, that the minister of the day said that there was at least one recommendation that was going to be rejected by government, and I’m not sure that was ever specified.

Could I add to the updates on the various recommendations which, if any, of the recommendations are not going to be brought forward by government? I’d love to know that.

Thanks, Chair.

Hon. D. Compton: We can so.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Forests, Fish, and Wildlife: 16,894,900

Shall it carry? Carried.

Environment Regulatory

Division Management

“Appropriations provided for the management and administration of the Environment Regulatory Division.” Administration: 5,700. Equipment: 2,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 2,600. Professional Services: 36,600. Salaries: 236,900. Travel and Training: 4,900. Grants: 25,800.

Total Division Management: 314,500

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

I’m wondering if you can give us an update on the implementation of the irrigation strategy over the last year.

Kelli Bulger: That would be in the next section.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, okay. Let me just check because I have a bunch of questions on that.

I’ll hold them until the next section, then. I have no other questions on this section.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Division Management: 314,500

Shall it carry? Carried.

Water and Air Monitoring

“Appropriations provided to administer and issue high-capacity well approvals, air quality permits, conduct air quality monitoring, undertake groundwater and surface water quality monitoring, prepare groundwater and surface water reports, and administer pesticide management activities.” Administration: 19,900. Equipment: 46,900. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 64,300. Professional Services: 215,200. Salaries: 1,476,700. Travel and Training: 74,600. Grants: nil.

Total Water and Air Monitoring: 1,897,600

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: I will ask some questions now, on the irrigation strategy, Kelli. The first one, I’ll just reiterate – just an update on implementation in the last year. What’s been accomplished?

Kelli Bulger: Specifically, I think it was introduced in 2022, which provided the power to create regulation to designate an area as a water management area. To date, these regulations have not been created, but work has been ongoing regarding the allocation of water on a watershed basis.

P. Bevan-Baker: One of the central recommendations, going all the way back to the *Water Act* but it was reiterated in the irrigation strategy, was the creation of a water management body – stewardship. Has work been done on that? What are the plans within the department for establishing that?

Hon. D. Compton: Yeah, we are re-establishing that. It kind of went to the wayside during COVID. We are working on that, yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Do you have any timeline? I was delighted to hear that, as will many Islanders be, minister. Do you have a timeline on when that body will be established? What do you think it might look like?

Hon. D. Compton: I'll have to get back to it. I did get some information when I was first briefed as the minister, but I haven't got an update on where we are with that. I will bring it back.

P. Bevan-Baker: That's great. I look forward to that.

The funding for irrigation was sort of gone in a couple of minutes – if I remember right, when we had the discussion here. Is there any thought to increase that funding to meet the obviously much greater demand than there was a couple of years ago?

Hon. D. Compton: Hon. member, I know it was a discussion we had within the department. I don't think we've reached a decision on that.

[12:20 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. The reason I ask is that there really is no substantial increase at all in this division, so it strikes me that there are no plans, at least this year, to adjust the amount of money based on this year's experience. You've just sort of admitted that's the case. I was just surprised to see that because of how quickly things went this year.

Hon. D. Compton: We did have that discussion about increasing the amount. Again, looking at the budget and where we're at and where we would find the funding, whether we encroach on next year's and what that looks like, but it is a discussion we're having.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm just going to read a bit from the irrigation strategy here. It says: "The *Water Act* strives to improve transparency on watershed management with Island residents. To achieve this, it mandates a water registry." I know there's a lot of data available online – it's a really good open data resource – but I'm wondering if there are any funds to expand that registry.

Kelli Bulger: Not specifically funding, but they're always expanding the registry as they collect more data.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Just to confirm, we're on water and air monitoring?

Kelli Bulger: Correct.

M. MacFarlane: I guess a question I have is when we look at – this section describes the groundwater and surface water quality monitoring and groundwater reports.

I recently brought to your attention, minister, an issue of potential water contamination in my district allegedly resulting from a farming operation. Does information like that get gathered? I see preparing groundwater reports. Is that data collected and either acted on...? I'm wondering if the government or the department provides funding to correct any water issues that might impact a large number of people.

Hon. D. Compton: I'm not sure I get your question. Are you saying: Would we, as the government, provide funding for a community or a few homeowners or...?

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, and as I'm asking the question, I'm also thinking about the situation of forever chemicals, PFAS. That comes to my mind as well, in addition to maybe another type of contamination, maybe from runoff or some other source.

This section says there are studies and reports done on that, so I guess my first question would be: When an Islander calls in and says there's been some contamination – again, thinking about what I recently brought to your attention, minister – does that get collected and put into a report, or does this talk about some other type of reports? I guess that's the question I'm trying to ask.

Hon. D. Compton: Obviously, it gets collected. I'm not sure that there's an actual report done on water contamination. As far as the PFAS, we, as a province, are footing the bill for Hazelbrook to provide a new well. So, I guess, depending on the seriousness, how many people are impacted, and whether it's a permanent contamination or not – I think those would all come into play. But I'm no expert, so I'll take it back to the department for sure.

M. MacFarlane: Can you give us an update on the Hazelbrook work that's being done?

Hon. D. Compton: Yeah. I talked to my deputy – it's probably been a month; we've been in here. But at that point, they were looking for a property and testing the water to make sure that they could have a well that was clean and provided water for the houses that were affected. They were looking at acquiring the land and I'm not sure if that's happened yet, but they're in the process.

M. MacFarlane: I think that's all I have. Thanks, Chair.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

Just a couple of specific questions on high-capacity wells because when the moratorium was lifted, there were a few that came on, but recently in the last couple years, because of the climate changing, we've had a lot of applications come in. I'm wondering how many new high-capacity wells have been permitted since the regulations were put in place. I don't know if you have a yearly breakdown for that, Kelli; that would be great if you could.

Kelli Bulger: I don't have a yearly, but it is 62.

P. Bevan-Baker: For '25-26?

Kelli Bulger: No, since '21.

P. Bevan-Baker: Sixty-two in total since 2021?

[12:25 p.m.]

Hon. D. Compton: Member, I'll just point out that a lot of the applications came after last summer. Most of them came after the drought of last summer. So, up until that point, there hadn't been as much of a demand or an interest because of the drought.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm sorry?

Kelli Bulger: One hundred and thirty-one since last August.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm wondering if I could ask for a written – because the numbers are a little confusing. If you could us a year-by-year number of applications and the number that were approved, that were permitted in the last three years, Kelli, that would be great.

I did appreciate a couple of minutes ago the minister saying that you are working on a water governance body. In the absence of that, I'm wondering – because, presumably, a number of these permitted high-capacity wells will be built and utilized in the next year or two, how are we ensuring the health of the water table and streams within a particular watershed in the absence of a water governance body?

Hon. D. Compton: The first thing I'll say is most all of the watersheds, there is not an issue with water availability – maybe one, and we all know what that is.

The one thing that I keep saying and I'm hoping farmers realize is the more applications that we approve and issue permits and someone puts irrigation in, the less water, possibly, that other farmers.... You know, you're going to have to share the wealth; that's the issue. Whether you've had a high-capacity well since they were implemented or whether one was just approved and put in, everyone has equal opportunity to use that water.

I think it's really important that farmers understand that because I feel like farmers that maybe had a high-capacity well put in two or three years think, well, I'm going to be able to run my irrigation as long as I want and the new people, it doesn't really matter. But everyone has equal access to that water. The department is monitoring how much water all of those high-capacity wells are using.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, that's a kind of a worrisome answer for me, I have to be honest, minister.

Hon. D. Compton: It's a worrisome answer for me, too. I mean, farming has changed; we know that.

Chair: Members, can you both keep it to a budget, please – budget questions?

Hon. D. Compton: We'll try, okay.

P. Bevan-Baker: I will endeavour to do that, Chair; I appreciate it.

A couple of things you said there concern me. One is that there are many users of water. First of all, the ecological needs of our individual watersheds, and we have many other users, not just farmers, of course. There are people who – residents who live in the area. There may be other businesses, any number or variety of businesses who deserve equal access to the water.

If all we're doing is monitoring the amount of water that the high-capacity wells for agriculture use, we're really not getting a clear picture at all of what the total use is, what potential impacts these new high-capacity wells have on other users, other people who wish to use it. That's why we need a water governance system in place.

I appreciate you're working on that, but I really hope that work is done quickly so that as we expand the number of high-capacity wells, we're not putting other parts of the – whether it's other users or the environmental needs of each watershed area in jeopardy.

I guess I didn't have a question, I'm sorry, Chair, but it was important that I got that off my chest. I appreciate you giving me a chance to do it.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you had mentioned the project in Hazelbrook. Is there an update on the progress of that? I know that the driveway is in. I'm just wondering when will the project be tied into some of the five or seven or eight homes.

Hon. D. Compton: I explained earlier, it's probably been about a month since I talked to my deputy about this, but they were acquiring the land, making sure that – digging the well or testing – making sure that the water was safe and healthy to use. I will get an update for you.

B. Curran: Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Water and Air Monitoring: 1,897,600

Shall it carry? Carried.

[12:30 p.m.]

Drinking Water and Wastewater Management

“Appropriations provided to administer approvals/regulatory compliance and protection related to water wells, drinking water and wastewater systems, and for the administration of the Water Act Regulations including well construction, water quality investigations, and other related services.” Administration: 7,500. Equipment: 5,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 7,300. Professional Services: 25,000. Salaries: 846,300. Travel and Training: 36,000.

Total Drinking Water and Wastewater Management: 927,100.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: I know the Leader of the Third Party asked about PFAS a couple of minutes ago, but I'm wondering if we're putting money aside for increased monitoring for potential evidence or presence of those chemicals in our waters across PEI.

Kelli Bulger: There is funding for monitoring for PFAS, yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: And is that new funding, Kelli, or is that something we've always had?

Kelli Bulger: It's existing funding, so that's sort of part of the responsibility of this section.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Maybe it's just anecdotal but it does seem like there've been a couple of very high-profile cases of PFAS being discovered recently. Is the trend that it is showing up – these forever chemicals, are they

showing up more frequently than they used to or is it just a blip?

Kelli Bulger: I don't think more frequently than they used to.

Hon. D. Compton: No, not more frequently.

P. Bevan-Baker: How often is the drinking water in our schools tested? I know there's been discussion about putting filters in schools, and of course, many of our schools are surrounded by agricultural facilities.

Kelli Bulger: I would have to bring that information back.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'd appreciate that, Kelli.

I think that's all I have on this section. Thank you.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Drinking Water and Wastewater Management: 927,100

Shall it carry? Carried.

Microbiology and Chemistry Laboratories

"Appropriations provided for the microbiological and chemical analyses of drinking water, surface water, and wastewater." Administration: 53,700. Equipment: 33,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 337,500. Professional Services: 10,500. Salaries: 1,052,200. Travel and Training: 4,100.

Total Microbiology and Chemistry Laboratories: 1,491,500.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: I just really have a clarifying question on this, Kelli.

It seems to me that this mimics very closely the previous section. I don't know if they've always been done as two separate sections or... Can you kind of explain how this differs from the previous division that we just passed?

Kelli Bulger: So, this is actually the lab that does the testing of the samples that are collected.

P. Bevan-Baker: Has it always existed as a separate section in the budget?

Kelli Bulger: In my recollection, yes.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Microbiology and Chemistry Laboratories: 1,491,500.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Environmental Land Management

"Appropriations provided to administer and co-ordinate the environmental assessment and subdivision review process, environmental permitting, contaminated sites, oil spill response, administer watercourse and wetland protection regulations, and the Agriculture Environment Officer Unit." Administration: 21,200. Equipment: 11,900. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 16,500. Professional Services: 94,300. Salaries: 1,493,400. Travel and Training: 86,500.

Total Environmental Land Management: 1,723,800.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

I'm imagining that with our move to electrification and the sort of gradual phasing out of oil tanks in people's houses and stuff like that, and stricter rules regarding oil tanks themselves, has the number of contaminated spills – have we seen a reduction in that, consequently?

Kelli Bulger: I don't have any information specifically on that.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

P. Bevan-Baker: I'll carry on, Kelli.

Where would one find data on the number of contaminated...? Because it can be super expensive when they happen. I'm just wondering if there's data available on how many we have each year.

Kelli Bulger: I will check with the division.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm wondering what the wait times are associated with the reviews and permitting under this division. Is that improving or are they getting longer?

[12:35 p.m.]

Kelli Bulger: It is two to four weeks, and previously it was four to six.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, so it is improving. The minister and I had a chat earlier today in Question Period and one of the concerns was the human resources available to carry out some of the functions in the department, but this doesn't seem to be an area where that's an issue.

Kelli Bulger: They're at full complement.

Hon. D. Compton: It's more enforcement than anything, not necessarily permitting.

P. Bevan-Baker: Can you tell us what role this section plays in relation to new developments, whether those are subdivisions or – I'm trying not to think about one particular development, but it keeps coming into my head. I know there's the *Planning Act* that falls in somewhere else, but the EPA is also part of when somebody comes forward with a new development. Is that where I would find the funding for it, here?

Kelli Bulger: Yes. New development, under the development control section – those files would be referred to this section for various reasons.

P. Bevan-Baker: One of the things that has caused confusion and angst is that there is a discrepancy in terms of setbacks between the EPA and the *Planning Act*. Is there any effort to try and coordinate them so we have the same setbacks related to the regulations of both acts?

Hon. D. Compton: I can't comment on that, whether there's been any conversation around marrying the two together, but I'll talk to my deputy and bring it back.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I have no question, but just a comment on that. It does cause confusion and it does create a situation where a new development can happen and it's in compliance with, let's say the *Planning Act*, but out of compliance with the EPA, and it's just – it would be really nice if we could coordinate. It doesn't seem like a complicated thing to do, so I would really encourage you to try and get that work done.

That's all. Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Waste Reduction, Recovery, and Recycling

“Appropriations provided for operation of the Beverage Container Program, the reduction of waste including single-use products, and oversight of the Extended Producer Responsibility Program.” Administration: 2,000. Equipment: 500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 2,851,300. Salaries: 130,400. Travel and Training: 4,600. Grants: nil.

Total Waste Reduction, Recovery, and Recycling: 2,988,800

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Just regarding Clean Farms there, I see just a little less than \$200,000. How is that working as far as – is there any market for the product that they're recycling, and are a lot of farmers participating? Could you give me an idea?

Kelli Bulger: I don't have any stats on that. It was transition funding for the stewardship program, so I'd have to bring that back.

R. Henderson: Are we planning on continuing it? Is it a five-year deal or a....

Kelli Bulger: I believe this is the second year and the final year of that particular funding.

R. Henderson: Okay, thanks. From my perspective, I originally signed that with that organization back when I was Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. There seems to be an increasing amount of plastic and recyclables involved in agriculture, and to do that effectively and efficiently is of value, but it also needs to have a market too. That's the tough part, I'm told.

Thanks, Chair.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Obviously, there have been a lot of changes in the bottle and can refunds in the last 12 months. Maybe I can ask a general question about this, Kelli. There's a lot of fluctuation in the

individual lines here in this section. I wonder if you could go through and just explain because, for example, the grants last year was almost \$200,000; it's zero this year. The amount of materials, supplies, and services has been all over the place. If you could just explain how the funds have changed and where they're going.

Kelli Bulger: Sure. The most material one there, in '25-26, we are showing over about \$2 million between '25-26 budget and forecast.

[12:40 p.m.]

When we were developing the '25-26 budget, we expected that the beverage container program would transition to industry partway through the year, so we reduced the budget. We expected it would possibly transition January 1st of 2026. Instead, it was determined that the better plan was to transition it at April 1st of 2026. Therefore, we incurred a full year of cost operated under the government instead of the industry.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. And what, Kelli, was the impact in terms of either expenses or revenues to the government from all of the Islanders who were waiting to – hoarding their recyclables? Did that have a positive or negative impact on the bottom line?

Kelli Bulger: I guess, from a past point of view – or, I guess, a future point of view – we did estimate that there was probably 5.6 million in that stockpile category. That's the reason why in fiscal '26-27 there is some transition funding, or one of the reasons why in '26-27 we retained funding to transition to industry to allow for those containers to be funded through government.

In addition, it recognizes that there is a 60-day window between when the container is sold and the refund is provided to the consumer. So, that would mean that in the 60 days preceding the April 1st transition, government's collected the revenue for the deposit, but the industry agent will be returning the refund. So, we retained \$2.8 million for that purpose as well, and we're pretty bang-on right now, pretty close to that \$2.8 million, which we would fund that out to May 31st.

P. Bevan-Baker: That's good to know. Well done on those estimates. And I'm assuming things will stabilize pretty quickly now that we have the inputs and the outputs – although there

were some questions today on the impacts of this on consumers. I don't know if the minister, given that we have a little more time to discuss that now, wants to elaborate at all on the discussion that you had earlier regarding what government may or may not do to try and make this more consistent across the province.

Hon. D. Compton: Well, all I can say is, again, it's between the producers of the beverages and the retailer as far as what the container recycling fee is going to be, and I did table that chart on what the cost is. Encorp would call it a fullback return. I have a hard time accepting that because, you know, you still are paying a recycling fee, but for all intents and purposes, you're charged 10 cents, you get 10 cents back, but there is a fee on top of that. That's done through that not-for-profit and through the industry, so they have to decide where they're going to land with what they're charging, and we'll keep an eye on what's happening.

But this is what they did in New Brunswick, and we're kind of using that model, and it seems to be working well there.

P. Bevan-Baker: I think my final question on this section: Given that the management of this program has been moved to a third party, were there any losses of jobs within government related to handing the program over to a non-profit?

Kelli Bulger: No, we had a program coordinator who's been reassigned to a different section.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, within the department.

Kelli Bulger: Within the department, yeah.

Hon. D. Compton: He's been there a long time; he just took this on as part of.... Yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

I'm good for this section. Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

[12:45 p.m.]

Total Waste Reduction, Recovery, and Recycling: 2,988,800

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Environment Regulatory: 9,343,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

Climate Adaptation

Climate Adaptation

“Appropriations provided to administer the Provincial Climate Adaptation Plan, implement action in response to the Interim Coastal Policy Recommendations, administer the Climate Challenge Fund, support interdepartmental climate action, and administer climate change related federal/provincial funding agreements.” Administration: 19,200. Equipment: 10,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 81,500. Professional Services: 1,435,300. Salaries: 805,200. Travel and Training: 28,500. Grants: 721,400.

Total Climate Adaptation: 3,101,100

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Just looking at the grants line, which is down substantially – of course, surprising to me given that climate adaptation is not something that’s getting easier or cheaper. I’m wondering why the grants have gone down and what specifically is gone from that grants line.

Kelli Bulger: We have paused the climate challenge fund for ’26-27 in order to provide an opportunity to evaluate the past five years.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I think I want to unpack what you just said there a little bit, Kelli. So, this program, the climate adaptation.... Sorry, what was the name of the program again?

Kelli Bulger: The climate challenge fund.

P. Bevan-Baker: Climate challenge fund, right. It’s been in place now for five years. So, we’re pausing it – and I know what that word can mean – in order to evaluate what’s gone on in the last five years?

Kelli Bulger: Yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, my question would be – I imagine that one can carry out an evaluation on a program without actually having to pause or cancel or cut or whatever you want to call it. Why was the program cut? We shouldn’t have to do that to just evaluate it. I’m not trying to be

antagonistic here; I’m just trying to understand it.

Kelli Bulger: It was the intention, when it was established, to evaluate the fund back in ’21-22, so that is why we are doing so. It is to evaluate the performance, relevance, and impact of the projects over the past five years.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Do we have any data on that evaluation, Kelli, or is that ongoing?

Kelli Bulger: No, that hasn’t started yet. We’re planning that for ’26-27.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. So, has the fund been replaced with some other money elsewhere, or is it gone this year?

Kelli Bulger: Just paused.

P. Bevan-Baker: Sorry, it’s paused. Excuse me. Okay.

This also covers the interim coastal policy recommendations, and I know there’s been a fair amount of talk on that. I wonder if you can just maybe give us a general update on the implementation on the policies regarding coastline protection.

Kelli Bulger: Just probably that the shoreline management plans are ongoing. Right now I think we’re close to completing the first five, and the final 12 are – we recently closed an RFP with a contractor to complete the remaining shoreline management plans.

P. Bevan-Baker: I don’t know if it’s the same contractor out of Halifax that did the first few. I had interesting conversations with them – very capable people who clearly know what they’re doing. Do you have a timeline as to when you think that all of the little cells will be completed, or at least the preparation for that?

Kelli Bulger: I do: 2029-30.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, okay, so three or four years. Okay.

One thing that’s always interested me – partly because it’s a wetland – is the coast saltmarshes and the mapping of the changes that are happening there. Is there funding in here for that? I’m wondering, if the results of that are out, if there are any significant changes. I suspect there are.

Kelli Bulger: I don't have a report on that, but I believe the agreement we had to complete that work was fully paid out between fiscal '24-25 and '25-26.

[12:50 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I don't think I have any more questions on this section.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Climate Adaptation: 3,101,100

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Department of Land and Environment:
38,203,700

Shall it carry? Carried.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Kelli. Thank you for being patient.

Chair: We'll just take a short recess.

[The Committee recessed from 12:51 p.m. to 12:53 p.m.]

Chair: Okay. For those that are following along, we are on page 56, Executive Council.

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

Hon. R. Lantz: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

I'll get you to state your name and title for Hansard.

Kelli Bulger: Kelli Bulger, director of finance.

Chair: Executive Council

Office of the Premier

"Appropriations provided for the operation of an office to support the Premier in carrying out responsibilities as Leader of Government and as President of the Executive Council. Employees provide program and policy advice, administrative support and organization, and liaison with the public and the media."
Administration: 20,300. Equipment: 3,500.

Materials, Supplies, and Services: 5,500.
Salaries: 1,209,700. Travel and Training: 72,200.

[12:55 p.m.]

Total Office of the Premier: 1,311,200

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just looking at the salaries. They've been fairly consistent, but it looks like the office is down two positions. I'm just wondering if you can explain that, if there's been some restructuring.

Kelli Bulger: Is that in – sorry, I don't have my.... Are you looking at the big book?

K. Bernard: It's in the big book, yeah.

Kelli Bulger: Okay. I believe we have two contract positions that might have been reported previously that we have not replaced.

K. Bernard: Given the Premier is chair of the Council of the Federation, are we responsible for funding the meeting in PEI this summer or is that federally funded?

Kelli Bulger: We have responsibility to fund the meeting, yes.

K. Bernard: Do you have a potential cost associated?

Kelli Bulger: I do. The projection was about \$442,000. We did fund it, fortunately, from a prior fiscal year. We funded it, almost in full, from fiscal '25-26.

K. Bernard: Okay.

I'm good, Chair. Thanks.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Office of the Premier: 1,311,200

Shall it carry? Carried.

Executive Council Office

Executive Council Office

“Appropriations provided for the operation of the Office of the Clerk of the Executive Council (responsible for the administration of Cabinet processes and management of Cabinet records), the Cabinet Committee on Policy and Priorities (responsible to direct and oversee the legislative and policy work required to fulfill Government's plan, and align it with fiscal and governmental agendas), Cabinet Committee on Trade Relations (responsible to identify, monitor, and analyze key emerging issues and strategic questions as they arise in trade relations), and Cabinet Committee on Fiscal Responsibility and Red Tape Reduction (responsible to oversee public spending, reduce administration, and improve delivery of government services), and Engage PEI.” Administration: 27,900. Equipment: 5,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 18,700. Professional Services: 80,000. Salaries: 1,882,400. Travel and Training: 11,000.

Total Executive Council Office: 2,025,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just noticing a slight decrease in salaries there. What position would that have been?

Kelli Bulger: We had some temporary positions. There is also a junior policy analyst position that we'll leave vacant for the current year. That was for the purposes of balancing within our budget target.

K. Bernard: I'm looking in the big book under professional services, and there's a legal services line for \$33,432. What was that for?

Kelli Bulger: I wouldn't have specifics on those particulars in terms of what the nature of the file was about with me.

K. Bernard: Under that is the PEI government policy capacity action plan. What's that?

Kelli Bulger: The action plan seeks to strengthen the government's ability to effectively formulate, implement, and evaluate public policies.

K. Bernard: Is that a finished document or is that kind of a living, breathing document?

Kelli Bulger: I believe it's complete, but it will obviously be implemented.

K. Bernard: Is that something that would be available publicly?

Kelli Bulger: I would have to check on that. I can check, yeah.

K. Bernard: There is also some strategic planning there. Do you have any information on that?

Kelli Bulger: Yes. That would be to facilitate the deputy ministers and their strategic planning for government and their departments.

K. Bernard: So, the new Cabinet committee on red tape reduction – can you tell us if there have been any recommendations that have come out of there yet or where they are in there?

[1:00 p.m.]

Kelli Bulger: They're in the process of collecting information from departments in terms of programs and services and efficiencies that could be achieved, and that sort of thing. It's an inventory process.

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

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

You mentioned that there's a junior policy analyst that's being vacant. That's not with the Anti-Racism Office, is it?

Kelli Bulger: No.

G. McNeilly: Is that position filled, the junior policy analyst for the Anti-Racism Office?

Kelli Bulger: We recently filled a junior policy analyst for the Anti-Racism Office, and there's a second position there as well.

G. McNeilly: And is the Anti-Racism Office – how much...? The grants aren't.... How much were the grants?

Hon. R. Lantz: It's in another section, isn't it?

G. McNeilly: It's in another section? That's what I was looking at. Is it Indigenous...?

Hon. R. Lantz: No.

Kelli Bulger: No.

G. McNeilly: Oh, it's at the end.

Kelli Bulger: They're separate. Yes.

G. McNeilly: Okay.

So, the red tape reduction that the member just spoke about – what's the financial responsibilities for that? Because it's kind of new, could you just give me some more information about when they're going to meet and what the terms of reference are?

Chair: I don't know if that's a budget question. That's not really a budget question, member.

Hon. R. Lantz: I don't have the terms of reference here with me.

An Hon. Member: It's online.

Hon. R. Lantz: It's online?

G. McNeilly: How much is it going to cost?

Kelli Bulger: It's an internal Cabinet member committee, so it would be similar to Treasury Board or Executive Council/Cabinet. So, internal cost – existing.

G. McNeilly: If it's a Cabinet committee, are all the Cabinet committees in this section?

Kelli Bulger: Well, Executive Council would be in this section. Treasury Board would obviously fall under Finance. The Cabinet committee on fiscal responsibility red tape reduction, yes.

G. McNeilly: So, is the Cabinet committee that was mentioned in the Minister of Housing's mandate letter...? Why don't we see it in here?

Hon. R. Lantz: There's no budget specific to the committee. It's just people sitting around a table, meeting with staff and discussing policy. There might be an incremental cost in coffee, maybe, but it's all included in the budget of the Executive Council office.

G. McNeilly: While you're sitting around having coffee in these committees, people still don't have a place to live, and that's why you set up the committees – because housing is important – and I want to know more about the

committee that was in the minister's mandate letter and if it's going to show up here. We talked about this committee three years ago, I think it was, Mr. Premier, that was going to be set up, and I don't know what came about from that committee or any of these coffee committees that have been set up.

So, could you just give me some more details about what the outcomes will be if we don't have the terms of reference here today? What will the outcomes of the housing committee be?

Chair: I'm not sure that's a budget question either. Can you relate it back to the budget? Or maybe we can set you up a meeting with the Minister of Finance and Affordability that might be able to give you a little bit more....

G. McNeilly: My question's not valid?

Chair: I didn't say it wasn't valid, I just don't think it's necessarily on the budget.

G. McNeilly: Well, when you have a writeup here and it says two different committees but doesn't have them all, and there's been a few little changes.... I want to know if the housing committee should have been in this, but there were such changes that it didn't make it into the book, or if it's of value to the government moving forward.

So, that would be my question: Why is it not in the book?

Kelli Bulger: I'd have to bring that back. Might have been oversight. I apologize.

G. McNeilly: No problem. There, that's my question.

I'm all done with that section. Thank you for your time.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Executive Council Office: 2,025,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Intergovernmental and Public Affairs

Intergovernmental Affairs Secretariat

[1:05 p.m.]

“Appropriations provided for research, consultation, and analysis of cross-government issues; provision of support and advice; and preparation of briefing documents on strategic intergovernmental issues and opportunities to ensure that the interests and priorities of the Province are presented in dealings with other governments.” Administration: 4,000. Equipment: 2,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 1,000. Salaries: 1,096,000. Travel and Training: 32,000. Grants: 98,900.

Total Intergovernmental Affairs Secretariat:
1,233,900

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I’m wondering if there’s any work funded in here to reduce trade barriers between provinces.

Kelli Bulger: I can’t speak to anything specifically. It’s just sort of what the section is responsible for.

K. Bernard: Do you have a sense of if that legislation will be proclaimed?

Kelli Bulger: No, I don’t. I’m sorry.

K. Bernard: Premier, do you?

Hon. R. Lantz: There’s still work happening on the regulations.

K. Bernard: What other work is being funded through this section?

Kelli Bulger: This would be the fed-prov relations, obviously, sort of the lead on behalf of government. They support departments, as well, in their relationships with the federal government. They also have, in the grants, the Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, population-based annual amounts.... That’s the sort of work that this section is responsible for. And then, of course, the 2026 COF meeting, they deal with COF and CAP and those sorts of things. That will be where those funds for ’26 COF hosting were paid.

K. Bernard: Okay.

I’m good, Chair. Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Do we have enough people in this section to do the work? This session of the Legislature, the last eight or nine weeks, it seems like, Mr. Premier, your government has been having a difficult time finalizing and shoring up deals with the federal government in a number of different areas. I’m just wondering if we have enough people in this section to assist with that.

Kelli Bulger: I will say there was no request for additional staffing in the budget planning for ’26-27.

G. McNeilly: Across the board, how does this work when you’re talking about Health or Education? I just had a conversation with the Minister of Education about their contracts and negotiation. Are people from this section there to assist the ministers? They seem like they’re having a little bit of trouble.

Kelli Bulger: I would say yes, they support all of government and departments and ministers with respect to their relationships with the feds.

G. McNeilly: The Indigenous Relations Secretariat, the legal services – I’m not sure what it was last year, but it was –

Hon. R. Lantz: Next section.

G. McNeilly: Is that the next section?

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Are we still under...?

Chair: Intergovernmental Affairs Secretariat.

G. McNeilly: I can’t ask about that now?

Chair: No.

G. McNeilly: Are you sure?

Chair: You can just as soon as we carry this. I don’t have anybody else with the names, and then we can move on, member, and you can ask questions in the next section.

G. McNeilly: Okay, it’s a deal.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Indigenous Relations Secretariat

[1:10 p.m.]

“Appropriations provided to fund consultations and negotiations under the Canada-PEI-Mi’kmaq Partnership Agreement and Framework Agreement as the Indigenous Relations Secretariat facilitates, coordinates, and leads all discussions with First Nations on behalf of the Government of Prince Edward Island. The Secretariat provides funds to Indigenous-specific programs and initiatives with grants to Abegweit First Nation, Aboriginal Women’s Association of PEI, Epekwitk Assembly of Councils (MCPEI and L’nuey), Lennox Island First Nation, and Native Council of PEI in support of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls capacity building work, core funding, and infrastructure.” Administration: 4,800. Equipment: 4,600. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 3,100. Professional Services: 283,000. Salaries: 544,900. Travel and Training: 14,600. Grants: 1,290,000.

Total Indigenous Relations Secretariat:
2,145,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

The legal services for \$201,000 – I wasn’t sure what was spent last year, so what was that number spent on? Is it about average for every year?

Kelli Bulger: In fiscal ’25-26?

G. McNeilly: Yes.

Kelli Bulger: By February 28th, we had spent \$201,650. That’s for specific Indigenous relations expertise with Cox and Palmer.

G. McNeilly: And is that about average? Is that what we’re looking at every year? It seems just maybe a little bit high for....

Kelli Bulger: It’s actually declining compared to ’21-22 and ’22-23.

G. McNeilly: Okay. So, in this section, the grants maybe were a fraction underspent, and then you just carried that number over to the next year. Maybe just speak about the grant line.

Kelli Bulger: The grant lines are, like you say, pretty much status quo from year to year. We did have, in fiscal ’23 base budget, additional dollars to support the preservation of Mi’kmaq language. That was through L’nuey or intended to be through L’nuey. Ultimately, there are programs delivered through the Aboriginal Women’s Association as part of the normal operations that fill that role, so therefore we have eliminated those dollars from this section.

G. McNeilly: Can we get a breakdown of federal government versus provincial support?

Kelli Bulger: There is no federal revenue here.

G. McNeilly: So, for this, the Missing and Murdered Women.... The call to action or the different recommendations – those are ongoing. Do we have enough staff in this section to...? What are we working on next? I know that’s an ongoing thing. Could you give me any information on where we stand versus the report card?

Kelli Bulger: I know that the report card was published on May 5th, so I guess that’s in the past. I don’t have any information on where we’re going next but I will say, in terms of enough staff here, there was no request for additional resources for fiscal ’26-27.

G. McNeilly: Okay, perfect. Thanks.

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

R. Henderson: Kind of related to the budget here. Remember, Premier; I had asked you about the situation of certificate of possession for housing on Lennox Island, and those people weren’t eligible for housing supports, for things like seniors independence programs or home renovations on Lennox Island, but they also weren’t recognized here in PEI. You had mentioned you were going to meet the Chief and try to work that out.

So, a certificate of possession, and how come they’re not eligible for...? Because it’s not a deed but it’s the same as a deed, so it’s considered that those people own their own properties on Lennox Island.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, I recall you asking the question. I got briefed at the time, and that’s about a year ago now, and now it’s lost on me a little bit. But there’s a lot of federal

responsibility for housing on our First Nations reserves, and there's something in there that we need to resolve with the federal government on that issue.

[1:15 p.m.]

R. Henderson: Well, that is the issue – the feds aren't covering it and the Province isn't covering it – and it's sort of like: Who covers that particular issue?

I guess I'm asking, since you're also involved with the Council of the Federation with the federal and provincial governments, is there anything you can kind of find some continuity in other provinces or jurisdictions?

Hon. R. Lantz: I'd be happy to look into it. If you could put this on paper and give it to me for something to bring back to you, I'd be happy to do that because I do remember the question last year. I do remember getting a quick briefing about it, but if it's an ongoing issue that we need to resolve with the federal government, I'm happy to look into it.

R. Henderson: Okay, thanks.

Thanks, Chair.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Under the grants, for Abegweit First Nation, Aboriginal Women's Association, Epekwitk Assembly of Councils, Lennox Island First Nation, and Native Council of PEI, they each got a \$50,000 grant for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Is that a specific project, or is that to go towards implementing recommendations from one of the reports?

Kelli Bulger: Nothing specific or project related; it's ongoing annual funding.

K. Bernard: Oh, okay.

Kelli Bulger: I'm sorry, I should say right now; the current agreement expires in the end of this year.

K. Bernard: Do we think that's something that we will continue, or is that to be renegotiated?

Kelli Bulger: Yeah, we do – I can't say specifically about that, but it would be sort of discussed throughout the year to move forward, at least for approval to continue funding.

K. Bernard: I'm looking at the Epekwitk Assembly of Councils – duty to consult. It's only \$15,000, but I'm wondering: Is that for something specific or is that kind of an ongoing...?

Kelli Bulger: That's an ongoing annual amount. Right now, we have an agreement that covers fiscal '25-26 and '26-27 for that amount as well as the framework agreement.

K. Bernard: Okay. If the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty asked that, just let me know. I didn't hear what report he was asking about.

I'm wondering about the calls to action that we've implemented from the Truth and Reconciliation report. Do you have a sense of what recommendations will be funded in the upcoming year?

Kelli Bulger: I don't have any information with me, but I can bring that back.

K. Bernard: Okay, that would be great. Thank you.

My last question may not be completely budget related because I'm not sure if there's a budget attached to it, but I'm wondering if there's any update on the renaming of the bridge. Are those conversations ongoing?

Kelli Bulger: There is no budget related. I know that there was an agreement a couple of years ago that it would be advanced to the federal government for consideration, and it is still with the federal government.

K. Bernard: Okay, thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Anti-Racism Office

“Appropriations provided to support the Provincial Anti-Racism Office and initiatives including the Anti-Racism Table, implementation of the Anti-Racism Action Plan, and grants to support community-led anti-racism projects.” Administration: 14,400. Equipment: 3,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 8,000.

Professional Services: 60,000. Salaries: 310,300.
Travel and Training: 27,700. Grants: 375,000.

Total Anti-Racism Office: 798,400

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thanks very much.

I just want to compliment the Premier and government on putting this in and making sure it stays in. It's very important. I think a lot of good work has been done, and I credit you with that. It needed to be in Executive Council for a reason. I watch this budget pretty closely.

My question is, obviously – actually, I know the answer, but....

[Interjection]

G. McNeilly: Well, because it's important.

[1:20 p.m.]

Salaries were down, but it was down more than one position, it looked like. It was supposed to be \$321,000. You spent \$131,000 – that is not one position; that seems like it would be more than that – and then it's going back up to where it is. What would be the shortfall on that?

Kelli Bulger: There were the two vacant junior policy analyst positions, one of which was just recently filled. That would explain the '25-26 savings.

G. McNeilly: Did you put out a job application for both positions and just could get one filled?

Kelli Bulger: I'm sorry, I don't know the answer to that. I believe it was just one posting for one position.

G. McNeilly: Mr. Premier, do you know anything about that, or no?

Hon. R. Lantz: I believe both positions are filled now, correct?

Kelli Bulger: Well, we have the director in place, we have one junior policy analyst, and then there's a second – it was a temporary position number which we are converting to a permanent position number. When we do, we will be able to post permanently.

G. McNeilly: Oh, it's not ready yet.

Kelli Bulger: That's correct, yeah.

G. McNeilly: Okay, perfect. I know what the grants do, and I want to say that those go out – and plus, what this does is it allows.... It's about allowing people to participate in an anti-racism province – somebody that doesn't stand for any type of racism things. It allows people and allies in, and those are the benefits of the grants, and I applaud you for keeping them in.

Under the Anti-Racism Office, there was a PEI anti-racism table transition and onboarding manual. Was that something that was created for people to come on board on the table? Just maybe speak to – it was a \$9,800 budget line.

Kelli Bulger: I believe it was more to do with the transition of the chair role – or the co-chair role.

G. McNeilly: Okay, so the chair stepped down obviously, but what was the onboarding manual then? Is it a manual there for when people come on board? Was that done at the same time?

Kelli Bulger: I think it probably encompasses both. It just speaks to highlighted best practice items and structured considerations to allow for better transitions.

G. McNeilly: Perfect. Great.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

This may not be the appropriate place to ask this question, but in case I miss the opportunity to – and it's on the grants. I, too, as the member has said, thank you very much for those and thank you, Premier, for the commitment here. But I'm learning more about some challenges in some of the schools around some racist behaviour.

So, are there grants here – do you work in conjunction with the Minister of Education and Early Years? Is this a joint effort to support schools to combat racism or is that a separate.... I can ask when the minister and his stranger are on the floor; I just didn't want to miss the opportunity.

Kelli Bulger: It's more grants for community organizations.

C. Simpson: Okay, thank you.

Thank you.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I don't know if this has been asked – I didn't hear it – but I see under the grants there's \$5,000 for the PEI Coalition of Women's Leadership, but there's another \$370,000. Is that the grants you were just talking about for community organizations?

Kelli Bulger: That's correct. There are larger grant amounts as well as microgrant amounts. Those funds, the \$5,000 that you see in the big book – as of February 28th, that's what was disbursed. The balance of the grants, to the tune of \$372,000, was paid out in March.

K. Bernard: Okay. I'm wondering if you have any information on any anti-racism initiatives that we'll be working on this upcoming year.

Kelli Bulger: Specifically – I'm just looking at a couple of items that have been highlighted for me: working with the Human Rights Commission to support initial steps towards anti-racism legislation through their reporting, working with the Department of Health and Wellness and their race/ethnicity project regarding disaggregated health data....

[1:25 p.m.]

That's sort of what's been highlighted for me that is new and will be worked on in '26-27.

K. Bernard: You just mentioned something that sparked something in me. It was one of the things that you just said – oh, the data collection for Health PEI. Is that project funded through this section?

Kelli Bulger: No, it wouldn't be. This is sort of the all-of-government plan.

K. Bernard: I think I'm done for that section.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Intergovernmental and Public Affairs:
4,177,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

Communications and Public Engagement

Departmental Communications and Public Engagement

“Appropriations provided for departmental communication officers and public engagement support.” Administration: 18,700. Equipment: 15,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 1,000. Salaries: 2,765,900. Travel and Training: 13,200.

Total Departmental Communications and Public Engagement: 2,814,600

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

There's a lot of staff in this section. How many are there here? It's \$2.7 million, roughly.

Kelli Bulger: Twenty-four.

K. Bernard: The communications section has grown quite a bit in the last seven years or so. Can you give us an example of – I guess, demonstrate why that need was there and what projects have been ongoing there?

Kelli Bulger: These are the staff that are embedded in departments that perform the communications function and support the ministers and deputies with that function.

K. Bernard: There have been a lot of independent websites launched in the last couple of months – the Island benefit, IRAC review – are those funded under this section?

Kelli Bulger: No.

K. Bernard: Okay. I'm good for this section.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Strategic Communications and Outreach

“Appropriations provided for a range of services such as: communications planning and strategy development, advertising, photography and video production, editorial, media, web, social media, and public outreach to all Government departments and agencies.” Administration: 21,600. Equipment: 62,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 564,900. Professional Services:

30,000. Salaries: 1,735,400. Travel and Training: 16,800.

Total Strategic Communications and Outreach: 2,431,500

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Can you explain to me how the last section and this section differ?

Kelli Bulger: The last section, as I said, they're the communications officers that support the ministers and the deputy ministers with respect to communications, obviously. It's a centralized section, the complement of which is comprised of writers, public outreach and affairs, web content, communications specialists, graphic designers, photographers, marketing, and multimedia supports.

K. Bernard: I'm trying to make sense of this. Would each department have that sort of support, and then this is a centralized...? Who would they be supporting?

Kelli Bulger: All of government.

[1:30 p.m.]

K. Bernard: I mean, obviously they're different people doing this work. That seems like an awful lot of money when we've hired those people within government. My brain is going to need a minute with that.

How do you ensure that what is the funding for communications is not being used – there's a fine line between political announcements and government announcements, so is there some sort of process that is used to ensure that those funds aren't being used for political...?

Kelli Bulger: I think that that would be an accountability piece for my team, who monitor and manage the budget for Executive Council, and my own department, to ensure we don't cross that line.

K. Bernard: Okay. I'm good.

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

G. McNeilly: Can you just give me a detailed – just picking up on those questions, the salaries were up last year until the end of March – 200

and some-odd thousand dollars in communications. What was the overspend there?

Kelli Bulger: We had two staff that were out on leave, and we had to hire temporary backfills to support continuing the work.

G. McNeilly: So, the backfills were not hired through agencies or anything like that? Was it just regular salary people?

Kelli Bulger: Yeah. Just department hires, yes.

G. McNeilly: So then, from the overspend last year, you're adding another \$15,000 onto the salaries next year; it's at \$1.73 million. Is that just collective bargaining?

Kelli Bulger: That's all it is, yes.

G. McNeilly: Okay, perfect. I'm good.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Communications and Public Engagement: 5,246,100

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Executive Council: 12,759,600

Shall it carry? Carried.

Minister, would you like to bring a stranger onto the floor?

Hon. R. Croucher: I would, yes.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Alright. For those of you who are following along, we are on page 44, Department of Education and Early Years.

Before we get started, can you please state your name and title for Hansard?

Chris DesRoche: Chris DesRoche, director of finance with the Education and Early Years department.

Hon. R. Croucher: Welcome, Chris.

Chair: Alright.

Finance and Administration

Finance and Administration

“Appropriations provided for operation of the office of the Minister and Deputy Minister and other administrative support services for the department, as well as for the costs related to the Land and Property Division of the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission.”
Administration: 100,700. Equipment: 844,300. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 36,000. Professional Services: 12,000. Salaries: 635,200. Travel and Training: 22,700. Grants: Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission: 2,974,500; Other: 2,727,900.

Total Finance and Administration: 7,353,300

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair. Welcome, Chris, and thank you, minister. We'll get started here.

When you take a look at the equipment under this section, it's gone up a little bit. Can you explain, under this section, what that equipment would be for?

[1:35 p.m.]

Chris DesRoche: Yes, the majority of the equipment in this section – \$824,000 out of \$844,000 – relates to software used by the system – in particular, Google Classroom and PowerSchool – and the cost of those have increased. So, it's contractually obligated increases.

C. Simpson: Thank you for that, Chris.

With the salaries going up there, collective agreements would be a factor; I'm making an assumption here. But my question would be: Do we have the same FTE equivalent positions as we did a year ago?

Chris DesRoche: Yes, there are four FTEs in this division – the deputy, the deputy's administrative assistant, the minister's administrative assistant, and our receptionist at the Holman building.

C. Simpson: When you go down to IRAC, the increase in the amount to IRAC, would that be covering the review of IRAC here or what's the increase difference here?

Chris DesRoche: No, the increase to IRAC is collective agreement increases. It's the status

quo, essentially. We are not covering the cost of the review. However, the review will help inform our budget next year.

C. Simpson: How many FTEs are at IRAC?

Chris DesRoche: I'm not sure. I'd have to bring that information back.

C. Simpson: Can you explain to us.... There's quite a drop in the grants, “other.” First of all, what's covered under “other” and what's been cut?

Chris DesRoche: In your list of handouts, “other” would include every grant listed there besides IRAC.

C. Simpson: The second part to that, Chris, was – I have the list, but what's been cut from previous years?

Chris DesRoche: There are a couple of grants that have had a reduction. There are also some grants that have had increases compared to last year. There's a Lester B. Pearson College scholarship of \$35,000 and – previously, when this was prepared – the Imagination Library of \$210,000 were the two reductions.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just going to jump up from that question there. That funding was taken away and now put back. Where would you have found that funding?

Chris DesRoche: We haven't yet, but to hit our budget targets, we will have to find it within the department.

K. Bernard: I'm looking at the travel. The minister went on a trip to Spain for the agent recruitment. I'm wondering if there was any success on that trip.

Hon. R. Croucher: Yeah, there certainly was, member. That trip was to an event, I guess we'll call it, where we were meeting with potential agents that were sending international students to Prince Edward Island. Very happy to say that it was an overwhelming success. Before we left there, from that event we secured seven new students, with numerous more that are currently looking. By all accounts, it was a huge success.

K. Bernard: This is out of curiosity. The Atlantic 911 ride – I'm curious why that was funded out of the Education budget.

Hon. R. Croucher: I was asked to go and represent that initiative and raise awareness. That ride funds a lot of AEDs in schools, for instance. It is tied into the school system. They have been a very, very generous participant in purchasing life-saving equipment for schools in the province.

K. Bernard: There's, overall, roughly a \$300,000 increase in this office here. Can you talk a little bit about...?

Chris DesRoche: Yes, we talked about how the software is increasing \$130,000. There was a small reduction in casual wages, so salaries are down \$60,000. And then grants as a whole, although there are some increases and decreases, were up \$229,000. The net amount is \$298,000 increase to this division.

K. Bernard: I think there might have already been a question asked around IRAC, but does that cost come out of this budget, and do we know – it doesn't. Okay.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you.

[1:40 p.m.]

APSEA has been cut – Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority – so I'm wondering what the reduction is there. Can you tell us a little bit about what APSEA does?

Chris DesRoche: APSEA is the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority. Although it may look like a decrease, there was a one-time – well, actually a two-time cost because we had one a couple years ago. There's a class action lawsuit against APSEA for incidents that have happened between 1915 and 1995. We accrued part of our share of the settlement a couple years ago, and this is the final payment; it was accrued this year.

C. Simpson: So, we don't fund any portion of the staff with APSEA?

Chris DesRoche: Oh yes, yeah. The base grant that you see of \$988,000 – that's the operational

grant. The additional amount you're seeing in '25-26 is our share of the settlement.

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

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thanks, Chair.

I'm looking, and I just want to clarify an answer that was previously given with respect to IRAC.

Maybe I'll start with this: Is this the total funding allocated to IRAC? When we look at the \$2,974,500, is that the amount they get to operate?

Chris DesRoche: That's the amount they receive from us as the funder from government. They would have other sources of revenues in IRAC as well. For example, in their audited '24-25 financial statements, our contribution was \$2.4 million out of \$4.8 million.

M. MacFarlane: When I look at page 11 of the little book, it has the revenue summary by department. I know IRAC is not a department, so would the revenue generated or taken in by IRAC fall within the \$57 million-odd dollars under Education and Early Years? It's included in that total of revenue in the department?

Chris DesRoche: No, it's not.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. So, as a Crown corporation, it's somewhere else where we would find the total revenues that IRAC receives through its filing fees and other sources? Where would that be found?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, like we talked about, we're \$2.4 million of the \$4.8 million of revenues at IRAC. I think there are pages towards the back of the book that show the gross amount of revenues and expenditures, but in our department, it's just our grant.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Thanks for that, Chris. I'll have a look there.

If I understood the previous question and answer correctly, there's no funding allocated here for the current review that government is undertaking of IRAC, but is there funding here for the ongoing land investigation that's underway?

Chris DesRoche: I believe that would occur within their normal operating budget.

M. MacFarlane: So, nothing specific to itemize out that would show what their budget is to complete that investigation?

Chris DesRoche: Not specific to that one investigation, no.

M. MacFarlane: When that investigation is complete, will there be a professional services line, or where would that cost be disclosed for individual specific investigations?

Chris DesRoche: I'm unaware of which investigation, or if it would be staff or professional services; usually a combination of both. But if you have a specific question, we could pose it to IRAC.

M. MacFarlane: I guess the specific question is to determine, when investigations are ordered – for Islanders to know how much they cost, if they're itemized out someplace. I guess what I'm hearing, Chris, is that they're not, and that there's no special allotment of funding for investigations – that IRAC does its investigations pursuant to the budget that's available to them and their own revenues. So, there's no specific amount directed for an investigation.

The second part of the question is: How do we determine how much was spent on an investigation once it's done?

Chris DesRoche: I can't speak to much of that besides that IRAC received a \$390,000 increase, which they identified as the increase they require to sustain their operations.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, thank you for that. Thanks, Chair.

[1:45 p.m.]

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I just have a couple of questions left under the other grants.

The breakfast program – there's no increase there. I know with, of course, the increased price

of food, do we think that \$380,000 will be sufficient?

Chris DesRoche: There's no increase in this year, but in the year that just passed, there was a federal agreement with Social Development that increased it by \$130,000, so there was actually a considerable increase in the past 12 months.

K. Bernard: I forgot about that.

I guess the same thing for the school milk program. It's \$67,000. I know the price of milk has gone up. Are we confident that that will...?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, we met with them recently. The price will remain the same for the current year. That funding helps. Between us and ADL and the foundation contributions, it takes it from 71 cents down to 55 cents, and there's over 600,000 units that go out every year.

K. Bernard: Yeah. Just a comment: ADL is such a phenomenal partner when it comes to kids and keeping milk affordable.

I'm good for this section, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Finance and Administration: 7,353,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

External Relations and Educational Services

Provincial Learning Materials Distribution Centre

"Appropriations provided for purchasing and distribution of learning materials for programs." Administration: 500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 1,197,200. Salaries: 188,000.

Total Provincial Learning Materials Distribution Centre: 1,385,700

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you.

Chris, there's two staff there; that's been historical for some time now. Can you explain to us how the materials actually get distributed to schools, and how is that funded?

Chris DesRoche: There's two staff, and seasonally, there could be a couple of casuals as well to help. The books are delivered to the provincial distribution centre, they are sorted by school, and they use transportation services within that line to deliver them to schools.

C. Simpson: With more use of AI, are we finding that the staff that are responsible for curriculum development are utilizing less textbooks?

Chris DesRoche: I don't know if I'd say due to AI, but there has been a trend in recent years where the publishers are moving more towards electronic versions of textbooks. Yeah, we have seen that trend.

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

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm looking at the increase in the budget. Is that due to an increased cost in supplies?

Chris DesRoche: Yes. What we're finding – as you can see, it was \$997,000. Our forecast was \$200,000 more than that, so we budgeted this year to match our current year spend. We are finding some pretty sharp increases in the cost of books and the cost of shipping the books to us.

K. Bernard: I'm guessing this is not the section where school supplies are funded.

Chris DesRoche: No, this is just ordinary textbooks to schools.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

External Relations and Educational Services.

“Appropriations provided for the management of external relations in the areas of Federal and Provincial policy, French Language, Aboriginal Affairs, and corporate services including: research, policy and planning, statistical data and analysis, legislative development, and teacher certification.” Administration: 44,300. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 108,400. Professional Services: nil. Salaries: 1,924,500. Travel and Training: 9,400. Grants: 207,900.

Total External Relations and Educational Services: 2,294,500

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

[1:50 p.m.]

I'm wondering if there's been any work funded here or if there's a need to fund more training around duty to report, especially now with the changes that have been made to the legislation.

Chris DesRoche: I believe that training would occur at the Public Schools Branch. Once we get to that section, there's a pretty substantial professional development budget which has been increased for the coming year.

K. Bernard: And can you tell us about any of the key policy work that's funded for this upcoming year?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, in the year that just passed, there was quite a bit of work done to the amendments to the *Education Act*, the *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, and the public schools act to help address some of the child safety issues. There's lots of work that has happened and is happening in different areas in response to the Jenkins report recommendations, such as minister's directives on protection and safety in schools.

In '26-27, we are updating our strategic plan; it just recently, in 2026, was at the end of its life. That's expired, so we'll be updating that in accordance with our new mandate letter.

There is a lot of work happening between here and the school boards that there's some overlap on with relation to the code of conduct, child protection handbook, and working with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection on some more policies and training.

K. Bernard: That's great. Thank you for that. And is this the division that would be responsible for the implementation of the inclusion report action plan?

Chris DesRoche: There is an inclusion policy analyst and a new inclusion manager, but that is in the English program section that's to come.

K. Bernard: Is this division responsible for the implementation of tracking absences?

Chris DesRoche: No, most of that work would happen at the education authority level – Public Schools Branch and CSLF.

K. Bernard: And under grants, there's a line item that's called school revenue replacement for \$103,000. I'm wondering if you could tell us what that is.

Chris DesRoche: When the healthy school lunch program came in, it replaced some vendors who previously provided commissions to schools as a percent of their revenues while they operated in the schools. When the lunch program came in, we didn't think it was fair to have schools miss out on that just because of another initiative, so we have replaced that. That goes directly to schools.

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

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

I'm wondering, Chris, under the grants, it's \$6,600; it says miscellaneous. What would that be for?

Chris DesRoche: It can vary, but in the past few years, there's been a grant provided to the Fédération des parents, like the French Home and School.

C. Simpson: Francophone Home and School association. Will that grant be – was that operational or was that project-based granting for them?

Chris DesRoche: Both; them and the PEI Home and School are both operational.

C. Simpson: When you go up to the school revenue replacement – I'm sorry, this question may have been asked; my apologies if it has been – what is that for?

Chris DesRoche: Yes, that's the one we just talked about.

C. Simpson: Yeah, I'm good with that, but I have another. Chris, can you outline for us – under this division, there's research and policy

planning. What policy planning is happening under this division now?

Chris DesRoche: That's the one we went through as well, the difference –

C. Simpson: Is there any other policy planning happening right now?

Chris DesRoche: Well, yes, the strategic plan, the code of conduct, the child protection handbook....

C. Simpson: When you take a look at, then, the statistical data and analysis, can you explain to us – statistical data and analysis of what in particular?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, it could be enrollment based. We do statistics and analysis for CMEC; surveys; assessments data; there's a staff of that division that analyzes PowerSchool data – that kind of stuff.

C. Simpson: The salaries have gone up a wee bit as well, and I'm going to assume that that's in part due to collective agreement. I'm wondering if there are any changes to the full-time equivalency number of staff in this section.

[1:55 p.m.]

Chris DesRoche: No, the \$137,000 is collective agreement increases.

C. Simpson: So, there's no changes to the staffing complement themselves.

Chris DesRoche: Not at this point, but we are undergoing a review of every division – position questionnaires – as part of an efficiency review that we're performing.

C. Simpson: So, the review of the questionnaire – that would be to determine the roles and responsibilities in addition to submission for reclassification, or is that a review of responsibilities to look for redundancy/repetition, and maybe need for a position?

Chris DesRoche: It would be both.

C. Simpson: So, that's happening across all the divisions. When will those reviews be completed and the minister able to respond to the impact or results of that?

Chris DesRoche: It'll take a while. We have a lot of positions, but we want to go through each one of them and make sure the duties and responsibilities are up to date and relevant to our current work.

C. Simpson: That would be within the department staff. Would there be a similar activity happening within the school authorities?

Chris DesRoche: When you get into the school authorities, most of them are in the schools, so it's a little different than the department.

C. Simpson: There's nothing under professional services for this year. What was there? Why would there be nothing needed at this point in time?

Chris DesRoche: The budget was put in last year for these professional services, and it was for Elections PEI's work on the school board elections. We don't have an election this year.

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

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

English/French as an Additional Language

"Appropriations provided to support the delivery of English/French as an additional language programs." Administration: 67,000. Equipment: 10,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 135,000. Professional Services: 76,000. Salaries: 311,000. Travel and Training: 8,000.

Total English/French as an Additional Language: 607,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just wondering if you can give us a sense of how many students we have that are requiring EAL and FAL services and if that number has gone up or down since last year.

Chris DesRoche: Not necessarily on who is requiring services, but there's approximately 3,900 students out of 22,000 that we would classify as EAL/FAL.

K. Bernard: I notice that there's a decrease in salaries here. Do you feel that that will meet the needs of the students requiring that support?

Chris DesRoche: I think it's important to recognize that the on-the-ground EAL/FAL supports are in the education authorities. There'd be 187 positions at \$16.5 million at the education authorities.

This is more international education as far as tuition fee-paying students, affiliate schools – we do license our curriculum to some schools in other countries. Sorry, what was the question? The reduction?

K. Bernard: Yeah.

Chris DesRoche: Sorry. There was a staff responsible for the affiliate schools that has been helping out in the English program section more and more, so we have transferred that position to the English education services section.

K. Bernard: I'm guessing then, given that there is the other section coming, that this isn't where – I can't remember the name of the special project that's been ongoing for EAL and FAL teachers, but I'm guessing it's not funded. I will find it by the time we – but I'm guessing that that project is not funded through this section.

Chris DesRoche: I'm not sure what the project is.

K. Bernard: I can't remember the name of it. That's okay. I'm doubtful that it's through this one.

I'm good, Chair, for this section.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

Chris, you've already answered several of the questions. One of the staff has been moved over to English programs, so that makes sense. Most of the staff that provide the direct service are obviously at the school authorities.

So, then, in its simple form, what exactly do the staff in this division – they look after the international schools. That's different than EAL/FAL, per se, so what EAL/FAL support is at department level?

[2:00 p.m.]

Chris DesRoche: There is one position. It's a resource and research specialist for EAL/FAL

programs around language assessments and what kind of materials would be best practices. That still exists in the department outside the school boards. It services both school boards.

C. Simpson: That was my next question. So, it services both the school authorities; it does not yet support into early learning and child care centres – EYCs?

Chris DesRoche: I don't believe so, no.

C. Simpson: Might this be, minister, where we might have some grant funding for the project you and I have been talking about, or is that found in a separate budget? For the Acadian/Francophone families.

Hon. R. Croucher: That would not lie here.

C. Simpson: Under Early Years? We'll get to it there?

Okay, I'm good. Thank you.

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

K. Bernard: Sorry, I found the name of the program, and I just want to make sure I don't miss the opportunity to ask about it. The step program.

Chris DesRoche: The step program. The summer step program is in the Public Schools Branch budget.

K. Bernard: Okay, thank you. I'm good.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total External Relations and Educational Services: 4,287,200

Shall it carry? Carried.

English Education, Programs, and Services

English Education, Programs, and Services

“Appropriations provided for divisional management and for various grants relating to the delivery of English elementary and secondary programs.” Administration: 10,400. Equipment: 29,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 966,400. Salaries: 3,267,100. Travel and Training: 18,400. Grants: 285,000.

Total English Education, Programs, and Services: 4,576,800

The hour has been called.

Hon. R. Croucher: Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal, that this House adjourn until Tuesday, May 26th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

See you next week. Have a great weekend.

[The Legislature adjourned until Tuesday, 26 May 2026 at 1:00 p.m.]