

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Darlene Compton

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MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE AND RECOGNITION OF GUESTS	4939
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS.....	4944
CHARLOTTETOWN-BELVEDERE (BGC Charlottetown).....	4944
O'LEARY-INVERNESS (PEI Forestry Sector).....	4944
CHARLOTTETOWN-HILLSBOROUGH PARK (East Royalty Lions Club).....	4945
ORAL QUESTIONS	4946
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Proposed U.S. tariffs on Canadian goods).....	4946
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Tourism contract with NHL) (further)	4947
CHARLOTTETOWN-WEST ROYALTY (Food insecurity in children)	4949
O'LEARY-INVERNESS (Impacts of diseases on oyster fishery).....	4951
LEADER OF THE THIRD PARTY (PBIS pilot program in schools).....	4952
BORDEN-KINKORA (Crapaud funeral home fraud)	4953
RUSTICO-EMERALD (Three-phase power)	4955
SOURIS-ELMIRA (Three Rivers land transactions).....	4956
CHARLOTTETOWN-WEST ROYALTY (LTC infection control policy) (further).....	4957
CHARLOTTETOWN-WEST ROYALTY (Food insecurity in children) (further).....	4958
TABLING OF DOCUMENTS.....	4958
REPORTS BY COMMITTEES	4959
Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability (Introduction of report on Committee Activities)	4959
ORDERS OF THE DAY (GOVERNMENT)	4959
Capital Estimates	4959
Health PEI (further).....	4960
Housing, Land and Communities	4977
PEI Housing Corporation	4979

ORDERS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT	4985
Second Reading and Committee	4985
Bill 121 – An Act to Amend the Gasoline Tax Act	4985
MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT	4989
Motion 122 – Improving Connectivity: Better Cell Phone Coverage Across PEI (further)	4989
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INNOVATION AND TRADE.....	4989
RUSTICO-EMERALD	4990
HOUSING, LAND AND COMMUNITIES	4992
ADJOURNED.....	4996

[The Legislature sat at 1:02 p.m.]

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. Welcome back to you and to all of my colleagues for another day of debate in our provincial Legislature, and all those who are tuned in at home and those who have joined in the public gallery, welcome. It's good to always see fresh faces in the public gallery.

I want to begin by offering my congratulations and thanks to all of those who participated in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Yuletide Gala on the weekend. They raised more than \$400,000 to fund the GI Genius, which is a cutting-edge piece of artificial intelligence system that is designed to enhance the detection of colorectal cancer; a very much needed piece of equipment. I want to say thank you to Tracey Comeau and the QEH Foundation, and to all those Islanders who have participated and supported that great cause over the years.

I also wanted to say hi and thanks to Leigh Read of Stratford, who spoke glowingly about the unbelievable level of support that he's received from the PEI health system over the last six years of his personal journey. His story was very inspiring to those who were attending the gala. Always good to hear, and things that we don't hear enough of here in this province.

I also wanted to offer my congratulations to the Amanda Power rink from the Cornwall Curling Club, who recently won a silver medal at the 2024 Canadian Curling Club Championships in Ontario: skip Amanda Power, third Sara Spafford, second Emily Best, and lead – I can't even read my own writing anymore – Janique LeBlanc. I do have my glasses; I don't like to bring them out if I can. I'll keep trying to soldier through here. They represent the Cornwall Curling Club. It was tremendous achievement for that Island rink to come up

just a little bit short to Nova Scotia in the finals.

Also, the Blair Jay rink from the Silver Fox Curling Club in Summerside participated on the men's side, made up of Blair Jay at skip, Corey Montgomery at third, Glenn Rogers at lead, and I think it's – let me just see, Madam Speaker...

Speaker: That's better. [Laughter]

[1:05 p.m.]

Hon. D. King: ...Mitchell Rowley at second. I might as well keep them on. I might as well give up the ghost. I'm doing the best I can, but I'm really feeling my way through this today.

I do want to say that today, there's an election in the province of Nova Scotia. My friend Tim Houston – looks like he will be re-elected in a resounding way. I'm proud of my friend Tim. He's become a good friend over the years. I'm proud that he has governed with positivity and focus, and he's gotten things done over there. I know he's faced a lot of opposition that has turned a little bit partisan and nasty and has lost focus. I hope there's a lesson in that for everyone who's watching.

Susan Holt in New Brunswick, who opted to be positive, was elected with the Government of New Brunswick and it seems those who opt to be so negative are going to be racing to the bottom today, and I'll be watching that today in Nova Scotia, as to who will win that rapid race to the bottom. And listen, having gone through many iterations of this over the years, the race to the top is much more exciting and rewarding than the race to the bottom.

I also wanted to say, finally, that yesterday was the launch of the Purple Ribbon Campaign and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This is a time for us to come together in solidarity to end gender-based violence and to show support for survivors. It also marks the start of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. We need to talk about this every day, not just during this time of year and these 16 days.

Intimate partner violence has become an epidemic in this country. It has severe impacts on the health and economic consequences for the victim, and also for children who are exposed to it and all of those who are connected to it in some way, shape, or form. It impacts far too many families here in Prince Edward Island, and individuals.

I will continue to work closely with Danya O'Malley and the members of the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention. I am, again, stating today that I will continue to be committed to put whatever resources are necessary on the table to fund programs and services to fund education for Islanders and to do everything we can to keep Islanders safe in this province.

I commend the Premier's action committee for their work, and all those Islanders who are supporting the end to intimate partner violence in this province and in this country. I congratulate and thank all of the members in here who I know feel the same way and are representing that today with their ribbons here.

So, with that, I wish all of my colleagues a good and productive day in the session today.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome those who are watching online, and in particular, those watching from the Tignish Seniors Home, and all those from the District of Tignish-Plamer Road. Also, those joining us in the gallery; I recognize some Lions members, so thank you for all of your service that you do for the local communities and for the Island as a whole. It's greatly appreciated.

I saw the sun peek out a while ago for a very brief period of time. It's...

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: Yeah, the sun was peeking out on that side until that room filled, and then it got dark.

But this weekend, I had to go over to Halifax for a medical visit on Saturday and the weather was crap, for lack of a better word. The roads were not great, and I'm just hoping that we have some good weather so that people can travel.

On that note, I do want to wish a former MLA, a good friend of mine, a good friend of many in this Legislature, Pat Murphy, who's heading over to Halifax tomorrow for another surgery on Thursday.... Just want to let him know that we're all thinking of him and wish him all the best.

With that, Madam Speaker, I wish everyone a great day. Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Welcome back to all my colleagues, and staff and Pages, and welcome to everybody joining us in the gallery today; it's good to see you. Welcome to everyone joining us online from Charlottetown-Victoria Park and all around the Island.

I would like to encourage the Premier just to give in. I, too, tried to fight the glasses, but I've just given in. Embrace it. It's a privilege to grow older.

A few things that I just wanted to highlight this afternoon.

My aunts and uncles are wonderful people: Uncle Johnny and Aunt JoAnne, and Uncle Wayne and Aunt Linda are putting on their annual free Christmas Day dinner at St. Paul's in Summerside at the parish hall there on December 25th from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. They do have limited seating, so the registration deadline is Sunday, December 15th. You can call Wayne or Linda Doucette at 902-436-4005 to reserve your spot. I can guarantee that it will also be a very warm place with them leading the charge.

[1:10 p.m.]

Tomorrow evening, Renting PEI is putting on an information session for renters. It shows renters what their rights and responsibilities are as tenants, and it's an opportunity to also gain some information on how to help navigate the current rental market. This is happening tomorrow evening, Wednesday, November 27th, from 6:30 to 9:30 at the Charlottetown Library and Learning Centre.

Of course, as was mentioned, yesterday was the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. It begins the 13 days of advocacy against gender-based violence. I just want to take an opportunity to thank all the organizations who work towards doing this and all the individuals that support this. I look forward to the day that none of us need to wear these purple pins anymore.

Finally, Madam Speaker, if you're planning your weekend, there are a few things happening this weekend. The Santa Claus Parade is happening on Friday, November 29th, at 5 p.m., followed by the tree lighting at the Confederation Centre of the Arts at 6:30 p.m. Of course, this weekend is the Victorian Christmas weekend on Queen Street and Victoria Row. It's an open-air market. This will include the Indigenous artisan market, November 30th, the Saturday, inside Confederation Centre, as well as the Maker Market at the Eastlink Centre on Saturday.

With that, I wish everyone a good day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise today to wish everybody back home in Kensington-Malpeque a great day. Thanks for watching in.

I also want to take a couple of minutes. I got word this morning that Mayor Rowan Caseley has given his resignation as mayor in Kensington. A sad day for the community. The mayor has put countless hours into the community. He's done a tremendous job for the community.

From myself and all the community members, we want to say thank you. The mayor was vital in helping me with some big projects over the years. A couple of examples would be the renovation to the rink, the new industrial park in Kensington, the seniors housing complex, and, as of late, the future Boys and Girls Club.

I want to thank the mayor, once again, for his contributions. I wish him and his family well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Welcome back to all of my colleagues today in the House, to our gallery guests, and all those tuning in from District 5 Mermaid-Stratford.

I'd like to take the opportunity to acknowledge that yesterday was the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Almost a quarter of a century ago, the United Nations General Assembly designated November 25th as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This is a global day created to raise awareness about violence that is often hidden.

November 25th also begins the official launch of the Purple Ribbon Campaign in PEI. I am so pleased today to see how many purple ribbons we have in this Legislative Assembly.

This year's theme is "Communities can end gender-based violence: awareness, advocacy, and action." We continue to hear terrible stories of violence against women across Canada, in communities large and small, urban and rural, in all demographics. We know gender-based violence happens, and it is time to take action and advocate for more responsiveness, safety, prevention, and inclusion, knowing that this has become an epidemic in Canada. It is only through collective actions that all citizens, including survivors, can feel supported to thrive.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I'd like to welcome everyone back to another week at the Legislature and say hi to everyone in District 8.

I just want to take a moment to recognize the work that's been done to get our cyberviolence prevention strategy off the ground. The department has been working very hard on this. We want to hear from stakeholders, parents, guardians, and caregivers. This is an important topic and something that we want to hear from everybody. If you're interested, get involved, and fill out this survey.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

N. Jameson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to rise today. Welcome back to all of my colleagues. Hello to everyone tuning in from home.

Welcome to those in our gallery. I want to extend a special welcome to the current president of the East Royalty Lions Club, Dawn Hobbs-Penton, and her husband, Jamie Penton, who is an active member in the Lions Club. Dawn was the past district governor of District N1. She's representing 72 clubs from PEI and New Brunswick and two clubs in Maine. She's also the second female to be the district governor from the Island.

I will be recognizing these two amazing community members in my statement today, but I did just want to say thank you for being here. It's really wonderful to see you both. Thanks for everything you do, and to all the Lions across the Island.

[1:15 p.m.]

Also, I do want to recognize the launch of the Purple Ribbon Campaign. It is wonderful to see so many purple ribbons in here. It's such an important campaign. The Minister responsible for the Status of

Women did a really good job describing it. Let's all take time to reflect and take action.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Welcome to all my colleagues and all those watching from home, especially Mary McKenna.

I'd like to take a special moment to mention some of the people who are in our gallery today. A longtime friend of our family, Will Burke, an Islander who we lost to Ontario for a number of years, is here with his dad, Fred, and his son Jared. Jared is the grandson of Mary McKenna, who is a resident in District 11, so thank you all for coming in today to watch our proceedings.

I'd also like to mention that yesterday was a special birthday in our house. It was a champagne birthday. Alex turned 25. I know I probably don't look like I'm old enough to have a 25-year-old, but I do. [Laughter] So, I'd like to wish a happy birthday to Alex.

And I, too, want to say how proud I am to see all of the purple ribbons in our House today.

Thank you.

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

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

I just wanted to echo the Premier's comments about the QEH Foundation Yuletide Gala. It was a wonderful event, and the featured speaker, Leigh Read, gave a really wonderful speech about the journey he'd been on. I just want to say that he took the effort to recognize a lot of people, a lot of the doctors and nurses and staff people at the QEH, that helped him along his journey, and one of those people was Coletta Morrison, who is a very good friend of my family. She's a now-retired service worker at the hospital and I was not surprised to see her recognized because she's got a huge heart. So, congratulations to Coletta.

It was funny; the story that Leigh Read told about dropping a can of British-style beans on his toe, which was a seemingly insignificant event, led to a larger series of events which was actually something of much larger significance, looking back. He got an infection in his toe, which led to a more systemic infection, which ultimately led to a more serious diagnosis that probably would not have happened that soon.

He told this story about the can of beans, and in fact, the first thing that was auctioned off in the live auction was a British-style can of beans. It was very spirited bidding, and actually, just a simple can of beans fetched over \$5,000 as the first auction item that night. So, that was really neat to see. That was the first item, and in fact, the last item was a beautiful piece of artwork by Emily Howard, and there was some very spirited bidding on that, and my wife got involved. She really wanted it and ultimately won it, so we were happy to make a nice contribution through that purchase.

One other thing: I just want to say hello to everyone watching. I was at the Shoppers Drug Mart on University Avenue yesterday, and I was at the cashier, and a wonderful woman named Bonnie said she recognized me and said she watches every single day. I'm not sure how she works around her shifts at the Shoppers, but she said she watches every day, and I said I would say hello, so hello Bonnie, and I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

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

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

I want to start by welcoming everybody to the gallery today. It's so lovely to see so many faces out there.

I want to add my personal congratulations; Kensington-Malpeque mentioned the retirement of Rowan Caseley. Rowan was in the gallery himself just last week and I had the opportunity and the delight of going over and having a conversation with him. He's always been such a gentleman, and I know he's done some tremendous things for his community of Kensington, and that whole area, actually. So, I was rather shocked to

learn of his resignation this morning, and I wanted just to take this opportunity to thank him for all he's done.

I also want to congratulate a couple of hockey teams from my area: firstly, the...

[Interjections]

P. Bevan-Baker: Yes, hockey. [Laughter]

The Mid Isle Matrix U11 boys team, who won this weekend's Early Bird Tournament, and there were teams from all over.

Hon. D. King: They beat us.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, exactly. Many of the boys, of course, would be from my area, being the Mid Isle Matrix, but they beat a lot of really stiff off-Island competition to win that, so congratulations to them. Also, the Gulf Storm U18 AA boys, who also won a tournament this weekend; again, many of those would be living in my area, so congratulations to the team members, coaches, and parents.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[1:20 p.m.]

Speaker: Hon. members, I just want to get up today, seeing as it's Tuesday, and welcome everyone here in the gallery and everyone watching from District 4.

Seeing the Lions Club here, it's great to see you members that are so dedicated to what you do for your community. On Saturday night, we had the Belfast Lions cash draw, and someone from Stratford won; I can't remember the name. It's the 36th annual draw and Ian Petrie draws the tickets. It's an elimination. He told a story about when David Cooper asked him to do it 36 years ago, he thought, "Well, that's easy. I'll just pick out a ticket and it'll be the winner." He didn't know he'd have to pick out 325 tickets, but he does a great job. Hello to Ian and to Nancy.

Also, on Sunday, we went to the Knights of Columbus roast beef dinner at St. Joachim's – a wonderful meal. Wonderful volunteers who just are there all the time; they work so hard at that hall they've got there. On the way there, we took our son and daughter-in-

law and our grandson, and Rory, who's three and never tires of telling stories. He said, "Where we going?" I said, "We're going to St. Joachim's." Well, he had a lot of fun trying to say St. Joachim's all the way to the church hall.

Anyway, have a great day, and let's have a great week.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

BGC Charlottetown

S. Dillon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the Boys and Girls Club, commonly known as the BGC Charlottetown, for its vital work in our community.

The BGC Charlottetown provides a safe and supportive place where children and youth can explore new opportunities, build relationships, and develop essential life skills. Their programming focuses on four educational pillars: literacy, arts and music, science, and life skills. They ensure that no child or family is turned away due to financial barriers.

The BGC Charlottetown offers three core programs, after-school ages five to 12, youth evening programming for ages 13-18, and they are currently serving 65 children, with a large waitlist.

In 2023, the BGC served 19,825 meals and snacks, offered weekly supplemental food programming, and through Project Backpack, they provided groceries to 33 families, addressing food insecurity in our community. In 2024, all these programs are still being offered.

The BGC Charlottetown prioritizes mental health, social inclusion, and employability through partnerships with Charlottetown's alternative education program to students from Birchwood Junior High School and are currently working to expand this program to additional junior high schools in our city. They also run full-day summer camps and youth nights, and the list goes on.

But BGC's biggest challenge to run these programs is space. They would love to expand into additional space to serve all families in need of after-school programming and provide a dedicated youth centre.

Thank you to the BGC Charlottetown for your dedication to the children and youth in our community.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, as I might be five or 10 seconds one way or the other.

Speaker: I'll be watching.

PEI Forestry Sector

R. Henderson: This government has shown a cavalier approach towards the PEI forestry sector, creating little by way of optimism for a future for this once valuable industry.

Once upon a time, forests were responsible for hunting and medicines by our Indigenous community, then a massive shipbuilding industry, and later, for housing construction, and more recently, a biomass sector for heating energy. Our Island forests are a renewable and sustainable resource if harvested accordingly, plus all the while being a positive impact on the environment while growing.

The PEI Forestry Commission, chaired by J.P. Arsenault, had hearings across PEI with decent turnout from those interested in the sector. The commission did up its work early and submitted its report with recommendations to the minister a few months ago. Yet, we have not seen the report released to the public.

But we have seen this government focus on the subsidization of installation of heat pumps, thus reducing the market for firewood sales. U.S. tariffs on softwood lumber have seen sawmills across Canada see reduced market opportunities, lowering the price to woodlot owners for stumpage fees.

We have also seen significant damage from Hurricanes Dorian and Fiona, leaving many acres of PEI forestry in a precarious state, at risk of fire hazards and disease, with little money for landowners to get that cleaned up.

Then, we have the inaccurate wetland maps making numerous PEI forests unharvestable by forestry contractors, yet the PEI department of forestry admits they are inaccurate. But government is making landowners prove the designation inaccurate at significant cost to the landowners.

[1:25 p.m.]

We understand buffer zones for brooks, marshes, and swamps, but not for trees that are harvestable on private land. The minister responsible for forestry should have this industry at a higher priority within his portfolio, as he has similar forestry contractors and sawmills in his riding as I do.

Advice I can give the minister is that we need to provide supports for biomass development, and encourage lumber opportunities by increasing the size and types of structures that we can use unstamped lumber, do away with the wetland maps, and have forestry technicians prove that they are one way or the other.

Let's make a concerted effort and build our biomass industry, and make sure that we can provide these resources for a profitable opportunity for landowners.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: I guess we'll just take that time from Question Period, will we?

[Laughter]

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

East Royalty Lions Club

N. Jameson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The East Royalty Lions Club has been proudly serving the East Royalty community and surrounding area since 1982. Founded with 20 members, the club embraced the

motto "We serve" which continues to inspire its mission today: Where there is a need, there is a Lion.

Currently, the club has 15 members and meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month, welcoming new members to join its efforts.

Fundraising is a cornerstone of the club's community impact, with activities ranging from catering pancake breakfasts, weddings, dinner theatres, and private parties, to hosting weekly cribbage nights on Mondays. The funds raised support critical causes such as medical travel assistance, financial aid for students at L.M. Montgomery School, donations to the Upper Room food bank, Blooming House, ParaSport PEI, and Cystic Fibrosis. The club is also a consistent donor to the Hillsborough Hospital, QEH Foundation, IWK, and other organizations.

As the Christmas season approaches, the club is gearing up to cater a no-cost Christmas meal for local seniors on December 1st. There is still availability for this dinner. If you or someone you know in East Royalty would like a meal, please reach out to Brian Reid at 902-629-1641 or Barry Collier at 902-368-7607. Additionally, the club is preparing food baskets and gifts for families in need at L.M. Montgomery School.

Looking ahead, the club has exciting projects on the horizon, including the ever-popular *Eddie May Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre* – that's a mouthful – on April 12th, 2025, and the Parkinson's pancake breakfast on April 26th, 2025. Tickets for these events can be purchased by contacting club members.

Today we recognize and thank president Dawn Penton and member Jamie Penton, who are in the gallery with us here. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to them and all the East Royalty Lions Club members, past and present, for their incredible contributions over the years. Your unwavering dedication to service has touched countless lives and strengthened the community in profound ways. We are truly grateful for everything you do. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

[Applause]

Speaker: Keep trying, members. Keep trying. [Laughter]

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

On a very urgent matter, a question for the Premier.

There is a lot of deep concern about American trade policy right now. We export hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services to the U.S. every year from Prince Edward Island.

Proposed U.S. tariffs on Canadian goods

What specific Island perspective will the Premier bring to the intergovernmental discussion that is scheduled for tomorrow?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It is a very urgent, pressing question that is of great concern to me. It's of great concern to our government. It's of great concern to Islanders and Canadians. As I've said in here, it's about \$1.8 billion on an annual basis, our trade with the United States. It represents about 75 percent of our total trade; 25 percent of our GDP is in trade to the United States. So, it is a very, very significant concern.

Our primary product that we ship is lobster, which is a very, very critical resource for us. Potatoes, pharmaceuticals, bioscience products.... It's a big, big issue, so I will be sitting down with the Canadian Premiers and the Prime Minister, talking about the impact to Prince Edward Island and what we need to be doing.

I think we need to be talking the language that our counterparts south of the border are talking. I think we need to increase NATO spending to 2 percent. I think we need to

increase our border protection services in a big way.

[1:30 p.m.]

I think we need to indicate to them that we're very serious about all of the cargo that leaves Canada through all of our ports, that we need to dive a little bit more deeply into security, to put at rest some of the concerns that our neighbours to the south have about the drug trade between Canada and the United States, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

We have unique concerns and specific matters here on Prince Edward Island, and I would hope this government will not get swamped by louder voices from Ontario and Quebec.

What matters other than the general concerns about commodities, will the Premier bring to the table to protect the interests of our province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Again, Madam Speaker, it's such a big, big issue for us. So much of our economy is built on our connection with the United States and the importance of that free-flowing trade that needs to continue. It's critical to our day-to-day lives. It will impact not just the trade between our countries and the economic growth, but it will impede our ability to make the investments we need to make if our economy isn't growing and strong. So, it is a very, very serious issue.

One company that I was listening in a meeting with recently – I think Seafood Express: about 90 percent of the trucks that they have on the roads are carrying goods back and forth to the United States. They employ about 125 Islanders. That's just one simple indication of the impact that it could have here, so again, we will be putting forward our voice.

When you sit around the Council of the Federation table or a First Ministers table,

yes, Ontario might have more population, but they're 13 seats around the table. Ours is equal and my voice will be as loud as the rest, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

As we move into the fourth week of this sitting, we are still waiting on government to produce the necessary documents related to their NHL scheme. Now, while it took a subpoena to produce the unredacted \$8.4 million contract from the minister, there is still plenty that has been promised to be brought back that hasn't been as of yet.

Tourism contract with NHL (further)

Question to the Minister of Tourism: When can we expect to receive a total list of the costs and expenses associated with the New York party to be tabled, as you said you would?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

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

Again, I've stated every single day – I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned four weeks in this – that I will bring back everything that I can.

Again, I don't like the terminology of a "party" in New York. Again, it was a trade mission. That is what this job is: in every single opportunity, try to promote Prince Edward Island on a global scale. Again, we did a great job of that this weekend with hosting the NCAA Women's Atlantic Slam.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Booze, food, and entertainment equals a party.

This minister sure seems to be a very slow learner. I would remind him that he has already run up against the line of being held

in contempt due to his unwillingness to be open and transparent with the House here.

Question to the minister: Will you finally be tabling all travel costs of your department staff for any and all NHL games and events attended?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

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

I do want to mention something. The hon. member mentions about the "booze-filled party" or whatever. I want to tell him that on Saturday, I had the opportunity to attend the Atlantic Slam event. My entire evening was spent walking around saying hello to all the individuals there; first of all, thanking the teams for coming to our beautiful province and inviting them to come back when the weather was going to be a little bit nicer in the summer.

I talked to the bus drivers who drove these teams around and said, "Oh my goodness, these are some of the greatest young ladies to come to PEI. They're all telling me they want to come back. They're asking questions about what PEI is all about." As I've said many, many times, as long as I'm the minister in this seat, I will continue to promote PEI, even if the opposition doesn't think I should.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So, again, did not hear an answer to my question in any of that rhetoric. And those people actually were here. They came to Prince Edward Island, but I didn't see anyone from the NHL here.

It's not just the Minister of Tourism whose memory seems to be failing him. It took several weeks for the Premier to even acknowledge that he attended these events, but he can't seem to remember who paid for what and when. How strange is that?

Question to the Premier: It has been two weeks now since you've stated that you couldn't remember who paid for your tickets

to the Winter Classic in Boston. Will you finally tell Islanders if you stuck them with the bill for these tickets, or did you accept a gift from the NHL and fail to report it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Madam Speaker, for the 75th time, my expenses go online. The expenses that I incur in the duties of my job as the Premier, I put online every month. That's what we've done. They're there. They've been there since the beginning, from two years ago.

I have committed to providing, as the minister has, all of the information that has been asked for, as we always do in this Legislature. We will compile the information and table it when it's completed.

[1:35 p.m.]

We're proud of our arrangement with the National Hockey League. It's paying off dividends. I'm very proud of it, and I hope that when the time comes to make the decision, that we decide to continue the contract, because it's a good investment for Islanders and the Island economy.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: My, that's going to be a lot of information coming back if it's taking you four weeks to compile it, Madam Speaker.

Once again, the Premier has let Islanders down with his attempt to keep the truth from them. One of two things has to be true: either the Premier stuck Islanders with the bills for all his NHL games and the event attendance, or he and his team have been accepting thousands of dollars' worth of gifts from the NHL all of this time and not even bothering to report it.

Question to the Premier: Who paid for your tickets to the NHL Awards banquet in Nashville that we know you attended? Did you stick Islanders with this bill as well, or did you accept tickets as gifts from the NHL?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Madam Speaker, I will give the same answer I just gave to the hon. member. My trips are all online. That's the rules of the Legislature. That's the rule of government. When I do business on behalf of Islanders during my duties of my job, I compile the information, and it is put online every month, there to see. It's been there for over a year and half or two years now. He keeps asking for it; he can go online and find it, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

There's nothing online to answer the questions that I've been asking for the past few weeks.

This government's responses, and that one there in particular, are very laughable. The most strange part about this NHL scheme is that they quite clearly didn't learn their lesson from the subpoena. This House has the authority to request documents, even if the government wants to stonewall and cover up their actions.

To the Minister of Tourism: Will you provide a full account of all costs, expenses, and other relevant information related to the NHL scheme and the NHL events that government members and staff have been attending for years, or will the Legislature need to compel you to release this information once again?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

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

Again, to my knowledge, I have, and I am continuing to bring back everything that has been requested; that the opposition has requested, that your standing committees have requested. I continue to bring back everything that has been asked of me.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It took a subpoena to get an unredacted agreement back. We have not seen any other tabling of documents associated with the expenses or the travel on this NHL scheme.

The facts are in. What this minister and this Premier called a \$2.5 million deal will actually cost Islanders either \$7.5 million or \$8.4 million. The minister and Premier said they have until December to cancel the contract, but it is in black and white that they have to cancel by October of this year. The list of contradictions continues.

A question to the Minister of Tourism: If you truly believe that this is a good deal, why did you choose to present so much inaccurate information to Islanders about this government's relationship with the NHL? Why do you continue to keep expense information a secret from Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

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

I continue to say that this is a good thing. I'm not giving inaccurate information by any stretch of the imagination.

The hon. member mentioned something very early in his line of questioning when he said he had asked about the Atlantic Slam, about how there were no NHL executives here. That, unfortunately, is the problem. A lot of people don't see this. As soon as Friday's Question Period was over, I received numerous texts saying: "Oh my goodness, have you been in Toronto Pearson International Airport lately?" There's a beautiful banner hanging up with a beautiful, picturesque picture of a PEI beach with the Prince Edward Island logo right beside the NHL logo.

The NHL is a known brand worldwide. We've aligned ourselves with that to bring more people to PEI.

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

G. McNeilly: I wonder if it shows the 41 percent of Island kids who are food insecure

in Prince Edward Island right beside that banner.

Minister of Social Development: Minister, food insecurity remains at a crisis level for many Islanders. The school food program has seen a 14 percent growth in demand this year. It was up 40 percent last year, with 68 percent of families unable to contribute.

Food insecurity in children

Question to the minister: What is your department doing to help families who can't stretch their budget to cover the cost of food for their children?

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

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

I'm honoured to stand here, member, to talk about the school food program on Prince Edward Island. It's an unprecedented program. It's a pay-what-you-can program. For families who can't afford to pay, they don't have to pay.

We're on target to serve one million meals this school year, all from this government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[1:40 p.m.]

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The administrative cost of running the school food program could offset the cost of simply making it free for all students. Why won't you cut the red tape and provide this program universally to hungry students without financial barriers when they get their meals?

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

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

This is a free, universal program. There are no limits. People can come in and have a

bite to eat. The kids can eat every single day during the school year and all summer; seven days a week for the summer food program. That's what this government did for the children.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Just take that word off and just make it free. Every kid can go up to that place and receive a free meal.

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: There are restrictions for those kids. Minister, you said...

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: You said in speaking to the media that a report for the school food program will come at the end of this year, but you've also indicated you'll continue to ask families to pay, which you said yesterday in the media.

Does this mean that the pay-what-you-can model will change to everyone pays?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Madam Speaker, I'll stand here all day long and talk to the member about this. There is no requirement for anyone to pay for school food. He's taking away from the people who want to contribute to Prince Edward Island and maybe what children are going through. The people that can afford to, they want to. They want to help, and the people who can't, that's absolutely okay. It's a pay-what-you-can. Again, we will serve one million meals this year...

[Interjections]

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Minister, will you commit to releasing the report on the school food program publicly or will Islanders be left

wondering if this is another document this government plans to hide?

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

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

I would have no reason not to support that document when the time comes.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Food insecurity is a symptom of a much larger issue, minister, and it's poverty. Families can't afford food, housing, or other daily expenses, and according to your own numbers, your government is going to fall woefully short of its goals it set for itself. According to the government statistics presented in the standing committee, food insecurity amongst Island children sits at 41 percent. Half of the Island children are going hungry.

You had a goal to eliminate food insecurity by January 1st, 2025.

Question to the minister: What excuse will you give Island families as to why you have failed to meet this goal that your own government has set? How do you justify leaving Island children hungry when your government spends millions and millions of dollars on ridiculous NHL schemes?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Madam Speaker, this government has spent well over \$6.3 million on food. All of that food that goes through our department, that this Province is supplying, has nothing to do with Statistics Canada. I went to Ottawa personally, and I talked to them and said that that has to change. That is unfair. We're getting statistics that are inaccurate.

So, that is one thing that I have to make clear in this House. Those numbers are not included in the 41 percent that you're talking about.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Madam Speaker.

Islanders know how embattled PEI’s oyster industry has suffered of late, with Hurricane Fiona, MSX, and climate change impacts. Even a month where we’ve had nothing but high tides and high northerly winds have made it difficult for oyster aquacultures to get their off-bottom leases’ cages sunk for the winter. Even more concerning is with Friday’s news that another oyster disease, dermo, has been confirmed in New Brunswick waters.

Impacts of diseases on oyster fishery

Question to the embattled Minister of Fisheries: What is your department doing to protect Island waters and prepare Island fishers from the impacts of dermo?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

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

I do appreciate the hon. member bringing up the question. When I first took this role, that was the biggest issue, and unfortunately, I don’t think it has gotten the light that it deserves because it is an industry that is so incredibly important to Prince Edward Island; 78 million pieces and about \$58 million economy coming into our province from the oyster fishers.

[1:45 p.m.]

Specifically with the hon. member’s question, as he knows – and I did invite the members of the opposition as well as the third party and my own caucus to have a briefing on the MSX situation. Where you mentioned with the dermo, there is an industry – and we actually co-chair a task force table that includes government, DFO, as well as industry. That has been brought to the table and the task force is trying to figure out the next steps.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Madam Speaker.

Thanks, minister. Obviously, the minister would know that dermo has a higher mortality and impact on the oyster survival than MSX. Your government has said the PEI oyster industry is thriving just a few months ago, but you seem to have neglected PEI’s oyster industry while you’ve been trying to defend all your other miscues within that tourism file.

What meetings, minister, have you had personally with the oyster industry over the past weekend to put a plan in place together to deal with dermo and protect Island fishers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

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

Again, since I’ve taken this role, I’ve tried not to let the NHL contract detract from my responsibilities as the Minister of Fisheries because again, I really want to emphasize the importance of that to our economy.

The hon. member might know that I’ve had meetings with almost every association in the short time that I’ve been in this portfolio, again, with specific questions to what you are talking about. There’s a lot, and I’ve learned a lot in this role and in this new position, that there are a lot of federal and provincial responsibilities. I do know now that as of right now, CFIA is taking the lead on this. I will continue to report back what I can report back.

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

R. Henderson: Well, that’s good to know, minister, because certainly this is a very serious issue. During my time on the weekend around my district, I certainly had this issue brought up because MSX was concerning, and they cannot believe that this minister thought that the industry was thriving.

In my previous question regarding MSX, now confirmed in numerous PEI estuaries, the PEI oyster industry has significant uncertainties with the implementation of the MSX in numerous Island waterways. In a

recent presentation of the legislative Committee on Natural Resources, CFIA noted that designating all PEI as an MSX-confirmed zone would significantly reduce the paperwork and protocols when oysters are transported on PEI.

Do you feel, minister, that PEI should be all one zone and end this bureaucratic workload, or should we still continue on with two different zones?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

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

That is a great question, and I know that that was brought to me a long time ago. Again, I am not an expert in this industry. I listen to industry. I've listened to industry with regards to tourism, and I will listen to industry with regards to this.

Again, as the hon. member would know, it would be a decision that CFIA would make, and as of right now, everything is being discussed at that task force table, which is involving my department, DFO, as well as all of the industry stakeholders, to make sure that, again, this is an industry that we protect here in the province.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

According to the Public Schools Branch website, positive behaviour intervention supports, or PBIS, is a comprehensive framework being piloted across 18 schools. PBIS aims to foster positive behavioural, social, emotional, and academic outcomes by establishing a safe, inclusive, and consistent school environment.

I applaud the PSB for implementing an evidence-based program, but I am concerned by the lack of support being given to the pilot schools. PBIS involves all stakeholders in student education to be active participants and supporters.

PBIS pilot program in schools

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: This positive behaviour

intervention supports program is only effective if the supports it relies on are readily available. What additional mental health and social supports have you allocated to pilot schools?

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

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

I have talked about the PBIS program here in the House previously. The Public Schools Branch has hired 18 additional FTEs to implement this pilot program in our schools. The member did a good job of describing what the intention/purpose of this program is.

It's had wonderful results in other jurisdictions where it's been implemented. We look forward to implementing it here. We'll apply resources that we need as we see fit. Staff are given instruction in non-violent crisis intervention, and we'll continue to add supports as are required to make this program successful.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This new program involves systematic and individualized behaviour support strategies based on data that empowers individual schools and communities to focus on social and learning outcome achievements. This requires much more than just one person, or these 18 FTEs you speak of, per school – one per school. It requires a collective approach including counsellors, social workers, and other support staff.

[1:50 p.m.]

From what I'm hearing, the implementation of this program so far is simply focused on compliance – for example, walking quietly in hallways or being quiet in the washroom – but misses the important aspect of data-driven supports.

Question to the minister: What data is being collected, and how is it being used in real time, as the program suggests, to support our students?

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

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

Again, the member has done a good job of describing potentially the great results we can get from a program like this. I would point out that we're just in the very beginning stages of rolling this program out. It's difficult for us to know right now exactly what effect it's having, but of course, we're always evaluating our programs. There are certain metrics and key indicators that we'll track throughout the implementation of this program to make sure it's having the intended effect.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: That's great, but I was looking for what the data is that you're collecting. If we don't know that, the program is not going to be effective, and it has great potential.

The violence in our schools will not be addressed by asking students to walk quietly. Many students require individualized support that just isn't available to them. The only people stationed in our schools who are quick to actually support students with trauma are counsellors. Some of them are spending hours driving between schools every day. They have up to 700 students on their caseloads in some cases. Do I really need to remind this House again that one in five Island children is abused, and one in four reports not being satisfied with their lives?

Question to the minister: Will you commit to increasing our counselling ratio to, at the very least, one in every school so that we can support this program and actually help our students?

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

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

Just to return to the issue of data, we have completed the collection of baseline data that we will use to measure the success of

the PBIS program. I would invite the member to come and get a briefing on what data we have collected and how we're going to measure that.

I would also point out something that I said here, I believe, last week. I think that enrollment since 2019, when this government first came into office, is up about 8 percent. Over that time, teaching resources have increased by 11 percent, EAs by over 50 percent, and school counsellors, themselves, by 38 percent.

We continue to add resources at a much higher rate than enrollment is actually increasing because we recognize the need for all of these supports, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The months have ticked by since the terrible situation occurred with the Dawson Funeral Home in Crapaud, which left dozens of Island families losing hundreds of thousands of dollars to a fraudulent funeral director who was convicted earlier this year.

In Question Period this spring, I asked the minister what supports he would offer these families. The minister replied, in part: "The government is very concerned with this matter, and we want to make sure that we can do all that we can. We'll see what we can do for the victims."

Crapaud funeral home fraud

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Over seven months have passed since you made that comment, minister. What has government done for these victims?

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

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

This is a very important case; a lot of people were adversely affected by one person's criminal intent. This government has been working with the funeral home association.

We are supporting them with a financial contribution to build their own audit system so that they can audit their own members so Islanders can feel safe and that their money is well looked after.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, your first supplementary.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The answer to the question of what's been done for the families and the victims is apparently nothing – no compensation, no resolution whatsoever.

The minister also said that day: “As the member well knows with his legal background, nothing could be done until the court process has been finished and after sentencing. Right now, government has enacted Victim Services to work with the victims of this crime.”

Minister, Victim Services was not able to reimburse the thousands of dollars lost by the individual families. The perpetrator has gone bankrupt, and along with it, any chance of the victims recovering their lost money.

[1:55 p.m.]

To the same minister: This situation was allowed to be created by government not having the necessary regulations and safeguards in place for funeral directors holding prearranged funeral money in trust. I know you received, minister, a detailed proposal from the victims back in early July, and no response has been given from your department.

Will you respond to this proposal and reimburse the money lost by these innocent families?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam Speaker, we're working with the board to improve all the inspection regimes. The board is serious about making sure this never happens again, and we are working side by side with them on that. In the spring, we're bringing new

legislation to update the current legislation that's there now so all Islanders can feel safe about their funeral arrangements.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, your second supplementary.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm hearing that the families are going to be left out in the cold on this and that there won't be any compensation.

The minister mentioned legislation coming forward. In the spring sitting, I did ask the minister about the *Prearranged Funeral Services Act*, which dates back to 1984. The minister made this clear comment: “Yes, of course; we're going to have that modernization of the legislation this fall for the Legislature. We will make sure that Islanders can feel trust with the funeral home board and that this will never happen again.”

Question to the same minister: The promises you make, minister, and the words you use in here matter to Islanders. There appears to be no legislation coming this fall, and once more, the victims feel let down by you and this government. Why make promises you are not willing or able to keep?

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

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

Stay tuned. The legislation is coming. We're consulting with Islanders so that they can feel safe.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Agriculture has long been the backbone of the Island's economy, and sustainable innovation in the sector is key to its continued economic growth. Now, modern agricultural operations, such as vegetable

storage, irrigation systems, dairy systems, and crop drying, need three-phase power for efficiency and reliability. However, many areas in PEI lack adequate access to this critical infrastructure, putting our farmers at a competitive disadvantage.

Three-phase power

Question for the Minister of Agriculture: Can you inform this House what steps are being taken to expand access to three-phase power to support agricultural operations in our province?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

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

I agree with everything the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald said about the agriculture industry. Unfortunately, it's not my file to do, but I'm working with the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action; I was working with the former minister and I'm working with the new minister. There was a commitment to look at all Island farms across this Island getting three-phase power. I'll commit to doing my best to make sure that happens.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Indeed, this is a pressing issue that all of government needs to work on.

Island manufacturing companies – for example, Kennedy Metals in my area – need advanced equipment powered by three-phase electricity to continue to grow and compete. Reliable access to this infrastructure not only ensures operational efficiency, but also attracts further investment.

This question is to the Minister of Economic Growth: What plans does your department have to ensure that manufacturing businesses in PEI have access to reliable three-phase power to support their growth and sustainability?

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

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

That's a good question by the member. I know the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Energy are discussing this. Perhaps I can join the table. I do believe it's a good – I know I have a number of businesses in my area that don't have three-phase power and it's obviously extremely expensive. Perhaps we can look at something, but I think we'll sit down with yourself, hon. member, the Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister of Energy, and see if we can find a solution.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, your second supplementary.

B. Trivers: Madam Speaker, three-phase power? Three ministers. Coincidence? I don't think so.

Three-phase power is also critical to the efficiency, reliability, and scalability of PV solar systems, especially for larger commercial/industrial applications where power demands are higher. Let's not forget that it's our farmers and our manufacturers, our private businesses, that generate the taxes that make all government spendings possible. Access to three-phase power would not only support their operations but help them adopt PV solar systems, reducing costs and greenhouse gas emissions, and moving us closer to our net zero goals.

To the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action: Can the minister provide a timeline for the expansion of three-phase power across PEI and explain how you're going to work with the other ministers to prioritize this essential investment to support both economic development and reach our net zero targets?

[2:00 p.m.]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I think I will commit to doing one-third of the work because we're going to be three different departments working here together. There are significant benefits to having three-phase power. In the first week, I think, that I was appointed to this department, we did meet with the Federation of Agriculture, and we did determine that there are over 300 farms in PEI, and 123 today are close to three-phase power lines that are existing now. We've asked our staff to look into it, to have a path forward to make sure that this happens.

We know it would be a great advantage for PEI to have those three-phase power lines here in PEI and to make sure that we can serve our business community. So, we are working on it, and I will commit to working with my colleagues here to make this a path forward, to make sure that we have three-phase power.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

R. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Since elected, I've been hearing from constituents and watching as things develop with the land situation in Three Rivers. Since elected, I've been asking questions on the legalities of these transactions, and what we as the Province can do to address the concerns I've been hearing from residents not only in my district, but the surrounding districts as well.

Three Rivers land transactions

Question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: What is the role of this government and your department when it comes to ensuring that the land purchase rules are followed, laws are being upheld, and that everyone is treated fairly and equally in this entire process?

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

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I guess we have a role as per the act, but in some cases, IRAC has a role. In some cases, if it's an off-Island purchaser, it would end

up on IRAC's desk to make the decision there.

I know that there are significant issues about land in multiple different areas in Prince Edward Island, not the least of which is down east. I've already committed to the House to get to the bottom of it, but I think that as time goes on, we'll have to ratchet up how we get to the bottom of it. But I'm on the path that I'm on. Until I get some information back, it's hard to take the next step.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, your first supplementary.

R. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Thank you, minister. You know I'll keep pushing you down that path.

Over the past year and a half, I've been watching social media and seeing the rhetoric ramping up almost daily. I appreciate that people are passionate about this, and have questions and concerns, but I do have an issue with the level of disrespect and hate that is being directed at municipal councils as of late.

I believe, as a government, we need to clear the air, so to speak, on the many misconceptions that are floating around the internet regarding the land situation in Three Rivers. I believe that, as a government, we have a responsibility to assist our municipal councils through this debacle.

Question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: As the minister who oversees municipal affairs, what guidance or oversight are you providing to the Three Rivers council as they deal with this unique and extremely challenging situation?

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

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I spoke to their CAO, John, not that long ago; within the last week, I believe, I talked to him, just about the issues and where we

can help take the pressure off, and where they're planning to take the pressure off.

I do agree that there's an enormous amount of rhetoric. I kind of abandoned social media myself because there's so much rhetoric there, but I feel like there have been multiple parties that this has been targeted at. There's GEBIS in our area. There's been the Irvings that's been fabricated by the Green Party. I've heard other farmers' names. Quite frankly, what I've said is we need to ratchet down the whole temperature of this story while we get some of these things done.

So, I'm there to support Three Rivers in whatever way I can. Currently, there's not much I can do other than be the Minister of Land, and I think they're getting blamed for a lot of that, and I believe that if David Weale stopped attacking the monks in such a racist way, we might have a more calm conversation about this.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, your second supplementary.

R. Croucher: I couldn't agree more, minister, and ratcheting down the rhetoric is going to be a must.

It is long overdue that, as a government, we address the questions from both sides of this situation. There is so much information and conspiracy talk swirling, I can't keep up anymore. No one is above the law. No one should receive special treatment when it comes to purchasing land in our province.

Question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: What can you tell us here today to set the story straight on what is really happening down in Three Rivers?

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

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[2:05 p.m.]

I wish I could set it straight. I think that's the issue that's out there right now, that I currently can't. In 2018, the Liberals looked into this. I don't know where that report is

and nobody seems to be able to get it, but I've asked IRAC for that report. We've asked IRAC to give us the report on everybody who's been asked to divest of land, thus they're over their limits. We do have to probably do more, but until I get those two pieces of information back, we'll probably not know what the next step needs to be.

I do think in situations where Anne, who's the Chair of the development committee in Three Rivers – who's basically a volunteer; they don't get paid anything – gets accused by the likes of David Weale of being on the take – according to David Weale, everybody's on the take, everybody's on the take, everybody's on the take. There's crooked this, and the communists are here, and China communism is here. It's ludicrous. It's ludicrous, ludicrous, ludicrous. I would ask people to turn off Facebook, and at least delete David Weale as a friend because it's nothing but crazy nonsense.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A question to the Minister of Health.

At Beach Grove – and I've talked about this before – residents have been prohibited from going outside for a walk despite the chief public health officer stating that there's no restrictions for asymptomatic residents. I have a correspondence here from the CPHO. It said: "No need for restricting asymptomatic residents within the facility during an outbreak." Minister, that didn't happen at my facility. It upset the workers, the staff, and a lot of people in that area.

LTC infection control policy (further)

Why did this happen, minister, and will you apologize for getting it all messed up for the people who live at Beach Grove Home?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yes, I was also included on that correspondence, so I appreciate that. It's always good when you can loop me in on those situations.

We have made some hirings in infection control in our long-term sector. I'm not sure of the details of why that would happen. I know you got a response about – we want to ensure mental health of the residents so that they can enjoy the outdoors. I would agree with that.

Again, I think it's something we need to look at for the benefit of all our residents at long-term care facilities. That's one of those recommendations in the long-term care report, that we take a really hard look at infection control measures and put the proper policies in place.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Question to the Minister of Social Development: You just said that you were planning a trip to go talk to the people at Stats Canada for the statistical information about food insecurity when it's 41 percent of children according to your department and your statistics. It says 41 percent here.

Food insecurity in children (further)

If it's not 41 percent, will you tell us what that number is of children living in Prince Edward Island, and do something about it? Instead of going up to Ottawa and talking to Stats Canada, fix the problem.

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

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

I could talk about this all day, as I said. Those stats, as you know, from standing committee are from 2022, correct? Yeah, you know that, member. You were in the meeting.

[Interjections]

Hon. B. Ramsay: But anyway, that's okay. I was to Ottawa a few months ago and I talked to them about – I'm sure when the federal government becomes involved in our school food program, boy, we're going to have stats then, but right now, we don't have them.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Statements by Ministers

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

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

G. McNeilly: By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a document from a standing committee regarding stats on food insecurity for children that states clearly it's 41 percent in May 2024, and that's an increase of 67 percent. I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

S. MacEwen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's not too often I get to table some documents.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter from a constituent, Ed McKenna, who runs St. Peter's Bay Craft and Giftware and also Confederation Trail Bike Rental Adventures, which is a letter stating he's disappointed in some PEI MLAs, and his endorsement for the partnership Tourism PEI has with the National Hockey League. I talked to him on the weekend.

[Interjections]

S. MacEwen: He doesn't get any, actually. He just runs two good businesses.

Speaker: Shall it carry?

[Interjections]

[2:10 p.m.]

Speaker: Members, I can't really hear what he's saying.

Hon. member.

[Interjections]

S. MacEwen: Madam Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter in support of the partnership between Tourism PEI and the National Hockey League from a constituent who runs two businesses in the area, and I move seconded by the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

S. MacEwen: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have a petition here that I'd like to table from individuals in St. Teresa and surrounding communities – and I have to give credit to Martin Kenny who I think did a better job of going door to door than I did in the area – to pave the Kenny Road out there.

Hon. D. King: What?

S. MacEwen: Yeah, eight pages of signatures.

Hon. S. Myers: There's 5,000...

[Interjections]

S. MacEwen: [Laughter] I know, I know. But the entire district signed it apparently. And I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: By leave of the House, I beg leave to table just some email correspondence from the CPHO stating that there were some issues with different parties

around Beach Grove Home, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Madam Speaker.

As Chair of the Standing Committee of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability, I beg leave to introduce a report of the said committee on committee activities, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, that the same be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Pursuant to rule 110(5) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, I'll be moving the motion for adoption of this report on Wednesday, the 27th, 2024.

Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam 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 Capital Estimates, in Committee.

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam 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 capital supply of His Majesty.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

[2:15 p.m.]

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

Minister, would you like to make a motion to bring a stranger onto the floor?

Hon. J. Burridge: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Welcome back, Jordan. Could you introduce yourself again for Hansard?

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

Chair: Alright. Minister, do you have any opening comments before we get going?

Hon. J. Burridge: We have a takeback, a question centered around how many spaces are currently in place at the child and youth for mental health and addictions acute care. The answer to that is here.

Chair: Alright, we'll get that handed out to everybody. Thank you for bringing that back.

Hon. members, we are on page 31 in Health PEI. We are currently debating the Capital Improvements – Buildings section. I've read it, but we are still asking questions.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Equipment and Other Capital Assets

“Appropriations provided for information technology purchases, system modernization and equipment purchases.” Equipment:

11,384,300. IT System Modernization:
12,464,300.

Total Equipment and Other Capital Assets:
23,848,600

The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair. Welcome back to the table.

We've gone through the capital side of it and we're on the equipment side, if I've got it, Chair.

Chair: That's right.

M. MacFarlane: Just let me get the bearings to make sure we're in the right ballpark when asking the questions.

I guess my first question would be around ramping up the equipment necessary to address some of our more historically challenging wait times; talking about the knee and hip replacement. I think most of us as MLAs hear concerns from constituents about those wait times; cataract surgery wait times.

Is this the section where there would be some funding available for addressing those equipment needs to address those wait times?

Jordan McNally: Yes and no. There is a project on this list, page 6 of 9, for surgical waitlist management software. That's an IT system rather than a piece of equipment, but that is meant to integrate surgical wait times and track that better, which would address the AG's report on surgical wait times, and also provide an individual with an estimated wait time so they know how long their surgery will take.

In terms of the specific equipment involved, it would be something that would have to be prioritized. Sometimes, there are equipment purchases under the capital repairs general bucket. Typically, it's a renovation or a repair, but only larger equipment purchases are identified specifically by Health PEI, i.e., replacement of large IV pumps, for example. It's such a large equipment purchase that it's its own line. Otherwise, it would be prioritized within their capital budget envelope.

M. MacFarlane: If I heard you correctly, Jordan, there are some instances, if it's a large enough item, it gets its own line?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, large enough item, or cumulatively large enough. Like, a large IV pump wouldn't be big enough on its own, but if you're replacing all large volume IV pumps together, that's a large enough capital purchase that it would get its own line.

M. MacFarlane: How is it that we don't see any of those lines – you pointed out the surgical wait list management software but, you know, it seems odd that there wouldn't be some specific lines for whether it's a larger item. Maybe it's some sort of imaging technology. How do we not see that being addressed, those needs?

[2:20 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: On that listing on page 6 of 9, for example, there would be, for instance, the Linac replacement machine that's on there, second from the bottom under equipment. There would be a large group of purchases under the QEH and PCH equipment drive, which is 100 percent offset by those foundations. That's a bucket of money that, basically, as they identify equipment to be purchased, it would go under that line if it's to be supported by the foundation.

So, yeah, if it's large enough, it'll have its own line. If not, it would either be an operating replacement or within one of those buckets.

M. MacFarlane: I've asked in other sections the same question as far as how these decisions get made. What's the feeding-up process that goes into what we see on page 6 of 9 when there are so many needs out there for pieces of equipment? We see the PCH fundraising. We see the QEH fundraising.

Is there a process by which Health PEI collaborates with your office/department to say we really need to see this in there right now to address the needs of our patient population?

Jordan McNally: These capital budgets are informed directly from – per your example,

Health PEI would send in their submission of all their requests. We would meet with them throughout the process to prioritize those requests. They would have their own process, even prior to submitting their final list of requests with their own staff, within their own divisions, of what their needs are. They have a capital planning team over there that would both execute these projects but also identify what the within the facilities, of the equipment.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. I'm curious why we have lines on here for the PCH equipment drive, 100 percent, and QEH equipment drive, 100 percent revenue. What is the relationship between the public's fundraising obligation to purchase medical equipment through the foundations versus the government's obligation to ensure that the medical facilities have the necessary equipment? It's a question I hear all the time: "Why do I have to give money to this health foundation? Isn't it the government's responsibility to make sure it has the equipment in it?"

Can you explain to me a little bit about the relationship between the foundations and what their obligation is versus what the obligation is of the government to make sure that our hospitals and facilities are fully equipped?

Jordan McNally: I can speak at a high level in terms of why you'd see an equipment line here when it would be funded either 100 percent or partially by one of those foundations.

In essence, at the end of the day, Health PEI will own the equipment that is purchased. Therefore, they need a capital budget to purchase that equipment. On the other side, they would get the revenue from the PCH or QEH foundation to offset that expense. There is revenue that Health PEI collects from them as they purchase equipment, but you need both the expense side and the revenue side separately.

In terms of what they determine is the obligation of the PCH Foundation and QEH Foundation versus government, I couldn't speak to that level of detail around the relationship and how they prioritize equipment.

Chair: One more, hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you. I'll just use that last question to sort of sum up on this area. If we didn't have the PCH Foundation, the QEH Foundation, Souris Hospital, all these different foundations, is it true, if – my understanding is that the *Canada Health Act* would obligate government to pay for, through its capital budgeting process, all of the equipment. It's a contribution from the public, but it's not like the government or governments across Canada don't have the obligation to ensure the equipment is there for what's needed in our facilities.

Jordan McNally: Again, I wouldn't be able to speak to what the obligations would be under the act. I don't have that good of knowledge around it. My assumption would be that Health PEI is responsible to ensure the equipment is there that they need. This is one avenue that they get that equipment from.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Thank you for that.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

The mobile primary health clinics, the half a million dollars that's in here – is that going to start in '25-26?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, that is the plan. There was some work around what that mobile primary health clinic would be. It would most likely involve a vehicle purchase of some kind so that equipment and staff could move seamlessly across the province.

The plan, based on their cash flow, would be that all the purchases in terms of the capital requirements would be done in '25-26. I don't have notes on a target date for implementation.

[2:25 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: What bothers me is that the same line was in last year's. It said: Establish mobile primary health care clinics to improve access across the province in '24-25.

We're seeing the same budget line, and the only thing that's changed is that it's moved to '25-26. That's a commitment that was in your last year's capital budget. It didn't happen. We have the same thing, and we don't have any information on it.

Minister, what is this and how is it going to serve Islanders?

Hon. J. Burridge: What is this and how is it going to serve Islanders? Is that your question? I think Jordan already explained what it is.

Is your question related to why it's in last year and this year?

G. McNeilly: Yeah. I mean, it was supposed to be done, it wasn't done, and then that information Jordan provided is all that he has. At this point, I'm disappointed that we're no further ahead, and the only thing that was talked about just now was a vehicle purchase and cash flow.

Hon. J. Burridge: I just think this is a case of – we did have a delay on this, and so it's been.... But I think what you see here is that it's still a priority. So, it's in this year, and all intent to get it executed.

G. McNeilly: They're just questions that I have to ask. I saw this in various places, and I still don't know. Is it primary health clinics, but they're going to be through a van moving across the province? I don't know how that works.

Is the \$500,000 to purchase the vehicle, or what is that money going towards?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, it's the vehicle, but also would include the exam table, chairs, technology; access to the clinical information system. Services would include disease prevention, health promotion, cancer screening, case management, chronic disease management, lab services, and virtual care support. So, picture what you'd get in a primary care clinic, but more mobile.

G. McNeilly: That's a little bit better, and I get excited about that. My job is to keep government accountable for that happening in '24-25, which it didn't, so I'm taking some responsibility because I want that to

happen. That's very important. It goes along kind of like a walk-in clinic model, maybe, that's moving around the province, and I hope that that works the way I'm thinking it should.

I'll just switch over and ask you about the long-term care replacement beds for \$3.6 million over four years, starting in '25-26. Obviously, this is a good investment, for 320 long-term care beds across the province.

What is going to be happening in the first fiscal year of that program?

Jordan McNally: Like you mentioned, it's the replacement of the actual existing beds that people are using. They do have a plan to basically roll this out into the various public long-term care beds. Replacement will start in '25-26, and that's the initial investment there. I believe it's roughly 14 beds that they'll be replacing, but the number will vary year to year depending on what they can kind of procure and plan to actually replace, but it's roughly 14 in that first year.

G. McNeilly: Okay, so the contract is more loaded in the future years? Out of 320, 14 for the first year doesn't seem like very many. Do you know why there are so few beds early on in this contract? Are we having trouble getting them?

Jordan McNally: No, this is a new line, so it's kind of a brand-new project. So, they'll be going out and likely doing a standing offer, and it's less so about procuring the actual beds and probably more so the implementation of those beds and just logistics of when you can switch somebody else into the new bed.

G. McNeilly: So, at the end of four years, that will leave us with 320 old long-term care beds. What happens with those beds? How do we use those and make sure that we're using those assets? What happens to those beds at the end?

Jordan McNally: That's a great question, and I don't have the answer, actually.

G. McNeilly: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair, and welcome back, Jordan.

[2:30 p.m.]

We've had a lot of debate, and motions, and discussions around ultrasound imaging for women with dense breasts. I'm wondering if there's any money in this budget for ultrasound machines.

Jordan McNally: Nothing specifically identified, unless it is under the PCH and QEH equipment drive priority list. Again, it depends on the cost of the equipment. If it's not a significant cost item, which I'm not sure how that item would be, it could be accommodated in the operating budget as a replacement of equipment or an addition of equipment.

I guess the answer is: It's not specifically identified here, but I can't say for certain that it's not somewhere.

K. Bernard: If something gets put on the equipment drive list, does that mean that government doesn't pay for it? That's one of the things that the QEH or PCH foundations would be fundraising for?

Jordan McNally: Yes, that is correct.

K. Bernard: I don't know if this is the right section for this, but I know that the Province purchased a drug-testing machine to make sure that people could come in and get their drug supply tested to make sure that it was safe – well, free of dangerous chemicals.

I'm wondering if there's any money in this budget or is there anything else to support that machine? It doesn't sound like government is going ahead with a safe injection site or safe consumption site, so I'm wondering if there's any additional equipment being funded for that as well.

Jordan McNally: Nothing that I've seen specifically identified. I couldn't say for certain that it's nowhere, but nothing in the numbers or descriptions that I've seen.

K. Bernard: Is that a case of another "could be in the operational budget"?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, if they've already purchased the initial equipment, likely

anything to support that would be too minimal to make it to the capital budget and, therefore, it would be an operating expense. If it was the purchase of a very large piece of equipment that was expensive, it could fall under here, but it sounds like that might be more of an operating expense.

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

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

I just had a couple of follow-ups on some questions from Charlottetown-West Royalty. That mobile primary health clinic, is that a new initiative just getting rolled out this year? Is that the first time we've seen that?

Jordan McNally: The mobile primary health clinic was in the plan for '24-25. There's been a delay, so the costs have moved into '25-26. So, it's not a new initiative; it just hasn't been executed and implemented yet.

The other line right below that, mobile X-ray unit – that is a new initiative that's new this year.

M. MacFarlane: That was actually my very next question. Is that part and parcel with the mobile primary health care clinic? Does it travel together or is it a separate mobile unit on its own?

Jordan McNally: It's a separate mobile unit on its own, but a similar idea where it would be a vehicle – I think it actually might be two vehicles – with X-ray equipment that can travel throughout the province to conduct X-rays.

M. MacFarlane: You say throughout the province. Is that tip to tip or does it go to where there's established facilities or hospitals presently?

Jordan McNally: It could target specific locations, i.e., public long-term care or private long-term care, but the idea is that it would be mobile enough – and it is two vehicles, just confirming that – with mobile X-ray machines that can conduct.... Now, I'm not sure what level of X-ray they can do

versus where you'd have to go to the hospital itself to do it, but they don't have specific locations here. It is something that can be moved around throughout the province, I think.

M. MacFarlane: I guess I'm just really curious about that initiative and where it came from.

You referred, Jordan, in your answer, to long-term care. Is that really the intention here, that it service the needs of people who may not be able to be as mobile? Obviously, it's a mobile unit so it's going to them, but it's not going to be intended just to be a convenience. It's going to be a service to those who are otherwise experiencing difficulties getting to a facility.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, exactly. That's right, and really, it is also attempting to relieve the pressure on ambulances and reduce the need for transfers of non-urgent diagnostic imaging. It's tied into relieving the need for ambulances, but also addressing accessibility or mobile issues as well.

[2:35 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that. I think Charlottetown-West Royalty was also asking questions about the \$3.6 million on long-term care replacement beds.

Do we know which homes those are going into? Are those in the public long-term care home homes?

Jordan McNally: Yes, they would be public long-term care homes.

M. MacFarlane: Are those homes identified, which ones are getting the beds?

Jordan McNally: I know for sure Beach Grove Home, PE Home, and Riverview Manor are on the list; the list goes on. I don't have the notes with me, but I think it would be most if not all of the long-term care homes that weren't built relatively recently, kind of thing.

M. MacFarlane: The next question I have is on the UPEI patient medical home equipment fit-up. I'm looking at page – well, it's just on the chart on 6 of 9.

Is that a one-and-done contribution to the UPEI patient medical home? That's not anticipated to roll into another year?

Jordan McNally: That's correct, yeah. Once the fit-up for that patient medical home is complete in the new med school, that money is allotted for any equipment needs to basically get the patient medical home ready to operate. That would be one and done, like you said.

M. MacFarlane: A similar question with respect to the line for the QEH nutrition services equipment replacement, we haven't seen any previous money allotted to that in the past.

Is that sort of fancy wording for kitchen upgrades?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, it would include kitchen upgrades and the equipment they use there. That goes beyond next year, and it is a new line, like you mentioned. They have funding basically next year and the next four years after that for the replacement of their equipment. It's really a five-year upgrade to nutrition services.

M. MacFarlane: Just to finish out this section of questions, I had the QEH generator optimization. Is that \$688,000 solely that generator, solely to support the CT scanner in the event of a power outage? It doesn't service any other equipment, just that CT scanner?

Jordan McNally: The \$687,000, yes, that would basically be the electrical work that's required. They actually determined that a new generator wasn't necessarily required to operate the CT scanner right now, which is a good thing, but the electrical work to actually be able to reroute power as needed still has to be done. Beyond the \$687,000, though, there is another line for QEH generator optimization, which is kind of lumped into pages 7 and 9, second from the bottom. There's \$6.1 million over five years. That is to replace the current generators and add, I believe, one new one to the QEH. That's more of a long-term replacement.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

The patient medical home that my colleague just talked about in here under equipment, the \$837,000, that's just all going to the medical school one, correct?

Jordan McNally: That's all going to that patient medical home, yeah.

G. McNeilly: It's in '25 and '26. Are you going to ensure that – we often see that things get postponed; this one cannot be postponed. Is planning well underway to make sure that they're going to be well fitted up in that? Is that enough money in there to do it?

Jordan McNally: In terms of the amount of money, I think it is adequate. Actually, on the operating budget side, they did contribute, I think it was \$4 million for the other part of the fit-up. This is just the equipment part, and that was in current year, to kind of properly fit up the primary care medical home. It is in '25-26, but if it's done early, in current year, then they would have the flexibility to move that ahead if they needed to.

Recognition of Guests II

Chair: Members, I'm just going to pause for a second to give way to the hon. Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population for recognize of guests.

[2:40 p.m.]

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you so much, Chair.

With your indulgence, I would like to recognize that the hon. Diane Griffin has joined the gallery. [Applause]

Diane is the tenth chancellor of UPEI and currently the chair of Health PEI, and also a resident of beautiful District 5 Mermaid-Stratford. We are thrilled to have you here today joining us.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: No problem. Good timing.

Orders of the Day (Government)
continued

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

That was \$4 million and \$837,000 for equipment, and that's going to be done.

This might be an operational question. The money is there, but does it have to wait until the med school opens before that facility opens? It's operational, I know, but I mean....

Jordan McNally: It probably will, but not necessarily. It's within the building, so obviously the building would have to be at a certain point where you could actually use it, but the other part of this is also staffing this patient medical home. I'm assuming they're planning for that as well, so the timing – it could be, but I'm not sure.

G. McNeilly: Thanks for answering that question. It just kind of goes a little bit outside of what's here.

The Health PEI website upgrades – it says \$291,000. That's in two years, '24-25 and '25-26. That work would have already gotten started?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, I believe they're already starting that now. Basically, it's to improve navigation of the current website.

G. McNeilly: In that, users of Health PEI, is it going to allow them to do any different features or is just aesthetics? Is there anything that users of Health PEI services are going to get out of that? For \$291,000, I don't know if it's.... I don't know IT, but it seems like a lot of money for an outward facing website.

Is that about on line with what it's going for or are there any additional things that Islanders can get with that?

Jordan McNally: I think the website alone – I'm not sure if there'd be any additional functionality. I think most of the added functionality or features would probably be – I would tie that to the citizen health portal that we talked about with Health and Wellness. That would be where you'd start to see your lab diagnostic imaging and that kind of thing, which may be tied to the

website somehow in terms of linking them, but it's more so improving the navigation of the existing website to be more user friendly.

Hon. J. Burrige: I would add to that, I think it is reasonable. Coming from private practice and building a website for a small engineering firm, when I look at what we paid for that level of a website redevelopment and looking at this number, I would say it probably is reasonable.

G. McNeilly: Thanks for that answer.

On the next page – I think I'm on 9 of 9 – the wireless for point of care devices. I asked questions about this on behalf of Health PEI users that were having trouble or would have to use their own devices to access the new type of fit-ups, the coordination fit-ups. These Health PEI staff are on the road; they travel on the road.

Are they being required to use their own phones? What would this do for them? It was kind of a major concern with them.

Jordan McNally: My understanding of this project is more so tying it into things that you may not associate with IT that are wirelessly connected or have the ability to be wirelessly connected. For instance, beds or IV pumps or temperature monitors, things that might connect wirelessly and feed information into, say, the clinical information system or that you could read remotely from an iPad or tablet.

In terms of the policy on when to use your own devices, I don't have a ton of knowledge on that, but I thought that the policy was basically if you're accessing government information on a regular basis that you would have a government-provided device.

[2:45 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: I'll have to tell that person that. That's what his problem was; he was having to use it. But I appreciate that, Jordan.

The implementation primarily in acute care facilities, it says here, about the wireless point of care devices; I'm starting to understand it right now. What I first thought

about was that it would be cell phones, but this is going to be more primary care into tablets and different things.

Are we getting this model from somewhere or are we creating it from scratch?

Jordan McNally: I know that we did engage an external contractor to develop the model. I couldn't tell you if it's, again, modelled after another jurisdiction or something that's already in place but I know it's not done in silo. It was an external contractor that came in to develop the roadmap of how to implement this.

G. McNeilly: Projects like this – when I see two fiscal years, that means that it's going to take a little bit of time.

Can we have anything for accountability purposes about phases? Is this going to be in different phases, so we can monitor this as it goes on, to ask better questions in the future?

Jordan McNally: Phase 1 is primarily going to be completed in current year, which is really the target operating model; what lays out the groundwork for how this is to be implemented. Phase 2 starts this fiscal year, but really, the majority would be in next fiscal year, which is basically to enhance existing infrastructure to tap into the capabilities of those wireless devices. There possibly will be a phase 3 – not currently in the plan – to actually start purchasing new technologies if it allows, but right now, phases 1 and 2 are really in this year and next year.

G. McNeilly: So, no towers.

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Again, I'm coming back to the equipment pieces, which is where we're at, so it seems appropriate, but specifically, I have asked about the fact that PEI is well below the national average per capita for MRI machines. Newfoundland has eight; we have one. I understand the fact that there is a staffing component that gets tied into it as well, but we're seeing people leaving the

Island to pay out of pocket for MRI machines.

I just want to make sure, if I'm asked, how I can help get potential for an MRI machine in the capital budget, however that might be. Does the Health PEI board – we have the chair here today. Does it come from there? Does it come from the hospital foundation? Does it come from Health PEI staff? Similar to large volume IV pumps on here, how do we get an MRI machine on here?

Jordan McNally: I really wouldn't want to speak to the processes of how Health PEI generates their capital needs every year. I know they do work closely with the foundations in terms of prioritizing equipment needs. I think it might depend on whether it's a net new machine or a replacement of an existing machine. If it's a new machine, the question I would ask is do we currently have the space for it and are there more renovations required? I think it would be best to ask somewhere else, potentially, of the best way to advocate for new machines, to be honest.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you.

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

Oh, you have more, hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora?

M. MacFarlane: I only had one, actually. Can I have more?

Chair: Absolutely. I thought you said, "Okay, thanks," and you were done.

M. MacFarlane: No.

Chair: My bad.

The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: I'm curious about these automated dispensing carts in that the description says that it converts labour intensive issuance of medication in a stripped format to an automated process.

Are these being rolled out for the first time in PEI. I've never heard of them. Can you explain what, in fact, they do and how they take work away and take jobs away?

[2:50 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: I don't believe they're new to the Island; they currently are in existence. This would be what they're calling a phase 2 of the automated dispensing cart cabinets. Actually, this is a good example of how partial foundation funding will help offset this project.

Yeah, I'm not sure. It is really how you'd envision them. Now, I don't work on the floor, so I don't know how they work specifically, but yeah, I'm not sure what other information....

Hon. J. Burridge: I think the big thing here, too, is they're identifying things that they can do to help automate and take labour intensive pieces of our health care system and automate. This would be one example, and I think previously we talked about the wireless – I forget the title of it, but there was the wireless for the beds, and everything was hooked to the iPads. So, I think that the health system is trying to modernize overall to kind of take some of these labour-intensive pieces and automate them and modernize them.

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, they're a new thing that I haven't heard of, and I guess the question is: Are they taking the work away from pharmacists so that pharmacists can be redeployed in other areas where they're perhaps more intensely needed? Has there been an analysis done as to the savings that these are creating? They are costing over \$2 million, if I'm reading that right. Is there training associated with how they're used? That would come with another cost unless that cost is factored into the \$2.2 million. I guess that's my question.

Hon. J. Burridge: A lot of those.... Well, you can go ahead, but (Indistinct) operational.

Jordan McNally: The training costs would be on the operational side when they kind of roll these out. It's not a new project; it was in the plan last year and it still aligns with what the plan was. I know Health PEI put this forward as a priority, so my assumption would be the analysis was done on their end in terms of the efficiency that this would create.

M. MacFarlane: Do we know what locations are getting these carts?

Jordan McNally: No, I don't have that level of detail, no.

M. MacFarlane: And then under that we see the medication cart replacements. So, are they replacing the previous version of these because they're not automated, these other medical carts?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, there's the dispensing cabinets where the drugs actually get dispensed from and then there are the medication carts that would kind of go around and actually administer the medication to patients. So, they are separate. The automated dispensing cabinets are more fixed, I would say, whereas the med carts would be something that they're actually wheeling around with their IT equipment and medication on it.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, I'll move on from those. That answers those questions, thank you.

^The hemodialysis machine replacements are to replace 52 machines across the four sites. So, are all of the machines being replaced, or what percentage does the 52 account for?

Jordan McNally: Sorry, which page are you on?

M. MacFarlane: Page 7 of 9 at the top, provincial renal program, hemodialysis machine replacement, \$1.65 million over three years.

Jordan McNally: It's projected to replace 52 machines over those three years, about three each year across the four existing hemodialysis sites.

M. MacFarlane: I guess my question was: Is that all of the machines at the four sites, or what percentage of the machines are being replaced, 52 out of...?

Jordan McNally: I don't have the total; I just have the number that will be replaced.

M. MacFarlane: If I could just get... if that could come back, if it was possible, that

would be a takeback I'd be quite interested in.

Jordan McNally: Sure.

Hon. J. Burridge: Sure.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

Just going through the long-term care, the IT solutions that we were talking about here, it's \$4 million over two years starting in '24-25. That's on page 8 of 9.

In last year's it said \$3 million over the next three years, but here it's \$4 million over the next two years. Did the money get spent and it just cost more?

Jordan McNally: It's a mix of both. So, there was some money in '23-24; it was estimated \$1.7 million. They actually spent about \$1.3 million, so there's a \$400,000 difference there that essentially carries into future years, but the cost did go up by about \$500K overall for this project.

[2:55 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: That's what I'm seeing here too, these are going up \$500,000; that's a lot on the total spend of \$4 million. That rate is unsustainable actually, that kind of an increase. Were you surprised at that rate increase for that?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, I mean, it does have a lot to do with the need and the cost for external consultants is going up quite a bit, versus if you could use internal resources, it'd be quite a bit cheaper. But, similar to everywhere, it's hard to staff these positions. That's part of the cost as well, the cost of the IT equipment itself has gone up a little bit since last year as well.

G. McNeilly: So, the consultant, are they applying the software? Are they giving recommendations as to what we need? Are they in the project? I don't mind spending on consultants, but I want to make sure that we're getting value for money. If this is a need then it's a need.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, these consultants would be hired to actually execute the project and are involved in the project management itself, of kind of securing it across the board. So, they are heavily involved, yeah.

G. McNeilly: Again, the only differences between last year and this year, there was a note in last year's and it says, "Note: Private long-term care homes will be included in the project, but those costs are part of the operational budget." That note was taken out in the data for this year.

Can you explain are private long-term care facilities in the operational budget, or why was that note taken out?

Jordan McNally: It was to just focus in on this capital versus what would be in operating. It's still the same note. It was just removed to avoid confusion, which we maybe did the opposite.

But yes, they would be in the operating budget side because it would equipment going out to private long-term care home.

G. McNeilly: Exactly, and I guess you explained it, but when I see that and the cost going up so dramatically, I'm like, was there...? And I appreciate your answer too.

Then that same thing I guess when I went back and looked at the website – just as my last question of this set – it looks like it went up about \$115,000 between one year and the next. It was \$175,000 in '24-25 and now it's \$291,000. I can't justify a \$140,000 website design with taxpayers' money in one year. Is that typical? Jordan, you know what I'm – I've got both capital budgets here. Health PEI website upgrades, last year, were \$175,000, and this year, they're \$291,000.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, again, I think it is a reflection of – and we might see this across the board with IT projects, is that the costs have gone up because there is more reliance on external resources versus being able to do it internally, both with the capacity and also the challenges of hiring staff.

G. McNeilly: Thanks for the answer.

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thanks, Chair.

The provincial dental program outreach – that’s another mobile service that’s being deployed, I think. I’m just looking at the line item for it. There’s nothing this year but was \$1 million roughly the last two or three years, but then when I look at the description for that item on page 7 of 9, it says it’s delayed due to supply chain issues.

How come there’s nothing further for it for this year? If it’s still not operational and up and running, why are we not putting anything towards it to get it up and running this year?

Jordan McNally: There is \$1 million in current year, ’24-25, forecast. So, that’s the \$961,000 that was mentioned in that description on page 7 of 9, and that would be for the completion of that project, which is set to be completed in ’24-25.

[3:00 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: How many units do we currently have operating, any at all?

Jordan McNally: I don’t believe there’s any operational right now. This would be the mobile dental clinic that would be complete this year.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Are they staffed with dentists or hygienists, or who operates those, or who will be when they’re deployed and rolled out? What are the staffing requirements for those?

Jordan McNally: I don’t actually have the staffing requirements of who will operate it in front of me; more so focused on the equipment itself.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Similar question to the mobile X-ray and that, do we know where it goes? Is it intended to go to, maybe the manors or long-term care facilities, where there’s less mobility?

Jordan McNally: It is focused on seniors and low-income Islanders. That would be the focus of it. It would be able to go to other places if need be, but I would assume that would address – take up most of their time, for sure.

M. MacFarlane: So, when is it anticipated to roll out? If the funding needs are met according to the budget, when will we see it on the ground?

Jordan McNally: I know the project, in terms of the equipment and getting everything set up, is on track for completion in ’24-25. I don’t have notes on whether that means staff will be in place and it will be operational by the end of ’24-25, but I know the project, in terms of the equipment costs and everything, will be done in current fiscal year.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Just returning to the foundations again, I want to just ask – I probably haven’t asked it specifically yet: To ensure there’s no redundancy or duplication of acquisitions or purchases, does the department collaborate and have a line of communication with the foundations? Because I know on the Prince County Hospital Foundation website, there’s a long laundry list of medical equipment that they’re slated to purchase with the money they have.

Is there someone who’s a liaison with the foundations to say, “Okay, you’re getting these pieces of equipment; therefore, we’re going to move away and we’re going to look at these other pieces of equipment”?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, and it does depend on – they have identified equipment that they fundraise for. Maybe they don’t reach the target for one initiative, but they do for another, and they would purchase that one year versus the next. But I know they do work quite closely with the foundation to make sure there is certainly no duplication of purchases.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. I asked generally about the generator line on there. Have there been challenges where the service has been compromised due to a power failure such that we’re putting a fair bit of money into generator optimization, \$6.1 million over five years? Has that been a need that’s been determined, perhaps either from Dorian or Fiona, with power outages not making that service available?

Jordan McNally: I think it’s more the identified age of the current generators. It’s just time. They’re reaching the end of their

useful life, and it is time to replace them. I don't have notes on a specific instance where there was an issue in using one, but it might be a good question for the department possibly to answer.

M. MacFarlane: I guess a question that leads me next would be: What would be the resiliency of our hospitals to continue to provide medical services in the event of a large power failure like we experienced with Fiona?

I know some of the fuel suppliers are getting fit up with generators so we have our fuel needs met. The Irving tank yard will have the ability, I believe, to dispense fuel in the event of a large power failure. Will we have at least one or two fully functioning hospitals capable of meeting medical needs in the event of a large power failure?

Jordan McNally: My understanding is that the current generators are operational and can be used. I know when we get to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, they also have an initiative for emergency preparedness specifically targeting adding generators to publicly owned buildings which in some cases were health care facilities, but also the correctional centre for instance, law courts.... A bunch of different facilities that didn't currently have a generator or needed one replaced due to age.

[3:05 p.m.]

I know, in terms of resiliency, it's definitely been improved since Fiona and will continue to be. I think there's money even next year to continue that work. I don't know if that answers your question or not.

M. MacFarlane: It does. Is there any impetus to move – we've talked in here before about a warming centre that has the ability to be serviced from the power stored in a bus battery. Is there any direction given to move to supporting our critical infrastructure?

We're rolling out a pretty big line of electric buses that have large EV battery storage capacity for V2G, to the grid. We're looking at spending a lot of money in the budget on generating capacity. Is there any move afoot

to take advantage of electric storage in our vehicle line?

Jordan McNally: I know there was one launched, I believe, in Tyne Valley there.

Hon. J. Burrige: Rustico (Indistinct)

Jordan McNally: Yeah, okay, there might have been one in Rustico as well, or planned for Rustico. I think those are kind of, in my mind, treated as a bit of a pilot to see how they operate. I don't think there's any further money in order to invest in some more V2V technology.

M. MacFarlane: I know Charlottetown-West Royalty asked a lot of questions on the software piece, and I hope I don't retread anything.

I guess my general question, looking at all of those lines on page 6 of 9, with respect to website development, IT solution for long-term care, mental health and addiction IT solution.... Are these costs that we're looking at year over year over year, like annual spending?

Because I see many of these have been on the books for, well, at least last year and this year. Is there an end to them, or are these maintenance costs that are needed to maintain software that's functional for the needs it services?

Jordan McNally: These truly are IT projects, whether to improve or replace existing systems. They all have end dates on them. There are no ongoing IT requirements that wouldn't be – most of that would probably be covered in the operating budget, in terms of licensing fees and cost of maintenance contracts. So, each of these are project based.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. The acute care one there, the CIS Millennium upgrade, is that hospital-specific or is it across the province? It's not like Prince County Hospital acute care, it's....

Jordan McNally: Yeah, I think that's across – that's for the clinic information system itself, the CIS Cerner.

Chair: Hon. member, on page 8 there, they list the descriptions of each one of those lines.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. I'm looking at the table, Chair.

Chair: Yeah, I know, but just for your information; if you see it on the table, then they list the description of each one – rather than Jordan having to repeat it each time.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, I have that. Thank you.

I'll have to try and get caught up on the descriptions, but does that integrate well into the electronic EMR records?

Jordan McNally: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: And again, the same question I'd have with respect to the long-term care IT solution: Is that tied into our EMR?

Jordan McNally: I'd have to double check that, to be honest. I know that's the idea, that they're all integrated. If it makes sense to tie into EMR, then it would. That's the point of – all these IT systems speak to one another.

Hon. J. Burridge: Yeah, I'm pretty sure that that's the goal.

M. MacFarlane: So, Jordan, your last comment that all of them speak to one another – the goal here, is it to have the... I'm looking at the hospital electronic health record, the radiology information system replacement... So, all of these costs here are designed to create a – I don't know whether seamless is the word, but a system that all talks and speaks to one another, that medical professionals can all have access to no matter what clinic they're in?

[3:10 p.m.]

Hon. J. Burridge: I think we will have to probably call someone in who's technically inclined and can speak to this to the level that you're looking for right now, but my understanding is there's going to be a central repository of that electronic health information, and each one of these – whether it's private long-term care or the hospital or community pharmacy – are going

to be able to access that kind of central data that's being held in the province.

So, I think that's the goal, to create that access and integrate all those systems so they're able to read from the same page when they're dealing with a client. Emergency room would be another one. I think that that's the goal, but unless Jordan knows more, I think we're getting to a level of detail where I think we'd have to bring someone who's in charge of these projects in to speak to you and maybe give you more detail and the level of detail that you're looking for.

M. MacFarlane: Sure, thank you for that. It's a fair bit of money when we add up all of the column there. There's \$2.8 million, \$1.8 million, \$2 million, another \$1.8 million, another \$1.4 million. I would anticipate that the goal of all of this IT spend – website spend, all the system replacements, solutions – would have to be a seamless system that integrates well and talks to one another, so when you're meeting with the doctor either in Souris or Tignish or anywhere in between, that all of that is there. Otherwise, it's an awful lot of money to spend on randomized components that are operating in isolation.

Hon. J. Burridge: This is not being done randomly. This is being done in a holistic approach. I think I said it before; we always think about infrastructure – we think of transportation, roads, bridges... These days, there's a whole other set of infrastructure that's being built, and that's digital infrastructure. So, these are the costs of doing that and delivering an integrated health system that will absolutely see better health outcomes for Islanders.

M. MacFarlane: So again, on that point, as far as achieving the better health outcomes, the surgical wait list management software – and I know you've indicated, minister, that it's tough to speak to the particulars to the software, but is that intended to help alleviate the wait lists, or is it going to leave the wait lists in those same long wait times that they are, but make them more easily manageable or navigable? What are we trying to achieve with that particular wait list software?

Jordan McNally: It's kind of multipurpose, but one of them is to improve reporting on what the actual wait times are, so that will be tracked within the system. It's also meant to help with scheduling, to streamline that. You'll have, basically, minimal chance of any misplaced or misbooked referrals; it will all be within the same system. It's meant for information flow and also additional reporting capability, to be able to track wait times, rather than the more manual process that's done right now.

M. MacFarlane: Last day, I asked about how much of the direction that we're moving in with technology is going to make it easier for Islanders, for patients to access their medical information. So, when we're talking about software for surgical wait lists.... I'm looking at other ones on here that might be of benefit to Islanders wondering how long they are.

Right now, you can go online, and you can see, at the QEH emergency department, there's a 10-hour wait to get in, or the PCH has a six-hour anticipated wait time to get into the ER department. Is that information for surgical wait lists going to be accessible to Islanders waiting for a procedure?

Jordan McNally: I don't know if it will necessarily be public knowledge. I don't have that level of detail. I do know that it will meet the CIHI national standards for surgical wait times in terms of tracking the wait time for each one. I know it is expected to improve patient flow, and I think there are roughly 70 surgeons provincially.

[3:15 p.m.]

So, it'll serve all those surgeons and properly book who is needed in the OR. In essence, by making that more efficient, you might increase the surgery throughput as well.

M. MacFarlane: I take your point, minister, that we're getting into some of the weeds on these questions. I wonder whether the health committee should be bringing in some officials from Health PEI to help answer questions on the IT direction that we're going in. That might be a recommendation to....

Hon. J. Burridge: I think it's a great idea and I think they'd be happy to, quite honestly.

M. MacFarlane: Okay,

Chair: I'd say they'd be really excited to, actually.

Hon. J. Burridge: Yeah. They have a lot of good things they can tell the world, that's for sure.

M. MacFarlane: Notwithstanding that, I might still have a couple more questions with respect to – like the staff scheduling software. I've heard from frontline health care workers, nurses in different departments; some would quite like the ability to self-schedule. I'm just looking at the description for staff scheduling software: improve staff scheduling and do a systematic call-out. Do we know if it will allow any staff inputting to help schedule their own schedules?

Jordan McNally: I think that would really be a policy decision in terms of (a) what the capabilities are, and (b) what ability they want to give staff to schedule. But it is more so focused on making that call-out for vacant shifts. That's a component that would make it more streamlined, I guess, in terms of how to contact people. Do you have to actually pick up the phone and call them, or can you send out a mass text or email to say, "This shift is available. Can you respond if you're available?"

M. MacFarlane: I guess my only comment in response to that would be that it seems like a lot of money, \$3.5 million over two years, with the goal being to determine the best method to reach the worker, be it text, phone, or email. I know we're talking a lot of money here in the budget, and maybe \$3.5 million is not a lot. I'll move on.

Chair: Okay.

M. MacFarlane: I'm going to bounce back to the Kings County Memorial Hospital X-ray equipment and if we know how many X-ray machines are being replaced.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, they just have the one, so it will be the one. My notes say:

remove the existing X-ray equipment and install the new X-ray equipment at KCMH.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Is there just one existing X-ray machine at that facility that's being replaced? There's one now and it's going to be replaced, so we're not getting a net gain, we're just replacing one?

Jordan McNally: I know for sure it's not a net gain. It is the replacement of an existing machine. I couldn't verify that that's the only machine, I guess. I don't have that information in front of me.

M. MacFarlane: The line, perhaps, above it – I'm flipping around, but on patient medical homes equipment, I know we've seen.... The Capital Improvements – Buildings line, there was a lot of different homes spelled out. How do we determine which homes under this section are getting the \$837,000? Because in the other section, they were spelled out.

Jordan McNally: That provision is more so directly for the UPEI patient medical home and the equipment needs there. That's really what that line is for.

M. MacFarlane: So, it's all for the UPEI patient medical home. You've already answered that; that's a one-shot deal, okay.

The wireless for point-of-care devices indicates \$4 million this fiscal and next fiscal to enhance existing technologies, wireless. Do we know which technologies are moving wireless, or is that a question for a committee meeting?

Jordan McNally: No, that's the project that I was discussing earlier.

Hon. J. Burrige: We were talking about that.

M. MacFarlane: That's the one?

[3:20 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: Yeah. It's for wireless devices such as beds that connect wirelessly or IV pumps that could connect wirelessly.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Do all of our hospitals have wi-fi access for patients in beds in rooms? I know at one point it was

rolled out to certain areas of hospital, cafeteria.... Do all of our hospitals have the ability for patients to access wi-fi/internet from their beds?

Jordan McNally: I couldn't answer that.

Chair: I think that's probably an operating budget question, hon. member. It's an operating budget question.

M. MacFarlane: Well, if it requires a spend on equipment to enable wi-fi access in the beds, would that not be a capital spend? I don't see how that would be operational if we need to put routers or modems or extenders in to enable....

Jordan McNally: Yeah, it's not necessarily an operating question, depending on the magnitude, but I guess my answer is that I don't know for sure if they all have it currently. I know there's no budget in here identified for expanding that access to anyone. So, it's not necessarily something I have the answer to right now. I guess it would be kind of a Health PEI question to answer.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Do the hospitals continue to provide televisions in-room for patients, or has that sort of gone the way of the dodo bird and no longer provide that service within the hospitals?

Jordan McNally: I don't know that either, to be honest.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, that's all. If we're moving on to fleet, then that's all I have for equipment.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Vehicles

“Appropriations provided for vehicle purchases.” Light Fleet: nil.

Total Vehicles: nil.

The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

The handouts reference one of these vehicles as the dental program transport van. I thought, in the questions asked by

Charlottetown-West Royalty, that the van was included in that previous section. Is this a redundancy, or is it a different spend?

Jordan McNally: This one is labeled as a replacement, so I'm not sure if there's a different dental program that also utilizes a van or not, but it's not a net new vehicle like the other program line. It's just labeled dental program transport van replacement, so it's an existing fleet.

M. MacFarlane: So, this is an existing van? Did I hear you correctly? So, it's already being deployed in some capacity, but I thought the program wasn't yet launched.

Jordan McNally: It might be something I'll have to take back in terms of clarifying the difference there between the two items.

M. MacFarlane: So, the home care adult day program. Is that one van for \$200,000?

Chair: This is last year's capital budget, right?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, the forecast.

I believe that's just one van, yeah.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Is it used to transport the participants during the day, or to and from the program? Do we know how the van is deployed?

Jordan McNally: It is for the adult day program. It would be to take participants to community outings such as visiting petting farms, community events, live outdoor music.... So, it would be transporting them from the day program to these events outside of the facility that the program....

Hon. J. Burridge: It is.

Chair: Hon. members, just to be clear – you're asking a question on last year's budget – we're debating the appropriations for the upcoming capital budget.

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, that was my next question, actually. That was my next question.

[Laughter]

Chair: Alright.

M. MacFarlane: Why are there no appropriations made for the 2025-2026 fiscal?

Jordan McNally: Usually, light fleet belongs with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure; they manage the light fleet.

[3:25 p.m.]

Sometimes there are needs that come up throughout the year that they don't have the capacity to fund within their light fleet budget, so it sometimes can be identified within the department throughout the year. So, there are no specific needs, I guess, identified outside of the Department of Transportation...

M. MacFarlane: In the spring sitting, we passed the *Stretcher Transportation Act*, if I have it right. That was intended to deflect the need for ambulances to move patients around who did not necessarily need the services of an ambulance. Did that new legislation not give any rise to the need for expenditure on vehicles that weren't ambulances but weren't just regular passenger vehicles?

Hon. J. Burridge: We're kind of off – we're debating something that's nil in this budget right now, but if my memory serves, I think they were looking to ways for other existing service providers to be able to take a stretcher in – i.e., Pat and the Elephant – and enable them to be able to make those trips instead of using up an ambulance. That's what my memory serves me on that legislation, but I could be wrong.

M. MacFarlane: A quick follow-up, Chair?

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you.

No, that does remind me as well that that was the intention, so that there wouldn't be cost incurred. Where do ambulances fit within this budget?

Jordan McNally: They're contracted out, so it would be on the operating budget side.

M. MacFarlane: Okay.

Thank you.

Chair: No problem.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

The van – the home care adult program, \$200,000. Is Brecken House getting that van?

Jordan McNally: This specific van is the replacement for the van that operates in the Kings County area. That's the one that was identified as needing replacement.

Chair: It's an excellent program, but it was also last year's budget, hon. member. We're debating the authorization of money for the capital budget, upcoming year.

G. McNeilly: So, is there money in there for Brecken House? They do day program. They've come to me and said that they can't get to the facility because it's a barrier. This is a great thing if we had more money involved in this. I don't know how.... This has been a problem identified by the staff that I chat with, getting to the programs. Is there anything in there in the future about that, transportation access to places like Brecken House that are operating now?

Hon. J. Burridge: What I would say, and from what I've seen is – you see, in this budget, a significant investment in the adult day programming. You're picking out a vehicle purchase, but I think overall in this budget, over the five-year forecast, I think there's \$34 million or so going towards the adult day programming. So, you are picking out a little piece that we'll certainly – it's a good thing to make note of, but overall, this program has gotten significant funding in our five-year capital program.

G. McNeilly: I don't know if that's the case if my people can't get to the facility and those programs that you talked about won't be available for two years. I agree that they are where we need to get to. I'm just wondering because it was identified, and I'll be looking for that too in the future – because as it increases, that becomes a real mobility problem. It was on the news this week. Accessibility issues are there. I want

to see Health PEI get ahead of that curve so people can attend different programming that they provide.

Just a question here, minister: '24-25, purchase of two vehicles for the inspection service teams. Did those vehicles get purchased?

Jordan McNally: That's in Housing, Land and Communities, I think. That's just the next....

G. McNeilly: Oh, you're right.

Chair: Shall the section carry?

G. McNeilly: No, one more.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, Chair.

The fleet replacement that we chatted about very briefly, I don't understand the wording of this: replace five vehicles currently in fleet at the end of life and then add one new vehicle to the fleet. Is that six? You're replacing five.

Hon. J. Burridge: This is....

Chair: Hon. members, we're having difficulty at the table to hear. I'm having difficulty as Chair to hear, as well.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty has the floor, but hon. member, we're actually debating the 2025-2026 budget. We're not revisiting money that's already been appropriated. You are asking questions now on money that's already been appropriated. We're on '25-26 – which, the line is actually zero.

[3:30 p.m.]

I'm going to ask you to stick to this upcoming budget.

G. McNeilly: That would be accurate if I didn't find other places where we didn't do that in this budget. So, if we....

Chair: Sorry, hon. member, are you questioning me?

G. McNeilly: Well, yeah, I am questioning

Chair: How are you questioning me?

G. McNeilly: Well, I just finished saying that I found things that money wasn't spent in this budget. So, I can ask those questions to see where that money went and what was spent.

Chair: No, hon. member, we're debating the 2025-2026 budget. You had asked a question about why something wasn't being spent, or being purchased, in this year, which I allowed, and it's a reasonable question. But now you're debating money that's already been appropriated.

G. McNeilly: Why is it in the handouts then?

Chair: Hon. members –

G. McNeilly: Why is it in the handouts if we can't debate it?

Chair: For good information for you, hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

So, go ahead, ask your question.

G. McNeilly: Well, I'm trying to debate the handouts that were presented to me, and I'm trying to actually keep track of what was spent before, and I found money in there along the way. So, I'm just trying to say – and I appreciate your indulgence. So, I can't ask questions about – was it six vehicles that were purchased, or was it five? Or were there five replacements and then one extra vehicle? And did we spend all the money there? That's the question that I want to ask.

Hon. J. Burridge: Go ahead.

Jordan McNally: It is six total, and this would be the plan for '24-25. So, they haven't necessarily been procured yet, but that's the forecast. It includes five replacements and one new.

Hon. J. Burridge: And just to note, that information is all in the notes. Jordan and his team have put a lot of time in, and it's been asked over the years to give you more detail, instead of just having a line item. They've put together, I think, really good

supportive documents for you guys to have more information at your fingertips, and I think that that's good for all of us in this House to have that extra information.

I think it is good, considering the size of this budget, to try to stay on target and keep the conversation where it should be, and not be debating, necessarily, items that are actually nil in this capital budget.

G. McNeilly: And I appreciate that. I just don't understand the process as a Legislature – how I keep track of those vehicles that clearly haven't been purchased and are not on the roads right now.

B. Trivers: Blue books (Indistinct) public accounts.

G. McNeilly: It doesn't get into that type of detail, Member from Rustico-Emerald. It doesn't.

B. Trivers: (Indistinct)

G. McNeilly: Do you want to talk blue books? I have them right here. I'm up to date on this, and I'm trying my best to be accountable to a billion-dollar organization. So, I appreciate the time that you spent there.

Thank you.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Capital Expenditure – Health PEI:
81,254,900

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. members, we're in Housing, Land and Communities.

Vehicles

“Appropriations provided for vehicle purchases.” Light Fleet: 120,000.

Total Vehicles: 120,000

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you so much, Chair.

Hi, Jordan. Hi, minister.

I see that there are two vehicles here for, as it says in the handout, codes acceleration fund program, and I'm wondering how many inspectors we have now who are looking to make sure that the builds we have are compliant with the building code.

Jordan McNally: I don't have the total number of inspectors currently on staff in front of me.

P. Bevan-Baker: The purchase of these two vehicles – was that necessitated because we now have a province-wide building code, and so the inspectors have to go tip to tip to do their jobs?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think – oh, sorry, Jordan.

Jordan McNally: No, go ahead.

Hon. J. Burridge: I think part of it too, is, yeah, there were new codes, but I think also there was a lot of work done to kind of expedite – for instance, building permits on a deck – so, to have maybe some more inspectors on the ground to do those quick little drop-ins on projects like this, if needed be. I think that they're trying to expedite the service, but that may require maybe some more inspection services in the background.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Jordan, I know you're not sure how many inspectors we have, but do either of you know if we're fully staffed? Do we have the capacity of all the inspectors we need? Because it seems like expediting that process, minister, has been a bit of a challenge.

[3:35 p.m.]

Hon. J. Burridge: I think it's alleviating a pressure with inspectors. Inspectors are hard to find; there's not many of them. The training is pretty intensive. A lot of times, it's an engineer with specific training for inspection. So, they're hard to find. I think that's why they're trying to expedite it, especially for those smaller projects, i.e., decks, so that they can focus more predominantly on the larger builds.

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, and maybe the answer is "I don't know," but are we fully

staffed in terms of the number of inspectors that we budget for? I realize that's an operational budget question, but it's related to the vehicles, I think. If we're buying vehicles, presumably we have the staff to go in them.

Hon. J. Burridge: We don't know that. That's something we could take back.

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

I'm fine for this section.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Chair.

Just to follow on that – and I might have missed this as I came in – what is the number right now in the fleet for this?

Jordan McNally: Specifically for inspections?

Hon. H. Perry: Yeah.

Jordan McNally: I don't have that information either.

Hon. H. Perry: How many vehicles would \$120,000 buy?

Jordan McNally: That would be for two vehicles.

Hon. H. Perry: That's two per year for the next two years? Or this year and then for the 2025 year. Okay. I guess down the road, what's the requirement for vehicles to be replaced in the year after? Is there anything?

Jordan McNally: Yeah. Since this is net new to the fleet – this request came from the department, but Transportation and Infrastructure really manages the total light fleet, so they'd have a replacement schedule. I think it's seven years and so many kilometres that, ideally, you'd replace the vehicle. It would just eventually come up for replacement after that time period passes.

Hon. H. Perry: I guess it was kind of along the lines, too, about how many inspectors there are, how many inspectors may be

needed, how many are required; it kind of goes along with how many vehicles would be required. But not knowing how many are presently in the fleet and purchasing these new ones still doesn't answer the question of whether that's enough, to be quite honest.

Jordan McNally: I know for the positions that were added in the '24-25 budget, which would come through the operating budget, this just follows that in terms of the requirements. If they add new inspectors, there would be light fleet requirements associated with them. This kind of addresses the immediate needs. If there are more inspectors added in future years, then this number would go up, kind of thing.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Capital Expenditure – Housing, Land and Communities: 120,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

PEI Housing Corporation

Capital Improvements – Buildings

“Appropriations provided for capital improvements, acquisitions, and construction.” Capital Repairs: 8,760,000.
Construction and Renovations: 70,772,300.

Total Capital Improvements – Buildings:
79,532,300

I can't imagine there's any questions on this. Oh, there are.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: [Laughter] Sorry to disappoint you, Chair.

Chair: We all have questions on this section.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yes, I'm sure.

Let's start at the top with repairs. I see in the handout that we have that it's estimated to be \$31.7 million over five years. Just checking that those five years are the years

of the housing strategy from 2024-29. Is that correct?

Jordan McNally: It might even extend a little bit into the year after. Most of this is actually an ongoing capital repairs budget that they get annually. There is money out in '29-30 that might just go just beyond the housing strategy. I'm not 100 percent sure on that, but that is roughly the same time period, yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. The \$8.7 million that's set aside for capital repairs this year, if it was equally spent over the five years, it would be six-point-something each year, but it seems like we're frontloading this. Are we catching up with work? In future years, is it going to decrease at a regular interval or...?

[3:40 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: It's pretty steady for the next two years. The reason for the larger spend in the first two to three years relates to – I'll refer to it as GRIP, greening and retrofit program, which historically was always housed in Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, but as they were working through that program, it was identified that a lot of social housing units could be upgraded and greened. So, there is \$3.9 million per year for the next two years transferred from DTI to Housing, because Housing really owns the assets and that's where the money has to land.

Otherwise, it's about \$4.2 million in years 4 and 5 after that, that would be more ongoing capital repairs.

P. Bevan-Baker: I see that it's pretty consistent with what we spent last year, and amazingly, to the dollar, the estimate and the forecast are exactly right last year. So, I appreciate your detail on that, Jordan.

Looking at the social housing facilities that received those repairs last year, do you have a list of them in front of you? There's nothing in our handout to indicate which buildings were renovated.

Jordan McNally: I don't have the listing of what will be repaired in current year. I do have a listing of projects that they have identified under that GRIP funding for this

year and future years if that would satisfy you.

P. Bevan-Baker: That would be great. Thank you, Jordan.

Jordan McNally: The larger projects would be electrical service and heating – primarily that would be installing heat pumps at the Montague social housing facility; Montague seniors housing; Newland duplex; Souris seniors housing – there are multiple buildings within that, A, B, C, E, F, G – ventilation upgrades; St. Peter’s seniors housing; windows, doors, and siding in Summerside; windows, doors, and siding in Tignish and Tyne Valley; generator upgrades in Rosehill and Summerside; ventilation upgrades at Hunt Court.

P. Bevan-Baker: Sorry, what was that last one? Which place, sorry?

Jordan McNally: 34 Hunt Court.

P. Bevan-Baker: Hunt Court.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, those are just some of them.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that, Jordan; across the province, and a variety of things.

I’m wondering whether we’re still dealing with damage that was done by Fiona, almost – well, over two years ago now. Or has that work all been completed now?

Jordan McNally: I believe it’s all been addressed or completed. I couldn’t say with certainty though that that’s the case. Nothing on my list, I guess, is showing that it’s related to Fiona.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I appreciate that because I do remember touring a number of public facilities after Fiona and thinking, oh my gosh, the amount of work required to get these back in a condition which you would want to live in or one of your loved ones to live in.... So, I’m really glad that that’s all been done.

I’m wondering what criteria the department uses when it prioritizes where these repairs and renovations are going to be done.

Jordan McNally: I think the best description is probably just in that third bullet: they do annual inspections, then they have reports from tenants, and then factor in the age of the building. Then, of course, things come up that aren’t expected as well. Depending on the severity of it, those could be prioritized over other projects, but those are the three main areas that inform what’s to be repaired by the Housing Corporation.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thinking back, not just to the times after Fiona, but regular conversations I have with folks – mostly seniors who would live in public housing or the facilities where those repairs are being done – they have an issue with the building, whether it’s a leaky roof, or the doors are not working right, or whatever. The heating system is inadequate.

They’ll ask me: “Where are we on the list? Do you know when we’re going to get our units repaired?” And I, of course, don’t know. I will direct them to the department, but I’m wondering how much communication – for me, this would be a useful thing for the department to do just from a human and political point of view, to inform folks in buildings where there are deficiencies of where they are on that list and how long it might be before they’re seen.

Is there a list – is that communication done regularly?

Hon. J. Burrige: That would be more of an operational question, likely, for the department.

[3:45 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, that’s fair. I just feel for them when they ask me, “When is this going to get done?” and I can’t tell them, and many of them who do go to the department will come back with, “Well, I didn’t – I don’t know. They don’t know either,” or “They won’t tell me,” or whatever, and I can sense their frustration with that.

Regarding the greening and retrofitting of the existing social housing inventory, I’m wondering, of the money that’s set aside for that, how many buildings or units will that funding impact?

Jordan McNally: It's quite a wide range depending on the size of the project. Some of them – actually, that was some of the projects I just spoke about; that was those ones. So, I'd estimate at least over 40 or 50 lines of different projects identified through that. It would depend on – some projects are quite large in terms of replacing windows and siding, and some may not be quite as large.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I hear a lot from seniors who have asked the department for some renovations in their bathrooms. They can't get into their tubs because there's no bar on the wall or there's nothing to help them with that. It's one of the biggest things that I hear about seniors trying to stay in their apartments, living independently – which is our goal, which is government's goal. When I hear that, I'm like, it should be a no-brainer that we can – either in new builds, tubs are accessible automatically, or we just make the changes.

I know there are two buildings in my district that don't have them. They're older builds. So, I'm wondering if there's any money in this budget to do that sort of work in existing buildings, in particular seniors buildings.

Jordan McNally: There's no specific budget line for it other than that capital repairs allotment of \$4.6 million for next year. That's something that sounds like it would be addressed through that fund, unless there was other funding available from another department or something like that. But that's where it would have to be addressed from.

K. Bernard: But you don't have anything to suggest that that is what that money is earmarked for?

Jordan McNally: No, I don't have that level of detail, no.

K. Bernard: And do you know if – and this might be too specific – in new builds, is that something that government is going to do? Especially in seniors or – well, obviously, in accessible buildings, that would be done, but

in seniors buildings, is that something government is doing moving forward?

Hon. J. Burrige: Probably more a policy question. Again, that would be probably better answered by the department. I do know that the new building codes had a lot of – that next level of building codes, I think, did incorporate more accessibility within the code itself. Whether that's what you're asking for, I'm not 100 percent sure. I think that probably is a policy through-the-department answer; you'd get more there. But I'm pretty sure in that new building code that there are some more accessibility pieces that would be mandated.

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

[B. Trivers in the chair]

Chair: Shall it carry?

[Interjections]

Chair: Oh, we have questions. Alright.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Am I on the list?

Chair: No, you are now.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much.

Most of my questions have been answered, but I just wanted to know if you could tell me the difference between the first two lines there that you have in here, with the \$20 million over five for capital repair and renovation costs for existing social housing, and then the \$11.7 million over five for greening/retrofitting.

What's the difference between the two of them? Because if it's windows or doors that are – you know? They're in both.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, there could be examples of both. The greening and retrofitting is like specific funding meant to identify how you can make the building more efficient or green. So, that would be more so replacing all the siding, adding insulation when you're doing that, and making the windows more energy efficient, whereas capital repairs, I would picture that more as like one of the windows in a

building might have to be replaced and that's a capital repair that has to be done.

The greening and retrofit is more like a project base that you actually identify what could be made more efficient within that building.

Hon. H. Perry: As a whole.

Jordan McNally: As a whole.

[3:50 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. So, these moneys that are in here for repairs, did the Housing Corp. ask for more money? Is there a longer list that they put in for and then this was decided that it was \$20 million and then the \$11.7 million; total of \$31.7 million?

Jordan McNally: I don't have in front of me what was requested. I do know that with the transfer of the GRIP funding from DTI at \$3.9 million, it does increase their capital repairs allotment that they had compared to prior years, but the amounts are pretty consistent with the plan that was presented last fall, as well.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, I was just asking because I didn't know what the state of repair may be with the existing social housing inventory on Prince Edward Island, whether we're keeping up with it every year or there might be a need to bump it up in the very near future, if not now.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, it's a tough question for adequacy, but I know that with the addition of new units, obviously they wouldn't require repairs right away. I think the \$3.8 million is higher than it's been in the past. Every year informs a new capital budget as well, so there'd be opportunities to increase that in future years.

Hon. H. Perry: Heat pumps – in the existing housing that's there, what percentage of them at present would have heat pumps?

Jordan McNally: I don't have that percentage in front of me, to be honest.

Hon. H. Perry: Is there much of a demand from the tenants to put heat pumps in their

apartments, their housing? Or ask, I should say.

Jordan McNally: I'm not sure what they get from the tenants in terms of the reports every year requesting for heat pumps. I know that's what that greening and retrofiting allotment of \$3.9 million is intended to help address, but in terms of the reports, I don't have that.

Chair: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, and then I'm going to come back to you.

Hon. H. Perry: Sure. I'll keep on this one because I know, in my area in particular, they've been asking to have – a lot of their housing is heated with oil. They, of course, as a renter, cannot apply for the heat pump program to have one installed, and it would really make a difference in their housing, of course, with a heat pump...

Chair: Member, that's an operating budget question under the PEI renovation programs, I think.

Hon. H. Perry: But that's not what I'm asking, sorry.

Chair: Or possibly – but this is...

Hon. H. Perry: Sorry, Chair, but there were heat pumps that were mentioned earlier that were going to be installed through the capital repair and renovation.

Hon. J. Burrige: In public...

Chair: These are publicly owned buildings.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, so there's nothing in here that would apply to heat pumps being installed in any of this social housing?

Hon. J. Burrige: There is. The capital program would be related to public infrastructure and adding heat pumps to public infrastructure. But there are programs, I think, through – there are other programs. Are you talking about a private entity?

Hon. H. Perry: No.

Hon. J. Burrige: No, it is a public entity?

Hon. H. Perry: Yeah, public housing.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, that's where this would be then.

Hon. J. Burridge: That's where this would go, then.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. So, again, that same question. I've been hearing and have been asked multiple times to advocate for it, and I have – I'm sure we all have – from individuals who rent from public housing. I asked about the percentage right now, what it was, and I know you may not have the number right off, but are you guys also hearing the same demand from those who are tenants within social housing here on Prince Edward Island?

Hon. J. Burridge: You're going to get a better answer out of the department on something like that. That's something I would ask the department.

Chair: Did you want to bring that back, minister?

Hon. J. Burridge: It's something we could bring back.

Hon. H. Perry: I'll ask again. I'll ask the department,

Hon. J. Burridge: Yeah, I think that you're going to get a better answer there.

Chair: Alright, the hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I know in this section, there's also construction and renovations, and acquisitions, presumably. We've started to acquire a significant number of new units across the Island, presumably in various states of net zero readiness, I'll put it that way. Are any of the renovations that we see here in this section, the \$8,760,000, related to brand-new acquisitions?

[3:55 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: As soon as they're acquired, they're part of the social housing inventory, so they could be prioritized in terms of whether it's under GRIP or general capital repairs. The list I'm seeing is more so focused on ones that probably are already

existing social housing units. Sometimes, when an existing unit is acquired, there's funding allotted to potentially repair that right away, if it's not in a state that's usable or reasonable. I think once it's part of the inventory, it could be assessed and prioritized in terms of adding net zero elements to it, but it would be under that general GRIP program.

P. Bevan-Baker: I know with the new schools that we're building, there's a real effort to make them all net zero-ready, is the terminology we use. I understand, obviously, when we acquire something, we acquire what we acquire, and likely, there will be work required to bring that up to modern environmental standards or energy efficiency standards. But I'm wondering whether the new builds that the Province is embarking on when it comes to social housing, whether we're using the same sorts of efforts to make them net zero as we are the schools.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, my understanding is that all new builds by government, which would include the Housing Corp., are made to net zero-ready standards.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, that's good to hear. I'm really glad to hear that. I'm wondering if there's any measurement done when we – because building new to net zero standards is not easy, but at least you have the opportunity with a blank slate to do what you have to do.

Retrofitting existing buildings, particularly older ones, to something approaching net zero or improving their energy efficiency can be incredibly difficult to do and very expensive and time consuming. I see that only 15 percent of the budget line here for capital improvements is actually going to repairs.

Are you anticipating, as the years go by, that that percentage – 85 percent is on construction and acquisition. Are we expecting, as we acquire more and more existing buildings, that we're going to have to devote more of that money to renovations that would bring that stock up to energy efficiency standards that we would expect these days?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think that would be more of a policy question, as well. I think that's a good question to the minister to see where they stand on that policy on acquisitions. I think that is an interesting and good question. I know the government does have a policy on new builds and what we're going to do and how we're going to build it and certain standards, but I don't think we can speak today on acquisitions and what the policy is there.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thanks, Chair.

Back when we were doing energy, I had asked a question about the transmission lines to the proposed wind farm in Skinners Pond. I was told those questions would be better asked in this area, the PEI Housing Corporation.

I know back in 2020, there was money allocated for the transmission lines at that time. Can you give me an update on where that is right now?

Jordan McNally: PEI Energy Corporation is where that lands. Because of the way they operate, essentially, it's a government business enterprise is what it's called, and they are self-sufficient; they don't require government funding to operate. They don't have a specific page in the book that we would be looking at. There is a schedule at the back that outlines the capital plan for the next year for Energy Corporation. It is an ongoing project in that Energy Corporation but there just maybe isn't an opportunity to discuss it in terms of the appropriation vote. But it's Energy Corporation, just to be clear.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. That's fine.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

I note that there's a \$5 million overspend last year. I realize this is last year, but I do have a question related to it. Did we have more construction and renovation projects than were expected or is that just a reflection of the increased costs in terms of labour and materials during that year?

[4:00 p.m.]

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

Jordan McNally: It's a lot to do with the timing of the projects. For instance, the cost for the two Malpeque Road developments, more of it landed in '24-25, and the cost for those projects were also higher than last year's estimate, so that would be kind of an upward pressure. A downward pressure would be – for example, 231 Richmond Street was planned to be completed last year, but due to delays, is pushed to next year, so that alone is \$1.6 million.

There's Hillsborough Park infrastructure and development, that larger program in Hillsborough Park. The plan was to spend \$4.8 million, but \$3 million was underspent and pushed into future years. So, it's a mix of increased costs in current year, but also the delay in other projects as well, to partially delay the costs, I guess, to future years.

P. Bevan-Baker: I realize we're getting close to the end, but maybe a general question. I realize there are a whole bunch of moving parts, and inevitably, things are not going to fit into the rigid timetable that we hope that they would; even in one build that doesn't happen, never mind having hundreds on the go at the same time.

But a general question: Is there federal funding supporting construction and renovations happening that we would find in this capital budget? Is that part of the line, here, Jordan?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, there is \$1 million for the CMHC co-investment repair funding. That helps offset general capital repairs. It wasn't in last year's budget as a revenue offset. That would be the main new one. Other than that... That's really the only federal funding, yeah.

Chair: Are there more questions on this section, hon. members?

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, but I know we're.... Are we out of time?

Chair: I just wondered, before the section carried.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yes, I do have more questions on this section, Chair.

Chair: Okay, alright. We'll report progress and move to private member time.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

S. MacEwen: Madam Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration the grant of capital 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.

Orders Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, that the 30th order of the day be now read.

Clerk: Order No. 30, *An Act to Amend the Gasoline Tax Act*, Bill No. 121, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Bill No. 121, *An Act to Amend the Gasoline Tax Act*, read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from

Charlottetown-West Royalty, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

[4:05 p.m.]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intitled *An Act to Amend the Gasoline Tax Act*.

Welcome, hon. member.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you.

Chair: Do you have any opening comments before we debate the bill?

Hon. H. Perry: Sure. Thank you, Chair.

Today, I bring forward a practical, targeted, and meaningful solution to one of the greatest challenges that's facing Islanders, and that's the soaring cost of living. This proposed legislation to reduce the provincial gas tax by 50 percent is a step towards providing Islanders with immediate relief at the pumps when they need it the most.

Let's be clear: Islanders are struggling to make ends meet. We've all heard it. They're seeing the rising cost of groceries, utilities, and housing. For many, filling up the car is no longer just a routine task; it's a source of financial stress. Meanwhile, this government has offered little more than complaints about the federal carbon pricing program and vague promises of action, and Islanders deserve better. By reducing the gas tax by half, we're putting more money back into the pockets of Islanders.

Here's what that means in real terms:

Right now, the gas tax generates \$26.5 million annually. Cutting it by 50 percent would save Islanders a collective \$3.25 million. That's money that's back into the pockets of Islanders, money that can go towards essentials like groceries, school

supplies, or heating bills. This relief would be immediate, tangible, and far more impactful than the vague belt-tightening advice that this government has offered.

This government claims it's on Islanders' side, but actions speak louder than words. They've complained about the federal carbon pricing program and shifted the burden onto families, telling them to tighten their belts, yet where is this belt-tightening within this government? Just last year, they risked \$10.7 million of taxpayers' money on the NHL scheme. Islanders deserve leadership that prioritizes the daily struggles, not vanity projects. They need to have immediate relief from the struggles that they're feeling right now.

We've heard the Premier say more can be done. Well, members, here is an option. Here is an option that can be done today to put money back into the pockets of Islanders who are struggling. It's sensible, it's bold, and it's focused on what matters most, and that's helping Islanders through tough times. Islanders are facing tough times now.

To those who say that we can't afford to lose this revenue, I'll say this: Islanders can't afford not to have this relief. So, it's time that this government tightens its own belt and does a better job managing taxpayers' money. Islanders have already done their part, now it's time for government to do their part.

I urge every member in this House to stand up for the people we all represent. Let's debate this bill, let's pass this bill, and let's show Islanders that we are all here to help, not just with words but with actions.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Alright, hon. members, there's only one clause with this amendment. Are there any questions on the bill?

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burridge: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, member, for bringing this forward.

I think my broad initial statement is I think we're all trying to give that tax relief to Islanders. I think we're all aligned on that. I think it's the delivery of how we're going to do that that maybe we differ on.

As far as, I guess, specific to the gas tax, this government has made reductions in the past, in 2019, 2020. They continued to make room prior to the carbon tax coming in, I think to the tune of – I'm going to say I think it's approximately \$24 million in tax relief on the gas tax over the years that we've been in government.

[4:10 p.m.]

What is left – the 0.8 cents – is the lowest in our region, in the Maritimes, and we use that money to maintain our roads and infrastructure. That's where that money goes.

I guess I would follow up in saying, your comments on tax relief, helping Islanders, and affordability, I think we all see that, and we all hear that.

While your bill that comes forward on reducing the tax is an area that we can do that, this government has made lots of other moves in that, personal income tax being a big and probably the one I know most about where we've set really strong mandates on raising that personal basic amount. We've reduced rates, we've raised thresholds, we've done all the things so that people, with every paycheque they get, they're taking home more of it. I think that that is money in the pockets of Islanders helping with that affordability piece.

The child care benefit we're bringing in January 1, 2025, again, is another measure to put money in the pockets of Islanders towards your affordability piece that I think we all recognize and want to do something about.

I guess what I would say – and I'm not going to sit here and hammer questions on with this – I think I'll end the way I started, in saying that bringing the gas tax down is a measure, no question, but a lot of that has been done to this point. We carry the lowest rate in the region with gas tax and we are doing lots of other things. I did mention the personal income tax, the child benefit, HST

reductions in housing – we’re doing a lot of things to hit those pieces on affordability. Reducing the gas tax is not something that we’re looking at right now because we’ve done a lot of it, and we’re moving on to other things, such as basic personal income tax.

I think those are the big pieces I wanted to get across to you. Just recognize that we’re all here doing the same thing. It’s just, government has had strong mandates and other measures to deliver that relief, and we’re doing it year over year over year, and bringing new layers of affordability in every year.

I’ll just leave it at that and open it up to other questions.

Chair: Do you wish to respond or...?

Hon. H. Perry: I can respond to that.

What Islanders need right now and those who are struggling.... And we’ve all heard it. I hear it constantly, the cost of living.

I said it before in this House, over the years that I’ve been knocking on doors, health care always seemed to be the top priority, the top priority, the top priority. The last few was health care and there was housing and affordability, but during the last by-election and the last election, it was the cost of living that was the number one issue at the door, in my particular area, and this is what I’m hearing from Islanders right across from tip to tip. It’s the cost of living.

This was a measure to actually put money back into the pockets or the hands of Islanders immediately. It was not something that was down the road or what have you, or planned down the road. This was something that would actually put it – every time they go to the pump, it’s helping them out a little bit, whether it’s \$5 savings that they could go and maybe support the local coffee shop and treat themselves every week. It’s that little bit that will help Islanders at the immediate time that is the reason why I proposed this particular bill. It’s because it’s probably one of the biggest talked-about issues on Islanders.

We use social media, for instance. Whenever there’s either an increase or

decrease in the price of gas, that’s all we see on social media is people asking, “Is it going up tonight? Is it going down tonight?” People are very concerned because even a few cents off a litre means a lot to those individuals who really struggle to make ends meet, especially people in rural Prince Edward Island who need a vehicle, who do not have public transit to get to and from work or to and from the grocery store, medical appointments, what have you. They feel it when they put that fuel in their car.

[4:15 p.m.]

Again, I hear it constantly, so this was why I thought: How can we immediately help these individuals, give them a little bit of a break, and help them through this financial situation that they find themselves in, and not only a few, but many Islanders find themselves in?

Other jurisdictions in Canada have done the same thing. I know New Brunswick, the government in power now, during the campaign, promised that they would reduce the gas tax by four cents per litre. In Nova Scotia, the NDP is promising to cut the taxes if they are elected, if they form government; they will save 15.5 cents per litre. Ontario has already cut their gas tax in 2022 and recently announced that their cuts would be extended into the 2025 year. Their total savings would be 10 cents per litre for Ontario residents or anybody buying gas in Ontario.

These are examples of governments across the country who are taking the initiative to provide real relief to their residents. This was, again, just something that I’ve heard day in and day out about, why can’t we reduce the provincial portion of the gas tax because, at the end of the day, it is taxpayers’ dollars and this would actually put \$13.2 million back into the pockets, on the immediate, to Islanders.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair, and thanks for bringing this forward.

Can you just talk a little bit about how this would help rural Prince Edward Island? Every time we talk about this, the government says that there's toonie transit and there are different things to get you from.... But it doesn't seem to be effective, and the cost seems to be extra if you're living further from different places.

Can you just talk about that a little bit?

Hon. H. Perry: Sure, and I did allude to that earlier, in response to the statement made by the Finance minister.

Those individuals on Prince Edward Island, and in particular, those who rely on their own transportation because public transportation is not available anywhere in rural PEI where they don't have that, they need to find transportation. So, generally, it's their own. They have a vehicle and that vehicle....

I wish Islanders could afford electric vehicles. It would be fantastic, but the majority of Islanders cannot even make their monthly payments without stretching their income. They would love to have an electric vehicle, and I would love to see them have one, but they can't afford it. So, realistically, they can't afford it right now, and I'd like to see us move towards more incentives to put Islanders in there.

In the meantime, those Islanders have to rely on their own transportation, which means the vehicle that they own, and they have to put fuel in that vehicle to make it work to get to work, to get to the medical appointments, to go to the schools, or what have you. It would mean a great deal, not only to rural Islanders, but to all Islanders who use their vehicle for transportation, who don't have access to public transit, or what have you.

Yes, that toonie transit is great, I will never complain about that. It provides an option, but it's a timed option. There are individuals that live in my district who work in Summerside, which is an hour away, and that toonie transit doesn't work with their schedule. So, they try, either on their own or carpool, to save those dollars because, at the end of the week, it adds up if you're driving two hours a day. It eats away at their income, so it would mean a lot.

Four and a half cents is what I'm asking the reduction to be on the provincial portion of the gas tax. It would benefit not only rural Islanders, but all Islanders who use gasoline in their vehicles for transportation.

G. McNeilly: You mentioned other provinces, and I think you mentioned Ontario and New Brunswick, so it's not like this hasn't been done before in Canada. It seems to be the way things might be going to provide said relief for people right now. They also mentioned – Manitoba, I think, might have something in place too.

Can you just talk about how that would more align Prince Edward Island with other provinces rather than not?

[4:20 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: It's a good question. In Manitoba, yes, I think it was announced yesterday that they also have the same reduction in gas tax in their province. When you see other jurisdictions doing it, it really validates my bringing this amendment to the *Gasoline Tax Act* bill to this House.

If other provinces are doing it, if other provinces are proposing it, or have implemented it already, then that makes me really feel good about what I'm doing because, yes, you know what? It brings immediate relief to those who struggle and who depend on gasoline-fueled vehicles to get them from point A to point B. I mean, we have five jurisdictions now that I know of that have either implemented or are proposing similar legislation as I am putting forward here today.

G. McNeilly: Thanks a lot for that.

This would just be on the provincial portion of the gas thing, so it will just be a cost saving.... I know that the federal government has rebates federally. Can you just tell Islanders how the rebate program for the carbon tax – would this be affected at all, the cheques that they receive from the federal government?

Hon. H. Perry: This would have no impact on that whatsoever. It's all provincial dollars. At the end of the day, this will save Island residents \$13.2 million that they can put money back into their pockets.

G. McNeilly: The income tax was one form of tax relief but that only happens – we have to come in here, we have to change the legislation. It was a campaign promise, but it was – and I know you’re getting there slowly. You could have just done that at once, but it is something, and I would agree with that. But this is, like you said, immediate savings for people when they’re struggling in the winter and it’s now.

How does that translate into tangible savings for individuals and families? I know you mentioned \$13.25 million, but what would it be broken down to, or anything, per family?

Hon. H. Perry: I don’t have that, those stats with me, hon. member, because not every family has a vehicle that requires gasoline, or it may be for their generators or what have you, but I can tell you it does impact a large number of Island residents.

When you go by any gasoline station, you see them lined up the night before there is a proposed increase in gasoline, you know that this really makes a difference in Islanders’ lives. Any time on social media when you say there is a proposed increase of gasoline tonight by three cents, it’s guaranteed, that evening at those gas stations, there is a lineup of people with their vehicles to fuel up because they can save a few dollars. That few dollars will go a long way to helping them make their ends meet at the end of the week or the end of the month.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

Chair: Shall the bill carry?

[Interjections]

Chair: We’ll report progress, hon. member.

No, sorry, we’re not reporting...

Hon. H. Perry: I didn’t end it.

Chair: We’ll report to the committee.

Hon. H. Perry: Yeah, but I would like to just say something at the end.

Chair: We voted, hon. member.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, it wasn’t carried.

Chair: No, that’s right.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

[4:25 p.m.]

S. MacEwen: Madam Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House, having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Gasoline Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and does not recommend same to the Legislative Assembly. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Motions Other Than Government

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

G. McNeilly: At this time, I’d like to call Motion No. 122.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Motion No. 122, Improving Connectivity: Better Cell Phone Coverage Across PEI, the motion has been read and debate was adjourned by the Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Trade.

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

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

I’m trying to remember where I left off there the other day on this. I guess we could kind of repeat all of what we had discussed.

Currently, we’re waiting on the report back from FarrPoint, and once we do have that, obviously, our plans are to build a number of towers. I’m not sure on the exact amount yet, but I think the way this will work, though, is that we want to make sure that the telecom providers will put their

infrastructure on the towers before we do build the towers.

I know Leader of the Opposition pointed this out the other day that, “Are you going to build them and hope to God, cross your fingers, that these companies will actually use the towers?” That’s how that process will unfold. I’m looking forward to receiving the report back and seeing the gaps across PEI; I know there are many of them. I think Islanders express that every day to their MLAs.

I know that since this issue has come up in the media a few times that I know CRTC is now receiving a significant number of complaints from Islanders, which is good, which is what we want to see because without them seeing that tangible proof that there is concern, that we can finally, hopefully, be able to get them to work with us.

But with that, I’ll pass the floor onto the next.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I wanted to rise and speak to this motion because, at its face value, it is a good motion. This has got to be one of the biggest issues that we’ve had in my area for a long time, frankly, and it’s not just about supporting people who are trying to communicate, but it’s supporting everyone.

Pardon me, Madam Speaker, I just have something in my throat.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think I’m ready to go. If I could get a Page to get me a glass of water, that’d be great.

Hon. D. King: Are you alright?

B. Trivers: I’m alright, Premier.

For a long time now, in District 18 Rustico-Emerald, it’s very easy to travel across the district and when you’re speaking on a mobile phone or mobile device, you know exactly where you’re going to lose signal. Frankly, this is my 10th year as an MLA, and it’s been going on for that entire time and

before that as well, and we really haven’t seen a lot of improvements in that.

It’s not just about the fact that we’ve seen degrading cell phone coverage, but we’re not seeing the improvements that have been known about for many, many years. Better cell phone coverage is something that’s really important and it’s something that I hear from my constituents about all the time. It’s very tangible.

In politics, there’s a term they call a back-pocket issue. Well, this is an issue that people see, they understand, they face it day-to-day, and in my opinion, this is one of those back-pocket issues. It’s something people feel right at the ground level.

[4:30 p.m.]

So, the problem here – and we’ve tried to dig into this issue at standing committee and really understand what’s going on and we’ve had in many witnesses, and we’ve made recommendations in our report.

But at the core – and other members have said this – is the providers, for the most part, don’t see the return needed to improve and expand cell phone coverage on PEI, which is why our government – and we’ve seen this in the capital budget – is taking steps to say, “Okay, if we can’t rely on private industry to do this, how do we work with them and support them, and find a path forward because it’s so important to Islanders?” Because that is what good government does. So, what we’ve seen in the capital budget is – I believe it’s \$2.5 million in there to help with this issue.

In my career, I’ve worked in information technology, but I worked in Ottawa in high tech for telecommunications companies. The one, primarily, was Newbridge Networks; I started way back in 1995 when I did a co-op work term there, and I started full-time in 1996.

When it comes to telecommunications, the technology is tricky and it’s really important that you get it right. So, I was really glad to see that the minister is doing a study, and making sure that the study is complete, to understand exactly where the problems are and why the problems are there, because you

can't make a plan to address it until you do that.

In fact, there was a company called Marconi – one of the older telecommunication companies in the world, really – they purchased a company called Northwood Technologies. I just narrowly missed it. In fact, I had a job offer to go to Northwood from Newbridge that I had turned down. They were bought two years later for millions of dollars. I was going to take a big cut in salary and get paid in stock options, but those are just some of the mistakes you make in life. But I'm sure everybody is glad I didn't take that job because I might not be here today...

[Interjections]

B. Trivers: ...[Laughter] speaking here today on this issue.

But one thing that Northwood did was they actually created models looking at the different specifications of a tower, how far it covered, and how the signal changed. Their product and their service was to actually determine the location of cell phone towers and communication towers, and to provide optimal coverage. So, this is a highly technical thing, and again, I want to give the minister kudos for doing a report.

Now, I know that we've been talking a lot about cell phone towers and communication towers here, but again, with innovation and the technologies of today, that may not be the only way to solve this problem. I think, if we have the \$2.5 million – if we don't use it all on towers specifically, and we find other ways to solve this problem, and we consult with the experts, then we should spend it there. I don't think it should be limited to looking at cell phone towers only, and that's important.

The other thing is it's unfortunate how when it comes to critical services like this – telecommunications – we're held under the thumb of providers. Really, the CRTC, that's why they were started. They wanted to regulate the telecommunications industry to make sure that for this critical service, private service providers in fact don't have a monopoly or duopoly and aren't able to really put consumers under their thumb and dictate not only pricing, but also dictate

where the service exists and what the quality of the service is. Unfortunately, we're seeing that right now. Especially in smaller jurisdictions like Prince Edward Island, I'd like to see them stand up and take a bigger role.

[4:35 p.m.]

The other thing is – and this has been a hot topic, of course, of conversation – with our electrical utilities, like Maritime Electric Company Ltd. – or even the Summerside utility, but primarily MECL – whether that should be provincially owned because it's a core, important service. We see that in many jurisdictions, the electric utility is government owned.

Here we have a partnership with a private company, and there's lots of debate around that, but this is yet another area where we have a critical service being dictated by private providers. We're paying what many say are the highest rates in the world here – not only in Prince Edward Island, but in Canada – and maybe it's time to take the bull by the horns.

Another study the Minister of Economic Growth and Innovation could do is, really, what would it take to have a government-owned telecommunications company that would actually provide these services? I'm not saying we need to go there, but I'm saying let's get the numbers on the table; let's see what it would take. I mean, internet access is part of telecommunications, and that's something that we've discussed at length and fought for.

Thank goodness for Elon Musk and his great work at Starlink. Elon Musk has just done fantastic things in that industry. It has given an option for people on Prince Edward Island who had no other option for internet access; they can sign up for Starlink. I know Elon Musk may have controversial views on some of his – you know, his social conservative views. I'm socially progressive, fiscally conservative. But when it comes to his solutions, and when it comes to his logic and his vision, it's something that has provided well for Islanders, really, with Starlink.

However, we should really look at a telecommunications provider when we do a

study to look not just at cell phone coverage, but also internet access because, as we know, you can use the technology for cell phones to access the internet. At one point, the former Minister of Economic Development actually had made a promise to table the plan to have a government-owned internet backbone. That would be Heath MacDonald here, which – I don't know; within months, maybe even weeks, he turned about-face and said, "Oh no, no. I'm wrong. We can't do that."

But had we had vision and boldness, and gone there earlier like this motion advocates for, we might have had a high-speed fibre optic backbone across this entire Island, where locally owned internet service providers could actually get access to it at much, much lower prices. So, maybe we need to look at this as a whole bundle of telecommunications services. We need to do that.

One company that no longer exists on PEI, as far as I know...

[Interjections]

B. Trivers: Well, if there happened to be a portfolio that I could assist with, I would be quite willing to consider that, for sure.
[Laughter]

There was a company on PEI – and correct me if I'm wrong, if they're still doing business – Wicked EH. I think there might be some Wicked EH customers here. I know they had their struggles, but their vision was a great vision. They said, "Why are you paying one plan to have cell phone service and access to telecommunications that way, and a completely separate plan to have home internet access when really, at the end of the day, if we put communication devices up on towers across the Island, you could pay one price and have high-speed internet access wherever you went on Prince Edward Island?"

It was a really neat vision. In fact, I think they, at one point, had done the work to determine where some – they were on the larger side – communication towers would go on PEI to cover the entire Island. Then, at an affordable price, you would buy one rate and you would have high-speed internet access wherever you went, all the time, no

extra charges, no worrying about data limits, no worrying about cell phone plans versus internet plans, et cetera.

That's where we need to go, really, this unified telecommunications strategy. Hopefully, that's what the new Minister of Innovation and Economic Growth is looking at. It will do more than just improve connectivity and better cell phone coverage, but it will provide affordable access for telecommunications across the Island, for all Islanders, if done correctly.

[4:40 p.m.]

We may even want to consult with Elon Musk on a strategy. I'm sure he'd be willing to do that. It might even improve our relations both internationally with the U.S., and federally here. We could be a pilot, perhaps, working with the U.S. government, as I know Elon Musk is now taking on a large role there based on the reports I've heard.

So, I do support this motion. I think when it comes to Islanders and my constituents, I know it's a back-pocket issue that, at the end of the day, they want to make sure whatever cell phone provider they're using, whatever mobile phone provider, they're able to have an uninterrupted, good quality service that allows them to take a call and access the internet and do what they need to do, wherever they are on Prince Edward Island and beyond. We need to work towards that. I think a new unified telecommunications strategy that considers even government-owned is a good way to go.

I thank the members for this motion and appreciate your time to let me speak to it.
Cheers.

Speaker: Next speaking to the motion, the hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's always interesting when the Liberals bring motions to the floor. I like to get the opportunity to talk to them, and maybe give a little reminder and history lesson on the political lay of the land. You know, Moses wandered the desert for 40 years. I feel like

the Liberals are on track to wander the desert for 50.

I'll tell you: 59 percent of Islanders today, through a Narrative Research poll, said they were currently satisfied with this government – 59 percent. It's through initiatives like the cell phone towers that the Minister of Economic Development has taken forward. It's through initiatives like investing in schools, investing in hospitals, investing in housing here on Prince Edward Island. And you know what? It seems, over and over and over again, the rudderless Liberal Party, while falling in the polls, can't seem to grasp the fact that they're on the wrong side of so many issues.

Madam Speaker, 48 percent of the people said they would vote Progressive Conservative if there was an election today – 48 percent of the people said they would vote for us today – while 19 percent said they would vote for the Liberals. I think there's something to be said in that. What that says to me is that – and you should hear this loud and clear – Islanders have spoken once again, and said they have full faith in this government and the work that they're doing.

We all know, through the capital budget process, there's an investment into cell phone service here in Prince Edward Island. We're confident that the providers will come online, and we're confident that we'll be able to fix this issue, just like the Member from Kensington-Malpeque fixed the internet. Remember the internet was an issue? No, you forget, because we fixed it. Remember how these issues just disappeared? This is a government that knows how to tackle and fix issues.

I'll read you something else here: “In our 25-year history of tracking the Island, we see King having enjoyed the highest level of government satisfaction recorded.” Ever – ever recorded. So, when we see motions on the floor – obviously, I support this motion, because this is work that government is doing.

And you know what? If you want to become popular with Islanders, perhaps you write all of your motions, post us saying we're going to do something asking us to do it, so that we can say we'll do it, and then you'll be

finally on the right side of issues, because I know you're tailing off hard when it comes to popularity.

I know you blame Trudeau in Ottawa, and I know he's not liked in these parts. I get all that, but I think you need to look in the mirror. There were some mean years here where Islanders couldn't get ahead, and there was no help from a Wade MacLauchlan government.

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: Closed schools – let's talk about the schools for a second.

[4:45 p.m.]

Wade MacLauchlan tried to close a school in my community, as well as several other schools, all while bringing in unprecedented growth in the population by running his PNP program wide open, and now we're at a place where we're building schools in Charlottetown. The Wade MacLauchlan government tried to close a school in Charlottetown – took it right to the final line of closing a school in Charlottetown – and here we're at the point where one has to be built.

Obviously, foresight is not a virtue of being a Liberal. Obviously, it's not. The same can be said when it comes to cell phone issues here on Prince Edward Island. I get it; they think that... We've been there. Look, I've been over there, thinking that this time we spent in the Legislature was the most important time, not out trying to talk to Islanders. I know that you guys avoid them, and I know that you are rudderless.

I'm going to give you the formula, and I hope I don't give away too much secret. I'm going to give you the formula. You can choose to use it, or you don't have to.

Go on out and get yourself a leader that people really, really like, and form government. It's that simple. It's that simple. I know you guys have trouble with that. I know you have trouble with that. You end up with a leader that nobody likes, and then you've all got to stand behind him and stand up for him – all the terrible things that Wade MacLauchlan stood for and all the terrible things he did to small communities.

In my former role as Minister of Environment – it’s funny – we took climate action and the goals of the Paris Accord seriously, we truly did, and I think that numbers moving show it. The programs we put in place show it. But under the Liberals, who federally mandated this, who federally took the country in this direction – which I totally agree with – the provincial Liberal Party decides to do nothing. Their plan was to give away – what was it, free licences? Remember that? That was their carbon plan.

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: Yeah, drive more. “Please, drive more. Save the environment.” It’s actions like that that make me reflect quite clearly on why, obviously, your party has never reached these heights in polling that we’re currently seeing here now.

I get it; it’s tough to be in the wilderness like the Liberal part of Prince Edward Island is today, but I urge the three of you – the small caucus of three or the blended caucus of six, whichever caucus you’re part of today – to watch decision making in action. Watch decisive decision makers make decisions that appeal to Islanders, to give Islanders the things that they want, that raise you to the heights of popularity, that give you polling results, and give you....

The number of members here who have had over 70 percent in the last election at the ballot box is astronomical. For a province that’s so tight.... You know, 50 percent vote – 50 percent when I started would have been a big vote, but I think I got 48 the first time I won, and I won large that time.

You know what? It’s the lack of decision-making capacity. (Indistinct) move over to Nova Scotia for a second. We’re going to witness what happens to the Liberal Party tonight. If they win a seat – if they do – they’ll be in third place in Nova Scotia after tonight, and probably deservedly so.

Now, I caution the Liberal Party over here that as time ticks on and we move ever closer to an election – which we eventually will, because the clock never stops – I think you’re going to have to get a leader, and I think you’re going to have to find some positive things to talk about. I think you’re going to have to start saying, “Here’s what

the Liberal Party stands for.” The Liberal Party today is against everything. They’re so negative. They’re so negative. They’re so negative.

[4:50 p.m.]

When I spend time at the coffee shop, down at Daryl’s, the rink, out here in the streets....

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: Not many Liberals at Daryl’s: five. There are five in Georgetown. In the last election, there were five.

But when I run into people at the grocery store, they want to talk about the positive things. They’re like, “Hey, it’s great there’s going to be a new school in Georgetown,” or “Hey, it’s great; I hear the Minister of Economic Development is going to fix cell phone service here in Prince Edward Island,” or “Hey, it’s great there’s finally going to be an investment into schools in Stratford so that all the students who go to Stratford can go from K right through to grade 12,” all because of this government.

Those are investments made by this government that will have a long-term effect on the growth of Stratford and the ability of students to not have to leave their community ever, ever again when we get these projects done – expanded services in the hospital, a medical school....

And you know, it’s funny, because they were all against it. Everybody was against the medical school. Everywhere I go now, people are saying, “You know what? I think that medical school is going to be a complete game changer for Prince Edward Island.” Of course it is. Of course it is, because that was the decision-making concept when the decision was made.

It’s easy to be against things. It’s easy to be against things, and it’s easy for Liberals to be because – I get it. It’s dark over there. I get it. It’s dark. And it’s dark in Ottawa. Sunny days are gone, I think. Are the sunny ways gone away? What happened to the sunny ways? Oh, at one time, they used to be so, so very sunny and happy in their entire approach.

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: Well, they ran out of our money. You're right. You're right. They ran out of our money, and the sunny ways went away.

I feel like, as a rural Islander – and I don't complain about it – I obviously choose to live where I live. We picked the location for the house we're in, and we picked it knowing that there was almost no cell phone service there. So, I get it; I moved to a place where there's no cell phone service.

Would I like it? Yes, absolutely, I would – I'm not going to lie – but I also would never give back the life that I have, being in a place that's so wonderful, that I get to wake up to every single day, or every evening when the local fox runs across the front yard for the kids to squeal, "You've got to come see the fox," or when the eagle comes to circle over in the morning.

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: Well, there are vultures, alright. You know where they are. [Laughter] They're definitely circling some carcasses over there. There are a lot of them. You won't get the bodies buried quick enough after Trudeau goes down in this next election.

I just want to touch on the poll just one more time, for those who weren't aware – and you know what? Fifty-nine percent satisfaction is extremely high. I spent a number of years coaching hockey – 25, probably, years of coaching hockey – and I'm not sure that I would have ever had a satisfaction rating of 59 percent coaching. [Laughter] I'm sure that I didn't. I won a lot of games, have a lot of trophies and a lot of banners, but 59 percent? Wow.

If the Premier hadn't already written a couple of books, I probably would say you should write a book. But he should write a book. He should write a book on how to run a decision-making government, make people happy, stay out of the wilderness, keep the faith, and not wander the desert for 40 or 50 years, which is where you guys are obviously clearly going.

And you know what the really awkward part about the Legislature is? Obviously, the Green Party is much more popular than you

guys are by polling, but they get two questions a day and you get 40 questions a day. I always think, man, those 40 questions could be put to better use. I'm sure that the Green caucus would agree, they could probably put those –

[Interjections]

[4:55 p.m.]

Hon. S. Myers: Yeah, and maybe if you guys had to tighten up your question to just asking six questions, maybe you'd get better at it, or I don't know, maybe get some help to write them. Maybe the Geoff Townsend model doesn't work anymore, and maybe you just need to reflect.

I get it. The media won't ask you why you won't have a leadership. When we were in opposition, they would ask us every second day why –

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: Every week, Paul MacNeill said we needed a leader. I think he likes this government. I think that's why he's not saying boo to you guys, because he doesn't care if you ever get a leader. He wants people to continue to be happy. He wants a government that cares about all Islanders equally, whether you live in Charlottetown or whether you live in rural Prince Edward Island, a government that cares about each individual equally. That's this government, and I'm quite proud to be a part of it.

As you know – everyone knows in here – I'm a staunch rural supporter, so I have big ties in rural Prince Edward Island. I have big feelings about rural Prince Edward Island and things that we can do, but I'm more than happy to work with my associates in Charlottetown. I have lots of friends in Charlottetown doing great things.

We can blend together a perfect government by keeping in mind that all parts of Prince Edward Island matter equally, which is what this government has done – to the tune of... In the 25-year history of tracking governments, this government has been the most longstanding popular government.

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: It's really a great affirmation of the work that we do over here.

To be fair, every member has their ups and downs. Whether you're in government or whether you're in opposition, you have your ups and downs. I'm sure there are way more downs when you're in opposition than there are in government, but everybody over here works hard to get their work done, and they put their heart and soul into bringing projects forward.

I get it. We get criticized by the anti-sunny-ways party over there. I'm sure that some of our members get down on themselves because they're always being singled out or there's always so much negativity. But boy, oh boy, oh boy, when you get a poll that says 59 percent of the people think you're fantastic....

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: Well, it makes you feel like the reality isn't being represented in here very well. The reality isn't being represented in here very well.

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: Well, I'm actually quite modest about it. I am.

[Laughter]

[Interjections]

Hon. S. Myers: They don't like to hear it. It probably won't make CBC.

I remember, we would get a bad poll – we were in opposition, and John Jeffery would drive every street in Georgetown and Cardigan to see if he could see my vehicle, and get me on camera, so I could just get pinned on what a terrible day it was...

And you know what? Really shocked. Today, generally, this would be the worst news you could get as a political party. Generally, you would be over trying to make a deal to get the House closed, but it doesn't appear that you're interested. I think you like wallowing in it, to be honest.

Sometimes, sadness is an easy place to live. It would be great if we could help some of these members over here brighten up. I know the sun hasn't shone in a month. Since the House opened, we haven't seen the sun. Maybe one day of sunshine and the sunny ways will come back, and we'll see the friendly that I used to see from over there.

I've seen you all smile before, so it's not like you don't know how to smile. I've seen you say nice things before, so I know it's not that you don't know how to say nice things; I truly believe that you do. And it's not that I think you don't care about your constituents or the job you do; I honestly believe you do. I just think you're struggling to put it all together. It's like a puzzle. It's like you have six different puzzles and none of the pieces for any of it.

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Hon. S. Myers: Oh, you're not enjoying this?

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hour has been called.

Minister, could you adjourn debate with a seconder?

Hon. S. Myers: I'll adjourn debate with the hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, that this House adjourn until Wednesday, November 27th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a good evening, everyone.

[The Legislature adjourned until Wednesday, November 27th, at 1:00 p.m.]