



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings**

(Hansard)

Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Wednesday, 27 May 2026

No. 35

The Honourable Brad Trivers, Speaker

Published by Order of the Legislature

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

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

Speaker – Hon. Brad Trivers

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Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
Arsenault , Gilles (IND)	Évangeline-Miscouche (21)	
Bell , Hon. Zack (PC)	Charlottetown-Winsloe (10)	Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning Minister responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs
Bernard , Karla (G)	Charlottetown-Victoria Park (12)	Third Party Whip
Bevan-Baker , Peter (G)	New Haven-Rocky Point (17)	Third Party House Leader
Burridge , Hon. Jill (PC)	Stratford-Keppoch (6)	Minister of Finance and Affordability
Compton , Hon. Darlene (PC)	Belfast-Murray River (4)	Minister of Land and Environment
Croucher , Hon. Robin (PC)	Souris-Elmira (1)	Minister of Education and Early Years
Curran , Brendan (PC)	Georgetown-Pownal (2)	
Deagle , Hon. Cory (PC)	Montague-Kilmuir (3)	Minister of Health and Wellness
DesRoches , Tyler (PC)	Summerside-Wilmot (21)	Government Whip
Dillon , Susie (PC)	Charlottetown-Belvedere (11)	Deputy Speaker
Dollar , Hon. Kent (PC)	Brackley-Hunter River (15)	Minister of Housing and Communities
Henderson , Robert (L)	O’Leary-Inverness (25)	Opposition Whip
Hudson , Hon. Ernie (PC)	Alberton-Bloomfield (26)	Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy

Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
Lantz , Hon. Rob (PC)	Charlottetown-Brighton (13)	Premier Minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs
MacEwen , Sidney (PC)	Morell-Donagh (7)	
MacFarlane , Matthew (G)	Borden-Kinkora (19)	Leader of the Third Party
MacKay , Matthew (PC)	Kensington-Malpeque (20)	Government House Leader
MacLennan , Hilton (PC)	Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke (23)	
McNeilly , Gordon (L)	Charlottetown-West Royalty (14)	Opposition House Leader
Perry , Hon. Hal (L)	Tignish-Palmer Road (27)	Leader of the Official Opposition
Ramsay , Hon. Barb (PC)	Summerside-South Drive (22)	Minister of Social Development and Seniors Minister responsible for the Status of Women
Redmond , Hon. Jenn (PC)	Mermaid-Stratford (5)	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence
Simpson , Carolyn (L)	Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park (9)	
Thompson , Hon. Bloyce (PC)	Stanhope-Marshfield (8)	Minister of Agriculture Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General
Trivers , Hon. Brad	Rustico-Emerald (18)	Speaker
Vacant	Cornwall-Meadowbank (16)	

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

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Thank you, everyone. Lovely to see everybody back for another day in the Legislature – my colleagues, staff, and Pages here at the Legislature. I'm looking forward to another day of debate.

Welcome, everybody in the gallery. Nice to see you. I understand we have a social studies class from École-sur-Mer, along with Jeanette Arsenaault and Austin Stewart. Is that correct? Lovely to have you; always enjoy having students here. Please enjoy the proceedings.

[1:05 p.m.]

Great to see George Dignan back again. I understand that he's decided it's much better watching live from within the gallery than it is online, so let me just say that to everyone watching online. Come in and visit sometime. It's great to be here live. It's like a baseball game – better in person. So, thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I want to first start by telling you that this morning I had the honour of presenting the Public Service Commission's Employee Recognition Awards. Each year, we recognize five outstanding individuals or teams whose dedication and leadership strengthen our government and the services we provide to Islanders.

These five awards are:

The Engagement and Collaboration Award, and this year, that went to Ryan Pineau.

We recognize the Premier's Leadership Award for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the Public Service; that went to Jessica Walker in Social Development and Seniors.

The Departmental Innovation Award was awarded to the provincial mobile X-ray service team.

The Douglas MacMaster Memorial Occupational Health and Safety Award – this is the 20th year that this has been awarded on behalf of Douglas MacMaster, and his family was there. He worked for the public service for a long time and was very passionate about workplace safety. This award this year went to the joint occupational health and safety committee in the Prince County highway maintenance division.

And finally, the Premier's Excellence in Leadership Award went to Sherrie Langley.

Congratulations to all the recipients. I want to extend my sincere congratulations to all of them. Your dedication, professionalism, and commitment to excellence make the Public Service Commission one of the best places to work, and your contributions strengthen the entire public service and the province.

As we move into the warmer weather, I want to remind all drivers to please stay alert and watch for bicycles and motorcycles on the road. These riders are smaller, they're harder to see, and more vulnerable to traffic. A shoulder check, a careful lane change, and a moment of patience can prevent a serious collision. Let's all do our part to keep every road user safe. Remember to look twice and save a life.

I want to congratulate UPEI Panther alumnus Joel Ward on advancing to the Stanley Cup Final with the Vegas Golden Knights. Joel now serves as assistant coach with the Golden Knights, but he first made his mark here on Prince Edward Island spending four seasons with the UPEI Panthers. During that time, he distinguished himself not only as an exceptional athlete but as a leader and a role model whose impact was felt both on and off the ice. Congratulations, Joel.

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

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise and welcome those watching online and in particular, those watching from District 27 Tignish-Palmer Road. Welcome to everyone joining us in the gallery today – social studies class from École-sur-Mer from Summerside, along with Austin Stewart

and Jeanette Arsenault, teachers. Welcome to today's proceedings. Harvey Collicutt, welcome back to – I guess several times this session you've here, and it might be several more before we're finished.

While I'm on my feet, I do want to send best wishes to all of those in the province who will be attending the Skills national championship on the 28th and the 29th. They'll probably be heading out today for that. All the best of luck. We look forward to seeing the results come back because we do have some very fine young individuals that are very competitive nationally. They have proven that in the past, and they will prove that again this year.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of work today; let's get at it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon to you and my colleagues in the Legislature and the staff, clerks, and Pages, and everyone in the gallery today. Great to see the staff and students out from École-sur-Mer. Welcome. Hope you enjoy the proceedings. And Jen Poirier, nice to see you out in the Legislature as well, and everybody watching online.

On Friday, I had acknowledged Lennie Gallant, who was an Island winner of an East Coast Music Award for Folk Release of the Year. Three other Islanders were added to the awards list over the weekend: Colin Buchanan, Producer of the Year; Logan Richard, who did so well at the Music PEI Awards a couple of months ago, received the award for Solo Artist of the Year – congratulations to him; and the Stompin' Tom Award was presented to Rhéal Arsenault.

[1:10 p.m.]

Congratulations to all of the Island winners of an award and everybody who participated and was nominated for an award. We have such a vibrant musical scene here on Prince Edward Island.

Also, the Wo He Lo Spring Clothing Sale took place last week and raised a record-breaking \$61,000 for the Queen Elizabeth Hospital – amazing support for the QEH. Proceeds from the sale of the clothing went towards the purchase of a resuscitator and warmer for the NICU at the

QEH. I'd like to thank the co-chairs, Jennifer MacDonald and Shelley Lea-Lantz, and all members of the group who gave up so much of their time to make the sale such a success.

Finally, on Friday, I hope to be joined by the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty at the Kinkora Regional High School's 5th Annual Relay for Life. It's a wonderful event. The students and staff all get together for the day and raise money for the Canadian Cancer Society. This year, they have a goal of \$14,000. They're over halfway there as of today, and I have no doubt that they're going to reach or surpass that event. Weather permitting or weather not permitting, it'll be a wonderful event with engagement from the students and the staff and everybody at the school in support of a great cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wishing everyone a great day of debate here in the Legislature.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I'd just like to say good afternoon to my colleagues and staff and our Pages, Nate and Connor, who are with us today, everybody joining us in the gallery, and everybody tuning in online.

I just wanted to take a second to congratulate four Trade HERizons alumni, which is a program offered through Women's Network: Karena Doucette, Cassandra MacLeod, Erin McNally, and Lindsay Myers. They all graduated from trades programs at Holland College, so I just wanted to congratulate them.

I also wanted to wish my mom a very happy birthday. Her birthday is coming up, and my daughter, Gracie – her birthday is coming up as well. She's going to be 18, so don't blink, because that goes by in a heartbeat – 18 years old. Anyway, I can't wait to see where you go from here.

With that, have a good day, everybody.

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Well, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to everyone watching in District 1, especially our

hardworking farming community and fishers. They've been having a heck of a start to the season, let me tell you, weather-wise.

I want to also welcome the grade 9 social studies students from École-sur-Mer. I had the opportunity to tour your school – beautiful school. I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

Finally, as the Premier had mentioned, George Dignan is here today. When he comes in, he generally gives a little wave, and I think it's for me – maybe not my seatmate, but we have a little argument on that. We usually have a little conversation about our same great hairstyle. Welcome today, George.

Thank you.

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

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome everyone back for another day of debate. To those joining us, our grade 9 students, welcome, and of course to my dad, and all those tuning in from District 5 Mermaid-Stratford.

It's a milestone day in our home. Today, our daughter and all of her grade 9 colleagues from Birchwood are having their semi-prom. As the member just mentioned how time flies really quickly, I feel like we just started at Birchwood, and here we are getting ready to wrap up our time there. I want to thank all the parents for all their time organizing and volunteering to ensure that they have a great event, and I wish all of the students a fun, safe evening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to welcome everyone back today. In particular, those watching at home in District 9 Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park. A special nod to the students; I hope you enjoy your time with us today. A special hello, too, to Jennifer Poirier, who's joining us here in the gallery. Jenn is a strong advocate for students with learning disabilities. It's so good to see you, and it's great to see you back with us again today. Hi.

So, to that, I wish everyone a great debate. Have a good day.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, want to acknowledge George Dignan here. I know he has two relatives in this Legislature. He's in my corner today.

[Laughter]

R. Henderson: So, be prepared, minister.

I also want to acknowledge a constituent, or maybe a former constituent. He still has a summer home in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness, but Harvey Collicutt is here. His summer home is on the MacDonald Shore Road, so he's probably checking those Transportation budgets online here coming up. He wants to see some work done on that road, probably.

[1:15 p.m.]

The other part of it for watchers online is that Bethany's dog, Harv, is a great watcher of the Legislature, and he gets really excited when I speak. Harvey sent me a clip of Harv barking at the TV watching me speak. So, at least I'm inspiring somebody here, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to say welcome to my colleagues here today and anybody that happens to be watching from District 23.

It's not very often I get the opportunity to welcome a class here from my district, École-sur-Mer, and Jeanette and Austin; thank you very much for coming down. It's a pleasure to see you, and I hope you enjoy today's proceedings.

Thank you.

Speaker: [French was spoken]

Hon. Z. Bell: [French was spoken]

Thanks so much for coming in today.

I do want to also mention George Dignan – two constituents in the House today here – and Harvey Collicutt. Harvey and I had the opportunity to watch Harvey's granddaughter last night as part of the Air Cadets. It was the 85th annual ceremonial review down at the Charlottetown Armoury. I can't say enough great things about the cadets, what they do, and all of the instructors, all of the time that's put into it, and the cadets themselves. They do such a great job.

I do just want to quickly congratulate Warrant Officer 1st Class Gavin Wells, squadron commander. I don't know all the awards that he won last night, but he won a ton. Also, to the special guest, the commanding officer, LCol C.Y. Michaud, who did an unbelievable job of the ceremonial review. Congratulations to all the award winners.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I did want to mention a couple of things going on in my district this weekend, both of them strengthening and helping communities through sharing.

The first is the 19th annual Canoe Cove perennial sale. That's this Saturday from nine until noon at Lloyd Inman Park in Canoe Cove. It's where you can come and meet your neighbours and have some free coffee and muffins and buy perennials and trees. The funds raised from that will go to replacing the roof on the Canoe Cove school.

The second one is the Clyde River Women's Institute food-sharing stand, which is back for the second year. That's in the parking of the Clyde River Community Centre. Stuff you grow yourself – bring it, leave it, and share it with your neighbours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome to everyone here in the gallery and those watching online.

I just want to make note that this Thursday, May 29th at the Charlottetown Brewing Company is the Lady Ball. It's in support of ovarian cancer. I wanted to say thank you again to the three Js – Jennifer Bowness, Jennifer MacPherson, and Jillian Forbes – in making this event possible. I am going to be cheering loudly and proudly from the sidelines as the Minister of Finance and Affordability struts her stuff on the catwalk at the Lady Ball.

I'm really looking forward to Thursday night. It's always a great night out of fun and raising funds for ovarian cancer.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Welcome to my colleagues. Welcome, everyone joining in the gallery. It's great to see some students here.

The main reason for me to stand is I want to give an update on the turtle story. My seatmate said maybe it could be a Netflix series, but anyway, I just wanted to update the House that Fitz Corcoran has received his adopted turtle certificate. I made arrangements for that to happen. Through Ontario, you can adopt a turtle. His parents reached out to me and said that they talked to him about the turtle and how much happier he is in his natural environment than living in their house. He is thrilled. You get a stuffed turtle, you get a certificate, and he understands how important it is to keep turtles in their natural environment.

So, I want the House to be updated. Thank you.

[Hear, hear!]

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Responsibility and Leadership in Government

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

If confusion burned heating fuel, this government could finally lower energy costs for Islanders.

This PC government talks a lot about leadership, but Islanders are starting to wonder who's actually in charge, because every time there's a problem, apparently somebody else is responsible. Health care wait times? Somebody else's fault. Health crisis? Somebody else's fault. The worst deficit position in the country? Apparently that just happened all on its own, just like potholes appear after the winter.

[1:20 p.m.]

This government always seems to have an excuse, a press release, or somebody else to blame. And while Islanders are asking for transparency, vision, and accountability, this government keeps offering photo ops, talking points, and announcements about future announcements.

Islanders deserve leadership that takes responsibility, not a government that spends like there's no tomorrow and governs like there's no yesterday.

The reality is simple: when you've been in power this long, eventually you stop being able to blame the previous government, Ottawa, inflation, the weather, or Mercury being in retrograde, because at the end of the day, blaming everyone else is not leadership; it's the clearest sign of a government completely in over its head.

Thank you.

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

Representing District 9

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As this session draws to a close, I want to sincerely thank the residents –

[Interjections]

C. Simpson: Well, it's coming to a close – someday.

I want to sincerely thank the residents of Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park for their continued trust and support. It is the greatest

privilege of my life to represent D9 in this House.

Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park is a vibrant, diverse, and beautifully unique community made up of incredible people from all walks of life, and that diversity is truly one of its greatest strengths. You are my priority. It's your voices, your stories, and your concerns that guide everything I do.

The role of the opposition is to hold government to account on behalf of all Islanders, and I am proud to say that as a caucus, we have worked together to do exactly that. Because of you, the residents of D9 and beyond, the true pressures facing Islanders have been heard in this House.

Together, we have spoken to the challenges in our schools and early years centres, the weight of the affordability and cost of living crisis, and the need for economic development that works for everyone. Your experiences gave voice to small businesses navigating red tape, people trying to access health care, and families who deserve stronger support from this government. We have also helped move the dial on legislation that one day will better protect victims of intimate partner violence and children who find themselves away from the safety of their homes.

This progress belongs to you, the residents of Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park and beyond. I remain committed to championing what Islanders need most: healthier communities, supported families, and a government focused on the priorities that truly matter.

D9, you are my priority today, tomorrow, and always.

Thank you.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Islanders are being asked to trust massive long-term energy decisions while nobody in government seems willing to clearly say who is actually in charge of making them. Government

blames IRAC, IRAC points to Maritime Electric, and Maritime Electric points back to government, while Islanders are left wondering who is ultimately going to be accountable when ratepayers get stuck with the bill for decisions being made right now. The longer this goes on, the more this government looks completely overwhelmed by decisions it should already have a handle on.

Energy infrastructure (further)

Question to the Premier: Who is ultimately making the decision on new generation for Prince Edward Island – Cabinet, IRAC, or Maritime Electric?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

The goal of this government is to empower this province to make independent decisions about our energy future with community energy, renewable energy resources.... I expect that the future in the energy space is going to involve a lot of innovation, both in technology and in our regulations, and that's what this government is focused on: modernizing our regulations so that we can support Prince Edward Island going forward with a secure energy future, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, in recent years, PEI has seen firsthand how vulnerable our energy systems can be during major storms like Hurricane Fiona, which left thousands of Islanders without power and exposed serious concerns around grid resilience and energy security. At the same time, demand on our grid continues to rise from electrification, population growth, and increased energy use, but this government is doing nothing to prepare our province for the next big weather event.

Question to the Premier – actually, I'm going to ask this one to the Minister of Energy: What is this government doing to build a more diverse and resilient energy mix here on Prince Edward Island so Islanders are better protected during future extreme weather events and energy disruptions?

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question that he has brought forward.

[1:25 p.m.]

With regard to what we're doing, you look – we have put in an application for a nation-building project for cables under Northumberland Strait, to supply that power source there. Recently, there was an expression of interest issued by the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy for battery storage. That expression of interest resulted in 40 replies, and that just gives an indication right there of the interest of the partners that we have, that we will have to address the energy needs of this province going forward.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Provinces are increasingly working together on regional energy opportunities, including transmission, renewable generation, storage, strengthening connections between provinces to improve reliability and to reduce costs for taxpayers.

Question to the Premier: What discussions has this government had with our Atlantic partners about expanding regional energy co-operation and how is Prince Edward Island positioning itself to benefit from future Atlantic energy projects and interprovincial connections?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously I talk a lot about interprovincial connections when we talk about the sub-sea cables. I speak to Susan Holt about that project all the time and our federal partners about that. In fact, it's well known we have an application before Natural Resources Canada to begin the work on planning and designing the replacement for the undersea cables.

But also, I think I'm on the record here just last week letting the House know that myself and the other two Maritime Premiers – I'm not sure if the Premier of Newfoundland is involved in this discussion – but certainly we have a meeting with Minister Hodgson to discuss regional

energy collaboration. I know that the concept of an independent system operator for the entire region will be on the table, something I've already discussed with my regional partners.

Certainly, I am going to continue discussions with my regional partners about energy cooperation in our region. We're too small to stand alone in our own energy silos. I think the federal government's national electricity strategy will go a long way to helping us advance all of these discussions in making concrete movement towards the future.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Let's hope it's not all talk and that we actually see action soon, Mr. Speaker.

Hurricane Fiona showed Islanders the importance of having reliable, local energy generation and stronger infrastructure in place before disaster strikes. Islanders want to know what this government is planning, not just for today's demand, but for the long-term future of our province.

Question to the Minister of Energy: Beyond announcements and studies, what concrete investments is this government making to increase energy generation on Prince Edward Island to create a more reliable, diversified, and storm-resilient energy system for Islanders?

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

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

You look at some of the initiatives that are taking place right across the province, but certainly with regard.... Let's take a look at the western part of the province. We have in Skinners Pond the wind farm that's going to be developed there and the number of megawatts of that wind farm actually is going to supply into the grid. The Member from O'Leary-Inverness – right in his riding, a major solar farm development that is taking place there in partnership between the Province with a partnership with the First Nations and the federal government.

That's just a couple of examples of initiatives that our government is taking with our partners

to look at the long-term supply of energy to this province of ours.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

He spoke of the wind farm in Skinners Pond. That was supposed to be up and running quite a while ago. It may be up and running in 2028, but nothing has even been started there yet. We talk about the solar panels, that's put forward by Lennox Island First Nations and the federal government. We're wondering what this province is doing to help secure energy here in Prince Edward Island.

I'm going to change it up a little, Mr. Speaker. I'm now going to go to – provinces are increasingly working together on regional energy opportunities including transmission, renewal generation storage, strengthening connections between provinces, and improved reliability to reduce (Indistinct) taxpayers.

[Interjection]

Hon. H. Perry: It was the same one; I grabbed the wrong paper. My apologies.

I wrote my rebuttal on the other one. Sorry. I knew we were going to somebody else.

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, take 2.

[1:30 p.m.]

Islanders are already stretched thin from trying to keep up with power bills, groceries, rent, and mortgage payments while government keeps making decisions that could drive costs even higher. Families are making sacrifices every single day while this government keeps spending like somebody else is going to pay that bill.

Fiscal management (further)

Question to the Minister of Finance: At what point does this government recognize Islanders cannot keep paying for this government's confused priorities and expensive mistakes?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

We've been doing everything we can to ensure that we're keeping as much money as we can in Islanders' pockets. I go back to the personal income tax relief that has been tens of millions of dollars just this year alone. That's \$20 million staying in Islanders' pockets – add on the Island essentials benefit, add on the PEI Child Benefit that we put in place last year and enhanced this year by \$50 a child. We're doing everything we can that we can do in order to keep more money in Islanders' pockets.

I actually have another statement again today that will put more dollars in Islanders' pockets.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's going to be future generations that are going to be spending for your guys' overspending. We have the worst deficit per capita in Canada. Moody's and S&P now have warned of Prince Edward Island's worsening financial position and growing debt burden. Despite those warnings, this government continues moving toward massive long-term spending decisions, while refusing to clearly explain what the final cost to Islanders may actually look like.

So, more and more this government is starting to look completely in over its head when it comes to managing both the province's finances, and the province's energy future.

Question to the Minister of Finance: Can the minister guarantee Islanders these decisions will not leave them paying even higher power bills and higher costs in the years ahead, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

When we are making decisions, we are keeping Islanders at the centre of those decisions. There are a lot of pressures right now that we are dealing with, but as a government we are ensuring that Islanders are protected. We are

investing where they're telling us to invest to help them out in their day-to-day. That's exactly what we're doing.

We can't control electricity rates, but we're going to work with our utility, we're going to work in a regional way with other provinces to figure out the best way to secure our energy in a reliable way and affordable way throughout Atlantic Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier this sitting, we asked the Minister of Finance and Affordability about this government's ballooning travel budget. At the time, the minister told Islanders that government was looking to reduce travel and find savings. A few weeks later, the Minister of Social Development and Seniors travelled to the north to participate in a meeting of ministers responsible for seniors that the majority of other ministers attended virtually.

Ministerial travel

Question to the Minister of Finance and Affordability: At a time when Islanders are being told there's no money for key supports and programs, how can this government justify sending a minister across the country for a meeting many others attended virtually?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

Our rule of thumb has been – and we have reduced travel budgets; we absolutely have done that, you see that in the budgets that we're seeing – is if you can attend virtually, do it. FPTs are important. When you sit at national tables and you're bringing seniors' concerns from Prince Edward Island to that national table, that is important and it's key. It's an important role in a minister's mandate to ensure that they're bringing PEI concerns to that national table, and that's exactly what the minister was doing. FPTs are a priority, and I stated that back when we had this discussion earlier.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Money for early learning and childcare centres, no. Money for interns and opportunities and Islanders, no. Money for oyster producers worried about losing their livelihoods, no. But money for a trip, yes.

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors: Will you please explain to this House the benefit of you travelling personally there and not attending virtually?

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

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

It was very important that I be there. There's a lot of information exchanged at those meetings. It was the second one that I attended in over three years. I did one in Moncton one time. So, that's really my first one. But it was really beneficial and I brought lots of information back to Prince Edward Island and shared what we're doing here with the rest of the country. It was very beneficial for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:35 p.m.]

In August 2024, PEI's Child and Youth Advocate issued five formal recommendations to the Province aimed at removing barriers to classroom participation for children with complex educational support and needs. In July 2025, the advocates progress report stated that the five recommendations had not been fully implemented. Two were rated as partially implemented, and three were rated as showing no implementation at all. The advocate describes the pace of progress as exceeding slow.

Child and Youth Advocate recommendations

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: What is the current implementation status of each of the five recommendations issued by

the advocate, and for each recommendation, will you please supply us with a target date for completion?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: I find it very interesting; she basically ignored the Child and Youth Advocate's advice here just a couple weeks ago.

Member, I will take back information on where we are with that. There are a number of recommendations that the Child and Youth Advocate has made that we fully support. There are some that we kind of pushed down based on our priorities. I'm very, very proud of the work that's being done in our department alongside our two school authorities, to advance the safety and security of our students in our system. But as far as where we're at with those recommendations, I can bring that back.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister is absolutely right. I'm not afraid to make a stand when it's right to do so.

The Premier and Minister of Education and Early Years received a letter from a mom outlining the direct impact to her child with diverse needs as a result of the loss of pedagogical support. The SNA that was hired to support her child is picking up the roles of the lost support staff. Her concern, rightly so, is that her child's needs aren't being met.

I also spoke to a dad who told me this week that he saw several staff changes with the people caring for his child over the last few weeks, and he said that can't be good for his child, which of course it is not. When he asked why, he was told it was because of the reduction in their staffing. Both parents are seeing the quality beginning to change and are concerned.

Early learning and child care funding (further)

Question to the same minister: What would you say to these parents whose children are living the direct result of the decision to reduce the

pedagogical support and seeing the quality of the service lessen?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: The first thing that I would say to that parent is that this member knows better. That's the very first thing that I would say.

That staff – I can't speak to why there was different staff with that child at whatever centre the member is talking about, but I can say with utmost certainty it's not because of a reduction in pedagogical staff. In fact, pedagogical staff and support is still in place until the end of June.

Thank you very much.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What happened – yes, the pedagogical support is in place until the end of June, but people aren't going to wait until they find new jobs. So, people have left. What happened was, in that case, the staff simply left, which is what I said they would do. So, the minister is exactly right; I do know what I'm talking about.

There are parents of high school children with special needs who were told that as of June 15th this year, their child's school year has ended. This has resulted in parents needing to either find care or take time off work, and one mom I know for sure has had to do so without pay. The EAs are still in the school. AccessAbility Supports doesn't kick in until after the school year ends – the end of June.

Question to the same minister: Minister, why wouldn't programming be prepared for these students to finish out the school year rather than put this pressure on families?

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

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

That is actually a very good question. I know nothing about this situation. That decision is made operationally at our school authority level. Certainly I'll talk to the member after Question Period and get a little more information on it,

and I will go back to the department and try and find some answers on that one.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

We know the oyster industry in PEI is currently under tremendous duress. We have seen both federal and provincial governments announce programs to help, but once again, this government can't seem to get the details out the door to those impacted the most. We all heard about the Richards on CBC radio this morning.

Oyster industry (further)

Question to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning: Why do you have such uncertainty and lack any details in the ability to assist the industry's workforce where many have no work for the coming year? When will the details of the workforce development programs be available to oyster fishers?

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

[1:40 p.m.]

Hon. Z. Bell: Well, I'm very thankful that the hon. member asked the question, and I know that he has shown a true passion for this. One of the main reasons right now, hon. member – as you will remember, last year when I was in the role of the Minister of Fisheries, the announcement that we made maybe didn't have the best resounding.... I guess the industry was kind of torn. You know, it's great that you're making an announcement; we don't know if this is tailored to it.

So, what we have done, and I told this member this before – we have an advisory board that we sit with, with the Shellfish Association, the PEI Seafood Processors Association, the Aquaculture Alliance, and I think if I didn't mention – I think that's the group. Anyway, when we are meeting as a group, we are going to make sure that all the terms of reference are finalized so that all the groups that are being affected will be in line and in stock with the announcements and when we release the details of the programs.

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

R. Henderson: Well, that’s appreciated to know that there’s a process in place, but it’s when. This is the part that everybody’s been so frustrated – but there are programs like the self-employed businessperson program where persons on EI can commence their own business while receiving income, while receiving EI benefits.

Question to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning: Let’s just make this simple, any shellfish labourer who has worked in the last year with a grower or a processor or any publicly licensed oyster fisher or grower who holds a licence be eligible for the program. Just make it simple.

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Okay, I don’t know specifically all the details, but I think what the hon. member is talking about might actually be a federal program. Like I said, I do want the member to understand that these are questions that are being asked at that advisory board table to make sure that when these programs are being announced, questions like that would be answered. Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: I’m trying to make it simple. We know the people that are affected; it’s shellfish labourers, public fishers, and growers. Make them all eligible. It’s the same Training PEI funding through the LMDA fund. The federal government does contribute \$25 million federally through an agreement and it’s administered by SkillsPEI, under which 70 percent of the tuition for a post-secondary student is covered by the program.

Some (Indistinct) programs are even 100 percent. Why can’t any shellfish labourer, fisher, or grower who wishes to take program to further improve their employable skills – either as a truck driver, health care worker, or even return to university – have their tuition paid for? It seems that if you want to be a truck driver, there’s some funding, but anything else, there doesn’t seem to be much for it.

Make this easy, minister. Let’s just make everybody eligible that’s impacted by this program. They’re all impacted. Will you do this?

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

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

Well, just because the hon. member is asking a question on the floor of the Legislature, it doesn’t mean that I will say that I will do that. But I’m sure this is something that he’s brought up through the industry. I think it’s so important that as we are trying to help the oyster industry, which is in a very, very difficult situation. We have numerous departments working, trying to help, and working with the industry. We feel that that is the most important thing.

The hon. Minister of Fisheries – his staff have been focused on this. The minister responsible for Finance PEI has been focused on this as well. It’s something that we will definitely take into consideration, hon. member, and I’m sure it will be brought up at the next advisory board meeting.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This Premier said a number of times that this was going to be a long sitting, which I assumed meant that a lot of work was going to get done for Islanders. Well, I was incorrect. Islanders are exhausted by this government’s reviews, studies, and excuses, while everyday problems keep getting worse. Solutions have been brought forward by the opposition parties, but at every turn, this government actively chooses not to accept these solutions that would benefit Islanders.

Government leadership (further)

Question to the Premier. Mr. Premier, when solutions are brought forward on reducing administrative burdens on doctors, on electricity costs, gas prices, IRAC, issues in our schools, this government’s response is always another review instead of action. Why are you so afraid, Mr. Premier, to make decisions?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I'll point out that the leader of the opposition has tried to bring solutions forward in the Legislature here. Last fall, he brought forward a bill that amended a bill that was not even in existence anymore. This session, he brought forward a bill to amend a piece of legislation that's going to sunset in just a few short weeks. They've brought half-baked bills that are more performance than real, impactful legislation that's been properly consulted and considered.

We're here every day doing the hard work. They get to perform on that side of the House for the cameras. We get to do the hard work and make the hard decisions every day, and that's what we're doing.

[1:45 p.m.]

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

M. MacFarlane: We will continue to bring forward legislation that is well considered, well thought out, and would actually benefit Islanders. We'll not make excuses for doing the work that this government should be doing. Islanders have been asking for years for government to step in and regulate Maritime Electric to ensure that rates are kept as low as possible while keeping our grid maintained and reliable.

Question to the Premier: Instead of taking action, Mr. Premier, you chose to hide behind reviews and delays. Why are you so unwilling to support a change that will actually help Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

This is exactly what I was getting at. He gets to stand up – the Leader of the Third Party – gets to stand up and say something is going to actually benefit Islanders when, on this side of the House, we know better. This is performance on this side of the House. It's politics, bringing forward legislation for the sake of standing up and saying they're doing something. When we look at it, it's no good. We're doing the hard work to make the changes that are necessary to improve Prince Edward Island.

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

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The government is clearly in its thoughts that it knows better than everybody else in this province that it can only come from that side of the House, the good legislation. Islanders know better, Mr. Speaker; Islanders know better.

Here's another one. The Member from Tignish-Palmer Road actually brought forward a real solution this sitting that would have put us in line with other provinces on how we calculate gas prices. This was a commonsense solution but again the Premier chose another review.

Question to the Premier: Why are Islanders made to wait while your government continues to study problems instead of solving them?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I know that Islanders are very frustrated with the price of gasoline here. We've talked about this at length this session. There are factors way beyond the control of Prince Edward Islanders, and I know that Prince Edward Islanders know that. I hope that we find relief from global events that are impacting the price of energy in this province and all around the world. I hope we find that relief soon. What was proposed in this Legislature would not make a significant impact whatsoever on the price of gasoline in this province.

We have a regulated system here – I will say this to rural Prince Edward Islanders – we have a regulated system here in this province that benefits gas vendors in every corner of this province and consumers in every corner of this province. It could be dominated by high-volume retailers in the urban areas if we didn't have the kind of regulation we do. That's the kind of service to rural Prince Edward Islanders, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier continues to blame global events, federal government money when there are solutions that this government has access to that it just refuses to take advantage of.

On health care, Islanders want access to primary care. They want off the patient registry. They want a government that listens to frontline professionals. We had an ER doctor come to the floor of this House asking, indeed begging, for a simple common-sense change to restrict sick notes. Even businesses supported the change but for some reason, this government could not support any action that would benefit Islanders.

Question to the Premier: Islanders, health care professionals, and businesses supported this common-sense solution. Why didn't your government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I alluded to this in my very first answer to the Leader of the Opposition's first question. It's that he was trying to amend a piece of legislation that we know will be sunsetted in weeks, in a matter of weeks.

The new legislation that will come into effect will significantly reduce the need for doctor certificates here in Prince Edward Island. That legislation will come forward, be proclaimed, it will have a beneficial effect for both doctors and for Islanders. That's what I'm referring to when I say they're performing over here, Mr. Speaker. They're performing for the cameras, for Islanders that are watching.

He accuses me of believing that I know best, that I've got all the solutions. That's exactly what he's pretending over here while we're implementing real-world solutions that benefit Prince Edward Islanders.

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

M. MacFarlane: There's none. No real-world solutions in this sitting. I guess this sitting is going to go on for another two months to see these real-world solutions.

[Interjections]

M. MacFarlane: The most obvious place that we need true decisive leadership is with IRAC. For years, the decisions of Liberal and PC governments have created a commission that is no longer trusted by Islanders. But guess what government did. They ordered another review and are pretending that that's actually action.

[1:50 p.m.]

Question to the Premier: When will this government stop hiding behind reviews and start leading on the issues that matter to Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I expect that we'll have significant recommendations about how to modernize and improve our regulatory commission here; how we regulate all kinds of provincial statutes here. We've put an ambitious timeline to consult with Islanders, and that is the main point I want to make here. We're consulting with Islanders, stakeholders, people involved, not bringing solutions that come to the top of our head and bringing them here to the floor without proper consideration.

So, that's what we're doing. We have an ambitious timeline. In six months' time, we'll all have a good sense of how we can improve our regulatory environment here in Prince Edward Island.

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

M. MacFarlane: This government has not shown ambition on anything, Mr. Speaker, in seven years of being in power.

Former Premier Alex Campbell is an example of a Premier who showed decisive leadership on tricky issues during a transformative time in our province. That's the kind of Premier who will be remembered because he not only improved the lives of Islanders while in power but set our province up on a path for growth and success and made difficult – not always popular decisions, but he made decisions.

Question to the Premier: Islanders elect a government to make decisions, not to commission reviews and studies and committees. Why don't you, Premier, issue a full review of your government's performance by sending Islanders to the polls?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

We had the opportunity to honour former Premier Alex Campbell at the Charlottetown Airport when we renamed the facility in his

name. Of course, he did get a lot of things done. He was an impactful Premier on this province.

I'll remind the Leader of the Third Party that Premier Campbell was elected four times and had a lot of time to implement his agenda, and we're looking forward to the same on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a bit of a tough act to follow.

Ensuring that every classroom has qualified adult support for student learning is fundamental to the success of our education system; however, many of our schools continue to have unfilled absences daily due to the availability of substitutes. These shortages have an impact on both staff and students.

Substitute teachers

My question is to the Minister of Education and Early Years: What steps are being taken to ensure that there are adequate substitutes for our schools?

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

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

Ensuring that our students have an educator supporting their learning is very important. We're strengthening our partnership with UPEI, the bachelor of education program both here on the Island and across the country, to attract passionate skilled teachers here in the province. We do have a working committee that's addressing some of the practicum needs in our system.

And look, it's just another great opportunity to thank our educators right across our system for the great work that they do every day for our Island students.

Thank you.

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

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At a time when our schools are facing staffing pressures, it's critical that we maintain integrity while removing any unnecessary barriers and delays that prevent willing and capable individuals from entering the classroom in a timely manner.

Question to the same minister: Will you commit to looking at how we can speed up the process for approval for our substitutes in our system?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Mr. Speaker, I spent the last 16 months looking for ways to make our system more efficient, certainly, and our processes. Certainly willing to look at that. I do believe we've got a pretty good system in place right now for screening and hiring educators.

One thing that I will not compromise on is safety of our Island students. The integrity of the system needs to remain intact. I've done, our department, and this government has done a lot of work to make our system safer for students in the form of criminal record checks and the screening process coming in. I will not compromise on that, but certainly willing to have a conversation on finding more efficiencies.

Thank you.

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

[1:55 p.m.]

S. Dillon: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, we know that growing our workforce is one of the most effective ways to build a stable and sustainable education system. Supporting our Island students to pursue careers in teaching should be a key part of that effort. At the recent UPEI convocation, only 54 percent of the graduating students from the bachelor of education English program were from PEI.

A question to the same minister: Given there is a shortage of teachers and substitute teachers, will you commit to meeting with UPEI to explore how more Island students can have the opportunity to become teachers right here at home?

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

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

I've made that very, very clear – that I've got an open door to my office. I've extended that invitation to all members in this House. I believe there's only one across there that has taken me up on that.

I am always willing to meet with any organization that wants to sit down and talk about our education system and how we can do better by it. Certainly, UPEI is one of those institutions that's a great example of that. So, absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The people I represent and across this province know that family is everything. When a young family is expecting a new addition, it's one of the most exciting times in their lives, but it can also bring a fair bit of worry if they can't access the specific care they're looking for.

We've heard from many families who want the option of midwifery services right in their own community, especially in rural communities where travelling for appointments isn't always easy. We've been working hard to expand health care options, but we know the demand is out there and it is growing fast, and folks are eager to see these services closer to home.

Midwifery services

A question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Can the minister explain why many Islanders continue to face barriers accessing midwifery services particularly in rural communities despite the growing demand for these supports?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

The most simple answer to this would be that we don't have enough midwives to offer this

service. We're currently actively trying to recruit more, the next step being to open a clinic in the Summerside area. But in order to do that, we need to recruit more.

Thank you.

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

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know that infrastructure and programs are only as good as the hardworking people that run them, as the minister had mentioned. We operate in a very competitive environment when it comes to health care workers, and we need to make sure that PEI is the absolute best place for a midwife to set down roots and build a career.

A question to the Minister of Health: What concrete steps will you and the department take to recruit and retain more qualified midwives to Prince Edward Island, and how will these efforts help to improve this access?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'm not sure how they recruit them. I would assume they go out and try and recruit them and find them and bring them to PEI, but the issue being that there's a shortage of them everywhere. It's a very difficult position to recruit, but I know that the recruitment team at Health PEI is doing their best to recruit more midwives. Obviously, we'd like to offer that service across PEI.

I know that right now there's a waitlist of about 20 families to access that service, which is unfortunate, but the reality is that we don't have enough resources. But they're actively working to recruit them.

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

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that it is a competitive work force and it's something that we have to look at.

A question to the minister. Once we work on recruiting and retaining some of these midwives,

will the minister agree that the new Kings County Memorial Hospital would be a good facility for some of these midwives to set up shop when we are able to recruit them? Will the minister commit to working on that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Well, we'll have to get the hospital built first, Mr. Speaker.

No, the next step is Summerside. That commitment has been made, and I think it's the most logical decision, there, to next expand to Summerside. I guess it would be great to have it at the new KCMH as well, whenever that opens, but realistically, we have to recruit for Summerside first.

There are only 400 midwives trained across Canada, so it's an extremely small pool to recruit from, but they're certainly doing their best.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go back to the same line of questions to the same minister.

[2:00 p.m.]

Same thing goes for wage supports. The rural employment enhancement program – or REEP – and Employ PEI as well EDA supported programs provide wage supports to unemployed Islanders. These programs have been a big help to many Islanders over the years.

Oyster industry (further)

Question to the minister: Will you make this easy, again, and state in this Legislature that any shellfish labourer, licensed oyster fisher, or oyster grower can receive 75 percent of their wages supported by the REAP program and if any employer would be willing to step up? Ultimately, minister, you don't need a committee. You don't need to review this. You have the programs. You know who's eligible. A chimpanzee could figure this out.

Will you immediately implement that all shellfish labourers, licensed oyster fishers, and

growers will be able to get this help for supports?

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

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

I don't know if that was an insult that was required. I try to answer the questions as best I can. I do my best to learn each and every day.

I will tell the hon. member that through SkillsPEI – as he would be very aware – it is a continuous intake. Through the department, through employment services, I think we've helped almost 14,000 people within the last year. So, I do want to let the hon. member know that anyone who was wanting to augment their – they can reach out to SkillsPEI at any point in time, specifically on these programs.

The questions you've asked – I've been chatting with my team in between your questions just to make sure that I'll have the proper answers for you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness. You're approaching the line, so be respectful.

R. Henderson: I will try to be, Mr. Speaker.

One of the issues that these programs have – because we have been having a lot of people go into SkillsPEI and they're told they're not eligible. That's the problem. This is why I'm asking the questions. As many shellfish labourers and fishers' EI is about to expire, will you make these programs retroactive so these people can be eligible for these programs?

Question to the Minister: Will you make all shellfish labourers, growers, and fishers retroactively eligible for these programs for any programs that require an EI claim to be active, as their EI is expiring?

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Hon. member, I do appreciate the question. I do think that that is a very hard thing to do. The one thing that I have learned in this role and in the role previous is that a lot of these situations – almost everyone is a unique

situation. I know the hon. member referenced a couple that was on the news the other day.

What I found originally is that every situation seems to be a unique situation, so it's hard to give a complete, carte blanche program for everyone. That's why I do encourage anyone to come and talk to the team at SkillsPEI to be able to better understand their situation. Of course, we do want to help them out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Primary care remains top of mind for all Islanders, and there seems to be some tension in here between various parties today. I just want to help out a little bit. I want to give the Member from Summerside-Wilmot a compliment for trying to set up a public meeting to talk about public care. I know the Greens' strategy was a weird strategy to push the government to run a public meeting, but that never happened. So, this party over here is the only party that listened to Islanders on primary care, had the public meeting, and tabled the documents.

Access to primary care (further)

Question to the Minister of Health or the Premier: Will you schedule in a very important primary care public health meeting so that Islanders have a place to voice their concerns and speak directly to government?

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'm assuming he's referencing the meeting that originally had been scheduled in Summerside. I think there was a number of reasons – and I think good reasons – that came up that we weren't able to have that at the time, but I'll collaborate with the two members from Summerside and the Member from Tyne Valley and see if that's something they'd like to do. I don't have an issue with it, but I'll speak to them and we'll move forward from there.

Thank you.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs.

Summer Community Tour with the Acadian and Francophone Community

Hon. Z. Bell: [French was spoken]

When I started in this role, one of the first things I committed to was to hear directly from the community.

[French was spoken]

[2:05 p.m.]

These discussions were very useful and informative.

[French was spoken]

I want to focus some time now on meeting the community where they're at. I plan to do this annually, rotating between the six Acadian/Francophone regions across the province.

[French was spoken]

The first event will be in the Evangeline area on June 11th from 1 to 3 and Access PEI.

[French was spoken]

The next meeting will be July 14th in Charlottetown at the ATC.

[French was spoken]

Lastly, on September 17th, I'll be in Souris at the Access PEI.

[French was spoken]

Mr. Speaker, I hope everyone will be joining me at one or all three of these meet and greets. The doors are open and I hope there will be a big turnout.

[French was spoken]

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

G. McNeilly: [French was spoken]

You need to come with a little bit of money for these communities because it's very important to keep the language alive.

[Interjection]

G. McNeilly: [French was spoken]

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

K. Bernard: [French was spoken]

I'm happy that you're starting with Evangeline. I'm just hoping that constituents there, their voices are still being heard. I'm happy to hear that this is going to be some that you're doing every year. I think that when we've got pockets of communities in different areas like that – the francophone Acadian community is not small, it's a growing community, a might community.

As was mentioned, I hope that there will be budget attached to that because it's not really in good faith if you're going around to hear what they have to say but no intention of following. I don't think the minister would do that.

[French was spoken]

Speaker: [French was spoken]

The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Education and Early Years Funding

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

Our government remains committed to ensuring our education and early years systems are delivering the best possible results for children, students and their families.

The 2026-2027 budget represents the single largest provincial investment in our early years and K-12 systems in the history of the province – \$101 million is being invested in early years this year. That's an increase of \$15.5 million over last year. To put that into perspective, that represents an increase larger than the entire budget for 2016-2017.

[2:10 p.m.]

That funding helps to preserve the delivery of affordable child care to Island families, not to mention across-the-board wage increases for

sector staff and increased investment for special needs and autism supports. It also includes funding to support the addition of 75 new early childhood educators that are needed to support the 400 additional spaces coming into our system.

We are proud to be delivering our country's gold standard for early years care, and we remain committed to ensuring it remains affordable for Island families for years to come.

This year, we are investing a record \$373 million in the K-12 system. Now, that's an increase of \$23.4 million compared to last year. That additional funding will create 89.5 new full-time equivalent frontline positions across the system, including new educational assistants and youth service workers, new positions to support the implementation of the recommendations of the Jenkins report, and new positions that will better support students right across the system.

There is also increased funding for our educational authorities that will help ensure that we are keeping up with the ever-increasing costs and delivery of the best possible education to our students. In total, we are investing – get this – just over a half a billion dollars to give Island children and students the best possible start in life.

We are developing new programs and policies aimed at improving student safety. We are improving student supports and continuing to invest in programs that make a positive contribution to student wellbeing, including PBIS and student well-being teams.

We are modernizing the system to ensure that all students are included and have an opportunity to learn in an environment that suits their needs. That is why we are investing in a new inclusive education manager and reviewing the way we deliver alternative education and the way we deploy our educational assistants.

I'm confident that these record investments will have a positive impact on our young people and will set them on a path that will improve their overall wellbeing and help them lead fulfilling and productive lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Well, the K-12 investments that are needed to ensure that our students remain in school and that our teachers have the resources and supports that they need to be successful every day facing those students is absolutely essential.

The concern: as they say, the devil's in the detail.

We can talk about the investments, but up until and including today, teachers are overwhelmed. EA positions can't be filled. Students are at record absenteeism. Children are being asked to leave schools.

What we talk about, about meeting the needs of the students and teachers – it doesn't seem to be there. Throwing money at something without a plan for success is just throwing money at something.

There is no denying that teachers, early childhood educators, EAs, SNAs, youth workers, all of the teams attached to early years and schools do everything within their possible means, but classes are getting bigger. They're more diverse. They're more complex, and it's falling on deaf ears. We need to start listening to the frontline staff when they say what they need, and we're not doing that.

There is no denying the incredible investments that have been made, though, in the early years, but I have to point out it began with the provincial Liberals. It was followed up by the federal Liberals, but I'll give credit. Yes, it was maintained by this current government.

Investments in quality early learning and child care, though, have a direct impact on outcomes for children. We don't know what the cuts are in the school system just yet. We have to get that forensic detail. We do know what the cuts are in child care, or some of them.

However, it's high-quality experiences that ensure the best possible outcomes. When the erosion of investment begins, so does the erosion of quality. The loss of the gold standard begins. Cutting support staff and grants for education will, in no small way, devastate our early learning and child care system. A publicly managed system such as ours must be financially supported.

Placing blame on others for a decision made by this government is not leadership. It

demonstrates an effort to find an escape goat. The story being told is that in the eyes of this government, early childhood education is dispensable.

[2:15 p.m.]

I've said it before and I'm not afraid to say it again: the old belief that anyone can do this work and it's basically custodial care is starting to resurface, and that's dangerous. Government will state that they value this work on the one hand and slash it with the other. It's the actions that speak, not the verbiage. Islanders will see through this, but unfortunately, children, families, and educators will ultimately pay the price.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I have to start by saying that this statement reeks of desperation. The largest investment included in there is infrastructure. Infrastructure needs people working inside it. This government either invests in – or cuts – but they invest in the same thing over and over and over and over again expecting different results rather than listening to the frontline, to the teachers, to the EAs, to the support staff, to the counsellors, to all of the people who see what is happening in our school system is not working.

Yet, rather than listen and act with urgency, this minister stood this morning and had the nerve to say that safety was his top priority when he doesn't even listen to the simplest safety things that people within the system are asking for. Before standing up and patting yourself on the back for this, you need to talk to and listen to the people within the system who know better.

When we talk about reviews within the system, the inclusion model review, the action plan was supposed to be released in the fall of 2024. The urgency of this government, the investments they've made, Islanders, please do not be fooled because we haven't seen any results as of yet.

As was mentioned by the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park, it is families and children who suffer. I encourage this government to get onboard with the urgency the rest of this Island is feeling.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

Canada Pension Plan

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

I rise today to tell Islanders about another affordability measure that will provide relief to individuals and employers alike.

Building off the work of past federal and provincial Finance ministers, such as our own Pat Mella who had the foresight in the mid-90's to secure retirement pensions and the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board for all of us, I am pleased to share that this government has supported the proposal to reduce CPP premiums beginning in January 2027.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Canada Pension Plan is a cornerstone of Canada's retirement income system, providing stable and predictable pension income to millions of Canadians. The federal and provincial governments are joint stewards of the CPP, working together to ensure its long-term sustainability.

The most recent review showed that the plan is in such a stable position that, in light of the affordability challenges all Canadians are facing, a slight decrease in contributions won't impact the financial security of the plan, but it will impact Canadians and their employers.

Reducing Islanders' contributions will save employees and employers an estimated \$16 million next year, rising to \$18 million in 2023. What this means in real dollars is that effective next January 1st, an Island employee earning \$70,000 a year will save about \$133 and their employer will save the same. This is money that can be used to pay bills, save, and invest for people and businesses alike.

The reliability and security of the Canada Pension Plan is reflective of how strong governance and careful planning can deliver real benefits.

This government is proud to be a part of this affordability measure that will leave more money in Islanders' pockets, and we will continue to advocate and support policies that support the financial wellbeing of Islanders today and into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'm not sure if it's a pleasure or not because, I mean, the devil is always in the details. We have more to come out.

[2:20 p.m.]

What the minister did forget to say was thank you to the federal Liberal government. I'll say that for you, Mr. Speaker, because it is mandatory federal social insurance program is what it is. It does help many Islanders for retirement, that have disability, or survivor benefits

Any dollars that we can put back in or keep in the pockets of Islanders, I do applaud – but again, I will say that this is a federal program, and I will take this opportunity to thank the Liberal federal Government of Canada.

Thank you.

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

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

The interesting thing about this is that the announcement was about how when you have good fiscal management, you glean the benefits of that, not only today but into the future; when you have poor fiscal management, rather than getting a dividend, you get dinged.

I wish this provincial government would look at what's been done with the CPP. It's managed not by the provinces or by the federal government. It's an independent Crown corporation that looks after this. Indeed, it's been very successful – almost \$800 billion sitting in the coffers at the moment – and that's because of good fiscal management.

Again, when you see good fiscal management, everybody benefits from that – the employees who are paying into the CPP, the employers who are paying into the CPP – and we will see dividends for years to come. I wish we had a provincial government that managed things as well as that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table takebacks to questions on the consideration of estimates for Land and Environment. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table takebacks to questions that arose from Question Period yesterday from O’Leary-Inverness and Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table takebacks to questions in consideration of estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table takebacks from questions in consideration of the estimates to the Department of Justice and Public Safety. I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table takebacks to questions in consideration of the estimates for Executive Council Office. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Orders Other Than Government

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, I’d like to call Motion No. 7 back to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, Motion No. 7 is currently under debate. Debate was adjourned by the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to continue debate.

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

Again, it’s a pleasure to rise today and second this motion – a very important motion to help our small farmers across Prince Edward Island and those in the aquaculture industry.

Small farms have been squeezed out over the past few decades, and it’s unfortunate, but they need to have access to equitable funding – any supports, any programs that are given to this province to help – just like the larger farms that are now in existence on Prince Edward Island.

[2:25 p.m.]

By reducing the red tape, by ensuring that there’s access to funding, all of that will promote sustainable agriculture and aquaculture practices here on Prince Edward Island.

The aquaculture industry – there are quite a few in my area that are in this sector, and of course,

in the last year and a half or two years, they have been hit really, really hard with MSX and Dermo. The future is uncertain. They are looking for this government to support them also. So, anything that they can do to make life a little bit easier to access any of these programs, any funding or anything at all to make their livelihood just a little bit easier would be well accepted.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I do support this motion. I'm hoping that it will get to a vote today because it is a very important issue. Again, I'll thank the mover for bringing this forward and look forward to debate on this motion.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise and speak to this motion today – a motion that I definitely will be able to support. I'd just like to thank the mover and the seconder for bringing it forward.

The mover did a great job yesterday rhyming off all of the farms and whatnot in his district. I didn't think I was as fortunate to have as many farms, but when I started travelling through the district last night and I was looking around, there are quite a few farms in there. There are a lot of small ones, and like the seconder said, small farms are getting pushed out and whatnot.

One of the key parts was that right in the middle of my district, they just developed a new road, the Cairns Boulevard. It went through farmland, and it was at the dismay of a couple of farm owners that were in there, multi-generational farm owners, the Reids. They had their land expropriated. It was private land that was stewarded for generations, and to find out that it can be entered, altered, claimed, and liened without due process made them very upset. It pushed them out of that area.

It accessed 345 acres of farmland that is now available for development in the middle of the city. Some would argue that cities should be where all the development is and farmland should be pushed out, but anybody who lived around there – they're quite a bit different.

So, for a motion to support and provide equitable support to small producers and reduce red tape....

You drive up there now and it's funny; you have a brand-new road, a connector/thruway right through the middle of the city, and it's farmed. All these lots that are available for building – Klondike Farms went in and they tilled the land and they planted potatoes all the way up. They assume that it's going to take a while for those lots to be developed, so rather than having them sit vacant, they farmed them. They got their potatoes in.

Klondike Farms, although they have a lot of acreage within my district that they farm – and there's a lot of big farms that do that, like Linkletter Farms. They have fields right beside my house. There's a field beside my house and I see Linkletter Farms in there farming it.

Kool Breeze Farms is another big one. They have a lot of acreage that wraps right around my area. They farm not just potatoes; they have their pumpkin patch and corn. They have their maze and all that. It's quite the operation, Kool Breeze Farms. Kudos to the Simmons family for what they developed there and for the amount of farmland that they do sustain and do keep running right inside the city. They stretch quite a ways back and they are right in the city. They border my property; I can see where they farm right from the house.

To have a motion like this supporting all the small farmers, the big farmers....

On the top of my district, which just borders Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke's district, there's a farm up there – Woody and Jeanette Pauptit's farm. They've been there for years and years. I remember being a kid and going there and milking cows. It was one of the rules that if you stayed over at Woody's brother Errol's – I got around with Errol's young fellow a little bit – and if you spent the night on a Saturday, you got up first thing in the morning and you milked cows.

Well, let me just tell you, I didn't want to drink too much milk after that. First thing in the morning on a Sunday morning, after being a young fellow out on a night of drinking, you didn't really enjoy milking cows too much.

It was farms like that that were smaller farms that they're still sustaining and they're still

going. We have to do all we can to support them from getting pushed out.

[2:30 p.m.]

There's also the aquaculture part of it, and that's a part that is very, very big for the City of Summerside. When you look at the oyster fishery right now and the devastating times that they're going through, I think back to all the businesses in and around District 21 and all around the city of Summerside that benefit from the aquaculture industry.

I remember – and it wasn't until a number of years after that I realized – when I used to work at MacArthur's Petro-Canada, Brian MacArthur – just an unbelievable businessman – and the little things that he did for the oyster industry. When I look back a number of years later, it paid him off tenfold.

He made sure he had every type of glove. You'd be working there and you had to figure out, "Okay, this went here; that one went there," because he had 40 or 50 different types of oyster gloves out for these oyster fishermen. But every oyster fisherman that went through – they stopped to pick up their gloves, but they didn't just pick up their gloves. They filled up their gas tanks. They filled up their outboards. They picked up their mixing oil. They picked up sandwiches. They picked up snacks for the day. That's how it was at a lot of businesses. The oyster industry is not just that industry; it reciprocates through so many other industries.

When you look at all the farmers and the fishers and all that, a lot of them take pride in the vehicles that they drive. They're all in at the car dealerships – I'm fortunate enough to have a number of them in my district – and they're in there buying new trucks. They're in there buying new vehicles for their spouse or whatnot, or with their spouse. It reciprocates so much through all different businesses, the aquaculture business and the farming business.

Where I have Bedeque Bay border my district, it used to be a great sight this time of year to look across the bay and see 120, 130 boats out there tonging oysters. Until you do it, you don't have that much appreciation for those men and women that are out there, because it is no easy job. Now, to look out there and not have one boat – well, actually, there was one out there the other day, but they were fishing bass. So, our oyster industry is at a crucial point.

The last part of this motion was to ensure fair access to funding. That's something that the Member from O'Leary-Inverness, when he moved this motion, he didn't really touch on that part enough, I don't believe. That's the part that I believe we really have to touch on because this industry, with the state they're in right now, this is where the little guy is getting pushed out.

Right now, for this industry to survive, they need seed; they need all the different things. They don't have seed right now and they're all trying to find it. The Aquaculture Alliance secured however many – two million or 200 million, whatever the number was – pieces of seed for the industry, and the little guy that doesn't have the big operation or that is not tied into that Aquaculture Alliance, they're getting pushed out because they're not able to access seed.

They brought it in and they're only given to their suppliers or their sellers that sell to them or whatnot, and the little guy that's trying to keep things going and trying to find seed can't get it. That is where this part of the motion is the one that I think we really need to touch on. Where this motion has "ensure fair access to funding, and promote sustainable agricultural and aquaculture practices" – that is the big one.

This seed that came in to the Island for the industry to try to rebound and get its feet back underneath itself is seed that was done through ACOA. It's federal funding and it should be available to everybody. It should be exactly like this motion says. It should be fair access to funding, and that's where it is. Funding for our oyster fishers right now, fair access to it, is fair access to the seed. They need to have the seed in their cages. They need to have their seed out there growing so that they can continue to harvest oysters and go on in the future.

[2:35 p.m.]

And it's not just that. A lot of the fishers, and there's a number of them in my area that I've talked to – not as many as some of the other members; some of the other members have a very, very big population of them, but I do have a couple and I know them quite well. I've had a number of conversations with them, and that is the biggest thing for them with this industry right now. They want to survive. They want to get through this, but they tried to get seed and they can't get seed.

And then they hear that the seed was going to be one price for one person to buy, and if you sold back to this company it was going to be a cheaper price, and then they heard that it was seed that was bought and funded by ACOA – a federal program – and now they can't access it.

That's where this fair access has to come in. These people – this is their livelihood, and there's money put in, and it should be accessible right across the Island; there are growers and fishers everywhere.

For someone on the outside looking in, it was pretty simple. If there were 800 cages out there and this guy had eight cages, well then, he gets that percent of the total seed that was brought there. That's how I would assume that it would go, but that's not how it went. That's what's really frustrating these fishers because you're going to have two or three of the bigger players pushing the little players out. That's what we've seen with farmland and with farming in the past, and now we're going to see it with our aquaculture and our aqua farming. That's what we don't need to happen because, like I said, it's not just that one family or that one business; it's the spinoff to them all.

Just the other night – I had a hard time keeping my eyes open in here yesterday; I was quite tired – I was up all night. We had a fire in Summerside. I left home at two o'clock. I went to bed a little early the night before and was a little hungry when I went to bed but said I don't need to eat. Then, at six o'clock when I was leaving the fire, I had a growl on. I went through the McDonald's drive-thru, and it was a busy morning. I said to the woman working the window: "You're having a busy morning." She said one of her workers went home sick, and it's fishing season. She said they're all coming in; they all grab their snacks and their coffee for the morning.

It's that reciprocating business that goes through all the other businesses. It's not just buying gas for their boat or buying gloves to fish with; it's where they gas up, where they get their snacks, where they grab their coffee in the morning. It's exactly the way that that manager at the McDonald's that was working the window said when I was grabbing my coffee: it's fishing season. It's not just aquaculture and the farming that is affected; it's all these other businesses.

So, when this motion is here and it's supporting small farms and aquaculture operators, it's so

much bigger than that. We're not just supporting these small farmers. We're not just supporting these aquaculture operators. We're supporting every other business that reciprocates from the work they do.

When you look at the different clause, "And whereas the design and administration of current programs often favour larger operations that have the staff capacity to handle complex applications, reporting requirements, and regulatory compliance, while smaller businesses focus on their day-to-day operations," that's exactly what we're talking about with the aquaculture, with a couple of these bigger growers coming in and pushing the little guy out.

These fishers have lived and relied on it for a number of years. They've grown a business, they know it inside out, and it's what supports them and their family and all the other businesses around. Now it's in jeopardy because they're getting pushed out.

So, this motion hits a lot of key parts, and I just hope that it will make a little difference bringing it to the forefront that these smaller businesses that are getting pushed out are looking for exactly what this motion says – ensuring fair access to funding.

In a couple different cases, it's not just the funding. Like the Member from O'Leary-Inverness spoke about, it was the program for irrigation that took all of three minutes to be opened up, and then three minutes later the \$1.5 million worth of irrigation was gone.

[2:40 p.m.]

Well, this is the same way. It's not just the irrigation; it's the seed for these fishers, where they had to figure out how they were going to secure it and what they were going to do. They didn't know a price, and then after the price came out or they thought they were going to get a price, the seed was gone. It was all spoken for and there wasn't an opportunity for everybody.

It's one thing to say bring in more seed, which a lot of people say (Indistinct), but it's not that simple because they've got to take that seed and they've got to cross it with the Malpeque oyster; that way we still have a Malpeque oyster.

What these fishers are fishing is world renowned and known – the Malpeque oyster. It doesn't

matter where you go, if they have oysters on their menu, normally you'll see a Malpeque oyster. Everybody knows it around the world, so we can't just take any seed in. It has to be crossed with the Malpeque oyster to get an MSX-resistant Malpeque oyster.

Kudos to the Aquaculture Alliance for bringing in this seed and having the ability to cross it and get the Malpeque oyster out of it, but if it's not available to all fishers, that's where the problem is. We have to make sure that it is available to all fishers. We can't push the little guy out. That's what this motion that I wholeheartedly believe in – and I'm pleased that the Member from O'Leary-Inverness brought it forward because this is exactly what we're talking about.

Like I said about the new road in Summerside, it's pushing the little guy out. The Reid family that farmed that land for years and years didn't have a big operation, but this was generational farming that they wanted to keep, and now they lost a big chunk of their land right in the heart of it.

We see it in so many ways, whether it's through the purchase of seed or whether it's through pushing someone out with expropriating their land. The little guy is normally getting pushed out, and that's what we've got to stop.

The little guy is getting pushed out and it's forced surrender for them; they're being forced to surrender. It's not what they want. They want to maintain and keep doing what they've always done and what they know and what they've grown to perfect over the years, whether it's through farming, whether it's through fishing. They want to continue to do that, but it's through different processes that we're allowing them to be pushed out, and that's where it has to stop.

This motion is calling on support for that little guy, that small farmer and aquaculture operator. It's something that we have to see happen and we need to promote however we can. If there's any way that we can do it, we have to find that out.

I know that our Minister of Fisheries has already said in Question Period in this House that he is going to look into it, that he wants to figure out how this seed was being given out and whatnot. I hope that he gets to the bottom of it, and I hope that this seed is available for all farmers, all fishers. I don't want to see a couple of the big

players push out the little guys. Provincially, if there's something that we can do to stop that from happening, it should be done.

It's the little guys that make it up, and we can't have one or two or three bigger operations pushing all the little guys out and taking over. We've seen it in the last number of years with other parts of the aquaculture industry where a couple of the bigger players took over. We don't want to see it happen with the oyster industry at the state that they're in right now.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion. It is a motion that I do support. I just wanted to, once again, thank the member for bringing it forward.

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

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

I do want to thank the mover of the motion for bringing it forward. Obviously, his passion for agriculture, for aquaculture, for our fisheries, it was evident yesterday when he spoke for – it must have been upwards of an hour on this motion.

I do thank the seconder of the motion as well. I was a little surprised, coming from a farming/fishing community, that the seconder might have spoken a little bit longer for it. But having said that, I've known the Leader of the Opposition for years. I know his passion/interest in agriculture and aquaculture as well.

[2:45 p.m.]

I do want to really applaud the Member from Summerside-Wilmot. It is so refreshing for myself as the Minister of Fisheries as well as a number of other portfolios/ministries, but coming from rural PEI with a farm background to hear an MLA, a colleague, speak with so much passion when he is basically from an urban district – speak with the passion that he has for our primary industries. And you know, I am looking forward to Charlottetown-West Royalty speaking with that same type of passion for our primary industries, as well as any of our other urban MLAs.

As I had mentioned here just a couple of minutes ago, with regard to the motion, first of all, I certainly am 100 percent in support of this

motion. When you look at the first clause in it, “Whereas small and medium-sized farmers and aquaculture operators are essential to Prince Edward Island’s economy...” – absolutely.

One thing that we have to remember too, though, I think, is you look at, over the years, the changes that we’ve seen. I’ll speak first of all with regard to the agricultural industry – the changes that we’ve seen over the years.

As far as the size of operators, I know in my community of Cascumpec area, years ago it was a mixed farm. Pretty well every farm was a mixed farm. They had maybe 10-12 milk cows. They grew maybe 10 or 15 acres of potatoes. They had a few hogs. They had a few beef cattle. They had a few poultry, whether it was layers or whether it was meat poultry. And as the years went by, that certainly did change. I think that we have to always keep in mind when we’re talking about small farms, for example, that there has been that transformation. It has progressed over the years.

I think back to when I started farming, and you looked at what would have been considered a large dairy operation at that point in time; today, it would be a small dairy operation. Same with the potato industry. Ones that were growing 50, 60, even 100 acres back then were considered a very large operator. Today, they’re non-existent, you might as well say. I think that we have to always keep that in mind, but at the same time, keep in mind the importance of our primary industries here in the province of PEI.

We’ve certainly heard the mover of the motion, as well as Member from Summerside-Wilmot, speaking about the aquaculture sector, and in particular, the crisis, the challenges that the oyster portion, if you like, of our aquaculture section is facing. In the motion, it refers to aquaculture operators, but we also have to remember and keep our focus, certainly, not only on the aquaculture portion of the fishery of the oyster industry but also the wild fishery as well.

[2:50 p.m.]

When we look at the aquaculture industry overall, though, whether that is with regard to finfish, whether it’s with regard to mussels, or whether it’s with regard to oysters, it has a tremendous contribution to the economy of Prince Edward Island. You look – over 2,000 jobs are directly or indirectly associated with the

aquaculture industry. Back in 2024, the aquaculture industry contributed in excess of \$96 million to the province of PEI’s economy. So, the importance of it is extremely evident.

When we speak, too, though, with regard to the oyster industry specifically, I have stood here, and coming from the area that I do come from, similar to the member of the mover of the motion, O’Leary-Inverness, we are – face it – in the epicentre of it at this point in time. We are.

I know we may have our discussions back and forth – and I’ll use that word, “discussion”; I won’t take it any further than that – but I know I do appreciate his passion. From the conversations, the sidebars that we’ve had, I do feel that he appreciates my passion for it as well.

That’s the type of thing – like when we can take those what might appears as differences when we’re debating, when we’re in Question Period, what have you – when we can take those, it’s so important to take them, put them aside, and at the end of the day, be able to work together. That, to me, is what we all should be here for – and I think, at the end of the day, that we are all are here for.

You look at the programs. Can government...? I’m not saying provincial or federal. Governments – can they do more? Yes, but I think one of the most important things that government at both levels, whether it’s provincial or whether it’s federal, when we’re speaking about the aquaculture industry, when we’re speaking specifically with regard to the oyster industry, and incorporating into that, the wild fishery.... It’s the listening part – the listening to the industry.

Have we always done the best that we could there? No, we haven’t. We have not, and that’s a disappointment I’m sure to all of us in here, and without a doubt a disappointment to the ones that are involved, the ones that are out there day in, day out, worried about what the future holds for them. That’s a disappointment for them.

And it’s one of the things – I really feel, with regard to the announcement that was made up at Mill River here a couple of weeks ago, that the reception, overall, of the programming that was put in place there was positive.

But to me, too, not only the programs that were put in place but the fact that there was a steering committee, I’ll call it, put in place with regard to

the Aquaculture Alliance, with regard to the PEI Shellfish Association, the oyster processors, the PEI Seafood Processors, to be able to provide that feedback. Okay, these are the parameters of a program. Are those parameters what's needed? What needs to be adjusted here? And then to have ones from the different departments of government involved, listening, and to take that feedback, and to provide it back to the ministers so that we can review it and make adjustments.

It's the type of thing, too – I go back to the importance of having the discussions. I know I had spoken here a few weeks ago with one of the members of the third party. The offer is still open. I'm happy to sit down with you to receive feedback to see how you might be able to work with us and the industry. The member is smiling; I think that she does recall. But those are the types of things, I think – once we get out of Question Period, of speaking on budgets, debate on budgets, motions – that yes, let's work together.

[2:55 p.m.]

I do have to applaud – and I know that the Member from O'Leary-Inverness, we've been back and forth a bit, the comment of me blaming the federal government and so on, and that's fair for him to say that if he likes to use that terminology. But it wasn't blaming the federal government. It was advocating to the federal government. I was glad to see that they came forward with programming, with fairly substantial dollars on that as well. I was pleased with that.

Here a few days ago, I tabled correspondence that I sent through to the federal Minister of Fisheries, and it was referenced here earlier today. One of the great concerns that our fishers have is with regard to: What's my income that I used to have over, say, the winter months, the off-season, with regard to EI?

One of the things that I had put in there, asked the federal minister to speak with her federal counterparts on, was to do something similar to what was done in Newfoundland a number of years ago when the cod fishery collapsed. That was taking instead of the previous X number of months into account for qualification, but expanding that over – if I recall correctly – the previous three-year period. Those are the types of things that I would hope at the very least that the federal government and my colleagues in

Ottawa will take under strong consideration and deliver on.

With that, I know that there are other ones here that most likely do want to speak to this motion. Certainly, we do have challenges – whether it's agriculture, whether it's in the fishery – but again, by working together, I think that we can overcome those challenges. I do want to reiterate my full support for this motion. I certainly hope that everybody within the rails of this Legislature will support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First off, I'd like to thank the mover and the seconder for this motion supporting small farmers and aquaculture operators.

I'd like to speak in support of the small farms and aquaculture operators right across Prince Edward Island, including many in my District 23, whose hard work sustains our communities and our economy. As most of you know, I have a background; I was a small dairy producer at one time. I still go out to the barn and check on things and see how things are going.

From our potato growers, our dairy and beef farms, and our mixed family farms to our shellfish harvesters, oyster leases, mussel operations, and lobster fishers, these Islanders are at the heart of who we are. In places like District 23, agriculture and aquaculture are not abstract sectors. They are our neighbours, our families, and our livelihoods. They rise early, work in uncertain conditions, and carry real risk year after year. They also carry forward traditions that define this Island while adapting to modern demands around sustainability, traceability, and global markets.

But these operators are telling us clearly that the pressures are mounting. Rising fuel costs, feed, seed, and equipment expenses are tightening margins. At the same time, many are navigating complex regulatory requirements that can be difficult to understand and costly to comply with, particularly for smaller independent operators.

We know that in recent years, governments have taken steps to support these sectors through cost-

sharing programs, innovation supports, climate resilience initiatives, and targeted assistance for fisheries and agriculture. Those supports are important and appreciated. I do want to echo the concerns brought forward by the Member from Summerside-Wilmot about the oyster seed availability. I think it's very important that we make sure that everybody has a fair kick at the can at that.

However, for many small scale operators, accessing these programs can still be a challenge. They tell us that application processes are too complicated, timelines are unclear, and eligibility criteria don't always reflect the realities of smaller operators, whether it's a family farm that's outside Charlottetown or a small aquaculture lease operator along our shores.

[3:00 p.m.]

We have an opportunity and a responsibility to make this better. It's about strengthening food security here at home. It is about supporting young people who want to stay on the land or on the water.

This motion calls for a focus on support and sustainable practices, which is a goal we can all stand behind as we look to the future of our primary sectors. By promoting fair access to resources and looking for ways to streamline how the government interacts with our producers, we are investing in the long-term health of our rural districts.

When we support small farms and aquaculture operators, we are investing in the future of Prince Edward Island, so along with the Minister of Fisheries and the mover and the seconder, I ask all members of this House to support this call for action, reduce the barriers, improve access, and stand behind the people who work so hard to feed us and sustain our Island way of life.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for bringing this motion forward. This is something that I so wholeheartedly support, and I wanted to say a few words. I thank everyone who has spoken to it, even the Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

He did talk about that road going through 300 acres of farmland, which....

T. DesRoches: Three hundred forty.

Hon. B. Thompson: Three hundred forty.

At the onset, I've listened to the Federation of Municipalities talk about how we've got to protect farmland, but I understand it is prime development, and that's where we want development to happen. That's just a fact that I just wanted to point out.

To the mover of this motion, you had a lot of good points yesterday. You said a lot. I walked into the department this morning and you might have triggered a few of them yesterday with some of your criticisms, but I told them to relax and leave your picture on the wall. It's safe there and we'll make sure that stays up there for a long time.

When we're talking about the future of farming, there are three next generations of farmers.

There's the generational farmer. I am a generational farmer; my kids will be generational farmers.

Then, there's immigrant farmers, where if there's not that next generation, farmers are coming mostly from Europe right now where their farms are worth extraordinary amounts of money because of the lack of farmland over there, and they're coming here to start farming.

Then, we have our new entrant farmers. When we want to talk about our programming to new entry farmers, I want a new entrant farmer. I was in the Future Farmer program. That was 25, 30 years ago now; it's quite a few years, but it hadn't changed that much since. It evolved a little bit, but it had never really changed enough.

So, this last year, the department took the initiative to improve the future farmer program – modernize it to the standards in which we see today where it's about people that want to get into farming. I see the future farmer program – it's that.... Some people call them homesteaders, but they can make a living off a small acreage of land, whether it's through livestock – in particular, beef is an opportunity with the amount of pasturelands we have on this Island.

The Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke and the mover have a lot of pastureland in their

areas, which are a great opportunity for our future farmers to develop a beef herd here. This industry is going through great expansion at the moment, and it's a lot to do with that money. Even though the member said it wasn't enough, it is fully subscribed and our herd is growing. So, it may not be big dollars compared to the price they're getting, but it's worth keeping those females here to grow our herd.

[3:05 p.m.]

With that, I would like to see this get to a vote, but our supports for our smaller farms is important because they are the backbone of our industry here in our rural communities. We see the Amish and the Mennonites here. They've taken marginal farmlands and small farms that some would say were no good, abandoned, and made them into thriving farms again. They keep expanding and expanding so that farmland is productive again and it's great to see. We have a different look on what we are seeing here today.

I appreciate the members for bringing this motion forward. I would like to see this go to a vote as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Next speaking to the motion, the hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will also be brief. I could probably spend the better part of an afternoon speaking about some of the small family farms in the area that I represent. I also would like to see this get to a vote, but I want to thank the mover and seconder for bringing this motion forward.

Our small family farms are the backbones of our rural communities. It's not lost on anybody in this House what the contribution of those farmers is to our communities. If at any given time a sports team or somebody going – a dance recital – and they need a sponsor, in the rural communities the farmer is where you go to. The local family farmer is still, in some of our rural communities, really, I would say the patriarch, if you would, of our communities.

I want to highlight, really quickly, some of the really instrumental farmers in my life. My family came from a farm in St. Teresa. My grandfather moved to Alberry Plains and set up a small family farm that has still stayed in our

family and will for generations. I want to thank all of those farmers that contribute to our economy, our communities, and our food security across the province.

I would like to see this get to a vote. I would like to say that I am fully supportive of this motion and what it does, and also of our aquaculture industry, understanding that luckily the fishers in our area aren't necessarily dealing with a whole great deal of MSX or Dermo, but we do have some of the soft shell clammers that have seen a decline in their industry. We need to see – also take a look at some of the supports that some of those clammers would be looking for or need to ensure that their industry is sustainable going forward.

It's something that I will bring forward to the Minister of Fisheries. I know that the federal Minister of Fisheries – at least it was brought to their attention, I'll just give it that. I think we can probably shine a little brighter on that here on PEI.

I do want to get it to a vote. With that, I'll let whoever is up next.

Speaker: I'll go to the mover of the motion to close debate, the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I do appreciate all those that spoke on this particular motion. I guess I want to get it to a vote, too, so I got maybe a minute here just of encapsulate everything, I guess.

I do think our small farmers, both aquaculture-oriented farmers as well as our terrestrial farmers on land – I want to make some points about our safety nets. I think that's something that's really important to allow farmers to at least have some protection from the ravages of weather and issues that come up with that.

I also wanted to comment a little bit about the O'Leary Farmers Co-op. It's there to provide supports. We have a feed mile there and for small poultry farmers, small farmers. I think the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke was actually one of the managers there at one time in the past. I want to commend the services that it provides.

I also want to just mention about three farmers I kind of – or four farmers I omitted from my district – Jamie MacWilliams on the O’Leary Road, Matt Milligan on Navoo Road, and Spencer Ellis, who owns O’Leary Produce. But also, one unique one is Lennox Island; they have a blueberry operation there in Lennox Island for Indigenous farmers. I want to comment on that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank those who spoke on this. I’d like to call the question for the vote on the motion.

Speaker: The question has been called.

All those in favour of the motion, please say ‘aye’.

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Speaker: All those against, please say ‘nay’.

The motion has passed and it is unanimous.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

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

I call that Motion No. 66 be now read.

[3:10 p.m.]

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, Motion No. 66 is currently under debate. Debate was adjourned by the mover, the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Speaker: To continue the debate, I call upon the Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today after having delivered much of the substance of my remarks when this motion was originally discussed last week. Just to recapture some of my comment before I hand the floor to the seconder of the motion, the intent of the motion that we start to unwind some of the powers that have been vested within IRAC over the years, essentially, the actions that can be taken at this time, not a review, but actual tangible actions that will result in improvements to the commission and to the services that the commission provides to Islanders.

We need to eliminate the patronage, make the hiring process open and transparent and competitive for Islanders. We need to pull back the curtains and provide some transparency to the work that IRAC does, so that Islanders have an appreciation of the work, but also so that we can see inside the system to see what’s working and what’s not working.

We need to make IRAC accountable lastly, to Islanders. We need some benchmarks, we need some performance measures, and I think the most important role that IRAC does play is its quasi-judicial function, which we often hear referred to about IRAC having that quasi-judicial function.

There’s a lot of different statutes and pieces of legislation that defer to IRAC for Islanders who need to appeal a decision, whether it’s on a license or a permit. That’s a function that IRAC can continue to perform, perform well, and that can be maintained. However, what we’ve seen and what the motion calls for is for a dismantling of IRAC. When it comes to what IRAC has become over the last 30 years of successive Liberal and PC governments’ handling of IRAC, it’s become the opposite of what I have originally called for, it’s become a place for patronage, it’s come a place of darkness without transparency, and there’s no accountability to Islanders for the work that IRAC does or decisions it makes.

We did have a land use commission, that land use commission was separate and stand alone. The motion calls for the reinstatement of the *Lands Protection Act* and land decision to be made, to be put back into an independent land use commission that is, you know, not patronage pointed, transparent and accountable to Islanders for decisions on the *Lands Protection Act*.

Those are my remarks, and I will turn the floor over to the seconder, and anyone else who wishes to speak to the motion. Also hoping, again, we hear from members in the chamber today but also hoping that we can get the matter to a vote on a fairly expedited basis, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: I’d like to call on the seconder of the motion.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

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

I want to start by thanking the mover of the motion, the Leader of the Third Party, who has brought forward pieces of legislation related to matters that IRAC deals with, and of course, this motion today.

Being a small province can come with big advantages. We, at least theoretically, should be a nimble province. We should be able to make decisions that other larger jurisdictions struggle with, simply because of their size. Everybody here, the intimacy of politics on Prince Edward Island, as we all know, is a very important and unique thing that we all benefit from. Everybody on PEI has a front row seat to the action of their politicians and the politics that happens here.

But smallness also comes with some restrictions, and occasionally, simply because of the size of our province and the breadth and depth of expertise that we have here, we have limitations on what we can accomplish. For example, some medical services we simply do not support here because of our size.

[3:15 p.m.]

IRAC does a lot. IRAC looks after gas pricing, it looks after land transactions, administration of the *Lands Protection Act*, as the Leader of the Third Party just said, rental disputes, rental rates, electricity regulation – there's a lot of really important and complex big files.

We as politicians, as regular MLAs, are generalists. We have to try and understand and be aware of a whole host of things, very big, large complex things. Ministers, given the fact that they can narrow their focus into a certain facet of political life here on Prince Edward Island, have more of an opportunity to develop expertise and become specialists in that area. But for most of us, we have to remain generalists.

IRAC is in that sense more like an MLA than it is a minister. They're tasked with a very wide range of duties. In order for them to do that well, we only have six commissioners – we have three full-time and three part-time commissioners. They are asked to oversee with knowledge and capacity and expertise all of those really complex files that I just mentioned. That's a tough assignment; it's a really difficult job.

In other province, and I'm looking at our immediate neighbour in Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board, which until recently was the equivalent of IRAC and carried out all of the same functions, in 2025, it was split up into two smaller, more specialized tribunals. There is the Nova Scotia Energy Board, which specifically looked over electrical matters, and the Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board, which looked after everything else.

This motion suggests that we mimic that, that we recognize that the administration and the regulatory of electricity, for example, is just too much, too complex, too big a job to expect a tribunal, a commission that looks after so many other things and the small number of people who are tasked with doing that, it's just too much for them.

I would love to see us, as this motion suggests, carve out parts of IRAC, whether it's the lands protection portion of that or the electricity regulation portion of that, and allow them to focus very much on that specific task and to provide Islanders with confidence that they are able to do that they are able to do that job well.

This is not in any way to disparage the work of IRAC. IRAC is tasked, again, with an enormous amount of complex work. I just think we're asking the impossible of a small group of people to be able to do all of the tasks that we ask them for.

Let's mimic what other provinces have already done. Let's give ourselves an opportunity to have the best regulation we possibly can. In Nova Scotia, the Energy Board there has already returned millions and millions of dollars to Nova Scotians through operating cuts and through a reduction in executive expenses. Their priorities are focused on affordability and environmental concerns, exactly what we need to be doing here when it comes to electrical regulation.

Let's modernize our regulatory system here in line with the other provinces and also in recognition of how quickly things are changing here. Our world and our province are, indeed, evolving and changing on a rapid basis. We need a regulator and regulatory processes and bodies that are up to dealing with that properly.

Again, I echo what the Leader of the Third Party says that I look forward to hearing others speak

to this but I really hope that we're able to get this to a conclusion today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to – it's a pleasure to rise in this House at any given moment to speak an issue, especially as important as this.

It's been established in the motion that IRAC was established in 1991. Any organization that has been around for this long needs to be looked at on a regular basis.

[3:20 p.m.]

I believe the Premier and the government has mentioned and announced that somebody with a great breadth of experience in the public and private sector in Rory Francis has been taking on that role of reviewing IRAC and reviewing its mandate and its abilities and its capabilities. I think that's definitely the first step in changing how IRAC operates. I don't think cutting IRAC and its responsibilities limb by limb as this motion alludes to is the proper way of doing it.

The third party rose in this House about three weeks ago and criticized a comment – or mentioned a comment; I shouldn't say it was a criticism. They mentioned a comment that I had made in an interview and highlighted a word that I said, and the word was "haphazard." The definition of haphazard is marked by a lack of plan, order, or direction. I believe cutting this regulatory body limb by limb is doing exactly that, and it's something that we've kind of grown used to around here.

I do think that taking out, piece by piece, different regulatory parts of IRAC will create a great deal of confusion to Islanders, will create a great deal of cumbersomeness when it comes to actually getting applications completed, whether it's somebody filing a complaint against a landlord, or it's the utility, or it's a developer looking to develop renewable energy on PEI. I think creating a number of separate bodies – I think that was essentially the intent of bringing those bodies together in a centralized body back in 1991.

The motion is accurate in one sense – that it says IRAC's mandate is broad and diverse. I think that's fair. I would say it's probably the actions of successive governments in the past, of both political stripes, some a little more active in punting regulatory decisions over to IRAC, really for political cover. I've followed current events for a number of years, and I can think of a few instances, and some instances that were just directly misleading to Islanders. That's kind of mentioned in this motion as well. I don't believe that was an issue because of the function of a regulatory body, but rather a function of political gains. This House and Islanders were let known of that issue through a standing committee.

But I knocked on doors in the by-election in December and it was an issue that I received quite a bit – that IRAC needed, I will say, and overhaul. I wouldn't say a dismantle. I'm quoted in the media as saying IRAC needed a bit of an overhaul. It's not because of any of the dedicated employees at the commission, but rather, it's been a body that's been around since 1991 with no real change or review.

I think the Premier has been, I would say, unwarranted in the criticism he's received for initiating the review of IRAC because this is important stuff. We're not fooling anybody here by saying that we're going to dismantle a regulatory body. This is very important stuff that this regulatory body works on every day.

[3:25 p.m.]

To say we're going to go in and cut this piece out this month and cut this piece out next month is – I will try my best to stay parliamentary, but.... It's haphazard. We can't be doing it that way, because it is a quasi-judicial body that handles very important issues every single day and we can't just go in and cut and slash limb by limb. So, doing a thoughtful review of the processes of IRAC, the processes of its commissioners, is a very wise first step into changing the culture of IRAC.

The biggest reason I think, when I knocked on doors, that people had an issue with IRAC was – and I think it will come in the review, and it'll be a recommendation – there has been an issue of transparency when it comes to the operation of the commission, and I'll go back to that is probably the fault of successive governments since 1991. So, I believe that this review that is currently ongoing and has a very ambitious

timeline, will bring that recommendation forward to improve the transparency of the commission.

And when I knocked on doors and I talked to residents, their issue largely in our area is the land issue. It's an issue because, like I said, there's been a lack of transparency. We need to improve that, and like I said, that will come back with the recommendations from Mr. Francis and his group, which is the right way of doing it.

I think we need to have a regulatory body that is strong and robust to ensure that decisions made by government or landlords or people trying to purchase land – we need to have a regulatory body there that has some teeth, and again, I figure that will probably be a recommendation that will come back from some of the work being done in that review.

I will let some other members in this House speak to this motion. I have to think that – however, I do agree that there needs to be some changes made at the regulatory body, at IRAC. I don't believe doing it limb by limb is the proper way of doing it. I do agree that a full and wholesome review of IRAC is the right way of doing it. We need to do something like this right. It needs to be done right because of the breadth and the importance of the issues that IRAC deals with.

With that, I will give the floor to who wants to speak next, and I don't believe I can support this motion that way it's written here today.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a motion that I understand where it's coming from, and I agree with a lot of it – not all of it. When we talk about IRAC, there are a lot of issues with them. Don't get me wrong, there's a lot of good with them. There are a lot of things that are perceived in the public that are not to be true. There are a lot of things that are illustrated and portrayed that make IRAC the bad guy, and sometimes it's not their fault.

For this motion to call the government to dismantle the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission, I think that's a jump. I understand why because I've said it myself in the past, but when you start to sit down and think about it,

and think it through, is this the road you want to take – to completely dismantle it?

[3:30 p.m.]

There are so many other things that could be done. I know that the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke has brought it up so many times – a public intervener. He has a great point there. Why not have someone in there to fight for the little guy that is not at arm's length of the commission, that is not at arm's length of government, that is there for all the right reasons? Like I said, the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke has brought that up so many times. We've had a lot of discussions on it, and it's something that I think would be a great start. Would it be the end-all, be-all? No, I can't see it. It would be a great start.

I do understand where the members are coming from with the dismantling. There's a lot of political patronage, and I believe there's been political patronage at IRAC right from the day that they were put in. I think that that is something that really has to be looked at – how people are appointed there. I think that we've got to make sure, going forward, if the commission is there and doing their job, that the appointments going forward are not political patronage. There should be some type of competition or there should be something to get the right people in the right position that are there for all the right reasons.

I believe that the independent review that's getting done will probably come back and say something along those lines. I don't know how in depth they'll go, but I imagine over the next six months that they'll be able to do a lot and they'll be able to look at a lot of things.

I know that I, for one, have always had an issue with IRAC, from my times when I sat on city council with the City of Summerside. I was one who was – the ones that were badmouthing them, saying they're useless and "What are they there for?" That was because of the fight that the City had with IRAC over the use of the cables, where the City of Summerside ultimately pays 10 percent of those cables – they pay for 10 percent, \$17-point-whatever million that the City has to pay back – but they're not guaranteed 10 percent of the power that comes across it. They get it if it's available, but they're not guaranteed. So, you know what, you're paying for something but you're not guaranteed for the product that comes through it....

I read the report and it wasn't a great report to read. It was very long and very wordy. I'm sure there are other members with lawyer backgrounds that probably loved reading that because they probably understood what they were saying in a lot of places, but I sat there and said: "What is this?" I read it, and it wasn't a small report. They went on to say how the City didn't have a strong business plan, and they didn't have.... Well, how strong was that business plan when the city was threatened with rolling brownouts? If they would have had that secured access, you wouldn't have had to worry about it.

There are so many things that you can go back and look at, but also, I don't just want to harp on the bad. There's a lot of good. A lot of people were glad when they're moving in places and they see everybody's rent that's going around them and whatnot and knowing that people can't put their rent up by so much, and that they're there and they have a board that they can go to and they can appeal different things.

But it's there; there are so many different entities that were folded in under one umbrella. We talk about the *Residential Tenancy Act*, and Mr. Speaker, you had a lot of issues with the *Residential Tenancy Act*. You wanted to rewrite it, reform it and whatnot, and that would have been something that would have had to go through all these different processes and appeals.

You would understand why a board like IRAC would be there after your *Residential Tenancy Act* would have been changed – if that was the route that you would have gone – and they were there to enforce it, to be there for anybody who had a problem with a landlord or a tenant or whatnot – and getting someone evicted and what the timeline was, or someone who didn't pay their rent, having timelines to get rid of them.

IRAC is there as a quasi-judicial – they're there to deal with this, and they're not supposed to be strongarmed by one person or another. If they're there fighting for the tenant, then they're also there fighting for the landlord, or they're there fighting for the electric....

I'm trying not to go back to the electric because I've got so much I'd love to say about the electric file. It's the one that absolutely blows my mind. It's the one that – I probably agree with this motion somewhat because of that electric file and because of what happened with the City of Summerside.

[3:35 p.m.]

I represent the city of Summerside, and they just keep getting pounded over and over with the electric file. I just couldn't believe it when they went through the process of all the lawyers that were fighting for the City and going through everything, trying to get it all figured it out to get access to the cables. And they weren't asking for full access to the cables. I remember being on city council at the time and members saying they just want a bike lane to be able to get on and off the cable whenever they need to. And "No, no, no, we're going to give you 10 percent if it's available." I'm trying not to go back to that because I don't want to sound too negative, but that is the aspect and that is the part that really left a sour taste with me.

There's a lot more to IRAC than just the electric file. There are a lot of tenants that have had issues in the past. I sat down with one lady there a few months back who had a problem with her landlord that wouldn't give her her damage deposit back. She was a young woman with a young family.

And you know what, that damage deposit meant a lot. She had to move into another spot because she wasn't happy where she was at with a lot of things that were going on for her young family and the landlord didn't want to give her damage deposit back. She'd left the apartment that she's renting in better shape than before she came. There was no issues. She had it spotless and they were just trying to keep her damage deposit. They were just saying no, you moved out; no lease that's signed that said she had to stay for so long.

For this young family and this young woman to start over at another department, she didn't have those funds to come up with. She needed her damage deposit back. She called me. We had a sit-down and we talked. She was in tears. "I've got to move out and I've got kids. I'm doing this all on my own. I can't afford another damage deposit. They're telling me I'm going to have to wait so many months to get my damage deposit back. How am I supposed to get another spot?"

She was one of the lucky ones that when she contacted IRAC, they did do good on her. She ended up getting her damage deposit back in a very timely manner so that when she went to her next spot, she explained – and she went to another spot with a landlord that was very good – and explained to the landlord what was going

on, that she was going to transfer the damage deposit from one to the other. He was a good enough landlord to say that, yeah, we can wait.

Whenever you get your funds from here, we'll just put it in. She had to go through the process and she did tell me she was very pleased with the process. When she called down there, the advice they gave her, how to do it, and it sped the process up for her. There are some good. I have a hard time picking out a lot of good; I do. There is some good that they do.

I know that when it comes to building permits and whatnot, that's one aspect that I dealt with a quite a bit in my previous work. After taking this role, speaking with developers in Summerside, there's a major developer that's across this Island, not just Summerside.

He told me he had an issue because he wanted to build a spot. It was going to be a big apartment building. It was held up because someone who lived at the other end of the Island – they lived in Tignish – were complaining about his build in Charlottetown. It was held up. It had to wait. It had to go through and he had to do this, had to be seen in front of the appeals board. He had to do all this.

Like he told me, that would have been built. He said this has been over a year its been held up waiting for this, waiting for that, then going to appeals and all that, it's been over a year that this would have been built. I lost out on the year of building and then lost out on one year quicker of getting rents coming back from them.

You know what, there are some issues that – as I see it and I'm sure as Joe Blow and the public sees it and what not – that it's something that's probably an easy fix to us, but I know that when you look at the commission that's there, something like that is probably not an easy fix. They probably have to go through a lot. That falls back on some of the red tape reduction that we heard in the previous motion for farming and fishing. Well, there's also with IRAC, there's got to be a lot of red tape reduction.

Being established in '91 to take all the political pressures off decisions and putting all these public utilities – the land use commission and residential tenancy – putting all them into one back then, it's evolved a lot over the last 35 years; it has. It has evolved a lot.

[3:40 p.m.]

I think that it really needs to be overhauled, how they do things and what they do. I do believe that this independent review that's getting done, I believe that it will touch on that a lot. I believe there are going to be a lot of recommendations that come back from that that will be to overhaul. It's to overhaul it, not to dismantle it. As much as I've said, and I know that there's people in my district that have probably heard me say it, "We just need to throw a bomb and we just need to blow this up, we've got to start fresh."

I've said it myself and I know there's people in my district – but when I think about it, it's not something that just needs to be completely abolished and dismantled, it's something that needs to be overhauled to the way our society is now. There are a lot of changes that should be done in there, and a lot of changes that need to be done in there. There are a lot of things that they can do that they probably don't have the ability to do right now, as they're a commission, and maybe they should be legislated to do a little more. Maybe they should be legislated to do a little less in some areas, but just to dismantle them completely, I believe they do hold a very, very valuable piece for us.

They are supposed to be able to make decisions that don't have political pressures, and I know that as an MLA in my district, people think that you should be able to do this, or you should be able to do that, and I appreciate the fact that there is a commission there that isn't supposed to be able to be swayed one way or another. I believe that there's no political pressure in it.

In saying that, going forward, I do believe that one of the ways that it has to be overhauled is the way that people are appointed there. These political appointees from political staffers, as great as they may be, they may be the best candidate for the position; I don't want to take away anything from any of them that are in there. They may be the absolute best person for that position, but let's have some type of competition, let's have some type of – something that evaluates them, and let's have more than one name put forward or two names put forward.

Let's get the best possible person for the position. These are positions that hold a lot of merit and hold a lot of credibility. So, rather than just dismantling it and blowing it up, let's get the proper people in there, and going forward,

let's make sure that we always have the proper people in there.

When I look at the, "Therefore be it resolved" part of the resolution, "Therefore be it resolved that this Legislative Assembly call on government to remove the administration of the PEI Lands Protection Act from IRAC and place it with an independent commission that reports to the Legislative Assembly, and whose members are appointed by the Legislative Assembly."

Well, once again, it's going back to that political patronage. I don't want to see members that are appointed by the Legislative Assembly. I don't want to see members that are appointed by – maybe you'll have one party that has the whole – we've seen it in the past – where we've only had one opposition member. Well, guess what, whoever would have been appointed at that time for something like this, it would have been political patronage.

I don't want to see something that is appointed, I want to see the best possible candidates. Let's not just appoint someone because they knew this person, or they worked for this person, let's appoint someone because of their merits and their credibility.

Let's not appoint them; let's let them win that position. Forget about these appointments, let someone win their position. Let them work their way into a position. And don't get me wrong, I am not taking anything anyway people in these positions but let's make sure that the best possible person is available and in that position. Let's not appoint someone because they knew this person or they worked here or they did this, let's have them work for their position, and that way we will end up with the best possible people to make these decisions.

With that resolution to remove the administration of the PEI lands act, I think that we're going to end up with a whole bunch – okay, we start with that, we start with removing the land act, then a whole bunch of political appointees, then what about the next part? Then do we go to the public utilities commission and move them over with a bunch of political appointees?

Then this one, then we end up with five or six boards like it used to be; maybe it worked, I can't speak to it back then, I wasn't very involved with it back in the '80s. I did not give

too many cares back in the '80s about a political appointed board, but going forward, rather than splitting this up and having five or six different arms split every which way with all political appointees in them, why don't we have one board that is there for all the right reasons, filled with all the right people who win their position, not being appointed?

[3:45 p.m.]

When we look at the next one: "Therefore be it further resolved that this Legislative Assembly call on government to begin systematically removing the other responsibilities from IRAC, including the regulation of our public electric utility, and placing them with independent, focused boards or commissions, as was done prior to IRAC's creation."

Well, it's exactly where they were going with the first one. Take one par –, let's put it on their own little (Indistinct) and make some political appointees, so then if you're going to keep going with the other focus boards, are they going to be all political appointees? I do not want to see any more boards, any more focus boards, or any more supposed to be quasi-judicial groups that are political appointees.

If you're good enough for that job, interview for it. Have someone, have a group that – Mr. Speaker, I'm being told to cut her down; other people want the floor. But Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I didn't want to get too much on the electrical part of it because that's one part that I can argue at. I might be a little biased because of my history with Summerside and Summerside Electric.

But as much as I would like to say that I completely support this motion, there is a lot of it I do support, but I don't completely support it because of the parts in there when you have political appointees and separate boards. I don't want to see any more political appointees. I absolutely hate the fact that – I'd just to see it go back and the best person in the position.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this. That's why I wanted the hon. member to stop talking.

As the Minister of Land and Environment, my eyes have been opened by a number of things within the IRAC file. Still working through how that pertains to land and *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* I feel IRAC has become the punching bag for all Islanders. We all have a stake in IRAC in one way or another, whether it's the price of gas or rent controls or lack of lack controls or someone from off-Island purchasing land and it has to go to IRAC and who makes the decision and everything is secret. I think there are a lot of issues.

I think any organization that has been in existence for 36 years probably does need some oversight and some review. I think that – and I know that's what we're doing as government. Once again, we have the Third Party coming forward and saying just do it. Don't bother listening, don't bother reviewing, don't bother talking to everyone who has a stake in this. I think it's really important that we do.

I know I'm going to take it upon myself as far as the Land Use Commission and the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* – the former Land Use Commission and the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* – and how the two were married before and how the decisions were made. I can't really say that I know that.

I don't think it's about political patronage so much as, again, finding the right person, but it's very difficult. How do you strike a board who is willing to make all of these decisions and make everyone happy because you are never going to do that, especially when you've got all of these issues that are encompassed within IRAC?

I'm not disagreeing that maybe we need to remove some of the responsibilities from IRAC out of IRAC, but I think, again, that's really something that we need to spend some time looking at. Rory Francis has been appointed to do that. I'm sure there will be a lot of discussions had. There'll be a number of interviews had. He'll research.

I've already – a number have come to me because now I'm the Minister of Land – well, IRAC, what about IRAC? They don't realize it's with Education. Even last week, I was trying to explain to someone why it's with Education. I think Islanders don't understand that. I've talked to the Minister of Education about – could I please get a primer on everything that is involved with IRAC because I think it's important for me as Minister of Land.

[3:50 p.m.]

There are lots of decisions that I think everyone in this House has questioned before. I think the perception in the public is we are in there messing with all the decisions that are being made, which is not true at all. I've been in government for seven years and in opposition before that. That is not the way this works, but I am as interested as anyone else to find out how it does work.

But anyone who has sat around the Cabinet table knows we do not spend a lot of time playing jiggery-pokery on what goes through IRAC because they are there for a reason, and they make decisions based on the parameters that they have in place. We might not agree with the parameters, we maybe need to change the parameters. We probably do not need some new ways of looking at what we're doing.

If we want to dismantle everything, I guess we go, well, everything old is new again so let's go back to the way it was. Life has changed in 36 years. Things are more complex; decisions are more complex. The population has increased. There are more regulations. All of those things come into play. So, yes, in 36 years, a lot of things have changed. Decisions that are made with IRAC, maybe they do need a different purview; I'm not going to say that they don't.

But to just say we're going to blow it up... I know probably everyone in this House has heard from their constituents: "Let's just get rid of it. We don't like it. We don't know what" – and it's because they have had an issue, whatever it is, whether it's the price of gas, whether it's "my rent is too high," or as a landlord, "I can't raise the rent."

As far as energy, we know that that's in the forefront. As the former Minister of EDIT, had a roundtable with a number of business owners just to talk about where they were, whether they were going to grow their business – where they were as far as the economy was and what they'd like to see. There were probably, I'd say, 20 business owners in the room, and big business, and it all came back to energy and the fact that they didn't want to expand – or they couldn't expand – because they didn't know whether they would be able to access the energy that they needed.

I know it's part of our heel – the focus of government. I will say, too, that I'm concerned.

I'd like to see more help for energy for the minister and for the department because I think we really do need to focus, and it can't be on the side of a desk or it can't be part of a very long list of responsibilities. There needs to be someone focused totally on what we are going to do with energy. The minister is working very hard, and I know that his deputy is working very hard, but it's a lot.

The energy file is a concern. How we change the energy that we have that Maritime Electric is transmitting versus creating our own energy. What does that look like? What legislation has to be changed? I just think that there's a lot to focus on in the energy file, as there is in Land.

One of the first things I did, I brought forward an amendment to the bill about non-land and how that is identified, I guess, and the fact that it's important that we close as many loopholes as we can. I mean, I came in to the role, legislation had already been discussed and was in the process of being drawn up. It takes a while to get legislation done and done right. Right now, I'm working on legislation for the fall on probably half a dozen points that will help tighten up lands protection.

You have a lot of opinions, I'll say that – a lot of opinions within the department, a lot of opinions in the public. The monks and all of the questions around the land that they own, why they are here, where the money is coming from – those are all big concerns. I've been to a Save PEI meeting. I'm quite happy to attend and hear what has to be said and to try and make changes.

I've met with a couple of the members on numerous occasions who said, "Well, then we need to do something. I said, "Well, I'm the Minister of Land. You tell me what you feel that I could do. If you have suggestions, tell me what they are, and I will be happy to review them and see what decisions we could make to change that."

[3:55 p.m.]

So, within my ministerial position as Land, it's much bigger than that, we assume. If you talk about one issue that seems, okay, maybe a little strange, but when you one issue and you hear a second and you hear a third, and there are anecdotal stories about where the money is coming from, how much land is being bought – all of those are concerns for me.

I'm a seventh generation Islander and very proud of it. I still own 80 acres of the family homestead since 1836. I'm not sure what will happen with it after we're gone – we can always hope that our son will take it over – but we lease the land to a farmer. I've met with groups who are invested in protection of lands. I said: "You're not going to make farmers the bad guy in this. We need to have farmers. It's the number one economic driver in PEI and we can't forget that."

We talked about supporting and having smaller farms. When I grew up – and every time I start talking about that I feel really old in here, but I can go down the road. My grandfather had a mixed farm, Lloyd Morrison had a mixed farm, my Uncle Stewart had a mixed – like you could just go the road and Lester Larsen and every one of them had a small mixed fixed farm. They have a few cattle and they had pigs, but they also worked in the woods in the wintertime. They probably fished some, too.

So, it's pretty hard – and I've taken one of the groups to task on this; I said a 100-acre farm is a wonderful idea, but how many people could actually make a living on a 100-acre farm? Some people can, but it's – how diverse do you want to be?

But also, we have large farmers here on PEI who employ a lot of people, and they have committed and invested to doing what they do. They're trying to be competitive; they're trying to be good stewards of the land. When we took over my dad's family homestead for my uncle, the first winter, they plowed in the fall and I said: "No more. I don't want my house sandblasted all winter long."

So, on our 60 acres that we farm – the rest used to be wooded – we do zero tilling. The farmer who leases the land does zero tilling. I've talked to a number of young farmers; they're doing the right thing. They're doing the very best they can. We know high-capacity wells are going to be forefront again this summer because we've got lots of applications. Farmers are going to have to share that water resource. Through Environment, we are going to work with the watersheds and the farmers to ensure that they are doing the right thing.

But back to the motion, again, talking about land and the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*, I think there are definitely things that need to be done – maybe some things we can tweak to make it

better. I'm not averse to maybe taking the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* out of IRAC, but again, that's a much further discussion. I'm not sure what that would look like. How do you appoint a board? We're going to have to have a lot of stakeholders on that board. It's very difficult.

You talk about patronage. Well, it's very difficult on PEI not to have some patronage, I guess you could call it, because we all know everyone. Many of the decisions we make in government go, well, why did we choose that person, because they're a Liberal or they're a Green or they're a Tory, or we can't choose a Tory because it will look bad.

There are many, many, I guess, decisions that need to be made within IRAC; I will not dispute that. I put it to Rory Francis and I will have that conversation with Rory about what I feel. I think we all have an opinion, and I hope that all Islanders get the ability to voice their opinion on what they feel – and not just in frustration, but with some good, creative, and constructive ideas on how we can make IRAC a better place, and in turn, make PEI a better place.

With that, I'll adjourn debate with a seconder, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

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

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

[4:00 p.m.]

I call Order No. 1, Consideration of the Estimates.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

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

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Welcome. If you could just state your name and your title for Hansard.

Wendy MacDonald: Wendy MacDonald, director of finance for the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Chair: Okay, members, we are on page 152 for those of you that are following along.

Corporate Services

Corporate Services

“Appropriations provided for operation of the office of the Minister and Deputy Minister, support staff, departmental centralized administrative management functions, including strategic policy, evaluation and legislation.”
Administration: 52,700. Equipment: 10,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 17,300. Professional Services: 76,500. Salaries: 1,502,900. Travel and Training: 32,800. Grants: nil.

Total Corporate Services: 1,693,000

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

In professional services, it remains unchanged from \$76,500, and there was a drop last year to \$48,000. What was the drop for, and why is it back up to \$76,500?

Wendy MacDonald: In this division – this is the corporate services or the overarching division for the department – we do have a professional services budget in here for items that may be unforeseen that come up or work

that may need to be done at third quarter. There was no such work, or we didn't have enough work or use for the budget, so we dropped our budget down to actual – or anticipated, I should say.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, so the 2026 handouts account for only \$7,513 towards labour relations, so where was the other \$40,000 of that spent?

[4:05 p.m.]

Wendy MacDonald: There was some work that was anticipated to be done, but the work never did happen. When we do third quarter, we're doing that in late December/early January, so there was still three months of the year left and the work did not happen.

Hon. H. Perry: Is that work anticipated to be done this fiscal?

Wendy MacDonald: Not to the best of my knowledge.

Hon. H. Perry: Is it common for a division or a department to spend money on labour relations? Is that not done centrally through collective bargaining?

Wendy MacDonald: This may have been an individual labour relations item, not necessarily an overarching labour relations. It could have been resulting from a – I don't know – a complaint or within the department.

Hon. H. Perry: This is a question on grants. Why is there nothing estimated for this '26-27 fiscal?

Hon. E. Hudson: The grants, member, up until this year, IWMC had over the last few years made application through IRAC for an increase in their rates structure and in their rates, which was granted. Up until this year, government has looked after those rate increases. IWMC did not make an application this year for an increase. That, to a certain extent, results in no grants this year.

You look over the last three-year period, since 2022, the Province provided \$9.5 million to go against higher waste management fees, but there is nothing from the department this year that will be going as a grant to IWMC.

Hon. H. Perry: Just to be clear, was there a request from them for support or did your department just decide it wasn't going to do it again this year?

Hon. E. Hudson: You can correct me if I'm wrong here, but yes, I do believe the previous years that there was a written request came from the board. Am I correct on that?

Wendy MacDonald: You're correct. In previous years, there was a request. In the current year, there was not a request.

Hon. H. Perry: On salaries, I notice that they rise from \$1.31 million in 2025-2026 to \$1.5 million in the '26-27 budget estimates. What staffing changes are driving those increases?

Wendy MacDonald: What are driving those increases are, in this division there were people hired that would be – we budgeted the top step of the UPSE collective agreement, people would have been hired into positions are lower steps. We're anticipating people moving through the step process, as well as there is a new policy analyst position in this division.

Hon. H. Perry: Has that policy analyst person been hired?

Wendy MacDonald: They have not been hired to date. They're just going through PSC staffing – or will be going through the PSC staffing process.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Hi. Just wanted to check and I couldn't really hear the minister when he was answering the question about the grants, but I recognize that IWMC came up a couple of times. Is the entire \$4 million that's no longer there in grants, is that because of IWMC?

Hon. E. Hudson: That is correct.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, that's all I have to ask.

Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Highway Safety

Registration, Safety, and Scales

[4:10 p.m.]

“Appropriations provided for administration and enforcement of the *Highway Traffic Act*, the highway weight regulations under the *Roads Act*, and the promotion of safety on the highways.” Administration: 55,000. Equipment: 16,900. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 536,500. Professional Services: 32,500. Salaries: 4,126,800. Travel and Training: 47,900. Grants: 319,000.

Total Registration, Safety, and Scales: 5,134,600

The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Minister, I had asked some questions in the Legislature in Question Period just regarding our driving examiners to see if there’s going to be a policy change to put them back in the vehicles as we were the only province in Canada that had them trailing behind. Like I said, I had a kind of a funny story in my own district where the examiner lost the driver, the vehicle ahead. Anyway, I’m just wondering where you’re at with that. Is that something you’re going to reverse and put them back in the vehicles?

Hon. E. Hudson: Certainly, at this point in time, it would be too preliminary for me to say one way or the other, to be honest.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Just further to that question, minister, I understand there’s a number of vehicles that are purchased for the specific purpose of following along – six, maybe, electric vehicles at whatever price tag those are at new. Would it not make sense at this time of trying to find places to tighten up the budget and save money to put the examiners back into the car like every other province and redeploy those electric vehicles for other purposes within the department.

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you for the question. I’m not going to agree or disagree with you. I would have to say, the very same as my answer, though, to O’Leary-Inverness that something, certainly, to take into consideration and review, but I’m not in a position right here and now to give a commitment one way or the other.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thanks, Chair.

Just on the line of administration, the spending is forecast at \$118,500 for ’25-26 on a \$60,000 estimate. What changed that section to bring the administration up that much?

Wendy MacDonald: During the last fiscal year that just finished, we had a Canada Post strike, so increased costs with courier. Now, that is not the full \$58,000. There would also be some association memberships and dues. In prior years, they would have been recorded through Materials, Supplies, and Services so they are now budgeted back in the line item where they belong.

Hon. H. Perry: In the 2026 handouts, there was a \$70,000 account to the ATV Federation for the annual off-highway vehicle registration. Where did the remaining \$205,000 go out of the \$270,000 forecast?

Wendy MacDonald: That’s in the grants?

Hon. H. Perry: Yes.

Wendy MacDonald: Yes. The handouts are at a point in time. There was a band of February. At that point in time, the PEI Snowmobile Association was not paid out as well as L’nuey. The ATV Federation also has a preliminary amount they are paid based on the registrations to the end of March. They are then – they get up to a certain percentage of the registration fee. As of the date of the handout, they were not paid out.

Hon. H. Perry: As of today, are they?

Wendy MacDonald: Yes.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. Thank you.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Actually, my questions were regarding the \$70,000 to the ATV Federation. I’m good.

Thanks.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Highway Safety: 5,134,600

Land and Environment

“Appropriations provided for staff, environmental services to department operations, management of provincial Crown lands, and survey operations of the department.” Administration: 144,700. Equipment: 11,700. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 251,400. Professional Services: 222,000. Salaries: 3,049,400. Travel and Training: 99,400.

Total Land and Environment: 3,778,600

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thanks, Chair.

[4:15 p.m.]

On professional services, only \$93,900 was spent of the \$272,000 that was budgeted in the 2025 budget forecast, so why is the '26-27 budget estimate still \$222,000?

Wendy MacDonald: This budget is for the department's responsibilities as they relate to the PEI climate adaptation plan. Certain parts of the funding are related to: resilience of public infrastructure – the consulting fees associated with that; consulting fees for the interim coastal policy recommendations report; and signage to alert public of potential coastal hazards – again, this is the consulting fees associated with that.

Hon. H. Perry: But that's quite a huge underspend, so why do you anticipate it to go back up again to \$222,000 for this coming fiscal?

Wendy MacDonald: The department continues to work towards these requirements in the reports, so it's....

Hon. H. Perry: I'm just going to ask one more question on this section regarding salaries. We went from \$2.5 million to \$3 million. Can you tell me why that is? Were there positions added?

Wendy MacDonald: There are no new positions in this section. This is a number of reclassifications to UPSE positions as well as pay increases or collective agreement negotiated increases for existing physicians.

Hon. H. Perry: That was \$3 million? That included all of that?

Wendy MacDonald: The increase of just over \$400,000 includes that, yes.

Hon. H. Perry: Yeah, okay then.

That's fine.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I'm looking at the – this would, I guess, be in the salaries line, but the description here is “environmental services to department operations.” Is this where you would find the staff would be enforcing the EPA and the various components of that?

Wendy MacDonald: Environmental management sections provide environmental management and regulatory (Indistinct) compliance services for the department and for other conducting activities within provincial right of way. Section staff have the authority under the provincial environmental protection plan to issue environmental permits to TIE for work-related activities.

P. Bevan-Baker: I see the Victoria causeway is specifically mentioned in the big book. Is the work on that complete? I know that was a very vulnerable part of the infrastructure in the south shore area. Have they come up with a plan through that work?

Wendy MacDonald: I don't have that information with me.

P. Bevan-Baker: There was a public event in Cornwall, actually, which was largely devoted to the outcome of the work that – it was still ongoing at that time; I want to say it was about six months ago. There were some recommendations that were present. I don't know if they were final recommendations or just working, ongoing recommendations, but I'm wondering – I understand, Wendy, you don't have anything there, but I wonder if the minister has any update on what the plans are to protect the causeway road there.

Hon. E. Hudson: What I would have to do there – we'll bring that information back, whatever update that there may be.

P. Bevan-Baker: I think that's all I have on this section.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Okay. Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Land and Environment: 3,778,600.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Highway Maintenance

Highway Maintenance Administration

[4:20 p.m.]

Appropriations provided for administration and supervision of the highway maintenance functions.” Administration: 31,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 2,536,600. Professional Services: 66,000. Salaries: 1,141,800. Travel and Training: 17,900.

Total Highway Maintenance Administration: 3,794,100

The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Actually, I don’t really have a question, but I just wanted to give a shout-out to a couple of your staff there that I know are the road supervisors, Kevin Coughlin and Darryl McHugh in my district, and the head of those supervisors, Dean Perry, at Slemon Park. Those guys – they’ll go out any time of day and night to deal with a problem, and I really appreciate that. I’m sure there might be some of your staff watching; you’ve got some good people there.

Thanks, minister.

Hon. E. Hudson: I appreciate that comment. Just following up on that, I will give a shout-out to all of the staff in my Department of TIE.

Thank you.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I’m looking at the – I think this is in the right section here; correct me if I’m wrong – the professional services. External consulting services for \$50,000 – do you have any details on that, Wendy?

Wendy MacDonald: The \$50,000 for external consulting services was services required to develop a tip-to-tip plan for the ATV trail in the

province. This was the department’s contribution towards the plan.

P. Bevan-Baker: I don’t know if this is something you could even pull together now, or maybe I could ask the minister for the staff to do this. (Indistinct) couple of sections where there have been fees either directly or indirectly related to the ATV Federation – \$50,000 here, \$70,000 in a previous section.

Do we have a total amount that this department supports the ATV Federation? Is that a number you could present to us, or get back to me with?

Hon. E. Hudson: Certainly. We can bring that back, member, yes. It would be varied. There would be the amount that resulted from the *Act to Amend the Highway Vehicle Act* that resulted in a requirement of registrations, with a certain percentage of that going to the ATV Federation.

Just so I’m clear, you’re specifically referring to the Department TIE, not other departments? It would be difficult, I’ll be honest, as minister, for my staff to go back to other departments, but with that, certainly we can bring that information back with regard to TIE.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you. Appreciate that.

I see also in this section, in professional services, there’s consulting services regarding the Confederation Trail. Can you also tell me what that was about, Wendy? It was \$39,000.

Hon. E. Hudson: Correct me if I’m wrong here, Wendy, but there was a consultation as well that took place right across the province with regard to usage of the Confederation Trail specific to the trail – not with regard to the study that was done, the consultation with regard to a tip-to-tip ATV trail. Is that...?

Wendy MacDonald: Yes. That’s correct, yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: I wonder if you can give us any update on the use of horses on the trail. I know there were a few pilot projects, I think they were described as, but are they ongoing? How has that been?

Hon. E. Hudson: Yes, the pilot ones are ongoing; will continue this year. I would have to go back. I think it’s one or two years ago that there was an expansion, I’ll say, with regard to the number of kilometres of trails that equestrian riders were allowed on.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that, minister. I'm just wondering whether there's any extra expense in terms of upkeep on those sections of the trail compared to others because of the horse use. I'm not suggesting there are; I'd just be interested to know if that's the case.

What's included in the materials, supplies, and services? That's the real big expense here. It's \$2.5 million.

[4:25 p.m.]

Wendy MacDonald: What is included in this:

- field supplies – small tools, building materials, nuts, bolts, et cetera;
- document printing and paper;
- equipment rentals such as trucks, backhoes, dozers, roller rentals used to repair roads;
- a small amount for protective clothing;
- computer hardware or software maintenance;
- culverts for driveway replacement, heavy ditching and resurfacing – culverts that are going in;
- shale gravel fill;
- road and roadside maintenance, which services for heavy ditching and road resurfacing for environmentally related maintenance project,
- the Durapatch is in here; and then
- another small amount for miscellaneous expenditures.

P. Bevan-Baker: I mean, those are all critical parts, and again, especially for those of us who represent rural districts, there's no end of requests and concerns regarding culverts and repaving and filling potholes and things – which surprises me, then, that last year, this section was underspent by half a million dollars.

Was there less maintenance than we anticipated? It's sort of shocking to see. I'm looking here – the difference between the budget estimate and the forecast for.... Maybe it's just the rest of the year and we're anticipating to spend the rest of that; I don't know. I'm just looking for an explanation, that's all.

Wendy MacDonald: This section may be underspent by half a million dollars, but I think if you look at provincial highway maintenance operations, the work was done through that. This is the overarching or the administration part of it. They sort of do province-wide, whereas if it's

directly accountable to a county, it would be associated with the overall maintenance.

P. Bevan-Baker: I think that's all I have for this section.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Province Highway Maintenance Operations

“Appropriations provided for staffing, materials, equipment, and services for the repair, maintenance, contracted snow removal, sanding, and summer maintenance of provincial roads.”
Administration: 85,400. Equipment: 7,500.
Materials, Supplies, and Services: 35,024,600.
Salaries: 20,835,100. Travel and Training: 270,400.

Total Provincial Highway Maintenance Operations: 56,223,000

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Obviously, minister, this is the coveted question annually, when it comes to.... I know it's salaries there, and I know the bush cutter is actually under capital, but I've had quite a challenge with getting bushes cut in the ditches of O'Leary-Inverness.

We've made a lot of disparaging comments back and forth and jokes about beavers on leashes and ties and whatnot. But what is the status of the bush cutter operator in O'Leary-Inverness? Will there be bush cutters cutting – or at least operating new machines?

Hon. E. Hudson: It's interesting. If I recall correctly, last year I think that you actually asked the question in the previous section, and then we brought it forward to this section here. But you're bang on the right section this year, absolutely.

Actually, the figures – in anticipation that you would be bringing this up again, I had an information supplied to me: last year in District 25, there were 96 kilometres done with bush cutting.

R. Henderson: Well, (Indistinct) 400 and some kilometres of road in total, but anyway.

My point is that there's a lot of roads, and I'm talking all roads, not just paved roads. Okay, keep going.

Hon. E. Hudson: That's the answer, the comment, to your question: 96 kilometres done in District 25.

R. Henderson: What's the allocation for this particular year then?

[4:30 p.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: That's a fair question. I think to say that there's an allocation per district – it would be unfair to say that, that we're going to do 100 kilometres in every district.

O'Leary-Inverness mentioned previously, just the great staff that we have – staff that go out, they survey the.... No, I don't mean literally survey, but they travel the roads to see where the work does need to be done, where the most important areas are that need that cutting done, and it would be the same again this year. To say that there's an allocation for District 25 or District 26 or 27 or any district would be inaccurate.

R. Henderson: I'm certainly well aware that they get moved around, as I happen to always be next door to a Minister of Transportation and they seem to get moved around a bit. But having said that, you did purchase some new bush cutters. My information was that there were problems with those bush cutters, and I guess we had the dispute about that.

But have the issues that were brought up about the bush cutters working in the rural areas and maybe not having the connectivity to be able to work properly – has that been resolved?

Hon. E. Hudson: If I recall correctly, what you had brought up at that point in time, member, was with regard to Wi-Fi –

R. Henderson: Well, the –

Hon. E. Hudson: Anyway, I went back. I did check, and what you had brought forward had no impact whatsoever on the ability of the bush cutter to operate.

R. Henderson: Then what was the reason why they weren't operating? They were parked in Slemon Park for some significant length of time.

Hon. E. Hudson: With that, Chair, I'll go back and I'll bring back the exact – what the problems were.

R. Henderson: Okay. I appreciate that.

Thanks. That's all for now.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I've seen that the materials and services was overspent by \$5 million last year, Wendy. I don't if you have an explanation you can give for that. Was it an unplanned project or is just increasing general costs, or what?

Wendy MacDonald: It is the increase per ton and usage of sand. The cost of sand has gone up 93 percent over the past five years. Summer maintenance contracts have gone up. CPI is increasing the department's contracts; that's a given. Basically, it's just an increase in contracts due to CPI and that.

P. Bevan-Baker: We all know how global events at the moment are impacting fossil fuel prices. Given that asphalt and so many of the materials that would be used by TIE are derivatives of that, do we have any sense of what impact that's going to have on our materials costs this year? Is that factored in to the number that we see there? It's actually less than what we spent last year.

Wendy MacDonald: The paving portion will be part of our capital budget. This is road and roadside maintenance – like I said, the snow plowing, grass cutting, salt, sand – so the impact of the increase, if there are increased asphalt prices, wouldn't be part of this budget.

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

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mechanical Operations

“Appropriations provided for operational costs of the government garages to supply equipment support to provincial highway maintenance operations.” Administration: 53,800. Equipment: 49,200. Materials, Supplies, and Services:

8,473,100. Professional Services: 9,900.
Salaries: 9,934,300. Travel and Training:
346,800.

Total Mechanical Operations: 18,867,100

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Is this where we would find costs associated with school bus maintenance?

Wendy MacDonald: School bus maintenance is the Department of Education. Our department does the work; the Department of Education is responsible for the costs associated with it.

[4:35 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. So, there are no costs here. Although you carry out the maintenance work, none of those costs would show up on a budget here in this department? Okay.

That's all I have on this section. Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thanks, Chair.

In salaries, on this line here, it went from \$9 million to \$9.5 million, and now this forecast is \$9.9 million. Is that again through reclassifications?

Wendy MacDonald: The reclassifications. There are no new positions in this division – reclassifications. We've also been able to fill vacant positions – mechanic positions that we haven't been able to fill in the past.

Hon. H. Perry: One more on travel and training. There is a considerable spend from the '25-26 forecast. What was that due to?

Wendy MacDonald: In this, there are the fuel costs associated with government vehicles. There is also travel and training related to apprenticeship training for mechanics. Some of them are finishing their blocks now, as well as there are equipment rentals. When I say equipment rentals, I mean forklifts to be used in the mechanical branch, so they're government-owned or rentals within the division.

Hon. H. Perry: So, why does the '26-27 budget estimate not increase? They sound like they're real pressures, obviously, with the gas and fuel

still up. Why does that not reflect that in the '26-27 budget line?

Wendy MacDonald: The equipment rentals that are in this at forecast time would be moved into the equipment rental category out of this travel and training because they're not really travel and training. They were in this as an equipment rental or a vehicle rental; they're not through an equipment rental. As well, like I said, some of their mechanics are finishing their block 3 training, so they won't be required to travel to finish their training sessions. Fuel pressures are increasing since we did our original budget because the budget is usually started long before this.

Hon. H. Perry: Just with that, I do expect the budget forecast for next year to be up from what is budgeted for the '26-27 year. Do you anticipate the same due to those pressures in fuel?

Wendy MacDonald: It depends on the markets and what the fuel prices are.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Sorry, I meant to ask this in an earlier section, actually. It's around the Park Street garage, which is now not used for anything, I don't think. Are there any costs associated with just the maintenance and the upkeep of that building? Is there a plan for it?

Wendy MacDonald: That would be in the direct building maintenance section of the division.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm sorry, which section?

Wendy MacDonald: The direct building maintenance.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm not sure if this is a number that you would have and I don't see it in here. It's going to sound like a ridiculous question. I'm wondering how much the department spends on pest control.

Wendy MacDonald: That would be in direct building maintenance.

K. Bernard: In direct building maintenance?

Wendy MacDonald: Yes.

K. Bernard: Is that upcoming?

Wendy MacDonald: Yes it is.

K. Bernard: Okay.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Confederation Trail Maintenance

“Appropriations provided for staffing, materials, and services to maintain the Confederation Trail System.” Administration: 3,400. Equipment: nil. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 548,200. Salaries: 1,457,500. Travel and Training: 23,000.

Total Confederation Trail Maintenance:
2,032,100

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I’m approached by – well, it’s the same person every year, but I also get emails from folks who have come here to do the Island Walk, for example, and do much of that on the Confederation Trail, at the lack of facilities. I’m talking here about porta potties.... I see the minister nodding his head; you probably get the same emails I do, minister, maybe more.

[4:40 p.m.]

Is there any money in here to improve both the number of them and also extend the season? We have people coming here, particularly in the fall, a lot later, but also in the spring time. I don’t think any of those facilities are yet open – they will be now, but back in April when folks arrive.

Wendy MacDonald: The purchase of the facilities would be part of our capital budget or part of a capital budget request. I’m not sure when the facilities actually open for use on the trail, so I really can’t comment on that.

P. Bevan-Baker: I couldn’t give you an exact date either, but I do know that the presence of

the walkers always – and other users of the trail – precedes the opening of the facilities. I’ll get back to you, minister, on that, because again, I suspect you get some of the same correspondence I do. But it’s a consistent thing every year: Why are they not open when there are people here? I’ll take care of that with the minister.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

In the previous section, minister, or department for which you’re responsible on Tourism, I had asked questions about washroom facilities on the trail. I got the sense that it wasn’t really a provincial responsibility, that it would be federal in nature. Maybe I misheard you, minister. The quizzical look on your face suggests maybe I misheard you.

I guess the question I have – and I know it would likely in the capital budget, but I know that we’ve got half a million dollars set aside for materials, supplies, and services. If the answer is capital, that’s fine, but I guess I do hear calls for enhanced washroom facilities on the trail. Is there anything in the budget here that you can point to to lead us in the direction that that’s something that government is looking at?

Hon. E. Hudson: It is. First of all, I guess, just a couple of comments. I can’t recall giving any such indication that it would be federal when I had Fisheries, Rural Development, and Tourism budget on the floor, so I want to make that quite clear.

With regard to additional facilities, yes, that would be in the capital budget. As the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point had previously asked about, it’s something – do I hear? Absolutely, yes I do. Again, it would be in the capital budget, but as member said, it’s a conversation I think that we can have subsequent to the operating budget that we have in front of us here now.

M. MacFarlane: But it would fall within this department – Transportation, not Tourism – in your mind, minister? Given the use of the trail, it would be a transportation capital expense?

Hon. E. Hudson: You know, that’s an excellent point, really. I think you look at – going back to

the other department just real briefly. You have synergies I guess I could say between different departments, obviously. You look at Fisheries, Rural Development, and Tourism, certainly the Tourism aspect of it. Does Tourism fit into the Confederation Trail? Absolutely.

M. MacFarlane: That's fine.

Thank you, Chair. Appreciate that, minister.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Highway Maintenance: 80,916,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

Building Services

Building Operations and Administration

"Appropriations provided for division staffing, materials, and travel for administrative, supervisory, and trades staff in building maintenance and accommodations."

Administration: 29,000. Equipment: 9,500.
Materials, Supplies, and Services: 1,843,400.
Professional Services: 150,000. Salaries:
1,738,000. Travel and Training: 38,500.

Total Building Operations and Administration:
3,808,400

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

I'm just looking at the professional services fee for construction standards review. Was that related to the national building code or is that something else?

[4:45 p.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: I'm sorry, with regard to professional and contract services, the increase? Is that what you're...?

P. Bevan-Baker: Well, sort of, but it was specifically – one of the costs there was related to what's in the big book, called the construction standards review. I'm just wondering what that was, what the review did, and if there were any recommendations from that.

Wendy MacDonald: That is in.... Actually, I'm going to say I don't have that information right with me. That's my (Indistinct)

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, that's fine. You could bring that back.

Hon. E. Hudson: On this here, it was professional services. It was for a consulting service to carry out a review of government space usage and a needs assessment.

P. Bevan-Baker: The description just doesn't seem to match the words that I'm seeing in front of me here. I just don't know what a construction standards review in. Can you just repeat that, minister.

Hon. E. Hudson: What we can do is bring back information on that, member, if that works for you.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, I'm totally fine with that.

I'm good. That's all I have for this section.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I'm good. That's all I have for this section.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Direct Building Maintenance

"Appropriations provided for regular maintenance, janitorial services, power, heat, and water to Provincial Government buildings."
Administration: 1,388,700. Equipment: 18,500.
Materials, Supplies, and Services: 8,268,600.
Professional Services: 1,096,600. Salaries:
2,992,800. Travel and Training: 5,000.

Total Direct Building Maintenance: 13,770,200

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm wondering if you have a line there that tells us how much maintenance is budgeted for public seniors homes.

Wendy MacDonald: Public seniors homes are not maintained by TIE.

K. Bernard: Okay. I guess now I'm wondering about the pest management control.

Wendy MacDonald: Approximately around \$70,000.

K. Bernard: Is that dealing with the problem in some of the buildings?

Wendy MacDonald: I would hope so.

K. Bernard: I've just heard from a couple of people that in Slemon Park at government garage there is a terrible rat problem, and they're being told there is no solution for it. Were you aware of that?

Hon. E. Hudson: That's interesting. Being from Prince County, I have not heard that. Tell them to reach out to me, please.

K. Bernard: Okay. Check it out.

Hon. E. Hudson: Yes.

K. Bernard: I'm good.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: I just want to check because I think this is where you said that the Park Street garage maybe would have been – the costs associated with that. I'll just repeat the question: Are there any costs associated with maintaining that? Also, does government have any plans of what to do with that structure?

Wendy MacDonald: There are costs associated with maintaining that building. The building has to have the lights, the heat on, and have things maintained in it. I'm not aware of any decisions on the property, but yes, there are costs associated with it.

P. Bevan-Baker: One of the things which – and there's an RFP out, or an ROI, I should say – regarding the battery installation here, or utility-scale battery, minister. They take up a little bit space, not an awful lot. I don't know how much acreage that particular plot of land has with the old garage on it, but in terms of a location for a battery in proximity to the Maritime Electric plant, it would be a good choice. But you're saying that currently there is no plan for that building? I'm assuming it's not going to be reused as a garage or something like that.

[4:50 p.m.]

Wendy MacDonald: I'm not aware of any plans for that building.

P. Bevan-Baker: Can I ask – I know you won't have this information in front of you and I apologize for asking you this, but it should be a pretty simple thing to get back – the acreage of that area where the provincial garage on Park Street sits just to give me an idea of how much land is there? I'd appreciate that.

Hon. E. Hudson: Absolutely. We can bring that back, member.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you. That's all I have for this section.

Thanks, Chair.

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

R. Henderson: This is actually a question from His Worship Mayor Gavin in the Town of O'Leary, but I believe your engineers have met with him regarding Royal Avenue in O'Leary. You're quite familiar with it I'm sure; it goes to the community care facility, the Willows.

I guess there was some talk about sidewalks and stuff. Is there any update I can provide the mayor on that question?

Hon. E. Hudson: Like yourself, I speak to the mayor on a fairly regular basis. As far as an update, I know that staff have been in conversation with the Town on a regular basis with regard to the sidewalk, and we've had conversations on it as well, member. You look at that great community care facility, the Willows, also being able to gain access across down the avenue – across to Vinny's, across to the post office.... What I will do is go back to the department, member, get the latest update, and provide that.

R. Henderson: Thanks. I guess that's all I'm asking – if you'd call the mayor or somebody reach out to him because he is looking for an answer.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry?

Accommodations

“Appropriations provided for lease and rental costs, janitorial services, power, heat, and water costs for leased accommodations.”
Administration: 18,628,100. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 766,100. Professional Services: 426,600. Salaries: 24,200.

Total Accommodations: 19,845,000

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

So, the \$18 million in the administration – I’m assuming the vast majority of that goes to rental costs for buildings that government leases. Is that correct? Yeah.

Can you give us a breakdown on – maybe it’s a very long list, and if it is, you could just get that back to me; that’s fine. But that’s a lot of money.

Hon. E. Hudson: We can certainly bring back the list, I’m quite sure. But just in the interest of time maybe, to give a high-level overview, it covers the costs associated with renting and operating 185 leased spaces in 107 locations with a total square footage of about 854,000 square feet – substantial.

P. Bevan-Baker: I see that there’s a project – I mean, that’s the biggest line item by far, but I see in the professional services, there’s management services for health and education projects. I’m just wondering what’s being offered there that we couldn’t possibly find skills for it in-house, either in another department or somewhere else in government.

Wendy MacDonald: Can I ask which handout you’re on? I’m sorry.

P. Bevan-Baker: In the big book, I’m on page TIE H1, and it’s professional services for accommodations.

Wendy MacDonald: The professional services are for security services in government-leased buildings.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, you know what? I’m in the next section.

My Apologies. Sorry about that.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

[4:55 p.m.]

Building Construction

“Appropriations provided for building construction staffing and related services for government building projects, including construction and major redevelopment.”
Administration: 13,200. Equipment: 8,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 6,500. Professional Services: 110,000. Salaries: 2,009,900. Travel and Training: 46,000.

Total Building Construction: 2,194,400

The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Just a quick question, and it’s more to do with the work that’s going on at Access PEI in O’Leary. That’s fine, I have no concerns there, but the old vet clinic that’s still there – once that’s completed, that a building that’s going to be sitting there and it’s certainly in need of repair. I’m aware that the Town of O’Leary has approached the department. I think they wrote a letter, I think to the previous minister.

Could you follow up on that and maybe provide them some information – whether there’s any interest in conveying the property over to them or not – so at least they can get some clarity?

Hon. E. Hudson: Certainly, I’ll have follow-up made at the same time as with regard to the sidewalk.

R. Henderson: I’ve got more questions he asked, but anyway. Thanks, minister.

Chair: Shall this section carry?

Hon. H. Perry: I have a question. My hand is up.

Chair: Oh, sorry.

Hon. H. Perry: It’s always like that, so....

Chair: That is not true.

Hon. H. Perry: It’s true....

[Interjections]

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Under the materials, supplies, and services line, \$125,400 on a budget of only \$6,500 in the '25-26 budget forecast – what happened there? What specific project drove that up – or pressure?

Wendy MacDonald: The pressure there or project that drove that up is that this division is responsible for the demolition of government-owned buildings when they are deemed to be demolished, and during the year, the former sewerage building in Wood Islands was demolished. What else was done?

G. McNeilly: The curling club?

Wendy MacDonald: Not in this division. Not in this department.

That's all I have in my notes. I'm sorry.

Hon. H. Perry: Professional services, again, there is \$227,000 on a line budget of \$110,000. What was unforeseen there?

Wendy MacDonald: What was unforeseen? There was some building design external project management services required due to vacant positions throughout the year.

Hon. H. Perry: Building design for what particular building?

Wendy MacDonald: I don't have that information with me.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay.

That's good.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

I see here the question I was asking last time, the project management services for various health and education projects. I'm assuming that health project is the mental health campus. I remember committee meetings where it was brought up that we didn't have the internal expertise for that, but I'm wondering what schools – if that's indeed what the education projects are.

Wendy MacDonald: Just in response to that, the professionals contract services here – those spends are because of vacant positions during the year.

P. Bevan-Baker: Sorry, this is for – oh, so we didn't have the services in government so we hired it out to a professional service outside?

Wendy MacDonald: Yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I see, also, that there are professional services for various capital building projects, i.e., Health PEI. Again, I go back to our standing committee where it was explained to us that we did not have the skills within the planning department to do that ourselves. Is that what that \$48,000 is?

Wendy MacDonald: Are you specifically referring to the mental health campus?

P. Bevan-Baker: I don't know. It just says i.e., Health PEI. I'm sorry.

Wendy MacDonald: Okay. That would be various – perhaps major repairs. It may not be building design in itself. It could be a roof replacement, not necessarily the design of the health building.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Again, I'm not sure what this refers to, Wendy, but it's regarding district heat, biomass heat, and forestry building design.

[5:00 p.m.]

The \$47,000, again, professional services – do you have any more information on that?

Wendy MacDonald: The forestry building design, I believe, is a capital budget through the Department of Forestry for the Upton Road. I think it's Upton Road park. There's a forestry building out there. Where the nursery is, I'm sorry – the Frank Gaudet Nursery. This would have been the design associated with it. Again, the consultants are hired, due to the fact that we were understaffed at that point, to keep the capital building and projects moving forward.

P. Bevan-Baker: I don't have any more questions in this section, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Building Services: 39,618,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal, that this House adjourn until Thursday, May 28th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a great evening.

[The Legislature adjourned until Thursday, 28 May 2026 at 1:00 p.m.]