



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings**

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Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Thursday, 28 May 2026

No. 36

The Honourable Brad Trivers, Speaker

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

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

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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 1:03 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Welcome to everyone in the gallery and everybody watching online.

I want to start today by taking a minute to wish the Minister of Housing and Communities a happy birthday. We sang him the song and we did the whole bit upstairs. Happy birthday to the minister.

Later this evening, I'm going to be attending the Downtown Charlottetown Inc. annual awards night. Events like this are really vital to the community as we recognize individuals and businesses whose dedication help make our capital city such a great place. I want to extend my congratulations to all those nominees tonight and those who will be awarded their awards this evening and express my gratitude to everyone who contributes to making the capital city such a special place.

I also want to thank the organizers for bringing the community together to celebrate these achievements and to look ahead at a promising summer, looks like, here in the capital area. I'm looking forward to that.

[1:05 p.m.]

I also want to extend a warm and heartfelt early birthday wish to Helen MacPhail from Clyde River. Helen will celebrate an extraordinary milestone very soon. Helen is turning 100 years young on June 8th –

[Hear, hear!]

Hon. R. Lantz: Happy birthday in advance to Helen. Reaching a century of life is a real remarkable achievement, and I want to wish Helen nothing but the very best on her special day.

I also note that next Saturday, June 6th, the community of Clyde River will be gathering to celebrate Helen with a birthday party. I know

it'll be a wonderful occasion for all those who attend. Again, happy birthday, Helen.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise and welcome all those who are watching online, and in particular, those watching from Tignish-Palmer Road. Welcome to those in the gallery today: Phil, George, Gerard, and I saw Dean MacArthur come in. Welcome to the gallery.

Also, while I guess there are some birthday wishes, I'll send up to Christopher Cross in my district, to Leo Handrahan. He had his 90th birthday yesterday, so I'd like to wish Leo a very happy belated birthday. There will be a bit of a celebration on Sunday for him in Kildare, so I look forward to attending that event.

With that, as I say, we have some work to do, so let's get at 'er.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon to you and all my colleagues in the Legislature and everybody who helps make the Legislature run. Welcome back for another great day of debate, and welcome everybody watching online and in the gallery today; some familiar faces. Nice to see Phil and George, and there's Dean back again, and Gerard Deveau. Great to see you out, Gerard, from Summerside. Thanks for making the trip down.

I'd like to offer congratulations to a young constituent of mine in District 19 who recently graduated from the primary care paramedicine program at Holland College: Anna Jesulaitis. She's a member of the Borden fire department. She joined as a junior firefighter in the summer of 2019, and the regular department in 2023. I went to school with her father, Bobby, for many years, also on the fire department in Borden. The family has a long history of serving with the department, and I'm glad to see that the tradition has continued with Anna. I wish her all the best as she starts her career and continues with Island EMS.

A busy weekend at the Crapaud Curling Club. Again, we have trivia Friday night and the ham cold plate takeout dinner on Sunday. This year, they have arranged for over 500 meals. It's the club's largest fundraiser of the year, so, happy to participate in that on Sunday morning.

Finally, I would like to offer congratulations to a large part of our Green caucus opposition office policy team for several years. He's no longer with us, but today, Nate Hood graduates from UNB law school.

[Hear, hear!]

M. MacFarlane: Many members here would be familiar with Nate and his time. He helped out with several pieces of legislation and was a stranger here on the floor. During his time at UNB, he won several prestigious awards.

He will be coming home this summer to begin his articling in Charlottetown, and it will be great to have Nate back here in PEI. I do hope, Nate, if you're watching, when you receive your law degree, that maybe you wear that corduroy suit that you wore on the floor of the Legislature that I know looks so sharp.

Congrats to Nate, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and recognize everybody watching from home, especially those in District 2, Pownal. Today's a very special day for two very special constituents of mine in District 2: my parents, my mother and father. Today is their 33rd wedding anniversary, and I will say, very much so, they are the epitome of "when the going gets tough, the tough keep going." When most people would be settling down and slowing down, my parents decided they'd open a construction company, so they're busy at it, and there's no rest for the wicked when it comes to them.

Happy anniversary, Mom and Dad.

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

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

I just want to welcome everyone to the gallery here today.

[1:10 p.m.]

Tonight, I'm attending the Lady Ball with several members of the Legislature here as well. But tonight, I get to practice my auctioneering skills. I hope everyone here that is going bids fast and bids often.

I also notice Saturday, June 13th is the Walk to End ALS. Former member, Mark McLane, was very passionate about this. I'm going to attend this on his behalf this year to bring remarks. It's at Victoria Park, June 13th, at 9 a.m. I want everyone to think about coming out and supporting ALS.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you very much.

Welcome back to my colleagues, staff, and our Pages Nate, Jackson, and Eva – Jackson thought that his time was up and didn't think he was going to get to come back, but it's his lucky day; he got to come back today – everybody tuning in from around the Island and, of course, everyone joining us in the gallery. Thank you for being here.

I, too, will be attending the Lady Ball tonight. I'm very much looking forward to it. When the Minister of Agriculture stood to talk about it, it made me giggle thinking – because the minister walked me up on to the stage when I was modelling in the show. I said to him, "Don't you dare push me off the stage," and he said: "Don't you push me off either." Anyway, it has become a really fun tradition for us for a great cause.

Everybody walking in the show tonight – everyone I've spoken to is terrified. I'm going to say this and if you're old like me, you're going to understand this: channel your inner Right Said Fred.

Thank you.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

I have no idea what that meant, but I appreciate the sentiment.

I would like to welcome everybody to the gallery today, Phil, George, Gerard, and Dean; really good to see you here. I also want to pass on my personal congratulations to Nate Hood on getting his law degree. That's really exciting. I look forward to seeing him back here on the Island.

I appreciate the Premier mentioning Helen MacPhail's 100th birthday, which is upcoming. Helen, of course, is a constituent of mine. She lives in the Clyde River area. She's an incredible woman. Her husband, of course, the late Lloyd, was an MLA in this Legislature and a Lieutenant Governor. She is still incredibly active, bright – just an extraordinary woman. I look forward to joining her for her birthday celebration on the 6th in Clyde River. Congratulations, Helen. What an amazing lady.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just wanted to welcome everybody back to the Legislature today, everybody in the gallery, especially Gerard Deveau. I was kind of wondering if you were going to show up. You normally do; every sitting we see you. And also, my regular watchers at home – Elizabeth, Joan, and Dorothy.

And I just wanted to wish all my colleagues lots of fun tonight at the Lady Ball. It made me reminisce back 23 years ago when I was a first-time firefighter; they made me go in the "Miss Fire Belle Ball." I had to shave my legs and put a pair of high heels on. It wasn't a pretty sight, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Members

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

Addressing Concerns in Education System

K. Bernard: I'll bring the vibe down a little bit in here.

You cannot imagine how I felt when I read the motion tabled yesterday by the Minister of

Education, urging himself to develop a new code of conduct for Island schools.

The minister says the code of conduct will set clear expectations for those navigating the school system – that we need baseline expectations for how students, staff, parents and caregivers behave, and clear repercussions for bad behaviour. Sure, this is one piece of the puzzle, but if tabling a motion is what it takes to get this minister to take action, where are all the other motions?

Where is his motion on creating an action plan for inclusive education that is two years overdue, for example? What this minister fails to understand is that in the education system, there needs to be a toolbox – one filled with various tools to help with various situations with various students.

A code of conduct is not near enough. This is the lowest of the lowest hanging fruit. Where is this minister's urgency for what frontline staff are crying for – help with complex classroom composition, violence in schools, and students falling through the cracks at alarming rates?

If the Premier wants to talk about performative and political actions in the Legislature, maybe he should look at his own ministers who, instead of rolling up their sleeves and doing the real work, are tabling performative, non-binding motions urging themselves to do what they already said they were going to do.

[1:15 p.m.]

Students, teachers, EAs, support staff, and school personnel deserve better than empty words. They deserve a minister with a sense of urgency who is engaged, listening and responsive.

Thank you.

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

Responsibility for PEI's Energy Future

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

The first question the Premier was asked yesterday was who is actually in charge of PEI's energy future – the government, IRAC, or

Maritime Electric – and it’s a really good question. Who is ultimately in charge?

IRAC of course adjudicates, but it has no authority to provide vision or direction. Maritime Electric is certainly in no position to be trusted with creating the framework for an essential service in which of course they have a massive, vested interest. Only government – only government – has the authority, the means, and I would say the obligation to take charge of this file at this critical moment. But to watch this tired and aimless government, you’d never know that they are the ones that could – indeed, for the sake of Islanders, that must – take control and guide our province to a safe, clean, reliable, and affordable energy future.

PEI is standing on the precipice of making a half-billion-dollar investment in our electricity future that will tie future Islanders for decades to come to unnecessarily large cost increases, but what do we get from this dithering government? Some stumbling steps towards a tiny battery that is going to be way too small and will arrive too late, and a broken promise to modernize our regulations.

At the very time when Islanders desperately need a lively government with some spark and an engine that’s firing on all cylinders, all we’ve got is this misfiring old clunker that’s only fit for the scrap heap.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

RJ’s Country Store

B. Curran: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’ll have to say the third party should take a page out of the Dalai Lama’s book and choose optimism; it feels better.

I rise in this Chamber today to speak about a place that defines the word “resilience” and a community that refuses to let adversity get the upper hand. I’m talking about RJ’s Country Store in District 2 and its owner and staff.

Not long ago, this vital local business was targeted by criminals who broke in and smashed the place to smithereens. It was the kind of senseless destruction that could easily break a person’s spirit. It left a hole in the community

and threatened a livelihood built on years of hard work.

But those criminals didn’t factor in the character of District 2. Almost immediately, the people of this area did what Islanders do best. They rolled up their sleeves, reached out their hands, and rallied behind the small country store. Neighbours, customers, and fellow business owners stepped up to offer support, proving that an attack on one local business is felt by the entire community.

Driven by that incredible wave of local support, they didn’t back down. They put the pieces back together, rebuilt the store, and reopened the doors to the people who stood by them.

This isn’t just a story about a store reopening; it’s a masterclass in community spirit. It shows that our true strength isn’t just found in bricks and mortar but in the pride we take in looking out for one another. When things get tough, the residents of this district ensured that the local staple would continue to succeed.

I ask all members of this House to join me in commending Robert Shaw and the staff of RJ’s Country Store for their determination and in celebrating the community that rallied together to bring RJ’s Country Store back better than ever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

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

Educational assistants

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

Yesterday during Question Period, the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough brought up a concern about EA coverage that wouldn’t be available after a certain date in one of our schools.

Member, I did go back to the PSB and got a message back from our assistant director. He confirmed that this isn’t the case, and the PSB is sending memos out to all of our school principals to clarify and explain the

expectations. I just wanted to clarify that from yesterday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

[1:20 p.m.]

Last summer's drought was a wakeup call for Prince Edward Island. Islanders saw dry fields, stressed rivers and streams, and growing concerns about groundwater supply. Farmers are working hard to adapt to protect the land that they rely on, but Islanders also want confidence that this government actually has a long-term plan to protect PEI's water supply as more high-capacity wells are approved across the province because right now, they're wary that this government does not fully understand the lasting consequences of the decisions made now, or the cost of this Premier refusing to make the hard decisions.

Water supply infrastructure

Question to the Premier: Since last summer's drought, what work has your government done to ensure PEI's groundwater supply can sustainably support the growing number of high-capacity wells? Will the Premier table research government is relying on?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, the Department of Environment is working diligently with all the farmers. I know there have been a number of more applications, but before you actually get a permit, you do have to have a groundwater exploration permit before you actually get a high-capacity well or withdrawal permit.

We're working with all of the watersheds across PEI to ensure that they are working with farmers as well. We do have a team that is exploring and monitoring every high-capacity well that we have here in the province.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Prince Edward Island depends entirely on our groundwater for drinking water, for farming, and businesses right across Prince Edward Island. Once pressure is put on the system, every Islander is affected, yet Islanders still don't know how many high-capacity wells are already operating, how many more are being considered, or what the long-term impact could be on aquifers and watersheds across the province.

Question to the Premier: Can the Premier tell Islanders how many high-capacity irrigation wells are currently approved and operating on PEI, and how many additional applications are currently under review?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, we have 186 total groundwater exploration permits in the works. Almost half of those were received after August of last year with the stresses we had and the demand for water. Right now, since the irrigation strategy was put in place, there were 26 water withdrawal permits issues. I'll double check and see if that number has increased since my last briefing.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This government often says its decisions are science based, but Islanders still have not seen clear public information showing groundwater capacity, recharge rates, or watershed stress levels across the province. If government is truly confident these decisions are sustainable, then Islanders should not have to rely on vague assurances when it comes to protecting our water supply.

Question to the Minister of Environment and Energy: What scientific modeling or groundwater analysis is government using to determine how many additional irrigation wells PEI aquifers can sustain safely?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, there is a water registry online. There's so much information there. It's a very science-based approach. We understand the watersheds are very important. With every permit that is issued, it will be watershed by watershed, and the department will review to make sure that the capacity is there.

I will say that the recharge seems to be wonderful after having the winter that we had, and on a day like today, we're very thankful for that, but hon. member, it is a scientific approach and the Department of Environment makes sure that – and will make sure that – farmers live within the perimeters of the permits.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

During last summer's drought, many Islanders with shallow residential wells were genuinely worried about their water supply while streams and rivers across the province faced serious stress. People want to know government is protecting communities and watersheds, not waiting until there's a problem to finally act.

Question to the Minister of Land and Environment: What protections are currently in place to ensure new high-capacity wells do not negatively impact nearby residential wells, streams, or watersheds?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, as I stated earlier, the first step of this application is to apply for a groundwater exploration permit. When that comes in, then the department will research and do what needs to be done to look at where that well would go and how it would affect the local groundwater. After that, then there would be a withdrawal permit request issued.

This is not willy-nilly. We are very concerned about making sure Islanders have the water that they need. We are more than willing to work with farmers to ensure that they have the water that they need, but we are all going to have to

work together and we're going to have to share the water. The department will work very diligently to ensure that there is enough water, and everyone will follow the rules.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

[1:25 p.m.]

That's exactly what my line of questioning is about, and what Islanders are asking. It's about that balance because we're the only province in Canada that relies on groundwater. Farmers are adapting and investing because they care deeply about protecting the land that they depend on. The question Islanders are asking is whether government is adapting quickly enough as well.

Last summer exposed real concerns about how prepared this province is for future droughts and long-term groundwater protection, yet Islanders are very worried that this government is simply kicking another difficult decision down the road instead of dealing with it head-on.

Question to the Minister of Land and Environment: Beyond discussions, what has this government actually done last summer's drought to better protect PEI's groundwater supply and prepare for future drought conditions?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, if you'd listen to the answers that I'm giving to the questions, you probably would have gotten some of this already.

When there's a permit issued, there needs to be a contingency plan if there is a drought. Also, we are now setting up a water governance coalition to ensure that there is oversight, not just within the department, but across all the stakeholders that are concerned. I can assure you that the department will work very diligently to ensure that we have groundwater for all Islanders.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'm asking these questions because Islanders are coming to us asking these questions, alright?

Yesterday during Question Period, the third party asked this Premier to call an election. We also believe that Islanders are ready for an election after this government put this province in the state of chaos for the past 18 months. Right now, all Islanders are not represented in this House. That weakens debate, weakens accountability, and it weakens representation.

District 16 by-election

Question to the Premier: You are one of the very few Islanders that doesn't want a general election right now. However, you do have the power and responsibility to call a by-election to fill one of the vacant seats in this House. When can Islanders expect that?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

We were having a caucus meeting before we came downstairs. I was talking about my experience out knocking on doors in my district recently. I can tell you, not one of my constituents asked me to hold a general election. It's on the bottom of the list of everybody's priorities as far as I can tell.

But yes, we are due. We must hold a by-election to fill the seat left vacant by our dear colleague, Mark McLane, and we intend to do that. Prince Edward Islanders will know when we are ready to call the by-election and so will everyone in this House.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While we were reviewing the budget for early years, I asked if there was a target for the maximum number of licensed spaces. I asked this because as spaces grow, it is becoming more difficult for centres to fill them, particularly for two- to four-year-olds. There will always be a need for infants.

Unless the province is moving toward a publicly funded system the same as schools, careful

monitoring of the number of spaces versus demand is essential. If you don't, centres will not be able to fill the spaces, further making them financially unviable.

Early learning and child care funding (further)

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: What is being done to ensure that there is not an oversaturation of spaces, thus making many centres unviable?

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

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

We have done such a good job in growing our sector. We were at a place just maybe a short year ago where we were standing up centres anywhere and everywhere in the province that someone was willing to do so. We're at a place now where we have to be more strategic in where we put our spaces and open centres and do expansions and whatnot. I mean, that's a testament to the work that's been done in this department, the work that's been done by our sector.

We have pivoted a little bit. We're monitoring that. We want to ensure that our centres operate at that 90 percent capacity rate and ensure the long-term viability of our centres across this province.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is a plan is what I thought I heard, but I'll come back to that.

[1:30 p.m.]

When the same minister was asked why the burden of proving financial hardship falls on the centres who have already disclosed their situation in writing, he asked them to encourage them to step up and come in and talk to the staff. Centres are saying that they've done that, and at what point does the department say it's time for the minister to sit with all early years centres and

better understand as a collective their very real concerns with the existing funding model?

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Will you commit to sitting with all the early years centres and truly listen to understand their very real concerns with the existing funding model and their viability?

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

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

The short answer to that question is absolutely. I will meet with any director and any centre at any time that they want to sit down and talk to me.

We've got some of the best people in our early years sector, as this member knows because she worked alongside them for many, many years. They're the experts. They have and will continue to meet with our directors to work through any issues that they have. Our door is always open. We're always willing to listen and we're always willing to work with our sector and our centres to ensure that they're viable, they're strong, and they're well positioned moving into the future.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: I appreciate that, minister. You can probably expect a large number of centres to want to meet with you as a group.

Educational assistants provide an essential service within our education system, yet the reality is EA positions are sitting vacant and there are people being hired who do not meet the qualifications. EAs are met with complex challenges without the resources they need to do their job well, and I'm hearing that some are even considering leaving their roles. There are more and more children attending school with incredibly complex needs. At a time when resources and training for EAs are critical, there's no plan on how government will truly support them so that they in turn can support the students and teachers.

Support for educational assistants (further)

Question to the same minister. The minister has talked about a review of the role of EAs.

Minister, please elaborate on what that actually means and what is currently being done so that EAs this coming September will have the supports they need to succeed?

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

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

Our educational assistants in our system provide a crucial, crucial role in our children's education and supporting staff and the system as a whole. I'm not sure what will unfold from this review. This is exactly why we are calling a review – so we can better understand where those supports need to be and how we can assist them.

As far as EA supports in the schools and our students that need those, the sooner that this opposition passes our budget the sooner we can allocate those resources for the upcoming school year. So, let's get it done.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

But the minister has talked about a review of EAs, yet allocated more EAs, but not sure what the review is going to mean and where the EAs are going to go. So, the answer is – will it look any different this fall? I'm not convinced it will for people.

Families across PEI have also reported that their children with autism and other neurodivergent diagnoses are being asked to leave school early during the day or are excluded from full-time attendance, sometimes on a daily basis, because the schools, to the best of their effort, are saying they simply can't manage the child's needs. The Province does not appear to track this practice or in any way publicly report it.

Supporting needs of neurodivergent students

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Can you tell us how many students in PEI are currently being sent home early or excluded from full-time classroom learning because the school simply can't meet their needs? And will you, minister, commit to releasing this data, broken down by schools?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Yeah, I don't know if I can commit to all of what she's asking for here today, but I do know that these issues – sort of like yesterday's issues that turned out not to be accurate, I have not heard these concerns come through my office. But I will go back and I will get the answers to those questions.

Look, all of our children in our system deserve to be supported, and I'm very, very proud of the work that our department and this government has done year over year over year to support students with those diverse needs.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just need to correct the minister. I was accurate. I am getting the information from the parents that were told that their children were done this year on June 15th.

[1:35 p.m.]

Advocates, educators, and families have repeatedly identified a shortage of EAs, specialized staff, and appropriate programming as a root cause for children with complex needs being excluded from school. Without adequate resourcing, the schools are left without the capacity to serve these students. This is not an issue or a problem with the teachers or with the staff. The problem is that the schools don't have the resources they need, and that sits squarely with the department.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: What specific additional funding – because you have to ask the right question – staffing positions or other resources have you committed to the Public Schools Branch for next year specifically to ensure that children with special needs can remain in school full-time?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: As I stated yesterday in my ministerial statement, our government has made the single largest investment in the history of this province in our educational system. That

includes a large number of special needs support staff, staff right across the system, EAs – we're bolstering up our HR to make our schools safer.

I'm very, very proud of the fact that we have invested \$38.9 million this year – the largest single investment in the history of this province; increased our budget by nine percent – to support our system and the staff within it, as well as the students.

Thank you.

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

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

We know that Islanders continue to be challenged with accessible, safe housing, and actions taken by this government have been mainly ineffective in making inroads to assist our homeless population and progress. This government bought a curling club, spent millions of dollars on it, then spent another \$400,000 to tear it down, leaving a blank space with nobody living in that area.

Provincial response to homelessness (further)

Question to the Minister of Housing: You did an online survey, but when do you expect people to be actually living in that space?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

I see we're recycling questions now. This was stated that I think that's in the capital budget for 2028.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, we're not recycling questions when there's an open blank space and nothing's been done, and there's never been any discussion with the community whatsoever.

In that public engagement survey – which you did table, minister, in the Legislature, and I've seen it many times. Public engagement was conducted to help determine next steps for the

property at 241 Euston Street. The engagement included an online survey with 45.6 percent of respondents identifying as – get this – visitors.

I wonder who these visitors are and why their views have been taken into account. What are you going to do with their information? Who are these visitors?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

Yeah, we did ask the public what their thoughts were. It came back that they wanted social housing with a little bit of commercial space, possibly, maybe a daycare, community space, and we're following through with the wishes.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: If you're following through on your wishes, when will that be done? Because it's not being done right now. After nine Housing ministers, it seems like they could not organize a two-car parade over here on that side.

Moving along to what we have done, minister: you've put the services of the Community Outreach Centre located down to Park Street. Residents and surrounding businesses have raised ongoing concerns about safety, disorder, and growing demand being placed on emergency services.

Question to the Minister of Housing: How many police calls and emergency response calls have been made to the Community Outreach Centre on Park Street this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

I'm not sure of the exact number, but I do know that things are going well down there. It's not that long ago that we didn't have this sort of thing here. We've stood it up. We've learnt as we went, and I've got to give credit to the Adventure Group. They're doing great work. They're making lots of touches with people. We're helping support them. We're helping get them into where they need to go, and we're

going to keep working hard and going to keep helping this vulnerable population.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, I totally disagree with that statement. This has been nothing short of a disaster. I don't think you know what you're doing. It clearly shows because there hasn't been plan over there. When there are zero dollars in the Housing First budget – you have no idea how to house anybody and it shows, and it's very apparent.

Islanders deserve transparency about what's happening down in that area. How many incident reports have been provided by the operators since the centre opened at the Park Street location?

[1:40 p.m.]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's passion for this, but I question where his passion was when he chose to run for the party that he chose because as I stated –

[Interjections]

Hon. K. Dollar: Well, everybody knows the history.

Mr. Speaker, there were no emergency shelters when this government came into power. There was no outreach centre. There were four supportive housing units. Today, we've got emergency shelters in Summerside and Charlottetown that were at capacity at one time, but the capacity is running down. We had four supportive housing units; we now have 135. We are working on more.

Mr. Speaker, we've been moving along here. Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Throughout this sitting, Mr. Speaker, this government has shown Islanders that when decisions need to be made, they either delay, ignore, or dismiss. Earlier this sitting, an emergency room doctor brought forward a

practical health care solution to this House. Unlike the doctor, who the Premier recently dismissed as “some doctor from wherever he’s from,” this doctor who came to the floor, who championed this solution, works and lives here in Prince Edward Island.

Government priorities (further)

Question to the Minister of Health: Minister, if you are truly committed to listening to Island doctors, how can you justify not listening when one brings forward a real solution?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s certainly a good question.

I think as the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning explained quite well, the *Employment Standards Act* will be proclaimed in the coming weeks, which will of course move the number of days required from three to five. I think that’s quite reasonable.

What I would also say is that I think a big part of the issue is businesses that are abusing/breaking the law, requiring people to go in to get a sick note from a physician when it’s under three days. I think we need better enforcement. We need businesses to follow the law. I think five days is more than reasonable, and under the new act, more professions under the *Regulated Health Professions Act* will be able to prescribe that note. I think five is very reasonable to take that pressure off our physicians.

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

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, this pattern of not listening to Islanders continues across government. The minister responsible for early years cut pedagogical services to child care centres despite strong opposition from frontline child care professionals, parents, and Islanders. Islanders are being told there’s no money for essential child care supports, while this government still refuses to cancel its millions-of-dollars NHL contract.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: How can you justify, minister, cutting child care supports while your government continues to send millions of dollars to the NHL?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, everyone in this House, everyone in this province is aware that we’re managing a deficit. When we’re managing a deficit, we have to make disciplined decisions about spending. Everyone understands that. There have been a lot of questions about that in this House, but one thing we made a decision to do was to maintain \$10-a-day daycare. That is worth thousands of dollars to families.

This is meaningful support for children, meaningful support for families. We’re still investing in education, in child care, and in health care. We’ve made principled choices to protect the greatest, most impactful programs in this province, and that’s what we’ll continue to do.

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

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Does the Premier consider continuing to spend millions of dollars on the NHL a disciplined decision?

After years of reckless spending and poor priorities, Islanders are now paying the price. Two credit rating agencies recently downgraded this government’s outlook to negative, expressing increasing concern over this government’s fiscal choices. Islanders are seeing supports cut while government spending continues to spiral out of control.

Question to the Minister of Finance: At what point, minister, do you take control of your government’s finances and stop allowing some of your colleagues to cut services to Islanders while others spend recklessly on private deals and executive reorganization?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

[1:45 p.m.]

This was a budget, like I said before, of very tough decisions. We had to look at things where every – there are really good things that we had to let go. It was a dilemma, and it was difficult. We kept a priority on education. We kept a priority on health care. We kept a priority on

affordability for Islanders and trying to ensure that those dollars were going – and we were bringing affordability to Islanders.

What the Premier spoke to about the \$10-a-day child care – per year, that's \$80 million that Islanders don't have to spend on child care. Those are the things that we protected. That's all going into Islanders' pockets, and we'll continue to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All these government's tough decisions seem to revolve around cuts to children....

[Interjections]

M. MacFarlane: When it comes to things that impact the daily lives of Islanders, this government refuses to move quickly, if they move at all. This Minister of Energy failed to bring legislation reforms to the *Electric Power Act* that his Premier promised would come this sitting.

Question to the Minister of Energy: How can you justify, minister, not being able to move quickly to bring forward this legislation when your Premier was ready and willing at the beginning of this sitting to butcher our province's conflict of interest protections in order to help out his caucus member?

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

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

Some of the terminology that's being used by the third party today – butcher – in the member's statement earlier. Anyway, I won't go down that road.

But this government has done more with regard to energy, with regard to providing services/programming for Islanders than any government in history. I applaud some of things that the Green Party, that the third party has advocated for in conjunction with us. But let's take a look at the number of dollars that we have

put in to programs over the last nine years since we have been here: \$363 million.

You look at some of the things that we are moving forward with in order to stabilize our supply of electricity. I spoke yesterday with regard to the expression of interest for battery storage. You look at the cable – the nation-building cable initiative that we are actively working with in partnership and pursuing with the federal government. Those are just three or four of the things, initiatives, that we have taken.

Thank you.

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

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the former ministers responsible for Energy who held the portfolio for almost four years – I think we know who we're talking about – when asked about the amendments to the *Electric Power Act* as brought forward by the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point said that if government brings its own energy bill, it won't be a whole different than this one. He also spoke about the benefits of these types of changes that he saw firsthand when he visited Hawaii during his time as Energy minister.

Question to the Minister of Energy: Minister, do you agree with your predecessor who has years of experience in this file and saw the benefits of these changes firsthand? Do you agree with that, Energy minister, or do you agree with your Premier on this?

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

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

I'm not sure if I should be reading through the lines of the Leader of the Third Party. That's almost like an insinuation that I should bail out of here today and head to Hawaii. Maybe some days, that doesn't sound like such a bad idea.

The former Minister of Energy, yes, I'll be honest, I have a lot of respect for him. He had put things forward. Things do change. You look at the economic climate, you look at forces outside of our control here in the Province of PEI and the impact that it has on various rates, whether it's with regard to gas prices, whether it's with regard to electricity.

When we bring something forward in this Legislature from our government, it's not going to be a half-baked response, it's going to be something that we have done the proper consultation, that we have done the proper research on, and we will get it right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, the bill that the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point brought forward was a well thought out, well-considered, expert-consulted bill. This government would do very well to simply copy and paste it and put it on the floor of the Legislature.

[1:50 p.m.]

I remember a day not that long ago when government was led by a Premier who believed that we should work together – all members in this House – collaboratively for the public good. How things have changed. Now this government is being led by a premier who refers to the work done by his colleagues as half-baked and performative, as though only he knows best, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Question, member.

Government leadership (further)

M. MacFarlane: Question to the Deputy Premier: Deputy Premier, how do you justify being elected under a promise of collaboration and public good with the actions and behaviour of our government now?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Considering we don't have a deputy premier, I'll take the question instead.

It's unfortunate what we're seeing as we get towards the end of this sitting. The Leader of the Third Party has two modes: alarmed and very alarmed. He very often is here to criticize, but very few times he comes with concrete solutions.

We're governing. They're performing. We're doing the hard work and will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Mr. Speaker, our provincial road network is the backbone of the Island economy. It connects our rural communities, our farmers, and our tourism operators. Keeping our highways safe and smooth requires massive, predictable funding. Historically, the provincial gas tax has been a primary tool to ensure that drivers using our roads are the ones paying to maintain them. With increasing traffic volumes and severe weather driving up maintenance costs, Islanders deserve clear transparency on where their hard-earned tax dollars are going.

Road maintenance funding

Question to the Minister of Finance and Affordability: Can the minister clarify exactly how much of our provincial gas tax revenue is directly locked in and allocated to fixing our roads?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

Hon. J. Burrridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial gas tax that we do collect is actually one of the lowest in the nation at 8.47 cents a litre. Total collection annually is about \$28 million and just scratching of the surface of the money we put into our roads. I know our provincial maintenance budget is north of \$50 million, so I can tell you every cent and more goes into the maintenance of our roads.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

T. DesRoches: Mr. Speaker, the mix of vehicles on our highways is changing rapidly. While traditional drivers pay a premium at the pump, fully electric vehicles pay zero fuel. Yet, the heavier vehicles causing the exact same or more wear and tear on our asphalt.

Question to the Minister of Finance: Is there anything currently going forward fixing our roads from an EV owner to ensure everyone pays their fair share?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

Yeah, this is a bit of a chat across the nation. I know other provinces have put fees on electric vehicles to help support road maintenance fees. I think Saskatchewan is one of them; maybe Nova Scotia. We haven't put that in place here in PEI, but we're certainly monitoring what's going on across the nation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

T. DesRoches: Mr. Speaker, like the minister said, we aren't the only jurisdiction facing this infrastructure funding gap. Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Nova Scotia have already stepped up by putting a dedicated tax on EVs, specifically earmarked to help with local road repairs.

Question to that same minister: Is anything like this specific policy that the other provinces are doing something the Department of Finance has actively looked at to do for Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

I think it just speaks to the broader issue of every province going through these tougher fiscal times and trying to find revenue sources to help maintain roads and everything else – health systems, education systems, all these things that we're up against. In New Brunswick, I think they're putting up tolls on their highways to help pay for their roads. So, yeah, governments are looking at lots of options to try to find revenue streams and try to find ways to help pay for these maintenance pieces. Not just on roads; on health, on education, justice – across the board, the pressures are real and governments are looking for those avenues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

[1:55 p.m.]

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've seen work expanding collaborative health care clinics and improving recruitment across

the province, which will make a difference, but as we look for common-sense ways to build on that success, I keep thinking about our seniors. For an Islander over the age of 65, managing chronic health issues or prescriptions without a permanent family doctor creates a lot of unnecessary worry.

Our province has a proud history of looking out for the folks who built it, and I believe we have an opportunity to lead the way by explicitly prioritizing our seniors on the provincial patient registry.

Access to primary care (further)

A question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. The minister should be looking for proactive ways to improve access. Would the minister be open to exploring a new policy that would automatically fast-track unaffiliated aged 65 and older to the top of the patient registry?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I can see the point that the hon. member is making. I think logically it probably makes sense, but there's probably also the issue of, well, is it 65? Is it 60? If someone is 64, are they going to be calling and saying they have a lot of health issues and should be part of that group of 65 and above?

So, it probably sounds better than actually played out on how that would work. I think there are probably some good points there, but it would be something we'd have to take a serious look at.

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

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hear from seniors at the kitchen table in my district who would find incredible peace of mind knowing the system has their back as they age. This isn't about changing what the department is already doing; it's about introducing a practical priority model, connecting our seniors with a dedicated primary care provider keeps them healthier at home and takes the daily pressure off our community emergency rooms.

A question to the same minister: Will the minister commit to having the department look into the feasibility of this senior priority concept as a common-sense addition to our ongoing primary care expansion?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I think what we have to do is make it priority to affiliate everyone on the patient registry. It has to get down to zero. We have to run our patient medical homes that we have across the province more efficiently and more effectively. We have many patient medical homes, but I don't think they're operating the way they should be. But we have to work together with Health PEI, with all the allied health care professionals, with the physicians in our patient medical homes, and bring everyone along together and improve how these medical homes work.

I think just by doing that, we can affiliate thousands of people off the patient registry; not just simply those who are 65 and older but all Islanders.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Protecting the health of our older population is vital to keeping our small rural communities strong and independent. Islanders want to see us continue to innovate, and a policy like this would show that Prince Edward Island values its seniors. It's a simple, targeted solution.

If this is the case, will the minister look at the feasibility of a primary care clinic or patient medical home in each county to affiliate those who have built this province – our seniors?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

No. We already have many patient medical homes that we can affiliate people to if we can find a way to run them, I think, more effectively. We seem to have all the ingredients in the patient medical homes, but we can't seem to get

the recipe right in how they're managed and how they're run effectively. So, I don't think we need to try and build more patient medical homes or new infrastructure. We have many existing patient medical homes.

If we can just find a way to work more efficiently and more effectively, I think we can do exactly what the hon. member wants – to take thousands of Islanders off the patient registry.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the most riveting documents I have ever read, entitled *With You, For You* – it says in there: “continue investing in public housing with the goal of eliminating the housing registry within the next 24 months.” This is the Tory platform from a few years ago – 24 months.

Social housing registry

Question to the Minister of Housing. The social housing registry is supposed to be updated every month. It hasn't been updated since March. Why hasn't the housing registry been updated, and how are you going to eliminate it within 24 months? That timeline has passed.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

We're working on reducing that registry. We're down 6 percent. We're going to be adding 200 more units here very shortly. We're going to continue working. We've made record investments. We probably did more last week than the previous administration did the whole time they were in power.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

[2:00 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: It's funny because just this week, I asked questions to the Premier about various committees they set up. One of them is the red tape reduction committee and the other one is the housing committee. At the highest level these are such priorities, and what does the

Premier tell me? He says that they're basically coffee committees, where you sit around and drink coffee.

Question to the Minister of Housing: Are you over there drinking all the coffee? What's being done at these committees? Because nothing is getting done.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Hon. K. Dollar: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been taking notice to the hon. member talking about all these different committees, and he's a little off on some of these committees, I believe. I don't think he knows what committee is what. He's talking about committees that were formed long and ever ago, and we've moved on to new things, Mr. Speaker. We're working hard here every day.

Thank you.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

Municipal Leaders Talk

Hon. K. Dollar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I almost forgot I was doing this.

[Laughter]

Hon. K. Dollar: I rise today to highlight Municipal Leaders Talk, a program that supports the people who serve our communities every day.

Launched last fall, the program offers free, confidential counselling to municipal leaders across Prince Edward Island because the truth is being a mayor, councillor, or a CAO isn't easy. These leaders carry real responsibility, and at times face stress, criticism, and even harassment. This program ensures they don't have to face those challenges alone. When we support their wellbeing, we strengthen our communities. Supported leaders stay engaged, committed, and ready to serve.

To our municipal leaders: support is here for you.

To all Islanders: let's remember that respect matters in every conversation.

For more information, visit princeedwardisland.ca/MunicipalLeadersTalk.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, minister.

This is something that I can get behind and support on because it is tough to enter into being an elected official and we need strong mayors. We need people to stand up, and they shouldn't be scared about what they're going to face online from a small minority of the people with a big voice and a big platform, and it's growing.

We have to stand with them. As the Member from Morell-Donagh talked about in one of his member's statements, it's situations like this that we have to avoid. But I stand with you. People make mistakes and people need to run and be well supported. I support you with that too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the statement.

I think that's a great initiative. We're seeing municipal leaders under so much stress and harassment and conflict within their communities.

I might suggest in addition to having a phone line for municipal leaders to call for support, maybe that this government show some leadership when it comes to our municipalities and address the actual problems that municipalities are crying out for support and help with – struggling under the weight of legislation that does not work for the multiple small municipalities in our province.

Maybe that's where the government and the minister could focus his attention, Mr. Speaker – on fixing the problem at its root.

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

Capital Update – Education and Early Years

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

Yesterday, the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park was a little confused in her response to my House statement on the Department of Education and Early Years operating budget. That budget invested a record \$505 million into the operation of the education and early years sectors across the province. Not one dime of it is capital, as the member suggested.

So, I thought I'd take the opportunity today to highlight some of the capital investments being made by my department over the next five years, which, again, is separate from operational.

Our government is committed to providing healthy, safe learning environments for our students and staff. That's why, over the next five years, our government has committed \$437.5 million in capital infrastructure including new construction, major renovations, equipment, and school buses.

Some of the major projects currently underway include Stratford High School, Evangeline, and East Royalty Elementary. There are major additions set to begin at Queen Charlotte and École François-Buote. We also have plans for major renovations at Westisle, and new schools in Georgetown, Summerside, West Royalty, and Stratford.

[2:05 p.m.]

We are purchasing 21 new school buses in 2026-27, we are improving ventilation at schools across the province, and we are investing more than \$4 million a year over the next five years in major repairs.

Our five-year capital plan for education and early years is the most ambitious in the history of this province. It demonstrates our unwavering commitment to the delivery of quality education to Island students in an environment that supports learning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Investing in education is investing in the future of PEI. Government understands that students are overcrowded in their classrooms, are in aging buildings, and that the learning

environments no longer meet the needs of today's learners. That is why it is important to make capital investments in schools across this province. These investments are more than bricks and mortar; they are about creating safe, modern, and inclusive spaces where Island students can learn, grow, and thrive.

Improving classrooms, upgrading ventilation systems, expanding learning environments, modernizing the infrastructure, and ensuring schools are better equipped to support both students and staff is absolutely critical. It is also essential to plan for future growth in communities where enrollment pressures continue to increase, which is why the budget increases; there are more people.

But buildings alone are not an education system. A new school means little if children are struggling to access the supports they need inside those walls, where teachers and staff don't have what they need to support those students. Students require mental health and wellness supports, inclusive learning environments, and early intervention, and teachers require the resources needed to support every child to succeed.

Capital investments are important, but they must go hand in hand with investments in children and teachers themselves. The responsibility is not simply to build schools; it is to build a system in which every child feels supported and valued and has the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

There is more work to do. Government must be committed to strengthening education, but not only through infrastructure. There must be meaningful supports and resources for teachers and support staff that will enable them to put students first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I'm more powerful than I thought. But I'm confused. He stood up – no smarter, though. That's classy.

I'm confused, though. You stood up to correct me, saying that I was talking about capital, but

then you spoke about capital, so let's talk about capital again.

We obviously need schools, but it's more important that we have the people inside the schools to do the work, so we need to ensure we've got teachers, well-trained EAs, counsellors, admin support staff, custodians, and bus drivers for said schools. Otherwise, they're empty buildings.

We look at the planning of this government, the poor planning – mobile classrooms as permanent solutions. Time of austerity should lead to innovation, yet in this government, that is not what we're seeing.

So, you want a solution? Here are a couple for you.

I've asked about this a couple of times: inventory of government buildings. Do you have one? Rather than build, build, build, perhaps you could look at the buildings that you do own and use those.

Speaker: Member.

K. Bernard: Let's invest in education like you say you are...

Speaker: Member.

K. Bernard: ...and listen to frontline workers.

Thank you.

Recognition of Guests II

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to recognize a constituent of District 2 Georgetown-Pownal, Kevin Taylor, who just walked in. Thanks for coming in, Kevin, and I hope you enjoy what you're seeing here today.

[Laughter]

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Speaker: Minister.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

[2:10 p.m.]

Speaker: 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 further 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 back. If you could state your name and your title for Hansard.

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

Chair: Okay folks, those of you that are following along, we are on page 156 at the top.

Health – Building Infrastructure

Health – Building Infrastructure

“Appropriations provided for division staffing, materials, and related services for Health capital building projects including construction and major redevelopment.” Administration: 12,000. Equipment: 23,900. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 3,400. Professional Services: 4,500. Salaries: 588,700. Travel and Training: 7,500.

Total Health – Building Infrastructure: 640,000

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The obvious line that stands out is salaries. Can you tell me why there is such a huge difference between what was estimated in '25-26 to what the forecast was?

Wendy MacDonald: This was a new division last year. The funding went in during budget debate last year. In order to staff a position, the process has to be followed. A position questionnaire has to be created; it has to go through a classification process to be created. Along those timelines, it was then posted. Again, it still has to work its way through a process, so it was towards the very end of the year by the time we got a position filled.

Hon. H. Perry: The difference between the budget estimate in '25-26 and '26-27 – there is a difference. What positions are being cut from the original '25-26 plan?

Wendy MacDonald: The positions are not being cut from the '25-26 plan. We're anticipating that due to the timelines that you have to go through to create the positions and be able to post positions and fill positions, there will be a delay in staffing the positions.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm not sure I follow what you're saying. In '25-26, you estimated there would be \$761,000 spent on salaries. The '26-27 estimate is \$588,700. That's quite a difference there. You're saying that because of the delay, there's going to be less staff required – or is it because there is less time in the fiscal year that you're paying salaries?

Wendy MacDonald: Less time in the fiscal year, and we still have to create a number of these positions. There are only two of the positions created right now. One is currently staffed; the other has been advertised and

posted. We still have other positions to create. We're not cutting positions or anything. It's just the delay in getting positions created.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Welcome back, Wendy.

Wendy MacDonald: Thank you.

P. Bevan-Baker: A couple of questions on this section. One has been covered by the Leader of the Opposition, but are the specific builds that this section...? I know it's a new section this year.

Is the money here going towards the mental health campus and the KCMH, or are there other projects?

[2:15 p.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: They are not going towards mental health campus, no. It would be new builds for the most part such as, member, you had mentioned KCMH as an example.

P. Bevan-Baker: I wonder if – there's \$588,000 in salaries. That represents quite a few folks, I imagine. Is the only project – you say it's just new builds – I know the KCMH is scheduled to get going soon but are there other projects that this would be going towards?

Wendy MacDonald: This is for new builds as well as major hospital redevelopment like an addition to the QEH or addition to PCH, just for examples.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Wendy, do you have a list of those projects in front of you there? I'm just looking at them because we've been – the timeline for KCMH, for example, has been pushed back a few times. I'm just wondering what we're actually budgeting for this year.

Wendy MacDonald: This is for the salaries for the oversight of the projects. The projects themselves are part of the capital budget. They would have been in this past fall's capital budget. I don't have a listing in front of me. I just have a couple of examples – KCMS, QEH, PCH....

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Wendy MacDonald: Health capital improvements.

P. Bevan-Baker: That's fine. I have no further questions, then.

Thanks.

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

G. McNeilly: You have one of two positions. What's the total going to be in this section, is it just two?

Wendy MacDonald: No.

G. McNeilly: Three?

Wendy MacDonald: I believe they're all listed in the salary handout. That was part of your big book. I can look for them here. If my memory is correct, it's either eight or nine positions in total.

G. McNeilly: Eight or nine?

Wendy MacDonald: Yeah.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Are they going to be staffed internally? Are we going external to fill those positions because I know it's an incredibly difficult skillset to have. How are we going to staff up to those positions? What's the plan?

Wendy MacDonald: For unionized positions, we have to follow the collective agreement. They have to be posted internally. If we're unable to fill the vacancy, then they'd go external. For excluded positions, they would go external.

G. McNeilly: I know we said major projects, new projects, but there are a lot of renovation-type projects to the QEH and others. I know they're doing stuff within the hospital at various times. What section will that work remain with?

Wendy MacDonald: That work will fall into this section – the oversight of it, not the actual building themselves. Again, the building is capital.

G. McNeilly: Yeah. Okay, that's good.

Thanks.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Health – Building Infrastructure: 640,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Capital Project Division

Traffic Operations

“Appropriations provided for staffing, materials, equipment, and services for highway signage, pavement line markings, traffic control lights, and illumination.” Administration: 25,600. Equipment: 7,300. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 2,673,200. Professional Services: 7,500. Salaries: 3,244,700. Travel and Training: 49,100.

Total Traffic Operations: 6,007,400

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Almost \$3 million was spent on a \$1.9 million budget in the '25-26 budget forecast. The '26-27 budget estimate stays high at \$2.7 million. What are these costs?

Wendy MacDonald: Are you looking for a listing of what's in here or...? Sorry.

Hon. H. Perry: Well, yeah. What is the difference? There is a huge difference in the cost so what is that?

Wendy MacDonald: It is for line painting materials, reflective beads, paints, signage for highway roads and road markings, below raised pavement markers – they sometimes call them cat eyes –

Hon. H. Perry: Cat eyes, yeah.

Chair: Member, just a moment.

Recognition of Guests III

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty would like to do a recognition of guests.

[2:20 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to recognize Luke Ignace who's here, just joined us. Thanks for joining us. He's done

a lot for our community and various fundraisers. Welcome to the proceedings.

Orders of the Day (Government)
continued

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Just to the salary line, the salaries were almost \$3.9 million. Again, it was forecasted almost \$2.8 million. Can you tell me what the difference is there – or why, I mean?

Wendy MacDonald: The increase in the forecast was partially because of collective agreement increases that were negotiated during the year as well as increased casual wages. For the current year, the '26-27 budget includes step increments, reclassifications, and (Indistinct) rates, anticipating the casual salaries will remain consistent with other years, not the forecast.

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

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

I guess one question I have – and I hear about it a lot, the minister and others in here may hear it as well – that the paint is just not holding up on the roads. I know I asked this question last year, minister, and I know it's perhaps a more environmentally-sound paint, but is there work being done or efforts being undertaken to change the paint?

Hon. E. Hudson: We're bound, I guess I would have to say, by the federal regulations that came in back in 2012 with regard to the type of paint. I believe the term is volatile organic compounds or whatever.

With that, though, member, one of the things that the department is carrying out is a process – and you may have heard me reference it – Pathways to Highway Safety, and just looking at other jurisdictions, how they may address things such as this. It's going to be much more varied than that.

But yes, I, like yourself, I certainly hear that on a regular basis of lineage just compared to a number of years ago – obviously pretty well decades ago when you go back to 2012 – but it is a federal regulations that require us to adhere

to the level of paint and the illumininity of it that we see right now.

M. MacFarlane: I appreciate the situation. I'm sure if we have to apply the paint twice a year as opposed to paying more for different paint and do it once a year, there could be a cost-benefit analysis done, but if we're tied to the federal regulations, I get that.

I look at the line for Materials, Supplies, and Services and there's a \$700,000 increase. I'm not sure if you explained that in the answer to the Leader of the Opposition or not, but I'm wondering what's – did that get addressed there, the increase?

Wendy MacDonald: Yes, that's for increased funding for line materials for the reflective beads of paint –

M. MacFarlane: Cat's eyes, yes.

I know this section also includes traffic control lights and illumination, which I assume is the roadside illumination. I know, minister, that I have a number of requests in for – is that what that is, the illumination for the highways? Not traffic illumination or traffic lights, but highway illumination, I assume that's what that is. I wonder now, with the extra \$700,000 if maybe I'll get a couple of those out in my district, minister. I'll send a reminder if we could because it's dark out there in many places.

Hon. E. Hudson: Just for clarity, are you referring, member, to the actual lighting standards, for example, at intersections?

M. MacFarlane: Or on the highway generally.

Hon. E. Hudson: Yeah.

Wendy MacDonald: Those are usually higher cost and usually included in the capital request or capital build.

Hon. E. Hudson: But as Wendy had stated, though, you look at the electricity cost, too, though, that is in the operating budget that has to be looked after. It's part of the expense with regard to the lighting of these lights, of these standards.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Capital Projects

Administration

[2:25 p.m.]

“Appropriations provided for the office of the Chief Engineer for administration and supervisory staff of the highway capital projects.” Administration: 60,600. Equipment: 28,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 37,100. Professional Services: 42,000. Salaries: 3,038,700. Travel and Training: 50,900.

Total Capital Projects – Administration:
3,258,100

Shall it carry? Carried.

Design – Roads and Bridges

“Appropriations provided for staffing, materials, equipment, and travel for road and bridge design.” Administration: 9,000. Equipment: 500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 5,500. Professional Services: 4,800. Salaries: 1,002,300. Travel and Training: 10,300.

Total Design – Roads and Bridges: 1,032,400

The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Minister, just regarding the Ellerslie Road-Route 2, there’s been some survey work done around there for a roundabout. Is that happening or not happening because there’s certainly concerns by the community about it happening?

Hon. E. Hudson: Okay, just with regard to anything such as that, that would be under capital budget. Having said that, though, I will go back, get an update, and I can provide it to you directly.

If there are any other members that would like that information, I can certainly provide it to them as well.

R. Henderson: Isn’t this section Design – Roads and Bridges? Why wouldn’t that be under this section?

Hon. E. Hudson: Maybe I misunderstood what your original question was.

R. Henderson: Well, it’s not construction.

Hon. E. Hudson: Yeah, certainly it would be the two portions to it. You’ve got the design

work which would be here. The actual, onsite work, whether it’s excavation, whether it’s pavement, what have you, would be under capital.

But again, I’d be more than happy to go back, get an update and bring that back to you.

R. Henderson: Yeah, I’d appreciate it. It’s not that I’m for or against roundabouts, I want to make that part clear. But I guess my comment to the engineer originally was to say the municipality needs to be in support of it, as well as the neighbours that are going to be impacted by it because you’re looking at a very tight squeeze there. I just would like to get some sense of an update because there’s been a lot of social media, there’s been a lot of comments made on it, and it would be nice to get some clarity to that.

While I’m on it, the other – and I’m assuming this is design as well – I was at a meeting in Central Prince municipality regarding Portage, the main highway in Portage, which you and I share a riding boundary on it. I’m assuming there’s going to be some work done there. I mean, they paved up to each side of it. There was a comment made that there is going to be ATV road or an ATV lane going beside that. Is that factual? They seem to think it is.

Hon. E. Hudson: At this point, it’s too soon – I’ll be honest – to make a statement definite on that. Again, anything like that would be under capital.

R. Henderson: Yeah, once again, I understand that the work would be capital but at this point, I’m assuming there’s a design component of it so that’s why I just wanted to ask that. Maybe some clarity just to – I know you’re the MLA on one side of the road; I’m on the other. If it’s on my side of the road, I guess I’d like to be somewhat updated of the district.

That’s all I really have. Bridge maintenance, I’ve got some more questions for you.

Chair: I’m not sure if you can do half a roundabout or not.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: There’s half a roundabout going in the Mill River area.

Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to come off that one again. I'm not saying I'm for or against roundabouts, but I am about safety, number one. There's been quite a bit of concern in my district regarding Profits Corner. Is there any plan for – or in the design stages, planning stages – for something, either a reconfiguration or what have you to make that intersection more safe?

[2:30 p.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: I agree with you 100 percent on that. One of the things, too, though – and probably it's not specific to budget here, we could have a sidebar on – is with regard to the impact, I guess I would have to say, of the Skinners Pond wind farm, just how those turbines, blades and like, have to be transported and negotiated around turns like that. That will and does have an impact of when a roundabout realignment at that intersection takes place. But I hear you loud and clear.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm not sure if I was clear. I know you said we could have a sidebar, but is there something in the works?

Hon. E. Hudson: Probably if you could clarify what you mean by –

Hon. H. Perry: Is there a plan to reconfigure that in the near future?

Hon. E. Hudson: Yes.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. I'm fine.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Bridge Maintenance

“Appropriations provided for staffing, materials, travel, and services to maintain small bridges.” Administration: 5,200. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 3,614,800. Professional Services: 420,000. Salaries: 744,300. Travel and Training: 9,600.

Total Bridge Maintenance: 4,793,900

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Just going to make one comment on Gains bridge. Thanks, that's been completed and it turned out pretty good; appreciate that.

I had mentioned to you there yesterday about it, once again a boundary bridge – got to go across one river to get from one riding to the next: Foxley River bridge. Do you have any update as to when that is going to be completed? Like I say, it was opened and closed again.

Hon. E. Hudson: Yes. June 5th.

R. Henderson: June 5th? Okay, thanks.

And to kind of branch off my previous question around this Ellerslie Road-Route 12 roundabout and whether there's a need or not – I question whether there's a need for that one, but the Bideford bridge, my understanding in talking to the engineers, is scheduled for 2027 to be replaced.

Are we anywhere in trying to redesign that section to try to straighten that road out a bit at that location versus having to put a roundabout in? It might be a cheaper or better option.

Hon. E. Hudson: I really couldn't say right now. What I would suggest – and I'd be happy to if the hon. member would so like – whether it's within the next two-, three-, four-week period, to get together – actually, probably have the engineer come up and take a look at it and have that discussion.

R. Henderson: I would appreciate that, minister, thanks.

That's it.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, did you have questions?

Hon. H. Perry: No.

Chair: Okay, you didn't have your hand raised. I didn't want to miss you. I didn't want you to feel like....

Hon. H. Perry: I appreciate that. I am getting tiny.

[Laughter]

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I see in this section we have a lot of professional services farmed out for bridge inspections; more

than half a million dollars there. Can you tell us – a few questions on that – what bridges were inspected, Wendy, and what the results of that were?

Wendy MacDonald: I don't have a listing of the bridges that were inspected. I can tell you that the inspections are broken down into two groups: large bridge structures which are inspected every two years, and smaller culvert-type installations which are inspected on a six-year rotational basis. The bridge inspections are performed between May and November by department staff and external consultants. The results usually come in later in the year and the final overarching bridge inspection report is issued – sometimes April; May, sometimes.

P. Bevan-Baker: I heard you say there, Wendy, that the inspections are carried out by department staff and an outside agency. Is that because we don't have enough staff, or is there a particular skillset that we don't have within the department to do a specific part of what inspections entail?

Wendy MacDonald: There are a large number of structures that need to be inspected on an annual basis, and it does require specialized knowledge and skillset to do it. The inspection services or the consultants that do it are specially trained for it. I can't speak to as to how many staff we would need internally to do what they're doing. There are only a few staff internally that do it.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I just want to take this opportunity to thank Darrell Evans in your department, minister, who has always been really approachable and explains things super well to somebody who knows nothing about engineering and bridges. I want to thank Darrell, specifically. I presume he's a big part of this.

I guess my question, though, is – and I don't know if the department would have done an analysis on this; I imagine it would – that we spent in one year over half a million dollars on outside professional services for what you just said, Wendy....

[2:35 p.m.]

I'm wondering – that's depending on what these folks charge, but it strikes me that if we can move that in-house, there are potential savings to be had there. Do you know – maybe the

minister knows – if a cost-benefit analysis has been done on that?

Hon. E. Hudson: I couldn't speak to that. I'm not aware of any analysis that was done. But I think, as Wendy has referenced, any major bridge structure has to be inspected – a requirement; safety has to be paramount – every two years.

So, you look at the number of structures across the province that do have to be inspected, the fact that it is a specialized skillset, and I would have to say – you had mentioned ones such as Darrell – we do have fantastic staff in the department. It's been referenced by O'Leary-Inverness, yesterday, some of the staff, but right across.

Having said that, the staff in the department – yes, they are busy. I think, to be able to rely on an external source for that very specialized skillset of having this carried out, that we're most likely getting bang for the buck.

Having said that, I will go back, member, just to see if there ever has been an assessment or anything along that line to determine what – if any – cost benefit there would be to having it done in-house.

P. Bevan-Baker: I really appreciate that, minister. Thank you for that commitment.

One last question on this section, and it's to do with materials, supplies, and services. I see we overspent by \$1.3 million there. Do you have any details on what that money was spent on, Wendy?

Wendy MacDonald: That would be in relation to repairs and maintenance for various small structures. For example, culverts, bridges, things that might have aged out – end of life, I guess you'd say – that need repair or replacement – again, small structures like a small culvert. It would include the equipment rentals, the guardrail, the concrete barriers, or whatever is required to repair those.

P. Bevan-Baker: I presume that was an unexpected extra expense last year. I see we're going back down – well, somewhere in the middle between what we spent last year. That's perhaps a more realistic estimate of what the costs would be this year.

Wendy MacDonald: Yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

I'm good for this section, thanks.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

I know, minister, in my district, the department's put a lot of attention towards the Tryon River bridge, known as the aboiteau bridge in Tryon. It's a wooden-plank, small bridge that gets attention every year. There are increasingly heavier trucks going over it with potato transportation and other industrial equipment.

Is there anything in the works for consideration for a refurbishment of that bridge, or replacement?

Hon. E. Hudson: That would be under capital.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Under this section for maintenance, is there anything earmarked for maintenance that you're aware of for that bridge?

Wendy MacDonald: Not that I'm aware of. The maintenance usually is a result of what the staff or inspectors find during the process throughout the year.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Materials Testing Lab

"Appropriations provided for salaries and related support costs for the materials testing lab and quality assurance for maintenance and construction operations." Administration: 12,400. Equipment: 23,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 9,900. Professional Services: 5,000. Salaries: 1,586,200. Travel and Training: 23,400.

Total Materials Testing Lab: 1,660,700

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Capital Projects Division: 16,752,500

Shall it carry? Carried.

Service PEI

Service PEI

[2:40 p.m.]

"Appropriations provided for staffing, materials, and related operational services to support the delivery of government programs and information through Access PEI locations in-person and Contact PEI teleservices." Administration: 137,700. Equipment: 33,200. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 94,900. Professional Services: 222,700. Salaries: 6,076,200. Travel and Training: 75,600.

Total Service PEI: 6,640,300

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: I have one question here. Materials, supplies, and services – there was a big overspend in the forecast. What was that due to?

Wendy MacDonald: That overspend was to implement the new Skip the Waiting Room licensing or queue management system.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, so that was just a one-time...?

Wendy MacDonald: Yes.

Hon. H. Perry: So, I don't have a question. I'm going to say – and I say it every year – a big thank you to all of those in whatever capacity within Service PEI or work at Access PEI, especially those in Tignish that I deal with on a day-to-day basis: Krista Gaudet and Carol Ann Barbour Shaw Getson. Thank you for everything you do.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I'm wondering – there was a pretty big overspend on salaries last year. Is that related to the new Access PEI site in Cornwall or something else?

Wendy MacDonald: That was the annualization of the Access PEI Cornwall location, yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks. Are there any plans for any other new locations? I seem to remember there was a petition from Rustico, maybe, or somewhere up in that area.

Hon. E. Hudson: Yes, there was. I think going forward, of course, new structures, whether it's under – anyway, it would be under capital, but I think that we always have to look at where the demand is. Certainly, Cornwall was an excellent example of that, I would have to say, not only with regard to servicing of the Charlottetown area to a certain extent, but also servicing up towards your area, member, and the Leader of the Third Party's area as well.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I appreciate you mentioning that because I always used to go to the Riverside Access PEI and it was getting increasingly busy there. You would sometimes wait for a very long time on occasion. I'm wondering whether the opening of the Cornwall facility – do you have figures to show that that's taken some of the pressure off the Riverside facility? I don't know if you keep tabs on stuff like that.

Hon. E. Hudson: Unless Wendy has something with her, I don't have the stats as far as changes between Riverside, Royalty Crossing, and the numbers at Cornwall. I do know that the numbers at Cornwall since it was opened have continued to grow.

P. Bevan-Baker: One thing that I find really beneficial is the fact that more and more of the services at Access PEI can be done online. I'm wondering if you have – again, I don't know if you have stats on that available but two questions on that. It's great when you can do – I'm thinking of vehicle licensing because it's lovely to be able to do stuff like that online when you can.

Is that something that Islanders are using more each year, and are there any new services that you're planning to introduce that can be accessed online rather than in person?

Hon. E. Hudson: What I can do, member, is go back to the department and see what stats we may have on that. One thing I personally think that would be interesting, too, to the members, is just the number of services – I can't recall the exact number, but it is way over 100 services – that staff, as the Leader of the Opposition has referred to – the great job not only in Tignish, which they absolutely do, but right across the province do, and the broad knowledge of government programs that they have to have.

[2:45 p.m.]

But specifically regarding your question/inquiry, we'll go back and see what (Indistinct) for that one.

P. Bevan-Baker: A takeback is great for that. Thanks, minister.

I have no more questions on this section.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Service PEI: 6,640,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

Infrastructure and FPT Relations

“Appropriations provided for the delivery of various Canada-Prince Edward Island Infrastructure Programs, as well as FPT relations.” Administration: 102,600. Equipment: 23,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 15,800. Professional Services: 427,000. Salaries: 1,550,800. Travel and Training: 42,700. Grants: 76,593,000.

Total Infrastructure and FPT Relations:
78,754,900

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Professional services: Why was there an underspend in that line?

Wendy MacDonald: Professional services are tied to the federal infrastructure agreement requirements. At different points in time during the agreements, different requirements have to be met. During the year, on an annual basis they do their annual audit of the administrative returns for each one of the municipalities. Then there's also outcome reporting that is required on certain time periods. There were just less requirements for federal or provincial FPT auditing requirements.

Hon. H. Perry: Is that typical?

Wendy MacDonald: It varies year to year on how much is required based on those federal agreements.

Hon. H. Perry: That's why I'm assuming your back up for this next budget estimate to be where you were in your estimate the previous year.

Wendy MacDonald: Yes.

Hon. H. Perry: Again, on the next line there's been an underspend for salaries. Were there some vacant positions that are now filled?

Wendy MacDonald: There were five or six vacant positions during the year, and yes, I believe three of them have since been filled. Also, in that variance between forecast and current year budget would be collective bargaining increases and reclassifications.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

I know we're entering the infrastructure and energy portion of the Transportation budget. Is there anywhere in here where there will be funding for the PEI Energy Corp.? I know it's a Crown corp., but a lot of the work they do sort of overlaps with the department. I just want to make sure I don't miss the section, if there is one, where I can ask questions on the Energy Corp.

Wendy MacDonald: The Energy Corp. is a Crown corporation which has its own budget (Indistinct) own line item, I guess you'd say. The Energy Corp. is not part of our budget.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. So, there is no way to ask any questions about the significant investments that the PEI Energy Corp. makes nor how many employees they have or what their roles are? There's no way you can answer those questions?

Wendy MacDonald: If they're not a part of this budget.

P. Bevan-Baker: It's important to me, Chair, so I'm just going to push on this a little bit.

I realize there is an annual report that comes out. Is there any way other than through a written question, for example, that one can find out more details or ask questions about the activities of the Energy Corp.?

Hon. E. Hudson: Actually, member, that was a suggestion that I was going to make to you is to provide a written question, even put it directly to

me, and I will try to find out as rapidly as possible if you do have specific questions.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Just the last thing – I appreciate that and I will do that.

One of the places where I see the work of the Energy Corp. and the department overlap is in IRAC hearings, for example, where a significant amount of work is being done and the PEI Energy Corp., for example, is an intervener in one of the cases that I'm involved in. But a lot of that work is to do with policy and new energy production, for example, which strikes me as something that would be a department decision.

[2:50 p.m.]

Where do we draw the line there between the work that is done on behalf of the department in terms of the energy strategy going forward, which is in part operationalized by the Energy Corp., but actually comes from the department? Again, I'm just trying to find out whether there's anywhere here that I can attribute an expense to some of the work the Energy Corp. does.

Wendy MacDonald: Well, in the section that we're on, this particularly relates to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Fund. This is not energy at all, this section at all.

Chair: It's not really a budget question. I don't know if you can

P. Bevan-Baker: I know we are later getting to – I just wanted to make sure that I didn't miss a section that I would have to go back to or ask your indulgence, Chair.

I do have some specific questions on this section. It's to do with some of the grants. There's a long list here, of course, of grants.

The first one would be related to Charlottetown. I know that they lost some federal funding recently because of – and they were very candid about it. There were concerns at a municipal and a provincial level, perhaps, that led to the loss of that funding. It was over \$1 million. Is that a CCBF – Canada Community Building Fund – or was that something else, Wendy?

Wendy MacDonald: That would not be CCBF, no. This is the former federal gas tax program,

which has a notional or a direct allocation, which is set out on an annual basis.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I wouldn't find in here – I'm just, again, because this is FPT relations – I wouldn't find the Build Community Strong Fund here. I think that's maybe where the loss was.

Is that something we would find here?

Wendy MacDonald: I don't believe that agreement's been (Indistinct) yet. I could be mistaken on that but....

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I'm not sure, either.

There is a pretty big underspend on the grants in the current year – \$86 million to \$75 million. Is there an explanation for that, Wendy?

Wendy MacDonald: That is in relation to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. The underspend relates to projects both through Crown corporations such as – I think the transition line might be one. Some of it was also to do with delays for some of the municipality projects. I don't have a listing of the exact projects, though.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I see it's sort of staying at the same level with a tiny increase, but is that...? When you mentioned there is perhaps a delay in some projects, I assume you're not expecting them to be bumped into the current fiscal, then, if the figure is staying the same. Any that were delayed, like we won't see a bump this year because they were delayed last year?

Wendy MacDonald: No, they're budgeted in this year. If they were delayed last year, the budget moves forward to this year. We've forecasted for them this year – or budgeted for them.

P. Bevan-Baker: I guess my question there, Wendy, is – last year we had estimated \$86 million and this year we're estimating \$76 million. Is there a reason why the grants have gone down \$10 million from last year?

Wendy MacDonald: Part of that is the Canada Community Building Fund, the former gas tax. It was signed late during – or early, whichever you want to say – to early '25-26, which meant the timing difference of getting the money paid out and getting an agreement signed with the

municipalities, part of that money slipped into '25-26. We are back down to the actual allotment that they are supposed to be getting.

That was a decrease of close to \$6 million right there just on a timing difference.

[2:55 p.m.]

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Infrastructure and FTP Relations:
78,754,900

Shall it carry? Carried.

Sustainable Energy Division Management

“Appropriations provided for the management and administration of the Sustainable Energy Division.” Administration: 4,200. Equipment: 1,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 292,600. Professional Services: 10,000. Salaries: 148,700. Travel and Training: 14,400.

Total Sustainable Energy Division Management:
470,900

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: With all of the cuts and reductions to the energy programs that happened in this budget here, I'm wondering whether there were any – it doesn't look like it but were there any positions lost within this department of sustainable energy?

Wendy MacDonald: This is the division management. This is the director's office, primarily, as well as any programming or advertising that takes into the net zero or energy minerals section. This is just the director's office in here. In this division, there has been no –

P. Bevan-Baker: No positions affected.

That's all I have in this section. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Office of Net Zero

“Appropriations provided for the operation of the Office of Net Zero and the administration of Net Zero related initiatives.” Administration: 34,400. Equipment: 17,000. Materials, Supplies,

and Services: 1,343,600. Professional Services: 319,700. Salaries: 1,446,800. Travel and Training: 27,800. Grants: 25,398,700.

Total Office of Net Zero: 28,588,000

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

This is where we saw, perhaps, if we look at the entire provincial budget, the division where the most severe cuts in terms of the percentage of their overall budget can be found.

We've gone from grants of \$50 million for various operations of the office of net zero down to \$25 million, a fully 50 percent reduction. I'm wondering if you can give us a detailed list of which grant programs have been either reduced or cut entirely?

Hon. E. Hudson: Under the net zero:

- Free home insulation program is ongoing
- Free heat pump, project completion
- Free hot water heater program, project completion
- Oil to heat, or the OHPA, project completion
- Active transportation fund, project completion
- The e-bike rebate program has ended;
- Bicycle and rebate program ended
- Electric vehicle incentive program ended

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I mean, it's a sad thing. I understand – the Minister of Finance spoke earlier today about the difficult choices that had to be made. I get that. I just wish that this was not the area that was not the area that was chosen for the severest cuts.

Programs that really were helping us reach our net zero goals and saving Islanders – all of those programs would both immediately and in the long-term save Islanders money. It's really as much an affordability as it is an environmental issue. I just want, on the record, to express my disappointment that this is where government made the difficult decisions, I get that, but for the sharpest, longest knives to come out.

I do have one question on this. I see salaries –

Chair: Can you just pause that question? Because I think that the –

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh yeah, if he wants to respond to that, I'd love that.

[3:00 p.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: I certainly, I do appreciate where you're coming from, member. If you look at the fiscal responsibility that we do have to have, any decisions that impact Islanders – and any decisions like this that we do make have an impact on Islanders – are not taken lightly. They are difficult. I assure you that, as I'm sure the member realizes and appreciates as well.

Having said that, though, I think, too, you look at the number of dollars that have been invested in these programs over the last eight-, nine-year period, thereabouts – well over \$300 million – and the fact that you look a number of years ago, that instead in the millions, these programs – and this was a number of years back, but it was in the hundreds of thousands.

So, the fact that we still do have in the range of \$25 million to \$26 million in there, from my perspective, is positive – the fact that there is still those dollars there. I do appreciate your comments, though. I'll leave it at that.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. So, a couple of specific questions – I appreciate your response, minister. I guess when I hear you talk about project completion on a number of those things, I... For example, a comparison I might make would be with the vacancy rate in housing and the affordability of housing.

Well, we can measure when we are back to a healthy vacancy rate and housing was affordable and our homelessness numbers are going down, and all that stuff, and then I think we can tick the box and say that project is completed. We've built more houses, we provided more subsidies, or whatever it was, and that problem has been – maybe not solved, but at least we've mitigated the immediate issue.

Here, we're trying to do our contribution to help fight climate change and reach net zero goals, and we are so, so far away from completion on that that it disturbs me that we use that sort of terminology for something which was a great program – would still be great program if we had it in place. So, while I appreciate your response, minister, I think we need to understand that this fight against climate change is far, far from over. I hope, in perhaps better fiscal times,

that the Province comes back with these programs.

I'm sorry, I did say I had a question and I do, Chair.

There is \$400,000 being cut from the salaries line. Does that mean that a couple of positions or perhaps a few positions are gone, Wendy?

Wendy MacDonald: We are anticipating vacancies or savings from vacant positions as well as, as you've seen, the grant line has reduced. We would have to review staffing requirements based on that.

P. Bevan-Baker: Is that a way of saying, Wendy, that it's just sort of natural attrition? Positions that open up are not being replaced, and that's why there's a half-million-dollar reduction in salaries?

Wendy MacDonald: We would have to look at the positions; perhaps there are casual vacancies. I don't have that information with me, but we would be looking at if there are casual vacancies, temporary positions, similar things like that.

P. Bevan-Baker: We have the most aggressive net zero goals and greenhouse gas reduction targets, and the most recent report that went out shows very clearly we're not going to meet them, and that was on the trajectory that we had with all these programs.

Are we, in abandoning these programs, sort of waving the white flag on achieving the goals that we have made for the province in terms of net zero and greenhouse gas reductions?

Hon. E. Hudson: That's more policy, I would feel. But having said that, from my perspective, no.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, that's incongruous, but I'll accept your answer, minister. I have no more questions on this section.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Just for clarity – you mentioned some of the grants. You went through them, like active transportation, free heat pumps, home insulation, hot water, and such, and you said they were complete. Does that mean as of the end of '25-26 fiscal, they will not be available?

[3:05 p.m.]

Hon. E. Hudson: Wendy, jump in if I'm incorrect on this, but when I say project completion, it would be that applications that are in the queue right now are definitely going to be completed. For example, the OHPA program – there's a number of applications that are in the queue that are included in this \$25.4 million.

That's just one example – that those applications that are in the queue that may have been on hold previously are being moved through.

Hon. H. Perry: That means then, yes, the ones that are in the queue may be taken care of, but there will be no new applications taken in in the 2026-27 fiscal. Is that correct?

Wendy MacDonald: That is correct.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. So, that's why the budget estimate for '26-27 is \$25 million, I guess, because I don't see that in the grants? It doesn't add up to what's there. Is there a list of what grants, other than the four that I can get out of here – the electrical service upgrade, residential home heating loan program, residential property heating loan program interest, and the free home installation program; those are the only four that will carry on in the '26-27 fiscal. Is there anything else?

Wendy MacDonald: The residential home heating loan program will carry on.

The two home heating loan programs will carry on.

Active transportation is project completion. Projects in the queue will be completed.

The free heat pump program: anything in the queue will be completed.

Free home installation: new applications will be accepted for that.

Free hot water electrification: projects in the queue will be completed.

OHPA: we are moving through the listing of projects in the queue through this year.

EV rebates, e-bikes, and bicycle rebates are ended.

Hon. H. Perry: But what I'm asking is – I know the electrical service upgrade wasn't mentioned, so will that continue?

Wendy MacDonald: I would have to look into that. That's not in my listing to be continued, no.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. It's on the list of grants though?

Wendy MacDonald: Yes. It's not in the listing to carry forward.

Hon. H. Perry: So, my question was – I know which ones are carrying forward from here and which ones have been completed. Are there any new grants for the '26-27 fiscal that are not listed in this table? Because it doesn't add up to the \$25 million – or does that \$25 million also include everything that's in the queue to make up that number? Is that correct?

Wendy MacDonald: There are no new grants in this section. The items that you're looking at are the actuals until February 28th, 2026, so they wouldn't add up to what's in the book.

So, no new grants, and – did I miss part of that question? Sorry.

Hon. H. Perry: Well, no. I was just saying because in the '26-27 budget it's a little over \$25 million, and that doesn't, of course, add up to what four remaining grants for programs are available. So, I was just wondering: Does that also include what's in the queue from last fiscal?

Wendy MacDonald: Yes.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Energy and Efficiency

“Appropriations provided for development and implementation of energy initiatives and for the operation of efficiencyPEI, which provide residents of PEI with information, advice, and programming to reduce energy consumption.”
Administration: 46,300. Equipment: 110,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 230,300. Professional Services: 786,200. Salaries: 1,765,300. Travel and Training: 66,000. Grants: 13,132,500.

Total Energy and Efficiency: 16,137,100

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

[3:10 p.m.]

We had a discussion in the last section, Wendy, about the positions that were being lost – I won't say cut, but lost – as a result of the reduction in grants, but here I see we have again a severe reduction in grants and the total from the two departments together is over \$40 million – but actually, the salary line increases from the forecast for this year.

I presume that the administration of the grants is a big part of the work of that office, so I'm trying to understand why we would have more positions.

Wendy MacDonald: They would be collective bargaining increases – the increase in the amount between forecast and budget.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. I guess from that, Wendy, you're saying that it's the same number of employees. Again, my question is, with such a reduction in the grants, and presumably the work to administer the application of those grants, why are we seeing the same number of employees?

Wendy MacDonald: Again, in this section, we would be looking at positions that may be vacant, casual positions that are not filled. But year-over-year budget has gone down by approximately \$200,000 – \$1.9 million to \$1.7 million. There is a reduction in the overall budget.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, okay. Alright.

So, the forecast is just to date. That's not for the entire fiscal year then, is it? You expect to spend the full \$1.9 million?

Wendy MacDonald: The forecast to the end of '25-26 was \$1.6 million. There were some vacant positions during the fiscal year which dropped it from \$1.9 million to \$1.6 million, and for the year '26-27, we're budgeting \$1.7 million.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right, and that's the CPI or collective bargaining that you just talked about.

Wendy MacDonald: Yes.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Sure. Similar to the last section, minister, I don't know if you can give us a detailed list – I appreciated that – of the programs, the grants that are being cut. I suspect this is largely the electric rebate. Is that where the biggest amount is coming?

Hon. E. Hudson: I'm sorry, could you repeat the comment or the question, please, member?

P. Bevan-Baker: Sure. We've got a \$14 million reduction in the grants here. I'm wondering if you could give us a list of where those reductions are happening.

Hon. E. Hudson: With regard to the programs, there are:

- Energy efficient equipment rebate, ongoing
- Energy rebates for pellets, ongoing
- Energy rebates – firewood, ongoing
- Home insulation rebates, ongoing
- Winter warming program, ongoing
- Business energy rebates, ongoing
- Home energy assessments, ongoing
- Strategic energy solutions, ongoing

Instant energy savings rebates program has ended. The new home construction rebate program has ended. Solar energy rebates program has ended.

That basically takes care of them.

Chair: Is this on the same topic (Indistinct)?

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, yes, it was just to clarify a couple of numbers, Chair. I'm sorry. You did say it was my last question. I suspect this will be my last one.

The three that I heard – the middle one I missed, but it was the residential energy.... The last three, I think, on your list, minister, and the solar rebate program, and then there was another one. Could you give us the dollar figures attached to those reductions, please?

Wendy MacDonald: Instant energy – that's one that's ended: \$244,000. What was your (Indistinct)

P. Bevan-Baker: There was the solar rebate, and then – I'm trying to get to \$14 million, so we've got \$13.8 million to go.

Wendy MacDonald: Okay. Solar energy, \$3.5 million; new home, \$600,000; and the energy rebate residential electricity –

P. Bevan-Baker: That's the big one, I imagine.

Wendy MacDonald: About \$9 million, \$9.5 million.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, that does get us to \$14 million. Thank you.

Thanks, Chair, for allowing that clarification.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thanks, Chair.

I'm going to carry on with that because some of them I didn't catch. Residential electricity – is that completed or ongoing?

Wendy MacDonald: It is ending June 30th.

Hon. H. Perry: Residential propane?

Wendy MacDonald: Ongoing.

Hon. H. Perry: Home comfort program.

Wendy MacDonald: I'm sorry, did you just say propane?

Hon. H. Perry: Yes, residential propane.

Wendy MacDonald: No.

[3:15 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: Home comfort program?

Hon. E. Hudson: Home comfort is ongoing.

Hon. H. Perry: And the instant energy savings rebate?

Wendy MacDonald: Ended.

Hon. H. Perry: Sustainability case review?

Wendy MacDonald: That is on a case-by-case basis.

Hon. E. Hudson: For clarity, member, when you say home comfort, are you referring to the winter warming program which is ongoing?

Hon. H. Perry: I'm referring to the line: energy efficiency grants updated to February 28th, 2026, the TIE S2 table that has the home.... Which one did you say? The home comfort program...

Wendy MacDonald: Home comfort is not ongoing.

Hon. H. Perry: ...for \$18,980. It's no longer going?

Wendy MacDonald: No.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. The other one was the zero-emission vehicle infrastructure program.

Wendy MacDonald: The zero-emission vehicle program is tied to a federal funding agreement for installation of chargers, and it is in completion this year. It will be completed this year.

Hon. H. Perry: And one more that I missed was community energy solutions.

Wendy MacDonald: Community energy solutions is also known as strategic energy solutions, and it is ongoing.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. Thank you.

Chair: Alright, shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Sustainable Energy: 45,196,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Department of Transportation,
Infrastructure and Energy: 279,124,200

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. E. Hudson: Chair, if I could, just before, I want to sincerely thank Wendy – and the staff, but especially Wendy – for her work. She is invaluable to the department.

Thank you.

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

Hon. R. Croucher: I do.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

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

Chris DesRoche: Chris DesRoche, director of finance for the Department of Education and Early Years.

Chair: Thank you, Chris.

[3:20 p.m.]

Okay. For those following along, we are on page 52.

Public Schools Branch

General

“Appropriations provided for public instructional and support staff salaries and operating grants.” Administration: 3,078,200. Salaries: 311,091,600. Maintenance: 17,149,200. Transportation: 8,102,300. Program Material: 3,371,700. Equipment and Repairs: 1,207,800.

Total General: 344,000,800

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

Welcome back. Chris, when you take a look at this budget, and Public Schools Branch waiting to receive their numbers – as is the French language school board. Earlier when I asked what the amount was that you were asked to find back, you said somewhere between 4 and 5 percent. Am I correct in saying that that would be the equal ask that you were asked to find in the Public Schools Branch?

Chris DesRoche: No, I wouldn't say that. It's much more difficult to do at the Public Schools Branch, frankly, just because most positions are frontlines. It's different than at the Holman building and our office where we might choose to leave a position vacant for a period of time. The Public Schools Branch receives an FTE budget, and then they just go fill as best they can all their FTEs, which is a little different. They're not responsible for the \$311 million; they're responsible to maintain within their FTEs.

So, in this case, there is no set target amount to reduce any of these lines beside the fact that certainly we will be trying our best to reduce expenditures anywhere we can.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chris. That's actually a good way to explain that.

When you look at the FTEs that this allotment assigns, would that be the equivalent number of FTEs as last year? I know there's an increase, but a lot of that would be collective bargaining.

Chris DesRoche: No, there has been an increase since last year. There are 85.85 additional FTEs in this section. However, 61 of them were added mid-year just due to urgency and the remainder came through in the budget. But budget to budget, 85.85 more FTEs than last year when we were here.

C. Simpson: When you say 85.5 – and I understand the urgency last year; that's carried forward and then the 20 extra or thereabouts – are those FTEs in what positions?

Chris DesRoche: The majority of them are educational assistants or youth service workers, depending on which they assign them to. There are 70 educational assistants and 50 have already been implemented. There are 3.5 teaching positions of which two have already been implemented. There are seven human resource positions, of which four have already been implemented – I'm sorry, three; one hasn't been filled yet. It will be filled. They've hired somebody, but not until September, so, filled, but not yet. Four policy analyst positions – one was added mid-year. Three speech language pathologists – they've already filled two and one is hired for September. And there was an assistant director that has been made permanent.

C. Simpson: Thank you for that breakdown, Chris.

With the additional EAs – and youth service workers but sticking with EAs first. A large number of those, I'm hearing, are difficult to fill positions and the branch has had to fill with people that aren't trained. If people aren't trained, where do they fall on the salary grid, or is it the same salary which is perhaps in need of an increase than those that are trained?

Chris DesRoche: The uncertified does have a different rate than certified EAs and youth service workers.

C. Simpson: Are you able to give a breakdown? Do you have that data, how many uncertified EAs and youth service workers there are?

[3:25 p.m.]

Chris DesRoche: I don't have the specific number. I think the last time I checked in with the Public Schools Branch, it might have been 15, 20 percent uncertified. But the challenge is the amount we've increased the EAs. Since 2018-19, we've gone from 442 to 764 between the two boards – PSB, in particular: 422 to 727. I mean, it's good. It's needed, but it has strained the ability to always hire certified.

C. Simpson: More of a statement than anything, minister. You can expect the challenges here with our most vulnerable population to have people who are uncertified really is a challenge. While I understand what the branch has been forced to do, we do definitely need to do different there than 15 to 20 percent uncertified staff because that directly impacts the children.

But I do have a question. With that, how many schools, Chris, again are there in the Public Schools Branch?

Chris DesRoche: How many schools? Fifty-six.

C. Simpson: Oh, it's counting French. Okay.

Of the 56 schools, would there be any that would see a reduction in their allotment this September?

Chris DesRoche: There could be. The numbers overall have increased, but certainly the Public Schools Branch, when they allocate staff out school by school, there'd be enrolment changes. On the EA front, different complex needs that need to be addressed. Certainly, some could be up or down, but overall, they're up.

C. Simpson: Based on the trends in our enrolments, are we seeing that the trending in with the same number of children – somewhere around 1,200 to 1,400, and the same exiting out – or have we reached that tipping point where there's more exiting and fewer coming in? As in overall, in terms of the school enrolments.

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, we had gone through a period of some significant growth. However, since '23-24, we were 20,539, 20,824, and this past year was actually 20,780. So, we were actually down 44 children this year.

Now I know since that time, we do monitor it monthly. Throughout the school year, that has come back up to closer to last year's amount.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

So, just looking at a few lines here. The transportation line saw a little bit of an increase, maybe half a million dollars. Will that actually result in any increase in routes or drivers or changes to routes or increases to drivers or is that a cost of living adjustment?

Chris DesRoche: No, there is no increase in bus drivers. However, that \$571,000 is just the rising cost to operate the fleet, both repairs, fuel, and electricity for the electric buses.

M. MacFarlane: You answered that, Chris, by saying specific to electric buses, is it? Is that where that extra money is earmarked for repair?

Chris DesRoche: No, not necessarily. Just as a whole, we have seen rising cost of repairs, but certainly we are experiencing challenges in the electric buses.

M. MacFarlane: I guess this is the section, then, in the budget for dealing with the electric bus issues or I guess any bus issues, right, not just electric buses, but this is all bus issues. What's the situation with the provider of those buses. Where does the Province now turn to get those electric buses repaired?

Chris DesRoche: It's a challenge for sure. The former vendor went into bankruptcy protection and I believe started under a new corporation. It is a significant challenge. We're doing our best but you're right, it is a challenge, especially to source some specific parts.

[3:30 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: I guess we can foresee some long-term investments having to be made if those buses are starting to come off the fleet, come out of the fleet due to challenges with costs and operations. I guess that might be something we see in future budgets. If those aren't going to have the longevity, unfortunately, I can see some costs associated with that.

Maybe just looking at the maintenance section here, the maintenance line. There was a bit more money, maybe \$1.5 million more, spent on maintenance forecasted to spend than what was budgeted and we're sort of budgeting for that higher amount.

Is that normal? Are we normally seeing sort of steady maintenance costs, or what's the jump we're seeing on this one?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, we have been seeing some rising costs of utilities, snow removal contracts, cleaning supplies, just general repairs and maintenance at schools. Contractors are charging more than they used to, so we did increase the budget to our forecast. Now, the fuel prices obviously have turned on us since then with the war, so it would be helpful if that stabilized because it's increased significantly, approximately 40 percent, since our budget was developed.

M. MacFarlane: So, fuel costs are included in the maintenance as well. You referenced the volatility in that market, so you're saying that fuel costs have increased?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, our past two years, for example, in heating fuel, we were at about \$1.25-\$1.27 as an average cost through the year, and you know, in April it was \$1.76 and today it's \$1.66, so we are going to be under some pressure if things don't stabilize.

M. MacFarlane: So, just as a wrap-up to the questions I had on this section, does this section include any upgrades to schools at all, whether it be HVAC or windows or any...? I guess there's always a fine line between what's maintenance and what's repair and renovation.

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, the benchmark we use is whether it exceeds \$10,000. So, if it's \$10,000 or less, you would find that repair in here – if you're replacing a toilet – but if it's HVAC, that would be in our capital budget under capital repairs.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

Going to go back to EAs for just a minute. From what I understand, the budget for EAs since 2020 has grown significantly – millions of dollars. Granted, understand why the need is there; still concerned with 15-20 percent hard to fill or having to be filled with people who don't

meet the educational requirements and the impact on the classroom and the child for that.

But with the announcement of additional EAs – how many additional EAs, I believe in the Speech from the Throne, were announced? 90? Am I...?

Chris DesRoche: Seventy.

C. Simpson: Seventy. Okay. What's the breakdown, Chris, in that 70, between EAs and youth service workers, or is that only EAs?

Chris DesRoche: Well, we say educational assistants, but we do provide the flexibility to the board to hire either. They're not terribly different in salary costs, so whichever they need.

C. Simpson: So, that's 70 in total and the flexibility is there.

We're assuming – I'm assuming; we're all assuming – the collective agreement – you're in that process right now as I understand it, with the EA union? So, I'm hoping that with whatever adjustments might come, they might make the position more attractive for people – easier to find.

However, is there money set aside in this budget – or would this be at the department level – if we have EAs that aren't trained but willing to get trained? Is there support there for that? Does that make sense?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, I know what you mean. I don't believe there are educational-type grants through us or post-secondary. There's definitely not through us. I'd have to check on post-secondary. They're actually the next department.

C. Simpson: Yeah, I'll ask.

I'll move away from there. I'm wondering about – going to buses for a few minutes. Do you know the number of buses that are due to retire this year, and are we able to backfill adequately?

[3:35 p.m.]

Chris DesRoche: As in do our...?

C. Simpson: The ten-year max, whatever that is, and then we retire buses and sell them and replace them.

Chris DesRoche: I don't have the exact number with me just because it's a capital budget, but I do know the number of buses that we're purchasing does exceed the number of buses that will be retired.

C. Simpson: Is this where I would ask the question on potentially having cameras on buses?

Chris DesRoche: It would likely be a capital budget, yeah.

C. Simpson: Is that a capital cost? Okay, thank you.

Are there positions made available specifically to the boards that would be responsible for the implementation of the Jenkins report?

Chris DesRoche: Yes. In particular, the positions that were added in response to school safety are the seven human resource positions and the four policy analyst positions. There is a considerable amount of policy work that is underway.

C. Simpson: So, those positions sit at the board level, obviously. Will they be dispersed to work within schools?

Chris DesRoche: No, the policy analysts would be more office positions working on policies.

C. Simpson: But the others?

Chris DesRoche: Human resources? No, those are also office.

C. Simpson: They'll all be office. Are there any positions that would be there to support the schools directly, then, for the implementation of the Jenkins report?

Chris DesRoche: That would just be the existing leadership – the director, the assistant director, the administrative support leaders, the human resources director.

C. Simpson: Okay, so the existing positions. So, is there additional funding found in here to provide extra training as needed for these individuals who would be taking on a new role specific to the Jenkins report?

Chris DesRoche: Yes. The first line, administration, is up \$300,000. The increases are some funding for some third-party investigations

of \$75,000 – when needed, they have a budget for that now – a student services review of \$35,000, some sexual misconduct training of \$30,000, the workplace investigation training of \$50,000, \$75,000 for criminal record checks, and \$35,000 for incident management system software licenses.

The other training that will be ongoing is the Commit to Kids through the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. Those licenses, when we buy them initially, cover their initial training, but there are also, this year and next year, refresher courses.

C. Simpson: The refresher courses – remind me again. Was that for all teachers, classroom teachers, or all personnel at the board level?

Chris DesRoche: All staff.

C. Simpson: With the increased diagnosis of children on the ASD spectrum and other complex issues, is there an increase in staffing related to behavioural support or autism consultants?

Chris DesRoche: Not this year.

C. Simpson: How to make this a budget question? So, no increases this year. Have there been any cuts or decreases to that or any vacant positions unfilled?

Chris DesRoche: I don't think there are any vacancies in the autism consultants or school psychologist. I'd have to bring that back, but I don't believe there are.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Just on the subject of autism supports, I noticed in the department section that we went through and carried, there was a whole section for autism supports. I guess I'm wondering if there's similar funding – I know there's no separate section – for other learning disability supports as well. How much do we budget, given that we don't have a dedicated section within the department or within the branch?

[3:40 p.m.]

Is there an easy way to figure out and to tease out the funding availabilities for other learning disabilities?

Chris DesRoche: That would be a complex question. I would argue the entire student services division – EAs, youth service workers, autism consultants, behaviour resource.... I don't have a single number, but there's a considerable number of staff that operate in complex and unique needs.

M. MacFarlane: So, yes, in the department there's a whole section for autism services. As the neurodivergence and the issues around learning disabilities seems to proliferate in the population, do you foresee within the department, or within the branch, ever teasing out a section just so we can see the funding that's earmarked to support learning disabilities and other...? I know, as you said in your answer, Chris, it's very complex. It sort of permeates across all lines. I'm just wondering if it would make sense, if it's something the department has ever thought about.

Chris DesRoche: These are grants to the school boards. What happens after we finish here is we do budget letters to the two school boards or education authorities. They take the administration, maintenance, transportation, and they populate their own budget with these numbers. Whether they have it segregated like that, I'm not sure, but I think the initial question of what would qualify under learning disabilities and stuff – I think that's the part that would be difficult to define prior to that.

M. MacFarlane: Sure, and I know there are a lot more people who know a lot more about how that might look than me, but I do know there do seem to be calls for increasing supports across the spectrum of learning disability challenges.

I know we've talked about bus routes in the previous department section, and I don't know whether there's any funding here for studying enhanced safety on routes. I know the minister – you were quick to rhyme off how many buses, how many drivers, how many routes, et cetera. I know that's complex, but does that whole discussion fall under the department and not under PSB?

Hon. R. Croucher: No, that discussion is going to happen between the department and the PSB, and in fact, it's already started in some respects. Our entire focus over the next little bit is to ensure that the supports are there to lead our students and our educators and our staff through this tragedy, but there will be conversations had on ways that we can find efficiencies and make

our routes safer. But those conversations will happen once we get through this terrible chapter that we're dealing with now. Certainly, that's something that I've already committed to and we know is going to happen.

M. MacFarlane: I appreciate that response minister. I know last year I raised, during this debate, the call for schools that are struggling with administration – principals and vice principals that are spending higher percentages than they would like to within the classroom in a teaching role and not in their administrator role. Do we know if there's been any improvements to those ratios and percentages?

I guess, to bring it to the budget, Chair: Do we have the information necessary on that to make investments to try and alleviate what those ratios might be if they're out of whack?

Chris DesRoche: We actually, in the last collective agreement, put minimum amounts of time for the administrators to be in the office and not teaching, and in our last budget, I think it was 3.5 FTEs that we added to make sure those smaller schools have some presence in the office.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, thank you. That sounds like there's forward movement on that to allow the administrators to do what they can as overseers in the school environment.

[3:45 p.m.]

Just looking at page 52 there in the book and it jumped out at me that both the program materials line and the equipment and repairs line – the numbers are straight right across the board as to what was budgeted, what's forecasted, and what's budgeted again. Can you explain how those numbers all seem to be in perfect alignment for that?

Chris DesRoche: Well, we really tried to hold the line as much as we could on program materials, equipment repairs, and administration, so there was no increase to the budgets for those lines except for the \$300,000, like we mentioned, that was for student safety and training and initiatives.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Just to follow up on that: Is it really the case that the forecasted amount is exactly to the dollar as what was budgeted last year, this just works out?

Chris DesRoche: For example, program materials, there's two components to that. One is school budgets and one is the free K to 9 school supplies. The K to 9 school supplies is relatively mature at this point, so it's somewhat predictable. The amounts to schools, the \$3.3 million, less the school supplies, just goes directly to schools, so....

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

There are currently 18 schools piloting PBIS. Is there any funding in there to expand that to other schools?

Chris DesRoche: Not this year. This is the first full school year. It was implemented mid-previous school year. I think the intent is to do an evaluation of the program, which I suspect will be positive, and look at it for the next budget.

C. Simpson: Thank you for that, Chris.

Is there any funding in here to support the inclusion action plan?

Chris DesRoche: Well, like we mentioned back in the English program section, the manager – I did look after that session, and the manager position is posted. Once that position is hired, the person is hired, they will start looking at that action plan and start to work with the boards on implementing some recommendations. But is there a specific budget in here for that? No.

C. Simpson: Are there any – and I don't know if this is found in here; I might have missed my opportunity when the department budget was on – but is there any funding in here for additional French immersion schools?

Chris DesRoche: Not at this time. We do have two net new schools being built but that won't be until 2027-2028.

C. Simpson: Because you say that, does that mean that that's potential for French immersion in the new schools?

Chris DesRoche: I don't think the programming has been finalized to that extent but practically speaking, if there are students in French immersion from Charlottetown Rural that are going to Stratford High School, I can't imagine

that they will be discontinued during their education.

C. Simpson: You mentioned, Chris, that last year there were pressures and there were an additional 60 positions that were brought in. I know that the allotment will come out when the budget is passed, but enrollment is not finalized until the end of September, typically, if I recall correctly. What contingency exists for you or the boards to be able to fill if ratios or the student numbers are higher?

Chris DesRoche: At this point, like I said, at the last monthly check, there has not been a significant increase in enrollment. If there are challenges in staffing schools, there's no contingency here at the department. We provide all the dollars that we can within the budget, so the contingency is working with the Minister of Finance to see if there are any additional resources available.

C. Simpson: This is likely Workforce and Advanced Learning, as I think about this, but – yeah, it is Workforce and Advanced Learning. There's no internal training additional than professional development for staff, right, so it's Workforce.... I'm looking at the training and allotments for EAs and what's available to Holland College and teachers and the teacher curriculum. That's Workforce. I answered my own question.

I'm good. Thank you.

Thanks very much, Chris, I appreciate it.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thanks a lot, Chair.

[3:50 p.m.]

For children, students, who need maybe some accommodation – they can't, for whatever reason, regularly attend; they have extended absences from school – is there any funding to assist those children in their educational support at home, whether it be tutoring or...?

Chris DesRoche: I'm not sure on that. I'd have to bring that back and ask that question.

M. MacFarlane: If you wouldn't mind. I guess a second part to that question would be: If they're falling behind and need some support to

get caught up, the tutoring piece to get caught up as well – is that considered in the budget?

Chris DesRoche: The Public Schools Branch does have a tutoring budget.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, and how is that accessed? What's the eligibility or the criteria necessary to access that?

Chris DesRoche: I'd have to bring that back. I believe the principal works with the Public Schools Branch identifying those, but I'd have to bring that back. We'll try to get that back for you tomorrow.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Just on that same vein, to determine where those students might fall academically and whether they're keeping up or falling behind, is there any funding in the budget – again, trying to keep it to a budget question, Chair; appreciate it – for independent academic assessments to see where they're at?

Chris DesRoche: I'm not sure. We'd have to bring that back.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Sorry, I don't mean to create a whole lot of homework, Chris, but if you don't mind, those are questions we hear, given that we do seem to be experiencing some absences of students who can't attend regularly.

So, if a student has an assigned EA, what happens if that EA can't attend? Do we pull EAs from other schools or is there funding available to enhance the EA complement, to bring new EAs in to support that student whose regular EA is not there, as opposed to pulling an EA from another school?

Chris DesRoche: You mean if a student is assigned an EA and the EA is out sick, for example?

M. MacFarlane: Yeah.

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, there is a casual substitute budget for bus drivers, teachers, EAs, all staff that need to be replaced.

M. MacFarlane: Any data kept on the number of substitute EAs being suitable or sufficient to meet the demand?

Chris DesRoche: There is data kept. I'd have to bring back the number, but certainly, back to our discussion around the increase in EAs over the

years, that naturally pulls from some of those substitutes as permanent positions. As we've been increasing EAs, we have put our own strain on the EA pool.

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, I appreciate that. I do hear from people who are interested in becoming an EA to support the need and lessen the demand and the stress. So, I do think there's a demand for it.

I think Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park was getting to this next question that I have, but I'm wondering about budgeted funding available for updated training, refresher training for mandatory autism, trauma-informed, PTSD-related training for school staff. Is that a Workforce and Advanced Learning question?

Chris DesRoche: It could be, if it was school training and updating courses, but there is a professional development budget at Public Schools Branch, and we can ask what training specific to education assistants is planned for the coming year.

M. MacFarlane: That sort of refresher training, then – how does it get determined as to what area that it gets focused in on? Is it consistent year over year as continuing professional development, or is it targeted for certain elements that might be relevant from time to time – we hear a lot about bullying in the schools; we talk about autism – so that the school staff are able to access the resources and the knowledge and the education and the training that the need to respond – also PTSD?

Does that come from Home and School or the federation? Where does that request come up to that allows the department to budget accordingly?

Chris DesRoche: Well, the professional development budget is at the Public Schools Branch, not the department, and it would be the student services team at the Public Schools Branch that would lead that training.

[3:55 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: For investigation – school environment/school place investigations of either safety issues or bullying – is there funding targeted for that? Because we don't have a breakout in the Public Schools Branch section like we see in other sections. We see a total of \$344 million, so it's hard to know where that

large sum of money gets allocated. Again, the question is whether there's funding, or is it ad hoc or case-by-case for investigations into school place issues?

Chris DesRoche: I think it would be depending on the situation, but we did talk about the increase in funding in the administration section. There is a third-party investigations budget of \$75,000 that's been added this year.

M. MacFarlane: Sorry, I heard \$75,000?

Chris DesRoche: That's been added to the budget, yes.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Does that also cover...? I know it's hard to predict legal costs year over year year-over-year, but what would be the legal cost budget if there's need to refer to external legal counsel for school place issues?

Chris DesRoche: I don't have their total legal budget. I think in the handout for professional services, it shows their forecast for the past year. As far as legal services go, it is kind of between the different divisions.

M. MacFarlane: Just keeping on the subject here of budget allotment, we've seen other departments have great success with like the patient navigator, seniors navigator, and cancer navigator. Is there such a thing as an independent, maybe not even independent but the first question would a parent navigator?

Chris DesRoche: No, there's no budget in the current year for a parent navigator.

M. MacFarlane: The reason for that last question is just that it can be complex for parents to navigate through the system when there are issues and unresolved complaints and challenges.

Is there funding available, either dedicated or available to be pulled from, for implementing and monitoring safety plans – student safety plans?

Chris DesRoche: No specific budget I'm aware of but we can ask that question.

M. MacFarlane: Do we know how many student safety plans might currently be in play right now?

Chris DesRoche: We don't have that kind of data in the budget books; we'd have to ask that.

Chair: Way down. I don't know if this is question set stuff or if this is a meeting with the minister, but go ahead with your next question and we'll see where that takes us.

M. MacFarlane: No, no. I meant to sort of reverse those last two questions and ask if we knew how many safety plans there were and then ask if there was funding about monitoring them because it seems like it could be expensive.

I guess the next question would be on speech pathology. I understand there's close to 200 non-verbal students in the Public Schools Branch alone. Do we know what the student speech language pathologist is? Are those positions vacant or is there funding in the budget to make sure those are filled?

Chris DesRoche: There was 11.3 last year. We've added three, two of which have been filled, and one is filled already for September.

M. MacFarlane: It's the department's understanding that the needs are being met with the current number of speech language pathologists?

Chris DesRoche: That's what's been added at this time.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Again, going back to students on the spectrum who might be flight risks, I don't think I heard the question from Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park about bus aides. Is there funding in the budget for bus aides? Do we have bus aides deployed already?

Chris DesRoche: Yes, there are some bus aides deployed in the system.

[4:00 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: I guess again, it's always about whether the need and the demand is being addressed. Do you have information on whether the number of bus aides is sufficient to meet the needs?

Chris DesRoche: I think they're assigned on a case-by-case basis, and it fluctuates each year how many are needed.

Chair: Okay. It is 4:00, so if we will –

C. Simpson: Chair, can we extend?

Chair: Just a sec, I feel like this is like yesterday. So, what I'm going to ask is so that our stranger doesn't have to drive long distances tomorrow, can we just take a few minutes to finish up this questioning? Are we all in agreement?

M. MacKay: It would be fine for a few minutes, Chair, but if it's too long, we'll be going into government members time, so try for a few minutes.

Chair: Okay.

M. MacFarlane: I'm not sure exactly how long it'll take to do the...

Chair: Okay, well I'm going to give you another question, and then I'm going to go to the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, so again, thank you, Chair.

Just further to that last answer, it is something that I hear from of the importance of having bus aides on our school bus systems. So, I guess, the question I have next, is the funding for transportation and accessibility adequate in your opinion, minister? I'll ask the minister as well, for students with disabilities who are on rural routes who have the longer travel time to get to.

Hon. R. Croucher: So, if the PSB had concerns with the staffing numbers, they would come to the department directly and ask for additional resources and we would address that at that time.

Chair: Member, I don't mean to be cranky, but you asked the question in three different ways, and they've answered that they have given bus and aides, and I think the stranger has answered your question. I'm going to come back to you, but I'm going to move on, but just be mindful they do answer, and just because you ask it in a different way, they're still going to give you the same answer.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair, I just have one final question, Chris.

So, with the increased requirements for psycho-educational assessments, have we increased the number of school psychologists?

Chris DesRoche: No, we haven't. We've made strides in the past six or seven years, bringing the wait time from over four years to about a year and a half, but for the current year budget, there are no additional school psychologists; there are 12 and they're all filled as far as I know.

C. Simpson: So, does that mean that we're down to consistently the max a year, year and a half for those assessments within schools?

Chris DesRoche: I think, I would say it's an average of a year and a half, I think it depends on the complexity of the case.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair, just a few more.

So, for medical emergency issues that happen within the school environment, do we see funding for staff training, for medical training, to respond? Is that like a continuing professional development program, like I've asked similarly before, or what's available for that?

Hon. R. Croucher: So, we have to have a certain ratio of educators or staff in our system that are trained in first aid and CPR. Very, very happy, if you remember when the first aid and CPR training was introduced into our school system for, I believe our grade 10 students, under the ACT Foundation that are trained in CPR and first aid. I can't emphasize enough the importance of having that training, but we do maintain a ratio in each of our schools.

M. MacFarlane: Can I ask, minister – again, going back to EAs just because there's such a prominent feature in our schools these days, especially across rural environments because I know in the past, sometimes EAs get pulled from one school to another – is that the preferred manner, minister? Or going back to the discussion we had on substitute EAs –

Chair: Is that a budget question? Can you tie that to the budget?

M. MacFarlane: So, the funding in budget for substitute EAs, is that intended to bring those

into a school as opposed to pulling EAs across schools?

Chris DesRoche: There's movement all throughout the year because children can move schools and sometimes the EA would go with the child. There's constant movement, but no, the substitute budget is to replace educational assistants that are out on sick leave or what have you.

M. MacFarlane: I have a number of more questions, but I'll deal with the minister directly on those.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: That'd be great.

[4:05 p.m.]

Okay, I just have a couple questions before we end off. One of them was you had talked with the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park about the seven people that were hired in human resources, and three of those were filled. Are any of those to directly deal with the increased educational assistants we've hired into the system?

Chris DesRoche: They were just being added to the HR team for the most part. One of them is specific to data with regard to the incident management system that's coming in but the rest of them are just to help the HR team as a whole, not just specific to some employees.

Chair: My other question would be along the lines of HR. Would you know if any of those people hired were to help deal with the backlog of actually getting substitutes on the list?

Chris DesRoche: I think that would just be a function of the entire team.

Chair: HR team.

Chris DesRoche: The bigger the team, hopefully they can improve that.

Chair: Okay.

M. MacKay: Government members would like the time.

Chair: Okay.

M. MacKay: Do you want to keep asking?

Chair: Well, I would like to ask one more. Would that be okay?

M. MacKay: Sure.

Chair: Just wondering about the NBCI training that staff and EAs get. Has that budget increased?

Chris DesRoche: I'm not sure. I can bring that back, though.

Chair: Okay, perfect.

Alright, seeing that there are no further questions, shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Public Schools Branch: 344,000,800

Shall it carry? Carried.

Recognition of Guests IV

Hon. Z. Bell: Can I have a recognition of guests?

Chair: You sure can.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you.

I just want to welcome Anne Nguyen. Hopefully I'm saying that right and my spelling might be off for Hansard, but N-G-U-Y-E-N. Anne is visiting Prince Edward Island from Toronto. She has a real keen interest in politics here in the province. I just wanted to welcome you, Anne, and enjoy your time here on PEI.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day (Government) continued

Hon. R. Croucher: 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.

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, that Motion No. 39 be called to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant: Motion No. 39: Recognizing the importance of vital community infrastructure across Prince Edward Island.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal, the following motion:

WHEREAS strong communities depend on essential infrastructure such as schools, post offices, fire departments, rinks, and recreational facilities to provide services and opportunities for Islanders;

AND WHEREAS these facilities are central to education, safety, communication, and healthy lifestyles, ensuring that communities remain vibrant and connected;

AND WHEREAS community infrastructure fosters social cohesion, supports local economies, and enhances quality of life for residents of all ages;

AND WHEREAS maintaining and investing in these assets is critical to sustaining rural and urban communities across Prince Edward Island;

AND WHEREAS the presence of accessible and well-maintained infrastructure encourages population retention and growth, contributing to long-term economic and social stability;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island recognizes the essential role of community infrastructure, including schools, fire departments, rinks, and recreational infrastructure in making communities thrive and urges continued support and investment to ensure these facilities remain strong for future generations.

Speaker: I'd like to call upon the mover of the motion, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, to open debate.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a motion that I didn't know if we were going to have time this sitting to get to the floor. I'm very glad that it is on the floor for debate because this is a motion that really is at the heart of every community right across this Island.

[4:10 p.m.]

I'm going to try to go through this. I'm going to try to keep it to the Summerside area because there's so much that I could talk about right across this Island, and I probably drift a little bit, but we'll try to reel it back in and keep it to our Summerside area.

I'm going to go through this clause by clause, Mr. Speaker, because every clause that's on here, it really speaks to the motion.

With the first part of the clause: "Whereas strong communities depend on essential infrastructure such as schools, post offices, fire departments, rinks, and recreational facilities to provide services and opportunities for Islanders."

Well, that is so true. There is so much when you talk about that. I look at Summerside and with the Summerside fire department, we're building a new fire hall in Summerside right now. They broke ground. It's something that's been on the books for I think about 13 years they've been trying to plan this. They've been going through – I've seen at least eight or nine different plans myself.

It's great to see them finally break ground but the Summerside fire department, they are such a pivotal part of the community in Summerside. They give to every organization. At the first of the month, when we have our monthly meeting, we're giving out to everybody that's in need, everybody that's sick, everybody that – a sports team that travels. They give so much more back to the community than just their fire services.

You take the fire department, last year the Summerside fire department responded to 435 calls. That's more than once a day that our pagers go off. We're very fortunate in the City of Summerside to have a department like Summerside fire department. We have five

teams, more or less, and they roll in rotation. When a silent alarm comes in, it's not all 60 guys running to a call. We're able to break that up but whenever there are general alarms, when there's medical calls, there's a lot more than one truck go. When there's 435 calls, there's a lot of members in that department that will hit 80, 90 percent of those calls.

It's very fortunate that we have some self-employed people that are in the department. It's very fortunate that we have people that work for companies that understand how big and how good of an asset the fire department is and allow their workers to leave for calls.

You talk about the rinks. Well, strong communities depend on essential infrastructure. Summerside has quite possibly the nicest rink this side of Toronto. For a small community like Summerside, the Credit Union Place, the Island Energy Ice Centre, what an unbelievable ice surface, what an unbelievable place.

Here, a couple of weeks ago when they had the Centennial Cup in Summerside, we were fortunate enough to have a number of guests show up to the gallery one day. I happened to look over, and I noticed they had the Nighthawks coat on. I made my way around to talk to them and explain to them that I watched a couple of their games during it and all that. Then they went on and they raved about the facility. They stayed right there, they were able to use the pool with the sauna, with the steam rooms. They were able to play hockey on the ice surface. They just could not believe it.

And now, we're very fortunate that the racetrack is tied into the same building. The kitchen at the racetrack has been closed down for a number of months. Red Shores decided to close the kitchen. They subbed it out to someone else. Duke Cormier's crew at Five Eleven West, they took it over. They got it opened before that Centennial Cup. It was some nice for myself as a horseman to be on the horse jogging by the windows and looking in and seeing that place full of people and eating again. It's infrastructure like that that is vital and we have to recognize the importance of it.

There is so much more. It mentions schools. Well, I was very pleased to hear the Minister of Education say that we are going to end up getting a new school in Summerside. Parkside Elementary, one of the oldest schools in Canada, it's in dire need of some work. We have a

number of schools that need some work but this one here is the one of the oldest schools in Canada. They have buckets on the window ledge catching drops. It's great to see the minister come out and say that we're going to get this new school. It's great to see the money being set aside to do some studies, do some plans and whatnot; it's great.

[4:15 p.m.]

One other piece of infrastructure is the new east to west connector, Cairns Boulevard. That is a major, major piece of infrastructure in the Summerside area. That road connects Water Street East with Ryan Street, so anybody travelling into Summerside, you're able to bypass a lot of the area and make your way right uptown if that's what you want. It alleviated a lot of pressure.

It's something that the City has been trying to get in place for a number of years. I think it's probably closer to 20 years that they've been trying to get this in because back in the later part of the 2000s, the underwriters stated that this road was needed, and not only did it provide another route, but it also provided exits out of Woodridge Park.

Woodridge Park is a park that has I would say 500 mobile trailers in it, and they only have one exit to get in and out of it. So, by the new east-west connector, Cairns Boulevard – there are a couple offshoots on it, and one of them is Sunrise Avenue which goes right into the back of the park. It's great. Everybody in there loves it and it's very busy. We walk it quite often with our dog. It's a great spot. It's an all-new pave, everything is nice and flat for a walkway, and you see the traffic going in and out of the back part of the park, and they're so pleased.

The second clause in here: "Whereas these facilities are central to education, safety, communication, and healthy lifestyles, ensuring that communities remain vibrant and connected," well, the healthy lifestyle is part of that.

Sure, we can talk about the Credit Union Place, about having the ice surfaces, about having the bowling lanes, about having the pool there, but they also have a walking track, and that walking track is always busy. In the wintertime, when the roads and sidewalks have ice on them and someone with mobility issues can't navigate that ice, can't navigate the snow, they've got a

heated walking track. It's great because a lot of people will go in there and their kids will be playing hockey or whatnot, and they're able to drop the kids off for hockey and go up and walk – four laps for every kilometre. It's very well used.

[Interjection]

T. DesRoches: I have walked it in the past. With a figure like this, I don't walk it lot, but I have walked it in the past.

When you're talking about healthy lifestyles, what is better than having a building like the Credit Union Place? It's just every aspect of it – the communication, the safety....

Well, I want to spin back to the Summerside fire department. When we talk about safety and we talk about communication, I want to talk about when Hurricane Fiona hit.

Hurricane Fiona hit, and most of the fire departments across the Island were still using analog radios. When Fiona hit, we responded to 39 calls that one night, and the analog signal was taken out, so we had no way of communicating. Thirty-nine calls came in. I set up shop in the office, I grabbed three or four different cell phones from everybody and got everybody on a truck with their own phone. I had them all written down, and the police station would have to call us on a phone – they couldn't use the radio because it wasn't working; the towers were taken out – and we had to dispatch that way.

Well, when we talk about the vital community infrastructure – since then, the government has invested in digital radios right across this Island. Unbelievable. One of the best things that's ever been done for the fire service across the Island – got everybody on the PICS radio system; you don't have to worry about it going down.

For someone who doesn't experience it and doesn't do that, you wouldn't understand how pivotal that was. I can think of one incident on a call, we had one of our pumper tankers at the northern part of the city and they were coming down Granville Street. The wind was blowing. The backs of our pumper tankers are open. The wind was blowing hard, and a five-inch line for tying into hydrants is fairly heavy. You know you can drive down the highway doing 90-100 kilometres an hour and they don't move, but on this night, during Hurricane Fiona, it hooked it

and it paid 650 feet of five-inch hose right down the centre of Granville Street.

[4:20 p.m.]

There was no way to get a hold of that truck and let them know: “Pull over, boys, you’re paying hose off the back. You’ve got to get it picked up.” We had no way. The analog system was down. Radio systems didn’t work. We had other people calling the police station on their cellphones and saying this was laying in the middle of the road.

You look back now and you can smile and chuckle about it, but it was pretty serious at the time. When that truck got to where they were going, if they had to hook to a hydrant, they had all their hydrant line laying out in the road.

It’s one thing to have it pay out on the road, but then to pick it up – 650 feet, and when it’s blowing the way, it was and rain coming at your sideways – and well, there’s nothing they could do. They sent out a couple of half-ton trucks. They loaded it in the back. They hauled it back into the fire hall, and they loaded the truck in the hall with not a lot of room so that they could get back out there and do what they were doing.

We talk about safety, and at one point in time, every member of our department was out in the trucks, and they were responding to every different type of call that they could. We were sending them every which way, and all while this was happening, the roof of our department decided it wanted to detach and end up in the parking lot. We talk about safety – infrastructure like a fire department – we lost our roof in that storm, and we had to keep going.

So, when we talk about vital community infrastructure, getting a new hall in Summerside is unbelievable. It’s been a long time coming; I’m glad to see it.

The next clause, “And whereas community infrastructure fosters social cohesion, supports local economies, and enhances quality of life for residents of all ages.”

There are two examples I really want to touch on with this, and they both pertain to the rink. The president of the Summerside minor hockey, Doug Dexter, is an unbelievable individual. Before Doug took over the minor hockey, Summerside minor hockey ran three tournaments a year. You had your A tournament,

your AA, and your AAA tournament. That’s what they had through the year.

Since taking over minor hockey, Doug has evolved that into a tournament every weekend from the day that hockey starts until the day it closes. I think he runs about 18 tournaments a year.

What that translates into is, rather than having overflow of hotel rooms for three different weekends of people scattering everywhere, the community of Summerside has a very low vacancy rate all year while the rinks are open. There’s a tournament every year – a tournament with 8, 10, 12 teams every weekend. They come over, they’ve got to stay somewhere, they’ve got to eat, they’ve got to gas up; it’s such a driver to the economy.

Then another one that I want to touch on is the Mardi-Gras Hockey Tournament. The Mardi-Gras Hockey Tournament that Aaron Doyle puts on is a tournament that, just like Doug Dexter’s tournament, has evolved. Now, it’s such a big tournament, he can’t even run it on one weekend. They run it over the course of a couple different weekends. Teams coming over from New Brunswick, coming over from Nova Scotia, a bunch of teams made up here. I believe that the female division has multiplied. There are so many teams in the female division. It’s absolutely crazy how much this Mardi-Gras Hockey Tournament that used to be on Mardi Gras weekend has evolved that it’s into two and three weekends.

It’s not just in Summerside anymore. All over – he rents ice surfaces all over because he needs them. When you’ve got a couple hundred teams playing in a tournament, you’ve got to find ice surface wherever you can.

Then I look at another one with this one here, community infrastructure. Just outside of Summerside in the Leader of the Third Party’s district is Bedeque. Bedeque is a spot that has a ball diamond in the middle of it now that the Jays Care Foundation was a big proponent of – plus the community, I think they put quite a bit into it too. They got a brand-new ball field out there that every time you drive by in the summer, there’s always kids playing ball there. It is great to see.

When you get infrastructure in communities that foster social cohesion and supports local

economies, it's so big. That's the thing that this motion speaks to.

The next clause in the motion: "And whereas maintaining and investing in these assets is critical to sustaining rural and urban communities across Prince Edward Island." Well, it's not just sustained invested in the community; it's when you're doing that, it's the spinoffs. It's the work of investing. Take the new ball diamond there when they're working on it. Well, those workers need to go somewhere, those workers need to eat, those workers need to gas up. It's such a spinoff everywhere.

[4:25 p.m.]

I've got to drift a little bit away from Summerside because I've got to touch on this and this clause. When you're investing in critical assets, this government invested in the fire service in so many aspects, but right down the road on Sleepy Hollow Road, we have the Prince Edward Island Firefighters Association training grounds. This government is investing \$2.5 million into our fire school.

That fire school is going to be state-of-the-art. To know that we're investing that much into this fire school, it means that they will have proper decon. They will have proper everything. They won't have to worry about water pressure, about water supply. The old sea cans that Myles Boulter started and have been welded and added to and stacked on – they're just every which way, are great.

All of us who have trained and gone down there – the Member from Souris-Elmira, he and I went through the fire service back 24 years ago. We went through the fire school at the same time. We had a lot of laughs down there. But to look at how much it's evolved from then until now, how it started out with, I think it was two or three sea cans with a live fire in it. Now they're three, four storeys. They're getting a little rickety; they're showing their age. They're still doing their job, but the safety, this day and age, is paramount. To know that this government is investing \$2.5 million into revamping that fire school – the only thing would have been nice if Myles Boulter still would have been here to see it.

There's so much, and when we go to the next clause: "And whereas the presence of accessible and well-maintained infrastructure encourages

population retention and growth, contributing to long-term economic and social stability." Well, I think of Billy Bridges Park in Summerside when I think of this.

Billy Bridges Park is the first fully accessible park in the City of Summerside. When I sat on city council back in 2015, I had a resident come to me, and they told me that they had to take their child out to the Kensington School in order to have a swing that was accessible for them to use. I couldn't believe it that a city as big as Summerside didn't have this infrastructure.

I have to give accolades because the Liberal government at the time, Wade MacLauchlan, he made a great decision. After three years of lobbying, our council in Summerside, and setting money aside each and every year – we weren't quite there – but Wade MacLauchlan, it was one of the great things he did. He ended up giving some money to Summerside so they could put this Billy Bridges Park in. I'll give accolades where they're due, Mr. Speaker. I won't give too many of them, but that is one I will give.

The Billy Bridges Park went in and we ended having a night, I don't know if it was at the Delta, but it was an awards night that they had and they recognized Billy Bridges, a native from Summerside who is a world-renowned Paralympian. They recognized him and they dedicated the park to him. When you go in there now, you still see the big sign.

But it's so nice to see that it's an accessible park. You see it all summer long. I drive by it every day and you see the kids going there. They're able – they have the mats down across the crushed rock so that they can push chairs across it and whatnot. They've thought of everything. The swings – they can lock a wheelchair in and the kids can swing. There's also not just accessible; there's a swing beside it so that their friends that might not need that can swing with them and whatnot.

It's infrastructure like that, that makes a difference in all communities. I couldn't believe that, at that point in time, Summerside didn't have something like that and now it does. It was one of the things that I was most proud of when we were on council, to get that done.

That was the start. Another accessible park that was the water park at the participark. All you have to do is drive along Granville Street by

participate any day of the summer when it's above 15, 16 degrees – now, if you get into the 20s, you'll really notice it. But go by participate in the middle of the summer and you will see no less than 250 kids all screaming and running underneath a couple of water fountains that are out there.

[4:30 p.m.]

It's infrastructure that really retains people to the city. It speaks to that social cohesion. It speaks to that growth. I didn't realize how many people would use a water feature like that. It's a good size and there are a lot of features to it.

It's not just Summerside. I'll drift a little and I'll give the Leader of the Opposition a little bit of credit here. His municipality up in Tignish – and other ones, but this one here I noticed because I was up there with my niece when she was playing ball and I noticed the water park they had up in Tignish. Holy jumpin' – the amount of kids that were using it up there. Here it is in Tignish; I didn't think there were that many kids around and I'm like, holy jumpin'. It was packed. There were kids everywhere playing on the water features.

It's infrastructure like that, that makes a difference and it's infrastructure like that that this motion is speaking to about the vital importance of that infrastructure. It's not just infrastructure in the different communities; it's the infrastructure across the Island. It's the infrastructure at the parks.

Here last week we had a lot of discussions around the parks. I think of Linkletter Beach. Linkletter Beach is a park that has a day park beside it. It has the campground on the other side, and the infrastructure that's there now with the stairs to get down to the beach and all that – I ran into a fellow, last summer. I was down, and Linkletter Beach is fairly close to home and there was a little fellow down from Ontario that I know quite well, and he wanted to go fishing bass. So, I said, "Yeah, I can take you, I know a spot that we can go and we should be able to get you some and it's not much of a walk".

So, I took him down the Linkletter Beach and there were a couple of older gentlemen down there that were fishing too, and I was talking to them and all that. They said, "Oh, we love it here, it's so easy. The parking lot is right there. There's a set of little stairs to get down. We don't have to go over anything rough". So, when

we have infrastructure in these communities like that, it attracts so many people for so many different reasons.

Like, who would have thought back 10 or 15 years ago that we would be talking about infrastructure on our beaches that allowed people that might not be as mobile as someone else to get down to go fish bass. I love fishing, and I look forward every year to the opening of trout season, but there are so many people that look forward to the bass season now. It's something that's really taken off.

Cabot Park – another one that has a lot of infrastructure in there that attracts people, retains people to the area. There's another one. Here's one that's quite funny, and I imagine the Member from O'Leary-Inverness will be quite familiar with this one. But it's not a park; it's the DeBlois Downs. Did not know there was a racetrack up in DeBlois. Now, it hasn't been run as a track and I don't even if it's still there, but I had to take a drive to go find it. It brought me to the community of DeBlois. Twice I've been to DeBlois. I drive by it all the time. It's right there on the left when I'm going up to Pleasant View, but I did not know that there was a DeBlois Downs. Me, who loves anything to do with harness racing, did not know it, so I had to go find it.

Another time that I was brought into DeBlois, there was a nomination meeting for an election a number of years ago, and they had it at DeBlois school.

So, here we have infrastructure in these communities that are bringing people into them. I didn't want to stray; I wanted to try to keep to Summerside, but I started talking about harness racing, and there's so much more across this Island with our matinee racetracks. That's infrastructure that the government is maintaining. That's infrastructure that the government is putting money into. That is infrastructure that brings people into those communities.

I think of Tyne Valley. When they have the race days up in Tyne Valley, you go down to Dillon's Convenience Store, right below the racetrack in the hollow, and well, I've got to tell you, they've probably got the best fried chicken on the Island. And people know that; they're at the racetrack and they're going down for the fried chicken. But you can't get in, it's packed during the race

days. So, there's another piece of infrastructure that is bringing people into a community.

[4:35 p.m.]

Then down the member's area from Pinette, they have the Kilted Pace. That always brings a crowd. I always get a chuckle. You've got to go down to the Kilted Pace. It's always fun to watch. Well, once again, this body is not really made for wearing kilts or walking or anything like that....

But there are so many; there's Alberton, O'Leary, Kensington – Kensington is a favourite of mine because it's close to home. It's an easy track to throw the horse on and run out to Kensington and go in a matinee race. And when you get them close to home, it normally brings a little bit of family around. They will watch you perform, we'll say.

It's these different infrastructures in every community that are so vital to the communities and it's so important because it brings everybody in from around, from one end of the island to the other.

When we look at the last clause: "Therefore be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island recognizes the essential role of community infrastructure, including schools, fire departments, rinks, and recreational infrastructure in making communities thrive and urges continued support and investment to ensure these facilities remain strong for future generations."

Well, all of these aspects that I talked about – whether it's investing in a fire school, whether it's switching over from the analog to the digital radios, whether it's going out to the matinee tracks, whether it's going fishing on a beach – they all make a difference. They all grow the communities. For them to remain strong for future generations, we just need to continue investing in them.

Some of these matinee tracks – some of these tracks are older tracks; they're around for generations. These beaches – I remember going to Linkletter Beach when we were kids because it was close, and it's still there; it's up and running and it's better than ever.

These are the things – we need them to thrive. We need to continue to support them.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I'd like to turn this over to the seconder of the motion.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to second Motion No. 39, moved by my esteemed colleague the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot. He spoke very enthusiastically, as he always does, about his community and the surrounding areas – and really, across the province. He's certainly a strong and dedicated advocate for his area and for the city of Summerside, and I don't think that's gone unnoticed.

This motion is fundamentally about the heartbeat of Prince Edward Island, our community infrastructure. I've spoken about key and important pieces of community infrastructure during my time in this House.

When we look across our beautiful province, we don't just see roads and bridges. We see communities that are bound together by shared spaces. We see historic schools and volunteer fire departments, as the member mentioned. We see our community rinks and our recreational parks. These facilities are the vital organs of our rural and urban centres alike. They provide safety and they cultivate education. They foster health and breathe life into our local economies.

Without some of these modern, accessible, and well-maintained infrastructures, our towns and our communities just can't thrive, and sadly, we have seen what years of neglect on some of these key pieces of infrastructure – what that neglect brings. We've seen it in our parks and our schools and our hospitals, and we just can't have it. We see what we have to do to catch up, and Rome wasn't built in a day, so it takes a while to catch up.

[4:40 p.m.]

Today we are asking the Assembly to formally recognize that reality and pledge our ongoing, unwavering investment into these key pieces of infrastructure. The words of this motion remind us that strong communities depend entirely on essential infrastructure. We explicitly highlight schools, post offices, fire departments, rinks, and recreational facilities.

But why, Mr. Speaker? Because these are not luxuries; they're fundamental public goods. They are the places where our children learn their first lessons and where our families gather in times of crisis, and where our seniors stay active and connected.

Investing in these spaces ensures that Prince Edward Island remains vibrant, safe, and united. Over the next few minutes, I'm going to take this House on a journey through the beautiful district of District 2 Georgetown-Pownal.

[Interjections]

B. Curran: Hop on the bus. All aboard on the bus. We're going to look closely at 11 specific pillars of local infrastructure that prove exactly why this motion matters.

Let us begin our journey through District 2 with our foundational pillars of our education – our local schools. Rightfully so, we're going to first turn our focus to the historic and vital Georgetown School.

Georgetown School was built in 1957. The member talked about some of the older schools in Canada; I'd say I might be close behind you. The Georgetown School was built in 1957 by the community. My aunt actually taught in Georgetown, just fresh out of teaching school. She taught many of the Cloreys and the Martells and the Gotells. Some of that school, actually, is built – as the Minister of Education mentioned – is actually built by old wreckage from a shipwreck.

The Georgetown School is the centrepiece of the community. It's heartbeat of the community. I have mentioned that heartbeat nearly stopped a few years ago when the government of the day figured it should have been on the chopping block and the lights turned off and the doors locked.

I don't know which government it was. I think there are a few around this room that might remember it, but it was that and a few others.

But the community rallied around the school.

[Interjections]

S. MacEwen: We held hands.

B. Curran: They held hands around the school, they did, yeah. The community rallied around it

and they showed a true piece of strength to keep that school open. I think it was really a picture of what other communities did to also secure the future of their schools because the government of the day decided – they went through, they brought all the communities through the turmoil and fear of losing their school and decided, I guess that we're not going to do that now.

I don't know necessarily if that was –

[Interjection]

B. Curran: I wonder who led that. I think it was the Minister of Education at the time. Actually, no, it's your candidate in Charlottetown that led that.

The Georgetown School is more than just bricks and mortar and classrooms; it's the cornerstone of District 2's educational identity. Some amazing people have gone through that school because it's a small Island school and students thrive in some of those Island schools; they really do. For generations, this school has welcomed the children of Georgetown and surrounding areas and has provided high-quality, intimate education.

S. MacEwen: Premiers have come from that school.

B. Curran: Yes, they do. Yes, Premiers have come from that school, and future premiers will have gone through that school, and a new one, at that.

When a small community has its own school, it has a future. It attracts young families who want to plant roots. If a community doesn't have a school, families really don't want to move there. They want to have services that they can access where they are, right at home.

[4:45 p.m.]

The Georgetown School builds a unique sense of belonging that's larger than life that centralized institutions simply cannot replicate. The staff and the parents and the students form a tight-knit family that look out for their neighbours and one another and the kids that go there every day.

Protecting, maintaining, and modernizing the Georgetown School is exactly what this motion calls for. It's exactly what this government has done. They have listened to the people of the area. The minister mentioned today the

excitement that is around the community of Georgetown, the Town of Georgetown, about getting that new school. It's still the Town of Georgetown.

It's about ensuring rural children have the same stellar access to education facilities as anyone –

[Interjections]

B. Curran: Stellar education, stellar – as anyone else in Canada. But the Georgetown School's value, which I think the previous administration may have forgotten, extends far beyond the regular school bell around 3 p.m. It operates as a central community hub during evenings, weekends, and throughout the summer months. Local groups use the gymnasium – however, it's small – for recreational sports, community meetings, and cultural celebrations. The area around it is a gathering place for neighbourhoods to place neighbourhood to play safely outside.

When we talk about social cohesion, as noted in the third “whereas” clause of this motion, we are talking about places exactly like the Georgetown School. We see what neglect to rural school infrastructure has done. It pulls the rug directly out from an entire community's social structure. We must ensure the Georgetown School and all other rural schools receive the capital upgrades and technological tools and structural support it needs. Our commitment to this school is a commitment to the long-term survival of Georgetown itself so we can see towns and villages and communities like Georgetown thrive.

Hop back on the bus. We're going to go about ten or 15 minutes down the road to another spot: the Cardigan Consolidated School. The Cardigan School was built during the comprehensive development plan. It's another shining example of why rural school infrastructure must be fiercely protected.

It serves as a critical anchor for the historic community, the village of Cardigan, and its surrounding farming and fishing families. The early years of a child's education shapes their entire civic outlook. At the Cardigan Consolidated School, students grow up with a deep personal connection to their local environment and community history.

The teachers there – and all the educators there, all the staff at Cardigan School, which is great.

It's led by Lisa Roach, who, sadly, is going to retire this year. She's had a historic career as an educator on PEI. I think, if you talk to Lisa, she can remember pretty nearly every student she's ever taught. It's educators like Lisa that keep these bricks and mortar schools thriving and these communities thriving.

Like I said, when a community loses its school, it loses its identity; I'll say that every day. That is why this motion argues that keeping infrastructure strongly encourages population growth. As you can see, some of the hottest real estate in PEI is in Georgetown, Prince Edward Island, and why? Because the school is still open.

[Interjections]

B. Curran: Hear, hear! The Cardigan Consolidated School also exemplifies the intersection of education and environmental wellness. With its proximity to the beautiful Cardigan River and local walking trail networks, the school leverages our natural landscape for active learning.

Investing in rural educational infrastructure like the Cardigan school and Georgetown school means upgrading its physical accessibility and ensuring its energy systems are modern and green, and keeping its facilities top-notch.

[4:50 p.m.]

We cannot expect rural communities to retain their populations if their schools are left behind. When the parents look to move to eastern PEI, the presence of a strong, well-funded school like Georgetown and Cardigan is the deciding factor.

By passing this motion, we send a clear message to the families in District 2 and across the province. We're telling them that their school matters, their children matter, and their community's future is secure.

[Interjection]

B. Curran: Stay tuned, we're not there yet. Get back on the bus.

The third educational anchor I want to highlight isn't necessarily in my district – we have to get back on the bus; now we're going to head about 20 minutes west – it happens to be situated in the district of the Minister of Land and Environment, but many of the students in

Vernon River and Millview go to the school in Vernon River.

It's where I went to school. It's where the Minister of Health went to school. We actually were on the bus together most of my consolidated school years. He had the same haircut then as he does now, except he had frosted tips at the time. I can show you a picture.

The Vernon River School serves as an expansive, industrious, and highly dedicated agricultural community.

I think in 1972, Vernon River Consolidated School opened. It has had ministers of health, it has had accountants, lawyers, doctors, farmers, fishers go through the halls of Vernon River Consolidated School, and for decades it stood as the beacon of academic excellence and rural community spirit. Every day – you still go through the halls and the teachers really care. I will say at every school across the province, the teachers really care about the success of the students.

The thing about Vernon River Consolidated School and all the schools I've mentioned – the kids don't fall through the cracks as they do in some of the larger areas. It's to no fault of anybody, but I think these small rural schools are where our kids really will thrive, and it's one of the many reasons why I was lucky enough to move back into the Alberny Plains/Vernon River area because I really wanted to see my son Oliver go to Vernon River School and get a stellar elementary school education.

The families of Vernon River are deeply involved in their school, supporting everything from hot lunch programs to school athletics. This school proves that the infrastructure is not just a line item on a government balance sheet; it's a living ecosystem. The gym walls are lined with banners and memories and the history of generations of Island families. Even the Minister of Health is on one of them, I think.

Upgrading and maintaining Vernon River School ensures that we honour the hard work of the families of the area. It ensures that our agriculture heartland has access to the cutting-edge educational infrastructure it deserves.

Without the Vernon River Consolidated School, the community would lose its primary gathering place. The school acts as a focal point for regional meetings, agricultural group

discussions, local youth groups, the Lions Club, the band club, and many other things that happen all the time in the school. The lights are hardly ever off in the Vernon River School. It bridges the gap between different generations, bringing seniors and youth together for school events.

I think of, when I went to school there, Martina Doyle, who was an elderly lady in the area who always gave back to her community every single day. She did a reading club with the students. The Vernon River School allowed it; it was perhaps a different time. Many of the kids welcomed and were excited when Martina would come and she'd always have fudge and biscuits and rolls, and we'd read books, and it was a lot of fun. Until the day she died Martina was a friend of mine, and she's very greatly missed in the community.

The structural integrity and the resource allocation of Vernon River School must be prioritized. When we invest in its classrooms, ventilation systems, and recreational spaces, we are investing in the next generation of Island leaders. Think of the work the Home and School in Vernon River is doing to build a wellness track and walking track at the Vernon River School. I think it's been greatly missed. It's one thing that they haven't had for years, and the work of Pam McQuillan and all of the members of the Home and School are doing to raise the money –

[Interjection]

B. Curran: Great school.

[4:55 p.m.]

They're raising money to build the walking track. I was lucky enough to actually attend one of their fundraising events and donated some money to the cause, and I'm really excited to partner with them and work with them to achieve it.

We're ensuring that the rural economy remains strong by providing local, accessible education. Let this motion serve as our promise to Vernon River that their school will remain open, modern, and thriving.

Let's shift from the classroom to the ice. We'll get back on the bus. We're going to head back to Georgetown now.

[Interjections]

B. Curran: We're going to go see Benji at the Georgetown rink. It's the Three Rivers Sportsplex, sorry, but we'll still call it the Georgetown rink. In Prince Edward Island – oh, no, Benji is still there; he'd be there forever – a community rink is far more than just a sheet of ice under a roof. It's where cold winter nights are transformed into warm community gatherings.

The Georgetown rink, or the Three Rivers Sportsplex, has been a sanctuary for physical fitness, camaraderie, and sport for decades, and the odd time, the odd fisticuffs. It's where young Islanders lace up their skates for the very first time, learning about teamwork, discipline, and resilience. It's where parents and grandparents stand along the boards drinking coffee and hot chocolate, seeing Kendal and Christy at the canteen and catching up with their neighbours.

The Three Rivers Sportsplex combats the isolation of rural winters by giving people a bright, energetic place to meet. However, running a rink in a small community presents immense financial and operational challenges. Ice-making plants, roofs, and boards require continuous capital-intensive upkeep. Phil Hebert, who the Town of Three Rivers hired to maintain the rinks in Georgetown and Montague, has been doing a great ensuring that the rinks are operational and they're thriving. But these rinks are often run by volunteer boards that manage these facilities and work tirelessly but they can't do it alone.

The Three Rivers Sportplex supports our local economy by drawing visiting teams, tournament traffic, and families to the Town of Georgetown. When there's a hockey game, Daryl's is booming, the streets are lined. These visitors spend money at our local shops, some gas stations, and our convenience stores. If we allow rinks like Georgetown to fall into disrepair, we just don't lose an ice surface – we lose a piece of our civic soul. This motion explicitly calls for continued investment to keep those critical facilities strong.

Now we're going to get back on the bus. We're going to head to Pownal where we see the –

[Interjection]

B. Curran: We weren't at the Pownal rink yet, we're getting there.

[Interjection]

B. Curran: It's alright, it's scenic. It is scenic, you're going to see it all. We're going to see it all.

We're going to the Pownal Sports Centre. The Pownal Sports Centre is a powerhouse of recreational infrastructure east of Charlottetown. It serves a massive catchment area from Stratford right to the county line in Vernon River. It goes to Fort Augustus, Donagh. It's a home to the Pownal Minor Hockey Association, which is one of the largest and most vibrant youth sports organizations on the Island.

On any given weekend, thousands of players, coaches, referees, and families pass through the doors of the Pownal rink. The Pownal Sports Centre is an economic driver, a wellness hub, and a premiere tournament host. It represents the absolute best of what happens when a community commits to modern recreational infrastructure.

But with such heavy usage comes incredible wear and tear –

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

B. Curran: I'm just getting started; I still have 40 more.

An Hon. Member: Forty-five more seconds.

B. Curran: Okay. The bus has not even warmed up yet.

To keep the Pownal Sports Centre operating at peak efficiency, we must provide steady, predictable infrastructure support. It's a centrepiece of our district and a centrepiece of eastern part of Prince Edward Island.

[Interjection]

[5:00 p.m.]

B. Curran: [Laughter] Okay, well, infrastructure like this, Mr. Speaker – I'm going to go until you tell me not to – infrastructure like this in every community is exactly what we need to support. It's an honour to support this motion.

I adjourn debate, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Extend the hour?

M. MacKay: No.

Speaker: The hour cannot be extended, member.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, that this House adjourn until Friday May 29th, at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

[The Legislature adjourned until Friday, 29 May 2026 at 10:00 a.m.]