

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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The Legislature sat at 1:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to welcome back my colleagues to another day of the provincial Legislature, those who are tuned in at home, and those who now make up the record post-COVID crowd in the gallery today. I say welcome, and I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

I want to begin by offering my congratulations to Luke Beck and Jamie Holland, who are the new owners of Kays Wholesale here in Charlottetown, taking over from Kim Green, who really built a longtime legendary business into something incredibly special. I know Kim is now turning this over to two very capable individuals. The Kays brothers' name has been so important to PEI, and Charlottetown in particular, for a long, long time and it's good to see that business continue to thrive. So, to Luke and Jamie and all the staff, the best of luck.

Yesterday, when I left the Chamber after Question Period, I had a very long and good call with congressman Glenn Thompson. The congressman represents the 15th congressional district in Pennsylvania and is the highest-ranking Republican on the committee with oversight for the FDA.

We talked a lot about potato wart and the program that we're trying to reestablish with trade to the United States. He also comes from a long line of dairy farmers, so he understands the plight of the family farm. We had a really good discussion, and I think that it will go a long way to help us that reestablish that border to the continental US that we need so desperately. So, really hoping to hear some good news on that sooner rather than later.

I also wanted to say that I had a chance to thumb through the most recent edition of *The Employment Journey on PEI*, and in this job, I know we can all relate in here, there's lot of really exciting things that come across

your desk, and there's lots of things that we see and read about of things that are happening here across PEI. But sometimes we even – we all get amazed about the great innovators that we have here.

Simonne Cormier of Valleyfield retired from 33 years with the federal government and is also a breast cancer survivor. She wasn't necessarily planning to be an entrepreneur but when she couldn't find a breast prosthesis that was made from natural fibres, she went out and created one.

And it's amazing; she has a company now, Au Naturel Solutions Inc. It's the first company to introduce a patented, innovative, all-natural handcrafted breast prosthesis to the marketplace, and they'll begin in April. I have two sisters who are survivors of breast cancer, and I know hundreds of Island women who suffer from this disease. And I just think it's incredible that she would be so selfless in this endeavour and that her innovative juices have grown to the point where this has become a reality.

So, just a really, really wonderful, heartwarming story and it's just nice to hear that some of the many programs that are out there to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation were able to help Simonne with this endeavour and I wish her the best of luck, Mr. Speaker, in the future.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I would definitely like to welcome all the folks in the gallery today. It is a great turnout, and it's family day for the Green caucus here today because I recognize Cindy Beaton there, who of course is the sister of the Member from Stratford-Mermaid. And a number of Summerside-Wilmot's family is here. I see Lynn and Wayne, Summerside-Wilmot's mom and dad, and I think her uncle Paul, and Lou, is that correct? Nice to see you all, welcome.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: In my own district, the South Shore Health and

Wellness Inc. are looking for volunteers to fill their board. This is a group that's been incredibly active in maintaining primary health care services for Islanders who live on the south shore of Prince Edward Island; a really great group that was spun up when a doctor left the area, which left a huge void in the primary health care service providers for the region. And they've been really successful in bringing back physician-led and a nurse practitioner practice to what is now the pharmacy in Crapaud.

So, it's a great group to get involved with. Lisa Gallant is the owner of the pharmacy and she's also the person if you want to reach out to if you live in that area and you want to be part of making sure that we maintain primary health care services for Islanders on the south shore, please reach out to somebody on the board and they would be very welcome to embrace you, I'm sure.

The 2022 PEI Winter Woodlot tour is happening this Saturday at 9:00 a.m. on the Millvale Road in Breadalbane. It's a family event, it's a lovely thing. I've been on the woodlot tours previously. You see all kinds of things. You meet experts in woodlot management, you'll see wildlife, you'll likely get some cider, and you'll get good chats and maple syrup and hot chocolate. And it's just a great event and that's happening on Saturday from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. And they just ask that masks be worn when you're there in the large group.

And on that note, yesterday in my greetings, I made note of the opening of Music PEI, which was to happen last night. And unfortunately, it was cancelled, and indeed they've cancelled the whole week.

Premier King: Oh, no.

Leader of the Opposition: And I'm desperately sad for them. The whole week has been cancelled.

There's really no sector other than the airline industry that has hit harder by COVID than those that require a live audience for their welfare, for their well-being, to carry out their work. And not only have they been almost the hardest hit sector, but probably the sector that's going to find it most difficult to come back. People have got

out of the habit of going to see live concerts and it might be difficult to get them back.

So, it must have been an extraordinarily difficult decision for Rob Oakie to make, but I think it's a responsible decision. I think some in this room may have some things to learn from that; a difficult decision but the responsible one.

I'm really sad for them all. I hope this can be rescheduled soon. We have the ECMAs coming up in Fredericton very shortly. They should be okay because the case numbers there are fairly low. We also have the Canadian Folk Music Awards happening here in Charlottetown. Selfishly, I hope they go ahead because my daughter is performing in that in April.

I hope we're out of this by then, but again, my heart goes to all of the musicians on PEI who are being denied this once a year opportunity to be celebrated in their own community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise and welcome everyone here. I'd like to welcome everyone watching from Evangeline-Miscouche and right across the province.

Special welcome to the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot's parents, Lynn and Wayne. It's certainly nice to see you; used to see a lot of you when I had my business in St. Eleanors and got to be good friends, and welcome here today, and to Cindy Beaton and the hon. member's family.

I'd also like to announce that the tickets for the 2022 Acadian and Francophone Chamber of Commerce PEI Entrepreneurs' Gala are on sale. It's the 20th anniversary of the gala, which is the largest entrepreneurial recognition evening of the year, and the chamber's biggest night. It will be held on Saturday, April 9th at the Village musical acadien in Abram-Village. Tickets are \$40 each and are on sale until March 31st, 2022.

I encourage everyone to attend this exciting event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

It is a pleasure to be back in the Legislature today for another day of discussion and debate. Certainly, I would like to welcome all those that are in the gallery. It's been great to see since we've come back in for this session that we do have ones in the gallery. I think it adds so much to the debate to have you here, so again, welcome to each of you.

I'd also like to say hello to all those that will be watching up in District 26 Alberton-Bloomfield.

Early this morning, I guess it was probably around 25, 20 to 8:00 a.m., that a picked up a full box of tulips out at Valley Street here. That is a fundraising drive initiative of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Foundation with the proceeds going to purchasing equipment. It was so well organized. I just pulled in. I had ordered my tulips online previously. I'll tell you, I was in, had the box of tulips, and was out of there within two or three minutes.

I'd certainly like to recognize and give a big shout-out to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for the great work that their foundation's auxiliaries do. (Indistinct) be about two, three weeks ago that I had the opportunity to meet with the foundation, their executive. I had a great discussion and it was great to hear the fundraising initiatives, their financial situation, but even more so some of the great projects that they're involved in in helping out with the health care system.

Certainly, I'd be remiss not to mention the board chair, Patsy MacLean, and the CEO, Tracey Comeau, for the great work that they do.

Just to rapidly finish up here, they're just an example of the great work that our foundations and auxiliaries right across the province perform, their fundraising, and I would like to acknowledge in my district the

Western Hospital Foundation and the auxiliary. The auxiliary itself operates the Bargain Nook right on Main Street in Alberton with all the proceeds going to the Western Hospital, and especially recognize two of the ones that work hard day in, day out – Lillian Silliker and Emanuel Bernard – for the great work that they do at the Bargain Nook and with the auxiliary.

With that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today. Hi to everybody in Mermaid-Stratford.

I do take great pleasure in welcoming those in the gallery today, especially my sister, Cindy. It's her first time being here so, it's just – we all have somebody in our lives that we count on to always lift you up when you need to be lifted or knock you down when you need to be knocked down.

I call tell you that when you get into a place where you're public speaking and you're presenting to different people, it's always nice to have somebody who will actually tell you the truth of how you sound or what you say or how you worded it. I can always count on my sister to be that person for me. I think we all need to be very aware of the things that we do, the things that we say, and recognize that we can all improve.

Anyway, I'm fortunate to have a sister who stands behind me for everything that I do and it was fun, when she was home when my dad wasn't well, they would wait for me to get home from the Legislature every night so that I could cast it on the TV and the we'd re-watch everything that happened in the Legislature every day. It was a high point –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Beaton: – but it was a high point for my dad. My family is very well aware now of how things happen in here, and they get the behind-the-scenes stuff, too.

Thanks to everybody for being here. I see Shawn Murphy just arrived. It's always

great to see Shawn. Shawn has been phenomenal for this province, an excellent MP representing his constituents well back in the day. I can say when I was chair of the Public Accounts committee, Shawn was one of the people that gave me a lot of advice as to how to be non-partisan and to look for accountability and excellent – looking at performance audits from a perspective that I've never looked at them before. I think we all need to have that perspective and great wisdom and people that will share that with us. It's great to see you, Shawn, and everybody else that's in the gallery.

I'd also just like to mention, I was at a public meeting last night for the Cross Roads Fire Department. The Cross Roads Fire Department's in a really great position there. They have all of the volunteer firefighters that they can have. They're all active. It's a really excellent new location that they're at. I had the – well, I guess I had the pleasure of being the only person at the public meeting, and then they shared with me that I was the only person at the public meeting for as long as they can remember.

So, because of that, I benefitted from an amazing tour of their new facility. Shane Mallard, who's one of the volunteers there, took me in through every single door, explained everything. We're just really fortunate. I know, across the province, we're fortunate to have many, many excellent volunteer firefighters. I would say that about Cross Roads Fire Department.

And just a shout-out to our new chief and deputy chief, Chief Kevin Reynolds and Deputy Chief Dave Walsh, who are now at the helm there and taking us into the next stages.

So, hi to everybody again and I hope you all enjoy the proceedings today. Thanks.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A warm welcome to the Green family and the new people who just joined us – Cindy and Uncle Paul, Aunt Lou, Wayne and Lynn, and to Shawn Murphy as well, and the crew that came in with him. I'm curious what Shawn's teaching now, what course

he's doing, and really, kind of to echo my colleague's point, the support in Public Accounts, really a professional who is more than willing to offer his thoughts and his experience. It's very much appreciated.

Je veux aussi dire un grand bonjour aux élèves et au personnel à Birchwood.

I would also like to say a big hello to students and staff at Birchwood.

I do breakfast program there on Thursday and I have my little posse that comes and gathers around the breakfast table with me to catch me up on the week's gossip and news.

This morning, we were talking about social studies curriculum. They were telling me how they don't learn about anything local, and I almost kind of put my tail between my legs a little bit because I was on the pilot committee of teachers who were piloting the new social studies program. It's not new anymore; it was years ago.

They do a lot of ancient civilization work and they're missing out – they told me they're missing out on the local aspect of things, which they will get in Grade 9 and there'll be dabbles of it through Grades 7 and 8, depending on their teacher. So, you know, it just got me to thinking and we got to talking about how things change and how we can't be resistant to change.

So, we were talking about how cool it would be if they had the opportunity to get around a table with curriculum makers and to talk about what they'd like to learn in social studies. So, I thought – we had a really great discussion, and also the staff, it's really incredible to have the opportunity to do that on a weekly basis where they get used to you and comfortable with you and you get to build that sense of community, and they are comfortable and trust you to come to you with issues and stuff like that.

I forgot to say hello to everyone tuning in from around the Island and Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise in the House today and also get to welcome my family here. It's so lovely to see all of you and I really appreciate my colleagues making my family feel very welcomed today, so thank you. My parents have been incredible supports to me, and I can't even begin to express how impossible it would be for me to do any of this if they hadn't been the supports they have been. And today is their anniversary –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lund: My parents were married in 1973, which makes this their 49th anniversary, so I would – thank you – happy to wish a happy anniversary to my parents.

And I also have my dear Auntie Lou and Uncle Paul here from New Brunswick, and I can't tell you what it means to me to have them over. With COVID, it's been so challenging for people to get to see their families who are out of province, and if memory serves, it's my auntie's birthday today. So, happy birthday to my auntie.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lund: I'd also like to welcome Cindy here today. I know that this might be your first time watching, but we know for a fact it's not your first time watching online. We know you see what's going on.

I would also like to see hello to the many, many seniors in Summerside who have been calling me all morning and leaving me messages about the rent increases that they are facing, and I know I had said on the radio this morning that some seniors in my district were facing up to a 23% increase, but I needed to correct myself because I had three seniors this morning call me and tell me about 49% increases and 54% increases.

Ms. Bernard: Oh my God.

Ms. Lund: So, I actually was mistaken. The situation is far worse than I thought, Premier.

So, we'll say thank you to all of those who are watching and reaching out, and we'll have to keep working on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome everyone today to the gallery, it's nice to see some faces in, and everybody watching from home in Kensington-Malpeque.

Today, I had the opportunity to join a live chamber event made up of the business community for a bit of a round table – economic recovery and COVID update. I want to thank everybody that took the time out of their schedule today and the chamber that organized that event, to all the businesses over the last couple of years, everything you've endured and everything you've went through, to all your employees, everybody has stepped up and got us to the point where we are. So, I thank everyone for doing what has happened to date.

As well, tomorrow I'm going to be joining I'm hoping a good crowd of tourism business across Prince Edward Island at the Delta tomorrow for our annual tourism strategy launch. So, tomorrow, we've got our launch coming, some great initiatives in the works, and I'll be able to provide the House with more of an update tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome to the listeners from Charlottetown-Brighton and a big welcome to all our many visitors. It's great to see so many faces.

I missed yesterday to recognize Diane Griffin's career as a senator. I may be biased, but I believe Canadians would be better off if senators served as limited by time instead of age.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hammarlund: That way we would have been able to continue the service of

people like Diane Griffin, who clearly has more to give to the public.

I have known Diane for decades, since I and my wife joined her gourmet dinner club; got in through a common acquaintance. As you know, you get by far the best conversation in the presence of good food and wine, and Diane always had something thoughtful to say and important things to do.

I will give you an example. About 30 years ago, a well-meaning person in the department of the environment announced that mercury in old-fashioned thermometers and thermostats was dangerous and should be replaced as soon as possible. At that time, almost every household had one or both. Of course, the mercury was, in all cases, safely enclosed in glass and was no immediate danger, but disposing of the thermometers and thermostats in the garbage, however, would result in a huge cloud of mercury spewing out of the waste to energy plant; not exactly an improvement for the environment.

Fortunately, Diane at the time happened to be I think a deputy minister in the department of environment, and as often happens here on PEI, it's the personal connections that count. I gave her a call and she immediately grasped the problem and promised to take care of it. It was only a day or two later that the government announced that all mercury-containing thermostats and thermometers should be brought to the local pharmacy for safe recycling.

This is an example of not only Diane's efficiency, but also how PEI is so unique and wonderful and small that you can almost always find a connection to a person to help you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just saying hello to everybody in District 14, especially everybody tuning in from Huntington Court today, big shout-out to you. And I do want to say hello to everybody in the gallery, and happy anniversaries and birthdays.

And a special shout-out to former MP Shawn Murphy, who's done a great job serving Charlottetown on a national scale, but also coming back and engaging youth and engaging different students. And today, he's brought with him a few people from the Master in Global Affairs class here at UPEI. And you know, you think about a time to be in the Master in Global Affairs and it's probably right now – I'm sure there's some very, very interesting discussions. So, I want to welcome Sandrine, Martha, Teresa, and Nick; welcome to the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton – Belvedere, sorry.

Ms. Bell: That's okay, no worries, there's a lot of us.

Speaker: Couldn't tell the difference.

Ms. Bell: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to get a bit ahead of the curve – hi everybody. You've all been said hello to already.

But I'm going to get a bit ahead of the curve because next Monday is International Women's Day. As you know, I think every day is International Women's Day, but, it's March 8th. This year though, the organization that I was previously executive director of, PEI Business Women's Association, is actually co-hosting the announcement of the 25 Most Powerful Women in Business in Atlantic Canada, with *Atlantic Business Magazine*.

There'll be an online even that you can RSVP to, to be able to see who is being honoured this year. And there were three recipients from PEI; you can actually know them in advance. So, it gives me a chance to give a special recognition to Jenene Wooldridge, who is obviously the executive director of L'nuey; to Mary Robinson, who is not only the representative for the PEI Federation of Agriculture, but the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, and obviously the managing partner of Eric C. Robinson; and Dr. Heather Morrison, our beloved chief of public health for PEI.

There are just such an amazing range of women who are honoured every year, but then this year is no exception, but it is particularly great to see such a range of dynamic women from PEI being honoured in this way.

And this is one of many activities that we're going to see next week, but this is one where we can really recognize the impact of women in diverse spaces, in spaces that have not traditionally been places where we might expect women to be, and that goes with the theme this year for International Women's Day, which is "Break the Bias".

I'm sure you'll be seeing much more over the next few days as we move towards that formal day but Mr. Speaker, as always, we should be celebrating women breaking barriers, breaking the bias every day.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A pleasure to rise and welcome everyone watching from, of course, District 18 Rustico-Emerald, and welcome everyone to the gallery. It's great to see you hear.

I wanted to give a shout-out to those folks – we've heard it many times, but I was at Charlottetown – there was a huge lineup at the testing site, so I went right to Borden. There was a big crowd there. Everyone's taking their responsibility to get tested very, very seriously.

I wanted to give a shout-out to just the efficiency of those sites. I went through and I think the member from Borden and maybe – he runs an efficient and tight ship down there. I think that's what I told them. Anyhow, it went well. I'm happy to say that I did test negative today and I'm back in the Legislature.

I wanted to recognize a senior 91 years young, Inez Doiron. She's in Charlottetown at the Andrews Home, but she hails from out in Rustico-Emerald. She likes to knit dishcloths. She started to accumulate them

so last year, she decided to sell them at her daughter's place, I believe, The Makers Place. I think it's Brenda that runs that. She raised \$325 for Blooming House and then this year, she raised another \$720 for Lennon Recovery House. So, this is a 91-year-old lady –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: – what a – I mean it's just, it's fantastic what our seniors continue to do on this Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

MJ's Bakery and Caboose Café

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

For 36 years, MJ's Bakery & Caboose Café, located in Tignish, has been providing Islanders with great quality home-baked goods. This business has become a staple in the community and has actively given back.

Owner Judy Morrissey-Richard, her husband Brian, and their three daughters, Kristy Lynn, Michelle and Jacqueline, have all had an active role in the day-to-day operations at some point over the years.

One of their major events is the annual Breakfast with Santa and Children's Magical Garden. This event was started in 2017 in memory of Everly Anne Perry, beloved daughter of Kristy Lynn and Bobby Perry. All funds raised are donated to Maternal Child Care at Prince County Hospital for the purchase of medical equipment in that unit.

This past event raised \$8,200 from their fifth annual fundraising efforts. With health restrictions still in place in 2021, members of the Morrissey, Richard and Perry families moved ahead in a safe manner and produced their most successful event to date.

They opened the Children's Magical Gardens Christmas display in early December in conjunction with the Town's Christmas Light Tour, serving free hot chocolate and cookies, drive thru style, and people were able to tour the gardens display. The entry-by-donation gardens were open nightly from 5:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. for the month of December. Despite battles with weather, they were able to keep the gardens open with some improvising.

Breakfast from Mrs. Claus' Kitchen was also takeout style from MJ's Bakery. Over 400 plates were served as families were greeted in the parking lot by a very "cold" Mrs. Claus along with some friendly cartoon characters.

During the week leading up to Christmas, they created a safe scavenger hunt that families could take part in with a prize for the winners.

Finally, cookie decorating kits were sold for the month of December with all that money going to PCH Foundation. These great efforts have led to great success. Over the past five years, this heartfelt memorial event has raised over \$28,000.

I wish to congratulate and commend MJ's Bakery & Caboose Café, along with all those who have made this annual event a success and for their continued support to the Prince County Hospital and the community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Rare Disease Day

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This past Monday was Rare Disease Day where people all over the world came together to call for equity for those living with rare diseases.

You may recall a motion I brought forward in this Legislature in 2020 calling on this government to implement a protocol to enable funding for treatments available in the formulary for rare diseases.

This motion passed unanimously and was inspired by Lucy Morkunas, who has an extremely rare form of cancer.

Lucy was originally denied access to medication prescribed by her oncologist even though it was listed on the formulary. However, Lucy's illness was just too rare to be listed.

Without this medication, Lucy would have likely had months, and perhaps only weeks, to live.

But Lucy did not give up, and after challenging her original rejection, contacting media, and the issue being discussed in this House, she was permitted access to the medication she so desperately needed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Altass: It is my great pleasure to share the wonderful news that Lucy's treatment has been working. She's still with us, and her cancer has been shrinking. Lucy's treatment has been so effective that the National Institute of Health Cancer Center is taking a close look at her positive response to see what can be learned to help others.

Everyone deserves their best chance to live with health and wellness.

Government must work to remove all possible barriers that prevent people from accessing the medication they need, when they need it.

I sincerely hope the minister will think of Lucy and others like her struggling with rare diseases when finalizing the details of the new pharmacare agreement with the federal government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Compassion

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With the advent of Omicron, we've witnessed a decided shift in this government's approach to the pandemic.

Government is moving away from public health preventing illness within the population and is shifting to personal responsibility.

Our plan to move on isn't reflected in our COVID numbers, though. What interventions, if any, will we see from government as the numbers continue to rise? Going back to normal should mean less illness, not more.

Government is asking Islanders to assess their own risk, but this requires government to provide adequate information to inform their decisions. Government does not make this easy. Ever since this transition to personal responsibility, we have been provided less and less information to the public.

This does not provide comfort to those who are really worried.

So many Islanders are scared, and rightfully so. They have assessed their own risk to the extent that it's possible, only to see government downplaying and ignoring their risks and concerns.

We have a crisis of compassion.

Islanders who are now and have always been at greater risk because of their vulnerabilities are feeling utterly invisible and abandoned. Instead of getting inclusive public health policy that respects the risk to vulnerable people, we're being told to be less fearful. We're told Omicron is less dangerous, even though it has hospitalized and killed more people on PEI than any other variant. It's probably no surprise that vaccination rates for our youngest have underperformed expectations as government assures Island parents that COVID is mild.

Our most Islanders are not worth less because they have a condition or circumstances that make them vulnerable, and they are right to be afraid when their very life and wellbeing is at risk.

Here's who I'm hearing from: parents of children under five who aren't able to be

vaccinated yet; mothers whose children have complex and life-threatening illnesses, which mean their entire family is isolated to protect that child because they can't go out and about in public when they don't know where is safe; patients in cancer treatment; young adults with cystic fibrosis; seniors with COPD; and the adult children of seniors, like me, who are worried sick about their loved ones, feeling that everything they do to protect them isn't enough.

Had we tried to create new normals and new societal expectations rather than insisting on getting back to a normal that wasn't serving everyone as it was, we would have all been better for it, Mr. Speaker.

If only compassion was as contagious as COVID.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

In response to questions that were asked yesterday by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe, I just want to correct one of my responses.

I mentioned a particular school that was going to be retrofitted. I want to correct that statement and advise that Cardigan Consolidated will be the first school that is slated to be retrofitted towards net zero.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: For our first question, I will call on the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to start off with a question that flows from the comments just made by my colleague from Charlottetown-Belvedere and my opening greetings which cited the casualty of Music PEI's festival this year.

New COVID cases across Canada have been down sharply in the last couple of weeks, but here on PEI, we've seen our numbers rising and continuing to increase. Right now, 3,355 Islanders are infected with COVID. That's one in 50 people. Fully 2% of the Island population right now, at this moment, have COVID.

To put that in perspective, it would be the equivalent of nearly 300,000 people in Ontario and they currently have less than 20,000. Our rate of active cases is nearly 10 times the national average. These numbers are startling to many Islanders, but through it all, our Premier has remained eerily quiet.

Moving On plan and COVID-19 cases

A question to the Premier: Is your Moving On plan working as intended and when will the rising case counts prompt a response from your government, if indeed it prompts one at all?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for the question. I certainly – and I think all Islanders share in his concern that COVID has been quite a journey for all of us here.

I think just to put things into perspective, we're still one of the last jurisdictions that are actually counting and contact tracing all of the cases, so perhaps some of the numbers might be a little more skewed. I think the fact that we continue to report the way we do I think should be a badge of honour for us.

I don't think there's any more Omicron in PEI than there is anywhere else. I think it's highly contagious, of course, and it's in every community across the country, largely.

I think what would precipitate changes, in response to the question, would be if Dr. Morrison and her team come to us and say that we should take these steps. That's the approach we've take throughout this and that's the one we'll continue to have.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think I'll turn now to yesterday's discussion on mental health and something that COVID, of course, is only amplifying. The problems of drug addiction and mental illness are destructive and they're universal and addressing them effectively is no simple thing.

But we have an enormous advantage here on Prince Edward Island based on the twin benefits that we have of being a small jurisdiction, and we have the gift of jurisdiction.

We can choose far more easily than most other places a unique path that suits us as Islanders. The person with the greatest opportunity and responsibility to steer us on that path is the Premier. Nobody thinks that we can eliminate the scourge of mental illness and addictions easily, but we can certainly choose to put in place long-term measures that have been shown to be effective elsewhere.

Long-term measures for MH&A

A question to the Premier: Are you ready to make some difficult and also some visionary choices?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. leader for the question and his passion for that. As I way saying to him just yesterday, I do appreciate where these questions come from. They come from a place of wanting to do better and I think we share that here.

I do think these issues are extremely complex. I do think there is a unique opportunity in Prince Edward Island because we can measure it easier, we can put the faces more to it than other places can – that we have an opportunity.

I think the challenges that we're working through and trying to really incorporate is to

take that important government policy and leadership and have it to be nimble enough that we can work with our NGOs and all of our partners so that it can be as personalized as possible for those individuals who need it.

I do think we have an opportunity to do that and, as always, I'm open to any and all good suggestions how we continue to get towards that end.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's tonnes of evidence that suggest that one fundamental piece of lifting people out of the cycles of illness and dependency is to provide secure, decent housing – Housing First, as it is known.

When somebody has a place to call home, so many other opportunities for healing and for personal growth suddenly become possible. Without it breaking out of those cycles of dependency is almost impossible.

Achieving this for all Islanders who are homeless or housing insecure will cost money. Absolutely, it will. But it's costing us money not to do that.

We have a government that seems strangely and shamefully unwilling to commit to addressing our housing crisis.

Commitment of funds to housing

To the Premier: Your minister responsible for housing has failed. He's failed to advocate for this foundational policy choice, leaving countless Islanders vulnerable. In the absence of leadership from that minister, are you willing to commit significant funds to provide every Islander the basic human right which is a place to live?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that – I appreciate the question and I do believe that we have put the resources that are needed there, but more and more are needed.

I think that money – again, I've said it in here before. I know the opposition gets upset sometimes when I say it, but if money was the only issue, money, we can find. Money, we can provide. But getting these units built is a very, very difficult and complex challenge, there's no question about it. We built 1,500 houses and apartments –

An Hon. Member: You did?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier King: – well, I didn't. No, the economy did. There's only so much that we can do. Our construction – they're working at a level, they need more people.

So, it's not a lack of money or concern, but we're playing significant catch-up in this issue.

But like I say, there are no simple issues, but yes, the money, if we can find more places to buy, we're doing all of those things, but we can't do it at a rate that's fast enough to deal with the challenges that we have been living with the last 20 years, Mr. Speaker.

But we're trying hard and we'll continue.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Well, you were right, Premier, in your prediction that the opposition would not like that because the 1,500 houses that you reference are built by private companies or individual Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: That's not the government building that. It's got nothing to do with public housing or spending money to create affordable housing for Islanders who really need it.

Over the years in this House, I've seen a dizzying variety of mental health strategies and personnel related to mental health come and go, and the overall impact of that has been chaos; chaos, and a deeply dysfunctional system which continues to fail

to provide even basic mental health supports for thousands of Islanders.

Day one shovels that were promised to start work on a mental health campus are still rusting away somewhere on a shelf a thousand days after the Premier promised that.

One thing that I have never, ever seen mentioned in any of the various mental health plans that I've read over the years, however, is anything resembling the Alliance for Mental Well-being. I've never seen anything like that anywhere.

Alliance for Mental Well-being strategy

A question to the Premier: Where did this idea come from and how does it fit into the long-term strategy to provide first class mental health supports for all Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was an idea that was generated by professionals within the health system on Prince Edward Island. I referenced it in the State of the Union Address last year. I think it's taken on a new name, but the name that we threw out there was simply a name to get the conversation started and to get the program started.

Its design is to be a body that can bring all of the partners together, government, who provide the clinical services and all the NGOs and partners who provide important service with mental health and addictions to address the gaps that might be there, to help assist those who might be able to do more, and to improve the services that they offer. And that's what it's designed to do.

It's built on a similar model that the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction was built on about 20 years ago for the federal government, what has proven to be a tremendous asset, Mr. Speaker, and that's what it's designed to do. It's to be another tool to help in the overall delivery of mental health and addictions services in the province.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker.

Governing well requires some fundamental principles to be in place: a strategic plan, an operational plan, and a way of measuring whether you're actually reaching the goals that you set for yourself.

Ms. Beaton: Exactly.

Leader of the Opposition: We've just started debate on the Budget, but it's already clear that this Premier's administration lacks any of these critical elements. Whether it's investments in housing or in health care or economic development, without a plan and ways to measure your results, you're just throwing money around willy-nilly without any clear guiding vision there.

To the Premier: Your minister of health has been largely absent during the biggest health crisis our province has ever faced. He has never articulated anything close to a plan to tackle mental illness and addictions, and he has overseen the steady deterioration of our health care system, to the point where we have over 20,000 people waiting to see a family doctor.

Absence of health minister

In the absence of leadership from this minister, when are you going to fill this void?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly won't take any lessons on economic advice from the Leader of the Opposition and his crew, I'll tell you that (Indistinct)

We are doing a credible job because all you do is spend money and you think – you talk about a magic faucet, that's why. There's not a magic faucet. (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: Spending willy-nilly, oh my Lord –

Speaker: The Premier has the floor.

Premier King: – spending willy-nilly – listen to him (Indistinct), can you imagine Mr. Speaker?

Anyhow, we've made record investments at every opportunity. We've had to make record investments in all of these aspects of our economy. All of the social necessities, but it's not enough money, we know that, we're spending more each year, we're spending record amounts of money in the Department of Health and Wellness and social development and housing. We're trying to respond to those needs to the very best that we can, we know that it's never enough, but we'll continue to push on that.

I couldn't be any prouder of the minister who works so hard day and night, who's there at 5:30 in the morning and doesn't leave until 7:30 at night at the latest sometimes. Drives every day back and forth to his home in Alberton. Couldn't be any more proud of the job he's doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I feel like I should remind the Premier that the opposition can't spend money. You're the one spending (Indistinct) money.

The Occupations in Demand immigration stream announced earlier this week is limited to four job categories. All entry-level positions that are too often paid below a living wage.

Immigration stream and low wages

Minister: Are you concerned that an influx of workers in these specific low wage areas could drive down wages in these jobs and keep them down?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you hon. member for the question.

So, no, I'm not. If anything, the wages should increase. There's a big demand in the workforce right now. I'm getting calls from

companies every day looking for people. I had a call from a gentleman yesterday who's looking for two labourers at, I believe, it was \$21 an hour, and he can't get one resume. So, if anything else, I think this is going to help the workforce out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Well, one thing we agree on is the wages should increase, absolutely.

Let's not forget housing. As my colleagues in the Green caucus and I have reminded this House many, many times, we are currently in a housing crisis, and low-income Islanders are disproportionately impacted.

Additional investment in public housing

Question to the minister: What additional investment in housing, and specifically public housing, will your government be implementing so that these newly recruited workers in low-income sectors actually have a place to live when they get here?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And absolutely, hon. member, housing is a huge issue right now, and it has been for a long time. And what has happened since this government has come in – has strategically had conversations to get what ideas we can. We have talked about affordable housing; we've talked about developers that are you guys are completely against over there. If it wasn't for developers building, we'd be in a far-off worse situation in the housing side (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacKay: The other day, I heard from the hon. members across there, going against our tourism gift card program to an industry that creates \$82 million in tax revenue that goes to programs like housing. We've seen the official opposition go against business and the economy, steady. We need tax

dollars to increase tax dollars to PEI to build housing and grow the economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Mr. Speaker, I believe there was a motion on the floor just yesterday about the need for a new population strategy and to plan effectively for infrastructure and things like housing when we are looking at a new immigrant stream. Yet, this stream has been introduced it seems without any consideration of housing for those who will need it.

We also know that many immigrants face barriers to employment in their areas of specialization. If that training was received in another country, for example, we've all heard stories of doctors working as cab drivers, RNs working in entry-level nursing aide positions. This is simply unacceptable.

Employment for immigrants re: barriers

Question to the minister: Without breaking down barriers that cause underemployment for immigrants with foreign qualifications, will limiting this Occupations in Demand stream to entry-level positions result in even more instances where high-demand, highly trained professionals are underemployed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Through that stream, if anything else, it's going to speed the process up. The first question I had asked the department: How long is this going to take to administer? How long do people have to wait to get into the country and get to work? The federal government has committed between one and three months, which is very fast-track. We're hoping this summer, we're going to have some of those workers here on Prince Edward Island working for the Island economy and creating tax dollars.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, I have asked the Minister of Health and Wellness several times in this House about changes to the *Long-Term Care Subsidy Act* regulations and I have yet to get a coherent response.

Changes to regulations in act

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Who determined that the regulations needed to be changed in the first place?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I do believe that she is referring to something that the member brought here in the previous session of the Legislature. If she is referring to that, those regulations were changed.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This regulation impacts so many ageing Islanders across this province.

Notifying seniors of regulation changes

Can the minister please tell me how he notified all seniors that were impacted previously over the last two years to ensure that they've been adjusted sufficiently?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'll be completely straightforward. I am not the one that makes the notifications to these individuals. I certainly will be more than happy to go back and get the process that was followed there and bring that back to the Legislature.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate that those regulations have been changed because I can't tell you how many people have reached out and said that they are struggling every single day to subsidize their family members because their family members can't pay for it.

I was sent results from a FOIPP request submitted by an impacted Islander. They asked for all background documentation, including policy briefs and research around the regulation changes in the first place. The department declined to provide any information.

Tabling of documentation re: act

Question to the minister of health: Is that transparency, and will you table all actual research, stakeholder input and analysis that established the government's decision to remove those exemptions in the first place?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As I'm sure that the member realizes, we have an act, the FOIPP act, and under that act there is certain information that, for a variety of reasons, cannot be provided to – whether it's the public or whether it is to individuals. I will certainly get back to the department, have follow-up made on that, but I have confidence compared to some of the ones on the opposition side here that do not have confidence in how our public servants react and the work that they do –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: – yes, it is. I will go back and I will see what I can bring back on that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I've heard from a growing number of EAs and substitutes who are struggling to fill positions as teachers find themselves isolating as our COVID cases soar.

Substitute positions in school system

Question to the minister of education: Can you tell us how many substitutes we have in the system right now to fill this gap?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question.

The exact number, I'll have to go back to both the PSB and CSLF to confirm. But certainly we have contingency plans in place. I do recognize that these are challenging times within our schools, and I want to say thank you to all those in our schools, all the staff that have stepped up through these tremendously challenging times.

Together, I think we've really seen a very successful back to school for 2022.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Speaker, I'd say those contingency plans aren't working too well. I've heard from at least a couple of schools who have had to halt resources to children like English as a Second Language and use those resource teachers to act as substitutes for teachers who are isolating. I'd say that's not a great contingency plan.

Resource teachers acting as substitutes

Question to the minister: These resources for Island students are critical after the two years of disruption they've faced. How are you addressing this so resources are never pulled from students who need it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Again, recognizing that these are challenging times and there are only so many substitutes that we can pull from, but I know that the department has put forward some staff to help in those areas, whereby there are some gaps. Overall, our attendance has been reasonably steady; albeit, there has been some absences in various areas, but we are dealing with those as they arise and the staff in both HR at the PSB and the CSLF are doing a fancy job, so I just want to say thank you to them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

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

I'm certain that all of us in this room have heard from community care facilities regarding staffing issues.

These facilities that care for our seniors are strained due to funding and their inability to pay staff competitive wages.

A year ago, I asked the minister of social development for help. After a rambling monologue, he committed to getting back to me.

Staffing issues in community care

Question to the minister of social development: After multiple failed attempts to get updates from your department, minister, can you please update the House today?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) monologue.

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

Mr. Henderson: We don't want a rambling monologue.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, I met with the Minister of Health and Wellness with a group from the western part of the Island of community care facilities that have aligned, and they are looking to address these very issues.

Right now, negotiations are underway to negotiate a new contract with community care facilities. We're well aware of the ask. I believe it's really – to address the wage issues the member is talking about, we're looking at an 18% increase in the amount of money that goes into that contract.

So, Mr. Speaker, the discussions are underway, but I expect positive results.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

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

That was the same response I got last year, but last year was the negotiations were going to end in May of last year and he was going to get back to me.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh.

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct)

Mr. Perry: So, that's probably why we haven't heard.

Minister, many community care facilities and long-term care homes have empty beds due to staff shortages. This is a crisis right across Prince Edward Island.

Solutions for LTC staffing issues

Minister, last year, you were hoping to come up with a good solution, both in the short term and the long term.

You've had a year. What are your short-term and your long-term solutions?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As my colleague, the Minister of Social Development and Housing, had referenced, we had a great meeting here earlier this week with representatives from community care facilities in the western part of the province.

The hon. member is bang on when he says that there are human health resource challenges, but they're not specific just to Prince Edward Island. They're specific right across the country.

And as I've referenced before in here, and I would appreciate and anticipate that there would be support from the opposition and from the third party on initiatives with regard to human health care resource recruitment, but for the first time that we do have national First Ministers of health that are working together to discuss and put together a plan for the long term, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your second supplementary.

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

I'm a little bit – I'm having difficulty understanding it. Last year when I asked this question to the minister of health, he put me on to the minister of social development. Now I'm asking the minister of social development; minister of health stands up to answer the question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Henderson: A little confusion there.

Mr. Perry: Mr. Speaker, something needs to be done for this, and it has to be done now.

Commitment to address staffing issues

So, I would suggest to one of the ministers, whoever wants it, that maybe you could look at different incentives like the signing-on bonus or something like that, but will you commit to looking into this crisis immediately?

Mr. Henderson: Yes.

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: And it's not unusual for the member across to be confused.

This is something that the member probably is not familiar with from his time in government. We actually work together on this side of the House, to go across silos and try and get things done.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I mean, in my department, of course, we're responsible for the contract for community care facilities, and in the Department of Health and Wellness, they look after both the long-term care and the staffing issues.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're going to work together and we're going to come up with a solution and we're going to support these key institutions in our society.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier in this session, we heard the Premier compare public legislation and the role of government to sausage-making, which is a bunch of bologna from where I'm standing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

This week, he informed us that no bill will come to this floor until he feels that government has held a proper consultation process with Islanders, yet this Chamber unanimously supported a motion to send a piece of government legislation back to committee only two days ago.

Consultation re: legislation

Question to the Premier: When you speak of consultation, what does that mean to you, and can you explain why these consultation

steps keep turning into a revolving door of broken promises and a lack of follow-through on your commitments to the stakeholders?

An Hon. Member: Story time. Story time.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, it's hard to get a firm grip on all of this stuff, because some days, we get accused of not listening to the opposition parties, and then when we listen to the opposition parties and send it back to committee, they go: Why are you sending it back to committee? So, I don't quite understand.

But I think that's the luxury of opposition, is you get to take one side of what the government does and argue the other, and that's our democracy in a nutshell, and I appreciate that.

I think that bill went back for greater consultation. I think that will be a good thing for it, that will make for stronger legislation. I think that's what we all want in here. Aside from the political credit and all the gamesmanship that sometimes can take place in here, I think we're all genuinely interested in having the best legislation to make the best province, and that's what it will do.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think we need to get into consultation again with this hon. member.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, I asked what value the Premier placed on the opinion of the province's Child and Youth Advocate office when it was brought to light that most recommendations were completely ignored on the proposed legislation.

The advocate later stated publicly, and I quote: that he was both disappointed and very surprised to see vigorous efforts made by a government department serving children, youth, and families to severely limit his jurisdiction to access records.

Limiting access to records

Question to the Premier: Why are you limiting access to records and dodging those who have put it in place to protect our most vulnerable citizens? Why are you doing this?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, in response to that similar question last week, I committed in here that we wouldn't bring forward legislation until such time as we were comfortable that it was going to be in the best interests of all that is designed to serve.

I have instructed all staff, as always, to be as consultative as possible and to get the input of the Child and Youth Advocate.

I would say that, because this is such a new position, I really do think a lot of people inside of government are trying to really adjust to what the obligations are and how they have to interact with the Child and Youth Advocate.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier King: I think they're learning this along the way. I think they're understanding that the Child and Youth Advocate is speaking, not just for himself or the body, but for the people that he serves.

And listen, we're consulting with him broadly and I've told the minister, I have told the staff in the department, that we are to take the recommendations, to address them all individually, and make sure we have the very best bill that we can bring forward, Mr. Speaker.

And when we have that, we will bring it in here to the Legislature.

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And before I get into my preamble, I'd just like to say –

Speaker: You have 25 seconds.

Mr. Gallant: – I thank our party and the opposition for bringing these important issues to light, and that the government did put that bill back to committee.

Mr. Speaker, this government has an established record of making big announcements and never following through, such as medical homes, mobile medical health units, solutions for housing, and so on and so on.

An Hon. Member: Late.

Mr. Gallant: It would seem that Premier King and his government have a lot of difficulty negotiating a plan and sticking to it.

Negotiation of upcoming bills

Question to the Premier: Premier, in light of government's first bill being sent back to committee, do you feel that the residential tenancy act and the child, youth, and family enhancement act you proposed are ready for debate, or do you need help managing these negotiations as well?

Mr. McNeilly: Oh.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am open all the time for as much help as we can to make sure we have the best legislation. Neither one of those bills have been presented here in the Legislature, and again, will not be until such time as we feel we've had adequate enough understanding and involvement from all of those who are going to be impacted.

When it comes to the residential tenancy act, this is something that will serve us for the next 10 or 15 years. I don't want to rush that. If people feel that is rushed, if people feel –

An Hon. Member: Rushed (Indistinct) two years.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) years.

Premier King: – if people feel that it's not being listened to and that it needs more consultation – the official opposition tabled numerous amendments with data that are

there. Those are things that need to be taken and looked at, and it would be a disservice to you and to all Islanders if we didn't give the department time to look at that and to make sure all of that is in a bill that we can provide for all Islanders.

Neither one of those bills will come to the Legislature until such time as we think it's in the best interest of all Islanders, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the member for Cornwall-Meadowbank, I'm fortunate that I have great schools of the Bluefield family in my district. One of them is Eliot River School, an elementary school in Cornwall with almost 500 students from Grades 4 to 6.

Closure of Eliot River School re: upgrades

Question to the minister of education: There are some significant and much needed upgrades taking place at the school this spring, but it will require the school to close early. How long will the school need to be closed in order to complete this work?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you, hon. member, for the question.

You're right, there are some significant upgrades happening in Eliot River Elementary, \$9.8 million in value. They started last summer, and the hope is to finalize them by 2023.

As per the legislation, students are required to be out of the school during school renovations, so contractors needed the time, they need an additional two weeks into next summer, so we had to close down the school two weeks early. But we have added an additional 10 minutes onto the school days leading up to that time. And we have also – will communicate to families that remote learning options will be available, enrich learning opportunities such as tours like Orwell Corner, transportation will be

provided and also the child care facilities in that area are willing extend their hours and provide child care opportunities for the school aged children during that two week closure.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad you clarified that, because I had some constituents that there was an impression that the school was going to closed for up to a month, so I'm pleased to hear that it is only two weeks and I will get back to them about that.

I agree that these upgrades are important, but it's unfortunate that the nature of these renovations will mean the school will need to be empty while the work is being done.

Alternative arrangements re: early closure

What sort of alternate arrangements were explored before selling on the need to close the school early?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Thank you again, hon. member, for the question.

This is a project that we've been working very closely with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and we did settle on that two week closure knowing that the contractors did need that extra time to complete this very important work.

So, again in those discussions and again happy to be able to have this opportunity today to communicate this with this public. But, those enriched learning opportunities, the remote learning, the child care and the transportation, it'll all be available to those families. And we really – the majority of families have already made plans for those two weeks, maybe they're taking an early vacation so that's great for them. But, for those who are staying here and would like those remote opportunities, they will be made available.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank, your second supplementary.

Mr. McLane: I think everyone recognizes the need for work, but I guess with the closures of the schools in January and to add another 10 to 12 days on to families is a burden.

I guess, my question is: What type of contingencies will be in place to fill the gap in the school and going forward, can we maybe – I know this is phase one, and we have two more phases to go, so maybe you can just explain to the House about how phase two and maybe phase three may roll out and will it result in other additional school closures?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And I can understand that this would be particularly more sensitive especially given the closure there in January. And again, we throughout the decision-making process we endeavor to involve all stake holders, including the principal there, as well as parents. We recently did do a survey with parents inquiring whether – or who needed child care service available during that time.

So, as the project progresses, I commit to working with the hon. member, and all the stake holders to ensure that this project is successfully done and I'm really excited to see the outcome of Eliot River. Already so much work has been done and it's going to look fabulous in the end.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

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

A few weeks ago, the province went through a significant thaw that saw a number of culverts and roads washed out, a number of these culverts and roads were in my district.

And I know right across the province this was a huge issue.

Extent of damage to culverts and roads

Question to Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure: What was the extent of the damage across the province and what will the price tag be?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and hon. member, thanks for the question.

Yes, certainly Mother Nature threw us a bit of a curve ball there a couple weeks ago and we did have some extreme weather patterns, coupled on top of each other. As we're all aware, we have had a significant amount of snow fall this year and followed by quite a thaw and rain. And we did experience, in various parts across the province, where we've had flooding across roads.

But Mr. Speaker, I'm very fortunate to be the minister of a department that is very professional. We had all of our staff and our private contractors out on the roads clearing the ice out of the ditches to eliminate flooding in crossroads as quickly as we could. Coupled with that, we had a very fast freeze pattern followed behind that so, as soon as we cleared the ice, we then had to get out and start spreading salt and sand.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Future plans for damaged roads

One of the roads that sustained significant damage was the Valleyfield Road near the Montague High School, which basically turned into a river. With drastic temperature swings now the new norm with the changing climate, has the department planned adequately for these events in the future when it does happen so it doesn't come as such a surprise and perhaps a stress on the Budget?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Aylward: Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much and hon. member, that's a very important question.

A lot of focus, not only in my Department of Transportation and Infrastructure but across all government departments, is climate change and how to mitigate the stresses that these climate patterns are bringing towards us.

As we bring out Budget forward here, hopefully in the next week or so, I would be more than happy to discuss some of the initiatives that we're doing and added financial assets to be able to mitigate some of the issues we've seen.

We have a very dedicated, professional staff in my department that are cognizant of what's happening out there. There's many inspections that take place on a yearly basis with regards to bridges, roads and culverts. As we move forward, I feel very confident that we will be able to mitigate a lot of the issues we've seen over the last couple of years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your second supplementary.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the other issues that came from the significant thaw was the flooding of basements and damage of property, which I don't think people might quite realize how extensive that damage was – quite similar to 2015 when we had the record snowfall.

In my community, I know, alone, a number of seniors that had their basements flooded that didn't know what to do or who to turn to and needed help with that. When Hurricane Dorian hit the province, the department of transportation reacted quickly and actually helped those in need that needed downed trees removed from their property, et cetera.

Speaker: Question.

Help with property damage

Mr. Deagle: Is there a possibility, minister, that in the future – obviously this event has already passed – that we could develop a program or we could help those in need that have significant property damage, such as a flooded basement, that can't – don't have anywhere else to turn and do need help.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, as a matter of fact, as a matter of point, I have a neighbour just down the street that his basement, his back yard is extremely susceptible to flooding. Matter of fact, during this weather pattern, I was probably down there for at least three hours assisting him, not as the minister of transportation, but as a good neighbour to ensure that he wasn't going to experience that flood damage.

Right now, within our department, we're working with municipalities as a lot of new subdivisions are being developed and coming online to ensure that the storm water and the climate change issues that we're seeing are not going to impact future development.

For those existing developments and those existing structures, we're certainly willing to help out wherever we can.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have recently seen the establishment of public transportation routes to Souris and Montague. These routes are run by Maritime Bus, yet our province already manages hundreds of buses and bus drivers with its school bus system, including electric buses.

Public transportation routes

Question to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure: Why do you not use your own system to provide the new routes?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Excellent question, hon. member.

Essentially what we're looking at right now in this pilot project that we're doing for rural transit, one of the first things that we determined is that the usage of the electric school buses – when they're out on the road, how long they can be on the road – but even more importantly, the demand for rural transit for people to go to medical appointments or to travel from one community to another. The demand is basically at the same time that our school buses would have to be transporting our children to the schools.

So, at this present time, that's why we're looking at the model that we're presently working with.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Establishing new public transportation routes, whether private or publicly, is expected to take years, and big losses are to be expected.

Cost of public transportation

Question to the minister: What is the current actual cost to the government to offer this service per ride or some other way?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Excellent question, hon. member.

I guess to be truthful, I would have to bring that exact dollar figure back. There are several departments that are funding the

public transportation pilot right now, so I'd have to collect that information from the various departments.

But I guess the other thing we need to ask is: What kind of price can we put on reducing our carbon footprint here on PEI? What kind of price can we put on ensuring that we are developing and growing a vibrant rural transit or public transit system here on PEI to get more cars off the road so that we can meet our goals of becoming the first net zero province?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the answer.

I suspect that it will be very similar to the cost of cab rides, and you wonder why you are not letting cab rides provide rides as well, since they are existing businesses.

While we now have a few buses offering rides along major routes, we also have about 100,000 cars and pickup trucks travelling every road on the Island to every point.

Private vehicles for public transit

Question to the minister: What effort are you making to make this huge fleet of cars available to help people to go where they want to and need to go? Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're not looking at incorporating private cars into our public transportation system. We are looking at a ride-sharing app that's available to bring people from more rural, remote areas to our trunklines.

But we're also working with community organizations such as in Kings County, where there's a group of four or five service organizations that are coming together to form a not-for-profit to be able to be a partner in a true rural public transit system here on PEI.

You know, I live in Stratford. I only have to watch the Hillsborough Bridge every day and how many vehicles travel across the Hillsborough Bridge with one person in that car or in that truck. That's why we're so adamant that we need a public transit system here on PEI.

Yes, it's going to take time to build, it's going to take time to get there, and it's going to take an investment by this government, and we're fully prepared to do that so that we have a reliable, dependable, regular transit system here on PEI so that we can once and for all get many of those privately owned vehicles off the roads and get people into public transit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. minister of justice and communities – or, sorry, the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

An Hon. Member: He only wishes, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Speaker: I guess that's what I was thinking.

Jobs for Youth

Mr. Fox: I just don't know where to start.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We can all agree that our youth are our greatest wealth and strength, and the path forward.

Investing in Island youth is critical. It starts with their education and must continue by offering them opportunities to put the knowledge and skills they learn in the classroom to real life opportunities.

The Jobs for Youth Program is an ideal bridge for this.

Through the program, Island youth as young as 15 years old are given the chance to gain

valuable work experience and they can develop skills through both the application process and the day-to-day interactions while on the job.

Employers who are approved for this program also benefit as they receive wage assistance and the opportunity to assist our youth across this Island. The benefits of this program are clear.

Young people have valuable and gainful employment that allows them to discover different sectors of our economy and employers can train and employ young people who can meet the direct needs of their business operations.

I am pleased to share that the applications for this year's intake for Jobs for Youth is open again and the department will be accepting applications until April 15.

I will just add that last year, fiscal year 2021-2022, we saw 726 applications received from positions granted and approved which put a value \$2.544 million into our businesses across this province and our economy.

Anyone wanting to apply, either as a potential employer or as a young person looking for a job opportunity, can go to the provincial website at www.princeedwardisland.ca/jobsforyouth.

Jobs for Youth program, we all can be proud of. It's the kind of program that invests in young people while supporting our local businesses and addressing the labour market shortages.

I hope all members of this House will encourage both Island youth and local businesses to participate in this program to help our province reach its fullest potential.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Jobs for Youth is a great title to that program and I'm sure the youth are very

happy to have a wage subsidy coming up. Unfortunately, when you dig into the details on this program, minister, I was hoping I was going to hear a change to what that wage subsidy is based on because it's based on minimum wage. So, what we're doing is, we're setting up employers to take these youth on, yes, but we're only subsidizing those employers based on a minimum wage offering.

I was really hoping to hear the minister announcing that that was going to be changed to, perhaps, a living wage or anything that's not just driving these youth into minimum wage jobs.

It's a great program. I'm happy to hear that it's open again, minister. I don't think anybody expected anything different, but I was expected more from your announcement here in your minister's statement.

You mentioned that labour issues is something that you'd like to address with this, as well. You might be able to take some notes from the minister of economic growth where we are now targeting these particular industries that we would like to see.

We've got immigrants coming in to Prince Edward Island that we're trying to encourage into certain fields, and we've got youth already here on this Island, minister. If you were to raise that subsidy level or make it not minimum wage, perhaps we would have more youth entering those fields here from Prince Edward Island.

While it's great to hear it's announced, on behalf of the youth of Prince Edward Island, I think we can do better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

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

I think is just one of the best programs out there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Perry: Since I've been in here, I've seen many a youth in my area have an opportunity to work in another industry that they haven't worked before. It gives non-profit organizations or public sector an opportunity to hire that don't have, maybe, the financial ability to do so.

Wages, well, wages can be increased by the employers and I'm really happy to see in my area that a lot of the businesses recognized the abilities that these young students, young individuals bring by actually giving them a little bit more. I have to commend those businesses for taking that initiative to do it.

Changes were made in 2020 which were really, really good by dropping the age from 16 to 15. That was good. It gave some of the younger high school students an opportunity to get out and to work and maybe save some money for a new vehicle that they wanted, or what have you.

It really, really did a lot in my area with the rec department, whether it was through their youth programming, through sports, even our cooperatives participate in it. Whether it's a seniors' home or blueberry industry or what have you. Water sheds are probably one of the biggest ones that use it and they really, really need it, the students actually learned a lot out in those water sheds. And all local small businesses that participate in it, again, by either treating the students with potential, employees on the road, giving them incentives to come back the following year, or just to teach them. That makes a big difference.

So last year the minister stated that there is room in the Budget to expand it if needed and I'm assuming he will keep that again for this year.

So again Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to stand up today and to speak on this program that I think is really, really important to the youth in Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: End of Statements by Ministers.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By Command of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table Report on Short Term Borrowing for – and I beg to submit herein for your consideration report on borrowing under section 46 of the *Financial Administration Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Land, Justice and Public Safety, that the said be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Myers: Mr. Speaker, by Command of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table the 2020-2021 PEI Museum and Heritage Annual Report for the period ending March 31, 2021 and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Social Development and Housing, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. member's pursuant to section 18 of the *Audit Act*, I wish to advise that I have received the 2022 Annual Report of the Auditor General. I move that the report of the Auditor General be received and do lie on the Table.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Thank you.

Reports by Committees.

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the day (Government)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move seconded by the Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank that Order No. 1 now be called.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move seconded by the Honourable Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank, that this House do now resolve itself into Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Chair (Perry): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to further consider the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

Request has been made to bring a stranger onto the floor.

Shall it be granted? Granted.

Hon. members, we left off on 56, post-secondary grants. That section has been read and is currently being questioned. We also have – the minister has some bring backs that will be handed out. I think they need to be tabled.

So, once they are tabled, they will be distributed to each of you.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah –

Chair: Oh, so there's one copy of each, so it would have to be –

Ms. Jameson: It would need to be photocopied.

Chair: Okay, sorry.

Ms. Jameson: Thanks (Indistinct)

Chair: This is just one, they would need to be photocopied.

So, it'll be quite sometime – well not quite some time, but it will be sometime before they are available to each of you, there's quite a few papers there.

Again, I'm just going to carry on with my list from yesterday, and I had the Leader of the Opposition asking questions.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

We were talking about the proposed medical school at UPEI and the delay that was revealed yesterday in some of your answers, minister. And I'm recognizing that this is a project which has many partners and crosses boundaries of various departments in government.

Most of my questions would be more appropriately directed to the Department of Health and Wellness, but given that the funding here, at least for the development of the of the medical school flows through your department, I'm going to just pull on that string a little bit. The establishment of a new medical school is not something that happens very commonly very often in Canada, and I'm wondering whether – how much time you expect the accreditation to take for this school to be licensed?

Ms. Jameson: Thanks for the question.

It'd have to go through a process with the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Committee and that processing time can vary. Because it's a partnership with Memorial University and because they already have an established medical faculty, there's hope that it will be expedited, but there's nothing certain around that at this point.

Leader of the Opposition: And I'm wondering again, this is a question I realize that crosses boundaries, but as something that the opposition, we keep coming back to, which is having a strategic plan, spending money in a way that you know that it is being used to meet the goals of that strategic plan. And I'm wondering what the business case for the medical school is, and how the expenditures that we're being asked to approve here \$4 million, is going to address the gaps in the medical system here on Prince Edward Island?

Ms. Jameson: Do you, want to know some more details around the \$4 million and what's it being directed to?

Leader of the Opposition: No, it's more the business case that's being brought forward to government to say this school is needed, and I think all of us support the idea of being able to graduate Island doctors from an Island facility; huge advantages in that in terms of retention. But it's likely to cost a lot of money, and again there are partners involved here, I understand that, just the capital cost where I've realized this is the operational budget so I'm not going to go there.

But this is a large undertaking and as I understand it, it's 20 years since a new medical school was established in Canada. So, it's not quite breaking new ground here, but we're doing something very unusual and exciting, and because you don't have a cookie cutter medical school business case to make, you can't take it from somewhere else because we haven't done one in 20 years.

I'm wondering whether somebody has presented to you the business case for the school that justifies the spending of the money.

Ms. Jameson: There was a proposal from UPEI that's been provided, and we can certainly provide you a copy with that. But this initiative really, truly is being led by health with education as a partner.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I'm good for now, thanks Chair.

I would appreciate a copy of that.

Ms. Jameson: Sure.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm wondering if you can give us a bit of an update on what's happening with the Cairo Campus. Oh my gosh, words.

Ms. Jameson: I'd have to bring that back.

Ms. Bernard: Can you just point to me where I would find that in the Budget?

Chris DesRoche: I'm not familiar with specific fundings are on that – same problem – with the Cairo (Indistinct). We'd have to bring that back and investigate that.

Ms. Bernard: I'm wondering, the Atlantic Veterinary College – there's a minimal increase there. I'm wondering is that like a basic inflation issue, or what's that?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, we actually did want to correct. We misspoke yesterday with regards to UPEI's core funding. We said that there was a multi-year agreement for the core funding at UPEI. It's actually only a multi-year agreement for the AVC section of the core funding. So that's a long-term agreement that expires March 20, 2024, and the UPEI proper core funding grant is an annual arrangement.

Ms. Bernard: Why only that small increase?

Chris DesRoche: That was a 10-year agreement, like I said, that's expiring March 2024, and that's the rate that was the annual increase (Indistinct)

Ms. Bernard: I mean for the rest of UPEI.

Chris DesRoche: The 2%?

Ms. Bernard: Yeah.

Chris DesRoche: I think we discussed yesterday, that's the amount that was negotiated with UPEI and Holland College.

Do you want to speak to your discussions?

Ms. Jameson: We've been in contact with both Holland College and UPEI very recently and they're both very pleased with the 2%. Certainly, we always would encourage them, if they feel their needs are higher, to come forward with a proposal next year and we'd be happy to entertain it, but for this year that's what they've suggested as an appropriate amount and we're happy to be able to support that.

It's very much in line with the other Maritime Provinces in terms of what's being provided post-secondary. It's actually a bit

on the top end. Again, strong partners and the 2% really is only one part of the equation because, as you see all the additional grants that we provide directed to specific programming and faculties.

Ms. Bernard: I know we've heard a lot about the fact that, in particular at the Atlantic Vet College, that students are really struggling with mental health due to stresses in the program. I'm wondering if there's any money in this Budget specifically earmarked for that.

Ms. Jameson: For mental health supports?

Yeah. Sorry, I thought we had covered this yesterday.

Ms. Bernard: Sorry, Chair. Just clarification.

Chair: They were asked yesterday, but I'll allow it. It goes through, yeah.

Ms. Bernard: Sorry, I'm wondering specifically – I know I heard all of that other stuff. I'm just wondering if there's anything specific for the AVC or is it just a general –

Ms. Jameson: The UPEI Fund would cover AVC, yeah.

Ms. Bernard: I'm going to stop there for now.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

I'd love to just go back to something that you brought back, Chris. I just want to make sure that I understand it clearly. I thought when we were talking about it yesterday, we were of the impression that it was a multi-year agreement with UPEI and that's why it was going to be 2% a year. The clarification is it's AVC that has the multi-year agreement. That's why they continue with the 2%. That makes perfect sense to me. I can understand there was a mix up on that.

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, there's core funding –

Ms. Lund: Yeah, no big deal.

Chris DesRoche: – separated into two areas, yeah.

Ms. Lund: I appreciate the clarification. I appreciate you bringing that back, but that also tells me that the reason we gave them 2% this year isn't because we had a long-standing agreement that we would only give them 2% this year. So, we know inflation is up 7% this year and I suppose – I'd love to know, what did they ask for?

Chris DesRoche: I think, as we described, it's an annual arrangement. There's budget meetings and we try to come up with an amount that is satisfactory on top of some program funds that are being provided on top of that this year.

Ms. Lund: Are you able to clarify what they asked for? Like, you had budget meetings and you go back and forth on that. What did they ask for? Did they ask for 2%?

Chris DesRoche: We meet with them and discuss pressures and what would be reasonable and 2% is what was decided.

Ms. Lund: I feel like you're answering a question I'm not asking. I 100% agree that 2% is what was decided. I see that in the Budget, but I'm wondering, did they ask you for a figure? Did they make a proposal? They didn't? The minister is saying no.

Ms. Jameson: I wasn't involved in those negotiations, but I'm not aware that they asked for anything in addition to the 2%.

Ms. Lund: Is it possible for you to just confirm that and bring it back? I'm sure if they made a submission you would be able to have a record of it.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah.

Ms. Lund: Yeah, that would be helpful.

There seems to be a pretty big drop in the Maritime Province's Higher Education Commission. I was hoping you might speak to that.

Chris DesRoche: That's actually an agreement that had been in place since 1979 involving all three Maritime Provinces.

What it did was look at students from each province and their enrolments in unique programs in other provinces and attempted to, through a formula, come up with ways that we could support unique programs that we access in Nova Scotia and vice versa.

In the last couple of years, all three provinces were interested in revisiting that arrangement. We, frankly, benefited from that fresh look at that agreement and we're going to experience a \$3.5 million decrease in our contribution to that agreement. So, it's great. It doesn't affect the Island students or institutions and it allows us to make some of these other investments.

Ms. Lund: Oh, that's interesting. Am I understanding it correctly that this is an agreement with all kinds of – or with multiple provinces but we were just paying a larger than fair share, sort of, proponent of it so they are – this isn't a decrease in services for us?

Chris DesRoche: No, it's not a decrease in services and actually, I believe the new arrangement is, I think it's just us and Nova Scotia that are in the new arrangement so that's part of the reason for the decrease.

Ms. Lund: That sounds like a good thing from the budget perspective. Will there be any increased costs in coming years regarding, like, developing medical programming for the med school at UPEI?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, at this point the amount provided initially gets us to March of 2023 and subsequent to that, there'll be more discussions with UPEI in the coming year around what it looks like for the following year. Initially, it's likely in the nine to 11 million range, but again, that's to be discussed over the next 13 months.

Ms. Lund: I appreciate that.

I'm going to move on to the life-long learning grants. I'm wondering, how quickly is that pot of money exhausted? I wonder if we turn people away, is sort of what I'm getting at, Chris?

Chris DesRoche: It would vary each year, but it's not under significant pressure where – I would recommend that people apply, for sure.

Ms. Lund: If it varies each year, it looks like it's a static line each year but, it doesn't seem like it's –

Chris DesRoche: The pressure would vary each year. This year there's not a significant amount of pressure that would require an increase in budget.

Ms. Lund: Would you say it's generally under-subscribed or –

Chris DesRoche: No, I wouldn't say that, no. It's pretty close to budget each year.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: That's really interesting. If you have anyone else on your list, you can put me back down.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Chair.

I just want to make sure that there wasn't a miscommunication earlier when my colleague from Charlottetown-Victoria Park was asking questions and I thought I heard you say chiropractic in your response, or was it the Cairo Campus?

Ms. Bernard: Yes.

Leader of the Opposition: It was the Cairo Campus we're talking about.

Chris DesRoche: (Indistinct) chiropractic –

Leader of the Opposition: That's what I thought, so I'm glad I went back.

Can you give us an indication of how much of the grant to UPEI is dedicated to the Cairo Campus?

Ms. Jameson: We'd have to find –

Chris DesRoche: We'd have to bring that back –

Ms. Jameson: Yeah.

Chris DesRoche: - what they're cost is for that campus.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, and can you give us any information on that? I mean, clearly the change in administration at UPEI, the previous president was Egyptian, and it was absolutely a project that was close to his heart.

I'm wondering whether the plans are to maintain that campus, whether there's going to be any concerns now that we've had a change in administration related to that. But mostly, I'm worried about – I'm not worried – mostly I'm asking questions about the costs associated with it and therefore, the taxpayers' dollars that were going in.

Chris DesRoche: We can bring that back.

Ms. Jameson: Yep.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I'm good thanks.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

Just looking at – before, in the past, minister, you had some COVID contingency funding in the past. Did any of that money go to UPEI in the past?

Chris DesRoche: No.

Ms. Jameson: No, not that I'm aware of.

Is there anything there for post-secondary institutions around COVID funding?

Chris DesRoche: Our department doesn't hold the COVID contingency, it's central to government, but in the current year I believe – just let me get it – the accommodations for when students need to isolate that would be the main program funded through the COVID contingency and the 2021/2022 fiscal year.

Mr. McNeilly: So, how much was spent there do you have the numbers?

Chris DesRoche: I believe it was forecasted at 635,000 at third quarter. I think it's in the \$750,000 range, but that's a round number I'd have to bring back the exact amount.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, I'd like to get – so \$750,000 spent last year for accommodations. It's central to government, so I don't know – what does that do for the – to the minister of education, how does she tap into that?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, we prepare a memo to Treasury Board requesting funding for initiatives COVID-related. We incur the costs and then we bill it to the central government for the COVID contingency.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, so is that – I know the Minister of Finance did mention some funding there – is that the \$15 million, is that funding that you could still apply for?

Ms. Jameson: Yes.

Chris DesRoche: Yes.

Mr. McNeilly: How would organizations like the – because the student union has come to us and said, we need more funding – COVID has disrupted.

We don't even see the costs; especially, in institutions whether it's security, whether it's vents, whether it's different things to be put on. They're talking about mental health. How would a student union apply for that funding?

Ms. Jameson: Well we had connected – staff had connected with all of the post-secondary institutions in January to inquire regarding their needs and it was deemed at that time that their main need was around the food banks, so we worked with the Department of Social Development and Housing and they were able to provide additional funding to all of the food banks.

We haven't heard directly from any of the student unions regarding additional needs, but as I say we did reach out in January, and certainly, would be open to reviewing any proposals that they have where we – they are top of mind in January, when we were having our discussions and exactly why we did provide that money for the foodbanks.

Mr. McNeilly: I think that's great and I mean there is food insecurity on campus and around the – I think that's wonderful.

All I'm trying to get at is that in talking to the student unions, I want them to be able to have an avenue if they see – their whole worlds have changed because of COVID, whether be people are not here, they're here, they're coming there might be some more funding that they have to apply for quickly next year and I just wanted them to maybe hear this and provide – to know that they can reach out to you and that would be okay.

Ms. Jameson: Always open when the student union connects with us; always, always take those meetings.

Mr. McNeilly: So, last question would be, if they came to you and said, COVID has displaced us, our student bodies are struggling with housing – because we talked about that before and you said, you weren't responsible for housing. How would an application like that go in? Would you be able to submit something like that?

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, we would – they would need to connect directly with the Department of Social Development and Housing, but certainly, I'd be happy to be involved in those discussions to see what could be done.

Mr. McNeilly: Then I guess then that minister would go and apply for – to the central Treasury Board for –

Ms. Jameson: Contingency, yeah.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, perfect. I will bring that back to the people that I'm asking these questions for on behalf of them.

Thank you, minister.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Post-Secondary and Continuing Education: 91,237,600.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Interministerial Women's Secretariat

Interministerial Women's Secretariat

“Appropriations provided to support the functions of the Secretariat, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and family violence prevention programs.”

Administration: 29,300. Equipment: 1,300. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 67,200. Salaries: 512,500. Travel and Training: 16,500. Grants: 2,081,500.

Total Interministerial Women's Secretariat: 2,708,300.

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

I realize that we just passed the other part of the Budget, but we just got a big handout of questions and I now have more questions. So, how do we want to handle this seeing that we moved through the section, but there was a lot of outstanding information.

Chair: The section was carried and we're going to move on to the next section. So, if you can somehow get your questions in there, somehow, make them applicable to this section we can – unless, of course, you guys want to entertain it in going back. But we did pass this, and we spent quite a long time on that particular section, so I think it's time to move forward onto the next section.

Ms. Beaton: Okay.

Chair: You have the requested information, I'm assuming, has been handed back out.

Ms. Beaton: Just, like just by hand.

Chair: So, yep.

Ms. Beaton: Okay.

Chair: So, now I'm taking questions on Interministerial Women's Secretariat.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm wondering about the period poverty funding, how does that work? Is it through grants, recurring funding?

Chris DesRoche: Yep.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, so last year we would have provided – we would have ordered all of the supplies for the food banks, the

shelters, our post-secondary and then distributed it.

As it relates to the schools, we had increased their budgets, each authorities' budgets and staff, principals were directed to purchase those supplies through their budget's.

This year we're centralizing all of it, so we'll be doing bulk orders and then we'll be distributing those products to the schools as well.

Ms. Bernard: I'm really glad to hear that.

That was one of the concerns that I had heard from a couple of principals was that it, you know, it doesn't sound like a lot, but when you're having to go out on top of everything else that you do go out and buy those it is a burden; I mean it's important, but you know it's a burden on them personally to have to go do that.

So, this past year – I'm talking this school year here. I've asked this question in written form and in several different ways, but I'm still not a 100% clear: was there additional funding added to the school's budgets for this?

Ms. Jameson: Yes, absolutely and they were directed on several occasions and both Norbert and Jill and confirmed that many times that they were directed to use those dollars to purchase the products.

Ms. Bernard: I just wish that you could have just said yes, the first time when I asked that question, it would have avoided a whole bunch of stuff, but anyway.

So, I'm wondering in the midst of our – when we were back and forth in our questions you had mentioned that you were reviewing this program and I found that kind of funny since it was such a new program, but are you reviewing that?

Ms. Jameson: We were reviewing the way in which the procurement for the schools was going to be managed and whether or not we would incorporate the Budget within the department and that's the way we decided to go. So, you'll see that extra funding in this year's Budget and we're happy to do that and get some bulk prices as well.

Ms. Bernard: The PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre, they received an increase of just over \$250,000. I'm wondering what their request was. Did they ask for more than that, or was their ask?

Chris DesRoche: That was their ask.

Ms. Bernard: The PEI Family Violence Prevention Services saw almost no increase in their operating budget, but during the pandemic, of course, we've seen such an increase in the need for services to deal with family violence. Why didn't we see an increase there?

Ms. Jameson: We hadn't received the ask. I know staff had been in touch with them, but from my understanding, there hasn't been a direct ask for additional dollars.

Ms. Bernard: I'm just trying to understand something – if we identify something as a priority, do we still count on the organizations to come forward and ask for money or is there a point where we say, okay, this has been identified as a priority for the government, so we are going to fund?

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, I have a strong faith and trust in the team under the leadership of Michelle Harris-Genge. She has a strong working relationship with these groups. We did increase all of our grants last year by 100,000, so some of the groups might have applied for those grants.

But again, we're always happy to (Indistinct) – I think these are historical investments in this department. Never before have we added two additional positions and the funding to the Rape and Sexual Assault Centre and all of it – I think that we're being very generous here and trying to support these organizations that are doing wonderful work in our communities.

Ms. Bernard: Since you mentioned those two positions, those two new positions, I'm curious because it was announced – I forget now, two years ago – that we were hiring a gender-based analysis, someone to perform gender-based analysis. Then we had a committee and then there was a researcher hired. Are those two positions that you announced before, are they in place and working?

Ms. Jameson: Yes.

Ms. Bernard: Okay, and so the announcement on page 24 in the Budget address, are those two new positions?

Ms. Jameson: Yes.

Ms. Bernard: That's, okay. That's cool. What led you to hire two position hires there? Was it an ask? Was it – can you just kind of explain the process and the work that they're doing?

Ms. Jameson: Sure. The analyst position is a new position. The researcher position was on contract and now we're making it permanent.

Ms. Bernard: Say that again.

Ms. Jameson: The analyst position is a new position, whereas the research, policy and support position, it has already been in place. It was a contract and now we're making it permanent.

Ms. Bernard: So, these aren't new, then. They're just permanent now.

Ms. Jameson: One of them is new, yeah.

Ms. Bernard: Which one's new? Oh, the analysis one.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah.

Ms. Bernard: So now we have two people doing gender-based analysis work?

Ms. Jameson: Yeah.

Ms. Bernard: Can you – what does their work look like? What led to two? What are they finding?

Ms. Jameson: Recently, and I'd be happy to share, they did a full gender and diversity analysis on the operating budget which was really thorough. I mean, they have worked with us on the Gender Diversity Guidelines; they were really co-leads on that. They are – especially with all the programs that we're rolling out throughout COVID – they had done analysis on the federal programs, as well as the provincial, to identify any gaps or opportunities.

There's a lot of work within the teams, really. Really strong team, too. We're pretty lucky to have them.

Ms. Bernard: That's really good to hear.

I'm wondering to what extent – so, they did a gender-based analysis over the operational budget. I don't know if this is the time to ask what they said about that? What were there recommendations to you?

Ms. Jameson: For the operating budget?

Ms. Bernard: Is that what you said?

Ms. Jameson: I can certainly provide you with the work that they've done. I think they were extremely pleased that each department really took that lens in their decision-making. Some of the programs and supports that were reflected in the Budget really do serve a broad range of diversities and that. They were really happy about it and it was the first time that they've been engaged to that level.

Ms. Bernard: Can you point to some of the changes that were made as a result of their work?

Chris DesRoche: I think one good example – they do review our capital budget last fall as well as our operating budget – and one good example of how it's impacted our department is when they were looking at our trades training equipment, they recommended that we allocate our portion of the Budget specifically for equipment that fits girls better, basically, or is more girl-centred. That's been a change in our department, for sure.

Ms. Bernard: Is there any other? Just curious what else they might have said.

Chris DesRoche: In the school construction area, certainly, they reinforced things that we were already doing, like gender-neutral washrooms and stuff like that, making sure areas are accessible to anybody with disabilities.

Ms. Bernard: That's why they're so important, right?

I'm wondering, obviously, they didn't get everything that they would have in their

analysis. I'm sure that there are things that got left out. I'm wondering what connection they would have to the Department of Finance. What does that line look like? Or do they report directly to – who do they report to?

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, they would report to me and Department of Finance had asked them to become involved in the process so they would, they looked at the Budget and identified themes. Again, I'm happy to share the summary document with you so you have a better idea as to how they do work, because up until probably a year and a half ago, I wouldn't have really, truly understood what a gender and diversity analysis would be so, happy to share.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you.

I appreciate that. I look forward to reading over that.

I'm sure you have more on your list. Can I get added back on to the bottom?

Chair: Sure.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

One of the questions that I had asked, I'm sure it's in this package of information that was just handed out to us. I have not found it yet, but I asked how many child care, how many people were on the registry waiting for child care spaces. Do you know where that is in this package or what the number is? Is it in this package?

Chris DesRoche: There's a lot more than that sent to photocopying.

Chair: There is more coming. It's being copied. There's a stack at least two inches thick that will be distributed around of questions that have been asked to bring replies back.

Ms. Beaton: Okay, thanks Chair.

So, presumably, because you have the information, I don't. Can you tell me how

many people are on the registry waiting for child care spaces?

Ms. Jameson: Are we entertaining going back to that section, is that –

Chair: If it's pertaining to this section and I think it's about –

Ms. Beaton: It is going to be about gender-based analysis. I'm just asking how many so I can relate it to my question.

Chair: Yes.

Ms. Jameson: As you know, it's ever changing. I think it was upwards of around 1,500, but I don't know if it's broken down as to when the children would require the service. So, I'm just going to – Chris, is looking through his notes there to see if he can find it.

Yeah, so we – the total number of children on the registry across Prince Edward Island is 1,600 and it's broken down by whether the child – the family needs care immediately, within the next six months, within the next year, or over a year; and, by the age groups, or course.

Ms. Beaton: Okay, thank you for that.

Was that information provided to the people that were doing the gender-based analysis on the Budget?

Ms. Jameson: I would have to ask them if it was.

Ms. Beaton: So, when you say that there was gender-based analysis done on the Budget, can you tell me what information was provided to those public service employees to be able to actually do a full analysis?

Were they provided the Budget before it was approved?

Ms. Jameson: We'd have to ask, I think it varied by department, but yes, they would have had a copy of the majority of the Budget before it was seen by you folks, yeah.

Ms. Beaton: Presumably – I mean, it takes us weeks to go through the Budget line by

line to find out where impacts to different departments are – so, presumably, if somebody was doing a gender-based analysis on the entire Budget they would go through to see what impacts there are to people impacted by gender to ensure that it is actually fulsome in taking care of what different genders require.

So, I'm struggling to understand what information they would have had to been able to provide you an analysis on the entire Budget.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, so I understand they would have been provided with the management plan for each department.

Ms. Beaton: Can we be provided with the management plan for each department?

Chair: Hon. member, that's something you'd have to ask each one individually.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah.

Ms. Beaton: Okay.

Chair: So, presently right now we have the department of education just on the floor.

Ms. Beaton: Okay, Chair, can I put a motion on the floor?

Chair: You can.

Ms. Beaton: Can I put a motion on floor that a management plan be provided to this House prior to the beginning of any of the estimate review of that department?

Chair: So, hon. members, a motion has been put on the floor.

Do you have it written, or do you want to?

Committee Clerk: I have (Indistinct)

Chair: Okay, I just want to make sure we have it correct.

Committee Clerk: I just need the end; so, a management plan be presented to the House prior to –

Chair: Prior to.

Ms. Beaton: Prior to the review of the estimates of that particular department.

Chair: So, I'll ask the Clerk to please, just read the motion.

Hon. members, a motion that was put forward is:

That a management plan be provided to this House prior to the review of the estimates of that particular department.

The floor is now open for discussion, are there any questions?

Chair: No questions?

Okay, we'll take a vote. All –

Mr. MacEwen: I do.

Chair: Sorry, I didn't see you.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

So, I may not be familiar with what (Indistinct) –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacEwen: – but are you're saying there is management plans from across –

Ms. Beaton: I'm sorry?

Chair: Hon. members, we're having difficulty hearing.

Hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, you have the floor, please.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

So, you're saying that there's management plans for every single department before the Budget?

Ms. Beaton: No.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: I'm asking for the management plan for the department prior to the review of the estimates in this House.

Mr. MacEwen: And what happens if it's not called a management plan?

Ms. Beaton: Chair, we've just been informed that a gender-based analysis study was done on the entire Budget and that the person doing that study would have management plans for the departments, so I'm assuming that there would be some sort of operational plan or management plan provided to the Women's Secretariat in order to do that gender-based analysis.

Mr. MacEwen: I'm just trying to assess it. I'm not sure if I'm comfortable with that just yet, but –

Ms. Bernard: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: No, I know, I just have to figure it out.

Chair: Are there any –

Mr. MacEwen: I guess I need to – I want to know what is in the management plan. If I'm voting for something –

Ms. Beaton: So are we.

Mr. MacEwen: No, but like is it like. I just don't know what's confidential and what's not; what's involved in it all.

Ms. Beaton: There shouldn't be anything confidential in it. It's how the department is determining how they're going to spend taxpayers' money; it's, how they're going to be using that money in order to run their departments.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah.

Ms. Beaton: That's not private information, that actually should be public.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: If it was like that that's one thing, but from what I thought it was there was also ideas pitched on like it could be A, B or C – things that might be put forward to a department – and then it goes maybe to Treasury Board to get approved, or not approved, kind of thing.

So, it's not necessarily the details behind the one specific thing that got improved, but it could be a whole bunch of ideas, and I just – it's interesting.

I'm good, Chair.

Chair: Any further debate?

Okay, I will call the question.

Shall the motion carry?

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Some Hon. Members: Nay!

Chair: Okay, I was going to say – so it sounded pretty even to me. I'm going to ask for a raise of hands. All those in favour of the motion, please raise your hand.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Beaton: Why not? It's transparency.

Chair: All those not in favour of the motion, raise your hand.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh.

Ms. Beaton: Well, that's telling.

Ms. Bernard: What do you have to hide?

Chair: Motion carries.

Oh, sorry. I'm sorry.

Minister of education, okay.

So, I do have a tie.

Mr. McNeilly: What about the first one?

An Hon. Member: Obviously, there's a tie –

Chair: And, yes.

And we have –

Ms. Jameson: We have a couple virtual. Oh, and another one.

An Hon. Member: Too late.

Mr. McNeilly: Another abstainer.

An Hon. Member: Ask her.

Committee Clerk: I don't know if he's there.

Chair: Pardon me?

Committee Clerk: I don't know if he's there.

Chair: Yeah, okay, we'll see if he's –

Committee Clerk: Okay.

Chair: Okay.

Ms. Bernard: There he is.

Ms. Lund: But he wasn't on screen, you know if he's not on screen he's not in the room.

Ms. Bell: He's not in the room or he's not on screen.

Ms. Lund: That's the rules of this House to be protected (Indistinct) –

Chair: I would – there has been. We will check on that.

Hon. members, we will have to take a very short recess to get a ruling on that.

[recess]

Chair: Thank you very much for waiting for that.

In discussion with the clerks, this is obviously new to us and we're all learning as we go.

In the guidelines – and the clerk had pointed out to anyone who was attending virtually that they had the option of, instead of keeping their camera on them and the big screen that they could actually turn it off, but they had to be at their table ready, right?

So, when I asked this particular member for the vote, there was an immediate response. Therefore, I'm going to ask him for his vote.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, I'm asking you, are you a nay or an aye on this?

Are you in support of this motion or are you not?

Can you unmute?

Mr. Aylward: Certainly.

Chair, I am not in support of this motion.

Chair: Hon. members, this motion will not carry.

We're going to move on.

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Can you please confirm if there was information provided to the person who did the gender-based analysis from every single department of government and that they reviewed and provided a report back on that review?

Ms. Jameson: Yes, I'd have to get a copy of what was provided but, yes. It wouldn't have necessarily been in its final stages because they would have made recommendations based on what they saw.

Ms. Beaton: I'm going to put another motion on the table, on the floor, Chair, if that's okay.

Chair: Yes.

Ms. Beaton: I'll reword my previous motion.

I'd like to put a motion on the floor that every department provides their strategic plan to this House prior to reviewing estimates of that department.

Chair: (Indistinct) differs from the first one.

Hon. member, I'm just going to ask you a question from Member from Mermaid-Stratford who put the motion forward: Can you just ask, or tell me, how this particular motion differs from the first one you put on the floor?

Ms. Beaton: Sure. I actually don't even know if it does, because I just love any documentation that could be provided to tell us what the overall goals are of each and

every department, how the funding that we're providing in the Budget can tie back to it, and what those measure – and what measurements of outcomes they are trying to achieve in their departments. I think that that's fair for Islanders to understand.

So, it is a document that would identify what the objectives are, how they will achieve them and their measurements as to how they will measure against those.

Chair: Thank you very much, hon. member.

I'm having difficulty just trying to differentiate the two of them because one, the first one was asking for a management plan which is pretty broad. The second one was a strategic plan.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair. (Indistinct) we were advised that a management plan is a document protected by Cabinet confidence. We are trying to clarify that we're not asking for anything confidential, if that helps to explain the difference between this motion and the last motion.

Chair: Thank you very much for that.

I was not in the room during the recess.

Ms. Lund: (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: I conferred with my deputy and the management plan is protected by Cabinet confidence. An operational plan is not. What we are presenting here in the operating Budget is the operational plan for each department. So, if there are further questions, you can bring those questions forward, but as far as an operational plan, that is what we're providing here with our operating Budget.

Chair: Any further discussion

The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thanks, Chair.

I think we all agree that we are on the Budget dealing with education and early childhood learning.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: So, I'm wondering how we can pass a motion asking for a strategic plan for other departments when we're not even on the page of them other departments.

Chair: Thank very much for that question.

It's a good question. But however, the Budget is on the floor, so a motion like that would be an order. They could put a motion forward at any time; anyone could put a motion forward at any time, it's the pleasure of the House whether that motion is carried or not.

I'm having a little difficulty here just trying – again, I know that the Minister of Finance did say that a management plan would be something that would be discussed at Cabinet as confidential. And a strategic plan, I need to know how the strategic plan differs from that management plan, I guess that's what I'm looking for, for clarity.

Ms. Beaton: We've had ministers that said that they've happily put their strategic plans on their website so that anybody in the public can view them. So, that is the kind of document that I'm asking for, I'm asking for what they are willing to publicly say that they are striving to achieve, and how they're measuring against.

Chair: Okay, hon. member, I am going to make a ruling on this. I asked a few times of whether it would be different from the last motion and I believe, like you just said, that information is available, the strategic plan is available online. So, did you not say –

Ms. Beaton: No, I've only had one minister confirm that his is, and so I'm asking – so here's what my biggest challenge with all of this, just to share with you all.

Chair: Okay, and I'm trying to be fair, so –

Ms. Beaton: I totally get that, Chair, and I know it's not your –

We just received two inches of paper for questions that we've asked over the last 4

days for budgets that are worth almost half a million dollars – or half a billion dollars, over \$500 million. And, we've now passed sections in which we've asked questions for and a lot of those questions should have been answered through strategic planning with key strategies of how they are supposed to achieve what their mandate set out for them to do. That's how you hold government to account when they tell you what you're going to do, they list it all out so Islanders can see it, and then we hold them accountable to that. That should be a public document.

So if we're talking about management plan being Cabinet confidence and a strategic plan not being, I want to understand upfront prior to going into debate on half a billion dollars of what we're actually going to be voting on, and I think that that's fair and, it is not available.

We've heard from this department that they don't actually have a strategic plan and haven't for possibly nine years. So, the challenge is, is once we pass the sections, we're not being allowed to go back in order to look at, are they spending money to achieve the goals that are set out in their mandate letters, which should be all identified in their strategic plans and listed with strategies and measurements so that we can hold them to account to how they're going to achieve that.

Chair: Thank you very much, member.

I have to make a rule of this.

So basically, what we're doing here is we're scrutinizing governments financial priorities and getting into anything whether it's policy, or that, this is not what we're doing today. The question – what they put forward we are scrutinizing line by line.

I'm going to call this motion out of order, and we're going to move on.

So, Mermaid-Stratford you still have the floor.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

So, we have, I believe we said 1,600 Islanders, children waiting on a registry for early childhood spaces. In that gender-based

analysis study can you please tell me what recommendations were provided to ensure that women have the ability to go back to work after they have a child, and take their legal maternity leave for one year, and not have to stress constantly about being able to find a place for their child to stay?

Ms. Jameson: Thanks, we can bring that back. I know that any women's groups I've spoke with, as well as the Interministerial Women's Secretariat, is very pleased with the investments that we're making in early learning and child care, again, historical in nature, we're not going to tackle this list overnight, but we're certainly making greater strides towards that and any government before us.

Ms. Beaton: Chair, I'm also going to talk ask about the RCW spaces because predominantly that would impact a lot of – I think we can all agree that the majority would be women in those positions. And the budget's not allowing for an increase, although we're hearing from a lot of people of how challenging their workspaces are, based on that.

So, what was the analysis around the no additional funding into long-term care resources in staffing – or sorry, spaces in order to create that capacity within human resources from the people who did your gender-based analysis?

Ms. Jameson: I can't quite determine what your question is, but we don't have any budget for increase spaces to RCWs in our Budget. As we talked about yesterday, this is something you can discuss with the minister of health.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: I'm done Chair.

Thank you very much.

Chair: You're welcome.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I want to just go back one second to the family violence prevention – the fact that there was no increase in their Budget.

So, the incidents of family violence increased by – this is according to the PEI Family Violence Prevention – that the incidents of family violence has increased by 23% and that women didn't want to take their families to shelters because they didn't want to expose them to COVID-19. And this would all be information that would have been available to you.

I guess I still – and the Premier stood in this House several times and said he was committed to this and I guess how would we know that based on the Budget?

Ms. Jameson: So, we did increase the amount that we are providing from 723,400 to 756,900. Also, we signed a bilateral agreement – oh, we are signing a bilateral agreement with the federal government – where if the first that the IWS has ever engaged on with the feds. And this will be a fairly significant value that will be directed to some of these organizations doing good work.

Ms. Bernard: I'm going to move on.

It was noted as we were going through the Budget that the director of the secretariat makes 76.95 – no, 76,000 to \$95,000 a year. And we couldn't help but notice that the other directors in education were making 93,000 to \$116,000 a year.

Can you explain that?

Ms. Jameson: You want to speak to that?

Chris DesRoche: All positions have a position questionnaire right from directors, and each one in this section and the Public Service Commission reviews those position questionnaires and reports back to the department what levels they're at.

So, it's actually – it's not a departmental decision, it's under Public Service Commission.

Ms. Bernard: I don't get that, that doesn't make any sense. So, you have no control over – that's a huge glaring gap and you want to talk about equity and equality,

women's equality and the director of the Interministerial Women's Secretariat is making significantly less than any other director and it's the same position. I don't understand how we cannot look that in the face and call it what it is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jameson: It would be dependent on credentials and years of experience and a variety of different things and I –

Ms. Bernard: What, sorry.

Premier King: It's not the PSC that signs (Indistinct)

Ms. Jameson: Well, I mean, the PSC, it's not a decision that we would make and there would a scale whereby, somebody with limited experience would be on the lower end and somebody –

Ms. Bernard: She does not have limited experience.

Ms. Jameson: No, and I'm not suggesting, I think she's pretty high – we don't to get into her salary here, but again those are great questions related to the Public Service Commission.

Ms. Bernard: Totally not the place for it, and I know you're not going to answer it, but I'm going ask it anyway.

As the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: Are you okay with that when you look at those numbers?

Ms. Jameson: It's not something that I control –

Ms. Bernard: That's not what I'm asking you, are you okay with that?

Chair: Hon. member, I'm going to call that question out of order.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah.

Ms. Bernard: That's fine, Chair.

I know obviously where she stands on that. I'll leave it there. I've got to say, this is unreal to me, the lack of transparency in this process.

One of the things that was said, and forgive me because I'm not looking back through my notes to find out exactly the name of this, but the committee that was struck on the gender-based analysis, one of the things that was a quote that came out of an article from them was, "We need to push back for inclusion and system change and not be bullied into a return to normal that increases disparity."

Where in this Budget do we see that pushback?

Ms. Jameson: Again, I'll provide you with the full review that they've done. Certainly, I think that there are some areas that – I know you're passionate around action against gender-based violence, health and wellbeing. You look at the investment in the women and gender-diverse islanders' health strategy, some of our grants even to STEAM, for example.

All of these things that they – their role is to influence other departments and to provide guidance around ensuring gender and diversity in decision-making. So, we've got a strong team. That's precisely what they're doing and that's my role as minister, as well.

Ms. Bernard: I'm going to go back for a second. When the Public Service Commission comes back and gives you those numbers, do you have to do what they say? Do you have to –

Chris DesRoche: I don't work at Public Service Commission but I think the process is, if you're not satisfied with the level that comes back, you appeal it and you can say here's some more information that you might have missed. It may or may not change, depending on that information. But it's certainly out of our control what I think or what anybody in the department thinks.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that. I'm going to let somebody else go for now.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

Clarification because I'm sure about the breakdown on the – if it's in this section with the grants – that there are a small number of women's organizations that get core funding. Is that coming through the grants through IWS or is that coming from a different section?

Chris DesRoche: I'm not sure if you have the handout for grants.

Ms. Bell: I don't have that. We only have a limited number and I didn't get one.

Chris DesRoche: Oh, sorry. No, it's okay. In this section, I think you may be referring to the East Prince Women's Information Centre?

Ms. Bell: There were five organizations, I believe. There should be East Prince women's association, Women's Network – trying to remember off the top of my head, yeah.

Chris DesRoche: The East Prince Women's Information Centre is 30,000; the Justice Options for Women, Inc. is 30,000; the Coalition for Women in Government is 30,000, the Women's Network PEI is 40,900; the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women is 230,000; PEI Rape and Sexual Assault is 740,500 and PEI Family Violence Prevention Services is 756,900.

Ms. Bell: Yes, so, there's four organizations, then, that are getting sort of a contribution to their core operational funding, and then the other ones have service agreements. They're a different funding piece, like the Family Violence Prevention; they're delivering different sets of services.

The reasons (Indistinct) get that difference is that they – with the ones that receive operational funding, at the time when this was announced a couple of years ago, it was the first time those organizations had ever received any operational funding from government. I think we can agree that \$30,000 is not funding. It's great. It means it's one less chunk of money that people have to fundraise, but that's a percentage of a salary or a rent or whatever.

Is there anything in your strategic plan that potentially looks at increasing that core

funding on a – or is that under consideration in any way for a future budget?

Ms. Jameson: It had increased this past year. Certainly, those organizations are eligible to apply for any of the grants. Last year, we had increased our grants by 100,000. We, again, recognize the importance of these organizations and I would think that, through time, we'll try to work with the Minister of Finance to increase those amounts.

Ms. Bell: Grants are grants; they are one-time funds and there's a very specific criteria in the Interministerial Women's Secretariat Grants which is they cannot be used for an existing project and they cannot be used – you can't apply for something which you've already received funding for. So, it's basically for a one-time project, which makes it very difficult for those organizations to effect any systemic change, for example.

You spoke earlier about the impact of the work that the grants do to help address gender imbalances. In a one-year time period, yes, but they can't continue because they can't apply for that money again. That's a continual challenge for NGOs. STEAM PEI has some great funding this year, but they're going to have to come up with a completely different project next year, which means they actually lose that continuity.

I'm just wondering, at what point do we begin to recognize that NGOs, including women's organizations, need multi-year funding?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: (Indistinct) but if actually want to see a change in gender-based outcomes, then organizations – other than the ones who are dealing with trauma – other women's organizations need multi-year funding, too. And 30K is half of a half of a salary.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, no, I don't disagree. I think recognizing the importance of the work that these organizations do, we can certainly bring it back to the director to see if there can be some multi-year funding agreements put in place.

I guess sometimes the only drawback with multi-year funding is that you're locked in at a certain amount, and I would like to think that, while I'm in this role, I'll continue pushing for increases. Again, it was the Minister of Finance who initiated the operational dollars, the core funding, the first of its kind, so I'd like to see that continue and only increased.

Ms. Bell: I don't think it's a drawback to be locked into funding if the funding is enough to – if you're actually able to be able to do your work.

The organization that I used to be with was lucky in that we had an existing funding arrangement with the federal government through ACOA, which was enough to actually cover 2.5 base salaries and our operational overhead. We still had to fundraise to do any actual delivery of programming. One of the things that we actually applied for regularly were the funds for the Interministerial Women's Secretariat, and we would have to measure carefully every year whether or not we could afford to apply for those grants because the cost of doing the application and the cost of running the program, we had to do off the edge of our desks. We weren't funded to do that work.

That's always the problem for these organizations. We're not giving them money to deliver the work they need to do, but then we expect them to do that work. You've talked about that, minister, multiple times, about how great it is these organizations do all this work in the community. They're doing it for free. They're doing it off the edge of their desk, and people are tired of that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: One of the most effective ways that we can actually effect change that matters in our communities, including around gender inequity and breaking the bias, is to actually fund organizations to do that work.

Like I did last year when I had the same conversation with you then, I will ask you again to please look at actually a different way. Just because we've always done Interministerial Women's Secretariat Grants

the way we have, adding more money to them doesn't change the barriers that those grants provide. What would actually make a difference is thinking differently about how we give them money and what we give it for in the first place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: I'm asking if you will, again, consider, in the research and the discussions with your very, very capable director, what the community is telling you they actually need versus what you're telling them they can have.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: You're welcome.

Shall this carry? Carried.

Total Interministerial Women's Secretariat: 2,708,300.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Department of Education and Lifelong Learning: 176,312,900.

Shall it carry?

An Hon. Member: No.

Some Hon. Members: Carried.

Chair: Carried.

La commission scolaire de langue française

Expenditure

La Commission scolaire de langue française: 20,727,400.

I can't see. Oh, are we starting here?

Committee Clerk: Yeah.

Chair: Okay.

General

"Appropriations provided for public instructional and support staff salaries and operating grants." Administration: 359,400. Salaries: 18,140,600. Maintenance: 1,396,400. Transportation: 579,100.

Program Material: 176,200. Equipment and Repairs: 75,700.

Total General: 20,727,400.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

So, the number of students in the CSLF has increased substantially in the last number of years, certainly. I'm curious if this trend is expected to continue.

Chris DesRoche: I would say based on recent years, yes.

Ms. Lund: Do you feel like the increase in funding is going to be sufficient to accommodate that new growth?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, we work very closely with the CSLF on their budget. We have an actual budget committee with their leadership and also members of their board, and have gone through some of their priorities in the recent year. Last year, we did a significant increase in the staffing, and this year as well, we are budgeted to increase it by another eight positions.

Ms. Lund: What are they identifying as their priorities, Chris, in the coming years?

Chris DesRoche: For this current Budget?

Ms. Lund: Yeah.

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, they identify a need for some additional teachers and EAs and also a custodial staff.

Ms. Lund: I was curious, just with numbers growing the way they are, if they're asking about new infrastructure; if they're looking for any new schools or any expansions in the coming years.

I'm just hearing so many new numbers in this area.

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, certainly, we're in the planning process for a major renovation at École Évangéline. We're still in the planning phase on that and have an application into the federal government for

some funding to help with the community side of that school as well.

In our capital plan, we've recognized that École François-Buote is experiencing some growth, and we had expanded that school – I can't recall which year, but several years ago, between five and ten years ago, maybe, and we have it in our plan to start next month to strike a planning committee to look at what the new expansion will look like.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that. That's all I was wondering.

Chair: Okay.

Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total La commission scolaire de langue française: 20,7 –

I have to start over again. If I don't say it fast it enough, I'm never going to get it out.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughing]

Chair: 20,727,400.

Shall it carry? Carried.

PEI Student Financial Assistance Corporation

PEI Student Financial Assistance Corporation

General

“Appropriations provided for student assistance and the community service bursary program.” Administration: 525,000. Debt: 540,000. Equipment: 135,000. Professional Services: 20,000. Grants: 10,500,000. Provisions for Loan Losses: 355,000.

Total General: 12,075,000.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Do you have any stats on how many students are accessing the community services bursary?

Chris DesRoche: I do, yeah.

Ms. Jameson: I can, too, if you like.

Chris DesRoche: Actually, do you have it?

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, I do.

So, in 2021-2022, there were 233 students received 121,500, so representing 24,300 volunteer hours. It's pretty much in line with the 2020-2021 uptake.

Ms. Lund: I appreciate that you say that's in line with last year's budget. Is that true over the last number of years? Is it approximately staying in the same range?

I was going to ask (Indistinct) about (Indistinct) trend.

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, it's been within budget all three years, and then this coming year, we've increased the rate from \$5 to \$10, which is why you'll see a significant increase in the Budget. The number of people, that's how much each person will receive.

Ms. Lund: What kind of assistance can students access under this bursary?

Chris DesRoche: Sorry?

Ms. Lund: What can they use it for specifically?

Chris DesRoche: Post-secondary education.

Ms. Lund: But there's no criteria around programs specifically?

Chris DesRoche: No, I don't think so, no.

Ms. Jameson: No, it's just a credit towards their post-secondary.

Chair: I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, sorry, it's a credit towards their post-secondary.

Ms. Lund: That's great news.

The disability support portion of the budget has not increased. Can you explain why?

Chris DesRoche: That's another program that does see consistently approximately the same number of students come through it. That would be about 250 students.

Ms. Lund: I'm curious if that program caps out. Do you get the allotted budget used up and then you have to turn people away, or does that reflect the amount of people who apply for it, is what I'm trying to ask you?

I'm not sure if that was clear.

Chris DesRoche: I don't believe anybody is turned away, but I will confirm that.

Ms. Lund: Yeah.

Ms. Jameson: I've not heard of anybody being turned away, and it's a federal program.

Ms. Lund: So, the Budget announced an increase of \$400 to the George Coles Bursary. I'm just curious what that is like for a student. Is that all paid out at once? Is that something they get at different points in the year?

Chris DesRoche: There is a scale depending on which course you're in, but if I use the most simple part of the scale, they get \$2,200 per year and that's going to increase to \$2,600 per year.

Ms. Lund: Do they get the 2,600 at the start of the year?

Chris DesRoche: I'm not sure. I would suspect so, but I'd have to confirm that.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah.

Ms. Lund: I know I hear –

Ms. Jameson: Yes, sorry, I can add to that –

Ms. Lund: Do you have something to add to that?

Ms. Jameson: It's paid between two semesters, yeah. It's paid between two semesters.

Ms. Lund: Between two semesters? It's split up?

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair. Sorry about that, I should have waited for you to acknowledge me.

Chair: No problem.

Ms. Lund: So, it is divided out. That makes sense to me.

I'm curious: I know I'm hearing from students who are really struggling. I'm willing to bet you are hearing this also.

I think that an increase to the George Coles Bursary is a good thing, but I'm just curious what options you were presented with to support students.

I realize this is the one you picked, but I'm sure your department had a number of ideas that you could choose from. I'm just curious, because I've heard from a lot of students.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, we made investments the last few years in the IAP grant, and that was based on need. This was also a platform commitment, to increase the George Coles, and certainly, we feel that it's been really well received.

I don't know how many students – I don't have the up to date numbers of how many students really get – after all their grants are said and done, they get, really, free tuition, but it is significant and, of course, students now are eligible to apply for EI if they have the workable hours.

Ms. Lund: I think the increase to George Coles is a good thing, but I'm also aware that any Island student that wants to pursue a program that isn't offered on Prince Edward Island isn't then eligible for George Coles. There are lots of Island students that are going to go off-Island to train and come back and work here and help deal with some of our shortages, that are not eligible for this program.

So, I'm just curious what other options were presented to you to go through.

Ms. Jameson: Yeah, I don't necessarily know if we need to go into that. We can certainly bring something back, but this is what was decided, and again, we're really pleased with the increases.

Ms. Lund: If you can bring that back, that'd be great, if you don't remember what options were presented to you. That's no problem. You can bring that back.

But I suppose there are a lot of students who are genuinely struggling right now, and the UPEI Student Union has made specific asks. I know that your department comes back with proposals.

I suppose I just try to understand how you arrive at some of your decisions, so that is why I'm hoping you can bring it back, because I'm curious why you didn't look at an investment that would touch students who are trying to fill gaps that we have, even if they're studying off-Island.

Ms. Jameson: Everything that's brought forward to us through the student union has been considered, and I think, mostly, we are able to meet the requests or have been in the last couple of years through education. Many of the options that they put forward are through other departments, so it's likely best to direct those questions to the other ministers.

Chair: Hon. members, we've now concluded the time allotted for government time.

I'll ask the minister to adjourn debate on this.

Ms. Jameson: 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.

Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House, having under consideration the grant of supply to Her 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 Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, I ask that Motion 85 be now read.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Motion No. 85.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park moves, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the following motion:

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for reviewing the way we support our elders;

AND WHEREAS elders deserve freedom and autonomy for as long as possible and government must ensure that investments, policies and practices supports this;

AND WHEREAS elders on PEI face a wide array of challenges that Government must address including food insecurity, unsafe housing, loneliness and poverty;

AND WHEREAS these challenges lead to elders on PEI entering long-term care homes earlier than necessary, further exacerbating the pressure on this system;

AND WHEREAS the challenges in our long-term care homes that this pandemic has highlighted are significant and must be addressed at a systemic level immediately;

AND WHEREAS private long-term care homes have had significant challenges during this pandemic across Canada and in PEI and have highlighted the need for public or not-for-profit approaches to caring for our elders;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislature urge Government to invest in and promote policies that support elders and address the challenges that they are facing.

Speaker: Call on the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As a child, I often heard, “Respect your elders,” and they were not just words. They were backed by actions. I would look at many of my elders in awe because, as I child, I was taught they were wise. They had experience and knowledge far exceeding mine and that I should listen; that I should respect.

Naturally, as you grow from that, one has assumptions about how our seniors are cared for as they move along the ageing process. I reflect upon my maternal grandmother’s experience, my grammie. She was blessed to have a family who wanted to preserve her freedom and autonomy for as long as they possibly could. Together, her children pooled their resources, they opened their homes; my uncle built on to his home. They recognized that her independence and freedom were of utmost importance and they had the means to provide her with this luxury of ageing in place.

Many families do not have this privilege, and so their loved ones are having to give up these things and their loved ones go into care much earlier than anticipated, much earlier than they should.

My grammie was my only grandparent who lived in a long-term care home. It was a beautiful privately-owned facility. To my naïve eye, it was the most beautiful place because, of course, everyone respects their elders and, indeed, she did get wonderful care, for the most part.

The staffing shortages were not as big an issue at that time and she was fortunate, as was I, to not really notice the gaps, as she had such a large family that could step in with whatever she needed, whenever she needed it. That meant my grandmother had all of her needs met and she lived in dignity and with respect.

Then we find out the truths, and they are devastating. We learned at the long-term care home meeting, through the health and social development committee, that the results of our inspections show that we are meeting basic standards of care. I thought to myself, well, that doesn’t sound so bad. What does that mean? Because, of course, I’m hearing stories of seniors not being bathed for a week or more at a time; that they’re sitting in their own urine and feces

for hours at a time; that there are not enough staff to get them up into the dining room to eat their meals; that some days, the only conversation they get is in passing from someone dropping off their meals, helping them to the washroom, if they’re lucky, or giving them their medications.

Yet, we tell the public that our inspections reveal we are meeting a basic level of care, and that’s a betrayal. I wonder what it would look like if we were not meeting those standards. And this is not about the staff who are working so hard under impossible, unsafe, and unfit conditions, because we hear often how much they love the residents.

As we prepared for this health and social development committee meeting, we wanted to have a clear picture of what people were experiencing in our long-term care homes across the province. We put out an ask to Islanders to share their stories with us. We received over 40 messages. I’m going to share two letters that I received from people who work, or worked, in long-term care homes. Of course, their information, their identify, is not being revealed.

“Hello. I’m a lifelong resident of Charlottetown sending you this message on behalf of a long-term care worker, also a lifelong resident of Charlottetown, who wishes to remain anonymous because she has signed a non-disclosure agreement. She wants you to know about some of the terrible working conditions she has experienced in her time working there and about the appalling living conditions being created for long-term care residents so that she can give you a question to ask Minister Hudson.

“The following is taken from a note she wrote to me in conversations we have had.” And this is a direct quote from the person she’s writing for. “To start with, I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement not to talk to media, et cetera, about things that go on in a long-term care facility such as wage discrimination: men with no experience getting paid more for the same position as women who were hired at the same time as them, and also, newly hired men getting paid more than a person who is currently in the same position and has been for several years.

“Some staff are not held accountable for things. Anything from not showing up for shifts to not following protocols in place for COVID, for example, lying about having negative rapid tests, throwing the test in the trash, then being made to re-test and actually being COVID positive.

“Each resident in our home only gets a bath or shower once a week, but for at least six months now, we would be doing well if we had two bathing days per week. Some residents have gone anywhere from three to five weeks with no bath or shower. This is due to a staffing shortage that has been ongoing, and now with Omicron, has so many staff sick, we work short-staffed every day.

“There are usually only four days per week when residents’ rooms get cleaned.

“Before Omicron started, we couldn’t even have residents come to the dining room for meals because we didn’t have enough staff to bring them all down, the only social activity they may have that day.

“When I had to go home due to stress after being verbally attacked by a coworker, I was told not to use sick time. Leaving for stress isn’t what sick time is for, is what I was told. Some staff are working anywhere from 10 to 15 days in a row with a number of double shifts in there. The business does not pay overtime other than if you work for more than 96 hours in a two-week period; you get an \$1.25 for each hour worked past 96 hours.

“Staffing problems are happening because there’s no accountability, poor wages, no overtime, and new staff not having any experience but also not willing to listen to the experienced worker trying to train them. Some new staff have no respect for our residents and the residents have brought it to the attention of our director of care, director of nursing and nothing is ever done about it.

“The environment is beyond stressful, but I keep taking it one day at a time because I care very deeply for our residents. This is their home and they are paying us. Some residents are scared to say anything about it – about some of the bad experience they have – for fear of being called a liar or maybe being told they will have to find

another home. There are so many things wrong with private care homes that go under the radar and there does not seem anyone willing to fix it. I will never allow my mother to go into a nursing home after working in this one.”

That’s the end of her letter but she went on and asked a question, and her question was the same question that I had: How are long-term care facilities still passing health inspections when they are in these terrible conditions?

This is a second letter from a woman who cares so deeply and wants the system to change so badly, she told me and encouraged me to share her name, but due to the current environment and the current fear, I have decided to leave her name out of this.

“I just wanted to inform you of my situation as a now ex-Health PEI long-term care employee.

“In the fall of 2021, I was feeling the tremendous pressure of my job working as an RCW in terrible morale conditions, non-disclosure agreements – which I cannot believe the minister acted like he didn’t know – broken coworkers struggling with mental health, constant coercion of working beyond scheduled shifts, vaccination status divisions, administrative incompetency, and resident cares never able to be met, and so much more.

“My mental health was not the best at this time, as you can imagine; a gradual decline since the pandemic due to stress. I went to a local nurse practitioner and was relieved to be given a month off on stress leave, which I desperately needed. However, when I brought this medical document to my nurse manager, I was told that, ‘HR is not going to allow you to do this,’ and that it wasn’t going to ‘cut the mustard’. I was told by my government employer that they were not going to allow me reprieve at my greatest time of need during near a decade of service as a health care provider, so I resigned, right then and there, to my nurse manager.

“I knew in my heart and could not fathom working another year like that, let alone another potential 30 more years to try and make it to retirement, working for an employer who thought of me more as an

indentured servant more than an employee. I would likely die from stress before then. I know I would. I've seen it happen to coworkers and other people in my line of work.

“At the time, I was intimidated by the system and I did not seek legal aid because, although I knew it was not legal what happened to me, I was not in a place or state of mind at the time to go down that route. But I'm feeling much better now.

“Now, we all know Health PEI always had its issues, but the pandemic really made them extreme and glaringly obvious. But I loved my job. I loved my work family. I loved the residents I cared for. I just could not reconcile anymore what I was seeing done by management, administration, and all the bureaucracy that just at the end of the day makes for easy and lucrative salaries for people at the top and just an absolute nightmare for the people working at the bottom.

“I wanted to share my experience with you because I want you to know the gravity of what is happening in health care and especially long-term care facilities. I appreciate all the great questions you are asking. Watching them get stifled only really proves how true and valid these issues and concerns are and how much they want to keep ‘non-disclosed’.

“I'm hurting. I lost my pension, my benefits, my work family, my career, all because I could not physically and mentally take it one more day being treated like a lowly servant. I feel so let down by our government health care system and so defeated by the bureaucracy of it all.

“I'm not really sure why I felt compelled to share all of this with you specifically. I guess it's because I really seen you speaking genuinely on behalf of the frontline workers and I greatly appreciate that. They need all the help they can get. Internal investigations need to be done for this vulnerable and suppressed workforce.”

The letter stops here. We lost this worker. We need her. We need him. We need them. We need to show through our actions rather than our words that we value her, him, them. This action looks like better pay, having an

opportunity to share concerns, and to not be bound by NDAs because no matter how much this government wants to deny it, no matter how much this government wants to say there's nothing in there that stops them from talking about this or that, the reality is – perception is reality. That's how they are feeling. There is a culture in all of our systems, including education where I have first-hand experience, that speaking out gets you in trouble, gets your fingers slapped.

Having an opportunity to share concerns and to not be bound by NDAs that just keep people living in silence while they see injustices around them – whether this government wants to accept and admit this or not. This would also be a step forward to show that this government is not ageist, that they are going to work towards fixing the years and years it has taken to get us into this mess. This government certainly did not create it, but you certainly have a responsibility to get us out of it, now.

When we have staff who are being treated like this, who are feeling like this through no fault of their own, who suffers? Our seniors. Our activities directors are exhausted as they can no longer gather everyone in one room for activities, and so are running around, trying to ensure that residents have some social connection, if they're lucky enough to have an activities director.

Our elders are lonely. They are socially deprived. They are not being cared for in the most basic of ways that they deserve. I hear that they see how hard the staff are working. They see how stressed and burnt out they are, and they want to support them, so they do not complain. That's heart-wrenching. That came from a couple of people.

I would like to remind you that government already has a task force, and this task force submitted recommendations a few years ago to their Promoting Wellness, Preserving Health implementation council. It was titled Out of Action Comes Change: Strategies to enhance social connectedness of older adults. The primary recommendation was: Establish a provincial council on aging with a mandate to strengthen ties between the health and social care systems, community-based care providers, and the University of Prince Edward Island to address issues of

concern to older adults such as isolation and loneliness.

Where are we with this? By the current climate here, I'm going to guess that these recommendations are sitting in a binder on a shelf somewhere, gathering a large amount of dust.

Another concern that I hear about: Who qualifies to be compensated as a caregiver when they are caring for a loved one at home?

Under the various program policies, I hear stories all the time of people who are the care providers, but because they are family, they do not qualify to be compensated for the time they spend looking after their loved one. They're leaving their jobs to care for their loved ones. They still have bills to pay; they don't go away. But because they are family, they don't qualify.

There's one story in particular that comes to mind of a constituent who reached out to me. His parents had immigrated here from another country years ago and, of course, they are ageing, and he refuses to put them in a home; he knows the best place for them is at home. The threshold is too low. He does not qualify for programming, but he's had to leave his job.

I can't remember what meeting it was, but we were talking about creativity and the importance of creativity, and how government shuts down creative ideas. Oh, it was in our housing forum. And this is yet another example. This man has close ties to the Immigrant and Refugee Services Association and has met several women who are looking to work. They speak the same language as his parents do. They are from the same country. They like to cook foods and they're looking for work like that, but because of the red tape, they can't work. But what a beautiful solution: to be able to go work full-time, to be able to survive and take care of your parents, knowing that they've got someone caring for them who are speaking to them in their first language, who are cooking those foods, who are spending that time with them, that social connectedness. That is so important.

As I prepped for the health and social development committee meeting with the

minister a month ago now and supporting staff for the state of our long-term care homes, I was thinking about my grandmother's experience. I started to think about myself entering a long-term care home and what would be important to me. I never in my life, considered that I might lose and that I would have to fight for my self-respect and dignity, that I would essentially lose my freedom and autonomy.

Elders deserve freedom and autonomy for as long as possible, and government must ensure that investments, policies and practice support this, not just in their words and the pretty words on the paper, but through policy. And in order to do this, policies need to be on paper and I find it increasingly concerning when I ask for policies and they're not on paper.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bernard: Because what that does, is give two different people with seemingly the same experience, the same criteria, one getting accepted and one not and no one being able to tell them why. This effects peoples' lives, but government does not seem too concerned about this.

We say we have age-in-place supports, we have the senior's independence program, we have the home care support program, and this one and that one, but the reality is we are not truly supporting or encouraging aging-in-place. The income thresholds that must be met are impossible. We need to do this better, and we need to take care of all the things needed to ensure that when it is time for someone to enter a long-term care home that we have put them, their health, their needs, their social connectedness, and their quality of life at the forefront. And that making profit off them has no place in this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bernard: This is not a math equation, they're not numbers. This is the life of an elder who deserves to be respected for the life they have lived to date, where they are now in this life, and the life they have left to live. We need to get them and their families around the table with the Minister of Social Development and Housing, with the Minister of Health and Wellness, and other policy makers to see how we can improve

this right now. Because I guarantee you, they have the answers, if we would just listen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this motion and I want to make comment about my hon. colleague, the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park who always speaks with such passion and authenticity and great feeling. And I always appreciate her remarks, thank you.

Of course, I'm one of the older members of this Legislature and I'm – you know, often times I feel that the proximity of being called a senior is, like it's right there. And so, it's not that difficult for me to imagine my colleague mentioned in her remarks about thinking of herself in a care home, and that's potentially a lot closer for me than it is for her, not necessarily, but potentially.

There's a very personal attachment to talking to this issue, particularly now that having got involved in politics, I've become so acutely aware of some of the profound problems that exist within our long-term care system.

I've been really blessed in my life, in all of the stages of my life, from my infancy through childhood and adolescence into adulthood. I was born into a loving family with parents who cared about me and were thoughtful and decent, I was surrounded by lovely people. Fought with my sisters like cats and dogs, but we were – that's normal family stuff and I'm closer now with all of my four sisters, I'm closer with all of them than I ever was. Now even though geographically we're on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

As an adult, I fell into a career that suited me, I surrounded myself with good colleagues, as I have here in my second career as an adult. I've just been blessed every step of the way along my life and for that, I remind myself each day how lucky I am, and I give gratitude for all of the things that have come my way in my life. And, I do

that in part because I know far too many people who have, as I put it yesterday when we were talking about a different issue, that some others have not been so fortunate in – I think the words I used were – life's cruel lottery. And, I've never forgotten that I, as an individual, am a member of a much larger grand collective of a community that there are connections between all of us. Connections that you can sometimes see and feel very readily, sometimes are much less obvious, but they're there.

And, I don't think that I can be fully content myself if I know that those around me are suffering, I need to know that the people around me are comfortable, that they're cared for, that they themselves are content. I'm very acutely aware of the connections that we all have to each other – and how, it's been said in many ways – but that one can measure the quality of a society or measure a society by how it takes care of its most needy. And that's just another way of expressing what I've just said, that it is a society, it is a collective, we are connected. As much as we strive for sort of rugged independence, particularly here in North America, that denies the reality, the truth that we depend on each other, and we need to recognize that in our society.

I want to be part of a society that measures up to that, that takes care of our most vulnerable. And, there are various times in our lives when we are able to give, whether that's as a parent to your child, whether that is as an adult to your aging parent, whether it's to your neighbor who is suffering whatever, anguish, loss of some kind, they're sick, they're frail, whatever. There are times when we offer ourselves and can be on the giving side, and there are times when we have to be on the receiving side as children of course, we're utterly dependent for many, many years. And as we approach the later years of our life that dependence comes back in different ways and to different degrees. But for everybody with a few rare exceptions as we enter our senior years, have to lean on others, we have to look for support, whether that's from our family or from our neighbors or friends or from our community and occasionally, from government. And government needs to be there for those who don't have those other support systems in their lives.

That's what this motion is about. It's about ensuring that – I guess the mover could have called it “no senior left behind”, because that's really what we're talking about here. There are many of us who are fortunate, fortunate because we have those support systems, fortunate because we have economic and financial stability to get us through those years. But there are many who don't.

And those connections I was talking about, that recognition that we are all connected to each other, needs to make its way into government policy because that is how we take care of each other, and particularly, that's how we take care of our seniors who have lived lives of service to their communities, often not asking for very much. I mean, the people who are seniors today grew up in a very different world from the one that we occupy now, and sacrifice was a given part of their lives. And at a time when they need our support that – they need to be given back some of that love and that care that they put out, I think it's incumbent on governments to make sure that they are there to do that.

The Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park shared some lovely and distressing stories from people who have reached out to her and I, too, have. I'm sure everybody in this room has received communications from Island seniors who have particular needs and sometimes they are absolutely heartbreaking. Sometimes they're humorous, sometimes you can help, sometimes you feel absolutely helpless because you are not able to fix the situation that they come to you. And that's one of the privileges of the jobs that we have, is that opportunity to help people when they reach out to you.

This is a little excerpt from an email that our office recently received and I'm just going to quote from it, with permission I should say.

“My husband and I were talking about long-term care the other day. We're both 66 years old and I don't need care yet. I hope I never will. I feel that long-term care should be part of the health care system. It should not be for profit were our elders are warehoused.

“The caregivers are often underpaid and underappreciated. We know that other countries do things differently and in some cases they do them better. We don't have to reinvent the wheel here in PEI, we just need to do better by our elders. Some countries pairs students at university with elders who need help and company.”

I talked about that in the alternative living arrangements motion that we discussed the other day, and I also talked about bringing day cares into long-term care. Sorry, I'm digressing from the note that I got.

She goes on to say: Some places make a care home that is more like a village, as I just described, and villages, of course, are made up of full spectrum of humanity where the residents can shop and visit and feel more like they're at home rather than at an institution.

I mean, it's not a particularly poignant letter, but I just found that very powerful just an ordinary Islander reaching out to our office with no need for themselves, but expressing the fact that at her age, many of her friends do need that care and they want to make sure that government is there to provide it.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say: I hope I never have to. At some point in an email when they're talking about going into long-term care and you know, that's really telling

I would love to think that we could look to long-term care as something positive, something that we could look forward to, rather than something that many people dread in our society. That's just not right, particularly, in a privileged wealthy society such as ours. We make choices – as we are debating as we are right now in Budget, when it comes to government expenditures.

When I think about our most vulnerable in our society: the children and our seniors, I really feel that the will of this House is that, we need to look after those people first and foremost.

That letter just exemplifies, I think, an opinion that's also out there in our community that here on the Island we take care of each other, and we take care of those who need to be taken care of.

I also should have mentioned earlier that sometimes you receive a funny note and I'm going to end by a note I received from an Island senior a little while ago, I think it's a nice one to end on.

He says this: In retirement homes in Ireland they go around with a tray at the end of the day and you can choose a Guinness or a sherry for a nightcap; how civilized is that?

I thought, that is exactly – I know which one I'd be choosing by the way – but I really thought that idea that a long-term care home is a place that one can celebrate that you can live a full life, you know, all the ups and downs, the joys and the pains, the full spectrum of living and I fear that we don't offer all of our seniors that opportunity; we diminish their lives.

I hope that this motion is a call to everybody in this House to allow every single one of our seniors to live their lives out to the fullest of their potential.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I appreciate the comments that have been brought forward and I do want to thank both the mover and the seconder of the motion.

To start off, I never really thought that the Leader of the Opposition and I had all that much in common, but as I hear him speaking there and you get away from the political part of this, there are – we all have so many things in common; one of them being, how blessed we all are, the ones that have the honor to sit in these chairs to have the debates. Yes, sometimes the debates get a little hot; they get a little angry to be honest by times. I think it's human nature.

But at the end of the day what are we here for and what do we all have at heart? I'm sure, it's to work towards making this Island a better place.

The Leader of the Opposition referenced not only privileged, but he also referenced his age. I'm not 100% sure, but I think I've got two or three years on you there, maybe even more than that. He referenced too, how blessed he had been with the household, with the family that he had grown up with, with his parents and I certainly am in the very same boat as that.

I know that you've heard me talk about my dad, that I have so much pride for and my mom who passed here a little over a year ago, so I'm certainly very familiar with seniors do. We all, I think, ultimately want to age at home, to live at home as long as we can. And with my dad, yes, so blessed that he is still able to be there; whereas, my mom, she did have to go into a long-term care facility.

It's never easy to see a loved one as they age, as things change physically, mentally with them to get to that point, but they are in your lives. That change has to be made; it's not easy – it's certainly not easy – but I've seen it from both sides.

I've seen, as the mover the motion had said, in the long-term care homes, just the passion that people have, the caring that the workers have, and how the residents – that is their home and how they are cared for there. I have to, as Minister responsible for Health and Wellness, but to state: yes, I am extremely thankful for the workers that we do have there.

Do we have challenges there, do we have health human resources challenges, shortages? Completely, we do.

Now, there is one thing that I do have to take exception to and I would have to go back and maybe ask the mover of the motion for a little clarification on this, subsequent, but I believe, if I did hear right, referred to as the ones that have the easy and lucrative jobs at the top.

I'm not sure if that was a quote that you had heard or not, member, but I just want to state explicitly that I have seen it at both sides, at both ends. I've seen the frontline workers in long-term care, the frontline workers in our acute care facilities, but as minister, I am blessed to see the dedication and the hard work of the ones that were referred to as the

easy and lucrative jobs. They are not easy; they are hard, hard jobs. They are positions that are filled by civil servants that have a passion for people, they have a passion for our Island, and they have a passion for helping people.

I think over the last two and a half, three-month period it's really came forward to me just how hard, how dedicated these ones are, whether it's at the deputy ministers level; whether it's at the directors levels; right down and whether that's through health and wellness or throughout Health PEI.

I certainly – I wanted to put that and make sure that from my end as the minister that that is on the record.

Ms. Bernard: Well, you can read in a letter, Ernie – sorry – minister.

Mr. Hudson: So, and now I'll digress a little bit. The Leader of the Opposition, he digressed briefly.

But yesterday we had heard about the chickenpox party and then after that we had heard about a horse that had fell through the ice. It's interesting though afterwards, I guess, I didn't quite finish that story because I had different ones ask me, did the horse live?

Well, the good news was yes, the horse did live.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh, okay.

Mr. Hudson: The horse that fell through ice that was rescued did live, so wanted to make that –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Compton: Tell them who was driving it. Tell them who was driving the horse. You don't want to hear that?

Mr. Hudson: You really want me to?

Ms. Compton: Yes.

Mr. Hudson: Okay, as I said earlier in my comments here how proud I am of my 103-year-old dad, it was my 103-year-old dad when he was a lot younger that was driving

that horse and sleigh that went through the ice, so.

I'll get into the text, the printed text here of the notes that I do have. So again, let me start by saying that this is an excellent motion and it's one that I am happy to see come before the legislature, before this House, and I'm happy to speak to it.

Elders deserve freedom and autonomy for as long as possible and government must ensure that investments, policies and practices support this. We owe so much to the people who have built the province we enjoy, and we ought to invest, we need to invest in the programs and policies that let Island seniors enjoy independence and community life as long as they possibly can.

We look at what is taking place in the Ukraine right now, we think back – I know we've heard the Premier reference three of his uncles who had served. I, as, well had three uncles serve and the sacrifices that were made and we can never take that for granted. And we see that what is taking place in parts of the world, it just reinforces that we can never take that for granted. And that we do owe so much to our seniors.

Elders on PEI face a wide array of challenges that government must address. Again, I agree completely, some of our senior's struggle to make ends meet, or to find needed supports, we know this, and it is the job of government to address those needs. And I know that my colleague, the Minister of Social Development and Housing, who I believe is going to speak to this motion as well, will be speaking to some of those programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the need for reviewing the way we support our elders. Sadly, this is all so true, this pandemic has cast a light on areas where we can and must improve our social safety nets. Our community has done a lot to serve and protect seniors over the course of the pandemic, but clearly, we can, and we must, do better. To give again a shout-out, thanks to Dr. Morrison and all the staff at CPHO for the advice that we have taken as a government from them. I've mentioned before, vaccination rates, the high rates of vaccination that we've seen here in the province and that has helped substantially

with regards to safety of our most vulnerable – of all Islanders, but, certainly, of our most vulnerable.

I'd like to tell the House a bit about the work that we have underway to improve service for seniors and help people remain in their homes and their communities as long as possible.

One example of this is the Provincial Seniors Health Services Plan, an ongoing five-year plan for the redesign of senior's health services. The plan focuses on three priority issues: enabling safe care close to home, enhancing quality and safety of senior's health services and of course, health human resources sustainability. If we want seniors to be able to age safely in the community, we need quality care and a committed work force to deliver those services.

Our plan includes policy, program and service reforms aimed at improving senior's health and wellness across care settings.

I think that sometimes we hear the debate here in the Legislature that we would feel that anybody listening in would feel that really, nothing was being done, whereas in actual fact, there have been substantial strides. You look at the Shingrix vaccine, which was rolled out very recently, and I know that the Leader of the Third Party one day had spoken about how great it was, and a day or two later complained that it was three weeks late –

Mr. McNeilly: That's right.

Mr. Hudson: – in getting rolled out, well you know –

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: – the opposition – third party I should say, had 12 years and I don't recall ever hearing anything about free shingles during that 12-year period. I digress.

Ms. Beaton: I wouldn't go that far.

Mr. Hudson: Low income Islanders and the seniors' dental plan. I'm not sure if anybody is familiar with CanAge Organization and a recent report that they released. I just want to read this into the record.

It states, "It's incredibly impressive that PEI, Canada's smallest province had emerged as the national leader in adult immunization".

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hudson: The Government of PEI scores the highest overall in this report.

We look at Mobile Integrated Health, we look at the COACH Program, we look at the formulary expansions that have taken place, over 80 additional medications and there was one of the opposition members that spoke quite passionately about the need for this earlier this afternoon. I'm so optimistic as we move forward in partnership with the federal government of how much more we will be able to do for Islanders. But, even without that federal partnership, over the last year the fact that there –

Mr. McNeilly: Right there, there you go.

Mr. Hudson: – were 80 additional drugs added to the formulary. The average previous to that on a yearly basis was approximately two. Couple of ones –

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: – very high cost drugs, Trikafta, Hemlibra, that help out –

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: And you know, I'll give credit where credit is due. I know that there was – and I do appreciate ones from the opposition certainly, and the third party that were such strong advocates for that and thank you for that.

Priority actions for 2022-2023, include expansion of home-based care programs, the implementation of a new self-managed care program, safe reactivation of respite in adult day programs in accordance with the public health guidelines. We are investing in community supports to allow people to remain in the community as long as possible.

I'm going to cut some of this off a bit short, I know that there are other ones that would like to speak to the motion, and personally, I do want to see it get to a vote here today, this afternoon.

With that I do just want to touch base though, briefly, what has been referenced earlier, and that is with regard that we do have to learn, we have to do better. You look – the department with regard to the data, the information it will be analyzed, it will be reviewed to determine how we can improve, that will be in consultation certainly.

Through the federal government they have the National Committee Standards Council of Canada and the Health Standards organization are putting out and comprising two complimentary studies in areas, operation and infection prevention and services standard.

It was referenced in the budget address, Minister of Finance had referenced that there will be completely independent review carried out of both, public and long-term care facility sectors. As I've said before, certainly when we see what those recommendations are, where we need to go, I endeavor to fully address those recommendations.

So, with that, again, I do want to recognize the value of people being able to age at home in the community and also recognize that we must enhance and support long-term care for those who need it and provide those services to Islanders.

We will continue to invest and I do want to say, I want to continue to work with the ones as we did when I referenced increases to the formularies, and especially Trikafta and Hemlibra, how we had worked together, how it had been promoted from all of us, the necessity and how important it was.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise to speak to this motion as the minister responsible for seniors. I do support this motion's intent and spirit. I can assure you that the Department of Social Development and Housing has and will continue to make investments and promote policies that support seniors. We are already doing this very important work.

Over the past years, in partnership with the federal government, local non-profit, and private partners, we have invested in the development of new affordable, social housing units. For example, our most recent seniors building, 31 units that opened on Pioneer, Acadian Drive – 31 units, social housing.

Through the Affordable Housing Development Program, along with investments in mobile rental vouchers to address the gap between income and rental rates, the provincial government is committed to adding over 1,000 new units by 2024.

The way the Affordable Housing Development Program works is we provide upfront – we call them forgivable loans – to developers. They build units that we have the right to put people into; social housing units, new social housing units. We put people in there and use mobile rental vouchers as one method of actually putting those people in those units. These are new units. It's a way we're using MRVs to address social housing in the province.

The other thing about this program is not only is it creating new social housing units that we control as government and we subsidize with mobile rental vouchers, it's creating new market units. In fact, those market units can also – and these are new market units, not existing ones – we put people in and we can subsidize their rent with mobile rental vouchers. That's how MRVs work and that's how they're actually addressing the housing shortage.

In the past year, my department also accelerated the doubling of grants to support renovations or modifications that support seniors to remain in their own home. To give you an idea, when I say doubling of grants, Seniors Safe @ Home went from 5,000 to \$10,000. Seniors Home Repair went from 2,000 to \$4,000. Seniors are also eligible for the PEI Home Renovation Program, which we raised from \$6,000 to \$12,000.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I just wanted to make sure that you really understood that. It's very important and I want to encourage people to

have their seniors apply for them. I mean, they could potentially qualify for all those programs. That's \$26,000 to help them stay in their homes, not to mention if they're people that do some sort of a disability or a "resourceability", as we like to call it, it went from \$8,000 to \$16,000.

I just wanted to highlight again, we have these programs. We want people to use them and we want to improve the programs so that people can access them.

Originally, this was going to be implemented over a three-year period but we just doubled them. We accelerated the recognition of the price pressures that seniors are facing when making these changes in their homes, and we made it happen right away. They have provided extremely important supports to seniors to age in place in their homes, in their communities, especially those who of course wish to do that.

This government has invested in additional support for seniors living in social housing, connecting them to services that allow them to age in place through the work of the department's seniors outreach worker. There is a seniors outreach worker and they're a very important part of the services we offer.

Task teams from the PEI Seniors Health and Wellness Action Plan, as referenced by the Minister of Health and Wellness, were jointly launched three years ago and have completed work on important issues identified in the plan, including accessing information and navigating systems, which is really important for seniors, and enhancing social connectedness, another theme that was talked about over across the floor earlier on by the mover of this motion. We are doing this work, and we're always looking to improve and expand on this work.

Also, based on research and recommendations and with some advocacy from the Leader of the Third Party, I'm pleased to report on the progress of our new seniors navigator position.

The seniors navigator is working now to provide timely connection of seniors to community, provincial, and federal benefits and services available to them. It was a need that was highlighted by the pandemic and

we took action. The seniors navigator supplements the services, the 2-1-1 system, and other navigational tools and processes across government.

Of course, we're in early days and I think every member in this House should have received an email talking about – we want to engage you in your districts to make sure that we're making full use of the seniors navigator.

In addition to our comprehensive suite of programs and services for Island seniors, the department has launched more new initiatives as direct and targeted responses to pandemic impacts. This is something we've talked about in the House before. At the peak of the Omicron wave in PEI, we implemented the Seniors' Food Security Program. We launched it for seniors facing challenges securing healthy, nutritious food. This was a completely barrier-free program. It was not means-tested. If you were a senior, you needed food, you made the call, you signed up, we delivered food to you, period.

Now, the challenges that some seniors were facing at that time included financial barriers to food, a requirement to self-isolate due to a positive COVID-19 test, or a loss of regular supports as a result of the rising case counts. This program was met with tremendous success and was extended even as public health restrictions eased. As we've seen in the Budget, there's much more to come in the future for seniors' food security programs. This is something that has been worked on within the department for quite a long time now.

Many Island seniors have felt the impacts of the pandemic on social isolation and loneliness, but because of this, our department was pleased to partner with the Red Cross to support promotion of its Friendly Calls Program. There's a lot of these different programs, and I know as MLAs, sometimes it's hard to navigate the programs yourself, so I really encourage people to call 2-1-1 –

Ms. Beaton: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – if you think people have some – if you want to refer people to the whole suite of programs, 2-1-1 is an

excellent service. They'll walk you through. It's not just government programs; it's full community suite of programs.

This Friendly Calls Program is a good one. It pairs trained volunteers with adults for regularly scheduled phone conversations and a connection to community resources.

PEI has doubled its investments for the Seniors' Secretariat Community Grant program. Of course, as we know, that supports community organization projects that foster community engagement, social participation, age-friendly initiatives, and active living for seniors. Of course, we've seen really, really great initiatives that are grassroots-driven by organizations and seniors.

As I mentioned in a previous motion, the government recently made substantial investments to the Seniors Independence Initiative by changing threshold amounts of funding categories. It's important to note this is separate from those renovation programs. This is yet another whole program dedicated to seniors. The department is currently looking at ways to further enhance this program and to continue to support seniors ageing in place.

And of course, we work closely with the Seniors' Secretariat on topics related to seniors' wellbeing, food security, safe and affordable housing, poverty, and loneliness.

Additionally, the department is fully engaged on these issues and other related topics through the federal, provincial and territorial seniors' forum. There is a recognition that, while the pandemic has affected all Canadians, seniors are among those who have been disproportionately impacted, and in collaboration with other jurisdictions, the department continues to identify key barriers to ageing well in communities, as well as meaningful and respectful programming that offers alternatives to private long-term care homes, upholds the independence and autonomy of seniors, and promotes meaningful social inclusion.

Last week, I did announce the five Senior Islanders of the Year and their outstanding contributions to the Island. Today, during greetings, I talked about a senior who was

originally from Mayfield, up in my district, Inez Doiron, and the great things she continues to do at age 91. Island seniors really do continue to serve their communities in meaningful ways and have left lasting legacies that will forever be treasured.

PEI seniors deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. That goes without saying. By working together, we can support older adults to stay safe and healthy –

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Mr. Trivers: – and continue to be active members of our Island communities. I wholeheartedly support this motion and recognize that every day –

Some Hon. Members: Call the hour.

Speaker: Hon. members, the hour has been called.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Adjourn debate?

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn the debate of this motion, seconded by the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, that this House adjourn until Friday, March 4th, at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The Legislature adjourned until Friday, March 4th, at 10:00 a.m.