



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings**

(Hansard)

Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Wednesday, 6 May 2026

No. 23

The Honourable Brad Trivers, Speaker

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

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

Speaker – Hon. Brad Trivers

Clerk – Joseph Jeffrey

Deputy Clerk – Emily Doiron

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

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

[The Legislature met at 1:00 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Speaker's Ruling

Speaker: Hon. members, on Friday, May 1st, 2026, the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning rose on a point of order stating that he believed that the hon. Leader of the Opposition had breached rule 35(2) which states that no member shall reflect upon any vote of the House.

Reflecting on a vote is understood to mean that “a question being once made and carried in affirmative or negative cannot be questioned again during the session but must stand as the judgement of the House. This is to prevent contradictory decisions.... Therefore, it is not in order to reflect or reconsider votes of the House.”

“Reflecting” in this case is limited to attempting to further contemplate a decision that has already been made by the House. It is not a complete prohibition on referring to a vote. According to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice, 4th Edition*, section 12.90: “This rule does not preclude comments concerning an opinion expressed by a member, or even by a party, during a vote.”

I have reviewed the transcript of Oral Question Period from last Friday. During the exchange, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition gives general comments about a committee report that had been adopted the previous day. His comments were limited to asking the Premier's opinion on the report and the effects of that vote.

Hon. members, given the description of reflecting on a vote and after reviewing the transcript, I do not find that any transgression of rule 35(2) occurred.

Thank you, hon. members.

[1:05 p.m.]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Good afternoon. Welcome back for another day in the Legislature here today. Welcome to everyone in the gallery – large gallery; a number of guests in the gallery here today – and those watching online.

I want to welcome Ms. Courtney from Prince Street School. She's here with her leadership class, students from grades 5 and 6 from Prince Street School. Thank you very much for coming. I have no doubt that we're in the presence of the future leaders of our province. Lovely to have you here.

We have a contingent just arrived from the tourism industry here with us today, I suspect here to hear a statement from the minister a bit later. I'd just like to welcome them as well. I had the opportunity to attend their Raising the Bar event to kick off the tourism season a week or two ago, whenever that was – time flies. But it was really exciting; a lot of excitement in the industry. You could feel it in the air. We're just coming off, of course, last year – an incredible season, leading the country in tourism growth. You could tell that everyone was excited. I've been hearing about solid bookings, a lot of people investing in their products, and raising the bar of delivering those products.

I want to welcome Corryn Clemence; Jackie Herbert; Matthew Jelley; Jen Sanderson; Ben King – I saw him come in, yes; Kirk Nicholson is here, I believe; David Groom; Liam Dolan is here; Richard and Faye – didn't see them come in, but I thought we might be expecting them; John Cudmore; Luke Thompson; Tracey – not here; Kent; Kelly Murphy; Mike Cochrane – all representing the tourism industry, all expecting to have a big year this year. I want to welcome them and wish them all the best for the season ahead.

Today marks the return of McHappy Day, a vital national fundraiser where McDonald's restaurants across the country unite to support a common goal. On this day, a portion of the proceeds from every single menu item sold is donated directly to Ronald McDonald House charities and other local children's organizations. These funds provide a home away from home for families during some of their most difficult moments.

I encourage all members of this House – and I know some of them already have – if their schedule permits, to stop by for a coffee or a meal today. It's a simple gesture that makes a

profound difference for families in our communities. Of course, Mr. Speaker, you and I had the opportunity to work the drive-thru windows there this morning. I saw the Minister of Health and Wellness there. I know Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning was in. I'm not sure who else, but I know everyone is making an effort.

[1:10 p.m.]

May 3rd to 9th is Emergency Preparedness Week. Emergency Preparedness Week is a national awareness initiative; an opportunity for you to take action to ensure you're prepared to protect yourself, your family, and your community during an emergency. This year, the theme is "Be prepared. Know your risks." We encourage everyone to understand the risks in your area and learn what actions you can take to protect yourself and your household. There are information sessions taking place in various communities across the Island, and I encourage everyone to take part.

This Saturday, Islanders have the opportunity to take off for a good cause at the 2026 YYG Runway Run, a five-kilometre run on the actual runway at the Charlottetown Airport, and every dollar raised goes directly to the PEI Humane Society. I was just having a chat with the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty; I was out for a run on the weekend for the first time in about six months and I still haven't quite recovered, so I'm not ready for the runway run just yet, but good luck to all those participating. A really unique opportunity to get out to the airport and run the runway.

Tomorrow marks the beginning of the 2026 Centennial Cup, and we're honoured to have the national spotlight shine on Summerside as this year's host. Nine elite teams from across the country have arrived to join our own Summerside Western Capitals in pursuit of the ultimate prize in Canadian Junior A hockey. Representing the very best of the 116 teams within the CJHL, these athletes demonstrate the peak of dedication and skill in the sport, and that's really exciting for Prince Edward Island and Summerside.

We extend a warm Prince Edward Island welcome to all the players, the coaching staff, to the families and the fans. We wish the competitors the best of luck and hope all the visitors enjoy the world-class hospitality I know

that they'll get from the city of Summerside and our entire province.

Thank you very much. I hope everyone has a great day.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome those who are watching online and, as usual, those in particular from Tignish-Palmer Road.

I'd like to wish all the best to the farmers and the fishers who are out working on the land and our sea to build our economy here on Prince Edward Island, thank them for all they do, and hopefully they have a very safe and prosperous season.

I'd like to welcome those in the gallery today: Prince Street School leadership class, welcome to today's proceedings; those from the tourism industry – I see John Cudmore here from Dyne industries and Luke Thompson from the Holman Grand, and all the others who are here from the tourism industry. Thank you for all that you do for tourism on PEI and for making this a place where people want to come and come back. Thank you for all you do.

Also, while I'm on my feet, to Bethany Collicutt-McNab and Harvey Collicutt – I saw them coming in: welcome to today's proceedings. They're no strangers to this Legislature.

May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, and this is a time dedicated to raising awareness and funding research and support for over 90,000 Canadians who are living with this chronic auto-immune disease. Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world, with roughly 12 Canadians diagnosed every day. Each year there's an annual walk as a key initiative to raise awareness for Mr. Speaker, and we'll be having one here in Prince Edward Island and I ask everybody to participate.

I'd also like to mention while I'm on my feet that M.J.'s Bakery and Caboose Cafe in Tignish is having a Mom and Me tea party this Saturday, May 9th, from ten to four. Mother's Day, of course, is coming up so it's a great way to celebrate all mothers and all mother figures. Mothers can consist of aunts, godmothers, and

others who play a meaningful role in any person's life. So, if you're in the area, drop by.

I would also like to mention our Miminegash athlete, Abby Hustler, who of course is the first PEI woman to play in the Professional Women's Hockey League. They are now in the playoffs playing against the Montreal Victoire, and the series is tied 1-1. Last evening they went into three periods of overtime before, unfortunately, Montreal won. But anyway, the series is tied 1-1, and we do wish – even though Montreal's a Canadian team, I guess up west we're rooting for the Minnesota Frost. So, good luck to Abby on her quest to bring home that championship trophy.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon and welcome back to the Legislature to everyone who plays a part in keeping the Legislature going today, including us MLAs.

[1:15 p.m.]

Welcome to everybody in the gallery. It's great to see the Prince Street leadership class out; I hope you enjoy the proceedings today and continue on your leadership journey. Welcome to Corryn and everybody from the Tourism Industry Association. Lots of familiar faces came in all at once; so many prominent players in our tourism industry that helps drive our economy forward as it has been so much in the last number of years. Thank you for all that you are doing to support the industry.

A couple of Mother's Day teas taking place this weekend:

Crapaud Hall, Saturday, May 9th at 12 noon – the tea includes sandwiches, sweets, tea, and coffee. Tickets should be purchased first. Get them at the Crapaud General Store. Proceeds go to the Crapaud Hall. That's at 12 noon.

If you time it right, the Cornwall area – at the Civic Centre in Cornwall – is having a tea at two o'clock. Again, light refreshments/sweets are on the menu. Tickets are \$10. It is possible to attend both Mother's Day teas if you time it right.

This week is National Hospice Palliative Care Week. It's a week set aside to thank the dedicated Health PEI staff, volunteers, and caregivers who provide comfort, dignity, and support when it matters most to families – such an important role they play. Palliative care takes place not just in hospitals but also in patients' homes; of course, in hospitals; but also in our palliative care centre and palliative care centres in the hospital. I would like to acknowledge that special week and all the great work that's done by those who have a part to play in providing palliative and hospice care at such sensitive and difficult times for families.

Finally, I would like to give congratulations to some students at Kinkora Regional High School who participated in the Island Justice Cup this week. There were four schools that competed in the Justice Cup. The students from Kinkora – Kim Destreza, Oscar Bulman, Abigail Bulman and Evelyn Trainor – competed in the Cup. It's an event organized by the PEI Law Society. It's a mock trial tournament where students make their case before sitting Provincial Court judges.

The school reported that the team's hard work paid off. The competition was fierce. The Kinkora students distinguished themselves as tenacious advocates for justice. A special thanks to teacher/advisor Norah Pendergast for helping put on the Cup with the students.

These mock trials and experiences into the legal world can send students from high school into undergrad into law school where careers can be established and founded, so these are really important. They take a lot of work for the volunteers involved to pull off. I really would like to thank and show appreciation to the schools involved, the students who participated, and the organizers of the event.

With that, I wish everyone a great day of debate here in the Legislature.

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon to anyone that might be watching from District 1, especially our fishers. As I said before, I've got five ports in my district that I represent. I know they're battling all kinds of wind as of late, some closures due to some right whale sightings. My son, Evan, fishes out

of the lake aboard *Miss PEI* with captains Nate and Quintin Mallard. He sent me a video about an hour ago, and there's quite a roll on in the north shore, let me tell you.

I'd like to welcome Ms. Courtney and her grade 5 leadership class from Prince Street School. It's always great to have students in the gallery to watch the democratic process in action.

Finally, I couldn't help but notice our friends in the third party – they're all sporting blue today. I don't know what that means, but I'm loving all the blue over there.

With that, I wish everyone a great day in here. Thank you.

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

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome all of my colleagues back for another day of debate, and to all of those joining us in the gallery: our students that are here, as well as our fabulous and amazing tourism industry representatives. Certainly, I have to recognize Corryn Clemence. I had the great fortune of working with Corryn for a short but amazing time. I'm happy to see everybody here.

Also, yesterday, I do want to recognize that my mom and dad celebrated their wedding anniversary – 53 years of married bliss and love. Certainly, one can only hope to have a marriage that – my dad is so in love with my mom and vice versa for my mom.

Also, the Stratford Youth Centre Drama Club is getting ready to present *A Wrinkle in Time* on May 9th and 10th at the Stratford Emergency Services building. Tickets are available to reserve. They go quickly. There is no set fee; it is on donation. I encourage everyone to come on out and see their great work.

Have a great day. Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

[1:20 p.m.]

Welcome everyone: colleagues, back here; everyone in the gallery; students from Prince Street – it's great to have you here; all the stakeholders from the tourism industry, thank you for what you do – we're looking forward to a wonderful year, as I'm sure you are as well; everyone out in District 4.

Spring is here when I can lay in bed in the morning and hear the lobster boat out there and can say Marty Morrison is right out. I can see him off the shore. So, that is a really good sign, and it is a beautiful day.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to read a letter that I got, a very important letter. It was hand-delivered to my desk – I know, I beg your indulgence, but:

“Dear Hon. Darlene Compton” – I know I'm not supposed to say my name, but this is what's in the letter – “the Minister of Land and Environment:

“My name is Fitz Corcoran, and I am seven years old. I want a pet turtle. On PEI, you are not allowed to have a pet turtle. A turtle would be a great pet. Yes, turtles carry diseases that could hurt reptiles, but I will make sure the turtle is safe and healthy. Turtles as pets will make people on PEI happy. As a leader, will you allow me to have a turtle? Please write me back.

“Fitz Corcoran.”

So, this is a public service announcement: you cannot own turtles on PEI. I had this discussion with my deputy because we thought maybe there were certain ones you could own, but you cannot.

I want to thank Fitz for reaching out. I'm going to table this letter because I thought it was very good of him to ask me this. My son did a little research: you can adopt a turtle. You don't get them actually in person, but you can adopt one and they will send you reports, so maybe I'll suggest that, or maybe I'll adopt a turtle for Fitz.

I just want to thank Fitz for the letter.

Everyone, have a great day.

Speaker: Well, minister, I think that was worth the indulgence. It definitely wasn't a minister's statement, so we'll –

Hon. D. Compton: I think if we all had turtles, we'd be happier.

[Laughter]

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to recognize everybody watching online, especially those in District 2 Georgetown-Pownal. I especially want to recognize the hardworking farmers and fishers that keep the economy in our district going. I saw Robert MacLeod had some ground broke just down below where I'm living now in Alberry Plains. I think he's hoping to put some corn in there this year. So, I wish everybody a prosperous season for all.

Today, I had the pleasure this morning to join others at the drive-thru window at the McDonald's in Montague with a good friend of ours – many in this House – Wayne Spin, who didn't mind boasting about his athletic and NHL knowledge. He might have trumped somebody else in this House as well.

I want to also recognize everybody in the gallery, especially our tourism operators, especially a very good friend of mine I've gotten to know in the last few years, Tracey Singleton, who has just snuck in behind me. Tracey is an incredibly effective and incredibly intelligent, hardworking person who can organize pretty near anything. If anyone's looking to organize – I wouldn't organize a two-car parade if it wasn't for Tracey.

Thank you very much, and go, Habs, go!

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I would like to welcome back my colleagues and staff, and our three Pages with us today, Jada, Connor, and Nate. Thank you for being here. A very special welcome to the leadership class of Ms. Courtney. Thank you for being here. Of course, to the tourism association members, thank you for being here as well.

As someone who advocates for women's health, one thing I've learned along the way is you just have to keep talk, talk, talk, talking about it, so

here I go again. I know I've told everyone that if they haven't listened to the podcast that resulted from the IWK Foundation women's health survey, you've got to listen – *The Fifth Wave*.

I just listened to the second last episode – April 22nd – called “Menopause at Work.” Please listen to it. It is fascinating. Even though I am obsessed with the topic, I learned tons of new things from that. It is a wonderful podcast if you have a woman or a young person in your life who may be at some point going through that. It's fascinating. Please listen to it, then get back to me. It's only 27 minutes long. You can listen to it on your run, Premier. You can listen to it when you're out for your walk. You can listen to it on your drive home. So, I encourage you to do that.

With that, have a great day, everyone.

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

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

It's always a pleasure to rise here in the Legislature. I certainly want to recognize and give a shout-out to anybody that is watching in from up in the West Prince area, especially District 26 Alberton-Bloomfield.

It's fantastic to see the full gallery that we have here with us today. I do want to welcome all the students. It's always so great to see young people in the gallery viewing the proceedings here.

[1:25 p.m.]

A special shout-out to the ones that have joined us from the tourism associations, the different industry groups from across the province. I will be having a minister's statement on that a little later today, and you will all have the honour of having your names read into the record twice today because the Premier has already done it. I'm going to be doing it again, just as a heads-up.

I also want to recognize Harvey and Bethany. It's always great to see both of you here in the gallery.

When I was speaking about tourism, this certainly falls into it. This fall, PEI, once again, will shine as Canada's Food Island with the return of the award-winning Fall Flavours Food

and Drink Festival running from September 24th to October 10th. The Government of PEI is certainly proud to support Fall Flavours as a signature event. Tickets went on sale this past Friday, and I would certainly encourage everyone to get out early and get their tickets.

With that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister, I did indulge you there because we have so many esteemed tourism operators in the gallery.

The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

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

I do want to recognize all of our guests here today. Prince Street, I love the shirts; those are amazing. Thank you to all the tourism industry partners. In my time as the minister, you were so supportive, and I do really appreciate that. Harvey and Bethany, and of course, Michael Baglole.

Also, it is McHappy Day. It's always a pleasure to see Lori and her crew, especially Erin Pippy, at McDonald's. Every day is a McHappy Day with Erin working the drive-thru.

Two little things – two sporting notes:

First and foremost, the Maple Leafs had one game to win. We won last night; thankfully, we have the first pick.

[Interjection]

Hon. Z. Bell: At Bingo.

Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, I do want to recognize a few youth in the community that are going to be heading to Quebec City. It is PEI's fencing association, Team PEI. It's the largest team in over a decade. They're made up of neighbours of mine, brothers Brecken and Campbell Burrows of Winsloe.

- Brecken is 17, a two-time PEI foil champion – just won the '26 New Brunswick provincial foil championship;
- Campbell, who is 19 – two-time PEI epee champion and the Ontario university bronze medal winner;
- Gabe Conroy, also of Charlottetown, and Graham Hart – both 14 – Canoe Cove, are multiple medal-winning athletes;

- Mae Wilson of Cornwall, 14 years old, is a two-time women's epee champion.

Next year, the Fencing Club is going to be celebrating its 60th anniversary, founded in '67 by Lothar Zimmermann, who is still actively leading the club. Very exciting things are happening in the PEI fencing community. Congratulations to the club and best of luck in Quebec City.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your indulgence.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to welcome everybody to the proceedings today, everybody in the gallery, the Prince Street power, everybody watching at home in District 21, my faithful watchers – Elizabeth, Kathy, and Joan, and Dorothy. Can't forget about Dorothy. Quick story, Mr. Speaker: last week, as you know, I missed three days when I put my back out. I got a message from Dorothy: "I don't see you on the TV. Are you okay, dear?" Well, I'm back. I hope Dorothy is watching. I'll get a couple more messages.

Also, I did stop in to McDonald's this morning for a couple of hours and got to work beside Nev, their manager. What a rewarding experience. My goodness, does that McDonald's in Summerside ever run efficiently. They are non-stop. It's impressive to watch.

Also, as the Premier mentioned, Centennial Cup starts tomorrow and our own Summerside Western Capitals have a game at 7:30 tomorrow night against the Manitoba Niverville Nighthawks. Hopefully, we get to see everybody there.

Before I sit down, it's not too often that I get someone from my district here so I'd just like to give a shout-out to Dave Groom, who is sitting here with the tourism group, and also, I guess, we also have Matthew Jelley, who used to be in the district but moved out.

[Laughter]

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It's a pleasure to rise today. I'd like to welcome those in the gallery and the leadership class from Prince Street School. Thank you for being here today, and I hope you enjoy the proceedings. And, of course, all those from the tourism industry and some very familiar faces out there – welcome today. It's going to be nice to hear the greeting that our minister has later.

I was also happy to stop off at McDonald's this morning with the member. We had a lovely time. I just want to thank every single person that takes the time to go through the drive-thru or drop in to McDonald's to support this wonderful initiative for Ronald McDonald House.

[1:30 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, if you could just indulge me for one minute, I'm pleased to recognize a remarkable young constituent from Summerside. Nine-year-old Rebecca Sijo, a grade 3 student at Greenfield Elementary School, has achieved an impressive milestone by winning the PEI Chess Championship at her grade level. Through this accomplishment, Rebecca earned the honour of representing Prince Edward Island at the Canadian Chess Challenge taking place in Winnipeg from May 16th-18th.

On behalf of the Legislature, Rebecca, I want to congratulate you on your success. I wish you all the best.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It's so lovely to see such a delightfully full Chamber and gallery today. Welcome to the Prince Street students, and Corryn and all your colleagues from the tourism industry.

I'm standing up to celebrate an event that we had in my own district in the Bonshaw Community Centre on Sunday. It was a fundraiser for the South Shore Food Share. Jenny and Jackie Myers, who are part of the steering committee of the South Shore Food Share – it's been going for ten years now – were in attendance. We raised over \$1,000 and a

truckload of food. Everybody had a fantastic time. Every single entertainer was from District 17, and they put on a beautiful show. In this difficult, fractured world in which we live, it was so lovely to feel a community coming together for a great cause. It was a lovely day. Thank you to all who took part.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Members, there was a lot of indulging today. I understand that – we've got a lot of members in the gallery – but when that happens on Wednesdays in particular, it cuts into non-government time. Today, we are going to start government time at 4:05 p.m. instead of four o'clock.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Recognizing Ashlyn and Reegan Gaudet

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I humbly rise to recognize and bring awareness to a couple of young women who call District 21 home. These two young women are Ashlyn and Reegan Gaudet, and although youthful at ages 15 and 17 respectfully, this pair are pillars of the youth community and racking up many accolades and accomplishments.

Ashlyn is currently in Ottawa where she is representing Prince Edward Island at the Integrated Youth Services Summit. She is co-emceeing the event, participating in the practice leads room, and leading the icebreaker. Ashlyn is taking charge on the big stage and is captivating her audience and holding her own as the youngest participant. Ashlyn has gained valuable experience and honed her skills over the past three years, when she has been a member of the Child and Youth advisory board. Mr. Speaker, you heard that right: the past three years. So, at 12 years of age, Ashlyn was making a difference and part of the group advising the Advocate.

Not to be outdone, her older sister, Reegan, is sporting an impressive resume of her own, starting with being named the City of Summerside Youth of the Year for 2026. Accolades that led to Youth of the Year included Reegan volunteering at the Summerset Manor, volunteering with Keeping Cats Homed,

volunteering at TOSH with the breakfast program, and working the Axe store, and was part of the TOSH bocce ball team, where the goal was inclusion.

Both Ashlyn and Reegan put a lot of time into their extracurricular activities, and both work part-time at Water Street Bakery but manage to concentrate on their studies as both have found themselves on the honour roll.

Hopefully, when Reegan goes off to Dal in the fall, where she will eventually gain a master's in occupational therapy, she can find her way back to the Island. As for Ashlyn, I am quite sure that we will be hearing from her as she will be advocating for PEI to put more focus on the Integrated Youth Summit in any way she can.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that this whole House would join me in congratulating these two remarkable young women who are pillars of the youth community.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

MADD PEI Police Awards

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the recent MADD PEI Police Awards and to honour the dedicated police officers across Prince Edward Island who work every day to keep impaired drivers off our Island roads.

Impaired driving remains a serious threat on our Island roads as we have three times the national average. Thanks to the vigilance, professionalism, and commitment of our police services – municipal, RCMP, and integrated units – PEI continues to make progress in addressing this issue.

I want to thank MADD PEI for their unwavering advocacy and partnership with law enforcement, and I extend my sincere gratitude to every officer who wears the uniform with pride and courage. Your dedication does not go unnoticed. Thank you for all you do and, in this case, keeping our Island roads safe.

Cpl. Jamie Parsons received Prince Edward Island's 2025 Top Performer award. As well, he received the Gold Award. Congratulations, Cpl. Parsons.

[1:35 p.m.]

Silver awards were awarded to:

- Cst. Bryce Haight
- Sgt. Lisa Jones
- Cst. Jonathan Maillet

Bronze awards were awarded to:

- Cst. David Burke
- Cst. Cory Burry
- Cst. Lucas Cann
- Cst. Kelvin “Kebby” Cormier
- Cst. Guillaume Fiset
- Cst. Kenneth “Kenny” Gillis
- Cst. Noah Gosse
- Cst. Andrew Griffin
- Cst. Jonathan Kennedy
- Cst. Troy MacDonald
- Cst. Steve Manning
- Cst. Matt Paynter
- Cst. Lorenz Sanders
- Cst. Jacob Schnarr
- Cst. Kalib Snow
- Cst. Braeden Steenson
- Cst. Prabhjot Uppal
- Cst. Robin Lee Watt

Congratulations to all those who received these awards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government’s Annual Interest Costs

R. Henderson: Thanks.

Mr. Speaker, \$201 million in annual interest payments is what this Conservative government is projecting Island taxpayers will send to the financial lenders of this province.

That is a staggering number for 180,000 Islanders to pay this year. It is more than the expenditures of all but four government departments. In fact, it is more than the combined spending of departments including Agriculture; Economic Development; Executive Council; Public Service Commission; Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism; Housing and Communities; Land and Environment – plus a few more million.

It works out to about \$1,100 for every Islander paying towards absolutely nothing of value in return, and that's just for one year.

PEI is in the worst fiscal situation on a per-capita basis of any province in Canada. How embarrassing. Worse yet, PEI's Auditor General has projected the province's net debt will reach \$4.5 billion by '26-27, and on the path that government is on, it's projected to exceed \$6 billion by 2031.

Those of us who've been here for a while know how this works. Unrealistic budget projections, special warrant spending after the fact, growing dependence on federal transfers, and economic growth that will not last forever will all catch the attention of bond raters. When this happens, those interest costs will likely go higher.

Governance is about choices and priorities, both in good times and in hard times. It is time this government started living within its means, making better choices, and breaking the spending and hiring habit that has defined it since 2019 because this so-called Conservative government is holding Islanders back from achieving the greatness we so rightfully deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Many community care facility staff right across Prince Edward Island are doing everything they can to keep seniors in their community, but they are asked to do this without proper supports. Level 4 residents require 24-hour nurse care, and that care is not available in a community care setting. This is not on staff; this is on this government.

Long-term care (further)

To the Minister of Health: Why are seniors in this province not being provided the level of care that they need where they are currently living?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I don't know if the member is referring to a particular situation, but I'd be more than happy to go back and check into it and take an answer back.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Multiple community care facilities right across Prince Edward Island.

This is what happens when a system is stretched beyond its limits. There's nowhere for people to go. Long-term care beds are full. Hospitals are full. We've had some doctors saying that the hospitals are a dumping station, and this government let it get to that point.

To the Minister of Health: Where does the minister expect these residents to go to receive the care they need?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

The overcapacity level in our hospitals actually has been reduced to a level 3. It was at a level 4. It has gone down to a level 3, which is good news. However, that being said, there is still a big issue with patients needing long-term care. That demand is still there.

We're doing everything we can to alleviate that pressure. We'll be adding about 330 new beds over the next couple of years, but that's going to take time to get up and going. It's certainly all hands on deck, but definitely good news that we're down to at least a level 3 where we were at a level 4.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This is not good news. There are still level 4s in the hospitals on Prince Edward Island.

[1:40 p.m.]

Because of this government's mismanagement of the health system, this community care

facility in Tignish I'm going to talk about now has been put in a position to provide long-term nursing-level care that it was never designed to staff or to deliver. They do not have the required nursing staff. The staff that they have are exhausted, stretched, and doing everything they possibly can to hold things together.

Now, I know this minister's go-to point is to point the finger somewhere else, but this one sits squarely with him now. Staff are stepping up, but this government is not. Presently, there are four level 4 residents at the Tignish Seniors Home Co-operative of 51 residents that call this home.

Question to the minister: Will the minister commit to providing the support needed so this facility can hire the nursing staff required to care for their residents who are categorized as 24-hour nursing care?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I do believe we've provided significant support to the home in Tignish over the last number of years. This is where travel nurses and agency staff come into play. The opposition and the third party have I would say rightfully criticized and held government accountable for using agency staffing, but this is exactly the reason that we do need them.

A lot of it is in our long-term care facilities, our facilities in rural – Souris; up west, as well. We just have a very difficult time staffing these facilities, and we have to use agency staffing. The reality is if we don't use them, these facilities would have to shut down.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, the minister doesn't understand the question.

These are long-term care facilities. They go up to a level 3. They're not licensed to take care of anybody above a level 3. So, you have four patients presently at the Tignish Seniors Home that are level 4 or greater. They need 24-hour nursing staff. They're asking you because your government has done nothing to support any long-term care facilities on Prince Edward Island to help them alleviate some of those pressures from having level 4 patients in it.

Will you support the facility so they can have the proper nursing staff to take care of these residents because you can't?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I don't think I would say that we haven't helped any long-term care facility on Prince Edward Island. I would say our government has made record investments in long-term care, more than any other government before us, whether it's red or blue.

But I will check into this particular situation. He does say that this is happening across the Island. I'll look into it and bring an answer back for him.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Perhaps you could check my email I sent you on Monday, along with the phone call that you said you would return.

Mr. Speaker, we are now hearing that on-call physician coverage for long-term care expired at this facility. It expired on the 27th of April, and nothing has been put in place to replace it. I mentioned last fall there were five. I'm not even sure – I didn't check with the other four to see if they have physician coverage.

The sad part is the facility wasn't even notified that there was no physician coverage. That leaves staff without support, and residents without timely access to medical care. This is unacceptable.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness: Why did your government allow physician coverage for long-term care to lapse without a replacement in place?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We were able to find a replacement for the home that the member is referencing. I did try to call the member back yesterday. He didn't answer. That's fine. I know he's very busy, but I did give him a call I think yesterday morning at some point – 8:30 or nine o'clock. I can certainly table

my phone records here to show that I did call the member back.

Listen, I'm more than willing to work with the member to try and resolve the situation if there is an issue up there.

Speaker: Just a reminder to go through the Speaker, member.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So, it expired on the 27th. The long-term care facility had an incident on the 28th. They called all of the doctors that were on the list to call – no answer, no answer, no answer. A little later, one doctor called back and said, “Our contract expired yesterday, but I will help you out.”

So, I'm not sure what this minister is talking about. The long-term facility – I checked five minutes before we came here. Did not hear anything from this minister or anyone else regarding physician coverage.

We're seeing the same pattern everywhere – residents in the wrong level of care, staff that are stretched beyond capacity, and now gaps in physician coverage. Everyone in here knows that the minister loves to grandstand and blame whoever he can, but this is not something the minister can pass off to anybody else. It's his responsibility to fix because this entire situation is a result made by this government.

Minister, will you commit here today to reinstate the on-call physician coverage today, and notify the facilities that they do have coverage?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

[1:45 p.m.]

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, the staff are texting me right now to say that there is physician coverage for the home that the member is referencing.

I did call the hon. member back yesterday at 8:19 a.m. He didn't answer, which is fine. I missed his call....

[Interjections]

Speaker: You have the floor, minister.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you.

I know he did try reaching me on Monday. I wasn't able to take his call. I did try him back yesterday, but I'm more to happy to talk to him after Question Period.

I don't think I'm a grandstander. I think the Leader of the Opposition is putting on a good show here today.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

We know how much difficulty this government is having getting money out to Islanders and to actually handle applications for programs that they implement.

Under the PEI-Canada agricultural program, which the government is responsible for administering, there is the agricultural stewardship program, which farmers can apply to for funding to modernize their farm operations and make them more environmentally sustainable. Within that program, farmers can get assistance for irrigation options on their farm.

Agriculture stewardship program

Question to the Minister of Agriculture: How much money is in this year's provincial budget for the water supply and irrigation program?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

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

\$1.2 million.

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

R. Henderson: Great, Mr. Speaker.

I have farmers in my riding who are considering irrigation options to reduce their dependence on moisture in their potato operations by installing modern, water-efficient irrigation equipment. The PEI Department of Agriculture was accepting applications on April 1st, 2026, at 8 a.m.

Question to the Minister of Agriculture. I had a farmer who submitted their application at 8:05 on April 1st, and was sent an email stating that their allotted moneys had been subscribed by 8:05. How is this an appropriate and efficient way of distributing money to farmers with no consideration for the quality of the application, geographical distribution of the money, and distribution of funds fairly to smaller operations that probably could use the support more than larger operations? You obviously spent \$1.2 million in less than five minutes.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

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

I had a phone call at 8:03, so it's even three minutes. Our province hasn't had the pressures on irrigation that we had after this summer. This was a 100-year drought that we had experienced last year. Our farmers are frightened. They want to get some security in their ability to grow crops here on this Island.

We had over 44 applications within a five-minute period for that \$1.2 million. I believe, not experiencing that kind of pressure before, there does have to be a better way, not just a first-in, first-out kind of process, and we will look at doing it differently for sure in the years ahead.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: I appreciate that answer, minister, because I do think it is important. We have lots of smaller operators out there, and we do like to see our geographical distribution be across Prince Edward Island for irrigation. We don't want to see all our irrigation in one location.

In the provincial budget last year, the Department of Agriculture spent \$3.5 million for last year's fiscal year for the ag stewardship program. This year, your department is actually allocating \$2 million for ag stewardship program.

How is that \$2 million divided up? We know \$1.2 for irrigation, so is it \$800,000 for the remaining programs that you offer? Because that's not very much.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. B. Thompson: There is a lot of pressure on that funding. That's a great funding. It's been in place even when you were a short-time Minister of Agriculture. It's a great program. It's fair. It's an ability for farmers to access new innovation/technologies to help with their systems.

This year, particularly, there are a lot of pressures for irrigation. I understand it, but it's designed to help all sizes of farms. It's not just for the big farms. It's for every size of farm, so they all can take advantage of it.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:50 p.m.]

On April 24th, the Minister of Health announced a review at Health PEI and said he directed the organization to focus less on management and more on frontline care. But when I wrote to the chair of the board for details on this, I got a very different story. The chair of the board had received no written direction from the minister and had no scope, no terms of reference, and no fiscal targets for the review.

Health PEI review

Question to the Minister of Health: Will you table the direction you gave Health PEI for the review, or did the minister announce it before he even knew what was going on?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I know that Dr. Richard Wedge – his response to the hon. member did say that:

“I can confirm that no formal ministerial direction was issued to the board in relation to this review. The need for an additional program review process was discussed by the board during the budget development cycle this past winter and again at the board meeting held in March '26. Following her appointment, the interim chief executive officer provided the minister with an informal briefing on the board's intended approach.”

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

[Interjection]

G. McNeilly: What's wrong with him?
[Laughter]

Mr. Speaker, the minister publicly announced this review, but Islanders still do not know whether this is a restructuring exercise or a cost-cutting exercise.

To the minister: What staffing or fiscal reduction targets has your government asked Health PEI to achieve through this review?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I don't think it's any secret that we need – I think, actually, the Leader of the Third Party had a good line. I think he said: more beds, less desks. I'm not sure what that line was, but it seemed to land pretty good.

I know the member wrote to the chair of the Health PEI board of directors, and I guess he's trying to politically interfere. I'm not sure what he's looking for, but this is what we see now and again from the opposition trying to politically interfere in the operations of Health PEI.

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

G. McNeilly: No. I've been here a long time doing this job, and I've seen a lot of different things. I'm looking for consistency and clarity from this government over there. This government says the review is about strengthening frontline care, but the real problem is that frontline positions remain vacant across the system.

Question to the minister: What evidence does the minister have that another management review will recruit a single nurse, a single doctor, or a single frontline health care professional?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Well, I'm not sure that a review is going to recruit more people. For

example, I know in home care, for instance, that in one particular location, they've now hired a fifth nurse coordinator position. Where did that nurse come from? The intensive care unit. What did that nurse do on one of her first weeks on the job? Organize the basement at home care.

We've got to stop pulling people off the front line and putting them into management positions. That's what our goal as government is. It would be good if the opposition would get onside.

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

G. McNeilly: He talked about home care; I have Beach Grove in mind. There's somebody leaving today to go from Beach Grove home to home care. You don't have a plan for any of these systems that you're operating here.

Here's something you did have. Last year, Health PEI introduced flexible hiring to move part-time and casual workers into permanent full-time positions. Frontline workers supported it, unions supported it, and by all accounts, it was helping with recruitment and retention, something this government has struggled with for years.

Staffing in health care

Question to the minister: How many health care workers moved into permanent full-time positions through this initiative, and why did your government fail to continue it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I know that there were some unintended consequences of this flex hiring, but it did actually move many individuals up into full-time work, which is what the goal was. I can get the exact number and bring it back.

I do just want to kind of – for the House: the hon. member wrote to the chair of the Health PEI board. When I did tour Health PEI and said hello to the staff, they actually told me that just to respond to all the committee requests, the letters that the opposition sends – in particular, the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty; I know the third party does this quite a bit too. They said that just to keep up with all those

requests from committees and the opposition, they almost need to hire one full-time staff just to keep up with those requests.

If we'd actually let the folks that know what they're doing at Health PEI, the experts that the opposition and the third party constantly claim that we're trying to interfere with – if we'd let them do their job and run the health care system like they know how to do, we'd be in a lot better situation.

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

[1:55 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: If we let this minister go, there won't be anybody left there. He's fired the CEO. I mean, this is the instability that this government has caused at Health PEI, and it's happening under your watch. It starts at the top. The CEO was fired without an explanation. The COO left after just six months. The former CHR – that's the chief human resource – is suing Health PEI. Now, the chief risk and governance officer is leaving on May 15th. We're doing our job on this side, asking questions about what is going on.

Frontline staff see the constant upheaval, and morale is suffering because of it.

Question to the minister: What is happening inside Health PEI that so many senior leaders are leaving in such a short period of time?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Obviously, some folks decide to move on on their own. That's like with anything, whether it's nurses, doctors, LPNs, senior leadership. Some people want to move on and take a different path or a different job. That's completely okay. I can't control that as the minister.

There are two positions – I think the chief risk officer; we're actually going to combine that with another position to try and save money and reduce that executive leadership. That's something the opposition is constantly asking for, so I'm sure they'll be very happy with that.

But I would say that with our new interim CEO and the team around her at Health PEI, it's like a

breath of fresh air at Health PEI, and I think if you go around and ask any of the staff, the frontline staff, they feel like they're being supported and listened to, and that's exactly what our government's going to do.

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

G. McNeilly: There have been problems there for a very long time, and it's tabled, no matter how you're going to spin it on this side.

Back to flex hiring for a second, because this was a program that was going to cost you a lot of money, and I think that's why you got rid of it. You paused it in August last year and it was working. That's what people are talking about in Prince Edward Island on the front lines. As the Nurses' Union said, instead of using travel nurses, this program was going to work, and you let it go.

Question –

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: It's a question, Minister of Agriculture. It's coming.

Why did your government cancel a hiring approach that was helping retain frontline healthcare workers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I think this program was intended to increase the number of staff taking on full-time work. I think we stopped it for – because we were costing us money. I don't think that was the case at all, but I can perhaps get a more exact answer, a specific answer, and bring it back to the House.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we all are now aware, gas is at \$2 a litre, something I don't think we've ever seen in this province. Almost exactly a month ago when gas prices began to rise but were still under \$2 a litre, I asked the Premier if he was going to change the way we calculate gas prices in this province to align ourselves with Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Gas prices on PEI are

consistently higher than our neighbouring provinces, and this is a glaring issue with the way IRAC is doing the calculations.

Gas prices (further)

Question to the hon. Premier. You committed, Mr. Premier, to looking at the calculation a month ago while gas prices continued to climb. What progress have you made since?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

The Leader of the Third Party knows very well that it's the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission that regulates gas prices in this province and it's they that control the formula that determines the price of gasoline, and it's they that I said are undertaking a review of that formula that calculates how gas prices are determined in this province. That's what they're doing. I'm sure they'll update us when that review is complete.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, a month ago when I asked the Premier the question, his response was: "I believe that the formula used by IRAC in regulating our gas prices used to use the New York benchmark. If it's beneficial to Islanders, we should return to that formula."

Mr. Premier, I think that your words speak for themselves. We should return to the formula, and you should direct IRAC to do that to save Islanders up to 10 cents a litre on their gas. Switching our benchmark from Charlottetown Harbour to the New York Harbour benchmark could quickly reduce our price by about 10 cents a litre. The Province has commissioned multiple reports over the last decade on this topic. We don't need more studies, we don't need more reports, we need action, Mr. Premier.

Question to the hon. Premier: Will you commit right now to changing the benchmark or remove the provincial gas tax on our pumps?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I don't direct IRAC. They're an independent regulator, and that's an important principle of

the way they operate, and he knows it. That's a bedrock principle of an independent regulator.

It's my fervent hope that they change back to the New York benchmark to save Prince Edward Islanders money at the gas pump, and I look forward to them making that decision, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier thinks it's good enough to pass this off to IRAC to make the decision – Islanders expect this Premier to lead and make life affordable to Islanders.

[2:00 p.m.]

Islanders have no choice but to tighten their belts. I think it's past time this government led by example and tightened its belt too. A quick look at minister disclosure statements shows some ministers charging \$1,000 a month in gas, some charging thousands in vehicle maintenance, even a \$1,000 deductible being charged to Island taxpayers.

Government spending (further)

Question to the Premier: Will you commit, Mr. Premier, to pausing vehicle maintenance and gas mileage this year to show Islanders that your government takes seriously both our provincial deficit and Islanders' cost of living struggles?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

It's now clear with the leader of the opposition is getting at, and it's the affordability issue that's very important to Prince Edward Islanders at a time of rising costs. But this government, in a budget of \$3.8 billion – about 10 percent of that budget, \$320 million, is direct programs and services that benefit Prince Edward Islanders directly, that help the affordability issue.

A brand-new program, the Island essentials benefit, will come into effect shortly and put money directly back into people's pockets so that they can pay for gasoline, their utility bills, their rent, their groceries – anything that they see fit to put it towards. We are helping Islanders, supporting them through difficult times where prices are rising, and we're investing in

programs and services that support them every single day.

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

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

Last week, I asked some questions about the community housing expansion program, which is a unique initiative here on Prince Edward Island, and an extremely successful program that has delivered, in a very short timeframe, significant numbers of affordable housing units for Islanders who need them. The Premier, the Finance minister, and the Housing minister all stood up in response to my questions to tell us how great the program is; yet, in the same breath, they confirmed that it had been cut with no explanation as to why.

Politicians, all of us, are tasked with making difficult decisions every day, and it's important to the people that we serve, the public of this province, that they have confidence that government is making sound choices based on solid evidence and results.

Affordable housing (further)

A question to the Premier: Why has this successful program that was actually meeting its goals being cut?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I am quite proud of that program, and as the Minister of Housing told us last week, it resulted in some 250 units being transferred from the private sector to the non-profit community sector so that they can be operated as affordable housing units in perpetuity.

A great program, great partners, and part of that program is investing in those partners to build their capacity so that they can manage larger inventories of affordable housing in Prince Edward Island, leverage those assets over time to reinvest in more. That program has not been cut. It is certainly paused for now, but we're still investing tens of millions of dollars in deeply affordable publicly owned housing this year. We have not reduced our commitment to affordable housing in this province one bit.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: I mean, it's just more of the contradictions that I heard in my answers last week. We were also told last week that this government is doing "a little bit of a reset" on housing.

Now, I can totally understand how this government might want to have a reset on some things that are going absolutely terribly, like access to primary care, affordability, and cost of living issues – energy prices, for example – or bullying in our schools. But I can't, for the life of me, understand why this government is pressing pause – cutting – and reset on a housing program that is actually meeting its targets.

To the Premier: What did your Housing minister mean when he said "a little bit of a reset" and what program or programs do you have in mind that are going to deliver more affordable housing more effectively and more cheaply than the one you've just cut?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I think it bears explaining to the public that the community housing expansion program is not net new housing. It is transferring properties from the private sector – market-rate housing – to the community housing sector – a wonderfully successful program, and I hope to continue to reinvest in that program with our partners going forward. But what we are still doing is adding net new, deeply affordable housing every year by spending tens of millions of dollars to build public housing for people who need affordable housing.

That is what we're doing: adding more new affordable housing.

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

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

[2:05 p.m.]

Last week the Housing minister, referring to this program, said: "It wasn't adding units to inventory exactly" – what the Premier just said – "and so we've turned our focus back to an

already existing inventory to continue to reduce our social housing registry.”

There are two things about that comment. Firstly, the registry has actually increased by 20 percent in the last year. It’s not going down. Secondly, as well as slashing this, to use the minister’s words, “extremely successful program,” you’ve also abandoned the tiny house project which was actually going to add units to the government owned social housing inventory.

A question to the Housing minister: Are you resetting or wrecking the affordable housing situation? Because it sure looks like it’s the latter.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Communities.

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

Let me remind the member:

We’ve decreased the registry by 60 percent since 2019. We’ve added 500 social affordable housing units since 2019. We have 195 coming on before September. Housing starts have been record numbers since the 1970s for ’24-25. We have increased the vacancy rate for the first time in many years, from 2 to 4 percent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last year, the Province launched the Protecting Our Future tariff response plan to safeguard our economy. We know that the Department of Economic Development, Trade and AI was tasked with rolling out immediate support, such as the tariff working capital program and the export enhancement and diversification fund, to help Island exporters navigate the uncertainty of the trade policy.

Tariff response plan

Question to the Department of Economic Development, Trade and AI: Can the minister give us an update on what specific actions the Province has taken in light of the trade disruptions? How many Island businesses have accessed these programs to date?

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

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

Certainly, I’d like to start to say our commitment is to support a vibrant, healthy, and sustainable Island economy first and foremost. We’ll continue to ensure that we can help the Island work through and navigate through the uncertainties when it comes to trade policy.

What I can say is we did stand up two programs, as referenced in the question – the tariff working capital program and our export enhancement and diversification fund. Through the export enhancement and diversification fund, there are a number of programs that fall underneath that. We have had the ability to support 180 unique companies for a total of \$3.3 million and are currently still working to support it.

Thank you.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, a key element of the province’s strategy is reducing our reliance on a single market by helping Island companies find new customers globally. Through Innovation PEI, there was a commitment to double our trade missions and leverage the export enhancement and diversification fund to help our world-class food and bioscience products reach markets in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

Question to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and AI: For the producers in my district and across the Island, where do we stand on these diversification targets?

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

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

Certainly, we know that it’s really important to continue to diversify our markets, and we’ll continue to do that going forward, and any opportunities that are presented.

We do want to continue to strengthen and have the resiliency for the markets here on Prince

Edward Island for the foreseeable future. We have increased and gone to 35 missions. We certainly want to touch all the sectors that we have – food, agriculture, fisheries, and clean tech, and additionally all the ones that fall within that – to support and continue to explore new options for those markets.

Thank you.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you.

With the CUSMA review looming in 2026, many Islanders – particularly those in our dairy and potato industries – are concerned about the potential changes to quotas or rules of origin. The Province recently created a Cabinet committee on trade relations to ensure PEI has a seat at the table during these federal provincial discussions.

Question back to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and AI: Given that our international exports hit a record \$2.6 billion recently, what is the Province doing right now to ensure that the upcoming CUSMA review doesn't jeopardize that growth? What should Island producers be preparing for next?

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

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

[2:10 p.m.]

Certainly, PEI is at the table. We are working hard to make sure that the interests and the needs of PEI are being represented and heard. We'll continue to do that in our commitment to support the industry going forward.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

S. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to try and get you back on track here, timewise. I just have the one question, but a bit of a long preamble, if you don't mind.

Maintenance workers here in the province are incredibly important, that work both with the Department of Housing and the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. The maintenance workers that work with the Department of Housing are paid at a level 10, and the maintenance workers that work in the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy are paid at a level 9.

You could say that perhaps they're different roles or they're working on different things, but recently, the group homes in the province that used to be maintained by the maintenance workers in Housing are now maintained by the workers in Transportation. So, you can see there's a bit of a gap there.

Compensation for maintenance workers

My question is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Can you go back to the department and look to see where this gap in the funding is between the level 9 in your department and the level 10 with the maintenance workers in the Housing department?

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the hon. member for the question.

I want to thank workers in both locations for the great job, their dedication, and their service to our department – my department – but even more importantly, to recognize the service that they do provide to Islanders each and every day.

I'm sure that the hon. member knows that the Public Service Commission does the classifications on these and that there are different factors that are taken in with regard to potentially the danger of the position; I'll just use that as an example.

Having said that, though, I certainly will go back, have this checked into, and will certainly follow up with the hon. member.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Yesterday the Premier's response to my asking for a clear list of cuts in this budget was basically: "Go read the budget book yourselves."

But this is not about us, it's about Islanders. The people – Islanders – are trying to understand what programs are being cut, what supports are being cut, and what services may disappear. And frankly, the Minister of Education is getting his numbers wrong, so maybe that explains why Islanders are still struggling to get a clear answer from this Premier.

I've been asking this for weeks, but now it's time for the Premier to be upfront and tell Islanders what is being taken away from them.

Future of government programs (further)

A question to the Premier, one more time: Will the Premier direct his Finance minister to table a clear, public list of all cuts and reductions in this budget?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I've been pretty clear that this government has done its best in a very difficult budget to maintain as many programs and services that Islanders rely on in difficult times. That's our responsibility: to get Islanders through an unprecedented affordability crisis where costs are rising like never before.

But there have been few cuts in this budget. There have been several reductions. Every single line of the budget will be debated on this floor. The opposition will have an opportunity to ask questions about every single item that's had a reduction in spending from this year compared to last year. I look forward to having ministers on the floor to talk about those. We can inform the members of the opposition about those decisions when we debate it on the floor.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But we're in now in May. It's not us asking these questions, it's Islanders that are coming to us because they have some worries. They have concerns. They have to plan for this year. This

government has no problem advertising its spending. Basically, it's its cuts that they have that they don't want Islanders to see, and that's very, very clear because he knows that Islanders won't like it.

The Premier can talk all he wants about transparency, about openness, but when Islanders ask for a straightforward list of cuts, he refuses to provide that. That leaves Islanders wondering what this government is so unwilling to be upfront about.

A question to the Premier: If the Premier is confident in his budget, why won't he simply tell Islanders what is being cut?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

[2:15 p.m.]

We're actually quite fortunate that we haven't had to reduce our budget more than we have. That is because Prince Edward Island – before Question Period, the Member from O'Leary-Inverness was accusing the government of holding back Prince Edward Island from achieving greatness. I can tell you, speaking with the Minister of Finance – she's been collecting facts that have been coming in recently, from Statistics Canada and other sources, about just how well Prince Edward Island is doing. We've been leading the nation in GDP growth for more than a decade. We've led private sector employment growth since 2019 by a long shot in this country.

I acknowledge all the challenges that everyday Islanders are facing, but on many measures, the economy of Prince Edward Island is doing well. These people that are here from the tourism industry are no small part of that success of this province. I went to their season kickoff, and there was a bus that said "Tourism = \$1B to PEI."

That's how we continue to make investments in Prince Edward Island, and I'm thankful for that every day.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, I'm glad there are some buses around, but people cannot get a place to live in Prince Edward Island, and that remains the key problem here, Mr. Premier.

Question to the Minister of Social Development. Meals on Wheels is a very important program. During budget estimates, we saw that their allocation was \$202,000 spent last year. Upon further questioning, we found out that the budget allocation for next year for Meals on Wheels is \$170,000. Minister, that's a cut of over \$32,000 to Meals on Wheels when people are struggling to feed themselves.

Meals on Wheels

Minister: Why did you cut the Meals on Wheels budget for Prince Edward Island?

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

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

Meals on Wheels is a very, very important organization and we support them. I think we're almost triple to what we supported them back when the Liberal government was in place, but we're going to continue to support them. We now have a rural routes program that services five other communities that they didn't do last year. It's just continuing to grow, and we're continuing to support them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Ministers

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

Global Meetings Industry Day

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

It's certainly a pleasure to rise here and recognize the ones that we have in the gallery from the tourism sector of this great province. As I had indicated in my opening greetings today, you are going to have the opportunity, the pleasure, of having your names put in *Hansard* – in the record – twice. So, savour the moment.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. Hudson: We have with us here today:

- Corryn Clemence – TIAPEI
- Jackie Herbert – PEI Tasting Tour
- Matthew Jelley – Maritime Fun Group
- Jen Sanderson – Golf PEI

- Ben King – Golf PEI, Green Gables, Andersons Creek, Golf Mania
- Kirk Nicholson – Budget/Avis Car Rental
- David Groom – Quality Inn & Suites, Brothers 2 Restaurant
- Liam Dolan – Peake's Quay
- Richard and Faye Wood
- John Cudmore – Holman Grand Hotel, Hotel Association of PEI
- Luke Thompson – Holman Grand Hotel, Meet PEI board
- Tracey Singleton – VMG, Cavendish Bosom Buddies
- Kent Scales – Scales Group
- Kelley Gillis – Meet PEI
- Kelly Murphy – Port Charlottetown
- Mike Cochrane – Port Charlottetown

With that fairly extensive list, if I have missed anybody, my deepest apologies to you.

Today we recognize Global Meetings Industry Day, which is a day to celebrate the economic and social value of business events, meetings, and exhibitions. Meetings and conventions play an important role in our tourism industry. They support local hotels, venues, restaurants, transportation providers, and many other businesses while showcasing that our province is a great place to meet and to do business.

[2:20 p.m.]

Traditionally, these events happen outside of peak tourism season, supporting our vision of being a vibrant year-round destination.

While today highlights the meetings industry, it also gives us a chance to talk about the broader tourism sector and the vital role it plays in our provincial economy.

Tourism is one of PEI's strongest economic drivers. It is nearly a \$1 billion industry in PEI and contributes over three times the national average to our GDP. Tourism is an export industry that brings outside money into our economy, powering jobs, strengthening communities, and helping fund the vital services that Islanders rely on each and every day.

Tourism also delivers well beyond the economic benefits; it supports community pride, celebrates and preserves our culture and heritage, and creates opportunities for Islanders to share what makes our province unique. A strong tourism sector attracts investment; it creates jobs and

supports long-term economic stability in the province.

On PEI, government and industry are aligned and guided by our all-of-industry Tourism Strategy. Our collaborative approach is focused on sustainable growth that delivers the most impact for Islanders. We are focused on attracting higher-value visitation, supporting year-round tourism, strengthening our workforce, and protecting the places and communities that make this province so special.

As we recognize Global Meetings Industry Day, we also recognize the full tourism industry, the operators and the staff who work tirelessly with smiles on their faces to make it possible.

Our operators are staying open longer and making a record level of investment as they support our transition to a vibrant year-round destination. It is our collaborative approach that has delivered back-to-back record tourism years, leading the country in visitor spending growth in 2025.

In 2026, we are seeing visitors booking earlier and lengthening their stay, bucking the national trends. This is a real testament to the product that is offered by our operators.

We remain committed to supporting a tourism industry that grows our economy, strengthens communities, and delivers lasting value, not only now but well into the future.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I do appreciate all that the tourism industry does here in Prince Edward Island. I guess during my time – I had a brief moment there where I was Minister of Tourism and represented the industry – and I got to know a lot of these people. I won't mention their names the third time, but I think they all know who they are. They're all pretty well the same people that were there when I was there. But Meet PEI – they have changed the name. It was always Meetings and Conventions PEI, so forgive me if I fall back to that term sometimes.

But Prince Edward Island has always done great jobs of promoting our tourism industry. I always

acknowledge tourism is actually the world's largest number one industry, so certainly a valuable component. Meetings, especially, are even more important because the one thing that PEI always did, when we host a convention here, we usually have the best turnout of any of the conventions that come here. For business or an industry that decides to host it here in Prince Edward Island, they're going to get a bigger turnout for that. I think that's really important to note.

Certainly, when business travellers do come for a convention here, they do tend to spend a bit more money. They tend to bring their spouse with them as well. I think that's a big thing.

Also, the other thing I would say about meetings or conventions that they host here on Prince Edward Island: we do tend to do it in the shoulder seasons a bit more. That's also a big boost to our provincial economy, for our restaurants and extending the season for them.

Certainly, we appreciate here all the things that meetings and conventions or Meet PEI does in promoting and growing our tourism industry. Keep up the good work.

Thanks.

Speaker: Responding to the minister's statement, the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[2:25 p.m.]

Thank you to the minister for the statement and thank you to everyone from the industry for coming in today. We certainly have a room full of the heavy hitters in our tourism industry in Prince Edward Island today. It's wonderful to see everyone out.

After COVID, the tourism industry took such a hit during that period of time. It's so encouraging to see the rebound and the bounce-back that's happened since those dark days.

Look around the world and we see the volatility of the world right now. Some places that used to be safe travel destinations for people to go to, what used to be reliable partners for us to go to to enjoy a travel experience, are no longer as safe or as reliable as they used to be.

But PEI continues to offer that jewel, that safe jewel in the crown here on Prince Edward Island, for a safe place for families to come; that's renowned. That reputation is renowned and we're seeing that with the number of people coming to enjoy and experience our wonderful province. It's so wonderful to be in a country that has such a high repute across the world and in a province within that country that has such high repute to be an attraction to get people to come here to us.

We look at the business – this is Global Meetings Industry Day with roughly \$1.6 trillion annually in economic benefits tied to that. We need to continue to get our share of that big piece of the pie and we can because we offer that in the summer, we offer that in the spring and fall and winter as a place that we can attract the business community as well to come to. We should be a hub for business events for the same reason that we're becoming such a huge destination on the tourism side as well.

If there's one thing I hear from constituents and tourism industry operators around the province is some support from government to test out the shoulder season expansion because these are businesses that have traditionally operated within a certain window of time. They're interested in maybe going into September, maybe into October, maybe even longer because our weather, our climate is changing so we're seeing warmer weather past Labour Day where it used to just sort of be a cutoff and you could throw your swimming trunks away for another six or seven months. We're not seeing that anymore.

We're seeing a wonderful shoulder season in the fall. We're seeing music festival like Sommo take advantage of that. There's lots of other businesses in the community and our Island who would like to take advantage and maybe test the waters to see if their business could extend further into the fall, but that's an outlay of money that they're just not prepared to make. Love to see some support, just pilot some projects into the shoulder seasons.

I do thank the minister for the statement and, again, thank all the tourism industry operators and representatives and advocates here today for their wonderful work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hope Air Day

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

We found the statement here. Today, I recognize May 6 as Hope Air Day and to congratulate the organization on 40 years of service.

For years, their work has helped Canadians focus on their health, instead of the cost or challenge of travelling to get the care they need. The work is especially important here in Prince Edward Island where our province's small size means some specialized health services are delivered through partnerships off-Island.

Last year alone, Hope Air helped Islanders by coordinating nearly 6,000 travel arrangements for more than 1,800 patient and escort trips including airline flights, bridge and ferry passes, gas vouchers, accommodations, meals, and ground transportation.

Behind each of these travel arrangements is a patient and their family going through a health care journey. Islanders like the Koebrich family from Summerside, whose story was shared online this week, understand these difficulties first-hand. When their son faced serious health challenges after birth, Don and Emmy, along with their children, Kelley and KC, experienced firsthand the kindness, compassion, and practical help this organization provides. It is stories like this one that make it clear why Prince Edward Island has partnered with Hope Air for decades.

Between February 2025 and March 2026, the provincial government provided over \$1.3 million to support Hope Air's work. This year, PEI is also pleased to be acknowledged as one of 40 Hope Air Patrons across Canada, a national recognition for outstanding commitment to patient care access.

I want to thank the donors, volunteers, pilots, airline partners, and health care partners whose generosity and collaboration make this work possible.

[2:30 p.m.]

I extend congratulations to Hope Air on 40 years of remarkable impact and wish them continued success in the important work they do.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to join the minister in sending a big shoutout to Hope Air today. Forty years, that's quite a long time of service to Islanders. And, too, I want to say, the Koebrich family – Don, Em, and Casey and their daughter for sharing their story with openness and such courage. Stories like theirs are not easy to tell and it's sure had an impact, so I want to say that.

Hope Air is something that Islanders need, but it could be a program that – I want the province to look at the funding model. People are coming to us and saying they're in a very stressful position, and it's very difficult for them to get supports. They don't know where to turn, so the funding model, let's see if we can flip it. It's a little bit backwards right now. People need to get that support before they go, and that's what people are telling us on this side.

Hope Air does a great job. In PEI, we're increasingly sending people off-Island at more of a greater speed, so we've got to make sure that they're there and the funding continues to match that because it is a matter of life and death.

I want to thank Hope Air for all they do.

Appreciate this, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Responding to the minister's statement, the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the statement on Hope Air Day today. Thank you to the Koebrich family for sharing their story of success under the Hope Air program.

But not every family has the ability to take advantage of the program and be eligible for the program that Hope Air provides. I know when we go through the budget, that's always a question we ask here on this side as we go through line by line on the health budget as to what supports are available to enable Islanders to go off-Island to get the care that they need because more and more we're seeing that that care that Islanders need is only able to be delivered off-Island.

And that's fine in many cases where we simply cannot offer that care feasibly in Prince Edward Island, but if we are relying on our partners off-Island to provide care for Islanders, we need to make that care accessible for all Islanders who need to get there.

For example, we have talked in here before, further to a motion that I had brought, about reducing or eliminating bridge fees for medical travel off-Island. I know we are down to \$20 for a bridge pass now to get across the Island. That's great, but I think we can do one step farther and if we have to go off-Island for take, take that bridge fee away and provide some supports from the government to make that possible and accessible for so many Islanders who need to go off-Island for that service.

Yes, thanks to Hope Air for what you provide. Thanks to the government for supporting Hope Air in delivering that program. That eligibility criteria does not catch everybody who needs to go off-Island.

When we rely on off-Island health care services as to the extent that we, it's incumbent on government to make sure that those services are accessible and affordable for all Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Compass Survey Report

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

The health and safety of Island children is a top priority for this government. Ensuring that we are doing everything we can to support their mental and physical wellbeing is considered in so many of the decisions we make and the policies we put forward.

One measure of how our kids are doing is the Compass Survey Report on child wellbeing. The survey tracks student health behaviours, offering timely and valuable insights to help schools, communities, organizations, and government support student wellbeing. Compass is also locally coordinated, which means we can adjust our questions to help respond to priorities such as vaping and absenteeism.

The 2025-2026 survey was completed by 74 percent of students at 33 Island schools who have grades 7-12 in them. It is a coordinated effort between the Departments of Education and Early Years and Health and Wellness.

The '25-26 Compass Survey Report is complete, and the report shows three years of improvements in most major categories including bullying rates, overall mental wellbeing, healthy eating choices, smoking, vaping, and cannabis use, and alcohol use.

Our government continues to focus on programs and policies in our education system that help kids make healthy decisions. We are laser focused on eliminating bullying in our schools through programs like Social Emotional Learning and PBIS supports.

[2:35 p.m.]

We are promoting healthy eating with our soon-to-be-released school food environment policy. We are providing even more supports to students like our student wellbeing teams and increased investments in student support workers.

We are protecting students and their safety by following through on the recommendations of the Jenkins report and instituting new measures like enhanced background checks, the soon-to-be-released sexual misconduct policy, as well as a new code of conduct.

We are focused on reducing students' use of alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis through information campaigns, and we are investing like never before in our education and early years system.

As Minister of Education and Early Years, the health and safety of our children is my top priority, as I know it is for the Minister of Health and Wellness, as well, and our government as a whole. That's a priority I share with parents, with teachers, education administrators, school staff, and communities across this province.

Everyone has a role to play in the wellbeing of children, and I look forward to working together to sustain the momentum identified in this report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can't wait to see the numbers on that. I can't wait because that is a very important survey, but let's call a spade a spade. This government is cutting early years supports. They cut the mental health alliance. They cut the health promotion budget. They cut LiveWell PEI. So, those Compass survey numbers will change, and they're going to change for negative in the future, because your dollars that you're investing are not matching what's happening there.

In the survey itself, the data told us that 29 percent of PEI students reported being bullied within the past 30 days in a previous Compass survey. The average for our country is 19 percent. That number – I mean, it had to have gone down, but the cases are getting much more severe. Families are coming to us and that's what they're saying: "My child can't go to school because of this" or "I don't feel supported and safe."

So, although these numbers – I haven't seen them yet, and I look forward to seeing them, but this government has a long way to go because your cuts don't match what's coming out of your mouth.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I could just say ditto, but I won't. I'm so happy to finally hear the minister say the words, "Compass survey" without it being in response to a question. I wasn't sure if government knew that survey existed.

I look forward to seeing the new numbers. I find it interesting that we see these numbers improving, yet we just hear that the numbers of youth reaching out to Kids Help Phone is skyrocketing. I don't believe it's just because they know about the number now; I believe that the young people and the youth of our province are struggling.

When I hear this government flip flop on their supports – how can you stand and say that you support the mental health and wellbeing of young people when you're going against your government's plans?

When I think about the fact that in the inclusion review action plan – which isn't released, but the initial report – stated that government was going to focus on kindergarten and early years because kids were struggling, and they understood that we needed to focus on that young group, yet we made pedagogical cuts in early years, which is exactly, exactly...

[Interjections]

Speaker: Member, you have the floor.

K. Bernard: ...exactly what is needed to get us through this.

And they keep saying "investments." I'm sorry; investments in buildings is very different than investments in operational.

The rates of bullying we have in this province, we can stand and say they're improving, which is phenomenal, but the amount of families that I have reaching out to me because their children are struggling – one child struggling in our school system is too much for me. So, happy to hear our numbers are improving, but I wish that this government's actions actually backed their words. I'm not seeing that. I hope that Islanders can see through that.

Thrilled to hear the Compass survey is improving. I very much look forward to diving into that, and I will continue to support Island children every day, as much as I can.

Thank you.

Recognition of Guests II

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: There's a wonderful businessman in the gallery today from Summerside, David Groom, and I'd like to wish him a happy birthday today, David.

[Hear, hear!]

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

[2:40 p.m.]

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

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

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

Pursuant to rule 78(9) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island* regarding responses to petitions, tabled under presenting and receiving petitions, I am pleased to respond on behalf of Government of Prince Edward Island to a petition tabled by the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point on April 22nd, 2026. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Tabling of Documents

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter which was sent, dated May 5th, 2026, to the hon. Joanne Thompson, Minister of Fisheries, House of Commons, with regard to the importance of federal support for our oyster industry which is in crisis. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter dated May 5th, 2026, to the hon. Heath MacDonald, and it is also with regard for the urgent need for federal support and partnership with the Province of PEI to provide supports to our beleaguered oyster industry that is in a crisis. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter that I tabled April 27th to the Minister of Health – actually, to Dr. Wedge,

who's chair of the board – and that was regarding a directive undertaking the program review focused on middle management that the minister spoke about, and in it, it was to review the plan. I asked him for the terms of reference, timelines for completion, budget allocation of review, communication plans, and associated human resource plans. I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the response from Dr. Wedge saying that, yeah, he didn't know anything. He said, "Thank you for the correspondence to the board of Health PEI regarding the forthcoming program review process. I can confirm that no formal ministerial **direction** was issued to the board in relation to this review." I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter from Fitz Corcoran about owning a turtle on PEI, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. members, by Command of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table the Elections PEI report on the District 2 by-election, and I move that the report be now received and do now lie on the Table.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. members, by Command of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table the 2025 Annual Report and the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, and I move that the said report be now received and do lie on the Table.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

[2:45 p.m.]

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Petroleum Products Act*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Bill No. 109, *An Act to Amend the Petroleum Products Act*, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This bill would bring Prince Edward Island in line with the other Atlantic Canadian Provinces by adopting the New York Harbour benchmark for fuel pricing. I've talked about this multiple times during this session. Establishing a common benchmark across the region would create greater consistency, improve transparency in how fuel prices are set, allowing Islanders a more accurate comparison with gas prices in neighbouring provinces. This change is intended to modernize PEI's pricing model and ensure fuel pricing reflects the same market standard used throughout Atlantic Canada.

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

G. McNeilly: At this time, I'd like to call Motion No. 3 back to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Motion No. 3, "Expand mental health support for youth," has been read. Debate was adjourned by the seconder, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

Speaker: Just before we get into the debate, I wanted to remind members, with the time changes, we're going to go to 3:15 before we go to third party time.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I want to thank the members for bringing this motion forward. Of course, this is a motion that I support. I think that it's the whole reason that I'm here – two things. One is seeing the inequities within our school system and how they impacted young people, seeing young make their way through school hallways struggling, being in a position as a teacher or a counsellor or a club person – getting to know young people in different ways and not always being able to help.

I know we just talked this afternoon about the results of the Compass survey, and while I hear they've improved, I haven't seen them yet. So, I speak with the old Compass numbers in mind given how much higher we are on the national average for so many things that are so concerning.

When I think about the fact that the Premier's Youth Council is back on, if we do that properly – I really look forward to government having input from young people because part of feeling as a productive member of society is feeling like you belong. It's one of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

When I think about all of the things that we discuss in here on a daily basis how much that impacts young people. When I look around the room – our Pages are here every single day, and at least twice a day, I look at them and wonder what they're thinking, wondering what they would say if given the opportunity to speak, because there's so much wisdom in our Pages. They're living the young life. We were there at one time, but most of us aren't there anymore.

And it's changed so much since we were young. When you think of – especially social media. I know I've said in here before I'm so glad that I grew up in the age before that was so readily available and before anything that happened to you could be broadcast anywhere and everywhere at any given time. I know I spoke recently about the student wellbeing teams and how I'm not sure what – it depends on which family of schools that you are speaking about.

[2:50 p.m.]

In some families, things are going really well; they seem to have consistency on their teams. They seem to have worked things out very well. But in other schools, there's a confusion because they don't have that level of support from the very....

If we look at tiers – I might mess this up, but if you look at the tiers of needs for students, tier 1 and 2 are to be handled within school. School can handle it. There might be some outside agencies involved, but tier 1 and 2 needs are usually taken care of within school. It's the tier 3 students and beyond that the student wellbeing teams are mandated to work with. So, I mentioned speaking to a school counsellor before who shared with me that not one single student on her list under – she works with students under the age of 12 – and not one student was seen on that list.

I think there are two things to this, I think that there is a lot of understaffing, a lot of turnover in these positions, and I also think the policies get in the way, because one of them states, if you try to contact the family three times and you don't hear back, then student wellbeing teams can just take that student off their case and they don't have to notify anybody.

I think that the review that we were promised in, I think it was 2021 or 2022 – I think it was 2021 – I'm not sure if that's been conducted yet. I've asked government if that's been conducted, but still haven't received an answer yet, so I guess that means no, which is really unfortunate. If someone wants to say that young people are their priority, they promise they're going to review the services offered to young people and they don't, there's an example of actions speaking louder than words. If you say you're going to do something, you say something's a priority, but it's not backed up by the budget, it's not backed up by actions, then it's not a priority.

When we think about the impact that this has, both on short term and long term, I have been saying since I got into counselling and started to learn more about brain development and started to learn more about trauma, one of the things we know is that, if we catch trauma when kids are young, I'm going to make this sound really simple, it's not simple, but you can love trauma out of a child; you can. That is why early intervention and prevention is so young.

I see the minister shaking his head over there, I wonder what he knows about trauma.

[Interjections]

K. Bernard: So, childhood trauma can be loved out of a child. That language sounds very simple; it's more to it than that, but it's just the way that it is. That's why I advocate so heavily and get so frustrated, because I know that that is the answer to so many of our problems: getting to support young people. Our youngest people, whatever they need – meeting them where they are, supporting them where they are so that they may grow up with the best opportunity to be their best, most healthy, most successful, happiest selves, whatever that looks like to them.

When we don't make that investment, that's when we talk about something being a policy choice, because now if I look at what's happening in our province and around the world, with mental health and addictions rates, that's what happens. Not to every single person; I'm not suggesting that, but if you have healthy children, those mental health and addictions numbers go down, they just do.

There is a program called ACEs, which is adverse childhood experiences, more of a concept, and it measures the amount of trauma that you've been through as a child. I apologize to the minister, because I don't know what.... That was an assumption, but it was just frustrating because I have been questioned on my knowledge of brain development before in this House, and I might be a little bit sensitive to that.

Adverse childhood experiences looks at how many experiences children have had when they're young that impacts them for life. So, looking at a severe accident, fire, divorce, violence – all of those things are indicators for a child's future and what that might look like. That's why, until the day I die, I will advocate for young people and youth.

[2:55 p.m.]

If we could invest everything into that. I stand here jokingly – well, not really jokingly. But government needs to tighten their own belt. If government tightened their own belts in terms of different things that they have for themselves and invest –

[Interjection]

K. Bernard: I won't get into details because I just won't. It's not really relevant for this discussion –because I care about youth mental health.

We just need to look at ways. You know, it's funny when we challenge government on cuts they've made, and they stand up and throw it back at us: "Do you want us to balance the budget?" Well, yes, we do. Of course we do, but we want you to be making the right decisions. In my opinion, any cuts to young people: wrong decision, wrong decision.

I sit here shaking my head, how you can say that young people are the priority and then you do that. If any member of government could pull me aside and say, "Listen, Karla, this blah blah blah." If someone in government could help me understand why that is conflicting in my mind by explaining to me how they prioritize young people and this is how these cuts prioritize young people or this is how these investments help these young people, wonderful.

But please come explain it to me because I can't tell you how much I spend thinking about how this government says one thing is their priority and then they make cuts over here or they say something else. It doesn't make sense. I think that the mental health and physical health of young people is the best example; the best one.

I'm not going to speak to this much longer, but this motion is calling for increased funding for youth mental health services including school-based counsellors, community programs, and to table a report annually on access staffing levels and outcomes for students. I think that is such a good idea because when we collect information, that gives us something to go on.

Right now, we don't have information. It's just like gathering attendance information. We can't say we don't care about a certain reason kids might not be in school but say we care about all of the social and academic reasons kids might not be in school. There are a whole bunch of reasons, and we can't just say we're not going to look at bullying, but we'll look at all these other things. It doesn't make sense.

Again, another thing that doesn't make sense: Out of one side of their mouths, they're saying this, and their actions are something altogether different. You might hear a bit of skepticism in my voice. It is there; you hear it rightfully.

How long have I been asking for one school counsellor in every school only to find out – I mean, not only to find out; I’ve known for a long time – that’s still not a thing. If we’re saying we just can’t find school counsellors, do something to get them.

I’ve said this I’m sure 54 times in this House, when I did my master’s in counselling, it was my dream to be a counsellor. I thought it was never going to happen. I had a young family, and I was going to have to go off-Island to get my degree. And then UPEI and Acadia came together and they hosted a master’s in education in counselling together. Because of that, 20 counsellors started – I don’t remember if it was 18 or 19 that finished – but something like that just to show that it’s a priority.

But we just don’t see that over and over again. There’s so much to say on this, I think I’m going to leave it here for now.

But I guess to any young people that are listening that things are really hard; there are people who care. Find that safe adult in your life and get them to advocate for you. Stand beside them and get them to advocate for you. Fight for the services. They’re hard to come by. Talk to your school counsellors, talk to the people that you trust. I know that sometimes it happens that the people, let’s say, within your school that are there to support you – you don’t trust or you don’t feel they may have your best interests at heart; find someone who does, because I guarantee you, despite how you might feel about school, there are people in school who care about you deeply.

Speaking as a grade 1 teacher and beyond, I mean that from the bottom of my heart; they’re like a part of your family. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: When you’re a teacher or you work in a school, you are a part of every child and young person’s village who comes through. That never changes.

[3:00 p.m.]

I was at Kay’s Wholesale the other day. I was walking up to the cash, and I looked at this young woman. I was like, “Oh, my gosh. Do you remember me?” She was like, “You look familiar.” I said I can’t remember your name, but I taught you grade 1. She told me Reese was her name. She’s off to university; she’s graduating this year. Immediately, her whole family came back to my mind. I’ve been

meaning to reach out to her mom to say hi, but that’s just the power.... I know the former minister, Mark McLane, same thing; I taught his daughter grade 1. When a family that you’ve been a part of feels a loss, it’s a little bit extra heavy.

With that, of course, I support this motion. Anything we can do to expand mental health supports for youth and young people I would stand behind. When government decides to show that this is a priority, I am there with you, beside you.

With that, I support this motion 100 percent.

Thank you.

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

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

Like the member before me, Charlottetown-Victoria Park, I recognize the importance of this motion for the health and wellbeing of young Islanders, but also for the general health and wellbeing of our communities and indeed of our economy.

Children are the foundation of everything that happens, really. If you think about our job as succession planning and making sure that we leave the province in better shape than it was when we got it, then that starts by ensuring that our children – the most vulnerable in many ways, and the most influenced by their individual situations – are given the best opportunity they possibly can to succeed in life.

I look to some other jurisdictions for inspiration. But before I go there, I think I need to acknowledge some of the wonderful work that’s been done here by this provincial government and by our government federally in terms of offering particularly financial supports to Canadian families with children.

The Canada child benefit stands out, of course, as the main pillar of that – a federal program that was brought in, I don’t know, three or four years ago and really made a significant difference to the number of children in Canada who are living in poverty. Therefore, it made an enormous difference to their wellbeing, their immediate wellbeing, their food insecurity, their energy poverty, their ability to learn in school – all of

the things, the social determinants of health – which are alleviated when you give families with low average incomes the supports they need for their children to be given the best chance possible.

Of course, we now have a provincial child benefit, much smaller than the federal one, but – and I understand that. We're a small province, I get that. But it's good that we're chipping in and recognizing that supports to children are so vital in terms of, again, not just their individual wellbeing but looking more broadly at a societal level.

When I read this motion and I see the words of making sure that our children are supported in their mental health, that's a part, of course, of their wellbeing. Those before me have spoken from a place of lived experience that I do not have – through their prior work to being elected as an MLA in this House – of experiences that they have witnessed firsthand.

So often, the school system is being asked to pick up the pieces of children's lives who, through absolutely no fault of their own, have been fractured, damaged, and broken because of any number of situations that they may face at home.

I mentioned earlier that I looked to some other jurisdictions for inspiration. I'm quite sure that what happened here in Canada at a federal level and now at a provincial level was inspired, at least in part, by the Finnish experience where, right from the get-go, and I'm talking about prenatal supports – and hopefully we will have the opportunity to talk a little bit later on this afternoon when it comes to third party time in this House – to talk a little bit more about prenatal supports and how critical they are to giving children the best start possible.

[3:05 p.m.]

But right from the get-go in Finland, they ensure that no child is left behind. There are financial supports for parents and families. There are supports for children with special needs where they identify it at a much earlier stage than we do here.

I mean, we look at the statistics of some of the children in our school system who are struggling with mental health, anxiety, depression, and also those who may be on the spectrum undiagnosed, and we don't always catch those things early

enough. That's a disservice to the children. It's a disservice to the teachers, the EAs and TAs in the classroom, and it's a disservice to the families – and indeed, to our whole community.

So, we could take some lessons from other places who make sure that those interceptions happen early because of proper funding and programs that are in place that are fully supported. Not only is it the right thing to do for those children's mental health and wellbeing, but it's the right thing in terms of putting money up front.

It's a cost – of course it's a cost – but the benefits that come from that are not only in terms of the wellbeing of the children; there are benefits to the entire society in which those children will grow up and become the leaders. Because those investments are made early, the potential problems which are brewing from birth or before birth are given the best chance to be dealt with in the most effective way possible.

I think of the 2021 report by our public health office here on Prince Edward Island on the social determinants of health and how Prince Edward Island – and things have changed here. It was only five years ago, but things have definitely changed here.

Back then, we were a relatively poor province. The average income for families here was far below the national average. We've got a much higher rate of chronic diseases here. There were implications of the poverty that existed here in terms of food insecurity; 25 percent of children lived with food insecurity. Energy poverty, where families are spending far more than they should just to keep their families comfortable.... All of these things are indicators that Island children are faced with some struggles that are beyond those of perhaps other provinces.

I do, of course, support this motion entirely. I appreciate the official opposition bringing it forward. I also appreciate the words of the mover and the seconder from last week, I think it was, that we debated this.

I look forward to – hopefully we'll come to a vote on this. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Might need the podium for this. I don't have any notes for this, but I'm going to respond to the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park and her comment to me that – what do I know about trauma?

What do I know about trauma? I can talk a little bit about what I know about trauma and what we're doing in our school system for trauma.

When I was seven years old, I lost my mother to cancer. Before I was married, before I had children, when I was 21, I lost my father to cancer. At 21, I became the primary caregiver for two intellectually challenged older siblings, one of which I'm the caretaker for and the primary caregiver for in Colville Manor, the other of which I found dead on his apartment floor. I had done wellness checks on him every couple of days and I didn't see him on New Year's Day, so I went down to check on him, and I found that he had succumbed to a cardiac arrest. I lost both my mother-in-law and father-in-law at very young ages.

[3:10 p.m.]

I became a paramedic, I became a funeral director and embalmer, and I've got a lot of experience in trauma-informed care and training from both of those programs.

Speaker: Minister, can you adjourn debate with a seconder?

[Interjection]

Speaker: No, I'm going to speak to that in a second.

Can you adjourn debate with a seconder, please?

Hon. R. Croucher: I'll adjourn debate, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability. Thank you.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Members, upon looking at rule 22(2)(s), in fact, four o'clock is written in the rules, and so cannot be extended to 4:05 as I previously stated. Sorry for any confusion that had caused, but I think I did make my point.

Orders Other Than Government

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

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the 28th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 28, *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*, Bill No. 106, ordered for second reading.

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

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*, Bill No. 106, read a second time.

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

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'd like to call upon the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*.

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

M. MacFarlane: I do, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Could I ask you to state your name and your title for Hansard?

Dr. Kay Dingwell: I'm Dr. Kay Dingwell. I'm an emergency physician from Prince County Hospital in Summerside.

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

M. MacFarlane: Please, thank you, just briefly.

Bill 106, which is before us, is similar to a bill that I had brought a couple of years ago, with a little difference that I will summarize in a minute.

What the bill purports to do a couple of things: to reduce the administrative burden on medical practitioners by eliminating the requirement for medical certificates, commonly referred to as sick notes, from the *Employment Standards Act*, as sick leave is permitted under subsection 22.2 of the act. So, specifically with respect to the allotment of sick days as guaranteed by the legislation.

[3:15 p.m.]

Secondly, the benefit to medical providers by removing that requirement, and also the benefit to Islanders as a whole to avoid having to attend in doctors' offices, nurse practitioners' offices, emergency rooms, and for the burden and the potential exposure of sickness for getting a medical certificate – also, again, known as a sick note.

I think it's important to note that the *Employment Standards Act* is clear that workers are entitled to a certain number of paid and unpaid sick days. That is a statutorily granted guarantee under our legislation to employees that their employer must provide up to three sick days per year paid. It's up to three sick days paid if you work for three years and three unpaid sick days if you, I believe, are beyond three months with the continuous employment. Those are the days that are guaranteed to workers in Prince Edward Island.

I guess to put it practically, an employee calls up, calls the boss in the morning, says they can't come in, they're sick. Well, if you're within your allotted days of paid or unpaid sick days,

that's it. That's as far as the discussion needs to go. That is in statute.

My concern that I had a couple of years ago, that I continue to have today, is the requirement to put workers through that process on a heavily burdened health care system when we have – under legislation in this House that's passed and is in law – guaranteed sick days for our employees. That's a primary concern for me. It just seems to me to make common sense.

I can get in to the consultation – perhaps there will be a question on that – or the jurisdictional scan. Happy to speak to that as well.

Before I turn the floor over to Dr. Dingwell, the only change to this bill from the previous bill that I had on the floor is a clarification under subsection (9) which makes it clear and concise that where an employee requests a leave of absence, an employer shall not require the employee to provide a medical certificate confirming that the absence was due to illness or injury because the previous bill I had didn't provide that clarity. It simply left some ambiguity. This new bill would swap out the current language in subsection (9) of the bill to make it clear that an employer shall not request a sick note for the sick days that are guaranteed by our legislation.

With that, did you wish to add to the discussion?

Dr. Kay Dingwell: I have a few remarks. I wanted to thank you for inviting me back to the floor of the Legislature, and the Greens' caucus for bringing this forward again.

This is an issue near and dear to my heart as an emergency physician, but also as someone who's been at the emergency department at midnight needing a sick note to take a day off work from a call centre in Charlottetown.

Today, we're here to discuss a bill that's going to make a very small but very important change to the *Employment Standards Act*, which I hope can be part of this government's expressed desire to work with physicians in addressing our concerns around the administrative burden we face.

The administrative burden on physicians is growing by the year and is continuously cited as the most important – or one of the most important – causes of burnout across all specialties. The health system is continually

tasked with taking on jobs for which it was not designed, and eliminating these inappropriate demands is a critical part of changing the trajectory that we find ourselves on.

Work notes for minor illness may seem like a very small thing. To many people, it seems very reasonable that an employer should request verification of an illness, of an employee being sick, to avoid abuse of the system. The problem is that a work note verifies absolutely nothing about their illness. For routine illnesses like coughs, migraines, or gastroenteritis, we are doing absolutely nothing to confirm that this individual is suffering from one of the commonplace miseries that each of us will face from time to time.

[3:20 p.m.]

They're giving us the exact same information that would give to their employer, and then we're writing a note saying they shouldn't go to work that day. The note reflects only that a request was made. There is absolutely nothing about my expertise as a physician that is required to tell someone that they have a stomach bug and should keep their germs at home. I believe them.

Each time someone with one of these illnesses presents to a health care setting for a work note, they are exposing vulnerable Islanders to highly communicable illness or, far to often due to the difficulty of rapidly accessing any sort of episodic care for low-acuity concerns, these individuals go to work sick. They go to work in our food processing, they go to work in our child care facilities, and they go to work sick in our health care facilities. In part because of this, we see outbreaks of communicable illness that should have been prevented.

This past winter we saw outbreaks of influenza and infectious gastroenteritis in community care facilities. In the same shift, I would be dealing with multiple frail, elderly residents of these facilities and also fielding requests from the employees of these facilities for work notes to stay home with the same symptoms.

Continuing to allow this is simply bad public health policy. Beyond that but also a critical concern to Islanders: every individual presenting to an emergency department or a walk-in clinic or signing on to Maple – or if they're lucky enough to have one, their primary care practitioner's clinic – requesting a note for a day

off work represents the expenditure of public health dollars and the use of public health care resources for the purposes of enforcing employee attendance policies.

Put plainly, it is not our job to police employee attendance or act as a barrier to adults choosing to use their own judgment to take a sick day that they are entitled to, nor is it the responsibility of Island taxpayers to pay for the inappropriate use of their health care system. Minor illness is simply a foreseeable part of life. Everyone gets sick from time to time, and they should be supported in making the safe and reasonable decision to stay home when they're sick.

It is for these reasons and many more that the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Canadian Medical Association, and many provincial and territorial medical associations recommend against the practice of work notes for minor illness.

The purpose of our public health system, which I am very proud to be a part of, is to protect and promote the wellbeing and health of Islanders. Continuing to allow the use of taxpayer dollars and overburdened public health resources to allow employers to externalize the cost of employee attendance management or to create barriers so burdensome that Islanders are forced to go to work sick, is bad for Islanders and perpetuates unreasonable administrative demands on health professionals.

I urge you to pass this bill and demonstrate to Island physicians that our concerns around the administrative burden are being heard and to show Islanders that this government will take rational steps to improve their access to the health care they deserve when they truly need it.

Thank you.

Chair: Now, is it the pleasure of the committee to have this open for general questions? Alright.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, promoter, for bringing this forward. Thank you, doctor, for coming in again.

I just have a couple of questions. Refresh my memory because I didn't know this was coming today. You mentioned, promoter, it was three and three – three paid, three unpaid. Do you

need a doctor's note for each single day, or if it's days consecutive?

M. MacFarlane: It's up to the employer presently to determine what it is. It's not mandatory; the word "may" is used in the current legislation. The way it's worded now, when an employee requests a leave of absence under this section that is three consecutive calendar days in length, the employer may require the employee to provide a sick note.

Hon. H. Perry: So, just to be clear, it's not just for one single day off, right? It has to be three consecutive?

M. MacFarlane: It could be for one day off.

Hon. H. Perry: It could be for one day off, okay. I listened to the bill – actually, I think I was probably chairing at that time, and I.... I'm just going to say I'm going to support it.

Anyway, that's all I have to say. Thank you.

[3:25 p.m.]

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you very much, Chair.

I do want to thank the promoter, and the stranger, Dr. Dingwell. Thank you very much for bringing this forward. I'll tell you, promoter, since you tabled this amendment, I've gone and tried to get the deepest knowledge I could of the *Employment Standards Act*.

I have a number of questions, and Chair, if there are other people on the list, by all means you can put me back on. The first question I have for you hon. member is, can you explain to me, because that's like when I met with my staff and I've met with the department, and I said, "Okay, let's play out all the different scenarios". So, can you explain to me like in real life, how this would be?

Because I would use the example of someone who, let's say they've been off for three consecutive days, and then the employer – because it's 100 percent up to the employer, phones and says, "You know what, I'm going to need you to provide a sick note". So, can you give me like the real-life situation on this? Just so I'm clear, because I've had it explained to me

a few times and I want to make sure I'm absolutely clear.

M. MacFarlane: Sure. So, the law presently does obligate employers to provide, over a certain period of time, three years, three paid sick days. So, what the bill would do would eliminate the requirement for an employer to demand a sick note for the statutorily guaranteed sick days that the employees are allowed to have.

Those accumulate over three years, those paid sick days. If the three days of paid sick days are gone because the employee calls in sick for three consecutive days, those paid days are gone and the employee at that point has to go into the unpaid section of the legislation.

I think right at that point, if an employee is, I guess to use the word that's been used before, abusing the system, they're abusing it to their own detriment because their three paid days are gone and they're into unpaid days at that point. So, if it continues beyond the three unpaid days, then the bill doesn't speak to that. The bill only speaks to the three paid and the three unpaid sick days, which would be the maximum allotment available to the employee under the *Employment Standards Act*.

Hon. Z. Bell: Okay thank you. I remember when this bill was debated the last time, and I think there was a lot – you used the word abuse – and I think there was a lot of discussion on that the last time; I'm going to get to that. I guess my quick question off the top is, you mentioned in your preamble, promoter, is the jurisdictional scan; can you tell me your jurisdictional scan, please?

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, we reached out to a number of organizations both in 2024, both before that, when the *Employment Standards Act* was being amended before I got elected, like that was a year or two before I got elected, our office did extensive consultation. We did it again in 2024 when I brought the bill the first time. I did it again this spring when we brought the bill forward the second time.

We reached out to non-profit, we reached out to all the Chambers of Commerce, we reached out, of course, to your department, minister, Federations of Labour, health charities, unions. So, this bill doesn't speak to collective agreements or collective bargaining on union side, only under the *Employment Standards Act*.

It was interesting to note a bit of a shift, minister, with respect to the business community, and I shared the Chamber of Commerce survey results. The Greater Charlottetown Chamber of Commerce did a survey of 48 members who responded to the survey and it's interesting to see that actually, a majority of members, 58 percent, expressed support for this amendment that I'm bringing forward. So, a majority of the chamber members, 45.8 percent strongly supported the amendment, 12.5 somewhat supported, and 17 percent were neutral.

[3:30 p.m.]

So, when we look at the business community, which I think is where some concerns previously fell when I brought this bill the first time, we now have 75 percent of respondents to this Chamber of Commerce poll who either support it or were neutral with respect to this bill, and only 25 percent expressed opposition. I think that's critical to note because there are really three different facets to the bill. There's the medical community that Dr. Dingwell spoke eloquently about and the impact on the medical community. There's the worker community, then there's the employer community.

It's interesting to see over time even the employer community recognizing that the current arrangement of requiring sick notes for minor illness for minor absence is really not a direction that makes a lot of sense.

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you for referencing the chamber survey, hon. member; thank you for sending that along to me this afternoon.

I guess my quick question to you, just on my very brief knowledge of the survey, would you say that that is – I know it's a survey that was done – but would say that the 48 would be a fair representation?

M. MacFarlane: I would say that when the survey went out – I don't have a number on how many received it, so I guess the answer, minister, is I can't say if it's a fair representation or not based on I don't know how many it went to.

But I think the results speak for themselves. The chamber has taken a neutral position on it but I know I had a great conversation with them and I think when the bill was explained as to the extent of what it will do, the three paid sick days and three unpaid days, I think a lot of eyes opened up and realized that we're not eliminating the right of an employer to demand a medical certificate for extensive absence from the office.

I think when we get beyond these three days in the legislation, it's fair game for the employer to ask and demand the sick note. We're simply dealing with statutorily guaranteed sick days that every employee in Prince Edward Island outside of a collective agreement is entitled to.

Hon. Z. Bell: Two things: I disagree with that. I think that with the elimination of the requirement for a sick note... That was just one of fears, that employer – and using the chamber as the best example....

The reason why I asked a question on if you thought it was a good sample size – and again, I know it's a survey and it was done in April; businesses are busy and they're dealing with a lot of things – 48 members did respond of 1,000, right. It's about 0.5 percent.

Just sticking with that same thing, you mentioned that 58 percent supported your amendment, meaning that roughly about 42 percent were either opposed or didn't have an opinion on it. In the summary though, the members who opposed the change generally emphasized the risk of abuse and increased absenteeism, loss of a management tool, and the need for safeguards.

I'm going to go back to my original point where I think you and I might disagree on that is that I think that with this, it does do exactly what the members of the chamber who said they didn't support your amendment is that it creates that risk of abuse and also the risk of increased absenteeism, the loss of a management tool for an employer, and the need for safeguards.

I'm just kind of curious about your thoughts on that.

M. MacFarlane: I think that everyone who received the survey had an opportunity to respond. Those who chose not to respond, we can extrapolate maybe they fit into the neutral category because they didn't bother responding.

I think the ones who responded actually had an interest in responding to the survey and sharing their thoughts and perspectives on it. I can't speak to those who didn't but there was an opportunity for those who didn't.

Those who did, the numbers are clear – 75 percent are either in favour or are neutral on it and the **ones response**. You're welcome to jump in if there's anything that pops into your mind, Dr. Dingwell but....

Dr. Kay Dingwell: There's evidence that supporting paid sick days for employees and allowing them to use these in their own judgement and the good judgement of the adult citizens of our province.

We have, from other jurisdictions, evidence that this actually reduces overall absenteeism because we're reducing the amount of sickness present in workplaces. It's good for business to support employees exercising their good judgement to stay home when they're sick.

[3:35 p.m.]

Regardless of whether there are concerns around employees using their legislative sick days, it still doesn't make it the job of the health care system to use our resources to write notes that employers want. I'm there to take care of sick people. I'm not there to tell them whether or not they should be at work with a routine, foreseeable illness that everyone experiences.

This isn't significant disability that does require medical assessment. This is people coming into my emergency department with gastroenteritis, making other people sick because they just need a piece of paper that verifies absolutely nothing. There is absolutely nothing I am doing in writing that note that prevents abuse of sick days – nothing.

Hon. Z. Bell: Maybe I'll just get back to – and Dr. Dingwell, you commented on that – the jurisdictional scan because I don't know if I got the full answer. I know, hon. member, you had mentioned that you had spoken with some different groups and everything.

Maybe talk about that jurisdictional scan if you don't mind, please.

M. MacFarlane: Sure. The responses that I received were overwhelmingly positive that it was time to make this move and eliminate this

burden. As Dr. Dingwell has said, there is no substantive assessment that goes in to the analysis of writing the sick note.

I think we've already touched on all the reasons why there was abundant favour of the bill. I won't repeat them in the interest of time. The response from the union side was a little disappointment that this was not going to speak to members of collective agreements. Not going to go there with this bill; it's beyond the scope of what this bill can do. That would be a whole other business to be considered down the road.

I don't know if there's anything specific, minister, that you want me to speak to, but I'd be repeating myself to simply repeat the feedback that I have received from the organizations.

Hon. Z. Bell: I'm glad you brought up that piece about the unions, because I had a chance to speak with the Federation of Labour recently.

I'm going to ask you a question first, and then I'll follow back into the question on the Federation of Labour. Again, I really do appreciate – we're in a weird place with this because we're in the current *Employment Standards Act*, which you have amended, but we also have the new *Employment Standards Act*, which is yet to be proclaimed.

I guess my question would be, hon. member: Why did you just choose to amend the current *Employment Standards Act*?

M. MacFarlane: Well, the current *Employment Standards Act* is the current act that's the law on the books governing the province right now. At this point, what I'm amending is the law that exists in the province that employers and employees are abiding by.

Hon. Z. Bell: That's, again, one of the reasons I would find it hard to support it because of the fact that – when I stepped into this role, hon. member, one of the first questions I asked was: “When are we proclaiming the *Employment Standards Act*? When do we proclaim this act? We passed it.”

My fear is I think there might be some confusion created if we pass your amendment because what happens is it's going to do one of two things. It's either going to slow down the process for –

[Interjection]

Chair: The hon. member has the floor.

Hon. Z. Bell: It's either going to slow down the process for the proclamation of the new *Employment Standards Act* or it's going to create confusion (a) amongst the business community and (b) amongst employees. I guess that's where we may disagree, but I'm curious to know you're thoughts on that.

Do you think that there would be some confusion created because, for example, if the House decided to pass your amendment and then I proclaim the new act which goes from three days to five days, there would be that confusion amongst the workplace and the workers?

[3:40 p.m.]

I know, sorry, that was not a very good way to ask a question, hon. member, but – I'm sorry, Chair – I hope you understand the gist of it though.

M. MacFarlane: I get it, minister. I get where you're at. I mean, fundamentally, I think government will either support this bill based on the benefits it gives to workers, to the medical community primarily and doctors like Dr. Dingwell, or it won't. I don't think it is a substantive or sincere criticism of the bill to simply say that it could potentially cause confusion. That's not the issue here.

Governments have amended non-proclaimed bills before. In fact, we recently saw it here in this sitting when government amended the *Government Reorganization Act* and actually amended the *Employment Standards Act* both as it currently existed and as it is yet to be proclaimed. That bill was actually amended, again, as it currently is on the books and as it is yet to be proclaimed. So, it is entirely possible for government to do exactly what I am seeking to do with this bill.

Show your support for what the bill purports to do by passing it at this time and amend the yet to be proclaimed *Employment Standards Act*. I find it difficult to accept the argument that that will somehow take an undue amount of time to process that.

We don't know when that bill is going to be proclaimed, minister. I don't know whether you said it's going to be this summer or not. I'm still

waiting a year for a bill that I had passed last spring on protecting farmland; that bill has still not been proclaimed. There is the bill that the Premier pushed through on eliminating trade barriers between provinces. That bill was supposed to get put through by July 1st last year has still not been proclaimed.

I think this is an opportunity for government to either support the bill and what it does and the benefits it provides, or to not, and work it out.

Hon. Z. Bell: Again, I think we may fundamentally disagree on that. You asked why government didn't do it and I asked you the same question, why you wouldn't amend both acts, both the current – what we're using, the *Employment Standards Act* – as well as the new act.

I'm going to go back to that comment I made with the Federation of Labour because a lot of work went into this, hon. member – into the new *Employment Standards Act*. There was a two-year review. That two-year review, from my knowledge, did not recommend the elimination. They recommended, I believe, the move from three to five days – consecutive days where an employer “may” – and think that's the biggest message that I do want to reiterate is that...

Referencing, again, the Chamber of Commerce, there are some businesses that don't ask for them. But I still feel that the ones that mentioned the needs for the safeguards that there has to be some sort of a tool for an employer to ask for an employee.

And, again, this was the one that I kind of formulated in my own mind. Hopefully I'm right in saying it but, for example, if you have a small business that has maybe three or four employees and there's an individual who is working and – they need X amount of employees to operate. One of the employees phones in saying they're not feeling well; they've got to take a sick day. No worries. That happens for four or five consecutive days. Then the employer goes and says, “Hey, employee Joe, I need you to come back, and if you can't, I need you to provide a sick note or a medical note.” I'm still going back to that.

I don't know what my question on that is, but....

M. MacFarlane: Minister, we're talking three days, we're talking three paid sick days. We've heard from Dr. Dingwell that it is not her job or

her colleagues' job to police employees who are receiving the benefit of three guaranteed paid sick days that your government put into legislation.

[3:45 p.m.]

This is a right that you've given to workers of three paid sick days. If you weren't prepared to actually allow the workers and trust the workers in our province to have the benefit of those three sick days, then why did you put it in the legislation in the first place?

Hon. Z. Bell: Sorry, I'm going to go back to my question originally about the unions because that one of their biggest pieces. One of the first questions asked to me when I met with them was: When are you proclaiming the new *Employment Standards Act*? Because you talked about the unions not having access to this.

I guess, again, I think that this would delay that whole process. If we do pass your amendment, do you not see that there would be a delay in the proclamation of the new *Employment Standards Act*?

M. MacFarlane: I guess that delay would be up to government to minimize that delay. That's not my job; that's government's job. I mean, unfortunately, we see lots of delays with government that appear inexplicable. This should not be an undue delay. If this bill is put into law, it amends the existing legislation at it is. Carry it forward under the amended act – under the yet-to-be proclaimed act.

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for joining us today on the floor. I have a couple of questions. I would have a little bit of a background on some of this bill and the amendment.

I think that the first thing that I'd like to say is that it is really important – and I think it's the job of everybody – to ensure that employers/employees and our really important health system does not have confusion on this, because I think it was mentioned that that wasn't really as important. I really think it is important that everyone knows what to do and what their rights are. One hundred percent, I agree with that.

The question I have is a little bit around where we went with unions – I can absolutely appreciate that, when our long-term care facilities are in those gastro and the respiratory situations and then staff incur that – how this bill will change that for the unionized employees that are in there when unions would have collective agreements around when they need sick notes.

M. MacFarlane: Sorry, if I heard the question correctly, the bill doesn't to speak to anything under the *Labour Act*.

Hon. J. Redmond: I guess I'm curious on – do we know or have you done any insight into what the balance or the demand would be around sick notes from those types of situations compared to small businesses in the workforce?

M. MacFarlane: It would be up to the bargaining agents at the table for various unions to negotiate under collective bargaining provisions that might be similar to what the bill would provide.

Hon. J. Redmond: Sorry, I think I need to reframe it. What I was thinking – and I'm just trying to process this in my head here now – is where the demand would be coming from for sick notes.

If it's coming after one day of sick, potentially that is a collective bargaining – an employee under a unionized work environment possibly. Anyone that is outside of those that work under the *Employment Standards Act*, there wouldn't be allocation from an employer with the ability to ask for a sick note after one day. Should that be happening?

I know it's absolutely 100 percent not the rule of our health system to call labour relations, but it could give direction to do that. Employers cannot ask for sick notes prior to three days consecutively off, so it's a little confusing for me to hear that that is happening, and disappointing that that could be a thing. Outside of a unionized collective agreement, we would have no ability to change that currently.

I'm just trying to envision how this amendment will work within that workforce.

M. MacFarlane: I'm not entirely clear on the minister's question, Chair, but if it's to do with a mixed workplace where there's unionized and non-unionized members, if that's the question,

then the bill will apply to the non-unionized members, and it won't apply to the unionized members.

[3:50 p.m.]

Hon. J. Redmond: I guess my other question would be is if it is removed currently, would there be mechanisms to prevent employers from asking for a sick note after one day if there's no regulation or requirement in place to or not to?

M. MacFarlane: I'm sorry, I'm going to need the question to be put again please.

Hon. J. Redmond: I'm trying to think about – would there be moments in time...? Currently, it has been stated that there are employees going in that have been instructed to get a sick note after one day. If they're not under a collective agreement and this amendment goes into play, would there be potential of that happening from any employer if there's no stipulation to say that you can't unless you have three sick days?

M. MacFarlane: The bill would eliminate the ability of the employer to demand a sick note for any days under the Section 22.2, which is the maximum of three paid and three unpaid sick days after three years. I guess to answer the minister's question, it would remove that – the ability of the employer to seek that note, which I think is established.

Hon. J. Redmond: Just switching gears slightly, thinking about industry and the workers and all of the elements at play is, what are your thoughts on the timeline in envisioning the change for this amendment for businesses, as well as with a new ESA coming into play, the timeline to change?

M. MacFarlane: This bill would come into force on Royal Assent if it should pass and it would be effective at that time. Then there would need to be the amendment, depending on government's plans to proclaim the amended act, then there would be work to do to amend that amended act. But for the purposes of the bill that's before us, it would come into force on Royal Assent.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, member, for bringing it, and thank you, Dr. Dingwell, for being in.

I completely agree if we can make your job easier –

M. MacFarlane: Here's your chance, here's your chance.

T. DesRoches: Well, I'll get to that, member. I have the floor to speak to it. For me, I come in here this morning, down to the building, with a different mindset. I had three or four people send me messages and say you have to support this because in Summerside, there are some employers that require sick notes after one day.

But then when I looked into it, this bill doesn't touch it. What you're asking to pass, these people that asked me to support this to help them are under collective bargaining agreement and this doesn't help. They're still going to be in the same boat. If we pass the bill, they're going to be thinking, "Oh, great," and then they go to work after being home sick for a couple of days and, "Where's your sick note? You know you've got to have one." Well, now, they're over it and then they have to go back. I just a problem with that.

But you got me off track when you said that. Why did we only do a jurisdictional scan with Charlottetown chamber? Summerside chamber is vibrant and that's pretty dear to me and I'm pretty sure it's pretty dear to you, member, and that's where I got these complaints from.

M. MacFarlane: If that's the question, I met with Mitch Martin and had a great conversation about it. I'm not sure if his members were included in the survey or not, but it was within his ability to do a similar survey if his members were not included in it, but yeah, they were consulted.

T. DesRoches: Sorry, I think I misunderstood that, member. You met with Mitch Martin, the executive director, but you don't know if the membership was included or not?

M. MacFarlane: I didn't meet with the membership. I met with Mitch and reviewed the bill with him. He expressed an interest in it. He left the meeting and what he did after the meeting, I can't say what he did or who he consulted with.

T. DesRoches: You met with the chamber, but you didn't any results from it; you didn't follow up and see if he met with his members because – is that what I'm hearing?

M. MacFarlane: I don't know whether his members were included in the survey that came in on the letterhead from the Charlottetown Chamber of Commerce, but we all met together as a group. If he was then to take it, I don't what Mitch's intention was after the meeting, but it was within his purview to talk to members and respond because he knew the bill was going forward.

[3:55 p.m.]

I can say I did not hear a strong opposition or any opposition from my meeting with the Charlottetown or Summerside chamber. Their position that they took on it was that they were not going to take a position for or against the bill.

T. DesRoches: My role before this, I came from a company that the day I started, they gave me 10 sick days and I didn't have to turn in a note, which is great, and I applaud them for being a company that did that. I was under the understanding now that all companies out there with the new legislation, nothing new, with the legislation that's in there, they don't have to present a sick note for up to three days unless it's under collective agreement.

M. MacFarlane: I can't speak to the *Labour Act*, the bill doesn't speak to the *Labour Act* in collective bargaining, the bill speaks to the *Employment Standards Act*, and sick notes are currently at the discretion of the employer to demand and to burden our health care system and doctors like Dr. Dingwell.

T. DesRoches: If we were looking to take the burden off Dr. Dingwell and all other doctors, which if we can take some burden off, great; why didn't we include everybody in this? Why didn't we put a proclamation in with the unions, with the collective agreements? Like I'm being told the new one that's coming out very shortly has.

M. MacFarlane: I can't speak to that, I can only speak to the bite sized pieces that I'm able to chew off, and the *Employment Standards Act* is the start of where this could go, and the collective bargaining agreement process could then rely on the precedent set by the ESA to

eliminate the sick notes; and I do understand that that's often where the bargaining agents will turn to when negotiating new collective agreements, is to point to the rights and privileges available to workers outside the collective agreements.

So, to answer your question, member, the potential is there to benefit unionized workforce.

T. DesRoches: So, the potential is there to benefit unionized workforce, but we're not going directly to benefit them because it's not a bite sized piece to take after?

M. MacFarlane: If I had any thought and hope that government would support this the second time – if I had the time and the ability to consult with the unions, and all of the people involved under the *Labour Act* I would have. This would be the start, member, that would set the precedent and it's in the ability of government to do that today, to set the precedent, set the wheels rolling, to eliminate this burden for a large segment – and I know you said you heard from people who were under collective agreements, I'm fairly confident you would have also heard, member, from people who are not under collective agreements who see the value in this legislation as well. So, let's not exclude them just because it doesn't include everybody.

T. DesRoches: Just one last thing, just a comment on that, member; my phone is there and I'll table anything in it. I heard from six people that are under collective agreement, all I believe are in the same company that sent me messages on this, and I didn't have any from anybody else.

M. MacFarlane: Well, that should be an indication to you, member, of the desire in the workforce community, whether it be labour side or non-union side, and we've heard from the medical community, that this is a direction we need to go.

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you very much, Chair.

I do want to ask your stranger a quick question. With the new *Employment Standards Act*, one of the points was it was moved from three days to five days, with the expansion of the definition of a medical practitioner to include different – because you did talk about it earlier on in your

comments, Dr. Dingwell, about where you have to see people to be able to write them a sick note.

So, do you agree with the new *Employment Standards Act* that broadening that definition to allow more qualified medical practitioners to be able to provide that note; do you agree with that?

Dr. Kay Dingwell: I think that making an inappropriate use of the health care system available to more people doesn't make it an appropriate use of the health care system.

[4:00 p.m.]

Hon. Z. Bell: Well, I'd ask the same question to the promoter, and I don't know if the answer would be the same, but when you were meeting with

Chair: Sorry, members. It is four o'clock, so we will have to report progress.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism, that the 18th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 18, *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act*, Bill No. 20, in committee.

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. Z. Bell: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act*.

Promoter, do you have a stranger you'd like to bring on to the floor?

Hon. D. Compton: I do.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Can you please state your name and your title for Hansard?

Lynn Trainor: Lynn Trainor, senior legislative applied research analyst.

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

Hon. D. Compton: No, I think we just continue on from yesterday.

Chair: Okay. It was the pleasure of the committee for it to be open for general questions. Is that still the case?

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: I've got basically the premise, I guess, of the bill and what you're trying to achieve and accomplish. I question whether it's really going to achieve and accomplish much but I did have one question that came to mind just – how do you define an Islander in the respect that – my guess was, and it's a guess and maybe this legislation can clarify that a bit more – that you have to be a resident of PEI for six months plus a day and file your income tax here. Is that – maybe you can just shed some clarification on that for me, please.

[4:05 p.m.]

Lynn Trainor: Under the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* currently, which is already defined, a resident person is a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident within the meaning of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* in Canada and has resided and maintained the person's principal residence in the province for not less than 365 days during the 24-month period preceding the day that the acquisition of the property.

R. Henderson: It's 65 over two years, sorry to interrupt.

Lynn Trainor: Yes. So then, from that, the key phrase in that is your "principal residence." Then you have to go back to the definition of what your principal residence is, and that's where the tax part comes in. So, your principal residence means the usual place where the person makes the persons home, and for the purposes of this act, means the person's residence in the province in which they file their taxes.

R. Henderson: So, generally the comment I made – six months plus a day; just have to do it for two years and file their income tax here. That's it in a nutshell?

Lynn Trainor: Well, it's actually 365 days over two years.

R. Henderson: Okay. But am I saying it wrong? I mean, it sounds like we're saying the same definition, but am I saying it wrong that six months plus a day, just do it for two years, but if you live for 365 days, you've obviously met the criteria right off the bat.

Lynn Trainor: Right, provided that you are also claiming...

R. Henderson: ...this is your principal residence when you file your income tax.

Lynn Trainor: Yeah, under your income tax as an Islander.

R. Henderson: So, when we go back to what I'm seeing in general terms, and I go back to O'Leary, that is what people are doing already. This is why I kind of go back – I'm not so sure what's really being changed here in saying.... So, just people don't live here for whatever – but I'm just finding most of them are coming here, that are become residents of PEI in definition of living here, but they meet the criteria after six months in two years' time. You don't even have to be a Canadian citizen, really.

Lynn Trainor: Well, we're not proposing to change any of the residency requirements through this bill. So, this bill – to back up – what it is doing, it is catching land or real property – I should say real property – that was previously exempt from the act.

If you look at the definition, historically there's always been this exemption there for....

[Interjection]

Lynn Trainor: No, this exemption for – anything that's an acre or under, that's located in a municipality with an official plan, is not land. When you look at the act as a whole, that real property is not regulated under the act.

So again, looking at the exemption, historically there's always been an exemption there, but over time, it has changed. In the beginning – in the '80s, say – land didn't include real property in a municipality exceeding an acre, and at that time, a municipality was defined as Summerside, Charlottetown, and a town incorporated under the village services act. Again, as that changed, it went on to what it is now, where we say that it is land – an acre or under in a municipality with an official plan.

Because of those changes over the year – at one time, real property that was not regulated under the act would be properties in Charlottetown, Summerside and a handful of towns. But now when you look at the municipal boundaries map, that collective footprint, if you will, of land that is not regulated under the act is growing and growing.

If you look at Queens County, for example, that would stretch from like Rice Point all the way to the North Shore, and so on and so forth. Anything in that area, one acre or under, is not regulated under the act.

So, you could, in theory, buy unlimited amounts; you'd never have to apply or have a limit.

R. Henderson: I appreciate that explanation, especially the better definition of the Islander and explaining that, so I don't have any other questions at this point.

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

[4:10 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: Yeah, thanks very much. Just a few questions there.

This bill – we debated it before, and I remember we talked about a consultation piece. Did it change from the time that it was on the floor? I don't remember if it was in the spring or the fall.

Lynn Trainor: Last spring.

G. McNeilly: Yeah. What changed?

Lynn Trainor: It's the same bill.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Was it first brought for first reading in the spring? There were some consultation issues, I think. What happened was something changed in the bill. We had asked questions about consultation. Can you...?

Lynn Trainor: Yeah. I think what you may be referring to is initially when the bill went out for consultation, there was no provision for the first municipal property to be exempt. Therefore, any non-resident who was acquiring a municipal property was required to file an application with IRAC and get Executive Council approval.

Through the consultation – and we did general consultation and then directed consultation to the Real Estate Association, the Law Society, and stakeholders like that – the overwhelming issue that we heard was when we're recruiting health care workers, et cetera, the first thing they'd be looking at would be an application requirement. So, we exempted the first one before we brought the final bill to the House the first time.

G. McNeilly: Yeah, I appreciate that. I remember that was on my mind as I was thinking about that, too.

I look at Charlottetown; you can do a lot with one acre of property. Will this affect development? You could put four, eight – you could put a lot of units on one area, especially in downtown, if you were to buy that. Will that affect this in any way? If this comes in, will it prevent somebody from buying another property and developing that property to increase the housing stock?

Lynn Trainor: Basically, it doesn't look at what is on the property, although generally when you look at municipal properties, an acre or less is probably housing; that's how we kind of approached it.

But certainly, as a non-resident, if you were buying a second property that was an acre or less within the City of Charlottetown – you already had one – you would have to get approval for the acquisition of the second one regardless of what you were going to do with it.

Hon. D. Compton: Member, this covers land ownership versus land use. Again, as my stranger mentioned, purchasing that second acre or under an acre – it would have to be an application to IRAC for that second property if you are a non-resident. It has nothing to do with how you're going to use the property.

G. McNeilly: I know then you'd have to go back for.... I understand that, but I was just trying to figure out what that – because most people in the area would buy a property to develop in some kind of way with that thought process, but I understand that.

Can you table the consultation from Charlottetown and Summerside? Well, Charlottetown, obviously I'm a representative here. I just want to see what they had to say, or maybe just read it out.

Lynn Trainor: Other than what I had indicated earlier about the vast majority of the consultation focused on that first one, I don't really have it broken down in terms of areas where the consultation came from. In some cases we wouldn't know. But at the time that we did the consultation, we did get a lot of engagement on it although it was only two and a half weeks.

[4:15 p.m.]

We had shared it on our social media – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn – and all across the multiple pages operated by government. We did have about 14,000 imprints on the page, and then over 500 external downloads – outside of government, 500 external downloads of the document. And then, if you recall, it was covered on CBC and Ocean, and all of those. Media picked up on it and spoke to it, which you often don't get when you're doing consultation.

Basically, from talking to different colleagues – I know in Justice, for example, oftentimes they'll do consultation over a period of months. We had, I think, 53 submissions through the website posting. I understand that oftentimes they're lucky to get a dozen responses to consultation.

You can always wish for more consultation, but we felt like we got a pretty high level.

G. McNeilly: Thank you for that, but we only have so many municipalities. I would have thought that the department would have actually reached out and done formal consultations with the municipalities. I just went through this with the municipalities. I might have missed the department, but I reached out to all the municipalities. There's not that many of them in Prince Edward Island.

I just asked you about Charlottetown, and we just got 14,000 imprints. I want to know what the leaders said to this specifically, because it would've seemed like a natural place to talk to them.

Lynn Trainor: When we did the targeted consultation, we did reach out to all municipalities with official plans. So, every municipality – there are 29, I think, with official plans – the Federation of Municipalities, PEI Real Estate Association, the Law Society.... We can table all of the responses we got.

G. McNeilly: I want to know what Charlottetown said for right now, but I also want to know what the Federation of Municipalities said. Was that separated from there? What kind of feedback did they provide?

Lynn Trainor: To be frank, I can't recall off the top of my head, but certainly, they did make a submission and that would be included in the tabled documents.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair. Hi, nice to see you.

I'm going to ask a few questions about the process because as I understand it, an application comes in from a non-resident, and rather than the process that exists now under the LPA – whether it's inside a municipality or an unincorporated area or whatever – it would first go to IRAC, then they would make a recommendation to Executive Council, and then a decision would be made. But here, am I right that we're bypassing that IRAC stage of the process?

Lynn Trainor: No, and actually, I did hear that out in the public purview somewhere. If you look at the language in the bill, it's the same as what is existing now. Basically, in section 3 of the bill where we're talking about the acquisition of municipal property, it says: "A person who is not a resident person shall not own or acquire an interest in more than one municipal property unless the non-resident person first receives permission to do so from the Lieutenant Governor in Council."

If you look at the language in section 4 of the act – the act, not the bill – where it talks about where a non-resident has to apply through.... The language is identical. It's the same process. We'll have to develop an application form, and any individual who is a non-resident who is buying a second municipal property – fill out an application, go through IRAC, they'll make their recommendation, and it will go to Executive Council.

P. Bevan-Baker: I really appreciate you clarifying that because, like you, I had heard that this was a sort of shortening or that it was a different process. I'm actually quite relieved to hear.

[4:20 p.m.]

Having said that, there are – and it's been expressed many, many, many times in this House regarding the transparency and accountability of the decisions that are ultimately made. I'm wondering whether this will – is there anything – any language in the provision, in the amendments here, that are going to ensure that when a decision is made on that second lot or third lot or whatever, that the

public will have access to the rationale behind that decision?

Lynn Trainor: Yes. Basically, right now – you may have heard IRAC talk about their guiding principles. Government kind of sets the policy direction and provides them with guidance as to – if you look in section 8 of the act, it talks about how IRAC reviews the applications and makes their determination. It talks about assessment of the best use of the land – and this is, again, for land; what's existing now – the most effective manner of ensuring best land use, et cetera.

So, they have guiding principles that, although they're not published publicly currently, I understand from the folks at IRAC that they speak to them frequently. If they go to the Real Estate Association or they have a presentation, they talk about these guiding principles. They're not state secrets or anything, what's contained in there, into what they factor into their deliberations.

For the municipal property, it will be the same thing. Government will then establish the criteria by which a person could obtain a second municipal property and would provide that to them for guidance.

Under section 8(2)(c), the plan is for government to develop or amend IRAC's current guiding principles with respect to land, add in the guiding principles as to how they will make decisions with respect to municipal property, and then the plan is that that process will then be published under section 8.1. Then, both processes – the guidelines – will be public on municipal property and land.

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, I appreciate the explanation there. There's obviously considerable work to do in regulation here before the bill will actually be effective. That's just a passing comment, and if I'm wrong, I'd appreciate you correcting me on that.

But my question was not regarding the sort of high-level principles by which IRAC makes recommendations to Executive Council, but on a specific potential land purchase.

Currently, a lot of concern has been expressed from this side of the House regarding the inability of the public to see and understand why a particular recommendation – well, we never see the recommendations from IRAC. They go to Executive Council and disappear, and then

Executive Council makes a decision, and we don't know whether Executive Council decision is in alignment with what IRAC recommends or not, nor do we ever see the rationale and the justification for Executive Council making a decision on a particular purchase. That's with the existing law.

I don't hear anything – what you said there – which will change that level of transparency and accountability, but am I wrong on that?

Lynn Trainor: I don't know. That's a complicated....

P. Bevan-Baker: It is.

Hon. D. Compton: I would say probably, member, first, that what we're trying to address here is the issue of non-land – the way this would have been identified – because it's not in any way tracked as far as non-residents within a municipality who own one, two, three, four properties that are all under an acre, you know? They can buy, buy, buy, and it never goes to IRAC that non-residents are purchasing a number of homes, is really what we're getting at here.

[4:25 p.m.]

The concern was these homes – a lot of them are left vacant. The grass is not cut. There was really no purview as to the non-resident purchasing four or five or whatever number of homes if each one of them is a purchase of under an acre in a municipality.

So, that's kind of what we're trying to correct with this amendment.

P. Bevan-Baker: Presumably, there would, however, by bylaws within a municipality that would – for unsightly properties – that would deal with that sort of thing. But I appreciate the very focused nature of this amendment, or these sets of amendments, and what the inspiration for them, if I can use that word, is.

But I still see no mechanism in the amendments before us that are actually going to increase transparency at all to the public, and that's a disappointment to me. I think there's always an opportunity when you bring forward amendments to a bill to actually enforce like it used to be with IRAC where you could actually see what the recommendation was. You could also see eventually what the decision of

Executive Council was. It's a disappointment to me that that is not included in here, but I'm going to move on.

A municipality, obviously they have the official plan, they are the ones that would have drawn up the official in consultation with their residents of that municipality. Not every municipality has an official plan; I get that. But am I right in saying that the decision regarding whether or not the purchase by a non-resident is taken out of the hands of municipalities and will now sit with Executive Council, and that the municipalities don't have input in how that decision is made?

Lynn Trainor: We're conflating here land use and land ownership again. The *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* only deals with land ownership. Currently, whether you're in a municipality or outside a municipality, the municipality has no role to play, has never had a role to play with respect to a non-resident acquisition of property within the boundaries of the municipality.

If I'm a non-resident and I'm buying six acres in the City of Charlottetown, I need my IRAC approval because that is land and I'm acquiring over five acres, but the City of Charlottetown never has or never will have a say in whether or not it goes through IRAC.

Now, once I acquire – if I'm successful and get an approval and I acquire that land – and I want to do a commercial or whatever land use, then I go to the City of Charlottetown and go through the process to get approval for my desired use. Does that make sense?

P. Bevan-Baker: Yes, it does. I really appreciate and I apologize for conflating those two things, but your explanation there was crystal clear; thank you for that.

Minister, you mentioned that what we're really talking about here is the purchase of multiple houses within a municipality, or perhaps that was the catalyst that got this thing going. I represent a rural district, of course, but it also has a fairly large municipality, now the rural municipality of West River, which now has an official plan fairly recently adopted, but it's there.

But the concerns that have been brought to me – and this would be both within my own district of New Haven-Rocky Point but also province-wide – regarding non-resident land ownership are not regarding small parcels of land within

municipalities with official plans. It's more about the purchase of those large swaths of land most of the time outside the municipality because 70 percent or something of the land is unincorporated on PEI.

I'm wondering why government chose – this would be a question to the minister, I guess – why you chose the very narrow focus of this bill be on those acres, one acre or less within a municipality, rather than trying to do something that I hear is the major concern, which is the larger swaths of land outside of the municipalities.

Hon. D. Compton: I'll say I've only been minister for I guess two and a half months. This was already on the work plan as far as making the amendment.

[4:30 p.m.]

Again, I represent a rural area, and most of the parcels would be more than one acre as well, and I'm very concerned with land purchase by non-residents. All I'll say is I'm working on that and stay tuned.

Lynn Trainor: I'll also add, too, just to clarify: within the boundaries of a municipality, if you're real property of an acre and less, you are called a municipal property. Once you hit above the one acre, you are land. So, you are still covered under the act.

If you are a non-resident acquiring land within a municipality and you buy one and a half acres, and then three and a half acres, you're up to your five acres. Once you surpass that, you still need approval.

The goal, again, is to capture everything that is not currently captured under the act. That was the goal with the bill.

P. Bevan-Baker: I know in your explanation earlier about the breadth of the consultation that you did, you mentioned the PEI Real Estate Association, and I've spoken to a couple of realtors who have expressed concerns around this bill and the extra administration. I'm not defending or advocating their concerns, I'm just expressing them here on the floor of the House, that this might create an issue in terms of their businesses because it puts new roadblocks in place.

What was the general consensus, if I can put it that way? In the previous bill, we heard about a survey that went out. Do you know where the PEI Real Estate Association sits on this?

Lynn Trainor: Well, again, when the Real Estate Association was initially – the consultation bill that went out initially did not have the exemption for the first municipal property, so of course, their feedback was, “We’re recruiting workforce,” et cetera, et cetera. That was the gist of it.

So, until we got to the floor – like, we didn’t confirm with all of these individuals that we consulted with that, “Okay, we heard you; we’re changing.” And we did change. So, when the bill finally got to the floor, we felt that we addressed those issues. And again, those concerns were not about worrying about clients buying multiple properties. It was: you’re moving home; you’re recruiting someone; this is going to be unwelcome. We heard and responded and changed the bill before it got to the House. So, we felt like we addressed it because that was the primary concern with a lot of the consultation.

P. Bevan-Baker: Just one quick follow-up, please. I also spoke to some real estate agents after the change was made, and as far as I could gather, they were generally satisfied that it did address the concerns that they had brought. But did I hear you say there that you made a change based on the feedback they gave you, but you did not actually check back with them to see whether that change did satisfy the things that they highlighted earlier?

Lynn Trainor: Yeah, I mean, I guess in our view, the purpose of the consultation is to get the feedback, and if you’re hearing over and over that this is the concern, which we did, and you move to address it.... No, we didn’t circle back to all the individuals who said on that particular point that, okay, we’re changing the bill to eliminate the requirement for an application for the first one.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Lynn, for coming back onto the floor, and minister.

Those were included in the line of questions that I had today, on the consultation with the PEI Real Estate Association. I might just have one

follow-up from that discussion with New Haven-Rocky Point.

[4:35 p.m.]

I do recall when that first consultative draft was sent out by the previous minister that there seemed to be a pretty firm and harsh response from the PEI Real Estate Association, and it does seem to me that the concerns were primarily around the hindrance that the bill would cause, as it was then, with respect to getting people into homes, and also negative effect on the market and market ability and the salability of properties in municipalities that were subject to the bill.

I guess my question would be: Was that your understanding of what the concerns were from the PEI Real Estate Association – the negative impact on the marketing and salability of properties? And I guess the second part of it was: Would it not be normal then, if you’ve addressed what you thought would be the concerns, to go back to that group with the second draft to get an updated opinion to see if it actually did resolve the issues and the concerns?

Lynn Trainor: Well, I think at the time it was just felt that we wanted to move forward with it, and to us, the feedback was fairly clear on that point. I mean, certainly from a non-resident’s perspective, just to kind of draw a similar comparison, if a non-resident is recruited to come here for workforce or whatever and they choose to acquire land in an unincorporated area or whatever of ten acres in size, they need to make an application to IRAC.

So, again, they’re free to acquire up to the five acres, then once you get there, you need an application. It feels very similar in the sense that we have this kind of carve-out for you to acquire up to this amount in terms of the land piece, and then on the municipal property side, you can have one. But once you want another one, then you’ll have to get approval for it.

M. MacFarlane: I know there’s been discussion also with respect to the distinction between the interest in land further to the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* and land use and land planning, and zoning further to either a municipal official plan or the provincial subdivision and planning act and regulations. But the act that’s before us doesn’t make any distinction between whether the one acre within a municipality is zoned

residential, commercial, or industrial. Am I right that all would be caught under the legislation?

Lynn Trainor: Yes, correct. If it's an acre or under, regardless of what is on it, it's called a municipal property.

M. MacFarlane: So, why would we include commercial- and industrial-zoned properties within a municipality? If I heard yesterday, or the last time this bill was debated, the concern seemed to be the compilation or accumulation of residential property.

Lynn Trainor: Yeah. We looked at the idea that a majority of these properties would be that, i.e., residential, and recognized that commercial, industrial, or other uses within the municipality would be captured by this as well. But the rationale was that, again, applying the same logic – when you think about acquiring multiple properties in a municipality with an official plan as a non-resident, in unlimited quantities, without any oversight whatsoever – that was a goal as well, to get in what is missing.

M. MacFarlane: So, I just want to be clear, then, that it's actually the intent of the bill and not either a corollary effect or a byproduct – that it is the intent that residential, industrial, commercial, and institutionally zoned properties are intended to be caught to further the intent and the aim and goal of the bill.

Lynn Trainor: Well, yes. Again, lands protection doesn't deal with land use whatsoever, so it would be irrelevant. It's more just, again, about picking up this exemption that is growing in span.

[4:40 p.m.]

Hon. D. Compton: I'll also add too, member, that part of this is the shortage of housing within our municipalities and across PEI. This is one way of curtailing some of those purchases. A number of the non-residents that come here seem to be very well-heeled and have no problem purchasing up these residents, and it's taking the opportunity and the ability away from Islanders to be able to do that when they purchase them.

Again, I've said all along. With land use, that's a different kettle of fish, but landownership – I know in my own district I'd say the purchase of housing that are left vacant and the land is left fallow is eroding our rural communities. So,

that's kind of where I come from on this, and I think this is just another branch of what we're trying to do.

This is a way of saying there's no reason that a non-resident should need to own five residential properties, per se, within a municipality without the purview of the Province into that. Because before they could do that, and we call it non-land because it's not considered land, per se, if it's under an acre within a municipality.

M. MacFarlane: I appreciate that and I agree, generally, and get all of that. I know where you're coming from, minister, with it, as it pertains to residential use property, but this net is far bigger than that. It includes property that a municipality might have zoned – any nature of zoning, again, commercial, institutional, industrial.

One concern I would have is someone trying to sell a business within the municipality that fits the definition here of the municipal property, and it's the type of business that's not capable of being sold or it's not being picked up by a resident person in PEI.

Do you see it making it that much more difficult to sell that property? Because it's not residential, it doesn't achieve that particular goal that you just stated, minister. It's a business and it's owned as such, and we're limiting who might be able to purchase that property.

Hon. D. Compton: So, if it's under an acre – a business that's under an acre – they still have the ability to purchase that, am I right? It's not about land use; it's about land ownership. Am I right there, Lynn?

Lynn Trainor: Well, if you think about the five-acre limit currently for land – whereby as a non-resident, once you exceed the five acres, you need approval. We see lots of approvals going through where there are lots of non-residents who, for whatever various reasons, exceed the five acres. That's what the process is for.

Similarly, in this we're not saying you cannot buy more than one municipal property. We're saying that once you already have one, the next one will be examined and you may have to justify or explain your rationale, why you need – you probably recall from the forms that IRAC has, if you already have land, explain why you need more land.

I would say the same thing: if you already have a municipal property, why do you need another one? So, there probably would be circumstances whereby okay, well, say I have a home here and I want a business next door, what have you; I'm just throwing something out.

Hon. D. Compton: It still does go to your five-acre tally. So, this way we can track when they get to five acres then I guess we look at it again, or IRAC does. But before, you could own 10 different residential properties that were all under one acre, and there was no purview on that as far as IRAC or the Province.

[M. MacKay in the chair]

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: I guess five, one-acre properties, you said 10, but it would be five, then we'd have to go to IRAC because you're over the five-acre limit.

Hon. D. Compton: Yeah, if we're looking at what we're doing here, it's an acre or under an acre. If we look at that then you could have five before it goes to IRAC, but if it's more than...

M. MacFarlane: So, just on the subject of IRAC, was there consideration given to the potential – was there any sort of modeling done as to what IRAC's inbox is going to look like further to this bill if it comes into force by way of the new applications, the number of new applications, the existing resources for IRAC agents to process them.

What are we looking at for a new workload and case load?

[4:45 p.m.]

Lynn Trainor: Certainly, we talked about that, and because currently you don't need an application currently, and the only way we have to kind of track non-resident ownership is through taxation, and their definition, of course, of a non-resident is different under the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*

So, you really can't predict how many more applications they are going to have. To me, the more they have, the more this bill is doing what it's intended to do, but certainly, the way we looked at it is if they need more resources, then government will...

Hon. D. Compton: We'll –

Lynn Trainor: ...give them more – [Laughter]

Hon. D. Compton: I guess it's a matter of priorities, and I think that this is a priority. In my mind, as the Minister of Land, it is a priority to keep track of and make sure that Islanders have the opportunity to purchase land here versus non-residents.

M. MacFarlane: I appreciate that, but I also hear some frustration and challenges with the IRAC application and approval process from non-residents, from non-resident buyers, from non-resident corporations, from PEI corporations, and the lawyers, and the real estate agents – all of whom are involved in the IRAC process as it currently exists – and now we're adding another layer to that process as it currently exists.

I would hate to see the approval criteria stretch out farther for some of these things because if you're a buyer and you're looking to buy property, and you're a seller and you've got multiple offers coming in, it's a challenging environment to navigate. The Chair may know some of that and what I'm speaking of as well, from his private work. The world moves quicker than sometimes government responds.

So, is there going to be defined criteria to help the IRAC officials in receiving and processing these applications? What are they going to use to help them?

Lynn Trainor: I'm not sure I understand your question. What do you mean by defined criteria to help them? Do you mean the guiding principles that I spoke to earlier? Do you mean an evaluating norm, in evaluating them? Or processing them?

M. MacFarlane: As the applications come in – and we've seen the breadth of the legislation expand and be amended over a time, over years. Now we're doing it again. We're placing yet more application obligation on buyers. So, the concern I hear sometimes from people involved, as I've already mentioned, is the time it takes and the uncertainty – the lack of knowledge – as to what IRAC is applying to determine applications' approval or denial. I know it gets up to Executive Council, and we can't talk about what comes out of there.

But when applications are being made to IRAC for approval to purchase, the feedback from the IRAC officials sometimes seems to vary. It doesn't seem to be grounded in either policy or criteria. That's the word I used before, Lynn, was criteria. So, now that we're adding this layer to the onion, will we be giving direction to those who receive the applications at IRAC and those who make the applications to IRAC to know a little bit where they stand on whether their application has a chance of approval or not?

Lynn Trainor: Right. So, you're speaking more to the evaluation versus IRAC's capacity in terms of processing.

Again, as I spoke to section 8 where the guiding principles which guide – section 8, sorry, of the act; not the bill – where I spoke to IRAC's guiding principles, again, that have been provided to them by government over the years, those will be amended to kind of probably update the current realities and also incorporate the guiding principles for municipal property evaluations. All of those will then be made public and published in the *Gazette* under section 8.1.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

[4:50 p.m.]

The bill captures municipalities with an official plan but not municipalities who have no official plan. Given the conversation we had earlier about the conflation potential of land use and land purchase, what was the rationale for not including municipalities who don't have an official plan?

Lynn Trainor: It wasn't so much about excluding a municipality without an official plan. It was about addressing the gap in the legislation, which as you look at the definition of what land is, it excludes property in a municipality with an official plan. Land or real property in a municipality without an official plan is land. I know it's confusing.

P. Bevan-Baker: No, you explained that absolutely perfectly; I appreciate that.

I'm going to give you a scenario now that there's a piece of land for sale that is somewhere between one acre and 4.9 acres. Would that –

within a municipality, with an official plan – is that something that would be captured by this bill or would a non-resident be able to purchase that piece of land, less than five acres but greater than one acre, without this bill actually capturing the transaction?

Lynn Trainor: Basically, that property, if the acreage was somewhere in that range that you were talking about, it is land and that would go towards the individual's aggregate land holding. If that individual did not have any land in the province, anywhere in the province, they could acquire the property – as they can now, currently with the legislation they have – without an application. But if they go to buy another property and that property is 0.3 of an acre and that pushes their aggregate total over those five acres, they will then need approval for that.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm looking at the transitional clause. This is Section 3 of this bill but it applies to Section 4 of the act. I'm just wondering why this was not made retroactive. It's least it's my reading of it is that it would not apply to land which is currently owned but were it purchased from that one would fall under this act.

Lynn Trainor: Certainly, it's a little difficult when an individual already owns property to get them to dispose of it. If you look at the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* in general, historically, in the beginning, that five acres – 165 feet – was ten acres, 330 feet.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Lynn Trainor: And so, over the years, things get changed. Historically, there's always some sort of transitional provision that says if you've acquired this land legally through the legislation that was in the place at the time you acquired it, you are deemed to hold it legally.

Same idea here, the idea that we would be going out there and forcing individuals who already own property to dispose of them is probably not realistic or manageable really.

P. Bevan-Baker: I completely understand the practicalities of it. I just wondered whether that was something that was even considered because, well, I don't know if maybe a question surrounding that: Do we have any sense of how of those acres would actually exist currently – people who own them but would not be able to own them if this law as in effect?

Lynn Trainor: I'm sorry, I lost your question there. I'm sorry. Could you repeat that?

P. Bevan-Baker: You know what, that's okay. I'll move on to beneficial ownership. This would, I think, be under – well, again Section 3 of the amendments here but pertaining to Section 4 of the act. It would be 4. (3), the definition of interest. I don't know if questions were already asked on beneficial interest or not?

[Interjection]

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Well, you know, you'll do a much better job than me so I'll pass to the Leader of the Third Party.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

That is an area that I have questions on. Minister, yesterday – I say yesterday, the last time we had the bill, I can't remember days are blurred – for debate –

Hon. D. Compton: Friday.

M. MacFarlane: – a couple of times, I think when it might have been O'Leary-Inverness, I forget who asked the question about where the bill came from. I picked up a couple of times you used the word “anecdotally” there's a concern.

[4:55 p.m.]

I guess I'm going to start my questions there: Is that all there is? Is it just anecdotal concerns that brought this forward? I'd like to think that legislature of a nature like this or any nature is going to come forward with more than just anecdotal concerns. I know what you're saying, but there must be more than anecdotal concerns.

Hon. D. Compton: Yes, well, I guess there are. I didn't bring any examples of that. I did say in my statement that anecdotally, this is what we're hearing. I didn't bring any proof of that, but obviously a number of people have come to many of us here in the Legislature saying: “What about that house on XYZ Street that's always empty, and they own the one next to it, and they own the one next to it?” That's kind of where it came from. And you can go and research, and they do own two or three houses in a row, so you know it's happened, and because

they're under one acre, it's considered – I hate to use the term, but I use it all the time – non-land.

Once this amendment passes, it will be looked at as land. Now it's not, really, because it doesn't go to your accrual of five acres total because under an acre doesn't need to go to IRAC.

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, I get that. The word “anecdotally” jumped out to me because you can back that up as you said, minister, by checking the property records. I don't know whether there's been a deep dive done by the department or not to try and determine the nature of this “problem” that the bill is trying to address, but there is more than anecdotal evidence, I would think, if the deep dive was done to identify.

That takes me to the question, then, on the definition of an interest in property. It's what I've spent a lot of time looking at because it means any interest conferring a legal or beneficial right to the use, possession or occupation of a municipal property. How does this bill intend to address interest as it's defined, and how we're either anecdotally or actually seeing that interest play out in land ownership in PEI?

Lynn Trainor: Just to go back to the first part of your question about anecdotally, I want to clarify on that. We did do some statistics, and again, this was just a snapshot of one day. We did Charlottetown, Summerside, Stratford, Cornwall, and Montague, and looked at the number of non-resident owners who had multiple properties just in those areas, just to get a snapshot. Again, keep in mind that when you look at tax records and you rely on those tax records, you're going to get numbers that are different.

Based on the definitions, they would be – in theory – higher than we see here, but just on those, we had that 11 percent of the non-residents in Charlottetown owned more than one property, 14 percent in Summerside, 11 percent in Montague, and then Stratford and Cornwall were lower. So, again, of the non-resident ownership in those areas, those percentages had more than one.

M. MacFarlane: I heard in the minister's opening statement, a reference to Three Rivers. I didn't hear Lynn reference Three Rivers in your....

Hon. D. Compton: Montague was referenced.

M. MacFarlane: Oh, you mentioned Montague. Okay.

[The Legislature adjourned until Thursday, 7 May 2026 at 1 p.m.]

Lynn Trainor: Yes. So, again, I think at the time, we couldn't separate out.... It's difficult, because it's such a wide area, to try to capture the actual municipality. We just used Montague. So, sorry. The next question – the beneficial ownership?

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, I guess that is my next question: We can put this law on the books and we can reference the definition of an interest in property, but is there an intent now that we're putting a fine point on the municipality side of it to try and root out where there could be an abuse of the beneficial ownership?

[5:00 p.m.]

Lynn Trainor: Right. That language is copied from –

Chair: The hour has been called.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, that this House do adjourn until Thursday, May 7th, at one o'clock in the afternoon.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.