



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings**

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Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Thursday, 7 May 2026

No. 24

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

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

[The Legislature met at 1:03 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Good afternoon, everyone – my colleagues, staff, Pages, guests in the gallery here, and everyone watching online.

This morning, I had a meeting with the CAO and the mayor of Summerside. We had a productive meeting on some important issues to the City of Summerside. Like them, we're excited about continuing our working relationship with the City.

I think I mentioned this yesterday, but it's worth repeating that Summerside – tonight is a massive night at the city of Summerside as play officially gets underway for the 2026 Centennial Cup at Credit Union Place, a ten-day national championship that brings together top Junior A hockey teams from across Canada.

Tonight at 7:30 p.m., our very own Summerside Western Caps take on the Niverville Nighthawks for their opening game. That is a big event for Summerside; it's very exciting. It's a real privilege for our province to be hosting this. I want to wish the Capitals all the best, and all the visiting teams – highly competitive tournament as they battle for the national title here in Prince Edward Island.

[1:05 p.m.]

I also want to recognize students from Elm Street Elementary School who are premiering their production of Disney's *Finding Nemo Jr.* tonight at 6:30 p.m. These talented young performers will be taking the stage at the Scott MacAulay Performing Arts Centre for a three-night run. I want to congratulate the entire cast, crew, and dedicated teachers on the months of hard work they've put into this musical.

This week also marked a historic milestone for our province with the signing of a multilateral emergency management agreement between the Government of Canada, the Province, and the Abegweit First Nation here. This agreement formally establishes Abegweit First Nation as a

full and equal partner in our provincial emergency management system, ensuring that planning, training, and response efforts are coordinated and culturally appropriate. A big step forward – it's a vital step forward in our commitment to reconciliation and to the safety of all Islanders. I want to congratulate Chief Junior Gould and everyone involved in making this partnership a reality.

While people are in Summerside this evening for hockey, I also encourage them to stop the Eptek Art and Cultural Centre to see the Beyond the Block exhibit. The PEI Modern Quilt Guild has put together a stunning display celebrating ten years of creativity, and it's a great way to support our local arts community before the puck drop tonight. It's truly heartening to see our local community hubs, from the hockey rink to the theatre to our cultural centres – they're bursting with activity this Thursday. I encourage everyone to get out this evening and support our local students, our home team, and the incredible talent we have on this Island.

Finally, tonight I am giving greetings at the 20th annual Business and Community Excellence Awards Gala hosted by the Eastern PEI Chamber of Commerce. I'm looking forward to this event to celebrate the great businesses in Kings County.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise and welcome all those who are watching online and those who are joining with us in the gallery today. Welcome to today's proceedings.

May 7th, today, is National Child and Youth Mental Health Day. This was established by FamilySmart in 2007 and highlights how small moments of care can make a big difference. As part of National and Youth Mental Health Week, this day reminds us that when young people feel seen, heard, and supported, their mental health improves. Even the smallest moments like checking in, listening, or simply showing up can have a lasting impact on a child's mental health. "I Care About You" is at the heart of May 7th, reminding us that through conversations, support, and everyday actions, we can help young people feel seen, heard, and valued.

While I'm on my feet, I'm going to talk about a couple of community events happening in my district. This is an online fundraiser for the Tignish Irish Moss Festival. This year's proceeds for the festival will go to the Tignish Fire Department. In prep of that, they're having a Grand in Your Hand. It's a \$1,000 prize. There are a limited number of tickets old sold – 100; \$20 each, of course. If you're interested, you can call the Tignish town office or you can check the Tignish recreation page on Facebook.

Also, in the Rural Community of Miminegash, their family fun committee is hosting a paint night, which is Wednesday, May 13th. You can contact the Community of Miminegash or check their Facebook page, which is the Municipality of Miminegash.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I wish everyone a great day in this House.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon to everyone in the Legislature for another great day of debate coming up. Welcome to everyone in the gallery for coming out and watching – I hope you enjoy the proceedings today – and everyone watching online, in District 19 and across the province.

Just a couple of events I'd like to highlight for those attending and those watching at home:

Tonight, nature trivia for those in the Montague area, put on by Nature PEI at the Copper Bottom Brewery, a great spot to go and hang out. The event is hosted by Nature PEI with the trivia master, Julie-Lynn Zahavich, who is well known to many of us in the Chamber here – forest conservation specialist with the Province. That sounds like a good time for those who are able to get down to the eastern end.

[1:10 p.m.]

Yesterday I mentioned students from Kinkora Regional High took part in the Island Justice Cup. Today I'd like to highlight the school that I went to and graduated from, Bluefield High School, who attended that cup and actually took home a silver medal. The students who participated in that mock trial competition: Addison Weeks, Eva Sabota, Allie Sanford, and

London Clark. I'd like to thank their teacher instructor, Mariska Gatha, and the lawyer instructor, Chad McQuaid, who also graduated from Bluefield High School. As I mentioned yesterday, a great opportunity to introduce high school students into the legal world.

Finally, for decades in my district, the Victoria Playhouse has played such a huge part in attracting visitors and Islanders to the South Shore area and to Victoria-by-the-Sea. The 2026 season program is now online, and as always, there's a great mix of comedy, music, and plays to appeal to everybody and everyone's interests.

Along with the local shops, accommodations, and restaurants, the Playhouse has really made Victoria a destination. I'd like to give best wishes to the folks in Victoria as they prepare for the upcoming tourist season, and I hope many of us have an opportunity to get out and take in a play or a show at the playhouse this season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's nice to be up on my feet today to welcome everybody in here for a great day of debate. I see the Minister of Economic Development and Artificial Intelligence's dad in the gallery today. Welcome to all those that are joining us in the gallery as well.

I just want to stand today and recognize retired teacher, Brenda MacNeil. She spreads her cheer and beautiful, seasonal bulletin boards with Westwood School, and I think the messages on her bulletin boards are worth repeating today. They read:

“Read your heart out.”

“Hello, sunshine” – perhaps maybe not today, but hopefully tomorrow.

“Work hard and be nice.”

“Don't let the ugly in others kill the beauty in you.”

I just want to thank you for her great words of wisdom to the kids at Westwood School, and Cindy Wood for sharing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and say hello to everybody watching from Charlottetown-West Royalty. I just want to welcome everybody in the gallery, especially new friends that I met today, Cathy and Mike. They picked a good day to come up on a rainy day here in PEI. They're here from Oklahoma – all the way from Oklahoma. Kathy is originally from Rustico, so I think she's visiting back here. Go Thunder! I'm watching your teams very closely. I love your team. Go Shai! Thank you for coming.

I just want to say to everybody watching in the Sunset Wing at Beach Grove Home, all our long-term care workers work incredibly hard. I had a recent chat with some of them, and I just want to say hello and thank you for all your efforts in all the wings of Beach Grove Home.

As well, Donna Sheehan recently retired. I just want to thank her for all that she did for Beach Grove Home. She had her ceremony yesterday with Health PEI, her pin ceremony; she retired. She just cared immensely, and I miss her every day at Beach Grove Home. Your work and effort will be a long time remembered. Thank you for your service to Islanders, Donna.

Thank you.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Are there any other greetings?

I just wanted to stand and also recognize Cathy and Mike, up from Oklahoma. Kathy was a Gauthier from out in Rustico, and they have a connection with one of the commissioners here in security. Don LeBlanc, I believe, is very, very close with the Gauthier family, so it's great to have you here today.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

AI Scribe Pilot Program

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, I've found myself in need of a primary health provider on more than one occasion in the last couple of weeks. Although I received great care both times, it is the later that I was impressed with and would like to highlight.

What really impressed me was the use of the AI Scribe pilot program. As the doctor walked in, he pointed at the literature on the wall and asked if I was okay with him using the AI program. Once he had my confirmation, he fired up the program on his computer, and the mic started recording our conversation. The end result was I received exceptional care in a timely manner as the doctor concentrated on the issues at hand and not taking notes. The doctor stated that once we were done, the AI Scribe program would generate a draft summary note that he would review, edit, and save to my electronic file.

As impressed as I was – and maybe just a little bit biased – I asked for his opinion on the pilot program. With a smile gleaming from ear to ear, he looked at me and said that it was the best thing that this government has ever done for him.

[1:15 p.m.]

He went on to state that at the end of the day, it shaves a lot of time off his day in finishing and preparing notes. He honestly does know if he could ever go back to the old freehand way and see as many patients.

So, this is a pilot program, and I am one member who has seen it in action firsthand. I would like nothing more than to see this become another tool in the toolbox for our primary care providers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

PEI's Long-term Wellbeing

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

There was a moment last week in this House where my longstanding concerns about this government's ability to run this province were brought into sharp focus.

It was during a series of questions I had on a housing program that's been cut. The Premier,

the Housing minister, and then the Finance minister each in turn stood up to answer my questions by first heaping praise on the program and then, literally in the same breath, saying that it has been cut. When I later asked how on earth this makes sense and for some data or evidence to support the decision, I got nothing.

For a long time, I have suspected that this government has had no ideas and no ideals to guide them. It's as if they are wandering around aimlessly without any clear sense of purpose or direction, haphazardly grabbing onto whatever they might come across, and axing good things that are crucial for the long-term wellbeing of this province. First threatening bikes and books for kids, and now some critical early childhood learning supports are gone – direct attacks on our children, who of course, are the foundation of this province's future. Successful programs to reduce energy costs for Islanders and our carbon footprint – gone. Direct attacks on the environment and economy on which we all depend.

Meanwhile, millions and millions of dollars continue to be spent on programs that offer no clear benefits. What is wrong with you? I think what's wrong is that this government has no clue what it is actually trying to do. Instead of making sound decisions –

[Interjection]

P. Bevan-Baker: Please.

Instead of making sound decisions based on solid evidence and results, they are continually drifting and lurching, making a mess of our budget, our environment, health care, housing, and the prospects of future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Importance of Financial Literacy

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to speak on the critical importance of financial literacy and its direct impact on the mental health of Islanders. We often frame financial wellbeing as a matter of personal character or simple math, but that dismisses the systemic challenges of our modern digital world.

The reality is that understanding finance is not a secondary skill; it is a primary tool for economic resilience. There is a heavy, invisible toll that comes from not knowing if you can cover a sudden expense. This uncertainty leads to a cycle of anxiety and exhaustion that impacts every part of a person's life.

This mental burden is why we must ensure that our provincial supports include the tools to build financial confidence. For example, when we look at social assistance programs, we have a prime opportunity to empower people by having case workers help clients develop and navigate a practical budget.

This isn't just about accounting; it's about providing a compass to someone who feels lost and replacing the fear of the unknown with the confidence of a plan.

When we give Islanders the tools the master their finances, mental clarity and peace of mind come from being in control of your own future. By making this knowledge universal, we are helping build a more secure and mentally resilient Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ambulance services

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

Earlier this week, the Leader of the Third Party asked about ambulances in the emergency health services agreement.

On average, in the last year, 14 ambulances were staffed during the day shifts. The minimum standard for the day shift is no less than 11 ambulances. Island EMS met this standard 98 percent of the time.

On average, in the last year, eight ambulances were staffed during the night shift. The minimum standard for the night shift is no less than seven ambulances. Island EMS met this standard 94 percent of the time.

Last fiscal year, the minimum staffing threshold established by the department, which does

require notification to the department within 24 hours if not met – that standard was met by Island EMS 96 percent of the time for day and night shifts. I have that data, which I can table after Question Period.

The most recent median provincial response time was 13 minutes and 11 seconds for emergencies and 18 minutes and five seconds for non-emergencies.

[1:20 p.m.]

It's important to note that response times and trucks on the road are only two measurements of system performance. The new emergency health services agreement includes over 30 performance standards and key performance indicators related to quality, safety, and system performance.

Thank you.

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

Early learning and child care funding

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

On Tuesday, the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park asked how many new positions would be required to meet the additional anticipated demand of 400 new early years enrolments in 2026-2027, and how we plan to work with the sector to meet that demand.

Approximately 75 new positions will be required to meet the anticipated demand. We are increasing funding this year by \$15.5 million, which will bring us up to \$101 million to help support this added demand.

There are 28 to 30 new grads expected out of various early childhood educator programs this year that will help meet that demand, not to mention folks affected by the 25 percent reduction in pedagogical support; there will be many opportunities there for them as well.

We are continuing investments into educational pathways for individuals who wish to complete entry-level certificate and diploma programs in early childhood care and education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Islanders are growing tired of a government that never seems to be prepared to make a decision. This Premier's response to every difficult issue is to pass it off to someone else. Another panel, another committee, another review – anything to avoid making an actual decision. Meanwhile, debts climb, projects stall, and Islanders are left waiting. That's not leadership; it's a Premier who keeps hiding behind the process because he does not want to make difficult decisions.

Government leadership (further)

Question to the Premier: Why do you keep avoiding decisions on issues that Islanders need action on now?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, we've put forward a budget. We've expressed clear and focused priorities of this government. Those are the priorities we're working on every day. We're making decisions every single day and delivering progress for Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

We haven't seen the budget all week on the floor.

Prince Edward Island is facing historic debt and deficits, yet when an opportunity appeared to increase federal defence spending, the Premier's first instinct was not to secure investment in PEI. It was to attack the federal government and strike another advisory panel. Nearly three months later, we are hearing that this panel may not have even met.

Question to the Premier: Has the provincial defence strategy advisory panel met, yes or no? Will the Premier table the membership, the timelines, and the meeting records today?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, we issued an expression of interest for people to serve on a

defence advisory panel. We've received some very qualified responses, and I look forward to announcing that panel in the very near future.

But I have been advocating on behalf of Island businesses/enterprises that are well positioned to take advantage of further investment in national defence spending in this country. I've met with our colleagues, our partners in the federal government. I've met with businesses here. They are aligned. In fact, I expect announcements very shortly in this province that will align with our national defence and strategic priorities here in Prince Edward Island to take advantage of these opportunities.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Three months and not even has a committee been formed yet. They haven't even met.

When the Auditor General raised concerns about the province's financial situation, the Premier's answer was to create another Cabinet committee on fiscal responsibility and red tape reduction.

Treasury Board already exists. Many of the same ministers are already sitting around that same table. This Premier talks about cutting red tape, but the moment things get difficult, he hides behind yet another committee.

Question to the Premier: What exactly is this committee doing that Treasury Board could not already do?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

This committee has met three times already. It's out there. It's public on what our mandate is. It's a comprehensive expenditure review. It's looking at customer service models. It's cutting red tape to make it easier for Islanders and Island businesses to access our services and programming. These are the things we're focusing on in the committee. We're already pretty well into the workplan, and some really good things are coming through.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and also thanks to the Premier for answering that question that was directed to him.

[1:25 p.m.]

Islanders are not asking for more committees. They're asking for decisions, they're asking for accountability, and they're asking for results. After weeks of pressure, this government finally tabled a debt management plan, but instead of concrete action, Islanders got another committee: the debt risk committee. At this point, it's pretty clear the Premier seems far more comfortable creating committees than making difficult decisions.

To the Premier: Has this committee met yet? What are its terms of reference and what measurable action has it actually taken?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability.

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

The debt management plan – again, it's on the website. You can take a look at it. Measures are already in place. We've put the fiscal anchor of 40 percent net debt to GDP. We've put the interest bite of less than 7.5 percent. We've planted seeds for the future. In fact, we're creating a general sinking fund, which is basically like a savings account to go against our debt, and we're starting to fill it. We're putting in interest that we're accumulating on liquidity reserves. Any surpluses in the future – at least 50 percent of those surpluses will go into this sinking fund. These are seeds. If this was done 10, 15, 20 years ago, we'd be in a much better place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Well, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker; yesterday the Premier stood up, and he talked about being sore from running. What he's doing is running away from these questions.

Given the recent scandals and growing concern surrounding processes within the Department of Environment, many Islanders are asking questions about the integrity and oversight of departmental documentation and approvals.

Department of Environment approvals

Question to the Minister of Environment: Can you explain what safeguards are currently in place to verify that signatures appearing on permits, applications, or related approval documents are authentic and were in fact provided by the individuals identified in those documents, particularly in cases where inconsistencies or irregularities may have been identified?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, those safeguards are in place now. There are always going to be chances for people that don't want to follow the rules to maybe break them, but we are there to ensure that they do not. I will rely on and trust my department to make sure that the right decisions are made.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much.

So, you're saying they're there now, but they weren't there before is what I'm getting from that.

As a follow-up, minister: If questions arise regarding the authenticity of accuracy of information submitted on environmental permits or applications, what process does your department follow to investigate those concerns, and how many such reviews or investigations have been initiated in the past five to seven years?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Hon. member, if you have some proof that there has been wrongdoing, please bring it forward.

[Interjection]

Hon. D. Compton: And we are dealing with that, as you are well aware.

I will tell you that the department does the work that is put before them pertaining to the

regulations and the act as we have passed in this Legislature. They'll continue to do that. They've done it in the past and they'll do it moving forward. Can we make sure that that's always followed? We do our very best and will continue to do that. If there is wrongdoing, we will look after it.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On April 30th, the Premier stood in this House and told Islanders that education had not been cut, that it was his government's utmost priority, and that spending had grown. The Minister of Education and Early Years then confirmed a \$1.4 million reduction to program support staff in early childhood centres. Early years centres are cuts to education.

Early learning and child care funding (further)

I have one question, and I'd like a straightforward answer: Do you, Mr. Premier, believe that early learning and child care is indeed education, yes or no? Because if you do, Islanders have been misinformed. There were cuts. And if it isn't, this government is now demonstrating the true value they place on our youngest children in the first five years of life.

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

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

Yes.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education and Early Years has also said that I've been sharing misinformation, so I'd like to set the record straight and come out with the facts. The Premier said there were no cuts to education. The minister has just said early childhood is education. The minister's office said up to 50 percent of program staff would be cut. The minister said 25 percent would be cut. One thing we do know: it's 100 percent confusion.

[1:30 p.m.]

Regardless of the percentage, the impact is the same. Centres will not be able to retain their staff, even with a 25 percent cut in their wages. The quality of early learning and child care has been sacrificed, and access will soon follow.

To the Premier: Will your government table a complete, line-by-line breakdown of every budget change to the Early Years division – what was funded last year, this year, and the net difference?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It's been said here many times when we debate the budget, our budget process is more transparent than any other place in this country. You'll have an opportunity to see those numbers, ask questions about them. We welcome that.

The fact of the matter is, early years education – she's playing with words here. We've increased the early years funding by \$15.5 million this year alone to bring that total to \$101 million of investment. This government continues to invest in our early years sector.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The early childhood sector is outraged, as they should be, because a ripple effect of what this government has done doesn't end at the centre door. It follows the children home to parents who will eventually not be able to get to work; into communities; and to the economic loss within our economic capacity. And, in 2027, we'll see that effect arrive at the schools. As I've said before, you'd best buckle up because it is going to get worse.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Has this government conducted an analysis, any analysis, on the ripple effects of the decision to the economy, to education, and to the children and families of the decision to cut support staff to this vital sector?

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

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

The member across used words like “misinformation.” I'll use it again. The approach that this Liberal opposition is taking on this front is shameful. It's shameful. The level of manipulation it is perpetrating in the early years sector is shocking, and it's taking away from the important work that's happening in this sector. I'll have some documents to table here a little bit later on that will prove that fact.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's just not right. It's just simply wrong. I come from the background. I will state: if people don't already know, I was one of the key people who created this system, so I actually do know what I'm talking about, minister, when it comes to this. The sector is outraged. I haven't done that; you've done that.

I will ask again to the Minister of Education and Early Years: When the centres begin to give the ripple effect impact – when this position is lost – to the quality of early learning and child care in this province, what will you do then?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: I do not dispute the fact that this member's got years and years of experience in this sector as a bureaucrat. Unfortunately, she's acting just like a politician right now that's trying to score political points on an issue. I strongly, strongly urge the sector to ignore the bad advice that they're getting from this opposition. They're not acting in your best interest.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another point of correction: I have given no advice and no direction to this sector. However,

I do know that the sector is highly concerned about what's happening to them and what will continue to happen to them. They're trying to say loud and clear: if this doesn't stop, we are losing our system.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years. When that happens, because these women – as you have said, the majority are women, and they are bright, and they are very resilient, but they are taking their lead from themselves and not from me, so please do not make that kind of a statement, because it is untrue.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: What will you do when those centres are not able to take those children in because of these cuts?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Just to clarify, I've never made a statement in this House that suggested that it's predominantly women.

If any centres are having issues with the funding model, our staff have already encouraged them to reach out, and we will talk that through.

[1:35 p.m.]

Again, there's bad advice being given by a Liberal staffer or this member to groups that are meeting. I am encouraging those people to ignore some of the bad advice that they're getting, listen to the ECDA, and work with us.

Thank you.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, on the funding model, you're absolutely right – the Department of Education and Early Years staff, one in particular, are absolutely there to support every operator with that funding model. I've been gone almost three years, and for years before that, those same directors were saying, "We can't keep up. We can't keep up." This government capped the operational grant portion of that.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Will your department commit to not just

trying to talk to people about it but to do a true review of the strengths and weaknesses that exist, and improve that funding model so that centres are viable?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: First of all, I take great exception to the statement that she made in her opening preamble about the ECDA. Great exception.

We have already stood up a working group. We have our terms of reference set. We are going to meet with directors, the ECDA. We're going to work through any and all challenges that they have, as we have been doing for the last seven years. There's been no government in history that has supported the early years sector like this one; 90 percent of the directors, 90 percent of the owners, 90 percent of the ECEs out there know this, but they are getting some bad advice from this opposition.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

We know that there'll be significant impacts to the economy in rural Prince Edward Island with the oyster industry in chaos. Many shellfish workers have been told by past employers that if they can find a job elsewhere, they should take it. But in rural parts of the province, there's not an abundance of employment opportunities.

One area where many unemployed workers have found employment is through the non-profit sector, which provides a wide range of services, including watershed work, thrift shops, oyster enhancement, and museums.

EDA special projects funding

Question to the Minister of Workforce: Why has your department reduced special projects funding for employment of vulnerable Islanders in this year's budget by nearly half a million dollars?

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

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

I'm going to have to bring that back to the hon. member to give the precise – because I've been going through the budget book, hon. member, and again, it's always tough to debate the dean of the Legislature, and also someone with a background in the Employment Development Agency.

I'll bring that specifically back, hon. member, but there have been some synergies with SkillsPEI because last year, 2024-2025, was when the EDA program and where a lot of those – I think you talked about the special programs specifically – moved into the Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning, which also houses SkillsPEI. So, we've been able to have some synergies through the two departments and the benefit of having both under the same roof.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Well, I mean, it's not that hard to look at the budget lines. It has the differences in the different programs.

But the minister's department has also increased – and it's a good thing – minimum wage twice since last year's budget. Yet this year, there is less money in the budget overall. At that time, I would expect demand is going to be even greater. In fact, most of the programs in the department appear to be seeing either a reduction or a cut, with the accumulated allotment going from \$7.1 million to \$6.9 million. And I see no specific program for workers affected by the oyster crisis.

Question to the Minister of Workforce: Give that the oyster industry has been in trouble for two years now, why have you not put together a plan ahead in this budget that will commit to create or develop a work-style program to support families affected by the oyster crisis?

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, hon. member, and thank you for the question.

When I sat in the former role as the Minister of Fisheries, we had a contingency set aside for that and it was used. I won't speak for the Minister of Fisheries sitting beside me, but I know that

there has been more money put aside for a contingency.

We are working on that because that has been something that has been talked about. I think it's been brought up by numerous fishing groups. And again, I'm only familiar with that from the point of view that I used to be – and I still always keep all the people in the oyster industry that are going through tough times close to my heart.

But I do agree, there needs to be something there, and we do have that contingency money there for those specific asks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

[1:40 p.m.]

R. Henderson: Well, that's good, and I felt that with the fact that you were Minister of Fisheries previously and now Minister of Workforce, you'd be really on top of this. But you're right, there is a contingency fund in the provincial budget of \$5.9 million, and the Minister of Fisheries has also said that he expects to access money to support the provincial share of oyster industry support.

But minister, you didn't specifically say: Can your department also access those funds to support those affected workers, or is basically a special warrant another option for you?

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

Hon. Z. Bell: Well, no, I think that you've asked that before with regard to the special warrant. Last year you asked that, too, and we were able to.... Because again, this is where the difference is of sitting in the Fisheries portfolio before and then moving into Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Last year when I was the Minister of Fisheries and I worked with the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning's department to try to come up with a program so that we can use some of that money to be able to help people to have employment – that's one thing that this department does. We are a people department. We try to help Islanders when they're in times of

need. I have no issue working with the Minister of Fisheries to help the oyster industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

According to Dr. Alikia Lafontaine – former president of the Canadian Medical Association and keystone speaker at this week’s meeting of the Canadian Society of Physician Recruiters here in Charlottetown – physicians in this province have lost trust in this government. This comes as no surprise after years of conflict, disrespect, and broken relationships at a time when thousands of Islanders are still without a family doctor.

Physician/government relations

Question to the hon. Premier: Mr. Premier, do you understand that if doctors do not trust this government, they will not choose to work here on PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, I’m not familiar with the opinion of the doctor that was referenced here. It’s certainly not a Prince Edward Islander.

I can tell you since the minister has taken the reins of the department and since we met with the Medical Society earlier this year, we’ve continued to work in partnership with our physicians in this province to rebuild that relationship, rebuild trust. The minister is doing an excellent job, and I will take my cues from the relationship that we’re building with the doctors in this province, not some doctor from wherever he’s from.

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

M. MacFarlane: This is the former president of the Canadian Medical Association, who was the keynote speaker at the physician recruiters event. I think the Premier could give the man a little bit more respect, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the keynote address at this week’s conference of physician recruiters highlighted that physicians in this province do not trust our government. If Islanders want doctors, it is now

clear that they need to be given an opportunity to elect a government that can be trusted.

Question to the hon. Premier: When will you give Islanders that opportunity?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, as much as the Leader of the Third Party would love to drive a wedge between this government and doctors, the fact is we are building bridges, we’re building trust, we’re working in partnership, we are – all the members on this side of the House (Indistinct) to go out of their way to speak to doctors in their community, to hear their concerns. The minister is working with the Medical Society. We’re making progress, and that’s what we’ll continue to do.

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

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, physicians want to be respected. They want to be listened to. They want to be treated as partners in health care. We heard yesterday directly from a doctor on the floor of this Legislature about how this government can show that they hear doctors and respect their concerns. Let’s hope government takes this opportunity to act on those concerns.

Question to the Premier: After seven years of this government eroding trust with doctors, why should any physician believe things will change unless Islanders elect a government that doctors can actually trust to work with them?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I just want to echo the Premier’s comments earlier about this. I walked into the office today and I looked at the *Guardian* and I saw this headline that says doctors have lost trust in the government. I said, “Is this three months ago?” Because it must be an old newspaper; I’m not sure where this headline came from.

We’ve met with the Medical Society. I’ve met with the College of Family Physicians. We’re rebuilding that relationship. That has been my focus since I came into this role. We’ve paused the MOA to rebuild the relationship, to go back to the principles of what’s in the PSA.

Paused activities for the MOA are:

[1:45 p.m.]

- selecting practice models;
- updated job descriptions;
- practice models and accountability measures will not be issued during the pause;
- individual calculation (Indistinct) for performance management purposes;
- quality improvement indicators will not be applied to individual physicians but used for system performance measurement;
- continued activities or panel size;
- patient panel incentive;
- shadow billing; and
- submitting timesheets.

All of this was done in consultation with the Medical Society. We're working hand in hand. I think we're building a good, strong relationship. I'm not sure where this headline came from, or this doctor that came into....

[Interjections]

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

We've heard about challenges many Islanders – particularly seniors – face accessing supports, and the invasion of privacy for some of these programs. Those aren't the only issues for Island seniors and their families in trying to access support.

The Province wants seniors to age in place, to stay in their own home and out of long-term care facilities for as long as possible. This is a great goal, but without the right supports in place, it's simply not possible.

Respite for at-home caregivers

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors. The key to successful home care is a caregiver – typically a spouse, and often a senior themselves. They need to be healthy, strong, and willing to set their own life aside. What supports are available for this person so they are able to carry out this demanding job?

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

Oh, sorry. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Can I just ask the member to repeat the question? Was it in reference to home care? I'm sorry. Sorry, member.

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

K. Bernard: It's the home caregiver respite program. I'm asking what supports are available for people who are providing home care in their own homes for their family so they're able to carry out the job.

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

[Interjections]

Hon. B. Ramsay: So, I am; I'm going to answer that. It is a health care program, but we do the funding for it through our department.

It's a \$1,500/month program for family members or friends or someone to come in and do respite and stay with those who are eligible to be in long-term care. That's the regulation on the program right now. We're hoping to expand that, but that's where it is right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

Currently, families providing home care are entitled to six weeks of respite care annually in a provincial care facility, giving the caregiver a break. These respite beds are reserved in advance by families.

Recently, because of a lack of long-term care beds, the respite beds have been turned over to long-term care and families are having to use private care facilities and pay out of pocket to get the rest they need.

A question to whichever minister: These family members are saving the system huge amounts of money by providing care at home. Why isn't the

government at least ensuring that they have a few weeks of respite each year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: It's a very difficult situation. I completely understand what the member is saying in terms of respite beds. Now, with our capacity at least dropping to level 3 – which is still not ideal, but it's better – the hope would be that we can open our full complement of respite beds, because I do 100 percent agree; that might be their one or two weeks that they need a break, and they deserve that. I do completely understand.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I've heard from caregivers in this situation, and they would like to see a focus group made of individuals involved in the system of care for seniors. At the center would be care recipients and caregivers. There's a lot of good support out there, but not always accessible due to limits, restrictions, and no coordination of what's available. We need a client-centered system of care where families can define their own needs.

To the minister: Will you establish an advisory group of those with lived experience to ensure that the home care system is meeting the needs of the clients rather than have the clients fit into the needs of the system?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

It's a good question. I think that clients are very happy with the program and the service that they're receiving, but I do think it's important that we do listen to those that have the lived experience within the system.

I certainly have no issue hearing their feedback. How that would look – an advisory panel or whatnot – I don't know, but I think we'd certainly be open to the idea of gathering that feedback and taking it into consideration.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I stated earlier in my member statement, I saw firsthand the way an AI scribe program works. Within five days, I received primary care services from two different physicians – one that used AI scribe and one that didn't. I'm not an AI guru like I know you are, Mr. Speaker, but let's go to the Minister of Health and Wellness for some questions.

[1:50 p.m.]

AI scribe pilot program in health care

Minister, I, for one, am 100 percent behind the AI scribe program now. This is a pilot program. When this program was put in place, what parameters were put around this program?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

That's a fairly specific question. I wouldn't know that off the top of my head, but I do know it's an excellent program and it's helping reduce the administrative burden on physicians. That's one of our main goals, obviously. We've reduced the number of fee codes, and now AI scribe – I think there are some 107 physicians, nurse practitioners, pediatricians, et cetera, that are using this program. I think almost all the feedback we've received is positive. It probably depends on who the user is, but all feedback has been extremely positive.

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

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, that's great that we're getting positive feedback on the program because I just couldn't believe how ecstatic that physician was when he talked about it.

Let's go back to that same minister. Minister, after speaking with the physician that used the AI scribe program and how pleased he was with it – made the statement that he didn't know if he could go back to the old freehand way. There's a lot of education in the doctor's office around the literature for the patient when they're walking in, but minister, what education is out there for doctors?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'm not quite sure what the question was, but I'll do my best to give a quick answer here.

There's no requirement to use AI scribe. If a patient wants to opt out, they're more than welcome to. We'll be conducting a survey once the pilot ends, which I think is January of '27, to hear feedback and any way that we can improve the system.

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

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll go back to that same minister.

Minister: Now, this is a pilot program, and I don't know exactly what the parameters are around it for how long it will last, but hearing how good it was for that doctor and you just mentioning that the feedback was all coming positive, what do we have to do to make sure that this program is available for physicians in the future?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I would say that the program will be available in the future. It will just be if we have to tweak how it works or any changes we have to make, which will be done, as I said, through feedback – a survey that we'll issue, I'm sure, once the pilot program is completed in January of '27.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pharmacy technicians are vital to the day-to-day delivery of health care in our province, and we value the important work that they do. Last summer, the Public Service Commission confirmed the reclassification of 50 of these professionals to a new group 8 level. However, we understand there have been some administrative hurdles in fully implementing this change, and the workers have been waiting for some time now.

Pharmacy technicians

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Could the minister provide an update to the House on the status of this reclassification and share when these technicians might see that matter resolved?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I would just like to complement our pharmacy technicians and the work they do. It's a very important role; it's hard to recruit those positions. Especially now with Pharmacy Plus and all the extra services that our pharmacists can prescribe and work with, they need that assistance.

I guess what I would say is I know that this has been ongoing for quite some time now, and I would offer my apologies. It shouldn't have taken this long, but I've been assured by Health PEI that they have made this a priority just within the last, I think, two weeks. Hopefully, we'll have it resolved soon.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, minister.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that creating a wage grid requires due process, and they are hearing that Health PEI is currently finalizing their submission to Treasury Board to officially establish the group 8 pay scale as it does not currently exist in the collective agreement.

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: To help provide some certainty for these frontline workers, can the minister share an anticipated timeline for when this submission might be approved by Treasury Board so the new grid can be put into place?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

[1:55 p.m.]

I've been told that the Treasury Board submission has been submitted to Treasury Board. I would assume that it will probably be on the agenda next week or the following week. Once that's done, there will obviously have to be

negotiations with the union on how that level 8 is set and how that compensation works, but I would hope within the next two weeks we can have that resolved.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, minister.

Mr. Speaker, the representative let me know that the collective agreement of the IUOE recently expired at the end of March. Because this specific reclassification was approved well before the agreement expired, there is some anxiety among the members regarding how the resolution and the retroactive pay will be handled moving forward.

Question to the Minister of Health: Can the minister provide some reassurances today that Health PEI and the union are working to process this specific reclassification as a priority and that it will not need to wait for the conclusion of the upcoming broader contract negotiations?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Right now, this will have to go through Treasury Board. They'll have to set a negotiating team who will work with the union to negotiate this.

But I just want to be very clear for the union that all pharmacy technicians within that union will receive the backpay. We're committed to ensuring that happens. I'm sorry it's taken this long, but I have been told it's a priority and they are actioning it.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The special projects program through EDA has supported many unemployed workers for years, and it actually saves money. With that, funding has been reduced. Then communities in western PEI will feel it even more because the need is greater there and the employment options are fewer, especially with the economic damage caused by the loss of the oyster industry.

EDA special projects funding (further)

Question to the Minister of Workforce: If the government is cutting EDA funding, will the minister direct a greater portion of that \$3.5 million to western PEI, where the need is greater and the employment opportunities are fewer?

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

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

I actually met with my CFO this morning to talk about this specifically. I do appreciate the question.

There's a lot to it that I'm, again, trying to understand myself. There was a federal reduction, I want to say two years ago, in '24-25. The LMDA – you're very right, hon. member. As I said, it's going to be hard to debate the hon. member. The LMDA – \$3.5 million, and I believe the following year was \$1 million.

My staff is great, through SkillsPEI as well as through the Employment Development Agency. They've done a great job. I do hope, hon. member, as well, when I say that reduction from the federal government.... I do want to say, though, the addition this summer that the federal government is adding 25,000 jobs across the country to the federal summer job program – that should be a benefit to PEI, I do hope.

I know I didn't fully answer your question, but I did commit to bringing back the questions that you had from earlier. Hopefully, they'll give a better description with that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Question to the Minister of Health.

We just talked about doctors, doctor recruitment, and doctors having lost trust in the Island government. It's not just doctors that aren't from Prince Edward Island; it's doctors from Prince Edward Island, as MSPEI did write:

“The PSA was signed. It was recognized that the true gain for patients for this agreement could only be realized through significant further recruitment of physicians to the province, not through expectations that the current workforce could do much more to reduce the patient registry.”

And then the next line says: “According to our records, there have been no new net gains of LFM physicians in the past year.”

Physician recruitment (further)

Minister, is that right? Have we not recruited any doctors like the MSPEI has said?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I did notice in the article in the *Guardian* today that that physician had said that we’re not recruiting enough specialists, which I’m not sure where that comes from because if anything, we actually do an amazing job at recruiting specialists; I think 41 last year alone.

But we do lack in recruiting family doctors. I’m not going to beat around the bush on that one. We’re not doing a good enough job. We have to do a better job of retaining our residents. I’m assured by Health PEI that they are working on that. They met with the family residents that we currently have, and they’re going to meet with the incoming residents for next year.

Yes, we do have to do a better job on family doctors, but specialists, I think we actually do very well.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[2:00 p.m.]

Moments ago, the Premier of our province just disrespected Dr. Lafontaine, who is an Indigenous doctor. You are in charge of Indigenous affairs on Prince Edward Island. He comes from Grand Prairie, Alberta, and that was very disrespectful, what you said. You wonder why we can’t recruit doctors to Prince Edward Island. It’s the disrespect like that.

Remarks re: physician’s comments

Question to the Premier. Last week I asked you to apologize to Islanders. Will you stand up today and apologize to Dr. Lafontaine, who’s an Indigenous member of the medical community, for those remarks you just made?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier of this province, I will work with the medical community in this province to better the system of care for Prince Edward Islanders. This is the opposition that used to belittle anybody in senior management that wasn’t from Prince Edward Island as “big city doctors” and other such things.

We are all working towards one focused goal: to improve the health care system in Prince Edward Island.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Cooling and Capital Improvement Program

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

Everyone deserves to live in a home that’s warm in winter and cool in the summer. Today, I’m pleased to announce a \$3.9 million investment to support cooling upgrades and capital repairs on privately owned long-term care and community care homes across Prince Edward Island.

This funding is being delivered through a one-year cooling and capital improvement program intended to support timely upgrades in facilities where needs have been identified through Department of Health and Wellness building inspections. Under this program, eligible facilities may receive up to \$2,000 per permanent licensed bed to support cooling improvements, including the purchase and installation of equipment. Funding may also be used for infrastructure upgrades identified through inspections such as electrical, plumbing, and structural.

This approach directs funding to facility-specific needs and helps operators make targeted improvements that meet safety, infrastructure, and licensing requirements. The program is jointly supported through the Government of

Canada and the Government of Prince Edward Island's Aging with Dignity funding agreement.

This investment builds on previous work. In 2022, \$500,000 was invested through the Safe Long-Term Care funding agreement to support cooling equipment in common areas. In 2024, our government invested \$3.6 million to install cooling systems in seven publicly operated long-term care homes.

This investment will make a big difference in the day-to-day lives of residents and staff. It will help create more comfortable living environments, improve working conditions for staff, and support the continued delivery of safe, quality care. This program builds on that progress, and we look forward to continuing this work to support the people who live and work in long-term care and community care facilities across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I've got to get some of those details in there because this is very important, what the minister just announced. It is hot in long-term care facilities. The air quality in the summer is difficult. I'm glad that the minister has talked about this before. It does get too hot. Last year was exceptional in those facilities, and I'm looking for a lot of funding into that area.

I think this announcement goes a long way. There is a lot of work to do. Some of our facilities are aging. There are facilities in my area that I've been trying to advocate for, to just expand a doorway just to open the door so people can get out in the courtyard. I can take you there and show you the door. I've talked about it many times. It just needs to be expanded. We need to get people out in the community and using those facilities, and upgrade those facilities.

Hopefully this is an announcement in the right direction. Air quality is incredibly important, and we have to do everything we can in Prince Edward Island to change that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

It is a good news announcement. Air quality is incredibly important, not just the temperature but also the quality of the air too – that it's clean, clear, filtered, and safe for workers and for the residents.

I guess what I would like to see as I look into the details on this is just the accountability. It sounds like the minister has indicated this is for climate control, for cooling and heating. I would like to make sure that that money gets used for that purpose because oftentimes we see this government give blank cheques to places and then not follow up to see where the money is actually being spent or if the money is going to the purposes for which it's being used for. So, we need some accountability measurements.

[2:05 p.m.]

Also, many of these facilities are operating under provisional licenses with outstanding conditions. I'm sure that there could be some support looking into those, as well, to make sure that the licences get out of the provisional category and that all the deficiencies that are noted by the inspectors are addressed and safe for the residents. Maybe that's something else this government could look at.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

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

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter sent yesterday from the Early Childhood Development Association to its members cautioning them against radical actions being proposed by certain centre owners, one of which is a staffer within the official opposition which appears to have been endorsed by the official opposition. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table an anonymous Facebook post on the PEI Early Childhood Educator's site that was directed to everyone in the group where an individual involved with the early years sector suggested a work-to-rule scenario where all fun activities for kids be eliminated as a means of protest, which, again, is a radical effort that appears to have been endorsed by the official opposition. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the updated patient registry numbers for the Province of Prince Edward Island for Islanders waiting for access to a family physician showing a net change in the registry over the past month of an increase of 751 Islanders and a year-to-date increase on the registry of 1,248 Islanders. I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table *the Guardian* news article published May 7th, 2026, entitled "PEI doctors have lost trust in government, former Canadian medical association president says." I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, 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: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table, in support of Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke's questions information that the official opposition received regarding pharmacy techs where they did talk about are not asking for anything other than clarity, fairness, and follow through and 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 Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the take-backs that I committed to the Leader of the Third Party and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Land and Environment, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Orders of the Day (Government)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, 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 Land and Environment.

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, 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.

[2:10 p.m.]

[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 onto the floor?

Hon. D. Compton: I do, Chair.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

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

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

Chair: Is it the wish of the committee to open for general questions?

An Hon. Member: General questions.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Welcome back, Lynn and minister.

Just further to where we left off yesterday when the hour was called, we were just having a bit of a discussion on what I see to be a continued challenge with our *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* which is carried into the bill before us today, which is with respect to the issue of interest in property and who has a beneficial interest in property. I know, Lynn, you were sort of in the middle of answering your department's perspective on that.

I think my question was just whether it be with respect to the bill before us or the legislation as a whole. If that is – and I think the minister was nodding when I was giving the preamble yesterday – an issue of concern with our *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* and addressing non-resident interest and ownership in land, is there a plan for how that could be addressed, either within the context of this legislation, or boarder?

Hon. D. Compton: Yes, thank you, member, for the question.

It's a major concern of my own, in my district and I think with a lot of Islanders. This particular amendment pertains to a very small portion of how we can maybe close a loophole within lands protection. I'm looking at a number of different avenues now that I'm the minister, and I would anticipate that – and I'll say this publicly – that we will have another bill on the floor come the fall that would deal with some of the other issues that we're facing.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, that's encouraging, minister, I think I heard you say another bill in the fall. I know you probably can't say too much, but would that speak to the issue that I'm raising here today on the subject of beneficial ownership and use of property?

Hon. D. Compton: Beneficial ownership would definitely be encompassed in that.

There are a number of issues that I'm looking at right now and I have another meeting scheduled next week with my department with a number of people in my department to kind of come up with ideas on ways that we can legally – or change the loopholes that are perceived to be there, or that are there, and also to ensure that land on PEI is owned by Islanders.

M. MacFarlane: So, just again, back to the bill before us, the hub of the whole thing or the material section is that a person who is not a resident person shall not own or acquire an interest in more than one municipal property without first getting approval.

So, we're dealing only with resident persons; we're not dealing with non-resident corporations or resident corporations, and if not, why not?

[2:15 p.m.]

Lynn Trainor: Basically, when you look at the definition of interest under the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*, you have provisions for corporation and a provision for a non-resident. In this particular instance where we're only dealing with non-residents, we included all of the interests that a non-resident could acquire; which includes an interest acquired through the holding or ownership of shares of a corporation.

For example, if you have a corporation that is owned by a non-resident that is acquiring a

municipal property, that non-resident would, by virtue of that, need approval.

M. MacFarlane: That's a good clarification, but also, this doesn't apply to Island-owned corporations.

Lynn Trainor: Exactly.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Perhaps just to clarify a question that I had raised yesterday, it doesn't distinguish between – I think you answered it, but I'm just going to get it clarified again. It's probably my last question: Why doesn't the legislation before us focus specifically on residentially zoned property? Because I do hear concerns about challenges in selling other zoned properties within municipalities – commercial, industrial, institutional.

Lynn Trainor: I'm not sure I'm getting your question. The *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* doesn't deal with zoning, so it's just the real property underneath. Whatever is on it would be scooped up under that. Regardless of the use, it is a property that is an acre or less within a municipality with an official plan that would be captured under this.

M. MacFarlane: But technically, it would be possible within the definition of municipal property to focus the intent of the section on specifically residentially zoned property because municipalities with an official plan have the ability to zone their properties. This legislation could have pinpointed specifically to property that has been residentially zoned by the municipality, but I see the department has chosen to make sure that it's covering all zoned properties.

Hon. D. Compton: We're talking about land here. In a nutshell, the amendment to the act is giving the province the ability to ensure that all land on PEI falls under the protection of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*, which wasn't happening before because anything under an acre within a municipality – a non-resident could acquire multiple acres and never come to the purview of IRAC or be part of what we're trying to do within *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*

It's also ability to monitor ownership of multiple residential properties by non-residents. Really, that's what we're trying to do here, and nothing else.

M. MacFarlane: But again, it's broader than residential properties. It's properties within a municipality that could be zoned any use at all. My understanding from the discussion earlier was that the concern was non-residents who might accumulate residential properties, but we're not just limiting the focus in this bill to residential properties. It includes all other municipally zoned properties for any purpose, and that's acceptable to the department's intent of what it's trying to address.

Hon. D. Compton: If it was zoned industrial and a non-resident purchased one parcel that was under an acre, fair game, but if he wanted to expand or she wanted to expand or purchase another industrial piece of property, or commercial, that would then come to the purview of lands protection.

That's what we're trying to do, is just focus on who is purchasing land in PEI and ensuring that the non-land – before this amendment goes through which we have right now – is tallied.

M. MacFarlane: It'll be interesting to see what it does, so thank you for that. That's all I have.

Chair: Shall the bill carry? Carried.

Hon. D. Compton: I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act.*

Shall it carry? Carried.

[2:20 p.m.]

Hon. D. Compton: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. D. Compton: Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

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 had 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 gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors, that the 20th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 20, *An Act to Amend the Real Property Tax Act*, Bill No. 24, in committee.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

Hon. D. Compton: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors, 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 intitled *An Act to Amend the Real Property Tax Act*.

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

Hon. J. Burrridge: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

If you wouldn't mind, please state your name and title for Hansard.

Ryan Pineau: Ryan Pineau; I'm the provincial tax commissioner.

Chair: Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

Hon. J. Burrridge: Yeah, I do.

Basically, this amendment is a 20 percent tax rate increase per \$100 of assessment for non-commercial realty for property owners who are non-residents. In addition, on the flipside, it introduces a 20 percent tax credit increase per \$100 of assessment for non-resident owners of multi-unit residential rental properties. This is just to mitigate the impact of a rate increase, recognizing the rent cap is currently in place on Prince Edward Island. They will take effect retroactively for the tax year commencing January 1st, 2026.

Chair: Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be read clause by clause, section by section, or open for general questions? General questions.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So, minister, how many rental properties are expected to qualify for this new credit?

Hon. J. Burrridge: For the credit on the multi-unit residential?

Hon. H. Perry: On the rental housing credits, yeah.

Ryan Pineau: I don't have an exact number for you, but it would be approximately 17,000, I believe.

Hon. H. Perry: So, has the government assessed whether this measure will improve rental affordability?

Hon. J. Burrridge: Well, it will just stay the same. That's the whole premise of the rebate. Nothing will change; as far as this particular amendment, everything will stay the same because of that credit.

Hon. H. Perry: So, there was no incentive to improve affordability. Was that not the purpose of this credit?

Hon. J. Burrridge: The purpose is – part of this is to add 20 percent to non-resident property owners in PEI, but what we realized in doing that was there would be non-resident owners of

multi-unit residential buildings. So, we wanted to make sure that that increase did not impact renters on PEI in those particular rental situations.

[2:25 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: But I'm talking about the positive. Will this amendment do anything to help Islanders with affordability?

Hon. J. Burridge: It would be neutral as to where it is today.

Hon. H. Perry: So, in this – just help me with some clarity here – is this giving landlords a tax credit?

Ryan Pineau: Yes. We're introducing a new tax credit, modelled on the one that we passed in this House a couple of years ago for multi-unit dwellings. That one was an affordability measure. This one's designed just to offset this increase in the tax rate.

For the non-commercial owned property – and just to clarify, apartment buildings are zoned or classified as non-commercial residential property for property assessment purposes – the rate has increased from \$1.50 to \$1.70. We're introducing a credit of 20 cents so that it brings the rate back down to that same \$1.50 for those qualifying units so that the rate hasn't increased.

Hon. H. Perry: Again, just for clarity, this only applies to owners who are non-residents of Prince Edward Island, or to everyone?

Ryan Pineau: For the purpose of this credit, it's only for the non-resident-owned apartment buildings. The reason being they're the only ones that are subject to that increase in rate.

For a resident-owned apartment building, that rate stayed at net \$1 per hundred. It's \$1.70 as the new headline rate, but with an offsetting provincial tax credit of 70 cents to bring it back down to the same dollar. So, on resident-owned apartments it stayed at \$1, but for those non-resident-owned apartments, we didn't want to see that increase on them because it's Islanders that actually live in the units.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair. Thanks, Ryan, for being here, and minister.

So, we're increasing to \$1.70 per assessment unit on non-commercial realty. We're talking about multi-unit dwellings, but non-commercial realty encompasses what?

Ryan Pineau: For purposes of the rate increase from \$1.50 to \$1.70, it applies to all non-commercial realty – and that includes Island residents – but with an offsetting provincial tax credit being increased to 70 cents. So, the PEI residents that own non-commercial realty stay at \$1. Non-commercial realty is essentially your residential property, but it also includes some other things like vacant land and a couple of other specific scenarios like the residential portion or rooming portion of a hotel.

For residents of PEI – resident owners on PEI – while the headline rate has increased from \$1.50 to \$1.70, that provincial tax credit that brings it down to the \$1 has also increased so that it stays at \$1. It's neutral for residents of PEI, and that's across all types of non-commercial realty. What the tax credit for multi-unit dwellings does is for those particular types of non-commercial realty, being multi-unit apartments, it introduces a new 20-cent credit so that that impact of the increase from \$1.50 to \$1.70 doesn't apply on those units.

M. MacFarlane: So, for non-resident owners of multi-unit dwellings it's too simplistic and incorrect, I'm sure, of me to say they get the credit that's available to Islanders.

Ryan Pineau: No. It is too simplistic only because they're two separate credits. For Islanders, it's a 70-cent credit and it brings their rate down to \$1. For the non-resident owners of multi-unit, it's only a 20-cent credit. It brings their rate down so that it hasn't increased, but it brings it down to \$1.50. That was always the differentiation. People refer to it as double tax. It's not double tax; it's really one and a half times. Residents of PEI pay \$1 per hundred, non-residents pay \$1.50.

For this new increase, the non-residents are paying \$1.70 but the apartment owners are going to stay at the \$1.50.

M. MacFarlane: Any thoughts on what the non-resident owners will have to say about the increase to \$1.70?

Ryan Pineau: I have received a number of emails, not generally supportive, but I think

understanding of the budgetary times that we're in.

[2:30 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: Okay. I haven't received any emails with respect to the bill before us, but I have received emails from non-resident owners in my district who take issue with respect to the double tax – which we all know is not double tax, but it's an enhanced tax on non-resident owners. So, a non-resident-owner is defined as someone who's not here six months plus a day through a tax year, or...?

Ryan Pineau: As we heard in the prior bill, there are different definitions of residency for the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* versus the *Real Property Tax Act*. For the purposes of our act, an Island resident is somebody who resides on PEI 183 days per year.

It's unlike the other one which is based on 365 over two years and where you file your income taxes. We don't have an income tax tie-in on the real property tax side. It's just 183 days a year. So, it's a little broader than, perhaps, the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*

M. MacFarlane: So, this will apply to all people who meet that definition of non-residents, who have either a cottage here or a home that's available year-round or vacant land. They're going to experience that increase across the board on their non-commercial realty.

Ryan Pineau: Correct.

M. MacFarlane: Some of the advocacy or the representation I get from constituents who have – I'm not going to call them seasonal use, because they're here more than just summer. They're here for several months – close to the six months, close to the 183 days. What they take exception with and what they're quite upset with is that they're Islanders. They may have moved to some other place to work and live predominantly, but they maintain property here that they use several months of the year.

Again, they consider themselves to be treated unfairly simply because they don't live here six months plus a day. I'm not necessarily advocating for that position, but I'm sharing what I hear from them; they feel like they're being penalized simply for having to move away to pursue work. They spend a lot of time in PEI

contributing to the local economy when they're home.

Is there any thought of trying to find a way to mitigate some of the distinctions between non-resident owners? They're not quite all the same.

Ryan Pineau: It's not something we have looked at within taxation. It's certainly something we have a lot of discussions with residents about, and we'll walk them through those steps to ensure that, if they're entitled to it, they're receiving it.

Particularly, I'd like to reiterate that your circumstances can change and you can always reapply for that provincial tax credit. If you're not eligible for the provincial tax credit that gives you that reduced rate, once your circumstances change and you do hit that threshold of 183 days, we will re-implement the provincial tax credit.

That happens for a lot of people who are in transition. They work out west, so they don't meet that residency requirement, but at some point they're moving back home. Surprisingly, one of the first things they do is apply and make sure that they're getting that provincial tax credit – probably before they do a lot of other things.

We're not there to trick anybody into not getting it. We try and make sure that we're fair and get that word out there.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. Do they have to show 183 days of history in the last year on the Island to be able to change their status from non-resident to resident?

Ryan Pineau: We have an application program that primarily relies upon them having a Prince Edward Island driver's licence or health card, in which case they've already proven to another department that they've met that residency requirement because it's a similar requirement on those fronts.

If that isn't how they've met it, some people may still be eligible for, for example, a licence in another province even though they're out of that province for more than six months. They can use other methods. They can attest an affidavit, for example.

M. MacFarlane: It sounds like it can be fairly responsive fairly quickly to someone whose status has changed to resident.

Ryan Pineau: For sure.

M. MacFarlane: The fact that a non-resident might rent their property out for the months they're not here doesn't give them the availability to claim this credit?

[2:35 p.m.]

Ryan Pineau: It would only come into play if it was a multi-unit – for example, a duplex. If they had a duplex that they were renting out, then it may come into play in terms of the new multi-unit dwelling credit.

The reason for the differentiation between a single rental versus a multi-rental is we don't track rental status. That's not one of the things that we look at in terms of a property.

For the purposes of administration, it's safe to assume you're not living in multiple units at the same time. So, anything with two-plus units, we can make a good assumption that it's a rental property. For a single dwelling, we can't make that same assumption. So, classification wise, it's not something that we can easily get a credit....

M. MacFarlane: Just a quick clarification. If someone lived on the property personally for five months of the year and it was a duplex, and they rented out both units for seven months of the year, does that qualify them for the credit?

Ryan Pineau: It would, on the side that's rented for the full year, for sure. On the side that they are in, it would depend if they are eligible for the owner-occupied program. So, we have another assessment program. It's not part of the tax act; it's part of the assessment act, and that's the one that caps your annual increase at the lesser of CPI at 5 percent.

If they are claiming that as their residence, they can't be in that program and also renting the property out part of the year. So, they would have to make a determination of where they lie on that.

Generally, it would be better to be in that program if they are residing in the property for a significant amount of the year than to be getting into this 20-cent credit because it's ongoing for the lifetime of ownership of your property, in terms of that gap between market and taxable.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Chair.

I just want to get a little more clarity on the 183 days that you're a resident, because in the other act we talked about filing your income tax here. So, as long as you're 183 days, regardless of where you file your income tax, is that correct?

Ryan Pineau: Correct.

There can be situations – typically people think of income taxes as being filed where you're primarily living, but for income tax purposes, there are a lot of different rules. Where you live on December 31st may dictate where you file your income taxes. So, if you have residence in multiple provinces, it tends to be where you file your income tax is where you're at on December 31st.

That can change back and forth even though you may primarily spend most of your year in Prince Edward Island. If you spend December 31st in another province, you might be filing your income taxes in another province. It kind of simplifies it from that perspective, so you don't have to go back and forth on the property tax side.

R. Henderson: It would be nice if there was some continuity between the two definitions – I mean, just from general terms on that.

I'm looking at this scenario. I have a lot of, I'll say single individuals, that travel out west. You'd know them; you probably have relatives in that category. But they go out west, work three weeks and one week back home. How are they defined in this? I'm assuming their home is here. They live here. They're only going out to work and probably be in a camp, which is not really their home. They might even file their income tax in that province, but yet....

Are they eligible for this? This wouldn't impact them?

Ryan Pineau: I'm going to say probably – without knowing all the details.

A lot of times, residence – you have to look at a number of factors: Is your spouse and your family and stuff all on PEI, and you're just living in a camp when you're away? You may not have another residence available to you in

that other province, so it may be drawn more towards the PEI side of the equation in that front.

R. Henderson: So, then it's really up to the individual where they define their residence to be in.

Ryan Pineau: We end up in a lot of detailed conversations.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

With this bill, you're talking about, kind of, two different things here. What came first? Why did this bill come forward? Is this to affect the rental markets or to get increased revenues?

[2:40 p.m.]

Ryan Pineau: I would say that the intention, originally, was a revenue driven bill. So, it's a budget measure with the increase from \$1.50 to \$1.70 across the board. But recognizing as we did that and looked at what properties are going to be impacted, we're hitting residential rental units owned by non-residents – which there are not a lot of them, but there are some – and the people that live in them and are Islanders.

Also, there's the interaction between the *Residential Tenancy Act*, which caps allowable rent increases, already been set for the year. This is coming in, later into the year, after that increase has already been set, so IRAC wasn't able to put that into their consideration. Landlords wouldn't be able to recover the increase in taxation that comes with it. This mitigates that increase on those residential rental properties across the board.

G. McNeilly: Thanks for that. You went on this; you were trying to look for more revenue, which is okay. When you first looked at it, before seeing the issues that it created with the *Residential Tenancy Act*, how much was the projected revenue for the province going to increase?

Ryan Pineau: I think if we applied it across the board without that credit, we're into about \$2.5 million, and with that credit, probably around \$2 million.

G. McNeilly: I didn't realize there was only about \$500,000 in the difference.

It's a little bit more comforting, because what we've seen over the last little while is.... What I worry about instantly, especially in my area is that there were a lot of owners from outside of Prince Edward Island – Killam and different groups that were there. They've since sold because they don't really enjoy what's happening here on Prince Edward Island.

I'm worried about that because I have a lot of rental units in my area. So, that's only going to affect about \$500,000 of the...?

Ryan Pineau: The 20-cent increase only turned into about \$500,000 on those non-resident-owned multi-unit rentals.

I guess we've seen the same thing – because we also operate the land registry – with a number of conversions of non-resident-owned properties into resident-owned properties because those buildings are being sold back into the Island resident market. So, less of an impact in terms of this credit not needing to go as far because there's just less of those non-resident-owned units. The provincial owners have kind of taken back over.

G. McNeilly: Thankfully, over the years those did that. I think about the Bevan Bros, especially where they have taken on a few of those areas, and you look at Belvedere Terrace – that's not going super great. Different things, different situations that I'm worried about in that section.

How many units are we talking about? I know the dollar amount, but how many units? Do you have a rough figure about how many units we're talking about?

Ryan Pineau: I don't that one off the top of my head. I do have the number, and I could bring it back, but I don't have it here with me.

G. McNeilly: We've got a few things this is going to affect. The *Residential Tenancy Act* issues January 1st, I think, is their date that they issue. Do you foresee this coming in play with that date or when do you think this would be applied?

Ryan Pineau: There shouldn't be an impact in terms of we'll call it the flow-through impact of this on a go-forward basis. Because we've put into place this offsetting tax credit, there

shouldn't be a – we'll call it a tax rate increase that impacts their calculations for – we'll call it next year.

Property taxes can increase because of assessment increases but there's no tax rate increase. They would be looking at kind of a like-for-like year over year in terms of property tax impacts and it being just the increase in taxation through assessment increases.

G. McNeilly: My last question is: Do you think this will affect the remaining units that are held by people outside of Prince Edward Island? Would it drive them to change in any way, selling to condos or selling those off? I'm worried about the stock that wasn't sold back into the Island before and now it's maybe a little bit – they haven't been kept up with and they're there. Are you worried about that at all, that that will create that situation?

Ryan Pineau: I think there was concerns that that would be an impact if we didn't put this credit into place and continued that increase in tax rate on those non-resident-owned properties where the tax burden is already higher with the \$1.50 rate versus the \$1 rate by resident-owned properties.

[2:45 p.m.]

This shouldn't have an impact. We've seen, I think, a slowdown in conversions to condos that were happening before where they're actually being re-converted back into apartment buildings. I think that initial – I think a lot of it was done for financing purposes. They were able to finance better on a condo unit versus a unit within an apartment building. Some of that's been undone at this point in time.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Perfect. Thanks a lot. I appreciate that high-level discussion.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

I just had one question. Sorry if I missed it, Ryan, in your answers to the previous line. What is the bottom line increase to the revenue side as a result of this amendment?

Ryan Pineau: About \$2 million.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you.

Chair: Shall the bill carry?

Hon. J. Burridge: I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend the Real Property Tax Act.* Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burridge: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows. Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burridge: Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and that the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Chair: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Real Property Tax Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the 12th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 12, *An Act to Amend the Registry Act*, Bill No. 11, in Committee.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, 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 Registry Act*.

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

Hon. J. Burridge: I do so.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

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

Ryan Pineau: Sure. Ryan Pineau, and I'm the provincial tax commissioner.

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

Hon. J. Burridge: So, essentially, this bill would amend the act to allow registration of a family law affidavit, enabling its virtual commissioning process to align with the process of the *Registry Act* rather than the *Notaries and Commissioners Act*.

Chair: Is it now the pleasure of the committee to have this open for general questions?

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

[2:50 p.m.]

We've debated this. This is not the first time. One of my questions was with respect to the consultation with the Law Society. I think you answered all of that, Ryan, that there was feedback from the real property committee.

Ryan Pineau: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: One of the concerns that I had presented to me from the bar was with respect to additional registry fees being downloaded onto Islanders or purchasers of property. Can you speak a little bit to how that's been addressed?

Ryan Pineau: Sure. First, I would just note – because I was on for the *Real Property Tax Act* and didn't say that tax bills go out today. Watch your mailbox next week.

[Interjections]

Ryan Pineau: It's everybody's favourite time of year as we swing into spring.

But while I do bill on that side, we did hear the concerns of the real property section of the Law Society on additional fees. Whenever we first looked at preparing this amendment, we were going to have the family law affidavit registered as a separate document, which would have involved a separate registration fee of \$77.25.

The real property committee came back asking that we incorporate essentially their existing practice, which is to allow the family law affidavit to be filed as part of the deed package so that it's filed under one fee. We did amend that where you have the option or the filer has the option of registering the family law affidavit separate but they can also file it along with the deed or mortgage to which it relates, in which case it's covered by that same \$77 that the deed or mortgage was going to be filed with.

In the majority of cases, unless somebody really wants to register the document separately, it's going to follow the same underlying process that the legal community is using now and be under that same \$77 fee that they currently pay to register the deed.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. So that must, then, be subsection 2(3): Exception – affidavit.

Ryan Pineau: Correct. We had to do that exception there to allow it to be filed along with that deed, but also in subsection 14, with the document registration. Typically, when a document is registered, it's assigned a number. With the exception that we've introduced for the family law affidavit to be filed with the deed, we also had to accept it from the registration number so that it's not given a separate number whenever it's filed in with that same package. As it stands, if you want to file a family law affidavit in with the deed, it will follow the same process where it's in under the same number as the deed under the same fee.

For all practical reasons, nothing will change in terms of the real impact of how family law affidavits are filed, with the exception of they

can now do it virtually using the process under the *Registry Act*, which is really the guts of the amendment and what they were after.

There's currently no virtual commissioning process under the notaries and affidavits act. It's to be introduced through regulation. It's not there yet, but regardless of if it came into place, the legal community wanted to ensure that those family affidavits, because they are always part and parcel to a real property transaction, followed the process under the *Registry Act* so that they could do all of those procedures through the same session.

M. MacFarlane: You just mentioned in your answer there, Ryan, reference to – is it the notaries and affidavits act? This doesn't address the current situation where an affidavit to be filed in the Supreme Court but not registered in the registry office would be virtually signed. There's currently no provision around accepting virtually signed affidavits outside of the *Registry Act*.

Ryan Pineau: Correct.

M. MacFarlane: Did you say something was coming down the pipe in that regard?

Ryan Pineau: I think the way they had set up that new act was that there was the potential for there to be a procedure under the regulations. There is currently not. Whether one is coming forth or not, I can't say, but there is currently not one there.

M. MacFarlane: As part of what we're allowing here – as you say, fundamentally, it's permitting the virtual execution of documents and enabling that, which came out of COVID because people weren't able to attend personally with notaries.

[2:55 p.m.]

I remember this situation well. People were trying to buy homes here and we would tell them they would have to go and sit in person in Montreal with a notary and they're like: "What planet do you live on? There happens to be a pandemic as we speak." But we were still requiring that, so this pivoted to allow that.

So, this is a big help to facilitating transactions, but one of the challenges has always been the lack of perhaps clarity around suitability and acceptability of documents that are virtually

signed because people are taking pictures with their phones. I've signed documents, and they're sending them to lawyers, and then the registry office either says yes or no. Are there any regulations to be coming under this act to give clarity around what's acceptable?

Ryan Pineau: There are no regulations forthcoming. We do have, you'll see, in the section 14(3) – which is an existing section – the right to refuse an illegible document. Initially, during those COVID days, we'll call it, when this was first introduced, we were getting a lot of really poor-quality snapshots from cameras and that kind of thing.

The registry office staff have worked with the legal community ever since that, in terms of kind of gearing them towards what the acceptable level of quality of a submission is. We're seeing very few that are coming in illegible at this point in time that we have to refuse from that standpoint.

M. MacFarlane: I don't think the act addresses – in fact, I know it doesn't. Will there be any regulations surrounding – and maybe the department doesn't concern itself with this – the process to be followed in executing the document virtually as far as.... It used to be, or perhaps currently still is, that you have to have a virtual meeting so you see the person. They're supposed to adjust their camera so you see their pen on the paper. They're then supposed to walk to a scanner or use a scanning device of some sort to then scan it to you while you're still on the call.

Does this legislation or the regs concern itself with any of that process?

Ryan Pineau: I'm going to say it's not part of this amendment; Section 19 walks through the procedure for the virtual commissioning that we require them to follow, which is essentially as you describe. It's one session, continuous, where the party that is witnessing can see the entirety of the person signing the document and then submitting it electronically back to the person who's witnessing it, who can then print it off and witness that document before submitting it to the registry office.

Our process is within that section 19, I believe it is in the act right now, and it seems to be working from that perspective.

M. MacFarlane: It almost seems that there has to be consistent guidelines around it because we've talked about the notaries and affidavits act and this act. It almost seems like there should be some consistency across the board as to how virtual documents are executed. I don't know whether that's something the department is contemplating or not, because it does require an interdepartmental approach to make sure that the same process is required, whether it's for signing Supreme Court documents or land title documents as well.

I don't know if you have a comment on that or not.

Ryan Pineau: We've met with the Department of Justice as they went through the consult for the new notaries and affidavits. They reviewed our procedures as part of the review of that, looking for feedback on how it was working.

As I understand it, there are issues in terms of the *Evidence Act*, in terms of that virtual commissioning process, in order to make sure that it meets the best evidence standard. Their preference is to have a wet signature – with the virtual witnessing, wet signature gets mailed back to the witnesser and a second wet signature. That's where I think they're at with it. Nothing has come forward yet in terms of that act, but they continue to do that jurisdictional scan on best practice for notaries or for affidavit documents.

M. MacFarlane: I suppose moving towards an electronic titles act or registry would help mitigate against some of this process as well. I know I've asked the minister before, and probably will again as we go through the budget, about moving this *Registry Act* that we have, which is pretty antiquated and entirely paper-based, to an electronic titles act, which Ontario brought in, I think, when I was in law school in 1996, around about. So, we're a little behind on that, but that would help us trying to scramble to do what we're doing here.

[3:00 p.m.]

I guess the question I have is also with respect to mobile homes, for example, which can constitute a family home. They're not real estate; they're a chattel for which a bill of sale transfers title. Is it the thought that this act would address the transfer of mobile homes as well?

Ryan Pineau: For purposes of the registry, I don't think they're covered. We do consider them real property. They're deemed to be real property under the *Real Property Assessment Act*, but not under the *Registry Act*.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. I'm fine. Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Chair.

Regarding the proposed change in clause 1(b) for the word "document," the definition, who was consulted when you were making the decision to exclude powers of attorney documents from the definition?

Ryan Pineau: It formed part of that same consultation with the Law Society's real property section.

The reason for that – it doesn't change anything that is currently in there. Powers of attorney are currently registered under section 45, so they're not registered and commissioned under that top section of the act. This just clarifies that they don't get pulled under this definition of document.

There's a separate section for the procedure to register a power of attorney. The reason for that is powers of attorney don't get witnessed before they're registered; they're simply registered. So, with a document, you have to go through and get it witnessed by a commissioner of deeds or various other eligible bodies, but a power of attorney is simply registered in the registry without being witnessed separately.

Hon. H. Perry: Thanks for that, Ryan. So, the Law Society had no concerns?

Ryan Pineau: No.

Hon. H. Perry: Are there any other statutes that would rely on the *Registry Act*'s definition of "document" that could unintentionally be affected?

Ryan Pineau: No. We checked, and our particular definition is solely used for our act and doesn't expand beyond that.

Hon. H. Perry: Is there any estimated cost on implementing these amendments, like staff training or system updates?

Ryan Pineau: Nothing required from that perspective. The current process is already that they register these family law affidavits as part of the deed package, so it's typically slipped at the back of a deed right now whenever somebody registers a deed.

That's going to continue, essentially, the way this happens, unless somebody really wants to register a family law affidavit separate, in which case it's simply following the same registration process we currently have, except they pay a fee of \$77.

So, no additional training or system change is required. It will typically follow what is already being done and has always been done. It just codifies that when they do it, they're allowed to use that virtual commissioning process under the *Registry Act*.

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

Chair: Shall the bill carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burrridge: I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend the Registry Act*.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burrridge: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burrridge: Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and that the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

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 had under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Registry Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the 23rd order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 23, *Public Sector Pay Disclosure Act*, Bill No. 22, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: Minister.

[3:05 p.m.]

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: *Public Sector Pay Disclosure Act*, Bill No. 22, read a second time.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you.

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, 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 *Public Sector Pay Disclosure Act*.

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

Hon. J. Burrridge: I do.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Please state your name and title for Hansard?

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

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think just a rough one. There have been calls for transparency in public sector pay. So, we thought we would bring this to the table to discuss and to work on that transparency piece that people have been asking for and legislate a list that would come in every year with operating budget.

Chair: Is it the will of the committee to just open this up for general questions?

Some Hon. Members: Open for general questions.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, minister. I just have one question really – well, to start with. What does this bill accomplish that can't be accomplished presently?

Jordan McNally: We all know – we call it the big book or the budget handouts. Basically, the same information that would be captured in this bill is captured in those budget handouts. The issue with the budget handouts is there's no policy or legislation requiring that right now. PEI is one of the few jurisdictions that does provide that supplementary information.

This bill would solidify that process, at least for the salary disclosure piece of that, and require the same level of detail that you currently get in those books, but also accumulate it and make it more user-friendly, if you will – think open data – and post it on the Department of Finance website.

The other, I guess, enhancement, if you will, on this bill compared on what you get in the budget handouts is the budget handouts are really only for what we call vote departments – departments that receive an appropriation vote. This bill would propose that all entities under schedule A, B, C, and D of the *Financial Administration Act* would be included in that disclosure, the only

exception being the Legislative Assembly and its offices.

Hon. H. Perry: I have no issue with making anything more transparent, of course. You're talking about those big books, it's been mentioned in here a lot when we're asking for what programs may have been cut or reduced and they're saying: "Go to the big books, go to the big books." I really wish that transparency was there also.

But it is difficult to go to those big books, and you see the salaries and you see the title of what the position is and the pay range, but you don't have individual names. Will this include individual names?

[3:10 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: No, it specifically excludes individual names. The reason for that is a ruling by the Privacy Commissioner in 2003 that stated that the disclosure of individual names with their exact salary was a breach of confidentiality and exceeds what would be considered appropriate for privacy reasons.

That ruling looks back at the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* where it specifically states that what is allowed to be disclosed is classification and salary ranges. But when you disclose individuals' names with that information and exact salaries, it goes beyond what that FOIPP act would allow.

Hon. H. Perry: Mentioning within the public body of it, is it for all positions or is there a threshold?

Jordan McNally: It's all permanent positions that are budgeted for and any contract employees, if their contract is more than a year, i.e., when there is an employee relationship with government and they're subject to payroll deductions. That's what included which would be consistent with what you get now in the big book.

Hon. H. Perry: So, contract – would that also include travel nurses?

Jordan McNally: No, it would not.

Hon. H. Perry: Why wouldn't it?

Jordan McNally: Those aren't treated as employees of government.

I suppose if they were under contract for more than a year, depending on the stipulations within the contract, they could be included, but typically, right now in those big books, agency nurses or staff are not included in there.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm just trying to find it here. So, if by contract, you have to be employed – or that contract has to be for more than one year for that individual or that position?

Jordan McNally: When an employee who is employed by the means of contract, authorized by the public body, for a fixed term of one year or more and who is subject to payroll source deductions. Sometimes professional service contracts are more than a year, but you're not subject to payroll deductions. You're treated more as professional service or consultant.

That's why that stipulation is in there: really, are you treated as a true employee of government?

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Hi Jordan and minister.

You mentioned the ruling in 2003, Jordan, there. I'm going to start my questions by asking about – because every other province except Quebec has a so-called sunshine list. As I understand it, in every single one of those cases, the specific salaries and the names are disclosed.

My first question is: Did you do such a jurisdictional scan? If you did, how did you come up with such a – you could almost call it the “public sector pay non-disclosure act” because there's nothing here that the public cannot already get access to.

I guess the question: Did you do a jurisdictional scan that informed this bill?

Jordan McNally: Yes; as part of the bill, there was a jurisdictional scan done. To your point, there is – most other jurisdictions have some form of disclosure required. Typically, they have a minimum benchmark, i.e., over \$100,000.

This bill was drafted with the restrictions put in place by the FOIPP act and the ruling by the

Privacy Commissioner. So, tried to provide as much disclosure as possible within the parameters set by previous order of the Privacy Commissioner.

The other point on readily accessible to the public – it is true; tabled documents are accessible to the public. The idea here would be that, specifically, more of a centralized open data format would be used to collect this information and post it online so that you could pull it down off the website, manipulate it, filter it whatever way you want, whereas right now, it's in a 365-page PDF document that you can't really do much with other than scroll through it line by line. That's what I offer.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I absolutely agree, Jordan, that the current – I mean, you can get this information; it's certainly not easy. I've tried when a number of people have inquired of me to get the information. It's just cumbersome.

[3:15 p.m.]

But the question is, and it was the first question asked by the hon. Leader of the Opposition is, that strikes me as something that wouldn't require a standalone piece of legislation to accomplish. Government could just decide to – well, we've talked about open data here many, many times, for years, ever since I've been elected.

Why did it require a piece of legislation to do something that government could have just decided to do through a policy?

Jordan McNally: I'll offer my thoughts and if the minister wants to add any, for sure.

By solidifying it in an act – I mentioned it earlier that the budget handouts that are currently required are not part of policy; they're not part of legislation, i.e., if a government chooses not to provide them, there's nothing keeping them from doing that. This act would force that disclosure no matter who was in government or what the decision of the day was.

The other piece is that right now, all that's disclosed is departments that receive a vote. By solidifying this in an act, you're requiring all those other – we can them ABCs – other entities under the FAA to provide the information. There can't be any objection against it because it is now a part of an act.

I think it enhances the current process and solidifies it, i.e., if a government chose not to do it, they would have to repeal an act in order not to provide that information.

P. Bevan-Baker: I want to be absolutely clear, I'm in favour of an act which does fully disclose, in the manner that other provinces do, what we typically understand a sunshine list to be.

But my problem with the act before us is that the central elements of all of the other sunshine list acts – and they have different names and they're structured slightly differently – but this one differs fundamentally from them because it does not require specific salaries for individuals nor the individual names.

I know you've now a couple times referred to the 2003 decision. Was any discussion had with current Information and Privacy Commissioner about perhaps revisiting that decision?

I mean, the world has changed a lot in the last 23 years and the fact that every other province somehow – and they all have Information and Privacy Commissioners, perhaps by a different name – but why is it not possible on Prince Edward Island when it's possible in every other province in Canada?

Jordan McNally: Be a great question; I don't pretend to be an expert on information and privacy.

To answer your initial question, no, the opinion of the Information and Privacy Commissioner was not sought in advance of this bill. The ruling and court case in 2003 and 2004, the court case I'm referring to challenge the disclosure trying to seek additional information, i.e., employee names and exact salaries.

At that time, the Privacy Commissioner – the order is online, August 2003. I looked it up myself. It does refer to other provinces as well in terms of what they do. They talk about Alberta in the decision and other various provinces.

You're right, a lot may have changed since then but to answer your question bluntly, no, the Privacy Commissioner wasn't consulted prior to this bill.

P. Bevan-Baker: I feel a little bit sorry for you, Jordan, having to sit there and defend the questions because it strikes me that the

motivation behind this bill is more political than it is practical. I really feel that the deficiencies in this bill, when you stand it up against every other province that has a public disclosure act, are so glaring that I'm struggling to understand why government would even have brought this forward.

Maybe the minister can, beyond what Jordan has already said, but I just can't see any value that Islanders are getting from this piece of legislation.

Hon. J. Burrridge: I think Jordan did a really good job a few times now to talk about why we're doing this and what it does bring.

It brings this information. It legislates it. We could have come into this budget this year and not provided that information. We do it because we think it's right to bring in those big books and that additional information. We do that every year and it's a lot of work, honestly, to pull those together.

Yeah, if in the future another government decides to pull them back, they absolutely can do that. This way it's legislated. This way it's codified; it has to happen.

[3:20 p.m.]

I think the fact that we are going to put it into an open AI format is a much better format that people can manipulate and work with and try to gather insights from. I think that that is a step up as well.

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, I appreciate the fact that the information, limited though it is, is going to be more accessible and more user-friendly to manipulate; I get that. But let's start with the minimum threshold. Every other province – it varies, but \$100,000.... Although, I have to tell you, \$100,000 when some of the pieces of legislation in other provinces came forward was a high salary. That's not necessarily the case anymore.

Even with the limited data that is going to be made available, presuming this act passes, did you contemplate having a minimum salary threshold below which you would not disclose, at least, the salary ranges?

Hon. J. Burrridge: I guess the fact that it is going into an open AI format – I guess the question is why wouldn't you want all the data?

In those types of situations, you might as well just have all the data at your disposal instead of putting in a minimum threshold.

P. Bevan-Baker: I have to admit that I'm not sure how I would have answered my own question because the value of a sunshine list is, as I understand it, from a public openness and transparency point of view – and you've mentioned in your opening statement, minister, that this was to work on the transparency piece; that's how you put it. That is increasingly important for Islanders.

But the purpose of the sunshine list as I understand it, for the public good, is that people have an opportunity to see the higher-paid members of the public service in their particular jurisdiction, and to know why they are in that position – and are they worthy of that? What is their training and reason for being in this position? But without any of that – all we have is salary ranges here; we don't have any names attached to that – I just find that this, it's almost a sham that this is –

Chair: Hon. member, do you have a question?

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I do. It feels like a sham that this is being proposed and named *Public Sector Pay Disclosure Act* when the only thing we're getting is the salary ranges that we could have got anyway.

I guess the question I would have is.... Salary ranges can – in an upper management position, a deputy minister for example, like \$70,000 or \$75,000 is the range. What value does that offer Islanders? We have no idea where that individual or where an individual in that position falls within that salary range. It seems almost meaningless to me.

Jordan McNally: Some things that I, myself, as a taxpayer, would see the benefit, I guess, of the way that this is being proposed – I mentioned that it can be pulled down and manipulated/filtered/sliced whatever way you want.

The range would be in separate columns so you can filter by upper range. You could say anyone that's within the range of over \$100,000. Division titles would be in it as well so you could see – well, right now in the big book you wouldn't be able to probably even count how many nursing positions are in Health PEI because they're individual lines. They'd still be

individual lines in this, but you could actually filter by nurse practitioner and see how many nurse practitioners are budgeted and/or there would be a column for the union you belong to, which currently isn't consistently applied in the big book. You could literally see how many excluded employees are budgeted across all entities in government.

And including the 17 entities that aren't currently disclosed in the big book, to me, gives a fuller picture of every budgeted position across government no matter how it's funded or appropriated.

To me, the number of ways you can slice the information that's going to be online would be beneficial from an analytical point of view.

[3:25 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm going to go back to the 2003 FOIPP decision because that seems to be the justification for our bill being as anemic, if I can put it that way, as it is. That FOIPP decision, as I understand it, was based on the language of the FOIPP act, but part of the decision was based on the fact that we don't have a public disclosure act; that was the rationale for the decision that was made in 2003. We're bringing in a public disclosure act.

Again, this would be to the minister: Did government consider appealing that decision before we brought in a public non-disclosure act like we have here today?

Hon. J. Burrridge: No, I think the precedent was set, and we decided to work within the environment that has been set and try to be as transparent as we can be, make this law, give Islanders pay transparency for every single position and, by putting in an Open I, giving them a place to run analysis, quite honestly – pretty significant analysis, above and beyond, as Jordan says, the normal budgetary positions that we usually disclose in those big books – and go further with it to include those 17 other entities.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I mean, again, going back – the 2003 decision seems to be the line in the sand that government is happy to stay on the other side of. I would say, with the appearance of a public disclosure act, that that decision is almost – I wouldn't say it's been overridden, but this is the time that government should have come forward and challenged that decision because part of the rationale for the 2003

decision was that there was no public disclosure act.

I'm not sure I have a question, Chair, I'm just really disappointed that....

Chair: Okay, if you don't, I'll move onto Charlottetown-West Royalty.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Yeah, thanks. Hey, Jordan.

How will this affect – when you say agencies – like the PEI Liquor Commission? All their salaries will be – where will we be able to find the agencies? Where will they show up?

Jordan McNally: It will all be in one data source. If you can picture specific columns – I use Excel, so that's what I'll use as an example – the columns would be “entity.” So, PEI Liquor Commission would be an entity that you could filter by, then the division or section they work in.

So, even within liquor, maybe which store or however they reallocate their salaries, the position title, the union they belong to – are they an UPSE civil or are they excluded? What classification level would be another column, your FTE equivalent is another column, and then their low range and high range. So, I'm thinking there's eight different columns that you could kind of slice the information by and one of them would be entity; you could filter by “Liquor Corporation,” for example.

G. McNeilly: And I'm unfamiliar; does PEI Liquor Commission follow the same classification – like level 17, 18, 19 – for all of their structure?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, there are entities that are outside of the Public Service Commission classification umbrella, if you will. PSC has laid out in the *Civil Service Act* what they're responsible for classifying other entities contract with PSC for classification services, whereas other entities never actually come through the PSC, so they might be on different salary scale.

Now, a lot of times they'll use maybe an existing collective agreement as a benchmark, but the enhancement, to your point, is that right now there's no specific disclosure of some of those entities that may use a different pay scale.

So now there would be a comparability option to what core government, let's say, would be paid.

G. McNeilly: Thanks for that explanation.

Would this affect anything through Engage PEI at all? Boards – like the board of Health PEI or anything like that? Or are we looking at...? No.

Hon. J. Burridge: They wouldn't be employees.

G. McNeilly: Yeah.

[3:30 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: Yeah, they're paid through honoraria, which is a separate TB policy, so there wouldn't be an employee relationship with government. So, no, they would not be included in this.

G. McNeilly: Okay. I'm just going to jump off the Leader of the Opposition when he was talking about – I was just in Beach Grove and I was talking to a travel nurse, and she actually said she's been at Beach Grove for over a year. But they're under a contract with an agency. We talked about it there briefly, but what's going to happen in those situations? Are they supposed to be a year and under, or if they go over a year, or are we going to see all the information in this list?

Jordan McNally: You mentioned that they're typically contracted through an actual company – an agency – so typically the contract is with that actual company, not an employee. It couldn't be tied to a specific position to disclose it. That's where I think the line is drawn: is there an employer or employee relationship and are they subject to payroll tax deduction?

That's specifically how we cut this because there are many other examples of professional services across government that are still disclosed as professional services in the big book, but just not to the level of detail that salaries would be. The range of examples that you could maybe come up with would be exhaustive. Trying to obviously make something that's digestible and executable – that's what this intended to do.

G. McNeilly: Is there any mechanism, while we have this open, that we can go to agencies that we pay...? There's \$41 million for agencies and

growing, and we get one line in the budget. It doesn't seem like enough.

Can we, at this time, make them disclose more of their information in this process in kind of list? It's not right that we're spending this much money going to an agency and we get one line in a budget. Has there been any consideration for that to get more information from these agencies?

Jordan McNally: I'm not sure if this would be the right mechanism to do it. I think there are other mechanisms where you could get detailed listings, whether it be through FOIPP or through a standing committee request. This is really, in my mind, intended to solidify specifically salaries and contract employees over a year, whereas professional services and getting additional information for those types of contracts – I think those other mechanisms are probably where I'd point to.

G. McNeilly: Perfect. And one more – the one thing that drives me crazy is when you see.... There's a salary range – I was just looking through it here, in Health PEI, but I don't know what the range is. I can't find it here, but it's \$150,000 to \$227,000. It's enormous. It's a \$75,000 range for various positions.

Why is that? How are we going to get around...? We don't know what the – it's massive.

Is that going to be the direction of government or are we pulling that back in, minister?

Chair: Member, if you were listening, the hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point has already brought up that question.

G. McNeilly: I think my question was better.

[Laughter]

Chair: It may be, and I will leave it to the table if they would like to re-answer it, but I just want to let you know we did already discuss this.

G. McNeilly: Okay, well, here's another one then. When you do see a salary range of – some places, in chief executive officers, there has been a flatline – \$350,000 for the CFO. That number has been wrong in the past with the chief communication officer. Obviously, they're going to be getting bump-ups, and it could happen at various times, but we see a flatline

number. How is that affected by this at all? Are we just going to see the flatline number?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, the act ties it to how the position was classified. Even those chief positions, we'll call them, at Health PEI receive the classification and approval at Treasury Board, so there should be a range associated with those. I don't know off the top of my head what that range is, but classification is defined in this act.

[3:35 p.m.]

It may take some time for everyone to make sure they're adhering to the act properly. That's why it may take time to issue this first open data list – because all the entities that aren't currently included will be for the first time and have to work through that. But for those chiefs, and/or executive positions, and whatever the position is classified at – which I know for sure those are classified – they would be subject to the same range disclosure.

Chair: Definitely a 10 out of 10.

G. McNeilly: Wasn't it? Thank you.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Back to the B-rated questions, I'm sorry.

I know there's a lot of people who have been waiting for a sunshine list here on Prince Edward Island. I must admit, I haven't sat down with any of them with the act in front of us, but my suspicion is that they will be less than satisfied. I don't know if you spoke to any of the outspoken public advocates for a sunshine list before you brought this forward to get feedback?

Hon. J. Burrige: I'll be honest in saying that as the minister in request for this, I would hear it here in the House from you being, probably, a lead on it and the media. Ordinary Islanders, outside of that, I think I've had one email on it as the minister responsible.

The one other piece that I will fit in here is the unions. We have talked with all the unions on this and I think they actually had input back in 2003, but they are on board with what we're doing. They would not want to see the quintessential sunshine list. The unions certainly

support what we're doing here but would want to go no further than that.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I have spoken to a number of public servants about the thought of having their salaries disclosed, and understandably, they're not really thrilled about that. Most of them would not fall above a reasonable threshold. What I was talking about earlier – we're really trying to capture the high salary positions here.

I think for those civil servants who are concerned about everybody on the Island – and I know you've mentioned this yourself, minister, about the intimacy of Prince Edward Island. But I think if a reasonable threshold been contemplated that a lot of those concerns went about because it would not capture a lot of the civil servants.

Again, I think I asked this earlier, but there was no low threshold that was ever contemplated in terms of if we were to produce a true sunshine list? That was not something you ever really discussed in the department?

Hon. J. Burrridge: I think we just – it was asked and answered I would say.

Chair: Yeah, if you want to answer it again, you can, but I believe that it was already asked.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, I know this hasn't been asked, Chair, and it's regarding that distinction between Prince Edward Island and all other provinces who have a sunshine list where the names and the specific salaries attached to those individuals exist, beyond a threshold. I'm going to come back to the FOIPP decision from 2003.

The FOIPP act is, of course, a very powerful act, but there are exclusions and exceptions to the FOIPP act. I'm just going to read the FOIPP act and its relationship to other acts. This is section 5(2) of the FOIPP act.

It says: "If a provision of this Act is inconsistent or in conflict with a provision of another enactment, the provision of this Act prevails unless (a) another Act; or (b) a regulation under this Act expressly provides that the other Act or regulation, or a provision of it, prevails despite this Act."

So, we could have written an act which said this public disclosure act prevails despite the decisions of the FOIPP act. I'm just wondering

why that wasn't...? It seems to me that that wasn't even considered. Is there a reason for that?

[3:40 p.m.]

Hon. J. Burrridge: I guess I'm not changing any line here.

We were just trying to respect previous rulings, provide transparency in a way that makes this disclosure law, and give it – we want government to give this; any kind of data – in a form that's open data so it can be analyzed, people can gather insights, and then taking it that extra bit to include all those other entities.

We're trying to respect the past rulings, respect the FOIPP act and its intent, while still trying to deliver transparency on this front.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'll just make a final comment.

I'm pleased that we're attempting to do what every other province in Canada has already done. I'm deeply disappointed that this bill is as ineffective, ineffectual, as it is. It's hard not to support a tiny step in the right direction, but we had an opportunity. This government had an opportunity to produce a real sunshine list with full disclosure and with reasonable limits on it, and you chose not to do that.

This is not a government doing anything substantial to improve transparency and accountability. I think that needs to be fully understood and on the record.

Chair: You have the opportunity to put it in a member statement.

Shall the bill carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burrridge: I move the title.

Chair: *Public Sector Pay Disclosure Act.* Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burrridge: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows. Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. J. Burrridge: Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and that the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *Public Sector Pay Disclosure Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: A recorded division has been requested.

Please ring the bell.

[The bells were rung.]

R. Henderson: The opposition is ready for the vote, Mr. Speaker.

K. Bernard: The third party is ready for the vote.

[3:45 p.m.]

T. DesRoches: Government is ready for the vote, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Members, the question has been called.

All those who are against the report of the committee, please stand.

[The Deputy Clerk calls the roll]

NAYS

Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Henderson
MacFarlane
McNeilly
Perry
Simpson

Speaker: All those in favour of adopting the committee report, please stand.

[The Deputy Clerk calls the roll]

YEAS

Bell
Burridge
Compton
Croucher
Curran
Deagle
DesRoches
Dillon
Dollar
Hudson
MacKay
MacLennan
Ramsay
Redmond

Speaker: Members, the report of the committee has been accepted and passed.

The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the 1st order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Land and Environment.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of supply to His Majesty.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

[S. Dillon in the chair]

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

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

Hon. E. Hudson: Yes. I do, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

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

Stephen Mutch: Stephen Mutch, director of finance.

[3:50 p.m.]

Chair: For those following along in the book, we are on page 82. We're going to start with the Department of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism.

Corporate Services

"Appropriations provided for operation of the office of the Minister and Deputy Minister and centralized administrative functions for the department." Administration: 15,400. Equipment: 1,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 11,300. Professional Services: 5,000. Salaries: 439,300. Travel and Training: 30,900.

Total Corporate Services: 503,400

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Just the increase in salaries there – it's about \$100,000, or a little less than that, I guess. I'm assuming that's another person, plus wage increases?

Stephen Mutch: Are you comparing last year's forecast to budget this year?

R. Henderson: Yeah. So, somebody was either missing, or a position down.

Stephen Mutch: Yeah. So, no new positions there. There were a couple of part-year vacancies last year that are now filled.

R. Henderson: I guess I should have made the comment – it's great to see Stephen here again. You were here just not that long ago with Agriculture, so you do both departments?

Stephen Mutch: I do both, yes.

R. Henderson: Wow. Impressive. Okay.

Stephen Mutch: Yeah. It's awesome.

[Laughter]

R. Henderson: Good for you.

Hon. E. Hudson: Good employees.

R. Henderson: Oh, I don't doubt that.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair, and welcome back to the floor.

Just below the salaries line, just looking at the travel and training, there was more than double the spend forecasted on the budgeted amount last year. What was all the travel about?

Hon. E. Hudson: That, it does increase – a reflection in out-of-province travel.

You look at how varied the department is, I guess I would have to say, when you look at Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism, when you take into account that sport and culture are also there. You look at the FPT meetings that staff and quite often the minister would be attending. That's part of it.

You also look at staff – and in cases, the minister, as well – attending events such as the Boston Seafood Expo, Expo Global – which is in Barcelona, Spain – and all of these.

Basically, it's promotion of the department and the various aspects of the department.

M. MacFarlane: The budgeted amount was only \$13,800, so I guess it was underbudgeted in consideration of your response, minister. I understand the scope and the breadth of the department. We've talked before about trying to reduce the travel side of the budget, but now we're actually increasing it almost threefold and more than what was forecasted to be spent.

Is this now going to be the new number going forward as the placeholder to budget from?

Hon. E. Hudson: I would anticipate that it would be, member. I think, though, as I had said in my previous answer, we have to – as a government, as a department – certainly look at the fisheries side of it. You look at what has taken place in the U.S. with regard to the potential impact of tariffs there. You look with regards to China – tariffs put in place there.

I do give credit to the federal government for having them removed, but at the end of the day, we have to continuously look at building our markets. I think I'd referenced Barcelona – the

show in Barcelona, Spain, one of the markets that we have seen fair growth, really tremendous growth, I would have to say, on a percentage base with regard to our seafood exports in Barcelona, and in Spain as a whole.

[3:55 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: Given all of that, should we see a corresponding increase in the other lines under corporate services as well, given the breadth and the scope? Because the budgeted amount is in total only \$8,000 more than last year's budgeted amount, so I'm assuming, then, that the department operates in this section with that amount and doesn't need a corresponding increase as we're seeing on the travel line.

Stephen Mutch: Yeah, and that increase, really, in the travel line was sort of moved around from some of the other lines. You'll see the materials, supplies, and services – we reduced that down to reflect what we actually have spent in it. So, really, there wasn't an increase in the overall ask; it was just more of a realignment to what our actual spend has been the last couple of years.

M. MacFarlane: And you mentioned, minister, in your answer the oyster industry, and I see last year there was a trip to Ottawa for federal meetings on MSX supports for the oyster industry. Was there anything that came out of that meeting of benefit to the industry, to your recollection?

Hon. E. Hudson: That would have been prior to my coming into this role. I do know that part of that though was substantial advocacy to the federal government with regard to partnering on assistance with the Province to the industry. That advocacy has continued and will continue.

M. MacFarlane: And I think my last question on this section would be on the legal fees spend of \$7,500. Was that to do with the oyster issues?

Stephen Mutch: No, that was actually just some HR/legal consulting just to resolve some personnel issues within the department. That's what that legal was.

M. MacFarlane: Alright, thank you.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Policy and Planning

“Appropriations provided to assist the Minister and Deputy Minister regarding policy, planning, and legislation development, as well as FPT relations.” Administration: 5,400. Equipment: 2,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 2,200. Salaries: 452,000. Travel and Training: 10,100.

Total Policy and Planning: 471,700

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Is this a new division?

Okay, can I ask how it came about and why it was not here before? It seems like something that could have been here before. Why not, and why now?

Hon. E. Hudson: That's a good question, and I think it is important, the realization that it is a new division and the importance of it.

It did come from work that was carried out by various divisions previously. We're looking just at, for example, building capacity, things along that line. You look at the work that was done with regard – and again, as an example, the *Combative Sport Commissioner Act* that we debated here a few days ago. It was obvious the amount of work that went into that; the stranger that I had on the floor, the tremendous grasp that that stranger had on it. We're looking ahead at the implementation – the drafting of the regulations that are going to be associated with that act.

One of the things, too, that as a department, as a government, we need to bring forward as well is an aquaculture act. So, all of this fits into this particular division here.

M. MacFarlane: Did I hear, minister, in your answer that there are no new positions? They're pulled from other areas to populate this division?

Stephen Mutch: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: And by way of planning, I think you alluded to an aquaculture act potentially.

Hon. E. Hudson: That's correct.

M. MacFarlane: Anything else contemplated?

Hon. E. Hudson: I'm sure that there will be as we go forward. One of the other things that I did mention or reference was the regulations that are going to be required and associated with the *Combative Sport Commissioner Act*.

M. MacFarlane: Where did the climate action policy coordinator come from?

Stephen Mutch: That position was located within – it might have been under corporate services in the prior year. It was a position created a few years ago, I believe.

M. MacFarlane: That's all I had on this section, Chair.

Chair: Total Policy and Planning: 471,700

Shall it carry? Carried.

Marine Fisheries and Seafood Services

Seafood Services

[4:00 p.m.]

“Appropriations provided for the effective delivery of information, and product and market development programs for both the commercial fishing industry and seafood products. This section also provides for the operation of services associated with seafood buying and processing as prescribed by the *Fisheries Act* and the *Fish Inspection Act*.” Administration: 4,500. Equipment: 11,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 85,600. Professional Services: 4,000. Salaries: 426,100. Travel and Training: 59,900. Grants: 395,800.

Total Seafood Services: 987,400

[Interjection]

Chair: Well, sir. Thank you for keeping me on task there, hon. member. It is four o'clock, so it's time to switch.

Hon. E. Hudson: Madam Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration

the grant of supply to His Majesty, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Orders Other Than Government

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

H. MacLennan: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, that the 29th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Order No. 29, *Financial Literacy Week Act*, Bill No. 105, ordered for second reading.

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

H. MacLennan: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: *Financial Literacy Week Act*, Bill No. 105, read a second time.

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

H. MacLennan: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, 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 *Financial Literacy Week Act*.

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

H. MacLennan: Yes, I do.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

If you could please state your name and title for Hansard.

Lori Ronahan: Absolutely. My name is Lori Ronahan, and I work with the Department of Education and Early Years. I'm the flexible learning support leader.

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

H. MacLennan: Yes, I do.

[4:05 p.m.]

I would like to explain why this Legislature should support the establishment of Financial Literacy Week on Prince Edward Island to be observed annually during the third week of November and why this matters profoundly for the mental health of Islanders.

We often speak in this House about anxiety, depression, and stress, particularly among young people, seniors, and working families. But one of the most common, at least discussed drivers of poor mental health is financial stress. Being worried about debt, covering rent, choosing between groceries and heating, or not understanding the financial products creates chronic anxiety that follows people home every night.

Over the past number of years, I have met with educators, financial literacy organizations and community leaders to better understand how Islanders experience these pressures. What I've heard constantly is that many people do not lack ambition or responsibility; they lack the access to practical financial education at the moments when it matters the most.

Financial literacy is prevention. When people understand budgeting, credit, fraud prevention, student debt and long-term planning, they experience less fear and more control in their lives. That sense of control is fundamental to mental health and wellbeing.

This bill does not mandate new programs or costs. What it does is create visibility, coordination and priority. By recognizing Financial Literacy Week, we encourage schools, community organizations, workplaces, and government agencies to align their efforts, share resources, and normalize conversations about money; conversations that are too often wrapped in shame or silence.

November is Financial Literacy Month in Canada. Aligning with the national financial literacy efforts also allows PEI to benefit from existing tools and partnerships.

Improving mental health is not only about treatment after crisis; it is about reducing the pressures that create crisis in the first place. Financial Literacy Week is a simple, practical, and compassionate step that will help Islanders build confidence, resilience, and peace of mind.

Chair: Is it the pleasure of the committee to have this open for general questions?

Some Hon. Members: General questions.

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

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, member, and hello. It's good to see you again.

Thank you so much, member, for bringing this bill forward. I absolutely will be supporting any effort to promote literacy and financial literacy, in this case for our children. Thank you.

My question – so, this highlights a week. This is a start. When you talk about working with the Department of Education and Early Years, what does that mean related to this bill, and what can we do to improve what could be happening in the curriculum at this point in time?

Lori Ronahan: Financial literacy learning outcomes exist in curriculum already from grades 5 to 12 explicitly, and we're working on financial literacy framework that will kind of add rebar to the structure of what we already have in place. I think what Financial Literacy Week will do is create almost like a flag on top of a building that really highlights the importance of financial literacy.

The school system in this proposal would have a raft of weekly activity – daily activities each day of that week where it's age appropriate, something that the students that can tuck into. We would present that to the schools that they could spend Monday to Friday that week doing something connected to financial literacy, just as a little highlight of that week. It just really shines a spotlight on financial literacy importance, which is not just knowledge building; it's habit building.

[4:10 p.m.]

You can learn financial literacy from a textbook perspective, but you have to develop the habits of financial literacy in order to really benefit from it. So, if we can embed that in our curriculum, but then highlight it and make it special, something that stands out in a week at school, that would be great.

C. Simpson: I would agree with that. Financial literacy is in the curriculum right now from grades 5 up, I believe.

Lori Ronahan: Explicitly from grades 5 up, yeah.

C. Simpson: How are students doing within that outcome? Do we track – do we know how strong our students are in their understanding of financial literacy?

Lori Ronahan: We don't have a standardized provincial assessment of financial literacy. There may be elements in a PISA test that are done from time to time. In grade 10 specifically, there's a course with a unit on financial literacy where the grades within that course could reflect it. We don't have any direct measures at this point, but that's not to say that we couldn't.

Again, a test result doesn't necessarily support that, but I think if we put learning outcomes out there, we highlight them, and we develop those habits of mind, and as we mentioned, having conversations and understanding is really where we need to head.

C. Simpson: I would agree with that, an authentic assessment taking a look at what children have learned and how they can apply that.

When we take a look, then, member.... Thank you for this letter from the CEO from the provincial credit union. What sorts of activities

would the community be engaging in during this week that they've already shared with you because I know you've done extensive work in getting this bill here?

H. MacLennan: That's what a lot of the financial institutions.... They like the idea of the week because they can focus on that; they all can focus on that week. They want to put seminars on. It's just lately getting into the schools, so we've missed a lot of people – we've missed a lot of young people.

By financial institutions – and hopefully government and different organizations like Junior Achievement and that – they're willing to go out into the communities and put on seminars to explain it out to them.

C. Simpson: Just a closing comment: Thank you again for bringing this forward.

I'm fine, Chair. Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, member. I have to admit I've known you for a long time and I know you had a bit of a passion for this particular issue. From my perspective, who is married to a former bank employee who now works in the credit counselling sector with a company and deals quite significantly with a lot of people that are in financial difficulty, there's definitely a need for greater awareness and understanding of how to manage money and how to handle it.

Is there some sense that after this week that you're using to sort of measure that it was a success? In other words, did all financial institutions participate? Were all the schools participating?

How do you know whether you've achieved what you want out of it? I mean, every day is a better day, don't get me wrong, but how do you that you kind of hit this one out of the park, so to speak?

H. MacLennan: Well, I guess a lot of it will depend on how many take it in. If you're going to the public, like the schools itself, I take it will be getting to every child which is a little different. They have it in the curriculum, but it's not mandatory.

But hopefully that.... Well, as far as in the communities, it would be nice to see a lot of people show up, a lot of people take interest in it, and get feedback. Doing those things, you can have surveys and that to see what they think of it. How can we improve in another year, and basically, put that information out there and ask them whether they think it's worth it or not or what we can do to make it better.

R. Henderson: That's good. From this perspective, if this bill passes and it comes into law, what department is responsible to take this bill and then promote it? I'm thinking Finance, but it might be Education – you're here, but....

Lori Ronahan: I think from the school's perspective, I would certainly take the initiative to prepare materials for the schools and to gather any anecdotal feedback that I could get from the schools who participated.

I think challenging communities to engage in an event that they choose to organize based on the resources in their community to address the needs in their community would be something that I would leave to communities. I don't think I could really step in and do that piece.

[4:15 p.m.]

It depends on who's involved, but I would certainly take on the piece for the school in conjunction with my colleagues because if you're going to have activities in the school – it may be in language arts if they were reading a story to a grade 1 student about making financial decisions or choices, or if you're doing skip counting in math using dimes and nickels and quarters in grade 3, and you may be doing budgeting in grade 10. It depends on if you want age-appropriate activities that are like a quick bite that best highlights the work that we will be doing.

R. Henderson: Fine, and I can appreciate that, but it's my understanding that every bill of legislation falls under some portfolio to make sure that it's followed and adhered to and whatnot. You're proposing that it's going to be a Department of Education.

H. MacLennan: Education within the schools. I'm hoping, though, that the Department of Finance would be interested to take on some of the responsibility.

R. Henderson: I'm still trying to say: Doesn't it have to be one department or the other? My thinking would be a bit more – I think the schools definitely play a role in implementing a lot of the process here, but where I see some of the real issues that are of financial problems tend to be as they become a little bit older because you start to have more money.

You see young people – they go out west or they're into the fishery and they make a fair bit of money, but they don't manage it that well. It is more of those ages that are a little bit older, like maybe 24 or 25, that really wind up getting in trouble.

I'm just wondering if it should be something with Finance and, yes, Education plays a role, too. That's where I think the financial institutions can be a big support to you.

Should you be doing it with some component of Education, will there be any resources allocated to the Department of Education to see that it be implemented in the schools and promoted in the schools? I'm assuming it's not going to be a lot of money, but are there going to be any resources of financial components put into this that you're aware of?

Lori Ronahan: I don't see there being any additional cost because I think we have resources and materials available and it's very easy to create activities that support that type of learning. I know that the institutions in communities are anxious to come in and speak to students in school. I don't see that there would be a particular associated with it – certainly not in early days and certainly not within this budget frame.

R. Henderson: I commend you on that. Like I say, from my perspective, I do support the bill, so I'm not trying to be difficult by any means.

I know my wife does a lot of going to community schools. She also goes to the Career Bridges program. They usually get her to come in and speak, then try to explain some of the processes that they go through, and the pitfalls of bad credit ratings and some of the problems that exist on that.

You're right, there are a number of resources out there. Promoting this is a good thing. I think you probably need a little bit more resources, though, just to try to promote it appropriately. Not everybody is going to want to volunteer to speak

and come into these events too. Maybe sometimes there has to be some small – I'm not advocating for my wife, a small stipend, but for others that will be doing this. She's close to retirement anyway.

Anyway, thank you very much.

H. MacLennan: I know that as far as the public – and like I say, the provincial credit union, they're more than willing. They put on little ones now, but they're more than willing to do these seminars, too. I've been talking to CIBC and that and they're willing to do seminars, too. It's to their benefit, too.

R. Henderson: That's all I have, Madam Chair.

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Chair.

First, I want to thank the hon. member and the stranger on the floor today to talk about this. I think financial literacy – as mentioned already, how important literacy is from any scope, but financial and being specific is really important.

I think it runs from children to young adults in their post-secondary years to community where we have the general public and enter our seniors and such. So, I am a big believer in knowledge is key and power, and that things like this will help our community going forward to do what they need to do.

I am curious if you've had – I'm going to put my old hat on from the years before this position and ask a couple of questions around the post-secondary. As a past individual of a staff of a post-secondary institute, one of the things that used to happen is during orientation, we would have financial institutions in set up and there would be student credit cards.

[4:20 p.m.]

I had a lightbulb moment at one point where a student was really excited. They had filled this out and they were, "Look, I'm going to get this credit card." I was like, "We're going to start with: that is not free money, and you'll owe everything back and more." And right then, I was really envisioning how financial literacy needed to work when you are embarked on post-secondary years, and a little outside your home, and a little more freedom and choice.

So, I'm curious to know if you've had any conversations, or are you thinking or considering any conversations with our post-secondary institutions on how they can incorporate Financial Literacy Week?

H. MacLennan: Yes, I have, actually. I was invited last fall to a seminar at UPEI. If I could just remember her name.... Kushi Damry, UPEI Student Union. She was very interested in it when I was talking it over with her. They have started, I think, some programs for especially a lot of first-year post-secondary students. So, it seems to be developing in the post-secondary.

Hon. J. Redmond: I don't have a whole lot more to question, but I want to just say I think a week is really important, as you mentioned, about putting that flag on the building. I know there are some financial aspects built into curriculum, but like everything, they become very normal, and we just work our way through them. When you have a week, it really does spotlight the importance of this, and we'll be able to target according to the age that it's being delivered to and the institutions or organizations being recognized within.

So, I just want to say that I am in full support of this. Congratulations on your hard work. I know you've been doing this for a really long time, and it's really exciting that it's here today.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Chair.

I just have one comment and one question, I guess. First off, I'd just like to thank the member for all the work he's done on this. This is something that he's championed from before he was even a member; I remember when we were knocking on doors and going door to door, that's all you heard from the member. He stuck with it. It took him three years, but he's finally got it to the floor, and I can't see how anybody wouldn't want to support this.

My only question would be – I understand that once it goes in, the weeklong part of it should be as quick as you get it – like the week that you designate – but how long will it take you to get it into the schools?

Lori Ronahan: I don't think it would take very long at all. I have sort of a plan set already; I've had this since last year. It's just a matter of doing system information that says, "This is our week, Monday to Friday; here are some grade-based activities that you can engage in through that week"; probably get a notice through the school system out to parents that say that the week is happening, and maybe even in that letter include some possible dinnertime conversation questions you can have. There are ways to engage the community outside of the school, but we have a pretty good communication system within the school to be able to get that information out to the system.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

B. Curran: Thank you, Chair.

I really want to thank the hon. member for bringing this forward, and thank you to the stranger for coming in. I know you've been working – it's been mentioned a number of times in this House how dedicated you were to this cause, hon. member, and I think it's truly a really great cause for Islanders and Island students.

I personally have the opportunity every year to volunteer with Junior Achievement, so I know what it's like – I'm just going to make a statement – to go into the classroom and speak to the students who really don't have a whole lot of familiarity with financial literacy, and seeing what those students – how they understand it whenever the time comes. You go in and, "This is your job," and they have cue cards – this is your employment, this is what you make, these are your bills – and they have to pick from one to another.

So, I just want to commend the hon. member for bringing this forward, and like I said, I don't think there's anybody in this House that's not going to support your efforts in this. I think that should be made very clear in the record. Islanders should thank you for it.

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Chair.

So, I just want to say that I'm very pleased to support this initiative –

[Interjection]

Hon. R. Croucher: Oh, I don't have to stand up, great; I'm going to sit back down.

[4:25 p.m.]

[Laughter]

Hon. R. Croucher: Chair, I apologize. I'm so used to getting up on my feet over the last several weeks, I just did it. Anyway, okay, I gave everyone a good laugh; that's great.

I'm very pleased to support this initiative. I'll tell you, this member has been a fierce advocate. He's put a lot of work into this. We've met a lot of times now. I really applaud him for the work that he's put. He's been very invested in this. I'm very happy that we're talking about this today and hopefully get this passed.

As a part of the broader work in our department, we're developing a comprehensive financial literacy framework that outlines how financial learning develops from early years right through graduation.

Financial Literacy Week, I think, would be a very timely and meaningful opportunity to highlight the work that we do and to engage students and families and communities in a shared learning experience. It's very, very important, and it's something that has been lost a little bit in society and today and the digital world that we live in, so I think this is very, very important.

The department envisions Financial Literacy Week as an initiative to build around three key components. One would be daily K-12 learning activities. We would have schools invited to participate in daily developmentally appropriate activities that reflect the progression of financial learning across all grade levels. These activities would support the implementation of the new financial literacy framework, help students connect in classrooms, and learn in real-world contexts.

Number two would be public engagement through media. I think that's important to extend that learning beyond the school environment. We would like to work with media partners on this to highlight key financial literacy topics throughout the public, not just in our school system with our students. That outreach would focus on sharing practical information,

recognizing student learning, and reinforcing the importance of financial capability for individuals and communities. This initiative would help bring financial literacy into a broader public conversation, and we would certainly support ongoing engagement in that.

And then third, community challenge to encourage that local engagement. Communities across the province – we would encourage them to design and host their own financial literacy events throughout the week, drawing in local experts and resources into communities across the province. This approach would really support the community-based learning aspect of it, recognizing the importance of engaging families, organizations, and local leaders to build on financial understanding.

I think together these components would create a coordinated, province-wide approach in supporting learners, strengthening that community engagement, highlighting our work – your work – on such an important topic, which is financial literacy.

Again, member, I am really proud of the efforts that you've put into this work. You've done a lot of work on this and I applaud you for that. We'll continue to work together to ensure that this hits all corners of our province from tip to tip. I'll do whatever I can to further assist you in your plight here.

Thank you.

H. MacLennan: Thank you.

Chair: I just have one question. I just wanted to say that I started out this journey as a seatmate with you. In my ear, I heard on a number of occasions financial literacy, financial literacy. I left for a little bit, and I've come back and I still hear financial literacy, financial literacy.

I, too, feel like this is a really proud moment for you to finally get this to this fancy word of "fruition" but super proud that we're sitting here today finally taking this to the floor.

[4:30 p.m.]

But I have only one question. And that is: Is there the opportunity to have any of these activities embedded into the already existing curriculum?

Lori Ronahan: Yes. We can look at what's already there and maybe during that week it might just be the time that that activity happens, but it could also be something that ties a thread together that may not exist.

I think financial literacy outcomes are certainly there. They're covered; it's part of curriculum, so they need to be addressed, but sometimes they're addressed in pockets. It's the ice cube versus the – if you plop food colouring into the water, it spreads through the water, and the ice cube just kind of sits there. I think if we could create a systemwide week of opportunity, it will tie threads together, make some of that specific outcome learning meaningful in a more broad sense, and broaden that conversation around.

I think, yes, in some cases; it depends on what they want to do.

Chair: I feel like there's a real opportunity to even expand that into stories and take it into writing and reading. I think there's a whole lot of ways that financial literacy can be put into our system. I'm super pumped to hear that it's happening.

With that, I will ask the question.

Shall the bill carry? Carried.

[Hear, hear!]

H. MacLennan: I move the title.

Chair: *Financial Literacy Week Act.*

Shall it carry? Carried.

H. MacLennan: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows.

Shall it carry? Carried.

H. MacLennan: Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

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 had under

consideration a bill to be intituled *Financial Literacy Week Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, that Motion 53 be called.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant: Motion No. 53: Recognizing PEI tourism operators in record year for tourism in 2025.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal moves, seconded by the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism, the following motion:

WHEREAS tourism is a key contributor to Prince Edward Island's economy, generating approximately six per cent of the provincial GDP, and supporting approximately 8,900 full-time equivalent jobs across the province;

AND WHEREAS in 2025 Prince Edward Island welcomed a record 1.87 million non-resident visitors, an increase of 10 per cent over previous record-breaking year in 2024, and achieved record visitor spending, estimated to be up 12.4 per cent year-over-year;

AND WHEREAS 2025 marked record performance across key tourism indicators, including paid overnight stays, room-nights sold, golf rounds, website visits, museum and heritage site attendance, and Confederation Bridge traffic;

AND WHEREAS these record-setting achievements reflect the dedication, resilience, innovation, and investment of tourism operators, small businesses, community organizations, and industry partners throughout the province;

AND WHEREAS Prince Edward Island's tourism operators continue to elevate our Island's reputation as a premier destination by delivering authentic experiences rooted in our

culture, heritage, natural beauty, culinary excellence, sport, and warm hospitality;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly recognize and commend Prince Edward Island's tourism operators, staff, and industry partners for their outstanding contributions and record-setting achievements in 2025;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly express its appreciation for the leadership, innovation, and commitment of the tourism sector in driving economic growth, supporting Island communities, and strengthening Prince Edward Island's position as a national tourism leader.

[4:35 p.m.]

Speaker: I would like to call upon the mover of the motion, the hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal, to open debate.

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to rise today and support a motion that recognizes some of the operators that really are the fabric to one of the most important industries in our province. It was mentioned throughout the reading of the motion that 2025 was probably – well, was one of the most successful seasons in the history of our great province.

Tourism is really a part of the fabric of our summer economy. Just to think that almost two million people came to Prince Edward Island last year – 1.87 million people visited our Island, which is an increase over another record year the year before – I think that's a testament to the work of the very dedicated staff in Tourism PEI in marketing our province to people across the world, and it's definitely a testament to the people we're recognizing here today as operators that welcome visitors from across the country and across the globe to our Island with Island hospitality and great food – some of the greatest food in the world – and definitely our Island hospitality.

It's not just that they came, it's that they spent their hard-earned dollars here in PEI as well. I think, if the numbers are right, the money that our visitors spent on PEI was also up by 12.5 percent over the year before.

[Interjection]

B. Curran: That's incredible. The Minister of Health just said that is incredible. That builds –

Speaker: I don't think you are allowed to refer to other members in the House that – they may or may not be here (Indistinct).

B. Curran: He's here.

Speaker: I could be wrong, but anyways.

B. Curran: He's here.

Speaker: But he is here, yes, indeed.

B. Curran: But really, I'll get back to this. That's incredible that people are coming here from all over the world and they're spending their hard-earned money.

But that money factors in to about 6 percent of our Island's entire GDP. That's significant. That means tourism is a real engine for our entire Island economy. Again, I have to go back and recognize the incredible dedicated staff of Tourism PEI and TIAPEI, and many of them were in the gallery here just yesterday, and also recognize the operators that welcomed everybody and showed them around our great Island.

We saw records in golf rounds on PEI, website visits, and museum attendance, and Confederation Bridge traffic was up exponentially. There are probably a few things that might have attributed to that. The decrease – from my previous life, the hon. Premier was very instrumental in getting the bridge tolls reduced. I think he was a thorn in the side of many around the country in making sure that happened and making sure that it stayed at the forefront of people's decision making.

But it's not just tourism in Charlottetown or tourism in Summerside that's increased, it's increased from tip to tip. I think the Minister of Tourism mentioned in one of his very knowledgeable preambles that, I think just in the area that I represent, tourism was up almost 20 percent from a record-breaking year the year before. Again, we have to recognize those that welcomed those people.

[4:40 p.m.]

The industry – it isn't a luxury to our rural areas, but it's really ensuring that our rural communities stay incredibly strong and incredibly vibrant. If we have little Johnny that goes, and it's his summer job working at the campground or working at Orwell Corner, for example.... A good friend of mine, Kevin MacLean, is the manager there. He runs a great operation ensuring that our Island history is not forgotten as well. Actually, I worked there at one time when I was younger. I did the tours –

[Interjection]

B. Curran: [Laughter] Yeah, so, I worked there when I was younger. I did tours of the community store. There were artifacts from specific eras in Island history that just looked like the day they came out of the box.

Keeping those rural communities strong also.... We talked about the ripple effect. It's quite the ripple effect. Those rural communities stay strong, which ensures that our schools stay open, which ensures our schools stay strong because families want to move where communities are vibrant. It also helps our rinks and our ball fields and the community centres and our art programs and our culture programs because families want to move to those vibrant communities.

When the visitors come to PEI and they travel across, they walk into our small little shops. You see some of the shops down on Peake's Quay and here on Victoria Row. In the summer, they're just bustling. You open the door and – they're lined right out the door, actually.

It also helps our local grocery stores, our convenience stores, our gas stations –

Hon. C. Deagle: Daryl's.

B. Curran: Exactly. Good shout-out to Daryl's convenience store in Georgetown. Georgetown is really – it's quite a town. It's probably one of the only towns in PEI that I can think of that is such a walking-friendly town because it's perfectly gridded. So, visitors can come to Georgetown. They can walk. Peter Llewellyn has his shop there on Water Street. There's the Georgetown Inn – great hospitality there – and of course, Daryl's, where you can buy anything.

[Interjection]

B. Curran: Pretty well. Pretty well. You can pretty well get anything there.

Our tourism dollars help us really preserve the heritage of our province. I mentioned Orwell Corner, where Kevin and his team work to preserve our Island history. Travel down our scenic heritage roads and see some of the historic buildings that are here in the precinct that we have the honour to sit in.

It's our community hubs that are – when our tax base is healthy, we can invest in some of the places that we love. I think of my district: the Pownal rink, Georgetown rink, Cardigan ball field, the Lorne Valley School. Some of those community spaces are really the heart of our rural communities. Every rural community has – most rural communities have their gathering spot; probably a little, sadly, less than in the past.

I'm lucky enough to represent a pretty cool place. Some of our tourism operators – I mentioned the great hospitality in my area. I think of the Georgetown Wheelhouse. Terry Nabuurs has an incredible restaurant there in Georgetown. It's probably the most beautiful view in all of Prince Edward Island when you're sitting on the deck –

[Interjections]

B. Curran: Oh, no. It's one of the most beautiful views in PEI when you're sitting on the deck enjoying a lobster roll and maybe having a cold drink in the evening watching the sun set on the Brudenell River. He really does an amazing job.

[4:45 p.m.]

Even in his own restaurant, he honours the history of the area. One of his bestsellers on his menu is the John Walsh Caesar. John Walsh was a pillar of the community of Georgetown and surrounding areas. Sadly, he passed away, but he really was that community leader that drove growth and resilience in the area. I was lucky enough to call him a friend, and his entire family are still fully knitted into the community, right from one end of the town to the next.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention, also, in Cardigan – which is a beautiful town, the village of Cardigan. It's a beautiful spot. You have Darcy MacKenzie's garage. You have Rice's garage; it's quite infamous in some local songs. That's where Canada's smallest library is. That's very well.... They stop in all the time. You see

cars parked there all summer long. They have a beautiful Cardigan arena.

And there in Cardigan, you have Clamdiggers with Holly Chiasson and Kent Livingston – a great spot to eat, enjoying another beautiful view. I'm pretty lucky to represent an area with quite the vistas, looking down different angles of the Brudenell River. We also have the Georgetown Inn, as I mentioned.

But when tourism is booming, like I said, it maintains the culture of our communities. The Kings Playhouse is one, for example, where in the heart of the summer it's hard to get a ticket to some of the shows that they put on there. It's great to keep those small Island halls booming because they're employers, they're places to gather for our community, and tourism and the impact that has on our communities is one of the real drivers of that.

But this motion recognizes the dedicated entrepreneurs of our tourism industry, and the stakeholders. Some of those people are some of the hardest working Islanders. It takes a lot of risk, a lot of risk to really jump in and be a tourism operator. There are so many different aspects. You have hotels, you have restaurants, we had Budget car service here, we had Matt Jelley with Maritime Fun Group – they really take the plunge.

When I was preparing for this motion, I thought of some of the tourism operators I know. I mentioned Terry Nabuurs, Holly Chiasson, but I also didn't have to look that far in my own home, where my wife – she was on maternity leave with our son, Oliver. If anyone knows my wife, she doesn't sit still all that well. I came home from work one day and she said, "Brendan, I'm starting a business." "Okay, with all your spare time," I said sarcastically. She said, "No, I think I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to rent equipment to families that travel to PEI." Like what? Cribs, strollers, car seats, and everything that....

So, she took the plunge, the same as many of these tourism operators do. Just during maternity leave, she decided she would start Ollie Roo Rentals, where she rents baby equipment to families that travel to PEI. As somebody who was – we did some travelling when my son was younger, and I have to say I greatly appreciate – oh, and they just happened to walk in the door.

Just as I started talking about my wife's quite successful business, she walks in the door. That's a little awkward. But she took the plunge. What I can say is I can appreciate what her business provides to travellers. I was the pack mule that had the car seat on one shoulder and the suitcases on the other. It's a convenience for Islanders that come to travel. I think when Kelsey decided she would launch her business, I don't think any of us realized the impact it would have. I think it was picked up by three national newspapers. It really went quite well. I also have to do many of the deliveries, but we'll just leave that at that.

[4:50 p.m.]

But providing high-quality baby gear makes sure that the family stays on PEI are the best that they can be. It's seamless for people travelling. It's Island hospitality. Kelsey is from Cape Breton, the other island. It's the Island hospitality that brought the idea forward and that's really what our tourism operators thrive at.

Really, our greatest asset for the tourism industry is the people that are there every single day. There are 9,000 Islanders that work in the tourism industry here on PEI, whether it's during the peak seasons or the shoulder seasons or in the winter seasons. Those are really the people on the front line.

I had mentioned that for many young people across the province, it's sometimes their first job, working in the tourism industry. There are summer jobs at Clamdiggers, or the Playhouse or at the Wheelhouse in Georgetown. It's where some of our young people learn the value of hard work, integrity, customer service, kindness, and hospitality.

I have to say that these record years are really – these operators, they had to handle some pressures with these record years. With a 10 percent increase in volume during some of the hottest days of the year last year in August, that really shows some grit and some determination. These hospitality workers and tourism operators are the best ambassadors that our Island has. I keep going back to – it's the Island hospitality, and that's what people keep coming back to every single year. It's our beautiful beaches, but it's really the people that make this industry a success.

This hospitality – it isn't just a phrase in the motion, this warm hospitality. It's the standard

of excellence that every Islander – whether they're tourism operators or you meet somebody in the street and you welcome them over for supper on a Sunday night, which if you grew up in my house, you would know happens more often than not. Your dad would come home – “I met so-and-so, and they're so-and-so's first cousin. They're on the Island and they're coming over for supper,” so he'd start barbecuing, and lobster boils.

One of the biggest weeks of tourism in PEI – it's my favourite week of the year. It's Old Home Week. I make no bones about it: I am a fifth-generation member of the harness racing community. To see on Gold Cup and Saucer night, when the lights go out and the spotlight's on, that there's tens of thousands of people there to watch a two-minute race – it would send chills up anyone's back.

We wouldn't have that – that race is one of the most prolific and hardest to win races in the world, and people from all over the world come for Old Home Week for those two minutes. They fly from everywhere – from the Netherlands, from.... Actually, last Old Home Week, we had a family that came from France. The mayor of Charlottetown stopped by and had some people; I think they were from the Netherlands and France. They came for Old Home Week, just to watch the exhibitions and the spectacle. So, they come from all over, and it's because of that Island hospitality, and I hope that can continue.

I won't speak for too long because I know that the minister is a proud advocate for the industry and has made no bones about it and the success of the industry. He has mentioned on a number of occasions that it's the operators that make this happen. But this year was a record year and is a victory for everybody across the province, from government to Islanders to businesses to industry partners, and every Islander who greeted a visitor with kindness.

I'll ask all members in this House to support this motion because, like I said, our tourism operators are some of the best Islanders as they welcome people from all over the world here to our great province.

With that, I will sit down and stop talking.

[Laughter]

Speaker: I'd like to call upon the seconder of the motion, the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism.

Hon. E. Hudson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[4:55 p.m.]

I was going to ask for the podium, but that's just going to cut into a little bit of time here, so I'm just going to go off the cuff to a certain extent.

I do certainly want to thank the mover of the motion. Obviously, his passion for tourism and for this Island of ours is shared, I'm sure, by everybody here in the Legislature, but certainly, as the Minister of Tourism, shared by myself.

I would strongly urge him to make a trip up to the western part of the province. He was very focused on the Kings County area.

[Interjection]

Hon. E. Hudson: What's that?

Hon. Z. Bell: Is there anything on the go up west?

Hon. E. Hudson: Okay, up west, what do we have on the go? We have Northport. We have the Pier at Northport looking out over the beautiful Alberton lighthouse and the harbour going out there. There's no better view than looking out from the deck at the Pier restaurant out through the harbour. It is beautiful.

But with that, getting back to the motion itself, yes, I give tremendous credit to the staff in my department in Tourism PEI. What their goal is – what their job is – is to get people here to this great Island of ours for the first time. But do you know who does the fantastic job of getting them back for the second time? Our operators – ones like the ones that were gathered here in the gallery just yesterday. I give so much credit to them.

As was mentioned by the mover of the motion, over the last two years we have had record tourism numbers. We have hit close to \$1 billion – \$1 billion. And you look at the rebound that we have seen in the tourism industry here in the Province of PEI: it has outpaced, since COVID, every other jurisdiction in this great country of ours, and it continues to grow – 2024, record year; 2025 beat 2024.

You look at the initial information coming in now. We are on pace; although with all of the obstacles, all of the challenges that we see worldwide, we are on pace for 2026 to beat 2025.

You look at our campsite registrations, for example. In 2025, it was a record. It was up 15.64 percent over 2024. To date this year, pre-bookings are up 7.3 percent. You look at the travel across the Confederation Bridge – it's up. You look at the number of ones who have flown into our beautiful Charlottetown Airport – it's up. You look at the overnight room reservations to date and also going forward – they are up as well.

We're not going to – anyway, yeah.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. Hudson: Okay. But with that, certainly as the mover had mentioned, tourism is a pillar of our economy. It's a real economic generator. You look at the fact – I do believe that the mover had mentioned – that it is 6 percent of our provincial GDP. But do you know what the national average is? It is about 2 percent. On PEI, our GDP from tourism is three times what the national average is.

It supports in the vicinity of 8,900 full-time equivalent jobs. Those are significant numbers. Those are jobs that we see right across the province, whether it's North Cape, whether it's East Point, every area in between. And that certainly is a revenue generator for the province.

[5:00 p.m.]

One of the things, too, though – I had mentioned the great staff in my department, the operators. But you know who else is an integral part of this industry? It's everyday Islanders – everyday Islanders. You get somebody here for the first time and you talk to them. You'll get the comment: "I have never seen a friendlier bunch." And it's true.

Speaker: Minister, the hour has been called, if you could...

Hon. E. Hudson: Oh, rats.

Speaker: ...adjourn debate with a seconder, please.

Hon. E. Hudson: I adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Speaker: Thank you.

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 adjourn until Friday, May 8th, at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

[The Legislature adjourned until Friday, 8 May 2026 at 10:00 a.m.]