

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Welcome back to my colleagues in the Legislature for another day of debate and to those who have tuned in at home.

I want to begin my remarks and a special welcome to Senator Kim Pate, who is in our province to support her friend Louise Arbore who will be awarded with the Simmons Medal tomorrow night at the Confederation Centre of the Arts.

Senator Pate was in my office this morning and we met for our second or third time, I guess, now on discussing issues around poverty reduction; she's of course a big proponent of basic income guarantee and she's meeting with many Islanders today and tomorrow to discuss that issue. So, I wanted to thank Senator Pate for the wonderful conversation we had and continue to look forward to make progress together on that file.

I also want to say a very special happy birthday to yourself, Mr. Speaker. It is an important day. You're getting close to the big one, but not quite there yet. But you're –

Speaker: How does he know?

Premier King: I did a little research, Mr. Speaker, and I know exactly the details and hope Wikipedia is truthful on the age, but I'll trust you for now; with that I know – I'm sure Shelly and others will have many celebrations planned for you. I know when you're not here, you're a tremendous giver to the community and I'm sure the community will be only be too glad to pass their best wishes to you.

I would encourage everyone to visit the Acadian Museum in Miscouche. They have added an archeology exhibit highlighting the four Island sites. The new exhibit called Unearthing the Past: Archeological Discoveries of Prince Edward Island will

highlight the history of Pointe-aux-Vieux, Havre St. Pierre, Nikani-ika'taqank and Petaweikek. My apologies if I don't have those exactly right, but it's important that we get up there and we see these wonderful art exhibits.

I also want to offer my congratulations to Steven MacKinnon, a Prince Edward Islander who now lives in Gatineau and is the Member of Parliament for Gatineau, who was recently appointed as the Chief of Government Whip in the House of Commons. He's better known in these parts, as the brother of captain Kirk MacKinnon on Ocean 100. But although he represents Gatineau, he's a great resource for me and for Prince Edward Island in navigating the sometimes tricky waters in the Ottawa capital region.

Just finally, on a much more somber note, I was in contact with Premier Sandy Silver in the Yukon, and I passed along the sympathies of myself and my wife Jana and all of Islanders, on their recent tragedy that occurred in the community of Faro. Premier Silver says, just an absolute, wonderful and beautiful community and this is, as you can imagine, a difficult time. Two individuals lost their lives and one is currently fighting for their life. I just called to offer our sympathies and anything that we can do in this difficult time.

So, I'd ask all Islanders to take a moment a send some thoughts and prayers to our friends in the Yukon territory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I want to take the opportunity, also, to wish you a very happy birthday and it was a proposal by one of our caucus members that we sing to you, but that was voted down you'd please to hear.

But you know what, we could celebrate with a good cabbage recipe and I want to thank Ann Thurlow who recently launched –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: – I'm sure that's exactly what you want for your birthday, Speaker.

The PEI Cabbage Cookbook, and it's a book. It's basically an ode to Ann's love affair with what she considers to be the chronically underrated vegetable of the cabbage.

Many things have come from the pandemic and this is one of the delightful ones. This idea started then when restaurants of course, were closed and there was very little market for fresh cabbage here, and Greg and Tania MacKenzie were really worried about selling off all of their produce. That's when Ann, who is an avid cabbage fan and cook, knew there was more to the humble cabbage than just coleslaw and cabbage rolls.

So, she went on Facebook, and started up this group and from that eventually has spawned her book. It's a beautiful book and it includes profiles of three cabbage farmers here on Prince Edward Island and essays by others, about great cabbage experiences that they've had in their lives, and illustrations by Islander Rebecca Ford and of course, there is recipes in there as well.

The book is also a fundraiser for the little Free Pantry on Weymouth Street. So, all of the profits from this are going to a very worthy community cause, which of course is exactly how Ann would love this venture to be. At the launch party that was recently held at the MacKenzie's Produce Inc. in Stratford, that was also a great success. A lot of people showed up, and cookbooks were sold, and recipes were exchanged, and cabbage chocolate cake, whatever that is, was given out.

And, Mr. Speaker, this is something that we could have brought forward for your birthday, fiddle tunes, Island fiddle tunes, were played on the tuba by Olive MacPhail. Now, that's something I would have loved to have heard, and as quirky, no doubt, as the recipes in Ann's book.

The second thing, and again this is a little more somber – much more somber, actually. I want to pay tribute to Karri Shea and the work she's doing in memory of her deceased son Oliver. Oliver's Song is a new non-profit initiative founded to honour Oliver's

legacy by creating opportunities for Island children to create and share in arts education. Oliver's Song is a partnership with ArtsSmarts PEI and the PEI Department of Education and Lifelong Learning. It was recently announced on *Our Musical Island*. The new video series, which is beautiful, if anybody has had a chance to see any of them, features performances and interviews and interactive learning experiences with local musicians and dancers and a variety of local musical traditions. Through ArtsSmarts PEI, music teachers were matched with local performers and artists to explore music and new musical traditions in their classrooms. So, it's a beautiful way to commemorate a beautiful little boy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to wish you a happy birthday. I guess we missed an opportunity to sing happy birthday to you. Anyway, I'm sure someone will before the day is over.

I also would like to wish everyone watching at home and the residents of Evangeline-Miscouche a good day, and I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, an honour to stand here today and also wish you birthday greetings, Mr. Speaker.

I'd also like to thank Senator Diane Griffin, who I had the pleasure of meeting with this morning – she and some of her staff, to talk many topics. She initiated the meeting because she wanted to find out more about our pilot with regards to rural transportation, which she is extremely supportive of, and told me in the meeting that anything that we need from her on the Senate level to advocate towards the federal government, that she would be happy to do so. I assured her that we had a great relationship with the

federal government, but if we did need any assistance, we would certainly reach out to her.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition just brought some news to my attention that I wasn't aware of, that Ann Thurlow actually had a book about cabbage. I had the occasion this past weekend to actually go to MacKenzie Produce and buy several of the largest cabbages that I had ever seen in my life, and, actually, over the weekend, I made roughly 40 lbs. of cabbage rolls. I had them two nights in a row for dinner. They're always better the second time, heated up and the rest are in the freezer, to be enjoyed over the winter.

On a much somber note, I learned some very sad news this morning. I had a message from a good friend, Myrtle Jenkins-Smith. Myrtle reached out to me to advise me that her mother-in-law, Elinor, passed away on Tuesday. Elinor was 105 and three-quarters years young. Myrtle told me that, up until about two weeks ago, Elinor was still only 91 years old. That's how she lived, and that's how she portrayed herself. I've known Elinor for many years. Although we may have been on different sides of the political spectrum, we had a great fondness for each other. I attended many celebrations over the years to commemorate Elinor's birthdays, such as her hundredth and so on and so forth.

I do want to extend my condolences to her family: Floyd Smith, her very special son Floyd; Faye Vincent; Sharon Chesley-Smith; Eric Smith; Vaughn Smith; and, lovingly remembered as well as a mother-in-law, to John Chesley, Judy MacPherson, and Myrtle Jenkins-Smith. Elinor was also beloved Nanny to six grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren, one great grandchild.

Over the years, Elinor and Floyd enjoyed many years of community games, up to 5 times per week all across the Island. One of her favourite haunts was Robin's in Stratford. Elinor was a very important partner on the family farm, along with Joe in Millview, PEI. Then she worked for a number of years in retail in Charlottetown.

When Myrtle reached out to me to ask me if I would like to attend the wake and the funeral, on the bequest of Elinor, I simply

said I would be honoured to. Especially during these limited numbers of COVID, it's a tremendous honour to be invited to celebrate a great life that Elinor had.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hello to all my colleagues and everyone watching from Charlottetown-Victoria Park and all over the Island.

Mr. Speaker, just for the record, it was my idea to sing you happy birthday, so that we're clear.

I had a busy morning this morning.
(Indistinct)

I had a busy morning this morning. I started my morning, as I do every Thursday morning, at Birchwood Intermediate School where I do breakfast program. I also do it Monday mornings at West Kent. I can honestly say those are the two favourite parts of my week. This week has been extra special because it's Spirit Week. It just so happens that I hit both schools on '80s day. And some of those costumes – one little one in Grade 2 came in looking just like Jane Fonda. It was quite something. Today there were some pretty spectacular costumes, too. My daughter and I had an argument over what was '80s, and I told her I should know because I lived through it.

Next, I had the privilege of being invited on a tour of our new library. It is quite – I don't even know the word – it's quite spectacular. I'm going to focus on one thing, because I don't want to spoil anything for anyone who hasn't seen it yet, but I was blown away, I actually had tears in my eyes when they talked about the children's section. They had gone on tours to look at best practices, to Truro and Halifax. So, they raised the floors so that, in the children's sections, when the adults are walking by, they're at eye-level with the adults. They're at eye-level with the street. I just thought, isn't that a great example of using a child lens on a service. So, thank you to the planners for that.

Finally, Ann Thurlow's book: I was just telling my colleagues I went to a potluck in university, and what I brought was a head of cabbage to boil and a bottle of mustard. I have to say, it wasn't the most popular thing at the potluck, but I quite enjoyed it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: I feel like I'm going to let the House down because I have nothing to say about cabbage. I'm sorry. I'll have to think of something now. It's a challenge, I tell you.

Yet another constituency meeting last night, but this time with a large group of tenants, both from my district and from District 9, who represent the tenants impacted by the most recent purchase and evictions. So, not such a happy story, but what is happy is when you see a community come together to support each other, to be able to sort of stand up and fight back. While there have been 11 eviction notices served, there were 27 tenants represented there because they support and are taking care of each other.

I wanted to say thank you to Terry Bernard from the City of Charlottetown, who attended for the meeting, as well as Chester Gillan from the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning's office, who was there, and most importantly, to Doug Dwyer, who is one of the residents, but is the organizer. He is a force to be reckoned with, a lifetime volunteer. Now what he's doing is being the man with the clipboard and organizing everybody and getting them in line. I'd also like to thank Connor Kelly from the Fight for Affordable Housing, who provided invaluable legal advice and reassurance that he would be there to support these tenants in their fight.

I think this is an example of where our community supports really do shine, and I'm really hopeful for these tenants that, even though it's a very difficult time for them, that they will prevail. This kind of work is why I'm an MLA. It's a real privilege to be in the room with people who feel so passionately about where they live.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It seems to be standard that everybody is passing on their birthday greetings to you, so I'll certainly pass on mine from myself and, I'm sure, from all of the great people up in District 26 as well, Mr. Speaker.

I had the opportunity last evening to attend the Health PEI Annual General Meeting up in Summerside. First of all, I'd like to pass on my thanks to Everton McLean. Everton, he is one of the comms officers within Health PEI. He did a great job. Seats were all full. Social distancing was adhered to. But the opportunity, as well, for anybody that wanted to submit questions online to any of the ones that were in attendance or in the panel, was available. Everton did a great job of coordinating that and passing on those comments and questions.

I also had, at the AGM last evening, the honour to present three different awards. These were the Leadership Excellence in Quality and Safety Awards of merit.

One went to the unaffiliated virtual care program from West Prince; a great group of health care workers/employees up in the western part of the province that initiated this, so I certainly pass on my congratulations to them.

Another one was to Health PEI IV to PO Antimicrobial Conversion Implementation, and please don't anybody ask me just what that was about, but I will say, obviously, it won an award of merit last night, so I'm absolutely sure it was very deserving.

And each of these two ones that I had referenced, they received a \$2,500 award to go toward further quality initiatives.

Finally, the overall award winner was the Public Health Nursing and vaccine rollout team. It could not have been any more worthy of the overall award-winner. Certainly, we have to give thanks to all of those that have worked so diligently hard to keep us safe over the last 18, 19 months plus. But the overall goal was to vaccinate 80% of the population of Prince Edward Island who are over the age of 12 years, and

as we all know, this goal was met and substantially exceeded.

So, congratulations to this group. They received a \$4,000 award, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I'd also like to pass on my thanks to the other seven teams that were nominated.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and happy birthday to you from me, as well.

There's a new television series called *Aww Shucks* that I just read about in *The Guardian* today. It's a five-part television series and it's set in Toronto By The Sea, but actually filmed in Victoria-by-the-Sea by all local crew and technicians. It's an incredible accomplishment by the local talent in the film industry.

But that's not all. If any of you went to the film festival last weekend, which I did, you will see that over the past five years, the quality and the output of the film industry has grown tremendously. I know here in the House, we spent a lot of time criticizing what the government does, and rightfully so, I might add, but sometimes, the government does good things too. And in particular, in terms of the film industry, the department at innovation has been steady and generous with their supports of the film industry over the past five years, or maybe even longer. It's great to finally see the results.

Congratulations to everybody in the film industry.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I love hearing everybody talk about MacKenzie Produce. It is in my district, and I was there last night. I was there with the

Stratford Sparks and Brownies, and we did their corn maze.

But one of the things that we get to do in Girl Guides is introduce girls to careers that they don't necessarily see themselves in. So, one of the things that we did was Tania MacKenzie actually spoke to the girls, talked about how she got involved in agriculture. And then, every year with the girls, we always do a test on who knows their vegetables, so Tania took them around the wagon and showed them all of the baskets. And surprisingly, these kids, they know their vegetables. Actually, every single one of them got the cabbage right.

And I would like to also commend Ann Thurlow on what she did to help bring so much awareness to the struggles that farmers had back when we started shutting down. MacKenzie Produce, they produce three million pounds of cabbage every year, and they lost their major source of where they sell them. Actually, they make locally made coleslaw using MacKenzie Produce, and they sell to KFC.

So, when you saw so many people not going to businesses in Charlottetown, they didn't have a place for their crop to go. And it just goes to show that, when you can start a grassroots momentum like Ann Thurlow did with the cookbook, there was a Facebook page, it was really awesome to see them coming behind MacKenzie Produce and supporting them.

And they've paid that forward. This week, they also donated pumpkins to UPEI for their Smash the Stigma event. It's their mental health event that UPEI is putting on. So, MacKenzie Produce actually donated those pumpkins, which was awesome to see.

And then, I rushed home after. I will tell you; we didn't make a mistake in the corn maze. We made it all the way through on time so that I could get home and do the virtual viewing of the Health PEI AGM. I have to commend Health PEI for the accessibility to their AGM. To put that virtually online, it was seamless. The sound was great, the camerawork was great, the content was great. It was good. It was really good to see.

And I will just also throw my congratulations to everybody who did win the awards, but I also want to just commend the Patient and Family Partner story. That was Debbie Pecoskie who spoke to everybody at that event and shared her story. And also Dylana Arsenault: She is one of our new recruits to Health PEI. She's originally from PEI, and she said she's grateful to come home. So, it was a great news story. It was a really nice way to showcase that recruitment.

I just want to say congratulations to everybody who put that event on last night. It was really well done.

Thank you.

Have a great day today.

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

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

I want to welcome all those who are watching from Tignish-Palmer Road, and a special hello out to my uncle, Jackie Morrissey, who's been a patient at the Western Hospital for the past 15 months awaiting long-term care. He watches religiously every day, so I wanted to make sure I give him a shout-out.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I want to wish yourself a very happy birthday, and to another good friend of mine, Olive Crane.

Last night, I got home, and I had a few constituents contact me. They wanted to share their appreciation for the work that I did to advocate, and also to the Premier and to the Minister of Finance, for putting an amendment that went onto the floor and went through on the *Community Development Equity Tax Credit Act*. So, I want to thank them and all the staff that were involved in that process and everyone in here who voted for it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome everyone watching from District 18 Rustico-Emerald.

I haven't given a shout-out to the farmers and fishers, who had a fantastic year by all accounts, but I wanted to give them a shout-out today.

And I was putting on my ribbon today, and I realized I hadn't mentioned the Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Recently, I believe a number in the Legislature received an email talking about prevention of breast cancer. I would say everyone in this Chamber has probably known someone firsthand that's had breast cancer. This was from a lady, Anne Zakem, who I had met when she was an early years centre owner. She was talking about how sometimes a mammogram isn't even enough, and it was an ultrasound that actually found her breast cancer.

So, I just wanted to thank her for the email. I know that, this administration and the Minister of Health and Wellness, we're all about prevention, and I'm sure that (Indistinct) will take action.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Did I miss anyone?

Well, hon. members, it's only –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Well, it's only –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: It's only fair that I get up and thank all the members that wished me happy birthday. Not only inside these walls, but right across Prince Edward Island, in my careers, hon. members, I met a lot of people over the years and made a lot of friends over the years, and as I was elected as MLA 10 years ago, I made a lot of friends that came and gone. Some are still with us today, and I made lifelong friends. It's a privilege.

One of my favourite sayings always was: There's two things I don't like, and that's growing old and going bald. And hon. members, I'm doing both.

[Laughter]

Speaker: But you know, on my drive in this morning, I was just wondering how grateful I am to have birthdays. Hon. members, I just lost two friends over the last week. One was the same age as I am, one was 42 years old and I've lost many prior to them. I'm grateful that I'm having birthdays and I used to have a head of hair that nobody would want and it used to be brown, but I'm glad I had that hair to lose. A lot of people have no hair to lose.

So, hon. members, just stop and think; when we think we're having a bad day, how grateful we are. You'll never hear me say that again that I don't like growing old, or going bald, because there's a lot of people wish they had just one more birthday.

So I want to thank all the members. I love birthdays. It started off yesterday evening, the staff took me out for lunch. I woke up in bed this morning with presents. I had cake this morning and I'm expecting cake this evening. I love birthdays and I love when people have birthdays, it's a special day and we should enjoy them. I was one of these guys not to give out my age. Social media; don't believe everything you see or hear on social media. But I don't mind giving out my age today because there's a lot of people that never made it to my age and I'm happy to be 59 years old.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Singing of happy birthday]

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Don't make me get back up.

Hon. members, the hour has been called.

[Laughter]

Statements by Members

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

Leadership Trickles Down

Ms. Bernard: You're a tough act to follow, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank all those working in the civil service of Prince Edward Island. They are doing the important work of bringing policy to life and are essentially the daily face of government to Islanders. They deserve to be respected, engaged, heard, valued and this in turn, will show them they are appreciated.

We hear regularly from Islanders about how they call a department, leave a message and then they wait. Often, we hear that no one calls them back. This is devastating, as some major life decisions are hinging on the results of these phone calls. Let me be clear, I know the people who are responsible for returning these phone calls are understaffed and overworked. They are given no authority and they have no answers to give because they have little to no direction from government. So of course, these phone calls are daunting for everyone involved.

Take the new dental program, for example. Staff were told that they would receive details in July. Government announced it and the phone calls started rolling in. Well, we are now in October and there are still questions. I know I would not be the one answering that phone call.

I would love to see us sit down with all staff from every department; have a PD day of sorts, to engage with them. Ask them: What is going well in your department? What do we have to celebrate? What do we want to continue doing?

Next ask them: What is wrong in the department? What are the challenges? Where would we like to see improvement?

Then finally ask: What are your hopes and dreams for your department? Ideally, what would you day look like? How many people would you have on your case load? How would that be decided? What information would you have to help you do your job? I would then like to see the results of this taken, compiled and transformed into new policies creating more efficient, safe and satisfying work places for civil servants, because they are the ones who are making a difference every day on this Island for Islanders.

So, let's support them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Purpose of Being an MLA

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

The COP26 starts in Glasgow in a few days and apart from this nostalgia that I'll be feeling for the city where I spent so many of my formative years, I'm reminded about the reason why I got involved in politics in the first place.

Ann and I had our first child, Kate, in 1988 and having children caused me to see the world through a new and different lens, one that looks a generation and more into the future. And what I saw back then concerned me. I saw a deteriorated society and a degraded planet. And I wanted to be a good dad. I wanted to raise my children to be responsible and kind and sensitive people, able to contribute to their community and to the world. But I also wondered at the same time, what was the point of raising an enlightened generation of caring, thoughtful citizens if the earth on which they were to live was going to be uninhabitable.

It was that realization that propelled me, reluctantly at first, to put my name forward to run for elected office and to get involved, and to get involved in the place where the big collective decisions are made, because I knew if we did not get that bit right, no amount of individual action was going to matter.

I was asked back in the 1990s what I thought the top three issues were that needed to be addressed. My answer was climate change, climate change, and climate change.

Despite decades of scientific evidence, even back then, telling us that the chaos and extreme events that dominate our daily lives today were coming, and that only a heroic effort would prevent climate collapse, it has taken us all of three decades to finally start treating this climate emergency like the existential threat it is.

We are stewards of the future, and my 33-year-old daughter now has a child of her own. In all the noise and bluster of the work that we do in this room, please let us not forget that our ultimate responsibility is to future generations. And that means that we must view every single decision we make in this House through a climate lens.

If we do that, we will be able to look back at our time as legislators and hold our heads high, and more importantly, be remembered by our children and their children as the decision makers who finally did what was required.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think you're near double my age now.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Deagle: But much wiser. But much wiser.

Speaker: Proud of it.

Young Millionaires – Cale and Denver Nelson

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to salute two young brothers and entrepreneurs in my district, Cale and Denver Nelson.

The two brothers, Cale and Denver, started their business in the summer of 2018, C and D's Honey, as a Young Millionaires Program project with the help of their mother and father, Dawn and Jeff.

Cale and Denver began taking an interest in bees in part from their father, Jeff, who was a beekeeper. The boys are involved in every step of the honey-making process and sell unpasteurized honey and beeswax products.

Their business began with a honey shack at the end of their driveway in Montague, and has branched out to include supplying The Wheelhouse restaurant in Georgetown with buckwheat honey for their chicken

sandwich, selling products at the Bogside Brewing farmers' market, and as vendors at the Peakes Quay, in our local shop, this past holiday season. They are very excited to join Island Artisan Market this year, opening soon in the Charlottetown Mall.

The Young Millionaires Program is a great way for kids to get involved in entrepreneurship at a young age. It provides programs and information to young entrepreneurs and makes them eligible for a startup grant.

I'm always glad to see young people in my community take initiative and work hard at something, and I wish Cale and Denver much success in the future with their business.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: End of member statements.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: For our first question, I'll ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Two days ago, in this House, the minister of health stated that the average ER wait times on Prince Edward Island are about two and a half hours.

Now, I'm not sure whether that statistic takes into account all of those who present at the ER, from the most acute, those Level 1 patients with severe illness and emergent conditions, to those who present as Level 4, with far less serious conditions.

Regardless of how the minister arrived at that number, it is in direct contrast to what I have been hearing from frontline medical staff who work in emergency departments.

ERs on overcapacity Level 4

A question to the minister of health: Are our emergency departments currently on Level 4 overcapacity?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With regard to the lead-in from the Leader of the Opposition, yes, those statistics were provided taking into account all levels of triage, right from one right up through five.

With regard to the second part of the Leader of the Opposition's question, yes.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: So, that was the second part of the minister's answer – Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker – was in reference to the Level 4, overcapacity.

That's a serious tipping point in any hospital situation. If this overcapacity continues to escalate, and it's been getting progressively worse, necessary emergency services may be impacted. We can never predict, of course, when a serious car accident may happen, or when someone will have a major heart attack, or when a mental health crisis will occur, and our emergency rooms are our most acute level of defense for those instances. If it cannot operate, people's lives are immediately at stake.

Emergency rooms ready for emergencies

A question to the minister of health: What immediate action have you taken to ensure that our emergency rooms are ready for emergencies when they happen?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the member would know, there's such an impact from one part of the system to another. Yesterday, the Member from O'Leary-Inverness brought up with regard to vacant long-term care beds. That certainly has an impact on the system, right through the acute care system, right through to emergency departments. As I'd mentioned yesterday, as I will be provided with the plan on long-term care bed reopenings, but that there will be 21 within the next week-and-a-half, I have been told. That will have a

positive impact, going back right through acute care, right through to the emergency departments.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Interesting, minister. Why wasn't that plan to open 21 LTC beds brought forward as a solution prior to the RNs recently sounding the alarm on what's happening in ERs?

The last time we opened 10 beds, 10, not 21, in long-term care facilities, it took weeks to transfer the patients. So, if you truly are finding 21 beds in long-term care over the next two weeks, there's a number of questions related to that. Who's transporting those patients? Is it ambulances? Because, if it is, then they're already understaffed, and we're taking them off the road when they should be dealing with emergencies. How are you staffing the long-term care facilities to retain patient-to-staff ratios? What is the start and end date for the transfer? How many of them will be moved each day? So many questions, minister.

Can you tell us how this idea will be operationalized?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All of the points that the Leader of the Opposition has raised there shows to the importance in how integrated our health care system is. I, personally, I have great confidence that the leaders in our health care system, all of the partners in our health care system, will be able to do this, will be able to do it successfully, because, like myself and everybody in this Legislature, those health care workers are there for Islanders to go above and beyond and to get the job done.

Thank you.

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

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

Indeed, minister. All aspects of our health care system are interrelated, and they're also interdependent, and, when one domino falls, inevitably it impacts every other part of the system. I can only imagine how our frontline emergency room workers are feeling through this. As one of the ER staff that I was speaking with just yesterday told me, and I quote: we are staffed to run an emergency department. We are not staffed to run a medical inpatient unit and a mental health inpatient unit on top of emergency department. End quote.

The fear and the stress of being understaffed and overworked is palpable.

Staffing in ER departments

A question to the Premier: You have been rightfully focused on keeping COVID out so that our hospitals do not become overburdened, but you've failed to recognize that the health disaster that your minister is ignoring, and that we have landed here anyways. Are you concerned about this?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader is accurate in saying that we've worked hard as a system and as a province to fend off COVID, but we've also been working to deal with all aspects of health care.

The reality, as the minister has articulated is, when the systems are breaking down within health care, which Dr. Gardam talked about last night at the Health PEI annual meeting, it just highlights the fragility of the system for sure.

We're trying to do everything we can, and I can assure Islanders and the Leader of the Opposition that we haven't ignored this. We're working diligently, as I've said from the beginning, to stabilize the health care delivery services on Prince Edward Island.

It's a challenging time in health care across the board and it's felt here, but we're working to stabilize that.

As Dr. Gardam and I talk about weekly, there will be more uncomfortable days before we get to more comfortable days. That's not to say we're not trying the best

we can. It's just the reality and the honesty we have to have with Islanders right now, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Dr. Gardam, and I would echo his words, said that there are many great people working in our health system, a system I think, as he put it, pretty dysfunctional.

I understand that there are big problems here, complex problems that are going to take to fix. I understand that and I accept that.

But here we are talking about immediate problems, Islanders lives at risk. Here's what some of the emergency room staff that I am hearing from are calling for and I quote, again: We need a safer place to work. We need better patient care. We need someone to take on this fight who has the ability to make changes now. We need change today and not tomorrow, or in a week.

Again, to Premier: I'm looking to you for leadership here, Premier. What do you have to say to those hard-working emergency department staff and what will you and your minister's department do for them today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I would say to those individuals on the front line of health care, thank you. You're doing a wonderful job and I want you to continue to do that. We're working hard to make your job a little bit easier every day.

That's exactly what Dr. Gardam is working on as the new CEO, full-time CEO of Health PEI. His plan, as he articulated last night at the AGM, is to build around stabilizing the system now and then working on the mid- and long-term solutions to make it better here, all the while in dealing with the challenging situation of the impacts that

COVID has put on the system and the overall stress that the lack of health human resources has.

I really wish there was a simple solution and a simple answer for this, but there's isn't. But we're working diligently to find solutions and I want those in the front lines to know we appreciate their support and we want to continue to be there to work with them as they work through this difficult time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders waiting for long-term care beds

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How many of Islanders are currently awaiting long-term care beds?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll get that information, the exact numbers, and bring it back to the Legislature.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've already got the number. It's 187 – 187 Islanders are waiting for long-term care beds and I got that direct from your department. 187 Islanders are either staying in the hospital far too long or they are at home needing additional care from loved ones, or home care, or some other means.

You've a plan for 21 – 21 of those 187 people.

Question to the minister: What are the frontline health care workers supposed to tell the families of those loved ones of when they're actually going to get a long-term care bed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For clarity, the 21 are the ones that are going to be definitely opening within the next week and a half. Yes, there are additional numbers like I had indicated to the Member from O'Leary-Inverness yesterday, but the total, 42, but there are additional beds, certainly in the private sector, that have not been staffed. For example, ones in Wellington because of challenges that they have there.

We do have to look at what our human resources are, without a doubt. But you look at the other side of it, too, we have spoken so many times that our loved ones, our seniors, where do they want to be as long as possible? They want to be at home. That's why we do have program in place, such as Coach, as an example.

Is there more to do? Absolutely. Is it simple? No, it's not, but we are working as fast as we can to turn this ship around and Dr. Gardam, certainly, he has the interest, as all staff in Health PEI do, the interest of Islanders at heart as we move forward.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The 187 are not the ones that want to be at home, using home care. They are the ones that are allotted, that are on the list waiting for beds, and this government didn't even see it in their Capital Budget to add new beds.

From a public perspective, you're hands-off from that. And so, you're putting it onto the private sector. The private sector is responsible to you, minister, not Health PEI.

There are currently over 40 patients, medically discharged, awaiting long-term care beds at the hospital. We discussed this. This is a domino effect. Everything impacts each other's stage. This means that those Islanders are uncomfortably waiting in a hospital bed, when the best place for them to be is in a long-term care bed.

That is 21% of the 187 Islanders waiting for long-term care – are in the beds at QEH.

Speaker: Question.

Plans for long-term care beds

Ms. Beaton: To the minister: Long-term care beds need to be made available now. What is your immediate plan for those Islanders, the 40-plus that are waiting in hospital beds?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

And what we're doing is, as I had said here yesterday, said again today, that staff work day in and day out at Health PEI to make sure that, as rapidly as possible, that this ship can be turned around.

It's not going to be overnight, unfortunately. I wish it could be. I truly do. But this is something, it is going to take a certain amount of time. You have the two aspects or the two parts of it. You have the actual infrastructure with the beds, but even more importantly, are the human resource needs that are required there?

And as I've mentioned before, it's not just RCWs. It's not just LPNs. It's RNs, and we are working, and recruitment are working on this day in and day out, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate when the minister brings back answers in this House to questions that we've asked, but I don't appreciate when the information is watered down, as pointed out for the 2.4 wait time hours at the hospitals.

I also don't appreciate when you understand what we're looking for and those answers aren't provided.

I asked the average number of holds in our emergency rooms, and I was told year-to-date average was 13. Yesterday, the QEH was at 26 holds. That is people that can't even get into a hospital bed. They are being held in the ER, and this is impacting the human resources in the emergency room.

That is why our hospital is at a Level 4 capacity.

Risk to patients at Level 4 overcapacity

To the minister: Are you aware of just how critical a Level 4 overcapacity is in our Island hospitals, and how much risk this puts our patients, our Islanders, and our staff members at?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Going back to the first part of the preamble that the member brought forward, with regard to wait times: Those are the average wait times across the system. As I had mentioned, they are triaged. Certainly, if you're triaged as a Level 1, you're going to get in. You're going to get in immediately. If you're at a Level 5, yes, unfortunately, you may be waiting a certain length of time. We have to endeavour to improve upon that.

The member states the information that I'm bringing back – where does the member think that information comes from? It comes from staff, so it appears that the member does not have confidence in the staff that is providing me with that information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm wondering and hoping that perhaps some of the staff that the minister is speaking about will be the frontline workers.

This past weekend, both the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture and myself had the great pleasure and honour to attend the PEI Federation of Labour AGM.

At this meeting, we heard from many long-term care frontline workers who had a key call to action to improve workplace safety and retention of workers.

Workplace safety and retention of workers

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Have you been engaging with our frontline long-term care workers and their unions, and if so, what do they recommend?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly, I've been engaging with frontline workers. I have conversations with frontline LPNs, RCWs, RNs, pretty well on a regular – on a weekly basis. My door is open. I think that the member knows that.

With regard to meeting with unions, yes, certainly, the minister that the member referred to – we had a conversation on the weekend and we collectively are coming together to meet with some of the unions that you have referenced here.

It's that ongoing discussion – I have had it previously, and I welcome the input, because we do have to work together across departments. The Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture, the department – SkillsPEI: How can they help out? So, it's a partnership there, again, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, nowhere in there did I hear any recommendations that you've heard through this incredible open-door policy that you have.

Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: At the meeting, you shared that communication between departments and ministers can be a challenge. So, I'll give you this opportunity now to open those lines of communication.

AGM meeting at PEI Federation of Labour

Can you please share with the minister of health what you heard from long-term care

workers at the PEI Federation of Labour AGM?

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

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

Yeah, at that AGM on Saturday, there was a lot of voices heard that day, and obviously, there was a lot of concerns on the health side. We must have had 45 minutes in questions, and a lot of them concerns varied anywhere from the frontline workers to resources to the mentorship to the communication with government as a whole.

A lot of the things that were said that day, I was quite aware that the minister of health wasn't even aware of, himself. So when I left that meeting, I picked up the phone to the minister and we had a great discussion. I said: I think, ASAP, you need to sit down with the PEI Federation of Labour, and myself, and hear their concerns to see how we can work through this.

He didn't hesitate one bit. He said: Certainly, schedule as soon as you can, and we'll sit down and meet. So, looking forward to them discussions.

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

Ms. Altass: Increased staff-to-patient ratios in long-term care facilities: Again and again, we heard the workers come to the mic, and again and again, they said, 'This is what we really need to make our workplaces safer and better and to help retain workers.'

Workers report that they are caring for more higher-needs patients than ever before, yet staffing ratios have not increased.

I spoke with one RCW in a long-term care facility who told me she is often the only RCW on shift, caring for 13 patients.

An Hon. Member: Oh, oh.

Ms. Altass: Long-term care workers are overworked, burnt out, and simply don't have the time to provide the care that patients truly need and deserve. This is why

so many long-term care workers are leaving the field altogether.

Increase of staff-to-patient ratios

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will you listen to workers and make proactive investments now to increase staff-to-patient ratios in public and private long-term care facilities?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

First of all, I agree 100% with what the member is putting forward with regard to staff-to-resident long-term –

Ms. Altass: Oh, sorry, sorry.

Mr. Hudson: I wasn't sure if the member was waving at me or –

Ms. Altass: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: Anyway, so I agree 100%, but with that, we do need to have the staff. We need to have the resources. That's why I will be meeting with the unions and –

Mr. MacKay: November 9th.

Mr. Hudson: November 9th. Okay, that's scheduled; appreciate that.

But that's also why we had met with the PEI Nurses Union. That's why I have met with the president of Holland College, to see how we continue to work together, but not only how we continue, how we can build and work better together and provide the HR resources that are so urgently needed in the health care system, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

We talked earlier of how various parts of our health care service are integrated, and therefore, interdependent, and how when

something goes wrong in one area, it almost always impacts another.

Many of the spots that are available at walk-in clinics, and they're one of the places, along with ERs, that are taking up the slack because we have such a doctor shortage and because currently, Maple is not even available to Islanders, many of the spots in walk-in clinics are booked through the Skip the Waiting Room app. And that's a great option for those with the technology who can access it.

However, you have to have a credit card to pay for the \$5 fee for using that app. This barrier creates a system that is less accessible for our most vulnerable citizens, who may not have a credit card.

Fee to access essential service

A question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Why are you requiring a \$5 fee and a credit card to access this essential service?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

A couple of things before I get on to the \$5 credit card.

I am pleased to state that it has been confirmed to me that Maple will be available next Monday, November 1st, that their staffing challenges have been addressed, and that it will be available at that point in time at the latest, possibly earlier.

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct) \$5 fee, minister.

Mr. Hudson: That's what I'm coming to.

With regard to the \$5 fee, I appreciate the member bringing that forward, and I'd be happy to go back, take a look at that, see if that can be changed, if that can be reduced to zero or not. There are contracts, I'm sure, in place, but I absolutely will take a look at that.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to go back to asking some questions about the QEH, because yesterday, I did receive a message from a constituent, a hard-working nurse at the QEH, outlining some of the situations that we've heard today, and it's quickly getting worse.

The QEH had 199 reported vacancies on August 31st, and the shortage is having major disruption on services and the quality of life of patients. Pages of unsafe work reports, not enough nurses to care for the overwhelming volume of patients, a lack of available spaces, and verbal abuse are just some of the many concerns the nurses noted.

Retaining of nurses in health care system

Question to the minister: How do you intend to retain nurses in the Island health care system, if these are the conditions they're subject to every day they go into work?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

My intention is not to only retain nurses, but to recruit additional nurses, and part of that whole – we've talked about integration here today.

When we recruit nurses, that in and of itself certainly is a benefit. It helps with the retention, because I know that our frontline health care workers, whether it's doctors, nurses, LPNs, right across the board, are going above and they are going beyond, day in, day out. It's a conversation that I've had with the CEO of Health PEI, with my deputy, with recruitment. We do have to work together, and we do have to do better, without a doubt, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, and just going on that, I'm going to quote from this message that I received: The only reason that we have a somewhat functioning department is because we have nurses who care.

Twenty thousand people on the patient registry, limited access to walk-in clinics, virtual health care in shambles right now, a lack of primary care options have led to skyrocketing demand at our ER. The results are people waiting up to 13 hours to see a physician. It puts nurses well beyond the safe staff-patient ratio: one nurse for 40 patients, sometimes.

Question to the minister: When are you going to stop talking about boats and ships, and when are you going to stop talking about everything else but fix and take action on this problem now? It's not about recruiting, it's about the staff conditions now, minister.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

It is about recruitment because with regard to recruitment, that, as I've mentioned before, that, in and of itself, it provides relief to the frontline workers that are there right now.

There are initiatives that we have taken. The members have referenced a shortage of physicians. We have added to the complement. We are rolling out as, contrary to what one member had stated, that they hoped it was in their lifetime, we are rolling out electronic medical records.

I put out the offer yesterday with regard to briefings on medical homes, medical neighbourhoods, so that we can all be aware, right across the board, in greater depth of what these will mean, how they will roll out, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, your second supplementary.

Mr. McNeilly: This is not the time to start talking about medical files and what we're doing in the future. We need to look at the QEH right now and figure out what's going on before it gets worse, which I don't see how that is even possible at this point.

I'll be tabling this correspondence that I read, and I hope all the Islanders look at it.

Support to nurses at QEH

But my question to the minister is: What are you going to say to the nurses who are working at the QEH right now who are burnt out, stressed, and just about at their wits' end because they're not getting the lack of leadership from you, sir, and other people around them to support their efforts at the QEH?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member can certainly say to me any time he likes that they are not getting the lack of leadership from myself. I am here. I will take that.

But he also says that they're not getting the leadership from those around them. That really disappoints me, because we have leadership the system, right throughout health and wellness, right throughout Health PEI, and for the member to insinuate that those individuals in those positions are not providing leadership – that greatly concerns me, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

An Hon. Member: Terrible. Terrible.

Mr. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, watched the Health PEI annual meeting last night. I've participated in a number of them and I certainly would say that there certainly was a lot of back-patting going on there, and Dr. Gardam did talk a lot about the game of Whac-A-Mole.

But today, we get an email that was sent to many of us here in the office, talking about

the complete chaos within the system from the Medical Director at the QEH. We hear 187 people awaiting long-term care, 42 vacant long-term care beds, and unsafe protocols.

I thought the minister would give us some information on unsafe protocols.

Staffing and safety for 21 long-term care beds

So, how did you fill the 21 long-term care beds that are coming up recently, and are they going to be staffed safely, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

How did we fill the 21 long-term care beds with regard to the staffing? We did that because of the hard work of our staff in Health PEI, in conjunction with health and wellness, Mr. Speaker. That's how we did that.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Henderson: Yes, we're certainly seeing that our staff are working extremely hard. The problem is you're overworking them, which is causing a trickle-down effect, where people can't – the stress and all those things that come with it, Mr. Speaker.

When we got 52 people just at the QEH alone awaiting long-term care, you've got the head of the ER saying that this is causing unacceptable situations for our patients and is a blockage for patients to go there.

Is it true that long-term care facilities are not accepting new patients because of an inability to meet staff requirements, Mr. Speaker?

Minister; tell us that.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. McNeilly: Good question.

Mr. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, when we indicate the number of long-term care beds that are vacant, the answer is pretty obvious. It is: Yes.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, your second supplementary.

Mr. Henderson: So, that's where the system fails, Mr. Speaker. The whole system starts to backlog up here. What we've seen now is we're hearing cancelling of surgeries. They were saying that might be a bridge to a long-term care solution, but without any confirmation of when long-term care can increase its capacity to its full capacity of 42, it's a bridge to nowhere.

Can the minister tell us a little bit about his guidance of this particular ship, or is it stuck in the ice, or is he the captain of the Titanic, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member references the great ship, Titanic. We had it mentioned here earlier today that they've heard enough about talking about turning ships around, but yet, he goes down that road.

And yes, it is. It's a big ship, Health PEI.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: He's been there. He knows how large it is. He knows, absolutely, the challenges that have been there, and we have had that great discussion and I appreciate –

Mr. Myers: He wasn't the captain, though.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) know who was the captain on that file.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: Yeah, but obviously, we needed a new captain, and I am very pleased to be in the captain's chair right now, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to be in the captain's chair.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A question for the Premier: Yesterday, I asked the Premier a serious question about mandatory vaccines, because he has previously referred to the concept as 'illegal'.

In the afternoon, members of this House debated an important motion on mandatory vaccines for frontline educational staff. I was looking forward to hearing from the Premier and see what he had to say, but he did not contribute to the debate.

Despite the enhanced risk that children under 12 face, it is very clear government will continue to oppose mandatory vaccinations.

Legality of mandatory COVID-19 vaccine

My question to the Premier: Where did you get the notion that mandatory COVID-19 vaccines were illegal?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, in response to this question yesterday, I said that I – and I would, again, say I generally don't speak in that – and many of the opposition members would probably be frustratingly supportive of that statement – that I don't generally talk in those direct terms.

I said I may have indicated in a comment that I would question whether it was legal. I don't think I've ever said it was illegal, and if I did, I don't why I would reference it that way.

Again, I would reiterate, we have the highest vaccination rate in the country and in the world for a reason. People have been wanting to help. Our goal was 80%. We're at 90, was never going to be 100, and what we're trying to do is navigate through some very difficult waters when it comes to health human resources.

The last thing I think we need to be doing is taking more people out of the system to leave less there, after listening to a full day of Question Period saying, 'Why won't you have more people?'.

So, I would say to the hon. member: Pick a lane.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would say to the Premier, I have picked a lane on mandatory vaccinations. If you listen to the Hansard, you'll see what you said about illegal vaccinations.

As it stands today, anyone under the age of 12 cannot get a vaccination, leaving them more at risk than those who are able to get vaccinated.

Our position on this matter remains the same. Let's take every precaution we can to protect unvaccinated children. Unfortunately, the Premier and his government do not feel the same.

Tabling of legal input on vaccine

Question to the Premier: Who told you vaccines were illegal? Would you table the legal input you were given on mandatory COVID-19 vaccines?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member, in return, if he could point out a jurisdiction in this country who's done a better job of keeping their citizens safe from COVID, Mr. Speaker, than (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: This is Question Period for me to ask the Premier questions, not him to ask me questions.

Mr. McNeilly: That's right.

Mr. Gallant: We have seen a testing regime brought in, and while that is better than

nothing, questions remain about the reliability of such tests and the costs.

Cost of testing regime and to administer

I asked the Premier in a similar question yesterday, but in typical fashion, the Premier did not provide an answer, so I'll ask again: Will the Premier tell the House the cost of one test and the cost to administer it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would tell the hon. member that I will ask the Chief Public Health Officer that question.

I don't know the answer to that because throughout this whole endeavour of COVID and keeping Islanders safe, I haven't asked the question what it costs.

We haven't lost a life, knock on wood, and that's a price that I'm glad we haven't had to pay, Mr. Speaker, but I'll get back to the hon. member with the cost of testing.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I'd like to raise concerns I have heard regarding pets and animal welfare in the province.

Recently, there was an article that the PEI Humane Society is struggling to find a temporary location while they are looking to expand and construct a new facility at their home location in Charlottetown.

It's my understanding that the PEI Humane Society is responsible for enforcing the *Animal Welfare Act* and the *Dog Act*.

Homing challenges with PEI Humane Society

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Land: Have you or any of your staff met with the PEI Humane Society to understand the challenges they are facing finding a temporary home?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a very important question.

First of all, I want to thank the many volunteers that work at the PEI Humane Society and those foster families that are taking pets in and caring for them while the PEI Humane Society is in an overcrowded situation, as they are.

The PEI Humane Society is a huge partner for us and will continue to be as we give a large funding to the PEI Humane Society to deal with our animal welfare issues on Prince Edward Island, particularly with dogs and cats. We will continue to work with them.

They haven't reached out to us looking for help, but we are working with them to help them find a suitable location in the near future.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The PEI Humane Society does appreciate the funding that they did receive, but the issue they have right now facing them today is the fact that they don't have a temporary home to locate to while they renovate their current location.

Departmental assistance to PEI Humane Society

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Land: How is your department assisting the PEI Humane Society find a solution to their urgent problems that they face today?

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The PEI Humane Society, our department will reach out to them today. They haven't reached out to us, but we will reach out to them and help them with the immediate future situation and help deal with that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think your department may have met with them already, but they weren't able to find any solutions or to work with each other on a possible location.

Temporary home for PEI Humane Society

A question to the Minister of Agriculture and Land: Can your department work with the PEI Humane Society to help find a temporary home so they can continue to support and ensure animal welfare in all communities across the province?

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, we started debating the Capital Budget. Other than the very brief Budget book, this House has received no information whatsoever about the hundreds of millions of dollars that government is asking the permission of this House to spend.

Our only recourse is to ask the minister for more information.

Info for informed decision on Capital Budget

Question to the Premier: Do you think your Minister of Finance is providing enough information in her answers for the House to make an informed decision on the Budget?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I think the process rolls out the way it has always rolled out here. I think there are lots of questions, but the Capital Budget in itself is a bit of a different document than the operating budget, in terms of where when you talk about money for a building, for example, you try not to get into saying it's \$350,000 for this building, before you go into the RFP process and maybe accidentally inflate costs or whatever.

So, it's a little bit of a different beast than the annual operating budget, but I think the Minister of Finance has proven to be very helpful and articulate in explaining that, and I expect that will continue.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Most people, when they're asked to write a budget, whether it be for their household, business, or a non-profit, know what's in it.

The Budget book, with its one-line descriptions covering tens of millions of dollars in spending, is completely inadequate for the job we have to do, and the Minister of Finance isn't able to answer anything beyond those one-line descriptions.

Approval of Capital Budget items

Question to the Minister of Finance: You seem to be approving Budget items without any information to justify or even understand these huge expenditures. How are we, then, supposed to do the same? Minister, are you just a rubber stamp?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

We meet with departments on a regular basis as government to ensure that they are putting forward what they think is important in their budget and line items. We look to them because they are the experts within their department who work there every day.

We have done our very best to bring forth some information, but as the hon. Premier said, it is a moving target at all times as to

where we are with the Capital Budget, and there are revisions at all times.

And as I mentioned yesterday, if there is not enough funding in one program, the department is more than able to come to Treasury Board to ask for an increase.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's the House that approves the spending in the Budget, and it's our job to ensure that those public funds are spent responsibly.

Islanders deserve to know what their government is spending their money on, and how it's going to meet the needs of Islanders.

The minister may not be doing her job, but we will do ours. We cannot pass this Budget without Islanders knowing what's in it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Info for informed decision on Capital Budget (further)

Question to the Minister of Finance: Will you provide this House with the detailed information that we have requested over and over, so that we can make an informed decision on the Budget?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, we'll bring forward any information that we have. I'll be more than happy to share it with you. I've said that already on the floor of the House and I'll continue to say it.

Again, it is not the operating budget. There are different parameters around where we are with buildings and infrastructure moving forward, with commitments to different departments; they go to RFP. We have to ensure that we are not, I guess, divulging what we are willing to spend on any particular item if it is going to RFP, because it leaves us at an unfair advantage.

But I will bring to you, and all members of the House, as much information as I can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Statements by Ministers

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

Age-Friendly PEI

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As many people know, Prince Edward Island has an aging population, and our communities are growing and changing – socially, economically and culturally.

The number of Islanders living longer lives is increasing. More people are retiring on PEI, and many people are moving here to attend school or to join the growing workforce.

With these changes comes the opportunity to work together to ensure that our communities are vital, supportive and responsive to the changing needs of today's and tomorrow's Islanders.

In August of this year, I was delighted to announce a new provincial recognition program that encourages communities, municipalities and organizations across the province to be a welcoming place for persons of all ages.

The Age-Friendly Recognition Program is intended to inspire communities to begin the process of becoming age friendly.

The Province is also working with Age-Friendly PEI Inc. – a community organization that promotes awareness of, and supports communities, in their efforts to become age friendly.

This partnership will provide additional support to communities that are interested, with their journey to becoming age friendly.

I would be amiss if I did not recognize the first Prince Edward Island city to become age friendly.

In August, I had the pleasure of awarding the City of Summerside the first recognition award under the new program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: This initiative is much more than providing ongoing services and support to seniors.

By building and recognizing age friendly communities, we are fostering stronger connections, and encouraging people to make planning and infrastructure decisions that will benefit all members of society.

Once again, I'd like to extend congratulations to the City of Summerside on becoming our first age friendly community on the Island.

I encourage all members of the House to support this important initiative in your districts, towns and cities.

For more information on the program, you can just google Age Friendly PEI or visit princeedwardisland.ca/agefriendly.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to congratulate the City of Summerside for becoming the first age friendly community in the province and I hope that we see this spread across the province.

There's one thing that we know, and that is when we make our communities more friendly for, really any more vulnerable group, we make it more friendly for everyone. This is one step closer to doing just that.

I'd love to challenge the minister to go ever farther and make them also more friendly for people living with disabilities.

I met this morning with Marcia Carroll and I asked her permission to use this because, I swear, she has said so many things that just stick in my head. One of the things she said this morning is, how do we stop discrimination before it starts?

I think that this is one way that we do that. I would love to see this, not just continue, but also grow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank the minister for talking about this, age friendly is very important.

Congratulations to the City of Summerside. This is fantastic. Looking to see more communities come onboard and get the information and doing the things in our community, right now, without the designation, or everybody can towards age friendly. It just means reaching out, making sure that you check on people in your area.

This time of year, as the weather starts to change, I just want to remind seniors, be careful out there. Make sure that things – in the winter season is a very difficult time for seniors, and just be a little bit careful. That's what I would say when you're going out.

But, congratulations and thanks a lot, minister, for this great announcement.

Speaker: End of minister statements.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

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

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a document, an email of correspondence outlining the dire situation of our QEH emergency room and I move, seconded by the Honourable Leader of the Third Party,

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.

Mr. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the an email from an employee from the emergency department at the QEH Hospital outlining concerns and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from O’Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, by Command of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table the *Public Department’s Act*, Transfer Orders EC2021-442 and EC2021-503 in accordance with the *Public Department’s Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Government House Leader, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Did I miss anyone tabling of documents?

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that this House do now resolve itself into Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

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

A request has been made to bring a stranger onto the floor.

Shall it be granted? Granted.

Please state your name and position for Hansard.

Gordon MacFadyen: Gordon MacFadyen, Assistant Secretary to Treasury Board.

Chair: Thank you very much.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

I do have some answers for questions that we had yesterday. If I could just table that and get some copies for the House.

Chair: Sure. Hon. members, we will continue on with where we were yesterday, but we will come back to – once this information is passed out – we’ll come back and ask the question again if we will proceed with what we had put off yesterday.

We’re going to be on page 9: Capital Expenditure for Education and Lifelong Learning.

The section on equipment has been read and is currently under debate.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

I'm glad to see the portable air purifiers. I'm just going to ask a few questions on that line, if possible.

Exactly how many air purifiers will be purchased for the \$225,000?

Gordon MacFadyen: The work to get the RFP out the door is almost nearing completion. They expect between, I believe, 150 and 175 units are going to be required.

Mr. McNeilly: So that would probably – when will the RFP be complete?

Gordon MacFadyen: Very soon, I believe.

Mr. McNeilly: How long until the purifiers are in classrooms.

Gordon MacFadyen: The exact date that they will be installed? I don't have that date, but we can get that for you.

Mr. McNeilly: So, 150 to 175; that's going to cover the 10 schools, correct? What's the allocation if there's more after that? Is it done on a need basis?

Gordon MacFadyen: I believe there was a survey of schools that was carried out. The number was determined and we'll have the number that is required.

Mr. McNeilly: There is a global demand on air purification and such. Did that effect the RFP at all? Was it difficult to get these purifiers, and what's the quality of them?

Gordon MacFadyen: Again, the department had engaged a professional contractor in the area, I believe it's MCA Consultants, to draw up the specifications, to narrow down what type of unit they would be willing to accept based on the expertise and requirements.

I suspect that with the RFP, it's more like a procurement tender of goods. We'll be looking for companies to supply them. We don't have them yet. The tender has not been closed as of yet. When that is closed, we'll know what we're getting, which particular model, and –

Mr. McNeilly: So, there's nothing in these schools now, there's in any of these classrooms now.

Gordon MacFadyen: Correct.

Mr. McNeilly: These purifiers are very easy to put into place, correct? Are they the ones that hook into the windows? There's no missed teaching time, class time is there?

Gordon MacFadyen: No. I think they're called plug and play. Plug it in and away she goes.

Mr. McNeilly: I just want to be clear that is a good step. This is needed but it's not the complete purification. It doesn't purify as well as we need them to.

Ms. Compton: Yeah. Hon. member, the challenge was to put in the mechanical ventilation systems, it has to be when the children are not in school. In the meantime, we wanted to have the very best air quality that we could. So, we're getting the air purifiers for that. Then, I'm guessing next summer, we'll start the process of putting in the mechanical ventilation systems.

Mr. McNeilly: Just the last question I would have, I'd like to maybe know some dates, for something to work on, when those will be in place. That's the only other question I have. I know you've already answered it, but that's something I'd like some information on.

Ms. Compton: I can bring that back.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks for continuing on with this, minister. I don't know if the information you've tabled already includes some information on the rationale on why we're only spending \$100,000 on playground equipment. If it does, it would be redundant for me to ask you again.

Ms. Compton: We actually have another handout here that we are just making copies of. I'll be happy to pass that around and, again, from the department of education, which I said we would get as much information as we could, so, (Indistinct)

Ms. Lund: (Indistinct) It's just hard to pass this section without having had an

opportunity to ask any questions without (Indistinct) –

Ms. Compton: I'll table these and copies for everyone.

Chair: Sure, and we'll pass them around. Okay.

Ms. Lund: Can I just ask that we not pass this section until we've had a chance to –

Chair: Yes. Do you have any further questions on this?

Ms. Lund: Not until I –

Chair: Does anyone else have further questions on this section at this time?

Okay, we're just going to pass them out and then give you a second to look over them.

The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: I don't know what's going to be in these handouts, but I'm just wondering if we got this \$100,000, how does that roll out to a school? Is it a 50-50 cost share, 90-10? Is it 100% funding? What kind of model is this?

Ms. Compton: There's actually some information coming to you on the program, so –

Mr. Howard: Okay, that's fine, Chair, we'll just wait and come back to this after we see the (Indistinct) –

Chair: You're welcome.

I'm just going to give one moment for those to look over it quickly, and if you need more time.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Are there two documents here?

Ms. Compton: Yes.

Ms. Lund: That explains it.

Thank you.

Chair: I believe all hon. members have received two copies, one pertaining to this particular section. If you haven't, just please indicate to me.

Have you had enough time to look at the one on this section yet?

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

I actually did not expect that I would have had enough time to, but there's almost nothing here, so it was very, very easy.

An Hon. Member: So, you've read it?

Ms. Lund: I have indeed read it, yeah, that was quick, quick.

I'm just wondering, this can't be what the department of education came forward with when they asked you to approve this. This plainly is not what they provided you, there's no chance, or you wouldn't have agreed to it. It doesn't tell you the rationale, it doesn't tell you how many schools they intend to accomplish for it. This isn't any information.

Ms. Compton: As far as the Childhood Recreation Fund, is that what we're talking about?

Ms. Lund: That's right.

Ms. Compton: It's a new pilot project, yet to be determined what the uptake will be. The intent is for the province to work with schools, home and schools; 50-50 dollars is what we're looking at. If there is more uptake than the \$100,000, then they can come back to Treasury Board and we can approve more.

Ms. Lund: I suppose the part that I struggle with is, every non-profit I've ever spoken to that reaches out to government and wants to be funded has to go through a rigorous process and they're doing very transparent.

They have to provide a lot of information. They have to tell you what they intend to do, what outcomes they're aiming for, and I just

don't understand why government believes it can spend the public's money without the same level, even a moderate level, of scrutiny.

If you got an application from a non-profit that looked like this, you would deny it.

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, we have whole departments in government that look at and make the decisions within government and present to Treasury Board and to all of Cabinet.

We also have a number of people in government who understand how programs work and will roll out the programs in the best and most efficient fashion they can.

We are willing to work with any home and school that comes forward. We still want to see that level of engagement so that if there is a playground needed within a school that home and school will take that on and move forward.

But the province is more than happy to partner with them to ensure that they have their playground.

Ms. Lund: I don't doubt that you have whole departments that are working on this. I'm certain that you do.

In fact, I'm certain that when they come before Treasury Board, they provide you with more information than this. It would be incredibly unprofessional if you were making decisions based on this. I'm sure you're not. I'm sure you're not, I don't assume you are. I assume you have good information to make your decision on.

But you don't get to spend money without the approval of this House and I don't understand why we are not able to understand the same information that you do.

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, I'm not sure what type of an answer you want from me. You're wanting to make managerial decisions for the department, is that what you're saying.

Ms. Lund: Is that what you're hearing?

Ms. Compton: I mean, we have a department who came to government and said, we are going to engage in this new pilot project. We would like to start – we don't know what the update will be – we would like to start with \$100,000.

Within government, we agreed upon that as part of the Budget and this is what we're presenting to you. That's –

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Let's unpack that a little bit.

It's interesting that when I ask you for the baseline policy brief information that you would have received as the Chair of Treasury Board before you decided to approve this and put it in the Budget, that you interpret that as me wanting to make managerial decisions. I find that interesting.

I'm actually not asking to have any say on it, but I'd like access to a briefing note on it, and I'll tell you why.

A \$100,000 is nothing for playground equipment. Literally every project I've spoken to at schools that are doing this are talking about \$130,000 to start, to get started. We know there are huge impacts of having access to playground equipment, to physical activity. We know how important it is to kids. We know this more now in COVID than we've ever known before.

The teachers have been utilizing outdoor spaces in ways that they just didn't before, and it's a good thing. It's actually a really good thing.

That's why, in our budget ask, we asked for \$1 million to start and you came back with a tenth of that. You're also claiming this is one of the boxes of opposition asks that you've ticked, right? You've completed that ask.

But, from our perspective, you've grossly underfunded it and you made that decision based on something. We asked for \$1 million. The department came back and suggested a tenth of that is appropriate. You made that decision based on something.

I'm just asking for a one-pager on what you got that made you decide \$100,000 was the appropriate amount?

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, we look at each department individually. We look at what the asks are put forward by the department and we look to the management within those departments to make the decisions that need to be made.

We can increase that if we so see fit to do it. If there is an uptake in the program, then there is the ability to come back to Treasury Board to increase the funding.

So, is the problem here that we didn't do what was asked by opposition, or is the problem here that you do not want the program?

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Talk about a false dichotomy, wow. The whole fallacy of logic that I could pull out from that is unbelievable, minister.

Ms. Compton: Good

Ms. Lund: Here's the reality of the situation. Are you telling me that non-profits can just say: hey, this is what I want to do. Roughly, here's the dollar amount and if I need more money, I'll ask for it. No, of course not.

Why do you think, as a finance minister, that you deserve less scrutiny?

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, I do not deserve less scrutiny. What I'm saying is, this is what was brought forward by the department. If you feel that it's not enough money, or you're not happy with what's in the Capital Budget, you have the ability to disagree and not to support it.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Is your position, minister, that you expect us to make a decision on whether or not to support it based on one line item and no information.

Are you refusing to provide information? Is that where we're at?

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, I brought back the information that was provided to me by the department of education.

Ms. Lund: This is the information that was provided to you by the department of education when you decided to fund this?

Ms. Compton: Yeah. Are there any questions about the actual –

Chair: – about the process, yes.

Ms. Lund: Sure thing. Lots of questions about the process. How did we get to a point where you decided that \$100,000 was the correct amount based on this two-line – who's the chair of Treasury Board, isn't that you?

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, there are many decisions to be made within government about the Capital Budget and we can put an unlimited amount on the funds that we spend, but we have to live within our own parameters.

We also said that this is a pilot project that we're bringing forward. We are going to start with \$100,000 and if more is needed, we will find the money to do it.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

I've got to tell you; I find it gives me very little confidence in the process that government is using to decide whether or not to fund things if you're honestly telling me that you're making this decision based on one line that comes forward. Is that accurate?

Ms. Compton: That's not what I'm saying, hon. member.

Ms. Lund: You said you're making it based on this information.

Ms. Compton: I said this is the information that was put forward from the department of education to answer questions that came to the floor of the House yesterday.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Then it is my suggestion that they don't think we have many questions. I don't think they heard the conversation that was actually

happening. You must get a policy brief. I mean, we really expect a lot from non-profits when they are applying for piddly amounts of money, really small amounts of money.

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, this is not going to be a not-for-profit that is applying. It's the home and school for every school.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Are you suggesting that you don't deserve the same scrutiny that a not-for-profit would?

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, I don't know where you're going with this.

We are looking at the Capital Expenditures for government and we have a whole House full of members that can vote on the Budget as it is presented. If you're going to vote against it, that is totally your prerogative. I'm bringing forward what we've got.

This is a pilot project. \$100,000 has been issued. It has never been done before. Never. We, as a government, are bringing it forward. We're going to commit to bring the funds that are needed for playground equipment – 50-50 dollars with home and schools.

Ms. Lund: I honestly don't know what it was like when you were in opposition so I can't suppose what that was like for you.

But when I'm asked to consider a budget releasing millions of dollars to government that doesn't belong to you – it's not your money, it's taxpayers' money – I take that seriously, minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lund: Part of making an informed decision means knowing what I'm talking about. Every debate that we have shown up here for, I've done my homework. I read the bills that are coming forward. I participate in briefings. I do my homework so I can have an informed opinion on whether or not I think this is a good decision.

You're giving me no information and you're saying that my option is to vote for it or

against it. Is that honestly your take, to just vote for it without understanding any of it?

Chair: Minister, I do understand, and I think the questions are in line. There is a process here and she is trying to understand the process. I'm just going to use an example. It's a simple example, but if, as a parent, my child came to me and said I want \$500, I'm not going to give him \$500 unless he tells me what it's for.

Ms. Lund: Exactly.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, I have repeated, we have \$100,000 to go to support home and schools across the province to help with fundraising for playground equipment. We will add to that if the need is there. This is for one year. If there are more schools come forward during that one year, we'll be more than happy to do it.

It is a pilot project. There will be parameters around it. We will work with the home and schools to ensure that the funds are there.

Chair: Can we move just off this home and school one and maybe go back to just general questions within the section, or specifically, something else because, again, it's been a little bit too repetitive on that one particular item, if you don't mind.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

I absolutely understand that. I will say one more thing on this point. I think there could be very good validation for why we have decided that \$100,000 is the correct number.

I believe it's entirely possible that you've looked at this and the playgrounds in 75% of schools have been recently handled and they are up to date. Then that would make so much sense to me for why you felt this small amount of money was necessary instead of a large amount of money that we felt was necessary. That would seem like validation to me.

You could tell me that you had surveyed the schools, or that – perhaps the minister of education has an intervention. Maybe she would like to provide some information. Maybe you know how many schools are in need of playground repairs and if that's the case, please, speak up.

If it's a very small number, then that would give us validation that would give me confidence in this decision. I just don't understand the reluctance to provide it.

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, I'm sorry you're not getting validation. But what I will say is, the schools can come forward to us and put in a proposal to get 50-50 dollars. I don't think it's up to the department to say you get a playground, or you need a playground or you need a playground.

The schools are to come to the department and propose that we spent 50-50 to put a playground in in that school. If there are more than two or three or four and the funds are not there, we will ensure that the funds are there.

I am not sure what the hon. member has a problem with that. What is the problem?

Ms. Lund: It's a direct question so I'm allowed to answer it. The problem is, you have provided this House with almost no information and you expect us to approve your funding for it.

I believe firmly there could be good reasons for why this is the dollar amount that you've come back saying is the correct amount. I'm prepared to acknowledge that could be the case.

But you are not willing to have the same level of oversight and scrutiny on your decision-making that we expect from organizations with way less staff than yours who are paid way less than you are.

Ms. Compton: I appreciate that (Indistinct) –

Chair: Okay, we're going to move on to different questions in the section.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Chair.

My question actually is under the handout here. It's under Capital Improvement, but my comment kind of relates to what we are looking for. What I'm looking at is net zero considerations and it lists various upgrades, which I'm very pleased to hear.

I see a single item saying, increase roof insulation to R40, which seems like, that's better than what's there; I assume it was probably R20. The only problem is that net zero, this doesn't mean net zero, you're just basically upgrading the roof to current standard. Net-zero is like R60 or more.

The thing is, then you're putting roofing on top of that that's supposed to last 30 years. That will basically mean that this insulation is going to stay until well into the '50s which is way beyond when this Parliament has promised us that we'll reach net-zero.

I get really worried. Then I look at the other things that says upgraded windows. It doesn't tell me if they're just putting new windows in to R2, which is the standard now, or are they going to go for R5?

I'm just pointing out that it doesn't mean anything without all the information. When they list the information, what am I supposed to do with it? Am I supposed to vote down the Budget because you only have R40 in the school?

It just doesn't make any sense that you, as finance minister, school board, net zero – whether it's public or the environment minister – would even consider R40 when you're promising net zero, being the leader in Canada. What are you talking about?

Anyway, that was my comment on that particular item.

Chair: Thank you very much.

The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Chair.

Let's come at this from a fiscal responsibility kind of perspective here.

Did the department of education or Finance consult home and school to find out what they thought you need for this program might be, what the required funding might be?

Ms. Compton: The Department of Finance did not. I can't speak for the department of education, but we can bring that back.

Mr. Howard: Seems like someone who probably should be consulted if we're this entirely on their asks than we should probably ask them what kind of level of funding they think is required for this. I'd also point out that even our new playgrounds are even overcrowded, and we could use more playgrounds on every school, no matter if they have a new playground or not, they're over-crowded; some of them need to be replaced.

We just passed a motion unanimously in this House recently, calling for social prescriptions; to get people out, to get them active and get them well. When it comes to our children this is a social prescription. This is something we should be diving behind entirely.

So, I guess, my question is: Do you feel as the Minister of Finance, that a \$100,000, cost shared across the 40 schools is a sufficient level of funding and I've heard you say before minister that: we'll just go back to Treasury and ask for more.

But that's not proper fiscal management.

Ms. Compton: Hon. member this is a pilot project we are starting up. The schools have been asking for help from government for a long time so we're getting behind them now. We don't know what the uptake will be, to be honest, can they even get the equipment during COVID is another question. So, for the first year – fiscal year, we will be providing \$100,000 and if more schools come forward with the initiative to put in a new playground and let's not forget municipalities have playgrounds, it's not just a school item.

So, we will work across the province and across all departments to ensure that we do what we can to get people outside and more active. This is one initiative that this

government is putting forward to begin helping to fund school playgrounds.

Mr. Howard: But just to be clear, this is only for school playgrounds this fund. This isn't for all these other playgrounds.

Ms. Compton: It's for school playgrounds that are on government property, owned by government that's under Capital Budget.

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

Mr. Howard: That's fine for now Chair, thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Chair.

Minister is it correct, this money was never there before this is new money?

Ms. Compton: It was never there before; this is a pilot project. Home and school boards have been asking for it for a long time and it is just the beginning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you.

So, you're going to give \$100,000 a year, for five years?

Ms. Compton: Is that what we have 100,000?

Mr. Gallant: Five-year plan, so half a million dollars?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah.

Mr. Gallant: So, you had a home and school association and they wanted to put \$40,000 worth of playground equipment. You could possibly give them half?

Ms. Compton: That's my understanding.

Mr. Gallant: Then would the department of fisheries and land, is it, would he give some too under his community development programs?

So, could we tap through the budget (Indistinct) departments – this is just (Indistinct) right?

Ms. Compton: I would have to look into that. It's going on government property, so this is a Capital Budget, Capital Improvement; so normally, what happens is the home and school will raise the money, raise all of the money and this way we are helping the schools with 50/50 dollars.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Chair.

I commend you minister and the department for this. This is something that's been long overdue. A lot of groups couldn't get playground equipment so, thank you.

Ms. Compton: I appreciate it.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chair: Any further questions on this section?

Shall it carry? Carried.

Capital Improvements

“Appropriations provided for building construction and Capital Improvements.”
School Construction and Renovations: 21,000,000. Capital Repairs – Schools: 2,000,000. Slemmon Park Records Centre Expansion: 360,000.

Total Capital Improvements: 23,360,000.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much minister, for the breakdown of what's happening with the schools. I've noticed on the second page there's Evangeline, Sherwood, Stratford, École François-Buote and school ventilations.

Now, it says: for Evangeline for example, begins summer of 2023 and not to see expected by 2025-26.

Sherwood similar, like the dates are different but occupancy is expected two years later. Is no one going to be in schools while these renovations are going on, or are they going to be renovated and schools still go on?

Ms. Compton: Anything that is a renovation will happen when the children are out for summer, I would assume, yeah.

Mr. Gallant: Okay, thank you.

On Capital Repairs, I know this was a topic that come up quite a bit in the past, used to be a million, you put it up to 4 million, then you're putting it down to 2 million in 2022-23. Is there a reason for that and could you explain some of those expenditures, like I understand they are emergencies right; if a roof started to leak or if windows started to rot, you fix them right away?

Gordon MacFadyen: The reason for the larger than normal budget last year was to access some of the ICIP COVID Resilience Funding. We were able to leverage some funding out of that program to get some 80/20 dollars for schools, so we're back to what would be a normal sort of repair and maintenance budget for schools this coming fiscal year.

Again, there is definitely a part of some emergency repairs happen, but a majority of the time the school board would work up a list of things that should be taken care of before they become an emergency and over the summer months if it's a large project they're tendered out and the smaller projects, sometimes they're just kind of taken care of. Like, if it's a roof or if it's a gym floor or it's a call system or sort of interphone system at the school, those are the kinds of things they would be trying to get done through this fund.

Mr. Gallant: So, would this speed up some of these things and that 4 million is what you folks put in, what did you get from the federal government?

Gordon MacFadyen: It would have been cents on that four, we had to spend the whole money and then the revenue would come to the operating budget as a grant from the federal government.

Mr. Gallant: And did it speed up some of these much needed renovations?

Gordon MacFadyen: I would say that it did, but it allowed them to tackle a few of the larger projects as well that sometimes you don't quite get to with \$2 million

dollars. So, there was some boiler upgrades, there's a couple of large roofing projects that were done for sure.

Mr. Gallant: One more question.

Chair: Okay.

Mr. Gallant: Myself and the hon. Member from Morell-Donagh had some concerns in the past about leaking roofs and buckets in gyms and buckets in hallways. So, is it safe to say that a lot of these things have been addressed, with this extra money and we have roofs that are in pretty good shape now (Indistinct)

Gordon MacFadyen: We have a lot of square foot of roof, on a lot of schools, so we definitely are trying to stay ahead of the game. Again, the department would put forward a budget that they believe that would stay ahead of the (Indistinct) requirements for schools. Depending on what kind of winter you have, and spring and thaw; cycles and things like sometimes schools don't winter as well as we would like them to. But again, we're always trying to stay ahead of the game.

Mr. Gallant: And just one more question on the Slemon Park Records Centre.

You outgrew your record storage, is that what it's saying here, underneath the – moving on, could you give me a little bit of an explanation on that?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, for sure.

They are approaching capacity at their location at Slemon Park. This particular project would allow for additional racking and additional space to be converted in the existing hanger, that they're in right now.

Mr. Gallant: And these are records from all government departments or?

Gordon MacFadyen: All government departments.

Mr. Gallant: Okay.

Thank you, Chair.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

The school capital construction, the West-Royalty project, the six point four six four million, but it's coming along nicely, but this year was a very tough year for cost overrun. Do you know what the cost overrun – I know we're only putting in 20% of that project, but what happens in the case of it going cost overrun, is it done – the Province picks up 20%, can you explain that?

Gordon MacFadyen: Sure. The way the process worked through the ICIP Resilience Fund, we had to apply with a project. So, we would get a particular at a particular dollar level set and they would approve that particular project. If when we go and tender it was higher, or if it was higher, we would on the hook for that. There was no opportunity to re-submit. And I believe we were close to the top end of what we were asking for; 10 million was the maximum amount for any one project. We were close to that with this one anyway, so if we happened to be over, the Province would pay the difference.

Mr. McNeilly: And I assume that project will be over.

Gordon MacFadyen: I believe that project actually tendered under –

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Gordon MacFadyen: – (Indistinct) one of the only projects I think we've had in a while, because we had it out slightly before the COVID boom had hit. Sometimes you hit the construction cycle where someone's looking for some work.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, we'll thank (Indistinct) West Royalty for that.

The other question I had: Is it on – I know there's tight timelines, based on that project, about getting it completed in time. What happens if that does not get completed in time? Is there penalties there?

Gordon MacFadyen: That's an interesting question. In the construction industry, there's always a 'Whose problem is it that we're not on time?', so I think we would hire a professional project manager that's

working with the contractor to make sure that each side is doing what they should do.

Have we ever charged penalties? I suspect so, but it would be likely a difficult process. We would be trying to work as best as we can, as collaboratively as we can, to avoid the legal side of trying to get in – I think we're pretty close to the timeframe there. I think the early winter, I think, just after Christmas, I think they expect to move into this school.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, and that was my next question, so I was just asking a few little questions.

Thanks a lot. I appreciate it.

Thank you, Chair.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Chair.

We've got some overcrowding issues. Our population is growing, we don't have enough housing for Islanders, and I'm wondering, in our Capital Budget submission here, we asked if government had a long-term plan to identify needed capital expansions in our schools so that they aren't overcrowded in the future.

I'm just wondering if there's considerations for that in this Budget here.

Ms. Compton: The list of schools that are going to be built in the Capital Budget – the department would be working on where they need to expand and grow, as far as schools.

What we're looking at here in the Capital Budget are the actual schools that are going to be built within this five-year window. So, it would be through the department that they would look at overcrowding and what schools need expansion or a new school.

Mr. Howard: Yeah, I can appreciate that it would be the department that would have that information, but surely they have a plan that they've brought before you for this Capital Budget to say: We're going to need X amount of dollars and X amount of years to ensure that our schools don't become overcrowded.

I don't see any of that here, so has that been part of the conversation?

Ms. Compton: Well, if you look, hon. member, this is over a five-year plan, and this Capital Budget is approving the first year of that five-year plan. So, anything beyond that, we'll be dealing with going forward.

Mr. Howard: So, the only year we have to really consider in your five-year plan is year one? Is that what I was hearing from you, minister?

Gordon MacFadyen: The process for capital between the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning and the school boards is one where the school boards are responsible for the short-term and long-term planning for schools and school construction. So, they would be submitting to the minister, on an annual basis, a plan – annually, submitting a plan looking forward.

This year, we have, I think, five or six schools from the Public Schools Branch that are in the five-year window, so when these schools start to be completed and start clearing the budget, there'll be some budgetary room for the next run of schools.

If you get down to – the French board has identified where their next need is, and that's École François-Buote. It has some planning money in the fifth year of this Budget. So, when the school board comes forward with what the next big project needs to be within the particular five-year window, I suspect that it'll show up in the five-year window.

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

Mr. Howard: That's good for me for now, Chair.

Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

Looking at the Sherwood Elementary School, and from the handout that you provided, we can see that larger allocation

for that Sherwood Elementary School replacement: Is that planning on groundbreaking in 2022, next summer? Is that when we're looking at that actually beginning ground?

Ms. Compton: Yeah, next summer.

Ms. Bell: Okay, and what's the scheduled opening date for that?

Ms. Compton: Occupancy is '24/'25.

Ms. Bell: (Indistinct) – okay, that's great news.

Obviously, I know there have been a number of announcements, but also, the previous hang-up was around acquisition of land. Has that all been completed now?

Ms. Compton: Yes.

Ms. Bell: Okay, and then I know it'll be a forecast out, but is the older school going to be demolished?

Gordon MacFadyen: I don't believe there's been a specific determination on – the process that's usually followed when a building is declared surplus, it gets turned over to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. They potentially could offer it up to other users within the government system, and if there was a needs assessment taken on it – obviously, there must have been a needs assessment that says it's no good for a school anymore, but if there's some other need for it, they would be reviewing that.

If you recall, when the PE Home was transitioned to its new site, it took a couple of years before they finally determined what the eventual fate of that building would be. I suspect that this would be the same.

Ms. Bell: And the reason for asking is – it comes back to the planning piece, again; that area is particularly tight. You've got the arena, you've got a community centre, you've got the current footprint of the school, the playgrounds (Indistinct), playing fields, and so when the new footprint of the new school – it gets even tighter. There's nowhere to move to and expand to because obviously it's in the middle of a residential area.

There is, though, for the community, a need for community space, so I just think to get that on the – I'm sure it is on the radar, but that conversation is a complex one, as the whole project has been, and it's certainly something that – again, that consultation with community about that community need is going to be a really big part of it, I think.

And obviously, we have Stonepark not that far away in terms of grounds and space, but there are some safety issues with just the traffic volume in the area. It's something that I hear a lot about from residents – is just shoehorning all those things into that space. The school is a priority, but it is a real challenge in terms of the density of the space.

Ms. Compton: And I'm sure the department is listening right now and are very well aware of the fact that we need to transition forward. Once the school is gone, what do we do with the space?

Ms. Bell: And as I said, just to actually finally see this moving to that point where we can feel that we're going to see the kids in a new space is really encouraging.

If I may, Chair, I have a question regarding some of the net zero adaptation –

Chair: Sure.

Ms. Bell: – in the same section.

I see the breakdown here in terms of projects that are looking towards reducing energy usage, but we also have a number of schools that, just within the last year or so, have had brand new oil-burning boilers installed. So, there's a bit of a left hand/right hand happening there.

What's the plan to try and transition? Even though those are relatively new purchases, what's the asset life on those and how do we balance out needing to perhaps transition away, because obviously, oil burning is not the place we want to be, now or in the future?

Ms. Compton: Do you want to speak to that, Gord?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, that's a pretty big question, for sure.

The new schools are definitely looking at new technologies, and just taking off on what one of the other members was commenting on, the net zero note. I think the department was trying to recognize that we have two runs of projects on the go: retrofitting older buildings and being conscious of our pathway to net zero and building new buildings. And sometimes the construction path is a little bit different for both.

So, I think as a department, the transportation and infrastructure, who is advising education on all these projects, is constantly reviewing what the best solution is for a particular building in a particular location.

A lot of where there can be – the wood heat was one solution that was put forward for a number of locations for government buildings, where they could co-locate. I think that they've gone there, where they think they can go with that particular one.

I think the reality of the day – we have no access to natural gas. Right now, home heating is our other primary use and they're trying to make as efficient use of that particular technology while it's still here today, with the mind to what the next phase is when it becomes cost-effective and available, for sure.

Ms. Bell: Yeah, I absolutely recognize that that challenge is sort of, when we have projects that are five years, seven years and (Indistinct) you're on a path and it's kind of going through like a train while things are pivoting in other areas.

I had spoken to the Minister for Environment, Energy and Climate Action on the same and we talked about the need to have more of that kind of crossover from space to space to sort of make sure that some of these messages are aligning.

I think some of the challenge here is, we've had some of these oil burning boilers installed recently as this year, which doesn't kind of line up with the other commitments that we're making. So at some point, we don't want to see projects getting delayed, but we also – we can't rob Peter to pay Paul. Sorry, Peter.

We have to sort of get some of these in better alignment, because we're not matching our messaging with our action.

And apart from that, just from a purely financial perspective, there is some cost in that. That's not a small thing to purchase and install and that's a waste of money if we're going to need to pull it out and replace it with something else. That's money that we could be spending on other things.

So again, from the instance of fiscal – if you do share your other side, it feels that we're just not getting two things lined up and how can we get that better lined up.

Ms. Compton: Well, hon. member, I totally agree, but sometimes it's the timing and if you need a new boiler, you need a new boiler and there really wasn't another option, is what I understand. I can assure you that when decisions are being made with all of my colleagues, the first thing we say is it has to be net zero, or net zero ready, anything that we bring forward that is government-owned and then also how do we go back and retrofit the buildings that we already have.

But as far as those oil-fired burners, they were needed and wasn't really an alternative at the time. We need to ensure that our children remain warm and not the best decision, probably, but the decision we had to make.

Ms. Bell: Absolutely (Indistinct) must, we don't want to be scraping ice off the inside of a classroom window. Done that. But too many long winters in mobile units at East Wiltshire.

I think it's just that message of alignment of the messaging. Again, we're looking at fiscal responsibility here and we are asked to look at line items regardless of size and are we making good decisions. So that's the messaging on that piece.

Regarding the Slemon Park Records Centre Expansion, records are a beast that we never have enough space for. Is this actually enough? I'm looking at this thinking that doesn't sound like it's going to get us enough.

Ms. Compton: I will refer it to Gordon, but I would say it's not going to be enough. We'll have to continually to look at that. There's always a challenge because of just the volume we have.

Gordon MacFadyen: The note says I think it's going to get us another 7.5 half years of storage space. During that time, I know the staff at ITSS are kind of constantly looking how we digitize our records to get away from the paper storage. So I think at some point in time, the slope of the curve for paper storage will come down and the slope of the curve for electronic storage will come up, probably no cheaper to store electronically than it will be for paper-based records. But I think those two will come together at some point in time. It's not getting to fit up too much space at a time if we're heading in that electronic direction.

Ms. Bell: Certainly my experience from my time at Veterans Affairs, was famous last words, because at the time when I first started there the records department was housed on the third floor of the Daniel J. MacDonald Building and at that time it was like this is all we'll ever need because things are ramping down. I think six years later they built a brand new building out at the airport and now that one's full. I don't know if we'll ever get rid of paper, Gordon. Bless your heart for thinking that (Indistinct)

So, when will this record centre expansion be ready to go? Because that's certainly (Indistinct) half of your cycle gets awful short if it takes a couple of years to get built?

Gordon MacFadyen: It's not getting built, so we're just taking some more space in one of the hangers at Slemon Park. So we're kind of – some interior renovations and some racking is what the (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: Thank you for that clarification and Slemon Park having that space is a huge bonus.

Question, Chair?

Chair: Sure.

Ms. Bell: Gordon, can I have a copy of your briefing book?

An Hon. Member: What?

Gordon MacFadyen: My personal information?

Ms. Bell: Well, you keep referring to it and it would be super helpful if I could just have a copy of your book.

Is that a yes or a no?

Gordon MacFadyen: It's my personal information, created to help support myself in this endeavour.

Ms. Bell: Chair?

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, you have the floor.

Ms. Bell: Minister, can I have a copy of your book?

Ms. Compton: Absolutely. It's the same as you've got.

Ms. Bell: All you've got is this?

Ms. Compton: That's all I've got in my book here.

Ms. Bell: No wonder this is so hard.

Ms. Compton: That's why I have a stranger on the floor.

Ms. Bell: That's why I wanted a copy of his book.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, do you have another question?

Ms. Bell: No, I'm good for now.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Okay, you're welcome.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to get back to some of those details. For instance, we know that older buildings are really difficult to renovate and

they're really difficult to bring up to net-zero standards. It's hugely more expensive, which is why you need to do net zero buildings to the right standard right away when you build them, which is why I'm really happy the government has committed to make all new buildings net zero.

So, old buildings are different, but when you do major things, like when you redo the roof, suddenly you have an opportunity, in the case of roofing, an opportunity that won't come up again in 30 years where you can upgrade to net zero like it's new.

It will, of course, cost more. It just, off the top of my head, will probably cost twice as much to do it right to net-zero standards. In a way, it isn't really a problem because the extra money will be offset by the savings you get in energy prices in the next 30 years.

The only problem is that the government, so far, has refused to look at how you tie together energy savings, net-zero savings with the extra cost associated with the net-zero goal that the government has set.

I've been hammering away for the last couple of years, actually, saying to the government: Why don't you set up some kind of fund through, say, the PEI Energy Corporation where the extra money needed for net zero can be provided and be off the budget so the finance minister can keep a nice tight capital budget and still get the money that should be spent here?

Why are you not looking into that?

Ms. Compton: Thank you, hon. member, for the suggestion. I'll put it forward to the minister and see if we can work with the corporation to make it happen.

Mr. Hammarlund: Well, it's nice to have a positive answer, but I have asked you for a couple of years already. But I appreciate that.

The other thing that really concerns me about wood boilers – I don't know if that's the place to talk about it – wood chip boilers. Is that under this Budget? You were talking about heating with wood chips, but is this an appropriate place to talk about that?

Chair: I'm sorry, hon. member. It's under transportation.

Mr. Hammarlund: I will get to it then.

Thank you.

Chair: Yeah, we'll get to that.

Do you have any further questions on this section? Any further questions on this section, member?

Mr. Hammarlund: (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Chair.

Ms. Beaton: Oh, thank you, Chair. Sorry, I'm getting used to that.

Chair: It's not my birthday. It's soon.

Ms. Beaton: Under the School Construction and Renovations, we have Stratford High School, which I am thrilled about. Let's start off there.

I had submitted some written questions around the school and what the public can expect to see. I'm going to ask those questions here because it is all around the school build, just to see if there is additional information.

The public consultation for the Stratford school: I understand we've already had a lot of public consultation. We had a phenomenal turnout from the public, which was great; lots of Stratford residents. Love to see the fact that there was Grade 12 students there at the time. Interestingly enough, they asked for windows in a school. I think that ensuring that there is many people involved in the consultation process is important because I'm not sure any of us adults would have even thought about we need more windows in schools, because that's what we should be building for the future.

My question around this is: Is there going to be additional public consultation happening on the Stratford school that will be engaging

the residents whose kids will be using that school?

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, did you say you submitted these questions, written questions?

Ms. Beaton: I did submit written questions, yeah.

Ms. Compton: And have you received answers?

Ms. Beaton: I received some answers, but I want to have additional information on those questions because I don't know if they were fully answered.

When will additional public consultation happen on Stratford high school where the public will be invited?

Ms. Compton: That's not something that we deal with for the Capital Budget. We deal with the numbers. We don't really talk about public consultation around the school. It's about the numbers and what's included in those numbers.

Ms. Beaton: But you kind of do because the funding for that kind of consultation has to come out of your capital amount. So, when does the money actually start for the funding for the school and for the consultation piece?

Gordon MacFadyen: The process that the department and the school board use and has used in past school builds, as you indicate, has a number of points where public input is sought. To that matter, there's a chair of the school construction committee. I believe this one is co-chaired by a couple of individuals. One is a community rep.

Through the whole process, the large planning committee is expected to bring back what the thoughts are from the various user groups and individuals that are concerned with the project.

As I understand, they're very close to the conclusion of what should go in the school, based on the feedback that they've received, to the point where they're hoping to get an RFP for design out.

Once we hit the RFP for design, which is really the first signal that a building will get built, it's pretty difficult to change what's going into the school because then it gets into further costs and change orders and things like that.

We've had a fairly long lead-up to this construction of this school so with, I would assume, numerous number of points of public input and through the various members that sit on the planning committee, we would hope to get her designed and get her built here very soon.

Ms. Beaton: Yeah, and I can appreciate that. However, one of the challenges is this is a government planning committee – my understanding. There are members from the public in it, but they don't actually have the ability to go out to the public to inform them on what the final design looks like until the government actually makes that announcement of what that final design would look like.

Am I correct in saying that?

Gordon MacFadyen: I believe one of the chairs of the school committee is a member of the public-at-large. To say it's a full government committee – I think there's two co-chairs for this particular committee. Really, they're informing what services, what's important to the community – gets into this particular building so that we're not building a cookie-cutter approach.

There's certain aspects of it that – a classroom is a classroom. A gym has a certain standard for a high school gym. There are certain pieces that have to go in from the government perspective, but how the look and the feel of the school, how it's situated on the site, what programming is interested – there will definitely be some base programming.

I know Three Oaks has the aerospace program that was important to that particular – when I was involved with the Souris school, the high school there, there was slightly different programming.

I think there's opportunity and there has been opportunity to get that input in. Like I said, I think they're coming close to the conclusion.

Ms. Beaton: Thanks for that, Gord.

I do understand that. I participated in public consultation that was held back in 2019. We had a couple of sessions at the town hall in Stratford, which was appreciated, and like I said, it was very well received and attended.

However, that member-at-large that's from the public, are they able to go out and actually discuss what the committee is talking about of including? Do they have the freedom to discuss that in the public?

Gordon MacFadyen: I'm not aware what they have the freedom to discuss. What I was suggesting is they have the ability to go solicit input and gather information from the people that they're hoping – because there's school board reps, there's Home and School reps, there's public-at-large reps. And then there's a chair that's trying to manage all of the expectations because, at the end of the day, we still are trying to have (Indistinct) budget and trying to be cost effective and trying to be comparable to other schools. It's definitely a balancing act of can (Indistinct) in school.

Ms. Beaton: My understanding is that it's being built for capacity of 750 students. That is based on the Barager data projections, which is what was used for Stratford Elementary, but I'm sure if you spoke to anybody in Stratford Elementary – and I spoke to the administration last year – they were already at their capacity and didn't have any additional room.

That Barager information, there would be some people in the public that would disagree with using that method to determine what capacity would be.

What thoughts do you have there, and do you have concerns based on when we build a school and we're only building it for today's capacity, but we could be absolutely wrong?

Gordon MacFadyen: For sure.

I had some conversation with the department on this particular topic and when the school does come online. Currently, within the greater Charlottetown area between Colonel Gray and Charlottetown Rural, we have

capacity of upwards of 2,100 students, I think, between the two of them.

This will add another 750 capacity to bring us up to about 2,800 or 2,900, give or take, for a school population of around 2,200 in the high school currently.

So, we have capacity for 500 in the greater Charlottetown area. You're not going to empty out one building to fill up another building. The school board is responsible to make sure that there is adequate zoning in the particular areas to make sure that each school has a fulsome school population.

But if, in the event that population explodes far past where they would have considered at the time, I believe that the school will be constructed in a manner that the expandable spaces are in places that can be further added on to, without disrupting the main core of the school.

The planning will be underway that could add another wing for the high school if needed be, sometime down the road.

Ms. Beaton: I attended Glen Stewart and it was over capacity when I attended Glen Stewart. It has had multiple expansions, and then, my daughter is now attending the school system. It's never been a school catchment, a family of schools that's ever really assessed capacity to what it truly is.

Stratford is probably the fastest growing community in PEI. We just had the largest housing development for this province announced about a month ago. That alone is supposed to bring close to 7,000 additional people to the Stratford area.

I have grave concerns that we already know that this is going to happen. I don't see anybody disputing that this development is going to happen. Now we're looking at a school that's for 750 kids, and that's at today's population projections.

Have you even considered layering on that additional development, and do you still think that we're at the right number?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, it's difficult to definitely crystal ball what's going to come out into the future. It's an exciting development that was announced. We're

growing in that direction. We're growing in the East Royalty area. Charlottetown, the greater area, is definitely growing.

But as I said, we will have capacity for 2,800 hundred students at the Grade 12 level, with the current capacity. So, we can grow by 500 between now and the time – and we know those students are in the system right now. So, we'll have some that come at Grade 12, but they come at every grade all the way along. They just don't all show up in high school.

So, I think it's a good discussion to be having. I think that they had picked a number based what the school board believes, and the school will get built, and if additions are required, I'm sure additions will be made into the future, for sure.

Ms. Beaton: And so, the construction will start in 2023, and we will have students in that school September 2025; is that accurate?

Gordon MacFadyen: I think they gave us a little latitude during the 2025 school year. Now, this is with a brand – '25/'26 school year, I should say, so that would envision September '25. It's unlikely that they would disrupt a run of students that started at Charlottetown Rural High School if the school is ready in January. So, if we can get the final planning meetings done, get the architectural drawings done, we can get an agreement to secure our piece of the land that would be the construction schedules proposed today.

Ms. Beaton: Appreciate that, thank you. And Gord, I'm going to take you out of the hot seat for a second.

I'm going do a question to the Minister of Finance: What impact to the province do you foresee if we build a high school to today's capacity and we're not building to what it will be in the future? Because let's be honest, even at today's capacity we have 170 kids per grade in the Stratford – that's not even including Donagh. And I don't even know if we even know what schools will be part of this catchment.

Do you know what schools would be part of this catchment, and are you comfortable in

building for this capacity? What questions have you asked the department around that?

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, thanks for the question.

I do not have capacity numbers in front of me here, but what I will say, and I'll reiterate what our stranger said, was: Within the greater Charlottetown area, we do have capacity for 2,800-2,900 students in Grade 12.

If we look, starting where we are in Grade 1 now and moving forward, that's what was looked at for this school. Could there be more space, more classrooms? There very well could be. We do not have a crystal ball. We're looking to the department to share what the needs are. This school has been in the works for quite a while. We've been trying to get to a point where we could purchase the land and get started and I feel that we are there, and this is what was proposed.

Ms. Beaton: I'm not asking for a crystal ball. I'm just asking for really diving into population growth numbers. And then, I would question – we keep saying, 2,800 capacity. There's capacity for 2,800 within the greater Charlottetown area. But what does that mean? Does that mean that half of Stratford is going into Charlottetown then, if we don't build the school big enough for what it's going to be to in the next five years?

Because I just want to point out that the housing development or the development for Stratford is put in for the next 10-15 years, so it's not like we're talking about 50 years from now. We're actually talking five years after you've decided to build this school. And then I have to actually point out: It's taken 10 years to get a government to actually agree to build the school.

So, given how hard the community had to fight for the school in the first place, I wonder if that capacity number is the right number based on growth projections, which falls in your department – population.

Are you comfortable with building a school that could be potentially too small within a matter of a few years?

Ms. Compton: Well, again, hon. member, I look to my department and to the department of education to consider population growth and the number of students that will be in high school once this is completed and moving forward. I have full faith in the departments to work together to ensure that we're doing the right thing.

Ms. Beaton: And did you ask those questions when the information came to you? I'm concerned that we're building a school that doesn't have enough capacity to even get us past five years after it's built. So, when this came before you, did you question the capacity numbers? And what information was provided to you to make you comfortable to say, yeah, that sounds like the right number?

Ms. Compton: Well, hon. member, I do defer to every department in government, including education, to ensure that they're making the right decision. This is what was put forward to my department. The numbers that are put forward are the estimates that we will need to complete the school and have it occupied by '25/'26, sometime within that year.

My opinion, I guess, is not really the opinion you need. You need the opinion of the department of education, and this has been on docket here for a long time. We want to see shovels in the ground. We want to see it built.

Moving forward, we'll do what we can to ensure that all students in Stratford are in this high school. I'm not sure what that looks like, but we are building a school for a capacity for 750.

Ms. Beaton: Okay. The minister can do an intervention if the minister would like, but it comes down to the Barager numbers, and the method that they used has been disputed for a very long time. Are we using the right method to do projections? Have we looked at how accurate they've been in the past? And can we say it's the right system to use to predict population?

Because the challenge with the Barager system, the way that way they work is, with a fast-growing community, it is actually not accurate in the past. The Town of Stratford has brought this forward on several

occasions when they were advocating for the school in the first place, and when we built Stratford Elementary and then when we expanded Stratford Elementary.

The history of Stratford has shown that the growth is not in line with what the Barager numbers have shown, or else we probably would have built a Stratford Elementary School that didn't need to be expanded within a matter of – you can count the years on one hand – after it opened in the first place.

See where my challenges are? I question whether you're using the right system for population predictions in the first place, and I would ask: How much is that costing taxpayers if we're not using the right system to predict population in growth areas? Rapid growth areas – that's the challenge, right?

Ms. Compton: I can't really give you an answer to that off the top of my head. I don't know how much that's impacting taxpayers.

We know the projected costs for the high school, and we want to see this project begin. We've been talking about it for a long time. There's been lots of back and forth with the town, and we're to a point now where we're going to actually begin the build and have a high school in Stratford for '25/'26.

Ms. Beaton: I'm not disputing that we should have – I would have loved to have seen the construction start this year, which I think is what the original plan for it was. So, just because we haven't planned in the adequate time and that we've pushed out our planning cycle so that the school's opening a year later than what it should have been doesn't mean we shouldn't be having a fulsome discussion on 'Are we building the right thing?'.

Given what we've seen in the past, we should have been looking back at Stratford Elementary to use that as a launching pad as to what we saw. We built a school that was too small pretty much the day that we opened it and then we had to put an extension on it.

So, I'm going to ask now about a junior high school for Stratford. And given that class sizes in Birchwood are extremely big – I

haven't requested it because the enrolment numbers didn't show that it needed – but I'm hearing that there are 29 kids in classrooms at Birchwood, which is where all the students from Stratford go. Not the Donagh students; the Donagh students go to Stonepark, which is unfortunate because we know the challenges that we have by splitting up that catchment.

Was there any discussion at all around the population growth and what we're going to need in school infrastructure that would have suggested that a discussion should happen immediately for a junior high in Stratford?

Ms. Compton: Well, hon. member, if you look at the five-year plan here, we are looking Evangeline, Sherwood, Stratford, Ecole Francois Buote and moving forward, Ecole-sur-Mer, as well, sorry.

We have to take into consideration the needs for schools across the province and the capacity for government to build, not only to find a builder that can meet the needs, but also the ability to – any capital money that we spend is borrowed and we want to ensure that we're doing it in a fiscally responsible way.

On the docket right now, we do have the Stratford school, high school, and if there's a need for a junior high, that will be further down the road for sure because we have to meet the commitments we've already made.

Ms. Beaton: I don't disagree with that. I absolutely agree you have to meet the commitments that you need to meet.

However, if our students are over-crowded in the school and we don't even have it on our radar for the next five years, I'm asking: Did the minister flag that we were going to need to be looking at a junior high school in the greater Charlottetown area of family of schools?

Gordon MacFadyen: I don't have what the current enrolment for this, the official enrolment, I don't have for September of 2021.

Within Stonepark and Birchwood for the past fiscal year, which I have information on, they were not at quite capacity for both

those schools. I think Stonepark was about 100 under capacity. Birchwood was 40 students under capacity.

As you know that kind of fluctuates from year to year and they're always looking backwards at what feeder schools are coming to inform the future. Right at the present time we have three, currently, within the greater Charlottetown area for junior highs so they're kind of meeting the capacity right now.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thanks, and just two more questions if you don't mind Chair. I appreciate you allowing to me to have so much time.

I agree, which is why I didn't actually ask for a junior high school. But there comes a time when the department has to be looking into the future based on population numbers. If we're only at space for 40 students, chances are we're going to be out of capacity in Birchwood by next year.

Unfortunately, one thing I wish that happened was that, actually, enrolment numbers were tabled in this House every year so we could all see where our schools are so that we can all advocate with the knowledge of information.

That being said, when we look at those enrolment numbers, how do we ensure that we are looking at the right schools? I know that we can feed information in, but if we don't have all the information that the department has, how can we ensure that the schools that are experiencing extreme growth are adequately being discussed around Executive Council when it comes to budget asks?

Because it shouldn't be just me asking for the new school. Really, it comes down to what's best for the child and it's certainly not to be in classes that have over 30 kids in them in Grade 7.

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, that is one reason we have school boards, to be able to look at the numbers, project forward where we need to be. It's not just up to you asking. There's quite a long discussion. There's

been a discussion a number of times in Stratford about what's needed.

We continue to work with both the municipalities and the community to make sure that government builds what is needed, but we also have to look within our fiscal envelope as to how much we can commit to within the five-year window.

Ms. Beaton: My last question.

Like I said, I had asked a lot of these questions in advance and when you only get, like, what's the capacity, 750, and you don't have any of the real stuff, like information behind it; I had the benefit of having information in advance, right, so that I could ask the specific questions that I wanted to know.

Part of the challenge is that the public does not have this information. One of the questions that I had asked, similarly to the Land Matters PEI project where that was made public and all of the government submissions and where they stood and what their process was was all on that website. I commend; that was a good job. I appreciate that. The minutes from those board meetings and from those committee meetings were all posted so that the public knew about it.

Would you consider, for any Capital projects going forward, having that kind of information? It doesn't have to be big, just here's the pertinent information that the public would want to know, here's meeting minutes, et cetera, and have that publicly available so that anybody who wants to know that, they can access that information so that it's not just held in committee discussions but it's actually available to the public for them to go in and pull the information that they want to pull.

Will you consider that for all Capital projects?

Ms. Compton: Hon. member, I'll provide any information that's given to me by the department. I have no problem doing that. I provided some today. But there is a process through Capital Budget and through operating Budget to ask questions and during Question Period, to ask questions about numbers in schools and decisions

being made. Hon. member, I think you do have that avenue already.

Ms. Beaton: Sorry, and I might not have explained myself well. What I'm asking for is is, once the project has started, for instance, or leading up to approved projects, a publicly accessible website, like Land Matters PEI. It was all there. You could go in and see the different presentations and everything so that the public can actually see it.

I get that I have the ability to come in here and ask questions but that's not what I mean. I mean after the project has started. Can there be a publicly accessible site for people to go and look up information, look up contact details for the committee members so they know who to touch base with?

I'm just asking for, like, a website for people to know what are the top – like, what's the budget? What's the capacity? Just high-level information so that the public is aware.

Ms. Compton: I think the public has the ability to listen and hear what we have say in here every day, so, there is that avenue.

I can bring back to the department your request and find out from them. I'm not sure exactly what the parameters would be but, absolutely, I will bring it back.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: I'm good, thanks Chair.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, minister, for committing to look into the alternative financing method I was talking about.

Speaking a lot about net zero and, of course, I'm really pleased that the government has taken my word for, just an idea and is bringing it forward with very, very aggressive goals. But, of course, it's going to cost money and we haven't seen how are you going to handle that. In the near future, I expect that you're going to need to spend

several hundred million dollars extra, just on the government buildings that you plan to build in the periods that are within the goals you are talking about. Some kind of alternate fund, I think you're going to like if you get around to setting it up.

What I'm wondering is if we can get some kind of commitment when I see this Budget here. I'm not so worried about the details, I'm worried that you're meeting the goal that you set yourself: your own net zero goal. The only way you could do that not only when you build new buildings where you do it, but also when you do new, major items on renovating buildings, like if you're doing the roofs, if you're replacing all the windows, they should meet exactly the same standards that new buildings do or you will never get to the goal. That's the way you get there is, you do it bit by bit.

It costs twice as much to do it later. There's really no reason to not do it now.

My question is: Does the minister of the Department of Finance speak to the minister of Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action and correlate the actions in your department with the promises in the other departments?

Ms. Compton: On a regular basis. The one thing I will point out is that, when we look at Capital Expenditure, it's a fine line between building what needs to be built – now we've made the commitment for net zero, we've also made the commitment to renovate with net zero.

So, we are working with the department all the time to see what projects we can bring forward and do them. You know, we've made this commitment. It is going to cost more money, but there are still always more asks than money. We have a lot of infrastructure in the province that we need to repair and look at to make net zero. It's an ongoing discussion as to what we tackle next and how we make it net zero and how do we find the money to do that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Appreciated.

Thank you.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Bus Replacement

“Appropriations provided for the purchase of new buses.” School Buses: 7,920,000.

Total Bus Replacement: 7,920,000.

The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you.

So, government's going to ensure all new buses are electric, and that's a welcome investment. But how many new buses will this be each year? I saw in the handouts a certain number, but do we have projections of how many we're going to be purchasing per year?

Gordon MacFadyen: I don't have the exact breakdown per year, but, over the life of this, the department advises it's 112. So, I assume if you did the total by 112, you could figure out the in-year purchase.

Mr. Howard: So, when you say 112, I think we have more like 300 buses total. So, that's just to get to this 50% mark, is that right?

Ms. Compton: 50% by 2027, yes.

Mr. Howard: So, do we have a target to get to 100%?

Ms. Compton: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. We made the commitment to – all purchases going forward will be electric vessels.

Mr. Howard: So, are we just going to carry on at the same rate? Do we have a date for that 100% target, I guess, is what I'm asking?

Gordon MacFadyen: There's approximately 340 buses in the fleet. On any given year, there's 307 regular runs and some spare buses to offset those 307 regular runs. With the end of this five years, we have 47 purchased over the last two, plus 112. So, we'll be almost half done. We do one thirteenth or one fourteenth of the fleet, give or take, every year. So, it will be another few years after this, for sure.

Mr. Howard: So, the one thirteenth, that's based on a 13-year lifespan? Is that why you're giving a number like that?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah. There are some regulations that were put in, that a bus can be on the road a certain number of years in the regular fleet, and then two additional years for the spare fleet. So, there is a life expectancy for buses, a maximum.

Mr. Howard: Very good. And so, what do we do right now, when our existing diesel buses are being phased out. What do we do with those?

Gordon MacFadyen: Generally, they're put up for auction with the government assets, for surplus assets.

Mr. Howard: And, do we have the same kind of plan for these electric buses? Do we need to change some legislation so that they can stay in service longer, or not go to the same auction process? Because they're vastly different by the time they get to year 12 and 13.

Gordon MacFadyen: For sure, I expect as we get towards the back end of the lifecycle for these electric buses, the batteries and the components will be different. I believe, where the majority of the problems for school buses had been in the body construction and the corrosive nature of Island winters, so the corrosiveness was kind of taking apart our buses. While the engines may be good, the body was kind of starting to show its age, so to speak. I'm advised, as well, that anything that's worthwhile coming out of a bus comes out of the bus before it goes on the auction block. So, I suspect the batteries would be part of things that we would be hanging onto, if they have future life for them.

Mr. Howard: So, we are projecting still the same life for them, and then we'll deal with it at that point? Or have we changed our projections?

Gordon MacFadyen: Again, this is the second year that we've bought school buses, so they're still in the infancy stage. I suspect when we get towards the – closer to the mid cycle, they'll have some good data on life expectancy, and they'll inform the regulations for school buses.

Mr. Howard: Are these going to be used exclusively for education purposes? I've heard talk about it being used for transit as well. So, are these going to be part of that plan, process, as well?

Ms. Compton: I'd say that's a really good question for you to ask on the floor of the House during Question Period.

Mr. Howard: I am on the floor of the house.

Ms. Compton: During Question Period. During Question Period, I said.

Mr. Howard: Okay, so you don't have the answer to that question?

Ms. Compton: No.

Mr. Howard: Okay. That's everything, Chair.

Thanks.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Capital Expenditure – Education and Lifelong Learning: 33,230,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. members, we're now going to do a changeover to opposition time.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration the grant of capital supply to Her Majesty, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Orders Other Than Government

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, I ask that Motion No. 71 be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Motion No. 71.

The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive moves, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the following motion:

WHEREAS democracy is a fundamental part of Canadian society;

AND WHEREAS the first-past-the-post electoral system produces seat counts that are often disproportionate to the popular support of political parties;

AND WHEREAS all politicians, and all parties, are widely perceived by the public, and by each other, to have a vested interest in the design of the electoral system;

AND WHEREAS this Government's first speech from the throne stated that Government would "convene a panel made up of citizens and elected members to consider reforms to this Legislature";

AND WHEREAS there is a strong appetite for electoral reform on Prince Edward Island, as evidenced by the 2016 Electoral Reform Plebiscite and the 2019 Referendum;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge Government to convene a Citizens' Assembly to deliberate on a model of proportional representation;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED this Citizens' Assembly be formed of at least 27 willing, randomly-selected citizens who are broadly representative of Island society as reflected in the Census, including age, gender, social class, and regional spread;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the mandate of the Citizens' Assembly include proposing, in a report to the Legislative Assembly, a specific, detailed design for an electoral system that is tailored to PEI's needs, and which it believes would meet the approval of a majority of the Island public.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive to start debate.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I have the podium, please?

I'm happy to move this motion which, at its core, is about improving our democracy. Democracy is what brings us here together. It guarantees Islanders a direct say in who represents them. Our democracy is not something we can take for granted. It's something we must always be evaluating to ensure it's working for Islanders.

Five years ago, we had a plebiscite on democratic renewal. The unofficial question being asked, according to the chief electoral officer's report on the plebiscite, was: is it time for change? The answer the people gave was a yes. There were five options on the table, including the status quo. And, as such, we used a ranked ballot to distill it down to one choice. That choice was a form of proportional representation.

In response, the premier of the day made an executive decision not to honour the vote, substituting his views for those of Islanders. His entire caucus stood as a block to vote against the expressed will of the people.

It was at this moment that I, personally, had had enough and it was the primary factor contributing to me being here in this Legislature today. I replaced a minister who had voted against the people.

The reason it hit so dear to my heart is that I have children who need legislators who can build consensus on a path forward, move towards it and keep moving forward.

The major issues of our time, like climate change, need a sustained and shared effort from our elected officials. We don't get that from the partisan politics that first-past-the-post fuels. We get lurching in opposite directions as we go from election to election, voting out the party that took us in one direction for the party that promises to head in the other direction.

It does not provide a stable foundation for progress.

These lurches are feed by the system of first-past-the-post such that a small sway in the vote can produce vastly exaggerated results. That is bad enough when there are two parties. Now that there are three well

established parties on PEI, the results can offer even further skewed results.

Majorities are more common in first-past-the-post, yeah, but these are not majorities that have the support of the majority of the voters.

It's not unusual, in fact, it's quite common on PEI to see 100% of the power to pass laws handed over to a party that is far from majority support.

With three parties and 27 districts, it is possible that a majority government is handed to a party that only gets 34% of the vote in 14 districts. That means, today, that a party needs less than 18% of the total eligible votes to secure a majority – 18%.

With proportional representation, that amount is always more than 50% of the votes. If we want to safeguard our democracy, we need to consider proportional representation.

A proportional system would deliver seat counts that more closely reflect popular support. It means more minority governments, but that means more collaborative governance.

In the early days of this Legislative Assembly, we heard loud and clear from Islanders that the collaboration that flows from minority governments is exactly the kind of spirit they want to see in their House.

It's a credit to every hon. member of this house that we were the envy of the country with our collaborative Legislature working for the best interests of the people, rather than the best interests of the party.

Not only does proportional representation mean more proportional sharing of power in this Chamber, it also means greater representation of women and under-represented groups in the Legislature. This has been the experience of the many international jurisdictions who rely on proportional systems.

We've had important debates in this House about the need to apply different lenses: a racial lens, a child rights impact lens, and so forth. It's not enough for government to

undertake this work, we also need a Legislature that brings these perspectives to the table.

If changes to our electoral system would provide us with a truer reflection of our population, we should make these changes, period.

It's my belief that Islanders feel better about their democracy when they're able to vote for the party that best reflects their values, rather than having to vote against the party that they feel they need to defeat.

Ever since I started voting, I have, for the most part, felt motivated by fear instead of hope. I know it's a feeling shared by many Islanders. That needs to change.

The referendum we had was inconclusive in its results; neither the yes side nor the no side won. I feel this is very indicative of the flawed manner in which it was designed.

Ironically, if we used the first-past-the-post system to decide the outcome, then proportional representation would have won. If we used proportional representation system to decide the outcome, first-past-the-post would have won.

We didn't use either. We had thresholds and rules set to make change more difficult because if no one wins, the system would not change. We had restrictive rules that required advocates on both sides of the question to register and chilled the expression of Islanders who were unsure what they could and couldn't say.

The political motivations of the government of the day were clear: the interests of the party were put before the interests of the people.

Another flaw in the process has been that there's been no definitive proportional option to debate. There have always been unanswered questions which leave voters with those questions leaning towards not voting for change.

I truly believe that once Islanders have a clear choice in front of them, with all of the answers to all of the questions laid out in a form of proportional representation, that we will get a truer, fairer vote on democratic

reform here on PEI, one that we can all honour.

All that context was needed to frame the reason that a citizens' assembly is essential to finding a path forward. We need, as even the fated former premier said, a clearer question. That's impossible until we have a well-defined proportional system to consider.

This motion seeks to strike a citizens' assembly to do just that. A citizens' assembly is an independent, non-partisan assembly of citizens that is convened to deliberate on complex issues of significant importance to society.

As we propose in our motion, and is normally the case, a citizens' assembly is broadly demographically representative of society.

Citizens' assemblies have been used in British Columbia and Ontario to study the question of electoral reform and have also been used in other countries, like the Netherlands and Ireland, to debate other issues of significance.

Why do I think a citizens' assembly is appropriate for PEI? First, it has an advantage as a non-partisan body. Whether or not it's true, politicians of all political stripes are, and probably always will be, viewed as acting in their own self-interest when it comes to electoral reform. It undermines discussions about electoral reform before they even begin.

Members of a citizens' assembly are not burdened with these political concerns, which leads me to my second point: citizens' assemblies are empowered to examine the evidence thoughtfully, deliberately, and put forward what they believe is the best public policy for Islanders. They are not limited by a lack of information or one-sided advertising that one might see during an election cycle.

Even the crafters of the flawed referendum were determined to keep politics out of the process, so they said. No politician was permitted to speak to the referendum during the active period of the referendum.

While I personally feel this was more intended to prevent education on the proportional system, as I mentioned, it is in the interest of the status quo to leave questions unanswered, it, nonetheless, is another reason I hope to see all members of this House vote to take politics out of it and to get Islanders to the table in developing of a specific systems of proportional representation, one that we can debate here fulsomely, after the work of the citizens' assembly is completed.

The government's first throne speech noted Islanders desire to approach our democracy with an open and judicious mind. That's a quote – desire to approach our democracy with an open and judicious mind.

It also made this important observation, another quote: While respectful of the traditions of this institution, government also understand that a rigid adherence to the past is no emblem of strength. To maintain public trust, we must evolve in a respectful and responsible manner. End quote.

We have the power and duty to strengthen and improve and evolve our democracy in a way that better reflects the identities and views of Islanders.

I encourage all members of this House to support this motion so we can move towards a more reflective democracy on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive for opening debate on this and being the mover of what I consider to be an extraordinarily important motion here in this House.

I spoke earlier today in my member's statement about what my motivations were for getting involved in politics. I definitely would not want to presume or guess at anybody else's aspirations and what was their inspiration to get involved here.

My experience in talking to elected representatives from all parties who are represented in our system, both provincially and federally and elsewhere, and some parties that have yet to be represented and have elected members, is that, it is the desire to improve the lives of the citizens and the people they serve in their communities. That is the foundation, or at least it's in there somewhere, in what motivated people to get involved in politics.

I heard from the hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive just a couple of minutes ago that, indeed, proportional representation was the thing that was the final straw, I think he put it, but maybe more positively, the catalyst that caused him to put his name forward in the election in 2019.

I want to talk about that election just a little bit, because lost in all of the clamour and the emotion, of course, towards the end of that campaign was the fact that we had a plebiscite attached to that vote in 2019. I'm on record on the night of that election. Of course, I was deeply disappointed that my party did not form government, although we made an historic breakthrough here in terms of Green politics in Canada. But I was very disappointed we did not form government, but I was more disappointed in the fact that the plebiscite on proportional representation failed by a mere 2%.

I was more disappointed because I know that the success of that plebiscite would have led to permanent – of course, the vote in 2016, as my hon. colleague has just mentioned, should have led to that anyway, because it was a clear winner in the plebiscite we had then, but here was an opportunity to underline the decision that Islanders made, and sadly we did not do that. It has left us with antiquated system which has been abandoned by so many democracies around this world, and I'll come back to that later.

We who sit in here as elected members are blessed. We get to help people every day. That's an enormously important part of our job. And there are many aspects to being an MLA, of course. We all do constituency work, and there lies a very personal and intimate connection that we have with all of our constituents, which provide us with opportunities to help them navigate through

life, sometimes through government systems, sometimes accessing essential services. And there's a tremendous satisfaction that comes from being able to help people.

In my previous life, I helped people in a very different way, but that was the core satisfaction in the job that I did. Again, each of us here has opportunities every day to help our friends and neighbours and that is a great privilege that we have as elected members.

We also do legislative work, and to me, that is the core of what we are elected to do. There are only 27 Islanders at any one time who have the opportunity and the ability to craft the laws of this province; again, an enormous privilege. I would love to work within a system that allows us to do the best legislative work that we possibly can.

Legislative work, of course, happens within the framework of whatever system you live and work within. Here, we work in a first-past-the-post system, a system we inherited from Westminster, from our British colonial past.

As I said a few minutes ago, many other countries who also inherited this system recognized somewhere along the way that it was not serving their democracy well, and they abandoned it for something different, something better. I would love to be able to carry out the legislative work that we do here in this House in a better framework; in a better system that provides the opportunities for cooperation, for collaboration, for shared ideas, rather than a system which encourages hyper-partisanship, which leads to snap elections when there is an opportunity for the government in power to take advantage of a system which exaggerates small changes in popular support, and which provides us with the stability of a system, as my hon. friend mentioned in his remarks, which does not lurch from one extreme to another as parties of different philosophies and values undo the good work that was done by their predecessors.

We're lucky because Prince Edward Island itself is a friendly, intimate place, a place where people take care of each other. When the late Stuart McLean was here, I'll never

forget the comments he made in Georgetown when he was doing his Vinyl Café show there, and of course, he always endeavoured to take a sense, get the pulse of the place in which he was speaking, and he asked about – it was a rhetorical question. He asked what it is that keeps this Island going, and he said: It's fundraisers. It's community events, that we're there to support our friends and neighbours. He was really struck by what an important part of our culture that is.

So, PEI is just naturally a more collaborative, collegial place than I think many others. That's part of our history, it's part of our tradition, and it's part of who we are. It's a lovely part of who we are, and I think that cultural tendency lends itself to cooperative politics.

Again, as my hon. friend said in his remarks: Islanders, while they may disagree with the policies that your particular party subscribes to, almost to a person, people will come up to me and say: You know what, I'm so happy that the politics that we have here on Prince Edward Island is friendly.

They like the fact that we like to work together, and that's something very unusual and precious and that's not to say that we don't get at each other sometimes, of course we do, that's part of our job too, but I think that we do it with the civility which is rare in politics. That sort of thing can happen or it can be encouraged, it can be incubated in a system that encourages collaboration and does not reward competitive hyper partisanship; to spring an election at a time when your popularity may have gone up a couple points and allowed you, as my hon. friend said: to form a majority government with far short of majority support in the population.

There are so many things wrong with the current system that we have it; produces false majorities, it produces under representation, it produces that lurching effect that I and my hon. colleague have talked about and we just have to look at any election almost, in the history of Canadian politics under this system will provide you with examples of the short comings of first-past-the-post.

Let's just look at the most recent federal election: did the party who won the most votes form government? One would imagine that would be a fundamental part of democracy that the most popular party would end up in government. No, it did not. A party that got considerably less votes ended up forming government albeit a minority government. But you know what? Had it been just a couple percentage points higher, either one of those parties could have formed a majority government, and yet not had the most votes.

I find it hard to defend a system that is that dysfunctional. I mean that's just one example from the most recent federal election that we have had. We have over representation from some parties because they have regional strength and therefore, they can elect members because they are operating not across the whole country. We have under representation of some other parties who may have run a national campaign, may have received a significant percentage of the vote, and yet are not represented in Parliament.

I'm not suggesting that every party that ran in that election, that I support the ideas that they come forward with and the policies that they promote, but they absolutely have a right to be represented in Parliament if Canadians support them, in sufficient numbers; and we have a system that does not allow that.

Of course, there was a promise to change federally back in 2015. Our Prime Minister stated very clearly in the run up to the election when he became Prime Minister of course, they were third party at the time, that this would be – if they were to be elected to government this would be the last election in Canada held under first-past-the-post, federally. A tremendous disappointment.

I know that in that election a large number of Canadians were drawn to the Liberal party specifically because of that promise. Because they are not satisfied with the system that we have, and they wanted to see something better and there was deep disappointment when our federal government did not uphold that promise.

Now, one of the reasons of course – that governments and they are not the first

government to have promised to get rid of first-past-the-post and bring in something more democratic and more representative of the will of the people – but, one of the reasons that governments are disinclined to do that when they finally get power is they have been rewarded by a system that allows them, even though they received far less, in almost every instance, than 50% of the vote, to have 100% of the power.

And, making the assumption, as many people do, that self-interest is the primary, if not the sole, motivator for politicians and political parties, they assume that why would a party ever change a system that has granted them this disproportionate amount of power. The problem with that motivation is, what if you're just in politics because you want a better system? What if you're in politics because you want better governance? What if you're in politics because you want to do better work? What if you're in politics because you want a Legislature that more accurately reflects the will of the people? What if you are in politics because you want better representation of all aspects of our community, from all corners of our community? Younger people, women, minority groups – every country in the world that has proportional representation, you will see far greater representation from minority groups in their parliaments.

So, my strong, as you can hear, endorsement of proportional representation is not because it's going to do the Green Party any good. We have proven that we can work in a first-past-the-post system and compete and form an opposition. It is because it provides better governance. It provides opportunities for legislators to do their job to the best of their abilities.

I want to talk a little bit about citizens' assemblies. Of course, they've been used in Canada before. Both Ontario and British Columbia have brought forward citizens' assemblies specifically to talk about electoral reform. And they've been used in other countries as well: the Netherlands, Ireland and, no doubt, others – where the opportunity for citizens to be directly involved in shaping decisions and gathering information and doing consultation, without the distorting lens of politics and partisanship that often pollutes truly

effective decision-making, those citizens' assemblies have come back and done extraordinarily good work.

Our motion talks about how a citizens' assembly would be chosen, and, as was the case in Ontario and British Columbia, they were randomly selected individuals from each district or each riding in that jurisdiction. In BC, it was 79, I believe; in Ontario it was 103. They did the work that we do as elected officials, without having to wear a political or partisan hat as they did it. The results are extraordinary, in both cases. The citizens' assemblies in Ontario and British Columbia came back with recommendations on what electoral reform should look like. They came back with different recommendations, and I love that.

In Ontario, they came back with mixed-member proportional, which is exactly what Islanders voted for in 2016. In British Columbia, it was a single, transferable vote system. Again, a proportional system, but a different kind of proportional system, that this citizens' assembly felt was more suited to the unique needs of British Columbia.

Now, in British Columbia, the vote that followed, and that was back in 2005, I believe, almost 60% of British Columbians voted in favour of the recommendation that came forward from that citizens' assembly. But they had set such a high bar for this to pass – 60% was the required amount of support for the recommendation from the citizens' assembly – that it, too, failed by a mere couple of percentage points, almost exactly as close as it was here on Prince Edward Island.

In Ontario, they came forward again with a mixed-member proportional system, and there the citizens of Ontario did not vote in favour of that. And, hey, that's democracy. Those are ideas brought forward by citizens to their fellow citizens, and sometimes those ideas are embraced, sometimes they are not.

Ireland, perhaps, is the home of the greatest use and utility and success of citizens' assemblies. Their citizens' assembly, the translation, I'm not going to attempt to say the Gaelic version, is We The Citizens, is who they are. They have brought forward recommendations to their parliament on things such as: fixed-term elections in

parliaments; abortion, which, of course, in any jurisdiction, but particularly in Ireland, was a hot button topic; the constitution of the country itself; and many other issues.

Now, in Ireland, of course, just a few years ago, they passed a law allowing abortion in a country where that would have been, perhaps, unthinkable had that gone through the political process of the parliament. But, because a citizens' assembly got involved, there was a strength. There was a vitality. There was an ability for the ideas that were brought forward by what was considered to be an independent and non-partisan citizens' assembly that allowed that very difficult decision to be made.

The party I represent here in this House is founded on a number of principles and values. Grassroots, participatory democracy is one of those. A citizens' assembly is exactly that. It empowers citizens. It reflects the essence of democracy, which is always messy. We see that ourselves, every day in this House, but it's also beautiful, and it can be powerful, extraordinarily powerful. When it's practiced by citizens, who are there because they wish to contribute to the decision-making process and democracy without any attachment to a political party, I think it's a wonderful opportunity.

Of course, as Winston Churchill said, democracy is the worst form of government, except all of those others that have been tried from time to time. A nod to the fact that democracy is messy. But you know what? It's the best we've got, and citizens' assemblies reflect the best of the best.

I look forward to hearing what others will say on this motion. We haven't talked about proportional representation really at all in this House since the election, and I'd be interested to see what other members think of this. We could still be pioneers. We can show that those results from 2016 were indeed the will of Islanders, and they can be acted upon. As we often say in here, we can do better, and we should do better. Here is an opportunity for us to do just that.

I look forward to others speaking to this motion, and I ask for every member in this House, support for this important motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Is there any other member wishing to speak to the motion? No?

If not, I'll go back to the mover of the motion, the hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive, to close debate.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Wonderful words from the Leader of the Opposition there. I am very surprised to see that no one else in this House wants to speak to a motion that would strengthen our democracy, but I guess we'll have to wait and see how the vote goes. Perhaps everybody's already made up their mind that they're going to vote for this, Mr. Speaker.

So, with that, I close debate.

An Hon. Member: Standing vote.

Mr. Howard: Call the question.

Speaker: Hon. members, it was asked for a standing vote.

Sergeant-at-arms, you may ring the bell.

[The bells were rung]

Ms. Altass: Mr. Speaker, the opposition is ready for the vote.

Mr. Deagle: Government is ready for the vote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McNeilly: The third party is ready for the vote.

Mr. Henderson: Third party is ready for the vote, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Okay, hon. members, those voting against the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe, the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities, the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land and the Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General, the hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture, the hon.

Minister of Health and Wellness, the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, and the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Speaker: Hon. members, those voting for the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing, the hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, the hon. Leader of the Third Party, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, the hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, the hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke and the hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Speaker: Hon. member, your motion passed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: I did have the right count; I was just checking my fingers.

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Motion No. 61 be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Motion No. 61.

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

WHEREAS tool libraries offer no- or low-cost access to home and garden tools and more, reducing cost-related barriers to home improvements and encouraging community sharing;

AND WHEREAS a small team of committed community volunteers established a tool library in Charlottetown

through donations, community events and fundraising;

AND WHEREAS the Charlottetown Tool Library not only lends tools and equipment, but also provides education, advocacy and maintenance for the community;

AND WHEREAS the Charlottetown Tool Library is currently housed in a storage locker and managed by a volunteer 'tool librarian';

AND WHEREAS the 'library of things' is already a reality in the PEI library system, including everything from musical instruments, seeds, telescopes to snowshoes;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature urge government to incorporate the Charlottetown Tool Library into the PEI Library system, expanding it to be available provincewide;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature urge government to make sufficient investment in the operational budget to fund expansion and upgrade of the existing Tool Library inventory on an annually recurring basis;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature urge government to allocate funding for a part-time Tool Librarian position to curate, manage and maintain the Tool Library.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to start debate.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's such a pleasure to rise to speak to something that has been a project of a really good friend of mine, also one that I have been involved with and supported for years.

The tool library, or I should start, Mr. Speaker, with what a tool library is. It can be something that is insubstantial. It doesn't to be at a library. It doesn't actually need to be a real place or a real thing and in this case, the Charlottetown tool library actually lives in a storage locker and occasionally, in the back of a truck and every now and then, it's set up at the Farmer's Market or other locations.

It's a transitory thing. It's a collection of things, not just of tools, tools for the home, everything from screwdrivers to Allen keys to hammers, power tools – there's a band saw, there's cooking equipment, there's canning equipment.

I have borrowed very large pots to do very large batches of mustard pickles, which my colleagues would approve, not cabbage, though. It also includes garden tools, power tools, power drills – everything you can think of. It's an amazing collection.

The reason why this matters so much is that it makes these things available to people who don't have them.

We all grew up in neighbourhoods and I have a very strong memory when we first moved here from the UK, from living in the city in London – you've heard me talk about that before. We moved to New Argyle. New Argyle is a community of 12 houses. I went from living in inner city London to a community where I could cycle up and down the entire road. We would count the number of cars that we saw in a day, probably on just the two hands. Everybody knew who everybody else was.

Steve MacKinnon lived at the top of my road. Probably a lot of the farmers in here will remember Steve MacKinnon. He was a pioneer in organic agriculture. He was the person who I first met as a farmer. He used to come and clear our snow.

One of the things that I have shared in here is how difficult it was for my family when we first moved here. We had never lived in the country. We didn't know anybody. We didn't know anything. We were really poor. We were so poor that sometimes we didn't know where we were going to get our next meal from.

That community took care of us. Every morning for that whole first summer when we lived there trying to figure out what we were going to do and how things worked, things would appear on our front porch – a bag of potatoes, a dozen eggs, fresh vegetables from somebody's garden, a chair that somebody had repaired, hand-knit mittens in the fall.

I can't tell you what an impact that had on me, about what neighbourhoods and communities really looked like, because that was our community and our neighbour taking care of us.

As we got established and we made our own place, we were then able to share what we had with other neighbours who needed things. In a community like that, some of the things you share are your tools and your expertise and your knowledge and your cooking and your babysitting, and all of those kinds of things.

We kind of take it for granted when we grow up in those neighbourhoods that we're always going to be able to get something that we need. You know, I don't have the right kind of hoe. I can go borrow that from John up the road. Or, I need to cut my lawn and my lawnmower's broken again. I'll just go borrow a lawnmower from across the road and put it back later. Hi, do you have a ladder I can have? That's just how things work.

But when you go into a community and you don't know anybody, or you go into a community and you don't have those kinds of connections, where do you get those things?

More and more in our communities, we don't have those kinds of connections, and we have this assumption that you have to have all the stuff that you need. But how many people in here have a garage or a storage shed full of stuff that they've used once in the last year? Or they bought it once because they felt they needed it and never touched it again?

One of the other pieces about something where you could feel comfortable borrowing and returning stuff is that you don't actually need those things all the time. You don't need it for those two or three days of the year that you're going to do the canning and maybe when you're done using it, somebody else could use it too.

Those two principles – those principles of neighbours who love each other and take care of each other and share what they have, and that we can reduce the amount of waste that we have if we buy less because we all could share one thing multiple times – are

the basis behind how tool libraries, or the library of things, works.

That's why it's so exciting that you can go to the library right now and borrow a telescope. I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but the last time I looked at those, I got sticker shock; they're really expensive. But I can go borrow one.

My daughter and I did that and we looked at the moon and it was amazing. Then we took the telescope back and somebody else got to have experience with their kid and didn't have to spend \$1,800 on a telescope. That means that you can open up doors for people to try things and do things that they could never have done before.

So, a tool library has a focus on home and garden tools, things that you're going to use in the house. If you think about those things that you normally have in a shed, that's what you're going to find in a tool library. Probably a pretty creative one, but glue guns could be in there too, for example.

How does this happen? How do these kinds of things come up if you don't have the person with the magic shed? Then you have some person or people who think this would be a really good idea, and in fact, there are tool libraries all over the world that are an established part of the community. Like any other good ideas, those ideas get borrowed and that's what happened here. Some really dedicated volunteers in the community said, you know what, we could do that here too, and so they did. Nothing like a good volunteer to say: I see a problem. I'm going to solve the problem. I'm going to do something about it.

And they collected what they had, and they asked their friends, and they put out a call, and before they knew it, they had enough to be able to say: Hey, we can lend it out.

So, it's donations. They did community events. They did fundraising. And then, they had enough that they could begin to partner and get more awareness of the tool library and all the neat things that they could do, and that's where we began to see things like fix-it fairs that were sponsored by the City of Charlottetown. I actually participated in one of those and ran a booth for a day repairing people's jewelry. In a past life,

I've made my own jewelry and have all my tools, and they're sitting in my indoor shed. So, I took those out that day and went and offered my services, and that fix-it fair is part of the story, again, of people taking that one step extra and sharing their expertise.

At the fix-it fair, you could bring your existing tools that you had to donate, and you could also bring ones to get them sharpened or repaired or cleaned, as well. So, it's this huge service that's offered which doesn't just lend, but also educates and advocates for the idea of community ownership, community rights, maintenance, and encouraging people to see that something could be repaired and reused rather than abandoned and lost.

That Charlottetown Tool Library is currently housed in a storage locker, which is being paid for by some donations, and is being managed by a volunteer tool librarian. I don't know if anybody in a space other than perhaps the Green caucus has met Daniel Cousins. He's pretty hard to forget once you've met him because he's 6'7", and he is a large personality with a large heart. He is one of the most hardworking volunteers in so many different things I think I've ever met.

His most recent project has been to encourage businesses to offer free fill-up for water bottles. He got some money through the City of Charlottetown through one of their creative projects spaces, he had stickers printed up that says 'Fill up here', and he singlehandedly talked hundreds of businesses into agreeing to display the sticker as a space where you could go with your water bottle and get a free fill-up.

This was partly in response to COVID, that we didn't have access to spaces where you could get water freely, but also, it's about recycling and encouraging people, again, to be more mindful about their use and wastage.

That's the kind of person that Daniel is. Daniel is one of those people who's a doer. He steps up, he sees a need, he fills the need, and he works so hard. And he is doing this unpaid, as a volunteer, and he has made a significant impact in the community. He has made a difference for people where they can be empowered themselves because they

have access to the tools and resources that they need to be able to do simple projects that you and I might take for granted.

I love my power tools. I love the fact that I just got for my birthday this year a most exciting thing; I got a Black+Decker workbench that collapses. It's my favourite new thing. I keep finding projects I can do so I can go and get my workbench out and unfold it and get out my chop saw and do something fun. But not everybody gets a kick out of chop saws and folding workbenches. Maybe it's just me. I don't know. Yeah.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: But you know, sometimes the barrier to that is that you don't know how to use it, or you don't have the confidence. And one of the things that I've seen, even when I've done projects myself, is what impact it makes when I share with other people that I built this, or I made this. They say: Oh my gosh, how did you learn how to do that? And I said: Well, I managed to teach myself without cutting off anything important, I watched a lot of YouTube videos, I have some great friends who are patient with me, and I tried.

But having access to those tools was a privilege for me to do that, and this is something where we can really open doors when we do that. And that's what Daniel was coming from, that everybody should have the same chance and the same opportunity to do something creative.

What I'm asking for is that – we've already seen that expansion of understanding that a library is not just books. It was a very long time ago that libraries started offering things like music, whether it be on CD, or they could do DVD movies; the idea that you go and borrow more than just a book has been – we've been pretty clear with that. But it's only in the last few years that we've really seen libraries expand, and especially here in PEI, to have this huge range of things that we can reach.

Right now, the one in Charlottetown, as was said earlier, offers snowshoes, it offers telescopes, musical instruments, there's a seed library, there are kits for parents who have children with learning difficulties,

there are sensory play toys for children with autism; gosh, I'm sure I'm missing things. There's science kits. There's so much in there that you can borrow, and that's a library of things.

It's not been a far step for us to think about that the tool library could be incorporated into our library system. It's sitting outside that right now as a volunteer activity run by the passion and creativity and love of somebody who absolutely thinks that this is the right thing to do, but that's a lot to ask of volunteers. Eventually, Daniel is going to need to do something else. And then what happens, and where does that go?

We have a brand new provincial library that's being built as we speak. I think my colleague from Charlottetown-Victoria Park had the privilege of going on a tour in that space just recently in what is the old Dominion Building, and from everything I heard, it's a fantastic, innovative, creative space. And isn't this the right time to take that tool library out of a storage locker and put it into a place where it belongs, into the library system?

It is not a large step to ask, and all it would need would be a confirmation that, yes, these are things that we can see as belonging to the library of things. Yes, there is a need for it, and Daniel can tell us all about it. He would be happy to do so, at length, because we know Daniel.

And there would just be a small request for a budget or support to cover two really essential things. One is the small cost that has been covered so far through donations and fundraisers to maintain and expand that library, because I can guarantee that once things become available for one area, everyone else is going to want one, too. We have the option in our library system to put in a request to borrow something, if you're in Montague, from the Charlottetown branch, and it will come to you through the internal transport system. But I would expect that the more that these things are available, the more people will want them, and we'll need to have more of the supply.

So, this would be a small ask to add to the budget. In this case, it would be the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning who have the operational budget

for the library system. And there is a requirement, as Daniel has demonstrated through his volunteer work, to have at least a part-time tool librarian who has a real and necessary function, and that's the maintenance and support of that tool library. It is the education and advocacy and outreach that goes with it, and obviously, we have somebody who is already a perfect candidate, and frankly, we could probably use more.

I have met so many people in the community who would be great at filling this role in other parts of our community, and I can imagine a future where we have a tool library in every library in PEI and we have a tool librarian in every library in PEI, and they are part of our community, taking us back to that time when you could ask your neighbour: 'Hey, can you help me out? I just need to borrow this for the afternoon.' I'll go to the library, I'll talk to the person there, and they'll tell me a story, they'll show me how it works, they might pop over for a cup of tea and help me with my project, and then I'll leave better for it because I'll know how to use the tool, and I'll know my neighbour, too.

And I think that's a really, really fun thing that we could do with not a lot of effort, and with recognizing the value; that that work has already been done and all we need to do is step up and just take it that one extra step further.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that, I'm going to conclude my remarks.

Thank you for the time and the consideration of Charlottetown Tool Library.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I would rather hear from some others. I've spoken a lot already today and this afternoon.

I want to echo some of the thoughts of my hon. colleague there, that not only are there

enormous practical benefits to be had from moving this inside a government-funded library program that can operate across this province, but while we do that, we're building community. And I love the example that she used at the very end of her speech there, of sitting down and having a cup of tea with somebody and connecting, because that's how we build community and retain community and strengthen community here on Prince Edward Island.

So, I stand up, of course, in support of this motion, and again, I look forward to others speaking. I hope this time there will be others speaking, and we can actually get support throughout this House for this lovely motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And it is, it's a pleasure to rise and to speak to this important motion.

I've talked to the person in question that has brought this forward. When I first heard about his ideas a few years ago, it was absolutely brilliant, and the passion to go behind it and to execute during difficult times was extraordinary.

This is the kind of way of the social future, I do believe. Especially now, Prince Edward Island is facing some hardships, some economic issues coming forward. We're all seeing that. What better way to enhance that, to get the things that you need but not have to purchase them, than a tool library, to make sure that we're getting those things – somebody is there for us?

And it's not just this idea; the mover was talking about the person who brought this forward. There's a series of unbelievable ideas that he talks about.

So, I just wanted to say that I support this motion, I support all that's involved, and I think this is a very good idea, a very good way that we can build community in Prince Edward Island. So, I'm really glad to take this opportunity to support this motion.

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this motion.

It really is an interesting idea, and I'm all for one for supporting making things reusable and sharing and efficiencies. It definitely would promote all of those different things.

When you take it down to a level of what's happening today, a lot of times, I mean, it's been happening for decades and decades and decades, is you go and you ask your neighbour if you can borrow something of theirs, and then they borrow something of yours. It's really just taking that to the next level.

Of course, there's a whole government component to it, and that's interesting. I mean, our libraries really do a fantastic job today of managing the lending of equipment, as the member said, when it comes to musical instruments and things of that nature, and they've got craft kits and all kinds of things. Not necessarily lending, but I mean, they have to look after, for example, the maintenance of the musical instruments, and that's where that portion comes in, like you were talking about, as well.

The other side is we have businesses that are in the rental business of renting tools, as well. We probably should consult with them and talk to them and see what their opinion is on this because, you know, rental businesses are in that for a reason. Perhaps there's room for both, because if you're talking about a business that rents tools, sometimes maybe they're going to rent the higher-end tools for people that want to pay that extra to do that. But maybe when we're talking about a government-run – maybe these are not necessarily those high-end tools.

I think there would be a challenge with the maintenance, but it's a really interesting concept, and it's one, again, that's very progressive, and one that we should consider.

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Speaker: Hon. members, the hour has been called.

The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe, that this House adjourn until Friday, October 29th, at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The Legislature adjourned until Friday, October 29th, at 10:00 a.m.