

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Darlene Compton

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[The Legislature sat at 10:02 a.m.]

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Good morning to all. Welcome back to our legislative session on Friday morning to all those who are tuned in at home and to those who have gathered in the public gallery today.

I would like to make special recognition and notice of Jane Ledwell, the executive director of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. I see Heather Mullen is here, chair of the Public Schools Branch trustees, and her son Eamonn is here. I was just thinking how much I love that lovely Irish name, Eamonn; a very famous Irish name throughout the history of the great Republic, of course, not the least being Éamon de Valera, who was the proud fighter for the Republic and I think the second or third president of Ireland if my memory serves.

But to all who are here, welcome. It's good to have you here.

As was indicated yesterday by many of us, today is International Women's Day. As I look in this Chamber, I do want to acknowledge and thank the elected women leaders from all sides of the House who all know that the roles in here are not easy, but they do their work each and every day on behalf of Islanders. I thank them very much for standing up, for representing Islanders, for representing their constituents, and for working to make the best decisions to benefit all Islanders.

I also want to acknowledge Kim Griffin and Jennifer Evans for their recognition being part of the 24 Women in Business in Atlantic Canada. I received the magazine in the mail two days ago. It was nice to read about that and to have the pleasure to work with both Jennifer and Kim over the years. I can attest that they're very, very strong

leaders with a very much get-it-done attitude, which is very, very addictive and nice to be around. I want to congratulate Kim and Jennifer, and all those others who are recognized as Atlantic Canadian Women in Business.

[10:05 a.m.]

Later today, I will be attending, with a bit of a heavy heart, the Kerri Wynne MacLeod Women of Impact Awards luncheon. I miss my dear friend, Kerri Wynne, as you know. I miss her; talk about an addictive laugh. It was just so amazing for her to be around. She was just a joy. We shared so many laughs together. I know she would be very proud to know that five Island women will be recognized for their extraordinary impact on the province, and for her to be recognized so deservedly as the namesake of these Women of Impact Awards. It will be a really nice gesture for the memory of Kerri Wynne and the family, and to all of us who loved her so much.

I do also want to acknowledge that all women in PEI, though they may not be on the front pages or leading meetings each and every day, they show up and give back to our province in so many ways and make our gentle Island a really special place to live, work, and raise a family. My wife Jana, my daughter Camdyn, and my sisters Pammy, Peggy, Toby, and Susie had so many positive influences in my life that have helped me. I am learning every day in here and they have helped me immensely on my pursuit of trying to be a better person.

So, to all of those who I call the true leaders of our province, who form the bedrock and foundation of our society, I say thank you and happy International Women's Day.

I guess the final curling update, regretfully, is that our own Tyler Smith from just down the road from my place in Hunter River, curling out of the Crapaud Curling Club, fell just an inch short of advancing to the playoffs in the Brier. It was heartbreaking in many ways, but it was so wonderful to see PEI have such a tremendous week. Those players played their hearts out and they were the belles of the ball at the Brier, gaining fans from all over the country. I just want to say to the team that your Island is proud of

you. Well done, keep up the good work, and next year the future looks even brighter.

Finally, we will be heading out tomorrow morning to attend the Boston seafood show, which is an annual event that really is the official kickoff to the spring lobster season in many ways, where the fishers, processors, and all those industry leaders will gather and talk about what's going on in the industry and the tremendous amount of positivity there seems to be in the air for a good season, price-wise, for lobsters, and also the health of the stock.

We'll be representing our province down there. The second biggest industry in PEI that drives our economy, of course, is fishing, largely around the lobster industry. So, to all those Islanders who I'll see in the next couple of days in Boston, I look forward to working with you and to continue to promote this most important industry for our province.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome those who are watching online, and those who are in the gallery today, thank you for coming in to join today's proceedings.

Today, as mentioned, is International Women's Day, and their theme this year is "Invest in women: Accelerate equality." Many accolades to many of the women in this House. But also, my career in politics actually started because of a woman; a woman who I really believed in, who was strong, who had probably one of the best work ethics I've ever seen in politics, and a person that I continue, to this day, to have as a good friend.

Keeping on that theme, today we have the Girls and Gender-Diverse Youth Parliament members, who possibly may be making an appearance in here at some point today. I just wanted to shout out to one in particular, Mary-Anne Gaudet. Mary-Anne was no stranger to this Legislature or any kind of parliamentary exercise. She was the premier

at the past Rotary Youth Parliament, and she's going to be participating today in the Girls and Gender-Diverse Youth Parliament. Shout-out to her, and a shout-out to all participants in this great activity.

Also, while I'm on my feet, I'd like to congratulate one of constituents, Abby Hustler from Ebbsfleet. She was named a top-10 finalist for the Patty Kazmaier Award. Abby is a junior forward. She becomes the seventh player in the St. Lawrence University women's hockey history to be named to the top-10 finalists for the award given to the top player in the NCAA Division I Women's Hockey.

[10:10 a.m.]

Congrats to Abby. We're always watching her online. Congratulations to her very proud parents, Paul and April Hustler, and to all her family.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Welcome back to my colleagues, staff, and Pages today, and I'd just like to start by wishing everyone a happy International Women's Day – my colleagues and the women in my life, and all the women, and especially to my mom.

I know she's not watching – she never does – but it's funny; when I got into politics, she would tell me and she would tell other people, "I don't know where she gets it." That always made me laugh because since my grandmother's passing, my mom has become the matriarch of our family. She's got a lot of brothers and sisters, and as well, is involved in so many different community things.

People often come to my mom if they need something, and she's the first one to jump up and help. To her I always say, "I get it from you," but she's so modest, she doesn't see that. So, happy International Women's Day.

I'd like to welcome everyone in our gallery today. Jane Ledwell, Heather Mullen, and Eamonn, thanks for being with us today.

I'd also like to congratulate Kim Griffin and Jennifer Evans. I think that they're two very strong women to celebrate on International Women's Day.

Music PEI is launching an initiative to combat sexual assault and gender-based violence in PEI's music industry. Rebecca Ford is the coordinator for the Ripple Effect, which is the name of the initiative. Its aim is to empower people with information and skills to combat sexual violence. This program was initiated, unfortunately, due to high levels of sexual harassment and assaults across the music industry. They receive funding from the Gender, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Community Enhancement program to carry out this project – and that will last until June – offered through workshops on harm reduction education, skills, and resources.

Rebecca Ford, who is the coordinator, I just have to talk a little bit more about her. Talk about an amazing, incredible woman. She also organizes coat – what's the word I'm looking for? She gathers coats from the community to give to people who aren't able to have winter coats and warm clothes. She's a huge advocate for overdose prevention and other harm reduction policies. Just such an all-around great person.

I actually met Rebecca Ford; the first time I met her, I was so intrigued by her. She was such a wonderful person. I saw on social media that – this was years ago – she was looking for someone to help her move a mattress, someone with a truck, and I thought: “Well, I have a van.” So, I said: “I'll help you.” So, I show up in my minivan, and it's her and I, moving this huge mattress from the fourth floor of an apartment building down to the bottom floor.

Anyway, Rebecca, thank you for all your work, and to Music PEI for taking that on as a priority. When people start talking about things and acknowledge things as priorities, things change.

I'm excited; there are – as I mentioned – lots of events this weekend for International Women's Day. I'm not going to mention all of them, but I will mention a couple.

There's one this evening celebrating female first responders. It's at seven o'clock this evening, at the PEI Fire School. Basically, the goal of the event is for girls to see women doing roles and to say, “Hey, look what she's doing. I can do that.”

There, we're going to hear from the very first female firefighter in Canada, Karen Morrison, who was in Windsor in 1983 – that's very recent for some of us – as well as celebrating other female leaders in roles. Also, this is the 50th anniversary of women joining the RCMP, which wasn't until 1974. This is a free event and no registration is necessary.

And of course, the annual event happening today from three to five from the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, at the Charlottetown Library and Learning Centre, will be happening. Looking forward to that event and many others.

Again, just wishing all participants, supporters, and coaches for the Girls and Gender-Diverse Youth Parliament, happening today – I look forward to hearing all about your day later on today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

I'd certainly like to welcome all the ones who have joined us here this morning in the gallery. Great to see you. Also, say hello to everyone who may be watching in, and everybody up in District 26, where we had quite a blast of winter over the last day and a half or so. Actually, 35 centimetres of snow fell at the highway depot up in Alma.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of our plow operators, all of our staff, for the great work that they have done and that they always do when we have storms like that, and very difficult conditions. I do recall my dad saying that when you get snow in March

and April, the positive part of it is it's a poor farmer's fertilizer. So, we got quite a bit of fertilizer over the last day and a half.

[10:15 a.m.]

Finally, earlier this week, I had the opportunity to attend, at the Lieutenant Governor's residence, the presentation of the Lieutenant Governor's PEI Engineering Achievement Award. That award was presented this year to CBCL for their design work of shoreline protection at West Point Cedar Dunes. I want to say that the work that has been done up there certainly has stabilized the shoreline and ultimately has resulted in the protection and stabilization of the beautiful West Point Lighthouse.

Thank you to CBCL for their work, and also to Stewart Enterprises' Larry Stewart for the work that he has done in implementing and putting in place the reefs under that. Great to see it and good to see some work being done, at last, up in O'Leary-Inverness.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Welcome everybody in the gallery today and those that are joining us, and those that are joining us online as well.

I'd like to take a moment to address comments made in the House yesterday. While discussing the value of taking a more therapeutic, upstream approach to addressing domestic violence, I used a phrase that was hurtful, and it wasn't intended. To anyone who was hurt, or may have been retraumatized by my comments, I wholeheartedly apologize.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

R. Croucher: Good morning, Madam Speaker.

I would like to rise today, as well, and recognize International Women's Day.

I would like to acknowledge all of my colleagues, those of you in the House today and keep our government running; my paramedic colleagues, of which make up roughly 50 percent of our staff at Island EMS; our first responders in RCMP and our fire departments – we have two awesome females in our department in Souris; the three most important women in my life, my wife Mary and my two amazing daughters, Jenna and Leslie.

To all of the women who have such a positive impact in our province, our country, and around the world, this is your day to be celebrated.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Madam Speaker.

It's kind of a little bit like déjà vu in the Legislature here today, from my Tuesday statement. You might note again that I'm wearing my Boston Bruins tie. For those Leafs fans in here, they had to suffer the consequences of our Bruins twice in one week, which has got to be very tough for those insufferable Leafs fans that are out there.

I also had a constituent, Nancy Wallace, former mayor of O'Leary, who was also at the game and she was having a pretty tough time as I was texting her back and forth from the game. Anyway, I apologized that our Bruins had to beat her Leafs at that game, but that's the way it goes.

Also, I guess while I'm on my feet, I have to acknowledge International Women's Day today, March 8th. I have, obviously, a number of females in my life who have had major contributions to who I am today. I have to acknowledge my partner in life, Sandra; she's always there for me when we need a little hand for things, whether it's politics – she doesn't like the politics very much but, she'll help when needed. My daughter Chantel, who works for Health PEI and is a great RN in the health care system; I have a daughter, Sarah Speth – she's a biochemist – and I have a granddaughter. My granddaughter, Olivia Noye, is in grade 2 at the Ellerslie Elementary School.

Although my daughters and my wife have really no love for politics, I'm kind of having some small hope that maybe my granddaughter will. Time will tell whether another Henderson genetics person is going to be here in the Legislature, so we'll wait and see.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

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

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

It is a pleasure to rise today and welcome back my colleagues and host our gallery guests and all those tuning in from District 4 Mermaid-Stratford. Happy International Women's Day to all of our great women out there on PEI. I certainly have many in my life that I am very blessed to surround myself with.

This weekend is the 38th edition of the Riverview-Dieppe Ringette Tournament in New Brunswick. I was very fortunate to compete in that many, many, many years ago as a young ringette player. I wanted to wish all of our Island teams that are travelling there today to compete, have a great weekend of competition and fun, especially to Charlottetown U14 team Morley, the team my daughter plays on. Go get 'em.

Thank you.

[10:20 a.m.]

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

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

I would like to get up today and wish everybody a very happy International Women's Day. Hi Jane, Heather, Eamonn, and everybody else in the gallery, and all the women here on this side of the rail.

I've been very blessed in my life to have been surrounded, right from the very beginning, by strong women, going back many generations. My mother was an extraordinarily strong, independent, and

unique woman. I grew up with no brothers but four sisters, also very strong women. One of the first things I ever said when I went to school was, "I have four sisters; Kate is the worst." We kind of got over that. I have a daughter now, named Kate after the worst sister, so there is evidence that I have got over that.

I want to wish Kate a happy International Women's Day, and my wife Ann, who, like my friend from O'Leary-Inverness, offers me great support. Doesn't like politics; she gets sweaty and turns off QP when that bit is coming up, but she appreciates the work that we do here, and keeps a very close eye on things.

That being surrounded by women has extended through my work in the dental office, where I worked almost exclusively with women, to our legislative office here now on the fourth floor, where up until recently when the election of Borden-Kinkora messed things up, I worked with three women, with Charlottetown-Victoria Park and with Katie and Michelle. Three left-handed women, I should tell you. What are the odds of that, that you would end up working with three left-handed women in your office?

Anyway, we've now diluted that talent pool, but I want to say to Michelle and Katie upstairs, I love you, I so appreciate the work that you do on my behalf and on behalf of our whole caucus here, and again, carrying on that blessed tradition that I have of working with incredibly bright, strong, smart women.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Hon. N. Jameson: Happy International Women's Day, Madam Speaker, and happy International Women's Day to all my colleagues and to all tuning in. It's certainly a day to celebrate. It's wonderful to hear all the comments in here this morning.

I tuned into CBC this morning and there was just so many good, interesting stories about how women were shaping the world in which we live and shaping the future. It's

amazing to be part of the evolution of all of it.

I do want to recognize – they have already been recognized in here today – the four Island women who were recognized by the *Atlantic Business Magazine* as part of the 25 Most Powerful Women in Atlantic Canada last night in Moncton: Alice Curitz, who was the founder of Our Landing Place; Jennifer Evans, the director of operations for Stingray Radio and digital platforms for PEI, New Brunswick, and parts of Nova Scotia; Kim Griffin, sustainability manager for Maritime Electric in Prince Edward Island; and Hai Nguyen, owner and operator of the Shed Coffee. All of these women bring with them a tremendous skillset and are outstanding leaders in our community. A big congratulations on your well-deserved recognition.

I know we have some guests here in the gallery today. I do want to welcome Jane Ledwell, the executive director of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Jane, your advocacy; you are amazing in every way. Thank you for all that you do. Really, really fortunate for your partnership, for the collaboration, and for your friendship.

Also, I want to welcome into the gallery Heather Mullen, who is the chair of the Public Schools Branch Board of Trustees, and her son, Eamonn; nice to see you. You are, I understand, a grade 8 student at Queen Charlotte who is learning about local government. What a great opportunity to be in here. This is what we'll call experiential learning, and we are absolutely happy to have you here today. I also understand that you are an experienced brown belt and you'll be competing this weekend in the Karate PEI Winter Open. So, on behalf of all my colleagues, I wish you all the very best this weekend.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hello to everybody watching from Charlottetown-West Royalty, and happy International Women's Day to everybody.

[10:25 a.m.]

I want to just say hello to everybody in the gallery. Heather Mullen and Eamonn, you're doing a great job. The karate moves are probably coming. Don't use any on this side of the House. Jane Ledwell, thank you for all your advocacy and work over the years, and Susan Laramée, thank you for joining us today in the gallery.

International Women's Day – it's so important. When you look through the title and what it's about, it's also a day for advocating for safety, equity, and the protection of human rights. That's in the theme. That's very important.

I want to talk about, very briefly, some of the leaders that work on equity, both with women and within their communities. I think about Jenene Wooldridge, Chief Darlene Bernard, Tamara Steele, and Sobia Ali-Faisal; incredible leaders in our community. I want to give them a shout-out, as well as the best, strongest leader I know, my daughter, Kiera Duffie, who is watching today.

Happy International Women's Day to everybody.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I wanted to rise today and welcome everyone here, especially everyone in the gallery. I notice Kris Taylor just joined us. Nice to see you here. Kris is known for a number of things across the Island. He always has a project on the go. Very accomplished in music, art, athletics, building, and the latest project, I believe, is Abegweit Links. He's advocating for a golf course. Welcome to the Legislature.

I wanted to recognize International Women's Day and wish everyone in the Chamber and in the gallery a happy International Women's Day and, of course, all of the women who have had and are having a direct impact on my life, chief among them my mother, Linda Trivers. Just a fantastic lady. I won't even get into her

extensive resume, but all the women who are watching from District 18 Rustico-Emerald.

I wanted to highlight that I have had huge shoes to fill as a representative of that area of the Island. I'm just going to list some of the great women leaders that have come before me representing that area: Jean Canfield, Marion Reid, Leone Bagnall, Marion Murphy, Catherine Callbeck, Beth MacKenzie, and Carolyn Bertram. These are the shoes that I've tried to fill – the great women who have really represented that area of the Island. Another great woman who also comes from the area, who I am going to talk about in my member's statement, L.M. Montgomery.

Indeed, International Women's Day means a lot to me and to the area that I represent.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone.

I just wanted to recognize International Women's Day as well. Anyone who knows me knows that I believe every day is women's day. I think that every woman in this House would agree we need to advocate for one another.

I just want to also mention our dear daughter, Katie, who was probably the strongest woman that I know. We will miss her greatly. I want to thank each and every one of you for the love that you've shown me. Have a smile every once in a while for Katie.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Black Pond Junior Sharks Hockey Program

R. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would like to recognize another fantastic program in District 1. I'm talking about the Black Pond Junior Sharks hockey program.

This 10-week program is for children ages 5 to 17 who are beginner skaters, new to the sport of hockey, and have never been registered in minor hockey before. The registration fee is just \$50. Full gear is required. Much of the gear is either sponsored or donated to the participants to keep the cost at a minimum.

It is held at the Eastern Kings Arena on Sundays at 3 p.m. Participants get an hour of ice time and includes basic drills and scrimmage games.

This year, the program had 37 participants, including five international students from Türkiye, Spain, Germany, and France. Imagine, a student here from a country like Spain, where ice skating is not a thing, and to not only have the opportunity to try skating but to also participate in hockey. I am willing to bet that this is going to be one of their greatest Canadian experiences.

I can't tell you how amazing this program has been for these kids. Without this program, many would never have the opportunity to dress in full gear and get out and try hockey in a low-budget, low-stress, non-competitive environment. Now, I use that statement loosely as I see the competitive side of some of the kids come out as they progress in the program and get more confident. It truly is incredible.

The program finishes up this coming Sunday, so I would like to take the opportunity to thank and congratulate Kim Outhouse and her group of dedicated volunteers and coaches – one of which is my son, Evan – for making this program the success that it is.

[10:30 a.m.]

I would also like to commend Black Pond Farms for sponsoring the jerseys for this program. The good news is, they tell me that the program will definitely be back for the 2024-2025 season.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Summerside Artist Janos Bergman

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise today to highlight and bring recognition to an amazing District 21 resident. Some in this House may have already met him, as the District 23 MLA and myself invited him to our PC Christmas social where he got to have a brief one-on-one with the hon. Premier.

This resident is an upbeat, abstract painter and artist who we all know as Janos Bergman, who lives and paints out of Lefurgey subdivision in District 21.

In the past two years, Janos has displayed his work in more than 10 different shows throughout Europe: in Rome; Florence; Milan; Venice; Massa, Italy; Arbon Castle, Switzerland; Lunéville, France; Bratislava, Slovakia; and next month he is back in Rome. He is back to display his well-known painting *Fleurs d'ete – Summer Flowers* – at the 1580 Maffei Marescotti Palace during the Arte Roma show.

Janos has been and remains the only invited artist to represent our Island, along with our country, at all of these events. He believes that his presence at these high-level events will further promote tourism and trade for our Island and our country.

Janos, over the past two years, has also found time to organize two solo events at his home showing his large number of paintings in his Summerside studio. In November 2022, the hon. Premier sent Minister Fox to bring greetings, and this past year, my colleague from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke attended.

Born in Budapest, Hungary, the proud Canadian for 50 years first was compelled to reach for canvas in the early '80s in Edmonton to find some balance and outlets for the pressure and demands of his career. What started as somber-looking portraits and landscapes years later developed into acrylic paintings that show a non-conformist approach, bold colour use, coupled with fearless brush and palette strokes. His modus operandi to consistently do the unexpected while being an environmentalist and using repurposed canvas will always keep you guessing.

Janos is fluent in English, French, German, and Hungarian, and was a senior executive covering government, private, and non-profit sectors all over the world. A graduate of marketing and business at McGill, he worked as a marketing director for the Edmonton Opera, as an independent contractor providing legal interpretation, and as an international trade development officer for the Government of Alberta.

Now retired, he always sees himself doing something and is currently writing a book about his life entitled *The Boy from Budapest* – or represent the province or country at a worldwide stage.

So, Mr. Speaker – sorry, Madam Speaker – I had this written for the first of the week, I apologize, Madam Speaker – I want to publicly thank Janos for all that he does as an ambassador for our District 21, for Summerside, PEI, and Canada through his nonconformist bold art.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

150th Birthday of L.M. Montgomery

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This year marks the milestone 150th birthday celebration of Lucy Maud Montgomery, author of the classic *Anne of Green Gables* novels.

As part of the 150th birthday celebration, Prince Edward Island is inviting fans from around the world to immerse themselves in the places that inspired L.M. Montgomery's imagination.

Offerings include the L.M. Montgomery Literacy Tour, a guided tour through picturesque local scenes brought to life throughout her novels; and the Inspiring World of L.M. Montgomery, a literary tour created to help guide visitors to learn and visit some of the most significant and meaningful places which inspired L.M. Montgomery to write.

L.M. Montgomery's writing has had a huge positive impact on our Island tourism, drawing visitors from around the world year after year. This impact extends not only to her birthplace of New London, and

Cavendish, the home of Green Gables Heritage Place, and not even to just the central north shore of PEI. Indeed, L.M. Montgomery put PEI on the map of the world and is a core part of our tourism offering.

L.M. Montgomery's life and literary legacy is a significant part of our Island culture and heritage. Kudos to our tourism operators, especially in the Green Gables Shore region, who have worked hard over many decades to promote the works of L.M. Montgomery, allowing the entire Island to benefit.

L.M. Montgomery has inspired everything from golf courses to chocolates and is a driving economic force. As PEI tourism strategies are developed into the future, let us continue to make the legacy of L.M. Montgomery a central part of our plans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[10:35 a.m.]

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

International students cap and housing

Yesterday we had an announcement from the Minister of Workforce regarding international student rates. With this announcement, it's clear that while this government might be capping the number of possible new students coming here at 2,000 for this coming year, it could actually mean more international students enrolled at our institutions if that cap is met.

Is that correct, minister?

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

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

The new federal policy that's put in place puts an allocation on all provinces and territories across the country. Our allocation of students is 2,000. That was distributed to our public post-secondary institutes, and we look forward to welcoming those students when they come in the fall.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

No one blames students for wanting to attend one of our institutions here on Prince Edward Island, just like no one can blame newcomers for wanting to make PEI their home. But the reality remains that this government has not done enough to keep up with the demand. Services are stretched thin as it is, yet this government doesn't seem willing or even able to make the proper investments needed.

Question to the minister: How many student housing units do students in our province have access to between all of our institutions?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question.

We certainly stay in touch with our post-secondary institutes all the time to ensure that they have adequate housing for their students. We know that those who come internationally generally would like to live on campus, and I know that our post-secondary institutes do the best they can to ensure that that can happen.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, but that didn't answer my question.

If our institutions want to take in more international students, one would reasonably expect that they would ensure that, at a

minimum, they should be able to access student housing here on the Island.

Question to the minister: How will your government ensure our post-secondary institutions are providing adequate housing supports for students if they are going to continue to bring in thousands of students here a year, so as not to add to an already overburdened housing market?

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

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

I think I just want to help with some of this, here. Our post-secondary institutions – we've been given an allocation from the federal government. Each school has the allocations that they're able to offer for students to come this year. They are similar numbers – the allocation was based on numbers in the past, and they're looking forward to welcoming those students in the fall.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, but that didn't answer the question.

We already have a less than 1 percent vacancy rate here on Prince Edward Island, and inviting more people here without addressing the issues that we're seeing right now is not going to help the problem.

The fact is our housing market is tapped. We already hear of UPEI telling students not to come here for their studies if they haven't secured housing ahead of time. Now, it would seem that this government is okay to leave students fending for themselves when it comes to housing while they take their money through post-secondary institutions.

Question to the minister: Why should international students, or any students who are seeking student housing, have any faith that your government will have actually taken the steps needed to ensure they have safe, affordable housing, given the horrendous track record that this

government has in creating safe, affordable housing for anyone, let alone students?

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

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

For international students who are coming, there are not more being invited. With an allocation, it actually puts a cap on that, making it a very strategic way that the post-secondary does need to recruit to ensure that they can have students come to add to that diversity and culture that's so important.

Certainly, more is needed to help those institutions. We do invest in our public post-secondaries. There is a brand-new residence at UPEI that we did invest in as well, and we'll continue to work with our post-secondary institutions to ensure that they can provide students that wholesome learning experience.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But with the cap, it could actually mean that there could be more international students coming here this year.

Targeted immigration for specific sectors

A question to the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population: For several years now, the population of Prince Edward Island has been growing dramatically. The pressures across the province are immense, and it seems pretty clear that this government is simply not coping with these challenges very well.

Why did this government place so little effort into attracting construction workers to our province during 2023?

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

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

[10:40 a.m.]

In relation to international students from a post-secondary institution, recruitment is a hard job and they are creative and innovative. With an allocation cap on the documentation that you can send out to offer to students – we've never experienced that before. So, the added numbers probably won't be there. There potentially could be, quite possibly less students coming based on only being able to offer the documentation to the number of allocations that you have.

The new announcement yesterday supports us – the ability to put an expiration date on those documentations to be able to offer if a student doesn't come, but again, they'll have to work hard to gain those international students. There will not be a flood coming. The cap actually puts it in a different position.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The cap could mean there's less, but the cap could also mean there's a potential for more, too.

But my question to the minister was this: Why did the government place so little effort in attracting construction workers to the province during 2023?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you again for the question from the hon. member.

We certainly work hard with our Construction Association of PEI. We have a recent agreement with that organization and ACOA to do some more international recruitment. We are in schools. Our post-secondary institution that has many of our trades visits our high schools. There is a new project happening there to support and to give them opportunities to try trades out. We'll continue to work hard to recruit construction skilled workers to PEI.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

To no surprise, we have a very serious housing problem here in our province. Everyone knows there is a real shortage of people to work in the construction sector, yet according to numbers provided by the government by CBC journalist Kevin Yarr, only 31 immigrants invited to our Island in 2023 were in the construction sector. That was out of more than 2,000 people who were invited here under the PNP and the Atlantic Immigration Program.

My question is: Was this government unaware of the fact that, through 2023, we needed skilled workers in the construction trades?

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

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

With this construction and the need for these skilled workers, we work hard all the time with our stakeholders, private companies in the industry, and helping and supporting them and directing to recruit.

In regards to immigration, we are looking for skilled construction workers. These aren't always easy to recruit, but we're committed to work hard to ensure that we get the workers that we need here to help with our housing shortage, to help with our health care, and to help with our education.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It makes very little sense. There are people from all over the world who want to move here to Prince Edward Island, and yet, with that vast pool of people to choose from, we don't seem to concentrate on the areas that we obviously need: 1 percent nursing, 1

percent construction workers, during a housing crisis, during a health care crisis.

Why did this government choose to invite more than 500 people to work in the food service and hospitality sectors?

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

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

Again, as recently as this past July, we have refocused our immigration and programs that we have the ability to pull those levers on. We are focusing on our construction trade, our health care, and our education, as well as manufacturing and trucking.

These specific sectors require certain skills. They're harder to recruit for, but we are refocusing and working hard to hopefully close that gap and we'll continue to do so.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But it took five years and a housing crisis and a health care crisis for this government to finally realize that we need to have targeted immigration towards construction and health care.

But with tourism, I fully understand that tourism is very important to Prince Edward Island, but let's face it, we need people to build houses in this province, and I haven't heard too many Islanders talk about a significant shortage of workers at Tim Hortons or McDonald's.

Minister, where did the pressure come from to invite so many people here in the food service and the hospitality sectors?

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

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

[10:45 a.m.]

Some of our immigration workers that are working in the quick-service industry can come through to live here in many forms. That's something that we do not have the ability to control. If you are on a post-graduate work permit and you've graduated from another province, you have the ability to live in the country and come and work here in hopes to gain your hours that you need.

We are working hard. We've refocused our distribution; that will focus our numbers into our targeted areas of the workforce.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'm sure that this province wasn't out there in this great big world, looking for people to pour double-doubles. What we really need is electricians, we need plumbers, and we need carpenters. Once again, why the concentration on the food service and hospitality?

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

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

Again, those that come to choose to live in PEI and want to build their life here are an important part of our Island as well. We have taken a refocused approach and we are targeting for today and future on that workforce that we need in our health, our skilled trades, and our education.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, just a simple question, Madam Speaker: Which businesses were pushing government to push so much work into fast food and hospitality workers?

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

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

There is no one pushing to drive the numbers there. We are working hard to bring in skilled workers. Again, those who have permits to allow them to move in through the country are doing so, and they are able to.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition

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

So, these decisions appear to be completely off the charts when it comes to common sense. Much of this record leads me to the conclusion, again, that this government is simply not up to the job.

Another part of these numbers is the fact that only seven people – seven people – in nursing and allied health services were invited to this province in 2023.

So, what's the problem here? Does the right hand not know what the left hand is doing? Was the minister's department unaware of a health care crisis in this province, where we need nurses a whole lot more than we need people in fast food?

Question: Was the department unaware of the need to recruit nurses and other health care workers?

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

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

We are quite aware, as we've refocused our immigration targets, and health care is the number one focus. We will continue to work hard to recruit workers here to help fill that gap.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, it took five years and a crisis in health care for this government to finally realize that we need targeted immigration. I know that in the recent population framework – you know that little thin document that you recently made public? – in that little weak venture, there was some mention of reducing the number of people invited to the Island through various immigration streams.

How many people will come to Prince Edward Island in 2024 through the immigrant streams?

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

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

We have a number of allocations that we receive from the federal government and based on our 2023 numbers, we are only going to fill that to 75 percent of that allocation to help – we still need employees to come to fill in our gaps in our sectors, but it will also help with the population growth.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Earlier this week in Question Period, the Premier inaccurately informed this Legislature that he thought the Community Hospital O'Leary was closed as a hospital. This reckless statement by a Premier of this province gave concern to those directors of the Community Hospital Foundation, as well as the 134 dedicated, hardworking staff at Community Hospital at that site.

Is the Premier out of touch with the health care system in this province? He says he needs to be involved in health care and I'm okay with that, but make sure he's accurate in knowing what health care services are delivered in this province. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines hospital as a building or institution providing medical treatment and nursing care for sick or injured people.

Community Hospital O'Leary

Question to the Premier: How do you define a hospital?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would say that when I was making my comments, I would have referred to the downgrading of the services offered in those places to the point in O'Leary and Souris, where the former MLA actually took the sign off the hospital and delivered it into the Minister of Health, saying that you've closed down all of our services. That's what I was referring to, which happened repeatedly under the former administration.

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

[10:50 a.m.]

R. Henderson: Well, isn't that rather interesting? So, when you downgraded the services at Prince County Hospital, did you close the Prince County Hospital? When you downgraded the services at Kings County Memorial, did you downgrade that service? Did you close that hospital? Same thing with Western Hospital.

In fact, the sign is still on the Community Hospital O'Leary if you want to know for sure; if you never go up there and check it out.

Community Hospital O'Leary provides funding – its funding actually comes from the Community Hospital's budget; 13 acute care beds services, providing convalescent, restorative, and palliative care. Islanders are referred to those services by physicians. Ambulatory care services are offered there, X-ray, lab equipment, and a foundation to help with the purchase of equipment, which is actually currently chaired by a former Conservative MLA who was the campaign manager of his candidate. It has four family physicians work from the site, and it has a long-term care facility that has 40 long-term care beds.

Question to the Premier: Why did you say Community Hospital is not a hospital in your delirious rant to the Leader of the Opposition a few days ago? Do you want to retract that statement and apologize to the

people of O'Leary-Inverness for that inaccurate comment?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It sounds like we have a government that's spending an awful lot of money delivering a wonderful service to a wonderful hospital in O'Leary, so we'll say thank you very much for that.

In spite of the path it was on under the previous administration, I can stand here confidently and say it will continue to play an important role in the delivery of health care systems in Prince Edward Island. I thank all of those who work within it, and to Eva Rodgerson, keep up the good work. We know who fights for the hospital up there, and it's you.

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

R. Henderson: While not an exact apology, it is reassuring that now the Premier is advocating at least for what the chair of the foundation – and she does do a good job, regardless of her political affiliation.

This foundation has fought hard for many of the services that are offered there at that particular....

Recently, there have been rumours abounded that the government wants to close ambulatory care services in O'Leary. This is an essential service. We have two young nurses who provide excellent service that require – wound, IV therapy, biopsies; the list goes on.

Question to the Premier: Based on your previous comment, will you commit to maintaining the existing services at CHO in O'Leary, providing that they have the staff to deliver the service?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would say that I would need the Minister of Health and Wellness to verify all of this, but I think I can say confidently that if the staff is there to provide the service, I would

love to continue to provide it there, just like I would like to provide the level of service at all of our facilities across PEI that go above and beyond to make sure we have the delivery of health care in PEI that Islanders need and want.

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

G. McNeilly: I asked the Minister of Health last week: Are we losing resident seats at Dalhousie in the near future? He didn't give a straight answer.

Medical seats at Dalhousie (further)

Premier, can you tell us what the plan is for the residency seats at Dal? Are we severing our relationship with this great Atlantic institution in 2029 as indicated in a letter from Dalhousie I tabled last week from their Faculty of Medicine?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Madam Speaker, I'll give the same answer to this question that the minister did, that all of the institutions are working together as we look into the future. They're talking about residency and the requirements that are going to be needed throughout the region. That's what the process will be, taking place.

I wouldn't want to assume how everything will work out, but all of those individuals from different institutions are working together to try to make sure we can deliver more health care professionals for Atlantic Canadians and Canadians.

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

G. McNeilly: You can blame it on whoever you want to blame it on, Mr. Premier, but your government said we would be keeping the seats at Dalhousie.

So, I just want to clarify: Has the plan changed, or is this another broken promise from your government in 2021, talking about this issue?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Madam Speaker, I'm not blaming anybody. I'm telling him the process that's going to take place so all of our institutions who provide services and who train our medical professionals can make sure we can do so within a system, knowing that it's strained, and how we can all work together to deliver the best education for them and get them ready to take a place in the system. So, I'm not blaming anybody.

We have a wonderful relationship with Memorial University. We have a wonderful relationship with Dalhousie University. It's served us well. It will continue to serve us well into the future, and we're looking at how we can deliver these services so we can train more health care professionals here in the region.

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

G. McNeilly: I want to be clear: the official opposition wants the medical school to be a success. At the same time, we want the challenges raised in the Spindle report and the Peachey report to be dealt with, Mr. Premier. Both reports say we were short about 50 doctors to bring access up to an appropriate level for Islanders. We also have a Medical Society asking for a pause until a solid plan is in place.

[10:55 a.m.]

Plan for UPEI medical school (further)

Mr. Premier, you recruited seven doctors in the last few months, but on the other side of the ledger, you lost four doctors. That's up three. That's a far cry from 50 doctors. Mr. Premier, we're not ready. What are you doing right now to ensure confidence in Islanders that we're ready for both of these things? Because it's happening pretty quickly.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: One of the things I'm trying to do is fight off all the fear that the opposition is trying to spin on this whole thing.

We have wonderful, hardworking people who have done this before, who have

worked within the system, who are working with many, many partners to make this a success. We have to work with them. We have to believe within ourselves as Islanders that we're capable of doing big things.

Cape Breton University in Sydney – Cape Breton is no different than Prince Edward Island, but they're not getting resistance from all of the opposition over there; they're rallying together to make it happen. That's what we should be doing in this province because we need to train more doctors. We can do that here. Islanders want to participate in this.

Will there be challenges? Absolutely, but we've done big things before. Fifty percent of the people in this province didn't want the Confederation Bridge, but we worked through it. We built it and not one of them would send it back now that we look back on it.

We need to work through this. We can do it. Let's trust the people that are working there to get it done. They have wonderful, thorough reports that they know they have to follow through. We have three years before we need to see any action within the health care system to get ready for this. We have time to do this. We can work through this. I wish the opposition would get on board.

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Earlier this week, the Task Force for Housing and Climate published its blueprint for more and better housing, which includes recommendations for the provincial government. Among these expert recommendations is a recommendation to create public rental registries to enhance our data collection to ensure government policy is working. Of course, the PCs have continuously resisted calls to create a rental registry.

Solutions for rental housing market

Question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: Why is a rental registry

such a good idea to experts but not to the provincial Cabinet?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

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

We have many things on our plate in my department in order to advance the interests of the province in terms of housing. I have a mandate to move ahead on many fronts.

Whether a rental registry is a good idea or not, it's not part of our work plan at this time. It's certainly something I'm willing to consider in the future if I'm in this job long enough. But there are many things we can do to improve the situation on the housing front and for renters in this province. A rental registry may be one of them. It's simply not on our radar at this time. It's not on my work plan.

We are concentrating in priorities in my mandate letter. It's plenty of work for us to do right now. We have to concentrate on the things that we have identified as priorities.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: That is so unfortunate given that we know how much a rental registry can help people in crisis.

One of the positive actions in the housing plan is working with non-profit and co-operative housing organizations to increase the supply of affordable rental housing through acquisitions. Last year, this House passed a motion to have government review this housing solution that would help keep housing affordable and out of the hands of speculators.

To the same minister: Why did you give no consideration to this solution in your housing strategy?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. R. Lantz: I didn't catch the last part there; I only caught the first where the member was referring to our program in the budget – that we're still working on – which

is our Community Housing Expansion Program. She correctly stated that, in part, that program will involve building capacity within our non-profit and co-operative community to acquire housing, but not only that, over time, as we build up their capacity and fund them further, to actually develop, build, and operate more property.

I think it's going to be a comprehensive program. It's going to take time to ramp it up because like many sectors in the housing sector, it does require building capacity. Just as it does to build housing, the non-profit sector needs to be built up to build capacity and to operate more community housing in this province.

We're committed to doing that. It shows in our budget. We're moving forward very quickly on that project.

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

[11:00 a.m.]

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I think you misheard the question because your caucus was heckling, but that question was on the right of...

[Interjections]

K. Bernard: That question was actually on the right of first refusal, which your government has not put into your budget but is also another good policy.

Vacancy rates: the housing strategy also shows government's inconsistent views on what constitutes a healthy vacancy rate. First it was 4 percent, then it was 3 percent, and now it's as little as 2 percent.

To the minister: How long will it be before we see government trying to convince Islanders that a 1 percent vacancy rate is healthy?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

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

I'll say right now that our current 1.1 percent vacancy rate is not healthy. We need to get that up. We're starting to see progress. That rose in the recent statistics, from 0.8 percent up to 1.1 percent. In fact, it rose quite significantly in other areas of the province. The one weak point was Charlottetown, where the vacancy rate actually dropped.

Although, we are seeing some encouraging indicators. In fact, housing permitting was starting to rise at the end of last year. January was one of the best Januarys in a decade in the Charlottetown area for housing starts. We're starting to see....

[Interjections]

Hon. R. Lantz: So, if we can get Charlottetown on course, we're really starting to see things turn in the right direction. In fact, on Monday night, Charlottetown city council is considering a vast number of applications for rental units in the Charlottetown area; over 2,000 units they'll be considering which....

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In my district, the Confederation Bridge fabrication yard in Borden-Carleton has been left unused and undeveloped for 27 years now. Recently, taxpayers picked up the bill to clean up the mess left behind by Strait Crossing Inc.; it cost about \$1.3 million.

In 2021, government issued an expression of interest for development ideas for the parcel and the closing date on that now is almost three years ago.

Future of former SCI fabrication yard

Question to the Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Trade: What is the status of developing the former fabrication yard at this time, further to that expression of interest?

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

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question.

As you know, the fab yard is an important piece of property for the Province; very crucial for us to be able to develop that piece of land. We have embarked, since my arrival, in a very transparent process with the Town of Borden-Carleton to move forward with that. That work has been completed. We've met and supported the town on numerous occasions. We continue to do so.

We will move forward. The Town needs a little bit more time to look at different bylaws that they need to amend to make this a reality and they've asked us to extend that timeline. We're very happy to do so and to continue to work with the Town of Borden-Carleton to make this a success.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, your first supplementary.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There was a lot in that response. My next question would be: Since the expression of interest went out, there has been a proposal come forward, minister, to develop a golf course on the site. On September 28th of last year, the developer did have a community meeting in the town of Borden to discuss the idea. I understand that there'd be no public funds required for the golf course, as the money is lined up.

During the by-election campaign, I talked with many people in the district who were supportive of the idea generally, but they did not feel as if their wishes or preferences for the development of the property were at all being considered by the government.

My question for the minister: Will you commit to a process for developing the fabrication yard that includes an opportunity for all the residents of Borden-Carleton to express their opinions on the development of this important parcel of land?

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

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question.

We do continue to work with the Town of Borden-Carleton, and we don't want to jump the gun and take a step here in moving forward. We've worked continuously with the Town of Borden-Carleton; we will continue to do so. They will consider all options, and at this stage they need a bit more time to be able to move things forward. We are aware of all the considerations that are in place right now and we want to give the Town of Borden-Carleton the opportunity to come forward and bring us options to consider.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, your second supplementary.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[11:05 a.m.]

I understand from the minister's response that it's in the hands of the Town of Borden-Carleton, but I understand there's also no scheduled meeting right now for the Town and the department to explore those further ideas to see what might work best.

However, I have been advised that there might be some work already completed on the site of the former fabrication yard, so that would be suggestive that maybe there's been a decision already made to move forward. Hopefully, that's not the case and that the minister is actually sincere in his efforts to try and communicate with the Town and the residents of the community.

The former minister, I would note, did commit to having a process that would ensure the community was fully engaged and involved.

My question to the minister: Will the Province commit to an open and fair RFP process – if we're moving forward with a formal and proper RFP process – that would

allow equal consideration for all ideas? If so, would that include this golf course?

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

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank the hon. member for the question.

We will consider all options. We've been transparent throughout the whole process. We will continue to be transparent. We will continue to support the Town of Borden-Carleton. All options are going to be put on the table, and I can guarantee this House that there has been no decision made at this point. We continue to support the decision of working towards attaining the goal in developing that important part of property that we have here in the province, and we will do so hand in hand with the Town of Borden-Carleton.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

R. Croucher: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Impaired driving continues to be a menace on our communities that too often has deadly consequences. I have seen this firsthand in my roles as a paramedic, a firefighter, and as the funeral director.

Addressing impaired driving

My question is to the Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General: What measures or new measures are in the budget to combat impaired driving?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question.

Impaired driving is too relevant on this Island, and it's been that way for far too long. I think it's everyone's responsibility in here to try to combat this.

It's just a reminder, over Christmastime, when three souls were lost to a stretch of road that I drive every day, and my family drives, my neighbours drive every day. We can't have any more of that.

To answer your question, we are adding capacity to our police force. We're adding two more members to focus on impaired driving to our traffic unit, and to do training and investigative work to fight impaired driving across this Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, your first supplementary.

R. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister.

It's encouraging to hear that there are steps being taken.

After a lot of years and a lot of effort, the provincial traffic unit was restored. Increasingly, the amount of situations involving drug-impaired driving are happening on our Island roads.

A question to the Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General: How is law enforcement adapting their operations to meet this rising threat of drug-impaired driving?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question again.

I met with the superintendent of the RCMP this week. We discussed many things, including our traffic unit, which we're building capacity in. It's been – from a lot of years before this – being cut, and we're adding capacity to it.

Is that enough? No, we have to do more, but we really want to focus on impaired driving. Superintendent Lewis wants to really combat this. We work great with MADD across this Island – Mothers Against Drunk Driving. They're a great team to work with.

But everyone in this Legislature here has to do a part, and I look forward to any

suggestions or any things that we can do. But we are starting, also, a yearlong campaign, not just near the end of the year near Christmastime. We're going to do a yearlong campaign.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, your second supplementary.

R. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That yearlong campaign, I love to hear that because it's more than just a few days of the year that we need to be talking about this. It's good that you're keeping your finger on the pulse of this because we need all the help we can get.

Increasingly, there is a public appetite to take a tougher approach to combat impaired driving.

[11:10 a.m.]

A question to the Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General: Are there any legislative measures on the horizon to strengthen the toolbox to those fighting impaired driving on our Island roads?

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

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

That's a good question, and that's something that we discuss often. But when you look at Prince Edward Island's laws right now, we have some of the toughest drinking and driving laws. We're the only province in the country that incarcerates first-time offenders in impaired driving, and it's not helping. Just throwing bigger fines and more incarceration isn't addressing the core problem.

Maybe we have to take an upstream approach with education, which we're going to do, but maybe there has to be other wraparound services. If you're caught, maybe you go to an impaired driving boot camp or something like that. We've got to really think outside the box so Islanders can feel safe on the roads at all times. We've got to really combat this.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Last week, I had an exchange with the Minister of Environment. I reminded the minister at the time that April 1st, there will be an increase on the carbon tax. I was also reminding government of the continued increases that seem to be continuing to hit Islanders, including the recent rate increases from Maritime Electric. This is the number one concern that I hear about every single day: how much things cost and how much things are continuing to rise.

Carbon tax increase

Question to the Premier: I am hoping that the carbon tax increase on April 1st has been something that you have been talking about. What will this increase on April 1st for the increase in the carbon tax mean for an already stretched wallet for Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

As of April 1st, I think the price per tonne for carbon is going to \$80, I believe. That will result immediately in PEI with the price of gas going up 3.4 cents and the price of diesel going up 4 cents per litre. To take that into full account, on April 1st, the carbon tax in its entirety will be – 23 cents per litre of gas that you pay at the pump is carbon tax, and 26.6 cents per litre is diesel.

I have written a letter to the Prime Minister where I outlined how advanced we have been in this province to fight carbon. We've seen lots of very positive initiatives that we've implemented here that have made a difference. I asked if he would not increase this at this time on April 1st because it's going to cause some hardship.

The ultimate hardship – there is an offset, of course, where the funds are distributed back to individuals, and it does help offset the cushion, but where it really impacts PEI the hardest – and I'm sorry for the lengthy answer but I think it's important, Madam

Speaker – is that the cost of goods coming to and from PEI come here by diesel. That's a consistent price all the time that's added to the end and is one of the many reasons why PEI has, for example, the highest food prices.

I would like to see this levelled off in some way until we can get some of those tough inflationary issues a little bit greater under control. I'll wait to hear back from the Prime Minister.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Since I've been in this House, it's been a back and forth with the federal government on the carbon tax. Two years ago, in this Legislature, we had the hybrid version with the federally mandated carbon tax. Gas, I think, at the time went up 4.4 cents a litre. The Premier says another 3.7 cents a litre means 23 cents a litre.

It's hard to believe that every single time you go to get gas now, you're at least \$100 in my vehicle just to fill up gas. If you're to the hockey rink or if you're travelling, this is a cost that is hitting Islanders hard.

A question to the Premier: I don't think you said it in your answer. You said that you would send a letter to the Prime Minister. What has been the response from the federal government on this?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: I'm not sure if we have a response as of yet. I mean, it's just this week when we wrote the letter, so I would give the Prime Minister time, with all of the things that he deals with on a daily basis, to read the letter and thoughtfully respond to it.

I think it's clear. I think everyone in Prince Edward Island understands the importance of battling, to the extent we can, climate change. We know it's a very real thing here. We've leaned into it as an Island, as a province, really, really aggressively. We've seen some very, very positive initiatives that have helped reduce our carbon footprint.

[11:15 a.m.]

Just to be fully open about it all, the cost of doing this is really, really difficult right now at a time when the cost of living is really, really high for everybody. On top of that, the Clean Fuel Standard that was added last year was 4 cents per litre for gas and 3.4 cents for diesel.

So, there's a considerable amount of added tax that has gone on this that have impacted Islanders, and as I say, it's one of the reasons why our food prices are so, so high, because all of that cost to transport it here is passed on in the end to the consumer.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Premier talked about how Islanders are cognizant, and Islanders are quick to adapt. The minister mentioned there were 7,000 heat pumps installed. Driving around the Island, you'll see a lot more solar on people's roofs and in their yards, et cetera. I do think that Islanders are drawing the line at the new Tim Hortons lids, but that's a different set of questions.

I had mentioned earlier about how in 2022, the Province was able to get what I thought was a pretty good deal for the province. In 2023, the federal government dug in their heels and we went to the federal backstop. I do know recently that the Prime Minister did give a pause to the home heating oil exemption for Atlantic Canada at a time.

Is this something that you and your colleagues around the Maritimes, Mr. Premier, think might be able to be implemented again, the pause?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Yeah, we were successful as Atlantic Premiers to convince the federal government not to charge the 17 cents they were going to add to home heating fuel to a place where it's our primary source right now, as we work to change that. So, we were successful in that.

I think this is an issue where everybody kind of agrees to the end of what we need to do, and there's a big disagreement on how we

get there, and whether the carrot or the stick in this region is the best solution.

I think where I get concerned is that under this current plan, we're at \$80 per tonne for carbon now, with the end goal being \$170 per tonne by early 2030 or 2032. I forget the exact.... So, that's going to continue to see considerable increases for these things.

I understand the premise of carbon pricing and I support it, essentially, but I also have been saying since I first started to run in politics that when we don't have any other alternatives here, it becomes a punitive and unfair tax and cost on those people at the end, and those are Islanders here, unfortunately.

So, I would like to think the Prime Minister would at least entertain the request and work, like we have been doing on many other files, to try to combat the high cost of living for Islanders.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Question to the Minister of Justice, just picking up on Souris-Elmira's great questions on drinking and driving. This is a major concern in Prince Edward Island, all across this House, and all across Prince Edward Island.

Talked often about police capacity, law enforcement, but the real issue is about harm reduction and health promotion. We are failing as a Province to do these two things properly and educate people. The government takes in over \$25 million of revenues from alcohol sales.

Health promotion and harm reduction

Minister: I will be bringing a private member's bill later on this session. Will you look at everything possible to make sure we're investing in health promotion and harm reduction across this province more consistently?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question.

Absolutely, yes. This is a public health concern, not just a justice concern. So, we definitely will.

Thank you.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

International Women's Day

Hon. N. Jameson: Madam Speaker, today is International Women's Day, a time to honour the remarkable achievements and contributions of women in Prince Edward Island and around the world.

This day is not just a symbolic gesture. It brings awareness about the resilience, strength, and brilliance that women bring to every facet of society.

As we reflect on this year's theme, which is "Invest in women: Accelerate equality," let us remember that each of us has a role to play in advancing gender equality. Whether it's through legislative action, workplace policies, funding grants, or simply promoting inclusivity in our daily interactions, we can all contribute to building a more equitable province.

I want to highlight a few investments we are making through the Interministerial Women's Secretariat by working with various government departments and providing funding to community organizations for projects to accelerate equality and empower Island women.

[11:20 a.m.]

We saw a great example of this yesterday with the 29 youths participating in the Girls and Gender-Diverse Youth Parliament. This is a tremendous project through the PEI Coalition for Women in Government, with a goal to amplify the voices of Island girls and gender-diverse youth.

Another new initiative being launched this month, which is a partnership between Innovation PEI and our Women's Secretariat through the National Action Plan to Prevent Gender-Based Violence, is a new stream of the PEI Arts Grant focused on gender-based violence prevention. Twenty-five percent of the \$100,000 funding will be dedicated to Indigenous-led projects or those addressing violence prevention in Indigenous communities, or Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. This initiative highlights the power of art to drive social change, emphasizing its potential to unite, inspire, and provoke critical thinking on issues like gender-based violence.

A new microgrant program is also being launched today through the PEI Business Women's Association, a fantastic way to support and empower women entrepreneurs across our province.

I'd also like to highlight the launch of a new website to help build awareness of the unique health needs of women and gender-diverse people when interacting with the health care system. This is a direct response to the *Awareness to Action: A Health Strategy for Women and Islanders Who Are Gender Diverse*. The goal is to enhance health care equality for women and gender-diverse individuals in our province.

Finally, I do want to thank the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women today. As I said, Executive Director Jane Ledwell is with us here today. Today, they are marking International Women's Day with a special event at the Charlottetown Library Learning Centre from 3 to 5 p.m. I am honoured to be speaking at this event, and I extend a warm welcome and invitation to all members of this Legislature to join me there this afternoon.

Let us come together to honour and celebrate International Women's Day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, minister.

It's great news, and it's such a special day and you do such a great job with it. I want to congratulate you on everything that's being done in the province.

As well, national action plan – we talked about it yesterday during budgets, and that's what is important about budgets. We see how much more money is coming to Prince Edward Island from the federal government to fight against issues.

The fact that the title of it is accelerate equality. Accelerate equality means we're only trying to get to parity and we're trying to speed that up. It's 2024. We have to continue to work on those barriers and putting people first.

The word equity in there is we have work to do on equity, and I mentioned this before with our equity groups. The murdered and missing Indigenous report and things – we still have work to do. We have to support our other provinces. I look at Manitoba, and I've sent a letter to the Premier before about looking at where we are with supporting other provinces as they try to put closure and make things better. We've really struggled as a country on that file. Let's make it right.

I stand with you, minister, always, and I look forward to supporting all women, and especially the ones in here today on such a special day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister for bringing forward this statement. I echo pretty much everything that she said.

As I reflect on the theme this year of "Invest in women: Accelerate equality," when I read that, it just sat with me so much and really resonated because one of the things that I reflect on a lot, that I hear a lot, that I read about a lot, is when a woman is sitting at a decision-making table, she brings a lot of voices with her. That is something that I think is unique to women in that.

All of the experience a woman has had – and a woman wears a lot of hats. As I look

around here, I know that every woman in here has children. I know some of them are grown now, but the reality is that when we sit in a chair like this, or we sit in any job, and we're working our butts off, and in the back of our minds is: What are we going to have for supper tonight? Do I have anything in the freezer to take out?

[11:25 a.m.]

While we're doing all this, we're managing our lives and planning out our lives. I think that the unique perspective that a woman brings to a table does accelerate equality. It does accelerate progress. So, I really appreciate that theme.

Along the lines of reconciliation, International Women's Day is a really important day to advance that, as we consider the fact that women bring a lot of voices forward. Microgrants/grants are so helpful to organizations who are doing the work to advance women's rights on gender-based violence. Super important.

But it wouldn't be me to not stand and say that offering them really consistent and good operational funding is the best way to support them because when they know the work that they need to do to advance all of these things, yet they are stuck writing grants for projects and having to kind of pigeonhole and pivot and do things a certain way, it just interrupts their work.

I would like to thank all those organizations doing that work, I'd like to thank the minister for the statement, and I'd like to thank Jane Ledwell and the Advisory Council on the Status of Women for all the work that they do, and all of the organizations – I'm not going to list them because it would take too long – but just to say thank you and once again, happy International Women's Day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Summer Student Employment Programs

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

I'm pleased to rise today to share with members about upcoming student opportunities.

We know young people need employment opportunities to explore career options. After all, they are the future of our workforce. As Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population, investing in young people is an essential step we need to take to ensure that we are providing valuable learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom.

The summer student employment programs provide the pathway for this. Through these programs, Island youth as young as 15 years old are given the chance to gain valuable work experience while helping them to develop soft skills. They gain experience right from the start, from the application process to the interviews, and then through the day-to-day interactions of the job.

The other aspect of the program is for employers. They are provided wage subsidies to give young people career opportunities, while helping them meet their labour needs. We know these programs are beneficial.

Our young people are gaining valuable work experience while supporting the needs of businesses across the Island. I am pleased to share that applications for this year's intake of Jobs for Youth and Post-Secondary Student Programs are open again, and the department will be accepting applications until March 29th.

To employers or youth looking to apply, you can find more information on our provincial website. Just go to princeedwardisland.ca/summerstudentemploymentprograms.

These are annual programs, and every year I look forward to their launch so we can give our students the opportunities they deserve, all the while connecting our business community to the new potential employees.

I know we can all agree that investing in our young people while supporting our local businesses is something we all should be proud of. I hope all members of this House will encourage both Island youth and local businesses to participate in these programs

so that they can ensure that our province reaches its fullest potential.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I do thank the minister for making this announcement today. It's been a long-awaited announcement.

I do know that this program is very important. In my 13 years of being an MLA, I have seen many, many non-profit organizations or private sector or even the public sector utilizing these programs. It was an asset to them, but also gave that opportunity to students to learn some very valuable skills to move them forward. Anything that we do today to invest in our youth, of course, is building a stronger future tomorrow.

The only issue I have with it at the present time is the feds come out with their jobs for youth programming, similar programming, sometime in January, when they open the application process for it. So, I have received a lot of calls from, again, businesses/organizations in my area, wondering about the provincial programs.

[11:30 a.m.]

If maybe they could align – the government could align that – to come out around the same time, there wouldn't be so much confusion. Not knowing when this is coming out, I have to try to keep a list, and when it does happen, get back to these people and say the application process is now open and you have 20-some days to do it. If you could just extend that or have that a little bit earlier and maybe align it with the federal process, it would make it so much easier for the businesses.

The other thing is for advertising on it; I know that you do it on – I think it's the Work PEI employment website. Just a little bit more, maybe, putting it out there, where students can find the successful applicants and where businesses may be able to hire a student.

Those are just things that, over my years, I get a lot of questions from, and probably anything we can do to streamline and make it easier for the people, the better.

It's a great program, and I do encourage anybody – again, the private sector, the public sector, or the non-profit sectors – to apply for this and give an opportunity to a student to learn, and also be eligible for the Career Connect program, or another program to help them through post-secondary. I know back when I was younger, my wife now, when we were going out, she was going to university. These jobs really helped her pay the expenses through university. So, I know the importance of it.

I do encourage, again, all businesses to apply because if you don't apply, it doesn't give that student an opportunity to have summer employment.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Thank you, minister, for the important announcement this morning. As my colleague, the Leader of the Opposition, has indicated, it is an important program. Lots of uptake over the years. The fact that it's tied into the experiential aspect of the students' development through education is important to ensure that the student has the opportunity to be supported going through the particular field of studies. That's an important tie-in.

The reality is that more and more young people need to work to get through. Back in our day, not everybody needed to take the summer to work; they could pursue other things and pursue their educational career more diligently. But the reality is more and more students are needing to work. It's an expensive environment. The other reality is that more and more businesses need the support to take the students on as employees.

It's a win-win, as I see it. I think the important take away is that the deadline is coming up rather quickly, March 29th, so we've only got three weeks left for

applications to get in to be covered by this important program.

Thank you, minister.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the document that just came out, *Blueprint for More and Better Housing: How federal, provincial, and municipal governments can ensure that we build 5.8 million homes that are affordable, low carbon, and resilient*.

This was written by the Task Force for Housing and Climate. I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the requested takebacks from budget estimates, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burridge: Madam Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the budget handouts for '24-25, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Education and Early Years, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that the 1st order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[11:35 a.m.]

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

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

Minister, would you like to make a motion to bring a stranger to the floor?

Hon. N. Jameson: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Welcome back, Chris. Could you introduce yourself for Hansard?

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

Chair: Alright, minister, do you have any opening comments, or shall we get right into it?

Hon. N. Jameson: Yeah, let's get right into it.

Although – no, I've just been told we have some takebacks.

Chair: I thought you might.

Hon. N. Jameson: Yes, I do have some takebacks.

Chair: Would you like to table those?

Hon. N. Jameson: Yes, I do need to table those. Thank you.

Chair: Excellent. Impressive turnaround.

Hon. N. Jameson: Yeah, we've got an impressive team in Education.

Chair: Members, we left off; we're going to start on page 54, and I will read the Public Schools Branch.

Public Schools Branch

General

“Appropriations provided for public instructional and support staff salaries and operating grants.” Administration: 2,700,200. Salaries: 268,270,300. Maintenance: 15,619,200. Transportation: 6,031,300. Program Material: 3,371,700. Equipment and Repairs: 1,207,800.

Total General: 297,200,500

Total Public Schools Branch: 297,200,500

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair, and welcome back, again, Chris.

I just have to say – I like to give credit where credit is due – I want to thank you for bringing back those takebacks so quickly, and also, all of the takebacks from the departments who have been here so far. Very, very much appreciated, so thank you for that. It doesn't always happen.

We talked about this yesterday under CSLF, but one of the things that we've heard about in Public Schools Branch, too, is the shortage of bus drivers. I'm wondering if

you can give us an update on that situation. Is there anything reflected in this budget for bus drivers?

Chris DesRoche: We have added two bus drivers in this section, but certainly, recruitment of bus drivers is always a priority.

K. Bernard: The hiring of two; I know that, especially when it comes to bus drivers and substitutes, there is a huge shortage. So, hiring of two; have you hired them already, or are there two new positions? Because I'm wondering, were there two hired, is that all that could be found? Or are there two in the works?

Chris DesRoche: No, I'm referring to two more for the coming September.

K. Bernard: I guess to be determined, but from your perspective now, is that going to be enough to alleviate some of the pressures?

Chris DesRoche: It alleviates some, but certainly we've had a lot of discussions lately on the transportation system. Our priority in the coming year is going to be to add more physical buses than we are retiring in order to increase the capacity of physical buses, and then look at more drivers.

K. Bernard: Are there increased salaries for bus drivers in this budget?

Chris DesRoche: There are collective agreement increases if that's what you mean.

K. Bernard: Nothing above and beyond that?

Chris DesRoche: They actually were reclassified up an additional level last year in reflection of the duties they do.

[11:40 a.m.]

K. Bernard: Yesterday we had talked about this, and refresh my memory: Did you say that there's a review happening of bus routes? I think that we were talking about this under CSLF. Is the review also under Public Schools Branch as well?

Chris DesRoche: The review that CSLF is undergoing is with regards to schools as well, as far as zoning and things, but the PSB does review their routes every year.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you. Maybe I'll just pick up on that. I hear there's a shortage of substitute bus drivers. How does that...?

Chris DesRoche: How does that...?

G. McNeilly: Where is it? How do you determine...? Are we short substitute bus drivers? Is it in a pool, or how does it...?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, there would be a pool, and certainly, they're always recruiting for more permanent and casual bus drivers.

G. McNeilly: Is the money in here, in the budget, to do that?

Chris DesRoche: It'd be the human resource department which would do that.

G. McNeilly: Okay, human resources. So, two new bus drivers in September; are those specific routes? Where are they going to be? It seems like we need more than that. I don't know if that's going to be enough.

Chris DesRoche: They'll add to their complement and then when they see all the enrolments for the year and the areas, they design routes each year. Like I was saying, we're looking to expand the number of physical buses in the coming year, and then look at potentially more bus drivers.

G. McNeilly: Could I ask questions about the physical buses in this section or is that in another?

Chris DesRoche: More of a capital budget.

G. McNeilly: Okay. I do have to ask this question. When the standing committee got a letter back from the PSB and said we are short buses – I think it Winter Wellness Day, there were no buses, or there were very few buses, and different activities going on. This is a major problem.

We're talking about both resources, both – substitutes, buses. How much of problem is

this between electric school buses, failing diesel buses? Are we going to get a plan on all this, and where to move forward so that our kids just can get from point A to point B safely, on time, and with heat on the bus?

Hon. N. Jameson: Thanks for the question. I listened to the committee meeting where the union spoke, and we've also recently met with both the PSB and the CSLF. We're very aware of the concerns. We are actively working to address some of those, so you'll see some requests to Treasury Board for additional buses. We need to ensure that we support our children and our bus drivers in the system so that children are able to get back and forth from schools in a timely manner and in a safe way. Absolutely.

G. McNeilly: I mean, we are putting in two new bus drivers, and that's important, but when the person in the standing committee is talking so frankly, it was almost like they need more support, and he was talking about that. So, I agree, but that plan is vague.

Is there going to something that comes out more formal than that? It seems like multi-step plan. We've got a few different issues in this field and it's very concerning. As our population grows, that becomes – we heard about it with kids, just some that are only getting a cheek on the bus, or only getting a cheek on the seat.

Hon. N. Jameson: Cheek on the seat.

G. McNeilly: I don't know if there's space on the buses right now, and I'm just concerned that it's causing major, major problems in this.

Hon. N. Jameson: As per Transport Canada, the maximum allowable number of students on a bus is 70, and absolutely, we adhere to those rules and regulations. If there was ever a concern, we would take action right away.

Buses are really the safest means of transportation, so rest assured that the children are safe on those buses. Maybe there are challenges with room and that, but there's never a time where there are more than 70 children on a bus, and mostly, they never get to that amount. There might be the odd route where they are reaching that capacity.

[11:45 a.m.]

I know that both the boards work very hard to mitigate those numbers and take them down to a more reasonable count.

G. McNeilly: I may as well just finish off with that. I'm glad, minister, that we're having this conversation. I appreciate the Chair allowing us to be – but I'm worried about the demand on the bus driver. We're talking about having to fill out more forms, having to do different things, and the task of the bus driver is definitely increasing. He went through his whole day. It's incredible how hard bus drivers work, from getting up in the morning, getting things going, making sure that they're there on time.

Are we doing enough to value the bus drivers that we have in Prince Edward Island?

Chris DesRoche: The reclassification of the bus driver salaries was reflective of those extra duties in the past year. So, we updated their position questionnaires. We worked with the Public Service Commission and got them an increase of pay.

Hon. N. Jameson: Also, further to that, we are exploring the opportunity of incorporating some sort of bus monitoring pilot, so that's something that you'll likely see here in the coming months. Still working on the details.

But they do have challenging jobs, there's no doubt. They're tough jobs and we appreciate them immensely. I think there's been a lot of light shone on our bus drivers over the last number of years, and if any of them are listening here today, thank you for everything you do.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Continuing on with that, I know that recently, in the last couple of years, there has been a lot of focus on bus drivers. One of the things that we've heard is that if they wanted to put in for vacation or if they wanted to do anything, they would be denied that. So, we say we appreciate them and then when we do things like that, it just doesn't make them feel valued.

So, I know that that probably has a lot to do with the fact that there just aren't enough bus drivers, but is there anything that the department is doing to try to ensure that they have access to things that they should have, like vacation time and things like that?

Hon. N. Jameson: I know our HR team works very hard to support staff across both boards. With regards to specifics, we could bring that back.

K. Bernard: This year's transportation budget is actually a little bit less than last year's. Can you tell us why we went over budget last year and why you don't feel the same level of funding is needed this year?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, there was a combination of two factors that led to the overage this year. One is bus repairs and the other is the fuel for the buses. So, we have experienced energy costs and diesel costs; historic highs in those prices.

On the bus maintenance side, there was a period of time between 2010 models and about 2013 models that really just, I'll say, weren't a great batch of buses and did incur a lot of costs. We retired a bunch of them this past September. We're retiring more this September. And around that time, we did improve the specifications of the bus tender, around 2014, to add better quality steel, premium undercoating, those types of things.

So, we did increase the budget for the fuel impact, but we're hoping that those investments that we made will help on the repair side.

K. Bernard: That makes sense. Thank you.

I know that there are new positions that are being added to the Public Schools Branch. I'm wondering if you can run us through that. I know that, no doubt, you've heard from a lot of schools who need extra support, so I'm wondering if you can tell us what additional human resources will be added.

Chris DesRoche: Sure. There are 35 additional instructional staff. It includes 17 additional classroom teachers, 15 additional EAL/FAL teachers, one FTE EAL/FAL manager, one FTE EAL/FAL assessment

specialist, one FTE student services manager for complex needs.

[11:50 a.m.]

On top of that, we have 65 educational assistants being added, 50 of which have already been hired because there was a need in the current year. We have an EAL/FAL school counsellor, two custodians, two bus drivers, and just with the additional activity on the maintenance side and human resources side and transportation side, we have added a director of property services, which was previously combined with the director of finance and administration. We're adding another HR manager and adding a transportation staff, as well, at the board office to help with the increased volume.

K. Bernard: Wow, that's a list. I'm really thrilled to see the extra hiring for EAL and FAL because that was something I was going to bring up because I run into them a lot when I'm doing breakfast program and when I'm out and about. Every time I run into them, they're just talking about how stressed they are. There's a new great program that's come out, but it's about the human resource side it. So, I'll be curious to see how this rolls out.

You mentioned an EAL/FAL counsellor. Can you tell me a bit more about that position?

Chris DesRoche: That'd be a counselling consultant position, more of an itinerant, that will go from school to school to provide professional development to teachers, specific to some of the challenges that EAL/FAL students have experienced, especially in the refugee population around trauma.

K. Bernard: That's really important. I have a few more questions on this, so if you could put me back on the list, that would be great.

Chair: Sure.

K. Bernard: But I don't see any new school counsellors that are being hired. Is that something that you didn't mention or are we not hiring more?

Chris DesRoche: This year, we've only added the counselling consultant in the EAL/FAL area.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you.

It's a great addition. It's much needed. Do you foresee and space capacities with so many teachers coming into the system?

Chris DesRoche: Certainly, we have some capital projects on the go. We have the new Stratford high school. We're about to start the planning work at an addition at Queen Charlotte. We have an addition in the design phase at François-Buote. We're adding two classrooms at École Pierre-Chiasson. So, yes, we recognize there are –

Hon. N. Jameson: Sherwood School.

Chris DesRoche: Oh, yeah, Sherwood School, once it's built, is a higher capacity than the previous school.

Hon. N. Jameson: Evangeline.

Chris DesRoche: Evangeline School is being built. We have a ton of projects on the go, recognizing, of course, that there are more students joining, and trying to get ahead of some of the capacity issues, or at least address them.

Chair: Just before I get into the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, at the risk of inviting every member to speak about the school infrastructure in their district, I'll remind you that we're talking about the spring financial operating budget, not the capital budget. There's plenty of opportunities to bring that up in the Legislature.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: I guess my question was about – because it was about the 17 teachers. So, the 17 new teachers, I know there's a ton there, but I just picked that out. I know....

Let's say that Queen Charlotte gets three new teachers to teach. Right now, the school is full. I don't know how to not ask a capital

– but where are the teachers going to teach if there's no place? I know there are repairs coming, but that's down the road. That's an awful lot of – I know how slow that works now, how much people try, but what are we doing to fill the gaps? What happens if a teacher cannot teach in the space that's provided to them?

Chris DesRoche: We are investing \$1 million in mobile classrooms as well. Should provide five mobiles that will be distributed around to various schools. After that, PSB will work with their principals, as far as scheduling around courses and trying to find ways to make it work.

G. McNeilly: I am trying to remember back through my brain: Was that in the capital budget?

Chris DesRoche: Yes.

[11:55 a.m.]

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, on Public Schools Branch – General.

G. McNeilly: Yes, I know. You know where I'm going; there are five mobiles. I understand. I'm remembering it now, but what about the gaps? I'm just trying to see about the gaps because there are some. I want to know, is there enough space that we currently have – and the plan is to have five mobiles in the long-term plan there. I'm worried about the next two years as our population continues to grow. The schools – Colonel Gray, Queen Charlotte, West Royalty – are all full, and various other ones.

What are we doing to make sure we're bringing on additional teachers and giving them the workspace that they deserve to teach?

Hon. N. Jameson: Infrastructure, no doubt, is a challenge. I see it; I visit schools across the Island. I think you've seen capital budgets over the last couple of years that are historical in nature. I do recognize your concerns because these are conversations that we're having all the time.

We recently confirmed the location of the five mobiles. Those are the five schools that

we see as the most pressing, currently, and we'll be working closely with the boards to ensure that we meet the needs of our school communities moving forward. We will be into the next capital budgeting planning process here very soon.

As Chris had mentioned, a number of the projects are well underway. École Pierre-Chiasson – they were able to get those two classrooms built very quickly. Yeah, we do have a lot of projects underway, and there are a couple of schools that aren't at capacity as well. It's trying to....

G. McNeilly: I don't know if we knew about the five mobiles before. You don't have to answer this because it might be capital, because it was in the capital budget, but the five mobiles –

Chair: Hon. member, we're not talking about the mobiles. We're talking about the Public Schools Branch.

G. McNeilly: The 17 teachers that are going to be in: How many of them will be teaching in the mobiles, and where will those mobiles be?

Chris DesRoche: We actually wouldn't know at this point where the 17 teachers will go. After we're finished the budget, we'll provide the allocations to the Public Schools Branch, and then they will work with the schools on staffing in May and June.

G. McNeilly: You mentioned about the bus monitor. I think it's a great program. Are bus monitors going to be classified in the budget, or is that a volunteer position? What's the plan for bus monitors, and how many will we need?

Chris DesRoche: There's a \$50,000 budget to do a pilot with the bus monitors.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to jump off of that; \$50,000 for a pilot. What will the \$50,000 go towards?

Chris DesRoche: It's still in the development phase. We're not sure yet exactly what it will look like. It's likely a combination of cameras and people.

K. Bernard: So, we're going to get salaries out of that \$50,000, too, potentially?

Chris DesRoche: It depends on the format of what it will look like.

Hon. N. Jameson: It could be. We've discussed, for example, hiring someone and having them potentially be on a bus for a couple of weeks. For example, there's one area – one bus – that's a concern, or maybe the bus driver needs supports for whatever reason; having a monitor on a bus for a couple of weeks and then having them rotate between a couple of buses, depending on the situation. That's just, again, one example of what's being talked about.

K. Bernard: Cameras; I guess I need to think about that a little bit. I don't know how I feel about having cameras on a bus to watch students. I think that a school bus monitor needs to be a person. I guess I would just put that there. As you're trying to figure out the details, I don't think that we should be considering – unless the school bus – well, no, I don't think cameras are the answer.

If we're asking for school bus monitors, we need a person there to intervene because when I think about a couple of incidents that I experienced on the bus as a child, a couple things were quite traumatic, and if a person had have caught that and intervened, it would have been a lot more comfortable than someone catching that on a camera.

As for all the positions that you had mentioned, I guess you probably don't know the answer to this based on the answer that you gave. I was going to ask how they were going to be distributed across the schools. We don't know that yet?

[12:00 p.m.]

Chris DesRoche: We don't know that yet, and that would be up to the Public Schools Branch. We don't get into the school staffing process at the department.

K. Bernard: I know when I asked a question the other day about coaches and if people had asked for support above and beyond math and literacy, one of the things that you had mentioned was supports being requested for social-emotional learning.

I know, especially since COVID, that mental health has been identified as a top concern for both teachers, parents; for everybody in mental health in children. I don't see one school counsellor, other than the EAL/FAL consultant, which I think is a great hire. One of the things that we had talked about was having a school counsellor in every school and we still don't have that.

Was there no consideration given to that fact?

Hon. N. Jameson: Absolutely, there was. We have heard tremendous feedback regarding our family support workers within the Student Well-Being Teams, so this year we thought the best investment was to add two more family support workers. But that being said, we did add, again, that EAL/FAL counselling consultant, which will provide additional support.

I'm hearing you loud and clear though and recognize that that's a priority for you.

K. Bernard: I wouldn't say it's just a priority for me, but it is certainly a priority for me. I think that the family support workers are great ideas. I think that that's a pretty progressive idea and I know that the Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere would agree with me that having a school counsellor in a school that's consistent, that has that relationship with the kids, is the most important foundation for even a family support worker to make that connection.

I won't rant about it because you know how I feel about it and I will rant about it until the day I die, but I think that it's an oversight to not have a school counsellor in every school.

I guess my last question, I think. Of course, we talked about the PEITF – the Course Correction that the Island teachers have been a part of through PEITF – and they need additional support because they're drowning a little bit. Not a little bit; they're drowning.

There were some pretty distressing statistics in there, so I'm wondering if we feel that the additional....

I guess a two-part question: The hiring for this year, did that grow out of the Course Correction initiative? And do you feel like

that's going to answer – does that directly respond to the asks from Island teachers?

Chris DesRoche: We work with the Public Schools Branch on these investments, and over the past two years we've added 109 and 115 positions to the system. I think that'll help alleviate some pressures.

K. Bernard: I guess one of the things that I spend a lot of time thinking about, and that I've had a lot of conversations – I've had a lot of parents reach out to me recently, and I really appreciate it because one of the whole reasons I got into politics was to reform the education system. When you don't have people coming at you constantly, it's hard to bring a voice forward that's not coming to you. So, I really appreciate that because now it's given me this whole new realm of area to dive into.

I hear a lot about literacy; how our school system is increasingly failing a larger majority of our kids. So, when I hear that and when I see that, and I kind of consider the evolution of education in terms of – we didn't know what behaviour resource teachers were a few years ago. We didn't have them, we didn't need them, and now we do. So, the whys.

Of course, I'll go back to the trauma we have in our school systems. I'll go back to – you know, we don't review everything that we do.

Is there anything in this budget that's going to help make literacy, in particular, and mental health – is there anything else in this budget that you want to talk about that is going to make our school system better suit the students in them? I didn't ask that very well, but I hope you know what I mean.

[12:05 p.m.]

Hon. N. Jameson: Yeah, I think in regards to literacy, you're likely well aware of the rollout of FUNdations. I'm hearing throughout our schools that that has been instrumental in helping to support our students at an early age with their literacy skills and build that foundation. I'm really proud of those efforts and I think you'll sort of see that we're exploring the next – I guess for the older grades, what that's going to look like, the grade 4 to 6 levels – what

program is going to be next in terms of supporting their growth there.

Social-emotional learning – that is at the heart of all that we're doing currently. I feel that that's resonating throughout our schools with regards to staff training, student training, all of it. It seems like it's woven in the fabric of our school system. That might be an interesting discussion for you and Tammy Hubley-Little, who's been leading those efforts, to have because I feel that that is really changing the way in which we teach because if our students are doing better and our staff are doing better from a social-emotional standpoint, they're better able to learn.

There's been, really, a focus on that before the academics; again, recognizing that the academics are important, but you can't do one without the other.

I think that piece, the adventure-based learning, the outdoor learning; we've done more over the last couple of years around outdoor learning. You spoke about STEAM the other day. We have added a lot of STEAM resources within our classrooms and getting kids outside and getting them active, helping to support their learning through outdoor activities. We've got some great examples of that at Central Queens and Montague and are trying to build capacity across the system. It seems like an area that teachers really want to become more engaged in and have more PD and training. Craig Clark; I'm sure you're familiar with Craig Clark. He's building a lot of capacity around that as well.

So, a lot of good news there.

A lot of focus on wellbeing. We do have a couple of budget items for trauma-informed investigative training, prepare, EDI training, the EDIA+ training. There are those pieces, which we have been focused on over the last couple of years as well, but again, I think that focus on resilience in both our children and our staff – we know that we need our staff to be strong and resilient and happy when they come to work in order to teach our children. How can we better support them?

K. Bernard: I appreciate that answer, minister.

The FUNdations that you just mentioned, is that program – I'm curious about the budget for that because from what I understand, and correct me if I'm wrong, did we take a program that was already established and put our own spin on it, or is this a program that is kind of in its pure form?

Hon. N. Jameson: We transitioned our funding from Reading Recovery to FUNdations and we've been rolling it out. We started with a pilot in two schools and now we've been rolling it out through our – we're into grade 3 now.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you.

Just back for a second to the bus monitoring. When you mentioned cameras, are you looking into – are there any privacy issues surrounding – would the camera be on the kids in the bus?

Chris DesRoche: It's just a consideration at this point. Nothing is finalized, and certainly, a privacy impact assessment would be required if we were going to go down that path.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Is the \$50,000 in this budget?

Chris DesRoche: Yes.

G. McNeilly: Under which line?

Chris DesRoche: We grouped it under salaries.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Equipment and repair at \$1.2 million; it's up just a little bit, but it seems like an area that maybe should be – I know there are often situations that happen. I see there's some money in the capital for the repair, but is that enough moving forward? I guess you spent exactly what you had budgeted for last year. It's up a little bit.

Can you tell me a little bit about that line?

[12:10 p.m.]

Chris DesRoche: That line and the line above it, we provide both boards with a per-student allocation. We increased program

materials by \$40,000 and equipment and repairs for classroom equipment by \$20,000 to recognize the additional students.

G. McNeilly: So, it's for chairs, desks, computers and....

Chris DesRoche: Exactly, yeah.

G. McNeilly: Okay. So, the new purchase of those would be under capital if they needed new equipment?

Chris DesRoche: No, if we were building a school, we would cover all the new desks and chairs through that project, but this would be just that there's a few more kids in a classroom who need a desk and a chair.

G. McNeilly: Okay. As I'm going through, I'm just inquiring about the different classifications between a cleaner and a custodian. Are we struggling to find cleaners and custodians in that area?

(Indistinct) I would love to see the salaries go up for those important members in the school system, but what's the difference between a cleaner and a custodian, and are the salaries keeping base? What's their union, and are you negotiating anything different with them?

Chris DesRoche: We are still finalizing negotiations with that CUPE group. As far as vacancies, there are no vacancies in custodians or cleaners at the moment. The substitute pool is an area that we monitor. I can't say a lot about the negotiations, but I'll say that both parties see the substitute casual rates of those positions as a challenge, and both are on board with addressing that.

The difference between the two would be duties, which would be in their position questionnaires. I'd have to bring back the specifics.

G. McNeilly: Oh, don't worry too much. It's just kind of an inquiry question. Reading through, I'm like, ah, I'd like to see those numbers. People need to be valued, I think, a little bit, and I just see those numbers might be an area of – but I know that you're probably in negotiations, so that's great.

I just had a question on your human resources consultant. It's got "legal," and that was \$45,000. What was that for?

Chris DesRoche: In the handout? The human resource, when they need legal services, it would be around, like, a staff grievance.

G. McNeilly: Is that number about on par with most years?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, we have increased the budget for that though. Previously, before it was an elected board, there would be a Justice staff assigned to it, so we're providing them with a budget to hire their own legal services now that they're an elected board.

G. McNeilly: Okay.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I just wanted to follow on; the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty asked a question that touched on this, and it's regarding the school monitoring pilot program.

I absolutely would follow on with what the Leader of the Third Party said. I was always of the impression that this was a human involved in sitting on particular buses, perhaps, to monitor behaviour. So, the thought that these might be cameras, it's a departure from what we've been told before and what Islanders were, I believe, told what this was. I definitely have some privacy concerns.

I'm wondering whether you have, as a department, approached the Information and Privacy Commissioner for an opinion on whether that's actually even appropriate on a bus.

Hon. N. Jameson: Thanks for the question.

At this point, we haven't made any determination regarding what that's going to look like. There's a task force that's been formed and has been working on recommendations on how we proceed. Just because we'd be choosing cameras

potentially on one doesn't necessarily mean we wouldn't be doing the actual bus monitor on another. We could do a combination of a few to see what might work better than another way.

And absolutely, we are engaging legal to ensure that that privacy component is well....

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, it's just in the development phase. We're not ready to roll it out or anything yet.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that. I'm glad that you are taking that into consideration.

[12:15 p.m.]

From a practical point of view, I remember when some cameras were installed in buses to monitor drivers; not the drivers of the buses, but drivers of people who were not complying with stopping for buses with flashing lights. It didn't work well. It cost a pile of money, and the end results were not what we hoped. I don't even know if that program is ongoing.

I know this is a monitoring program here, but I'm wondering if you can give me any updates on that? Just because that might inform us as to whether this is even something that's practically useful.

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, those cameras were purchased 15 or 20 years ago now, so certainly, the technology was not anywhere near where it is today. I can tell you, in other jurisdictions, there are cameras on some buses, both inside and outside, but again, before we would ever do it here, it would certainly be fleshed out, legally and privacy-wise.

P. Bevan-Baker: Alright. Chris, do I take it from that that we're no longer using cameras as a way of monitoring for drivers not complying with the flashing lights?

Chris DesRoche: The pilot from 15 years ago was I think eight cameras. I doubt many are still operational at this point, but it is still something that we're considering on the outside, as well.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, because that's something you hear sort of intermittently,

but on an ongoing basis, of people not obeying the law regarding that, which is a very fearful thing. Thankfully, we've never had an issue here. But if those cameras were – if it was 15 years ago, Chris, that that was tried, and they never worked well, is there anything in this budget for cameras for surveillance of the outside of the bus?

Chris DesRoche: This is actually the operating budget, and that would fall in the capital budget.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. Okay. I understand the overlap there. I'm assuming the pilot project – because you haven't committed to cameras at the moment, that's why it's appearing in the operational rather than capital. If you were to decide, yes, we're going to put cameras inside the buses for the monitoring process, that would appear in the capital budget, rather than the...?

Chris DesRoche: If it was over \$10,000, it would go in our capital budget.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. Okay, I'm good, Chair. Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I think just two more questions. Under student services, the consultants – diversity, equity inclusion – for \$5,000; I know that's a small amount. I'm wondering, is there any new initiative that's coming out of that?

Chris DesRoche: We're adding \$160,000 in PD in that area, in the administration line. What they spent \$5,000 on, I'd have to ask and bring that back.

Hon. N. Jameson: We've also posted a new position at the PSB for an equity, diversity, and inclusion consultant. I don't know exactly the title of it, but they're looking to fill that currently.

K. Bernard: Before I ask my last question, I just want to really thank you for standing strong in this because I know that there has been a lot of pressure from people who would like to see it the other way around. I don't doubt for a second that, whether we support these guidelines or not, we all want the same things for our kids. It's just, I don't

think people realize how much they're harming children and young people when they're pushing against this.

So, I want to say thank you for your commitment to this because lives depend on it. I think that you recognize that, and I want to say thank you for that.

My last question is about psych evaluations. I think that you said for Public Schools Branch, it fell under this section.

I know that to any school that I've worked in, every year it's like the lottery for kids, basically, because depending on the size of your school, you're picking how many children are going to get the psych evaluation that year. That's a real equity issue, and I think it's so unfortunate because when these children who need that, and for us to fully understand their needs – I know that one of the things that you put in, minister, was that students who needed the support, whether they had a diagnosis or not, got it, which is very much appreciated. I just worry about the future impacts of kids not understanding.

[12:20 p.m.]

I know when my son was diagnosed with ADHD, he was really upset about that. I said, "No, this is an exciting time to learn about your brain, and how your brain works, and all brains work differently." I think that that's a message that a lot of kids don't get in public schools, that we need celebrate neurodiversity. Instead, kids are more pigeonholed based on behaviours and based on diagnosis, and I think that that's so damaging. So, these psych evaluations are so crucially important.

I'm wondering how we are going to address that in this budget. What do we see in this budget to support the psychological evaluations?

Hon. N. Jameson: I can say, and I think I mentioned it the other day, our evaluations – the wait time for them has gone down to one year, which is quite significant. It means there's a lot of hard work happening, and there's more volume, which is good. I think that we've done a lot over the last couple of years. We have no vacancies currently, which is a first.

Chris DesRoche: No, there's no vacancies in the psychologists.

Hon. N. Jameson: There's no vacancies, yeah.

Chris DesRoche: There's a budget for private assessments in this budget as well.

K. Bernard: This is my last question.

Chair: I never would have ever guessed that.

K. Bernard: [Laughter] I know I keep saying that, but I think I mean it this time. Now I forget my question.

Chair: Blame me.

K. Bernard: It's your fault.

I know that we talked yesterday about Charlottetown Psychological and Therapeutic Services, so I'm going to connect you with them. I think that that's great.

Oh, okay. I remember my question now. You said that it's a year wait. Is that a year wait for every student in the Public Schools Branch who needs an evaluation, or is it a year wait for the three or four or five or whatever that has been passed on to the department through the schools? Because there's a difference. A lot more kids need psychological assessments than are passed on because as schools, they're only given so many.

Is that year wait time for all students who need psychological assessments, or the ones who have been identified as the priority?

Hon. N. Jameson: We can get back to you, but I believe it's the ones who have been identified.

Chris DesRoche: I'm not sure how they calculate it, but we can bring that back for you.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

The student services consultant that the Leader of the Third Party talked about – diversity, equity, inclusion – for \$5,000. We don't know today what that was for?

Chris DesRoche: No, I'm not 100 percent sure what they had spent that professional fee on. It was only \$5,000, so it couldn't have been something major.

G. McNeilly: Well, diversity, equity, and inclusion are pretty major to me. I don't know. It probably wasn't anything major, yes, and that might be the problem with that.

Hon. N. Jameson: I know we do have Evelyn Bradley still on contract, whereby if in fact we need her in certain situations, we're able to call her. It could be related to that, but we'll find out. And as I say, the branch is hiring somebody full-time.

G. McNeilly: Perfect. The person that you're hiring full-time, it wasn't clear if that was a position or the word consultant. Was that in your hiring numbers in the budget that you're presenting?

Chris DesRoche: It's a position at the Public Schools Branch.

G. McNeilly: Okay. It's already in competition right now, is it?

Hon. N. Jameson: Yeah, it is. It's been out for a few weeks. I'm not sure if it's still available for application, but I can certainly find that out, and if there's anybody that you're aware of that may be qualified....

G. McNeilly: You better not do that. But it's hard to find professionals who meet certain criteria.

Hon. N. Jameson: Absolutely.

G. McNeilly: That's what I'm kind of getting at. I think that with future positions like this, we have to broaden our scope maybe a little bit because equity means putting people into positions, but they've never been in that position, and they've never been able to get the qualifications.

I just want to bring that to the minister, that I'm glad to see this, but it becomes a problem to get the right person qualified.

Hon. N. Jameson: I think you're right. I think we had had it up, and we actually did have to broaden the scope of it.

[12:25 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: Great. I'm glad to hear that. I appreciate that. I applaud the work. It's slow, but it's consistent, and I know the minister is pushing for this. I hear it from the community, that it's tough for kids to fit in at times when they don't look the same as most people around them. We have got to make sure that we understand that, both as teachers and learners.

I appreciate the minister's passion around this. I'll continue to ask the questions.

Thank you.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Thank you, minister; Chris.

Alright, members. We're going to shift to the Department of Housing, Land and Communities.

Minister, would you like to make a motion to bring a stranger to the floor?

Hon. R. Lantz: Yes.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Welcome. Could you introduce yourself and your title for Hansard, please?

Matthew Praught: I'm Matthew Praught. I'm the director of finance for Housing, Land and Communities.

Chair: Welcome, Matthew.

Minister, do you have any opening comments, or shall we get into it?

Hon. R. Lantz: I think we'll just get straight into it.

Chair: Excellent.

Minister and Deputy Minister's Office

"Appropriations provided for operation of the office of the Minister and Deputy Minister. Administration: 18,500.

Equipment: 10,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 5,700. Salaries: 436,300. Travel and Training: 29,500.

Total Minister and Deputy Minister's Office: 500,000

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: A few questions. I'm going to start with the administration line. There's a decrease in this year, a small decrease, but what is that due to, in the administration line?

Matthew Praught: There's just been a few adjustments to some of the smaller accounts, some telephone charges, some meeting costs; we just made some adjustments in there, some smaller amounts.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. Again, equipment; we're down \$15,000.

Matthew Praught: Equipment – this was the first year of the department kind of in its current state. There would have been some costs for some setup, and just not anticipating quite as much this year.

Hon. R. Lantz: We moved to a new office.

Hon. H. Perry: So, with salaries, how many new positions or were there any new positions created?

Matthew Praught: There are no new positions in this section. There were a couple of, just, true-ups on some benefit items. There would have been some collective bargaining increases included in that amount as well.

Hon. H. Perry: We'll keep going down; travel and training line. You were on par with what you had forecasted, but your estimate is, well, \$16,000, a little less this time for travel and training. Do you expect to do, obviously, less?

[12:30 p.m.]

Matthew Praught: Yeah. The \$31,000 is just in there as a forecast for the current year. We evaluate what the anticipated needs are for that and we've just dropped that down a little bit.

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

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

I have no questions on this particular section, but I'm just wondering if there are any more handouts coming? There's really nothing other than a wage range in the documents we got in the big book.

Matthew Praught: There would have been – handouts in terms of salaries, or just overall? Yeah, that's what we have right now. If there are other items that will end up being needed, we'll address those.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm just surprised. Some other departments, you get a –

Hon. R. Lantz: I'm not sure what you've got. Is it any different than last year for this department?

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, I couldn't speak to that, but I can tell you it's a lot less than you have in front of you, minister, which is appropriate. But I was just asking if there were any additional handouts, that's all.

Matthew Praught: Yeah, (Indistinct) handouts would be similar to what were sent last year as well.

P. Bevan-Baker: Alright. I'm good for this section, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Corporate Services

Corporate Services

“Appropriations provided to support functions and services related to policy, legislation, planning, program development, evaluation, quality improvements, performance, and Federal/Provincial/Territorial relations.”
Administration: 23,400. Equipment: 15,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 3,500. Salaries: 1,020,500. Grants: 500,000.

Total Corporate Services: 1,562,400

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'm going to go right to the salary line. What new positions were created? It looks like there was.

Matthew Praught: There'd be an annualization of some positions that would have been established in the prior year. They may not have been budgeted at that time as they were being created and set up with the new department. So, that would be a piece of it.

There are some policy roles.... We would anticipate staffing some of those positions within this current year that just hadn't been last year.

Hon. H. Perry: What do you anticipate the potential positions to be?

Matthew Praught: We have an economics analyst that has a start partway through the year. Then we also have a couple of policy analyst roles, a manager of policy, and a quality risk coordinator.

Hon. H. Perry: Just on your line, there's appropriations provided for – one in particular is legislation. Can you just elaborate on that a little bit more, how the funding goes into that division for legislation?

Matthew Praught: Well, this being the corporate services division, they would be looking at the types of things that they would need for the department to operate and if there's a legislative adjustment or anything that needs to be proposed, they would be working on those types of items.

Hon. H. Perry: So, is it the usage of your own staff for legislation, or do you go outside at times for advice or for more support? For legislation preparation, let's say; for drafting.

Hon. R. Lantz: We'd certainly go outside the department, but we have legislative analysts in the department.

Hon. H. Perry: Minister, you had mentioned when we had our legislation on the floor that you guys were working on something in regards to that letter actually,

that was written by a few municipalities and different developers to address some of the points that they brought forward, and you expected that legislation to be brought forward possibly in the fall of this year.

Is this where that process would either begin, or would that be the whole process within your staffing?

Hon. R. Lantz: I assume it works the same in every department, where they would have policy analysts, legislative analysts, working within the department on amendments, working on amendments to the legislation they're responsible for, but then it goes through Legislative Counsel for final review.

[12:35 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: Before we get to that final review, obviously, if it's only going to be introduced this fall, I'm assuming that it's still in the process of development. So, all the development in any legislation that's put forward by you, representing your department, would be created and then drafted within that division. Is that correct?

Hon. R. Lantz: That's correct, yeah, if I understand the question correctly.

Chair: I'll come back.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'll start by asking about – because there's a lot of stuff going on at the moment both federally and provincially regarding legislative changes on the Housing file. I'm wondering what the main FPT issues are that are being discussed between PEI and the federal level at the moment.

Hon. R. Lantz: Infrastructure. I've got three divisions, so are we talking about Housing or...?

P. Bevan-Baker: Yes, talking about Housing at the moment.

Hon. R. Lantz: There's a lot of discussion about, obviously, financing opportunities through CMHC for various programs. I

think the federal government – I can't speak for them, but it sounds like they're working on some sort of way for financing community housing – acquisition fund of some sort, perhaps – that we may be able to leverage with our own program that we're setting up. Certainly, a lot of discussion around investment in factory-built housing; how to incentivize that.

Those are a couple of things that come immediately to mind.

[Z. Bell in the chair]

P. Bevan-Baker: Sure. Regarding a couple of those programs, the Rapid Housing Initiative and the Housing Accelerator Fund: Do we have active proposals in front of the federal government on either of those?

Hon. R. Lantz: I don't think the Rapid Housing Initiative is active anymore. I'm not sure about that. I don't think it's open for application.

But certainly, the Housing Accelerator Fund – well, applications have closed, but there are still outstanding applications to be decided upon. I have a good feeling; I think we have nine applications from Prince Edward Island, which is good. It was a very difficult application process and we used staff from our department to support municipalities to help get those out the door; the smaller municipalities. I think we've got nine, and I'm confident we'll get good reception.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm glad to hear that, minister. I know, you look at Summerside, who have made a successful application, and Charlottetown is in the midst of that as well, and I'm glad to hear –

Hon. R. Lantz: Charlottetown got theirs.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, they did? Okay.

Hon. R. Lantz: It was successful. You were at the announcement.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, that was just for developing a framework. It wasn't for any actual building of houses, if I remember.

Hon. R. Lantz: Housing Accelerator Fund.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: There wasn't any money in the announcement in Charlottetown to actually build any houses.

Hon. R. Lantz: There won't be for any of the Housing Accelerator Fund.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

The Rent-to-Own proposal, which government is planning to – can you give us a status update on that?

Hon. R. Lantz: The Rent-to-Own program?

Matthew Praught: That's going to be in the Housing Corporation.

Chair: That's in a different section, hon. member.

P. Bevan-Baker: Sure. The reason I ask it now is because there's also a parallel federal program which they've struggled to get off the ground, but I'll wait until we get to that section to ask that. I do have other questions though.

One of the housing policies that the feds are committed to is the elimination of blind bidding, and that has not materialized yet at the federal level.

I'm wondering, if they do not come forward with that, is that something that you intend to do provincially?

Hon. R. Lantz: No, it's never crossed my radar. The only time I've ever – well, I didn't even discuss it, I heard the former federal Housing minister, Ahmed Hussen, mention it once and I've never heard it mentioned since.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Did you have a follow-up, hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, or...?

P. Bevan-Baker: Not on that particular issue, no, but you can put me back.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: I will do that.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

I know just last year, maybe, during the shift, the minister and I talked about just overall, there were some positions missing in the department. Are all of those filled right now? I know there were some issues.

[12:40 p.m.]

Matthew Praught: They may not be completely filled right at the moment, but the intention is that all positions will be filled through the year, yes.

Hon. R. Lantz: We're staffing up slowly.

G. McNeilly: Thanks. That's what I was getting at because I just remember hearing that, and it was tough to find people. People need to be experienced in this department to do the analysis and stuff. Are we having trouble with competitions, or it's just a slow process through the PSC?

Hon. R. Lantz: It is a slow process, yes. I think anybody doing recruiting these days, regardless of what sector you're in, has difficulty.

G. McNeilly: Can you tell me about the quality risk coordinator? I don't know much about that position.

Matthew Praught: I wouldn't have a lot of support for that item, but it's something that I can bring back some details on, if necessary.

G. McNeilly: Would that be in the shelter system, amongst the shelter systems? What component of housing are we talking about; quality risk?

Matthew Praught: There may be a housing component, but this would be – more of a housing portfolio would live within that other section, but there may be some here.

G. McNeilly: I've been the critic for this for a while, and critical of our planning within the department. Do we have enough

planning staff about where we're going in the future and how we're making decisions?

Hon. R. Lantz: Sorry, what was the question?

G. McNeilly: I have been critical – under this section in Corporate Services, it's planning; planning for whatever the department's doing. It sets the tone for what we're doing, when we're doing, why we're doing it, and how we're helping people. That's how I see it.

Do we have enough? Have we put enough emphasis in planning housing, right from the shelter system on up through the entire rainbow of housing we have to get? Supportive, transitional; I can go through it all. But have we done enough, and do we have enough staff in planning at the moment in your department, minister?

Matthew Praught: I mean, we definitely have planning roles throughout all the different sections. With this one, they would be looking at some of the overarching items for the department, and again, we mentioned there are some vacancies to fill, but we feel that having a full complement of those roles would suffice.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'm going to go back to just in the legislation part of it and the planning process for that. You had mentioned the other day that you had some legislation proposed for possibly this fall. Are there any other pieces of legislation that you have now underway that may speed up the process of housing units on Prince Edward Island?

Hon. R. Lantz: Legislative amendments, or...?

Hon. H. Perry: Either-or.

Hon. R. Lantz: Regulations – well, for instance, yes, we're constantly planning. We've got this provincial land use plan coming up, so we do intend to bring forward some interim measures that would be in place before the entire provincial land use

plan is in place. As I said to you, we're still considering some of the options that were presented to us in that letter from the municipality.

Hon. H. Perry: So, you're just considering it then. You don't have anything in draft form yet, legislation-wise, that might be presented this fall?

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, we have staff drafting things. I haven't seen drafts of anything myself, but that would come forward this fall.

Hon. H. Perry: I guess I was going into to the Rent-to-Own, also; I have some questions on that. But that programing, again, is a little bit later in this.

Policy and analysis: right now, do you know how many Islanders are in need of housing?

[12:45 p.m.]

Hon. R. Lantz: It depends on how you define "in need." We would do an evaluation of clients, and there's a specific definition called core need that would establish whether they're eligible for social housing. Those that are on our registry – which is somewhere in the 500 range, I think, at this point – would all be in core need of housing.

Hon. H. Perry: Other than the core need of housing, do you have a number of any Islander looking to be housed? That can include homelessness. That would include young families who are maybe living with their parents or someone else because they can't afford to buy their own home. Anything like that; those who are couch surfing, what have you.

Is there any number that your department would have, any kind of analysis of what that need is? How many people are unhoused? No, I'm going to change that. How many people are in need of housing?

Chair: Hon. member, I understand that, and I appreciate the question, but can you try to frame that towards a budget-related...? Please and thank you.

Hon. H. Perry: Yes, thank you. This particular section deals with the planning

and it deals with policy. Part of the development of policy – I’m looking for an analysis. You’re not going to prepare policy or legislation unless you actually know the reason for doing it.

My ask is, in relation to housing, what is the need for housing on Prince Edward Island? How many Islanders are in need of housing on Prince Edward Island at the present time?

Chair: Sorry, hon. member. I believe he answered that. He said it depends on your definition of “in need,” and then he also said he thought the number was around 500.

G. McNeilly: No, that’s how many people –

Chair: Okay, if you have a question – if not, I can put you back on the list.

Hon. H. Perry: Chair, my question was – and I will say it again. I talked about numbers, not just core housing. I’m talking about individuals who may be living with a family member because they find or afford rents; young families who can’t afford to purchase a new home or even find adequate housing; those who are homeless; those who are unhoused.

Does that department have a specific number of Islanders who are looking for housing, regardless of the type?

Hon. R. Lantz: I think your question is far too broad for me to answer specifically. I tried to give a couple of examples of some numbers that we do track, but I think what you’re saying is there’s a lot of people out there who may not have adequate or suitable housing, and there are very specific definitions of those, and I think if you read our housing strategic plan, you’ll see some of our analysis about that and how we use that as part of our evaluation of someone’s core need of housing.

Hon. H. Perry: I guess the reason why I’m asking that is in order to move forward, you have to know exactly what the needs are, and not only what the needs are but the number of individuals or families that need to be housed. Without knowing those numbers, how can one have a plan to move forward that’s actually going to address the housing crisis that we’re in at the present time?

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, there’s a number of indicators – they’re all publicly available – such as the numbers we track through our HIFIS system and our coordinated access system who are mostly people who have some sort of housing need. Our shelter stats are online. Our social housing registry stats are available. There has been much discussion about what the need for new housing is.

I don’t think that’s specifically what you’re asking. We know that that’s about 2,000 units, give or take, a year to meet growing demand. But I think more what you’re asking about is: Are people bunking up for a lack of better, suitable housing?

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks. I’ll follow on that line of questioning, actually.

I’m going to quote from the Housing Action Plan, and I will tie this to the budget, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, member.

P. Bevan-Baker: The housing plan says:

“Collaborate to ensure accurate information and system development in a timely manner to ensure the best supports are in place for Islanders who are unhoused and to gather information for future decision-making, including *Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)* and *By-Name List* (a real-time list of people experiencing homelessness in a community).”

That coordination, that collaboration, is going to cost some money. I’m wondering if there’s any money in this budget for that initiative.

Hon. R. Lantz: Coordinated access?

[12:50 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: For what I just described, which is out of the action plan: the collaboration, the collection of that data. It’s going to cost money to do that.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah. I could tell you, probably, if you were asking specifically about a budget line, whether that falls into it, but I can't recall it right now where that would fall.

P. Bevan-Baker: I think this is a novel initiative. I don't remember this being discussed or ever brought forward, certainly in a budget discussion, before. That would suggest that there needs to be new money set aside to get this data and, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition just said, in order to develop good policy and legislation, we need the information.

I'm just looking for where I would find that money and how much it is.

Hon. R. Lantz: I'm not necessarily sure that it does require new money. You're assuming it does; I'm not sure if it does. We work with all of our coordinated access partners on a continual basis. Those processes in data sharing are constantly improved. So, I don't know. You're suggesting that it's a new initiative, but it may be just operational.

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

P. Bevan-Baker: I would imagine if things were working well now, we would have that figure and we wouldn't have to be guessing at it. So, somewhere along the way, either the data is not being fully collected or it's not being collated and brought together into a single place where we can find that out and, therefore, know what the actual number is. And I realize that's changing all the time.

If it's not working now, which seems very clear to me, that suggests that either a reorganization – which is, I guess, what you're saying – no new funding but just a reorganization or a re-emphasis within the department. Is that what you're suggesting can accomplish that?

Hon. R. Lantz: Partly, yes, but we do give a grant to the John Howard Society to manage the HIFIS system. That's where much of this data is collected; a portion of the data. That's not all of the housing data that would be coordinated, but – because you're speaking about an initiative to gather more and more housing data into a central decision-making repository.

We do have staff that gather all kinds of statistics and analyze them in dozens of different ways that is available to us and that we see on a regular basis. I think what we're talking about is sharing that data with partners and within the sector to make better decisions, and across departments, I should say, because we work very closely with Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population, with some of that same data.

P. Bevan-Baker: I see huge value in having accurate information here for lots of reasons. Again, I pulled that from your Housing Action Plan, minister, which talks about presumably a new initiative to collaborate and ensure accurate information to guide system development. Now, I presume you wouldn't even need to put that in a housing action plan if that facility already existed.

So, I'm thinking that the grant, for example, to the John Howard Society – and they do fantastic work and valuable stuff for government, but also various communities – if they are the ones who are going to somehow centralize and coordinate all of this, more money is going to be needed for them, rather than just enough to keep the HIFIS numbers.

I just come back to, if these are not just empty words and we're actually going to do a better job of collecting and coordinating the information, then that's going to require either a reorganization or more money. I'd love to see where that sits.

Hon. R. Lantz: Many of these actions will be ongoing initiatives. Some of them will be very distinct initiatives that we pick up at a point in time, fund, and dedicate resources to. Not everything moves ahead all at once, at the same time.

P. Bevan-Baker: I understand that. As you mentioned earlier, minister, you have three branches of this division. I'm wondering, when it comes to policy and legislative priorities – let's start with municipalities. Are you planning or are you in the midst of any amendments or changes to the *Municipal Government Act*?

[12:55 p.m.]

Chair: Hon. member, where are you referring to? I don't have what you're speaking about in front of me.

P. Bevan-Baker: Corporate Services oversees services related to policy, legislation, and planning.

Chair: Yeah, I can read that.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, this is Housing, Land, and Communities, so I'm talking about the Communities section here, and the biggest piece of legislation which governs our municipalities and communities is the MGA.

Chair: That's right. So, you're asking questions about the MGA?

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm wondering if there are any amendments or what the policy or legislative priorities are regarding municipalities.

Hon. R. Lantz: I think the biggest policy item right now is renegotiating our revenue sharing agreement with the municipalities. That's just about to get underway.

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

G. McNeilly: Just getting back to – under this, it's evaluation, and I'm just trying to see if we have enough staff to do the work. Minister, was there a point-in-time count last year?

Hon. R. Lantz: Sorry, I missed the first part of the question. I just heard point in –

G. McNeilly: Was there a point-in-time count in Prince Edward Island last year?

Hon. R. Lantz: I'm unsure. I can bring that back for you.

G. McNeilly: That's done by the John Howard Society and it's –

Hon. R. Lantz: I know the last one was certainly more than a year ago.

G. McNeilly: It's important because we're talking about evaluation; we're talking about making sure that we have everything that we need for your department to do the analysis. The Kings County report that you put out,

you did a Kings County report on homelessness; it was kind of critical of the by-name list, and it said it didn't reflect the eastern part of Prince Edward Island.

Do you find that we're doing enough? Would that be accurate? They were a little bit critical of the John Howard data collection around eastern Prince Edward Island and the issues that they have around homelessness and what the needs are, to be determined of a shelter.

Are you getting enough data, as the minister, to inform decisions in eastern, western, and Summerside areas of Prince Edward Island?

Hon. R. Lantz: Obviously, the more data we collect, the more useful it is. I think it's a matter of expanding our network of coordinated access partners in Kings County and in Prince County to improve the data.

G. McNeilly: We're talking about program development and evaluation. I'm just trying to figure out where Carlene Donnelly comes into the budget line. Is it in your department? Is it in Housing? Land? Is it in PEI Housing Corp or somewhere else? Because she's helping with the evaluation and program development piece for our province.

Hon. R. Lantz: I think we'll have to confirm. I think it may fall.... Do you have it there?

Matthew Praught: I'm not seeing it here quickly.

Hon. R. Lantz: Take that back.

G. McNeilly: I guess I couldn't ask; do you know if that's –

Hon. R. Lantz: It's in our budget somewhere. Under what, I can't pull it out of my hat right now.

G. McNeilly: Do you know if that's a six-month contract? Is it ending in March? We might need further supports. I'm just asking how long.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, it was a six-month contract.

G. McNeilly: So, it's over in March. Under this section – I don't know if I was sleeping – \$500,000 in grants. Could have been; could happen. Is there a budget handout on that, or was that question already asked? Or is that in there?

Matthew Praught: There is a handout there. Current year.

G. McNeilly: Oh, got you. Got it now.

Hon. R. Lantz: You should have grants, yeah.

G. McNeilly: Immigrant and Refugee Services Association -- that was a federal government transfer, the \$500,000, was it?

[1:00 p.m.]

Matthew Praught: The \$500, I believe, was just in our –

G. McNeilly: Oh, \$500?

Matthew Praught: Oh, sorry.

G. McNeilly: No, \$500,000.

Matthew Praught: The budget amount is within ours. There could be a number of different initiatives that the department undertakes through the year. It could fall within a number of different initiatives that we have.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Going back to legislation in the Land section. The *Planning Act*, I'm wondering – or policies in that area – what the priorities are for this year?

Chair: Hon. member, we're talking about the appropriation provided to support those services. So, not to lead the witness, but you could ask questions like: Are there enough resources to provide policy direction? But when we get in to asking about what the legislation is going to look like or what the policy priorities are, or that kind of stuff, there are other opportunities to follow up on that in the Legislature.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I appreciate that, Chair. I'll pass on this, then.

Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm just going to follow up on my colleague here, on those grants. The grant line has – the budget for 2023-24 was \$500,000; the forecast, again \$500,000; and the estimate says \$500,000. Because we have nothing other than one line here saying \$77,000 year to date spent on Ukrainian support, can you give us a breakdown of what that \$500,000 is, and what grants?

Matthew Praught: The \$500,000 is a forecast at the end of the year, so it may not all be spent yet at the time of publishing this. But again, the \$500,000 could represent any number of initiatives that the department would have throughout the year that kind of fall within the mandate or the programming for the department.

Hon. H. Perry: Can we have a list, or can you give us each one of those grants that are listed under this \$500,000?

Matthew Praught: Well, we have the \$77,000 on there that has been issued, year to date. I don't have the background to the \$500,000 as that's a forecast.

Hon. H. Perry: Last year, how much money was spent on grants?

Matthew Praught: Last year....

Hon. H. Perry: 2023-24.

Matthew Praught: So, current year. To date, the \$77,000, as of January 31st.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm just going to get the correct. To date, January – there are only two months left in this fiscal – you spent \$77,000 of the potential \$500,000 that was budgeted?

Matthew Praught: Yes.

Hon. H. Perry: And you're putting \$500,000 back in again in the '24-25 budget. What do you anticipate to be grants coming up if there was only \$77,000 spent last time?

That's \$430,000 more than what you had spent the previous year.

Matthew Praught: Again, the current year is not completed yet, so there may be some additional funds that do end up in that grant line. But again, there may be any number of different initiatives that come up through the year, so that's a budget that's established for that.

Hon. H. Perry: But that's \$430,000 that is still sitting there just in case something arises, right? You're not going to spend – \$77,000 was the end of January, so you have two months. In two months' time, do you anticipate spending \$430,000? What grants could possibly go out in the next two months?

Matthew Praught: In coordination with our staff and in preparing the third quarter forecast, that's what they had anticipated spending. Further detail behind that, I could maybe follow up on, but that's the information that we have.

Hon. H. Perry: I guess what I'm trying to get at is, in budgeting, if you only spent \$77,000 and we're saying two months – even if it was \$100,000, that's \$400,000 more that the department is asking for, potentially, for grants. What potential grants could be awarded that would hit that \$400,000 to \$500,000 mark?

[1:05 p.m.]

Hon. R. Lantz: I think, even in the information we've got, we're missing some of the lines that would fall under there. So, let us bring something back to fill that in.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, Chair, then I will move that we do not vote on this particular section until we receive that information because it's \$400,000 that needs to be accounted for.

Chair: Can I move on to the next person?

Hon. H. Perry: Yeah.

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

Hon. H. Perry: I will come back to that.

Chair: I know you will.

G. McNeilly: Under Corporate Services, what's the criteria for these grants? Do people apply to Corporate Services for grants?

Hon. R. Lantz: I think when this grant line was under the previous department, SDS, there were a number of grants that fell under here that probably still do. I think that's what we need to come back and fill that in with. Like Boys and Girls Club – I'm not sure what else, but we'll have to fill that in with additional information.

G. McNeilly: Immigrant and Refugee Services Association, they were the ones who got \$7,700. What did that go towards, housing?

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, just for settlement services.

G. McNeilly: It's just really difficult to figure out what's going on because I really look at it as like – we went through a bunch of grants and different organizations, and social development does have one, workforce has one, and I just don't understand why it's there.

I just wanted to ask a couple of those questions, finishing up there, but I don't think we're passing this section anyway, are we, Chair? No? Are we going to vote on this section?

Chair: Not yet; I've still got people on my list.

G. McNeilly: Okay, perfect. I'm done for that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Did you want on the list? Oh, I guess I have exhausted my list.

Members, there is a request to hold this section until the information comes back. Is there agreement to hold this section and come back to it?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Chair: Alright, we'll move onto the next section.

Land Division

Land Administration

“Appropriations provided for the management and support of the Land Division.” Administration: 44,500. Equipment: 3,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 9,200. Professional Services: 2,300. Salaries: 761,800. Travel and Training: 10,600.

Total Land Administration: 832,200

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

I'm wondering if you could explain what the Land Administration section actually covers.

Matthew Praught: Sorry, I missed that.

P. Bevan-Baker: In the description here, it just says appropriations provided for the management and support of the land division. But I'm wondering what this section covers.

Matthew Praught: This would be primarily processing. So, for the land division, there would be permitting, and inspection services, and those types of things that fall within it. This would be – predominately, you'd be looking at your service officers and administration people who are processing those items.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that.

Thank you, Chair. I'm good for this section.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Inspection Services

“Appropriations provided for the operation of Inspection Services including electrical, boiler, liquified petroleum gas, plumbing, elevators, lifts and amusement rides, building code, petroleum storage tanks, and ozone layer protection.” Administration: 25,800. Equipment: 22,400. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 102,700.

Professional Services: 520,000. Salaries: 2,381,500. Travel and Training: 160,200.

Total Inspection Services: 3,212,600

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Salaries; there's an increase of \$300,000, so I'm assuming there are at least one or two new positions. Is that correct?

Matthew Praught: Yes. There would be funding included in there for a couple of new inspector positions and there's also, included in there, funding for a project coordinator for process improvements.

Hon. H. Perry: You mentioned inspection positions, a couple of them. Can you be more specific as to what inspection –

Matthew Praught: Electrical.

Hon. H. Perry: Both electrical? Okay

[1:10 p.m.]

With the... I guess this is just to do with that part of it.

Hon. R. Lantz: Inspect all the heat pumps that we're putting up.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, that's exactly where I was going to go with that. What was the requirement for two new positions? Is it because of the heat pump program?

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, it certainly puts a lot of strain on the electrical inspectors. It's a bit of a bottleneck. They all need to be inspected and certified.

Hon. H. Perry: So, these new positions for electrical inspectors, they will have the same duties, let's say, as the present electrical inspectors? Or are they just two new created positions that are going to deal primarily with heat pumps?

Hon. R. Lantz: I don't know if they're going to be tasked with specifically inspecting heat pumps, but it certainly provides much more capacity for the whole electrical inspector service.

Hon. H. Perry: Does this section also include permitting for development?

Hon. R. Lantz: It would include....

Matthew Praught: We would have a section for development control.

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, the building code inspectors would fall within here and the development control would fall into that one. So yeah, building inspectors are in here.

Hon. H. Perry: So, it's just the inspection part of it; it has nothing to do with the permitting process.

Hon. R. Lantz: That's right.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Sort of following on from what the Leader of the Opposition just said, and I realize there's overlapping – you know what, I'll hold onto that until we get to the permitting section, Chair.

But I am going to ask a question on the *Amusement Devices Act* that we passed an amendment to. Are there any extra expenses incurred to government because of the amendment we passed in the last sitting?

Matthew Praught: I wouldn't have those right on hand if there was.

Hon. R. Lantz: Not that I'm aware of.

P. Bevan-Baker: And you mentioned the bottleneck around the heat pumps and the expansion program – wonderful, lovely, fantastic – and the positions that are now required for that. Generally speaking, have you seen an increase or a decrease – not just in terms of electrical inspections but all of the plumbing inspections, the construction inspections, and the building inspections – whether the time for that has gone up, or gone down, or is it static?

Hon. R. Lantz: There's certainly a lot of demand on inspection services right across the province with all of the construction activity that we have, yeah. They're working flat out.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, can I take it from that, minister, that wait times have actually increased because of that?

Hon. R. Lantz: No, they've actually decreased with some of the measures we've taken.

P. Bevan-Baker: One area where I know there's been some frustration because of delays is when you install a solar array on your property; of course, you have to wait for the installer to come and do that, and then there's a delay on electrical inspection. Sometimes it can last for several months. I'm wondering whether that's something that you've heard about. Will these new positions improve that?

Hon. R. Lantz: I think the new electrical inspectors are certainly going to help improve that, for sure. But you can only operate at a certain pace with the capacity we have. If it's not acceptable, we'll just look at adding more resources if necessary.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, we have our provincial inspectors, electrical inspectors; but with solar arrays, Maritime Electric has to come and okay it as well, and there's a pretty big delay there. Do they have their own inspectors, or do they contract that out to the department?

Hon. R. Lantz: I'm not sure what role Maritime Electric plays. It's not in our budget anyway.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I get that. I guess I'm speaking on behalf of a number, actually, of constituents in my area – and I presume that's true in other parts of the province as well – who have got their solar panels installed and are waiting; again, sometimes months. Somebody told me it was over three months between the installation – where of course, they're there ready to work, and the sun is shining, and the only delay is the fact that Maritime Electric hasn't shown up to do whatever the final connection or inspection is.

[1:15 p.m.]

So, can I ask your department to perhaps look into that, and give Maritime Electric a gentle shock, maybe, to get them moving on that?

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, and I'll pass that along to the Minister of Environment as well.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that.

I'm good for this section. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Chair.

Just in your expenditures in your consultation services that were required, I notice that you forecasted that whole line for '23-24, and your year to date is exactly the same. The forecast was until March 31st, and the year to date is until January 31st. So, there are still two months left. Can you just tell me why each one of those line numbers match up?

Hon. R. Lantz: What lines are we on?

Hon. H. Perry: We're talking about inspection services. Maybe I'm in the wrong one, but it says inspection services and consultant expenditures. I'm on this handout here. It is your second page, page two. It says inspection services, and then it talks about the breakdown of consultation. It talks about the permitting for the Lean Six program...

Matthew Praught: Is that the \$10,000, the \$17,500? That number, there?

Hon. H. Perry: Exactly, yeah. I'm just wondering why those numbers match up exactly, all the way down to year to date, when there are still two months left in this fiscal.

Hon. R. Lantz: I think those spends have all completed.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. Just one question on that. The Lean Six program, can you just give me a little bit of insight on what that is?

Hon. R. Lantz: Lean Six Sigma. It's a process improvement methodology. People get certified in this process. It's like business analysis, going through and making process improvements. Toyota is the lead example; I think developed Lean Six Sigma, maybe. I don't know. I might be pulling that out of my hat, but they're the standard in process

improvement. It's become a profession for some people.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, thank you. I just saw it and I didn't know what it meant, and I was curious, so thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry?

P. Bevan-Baker: Chair, can I just ask one question?

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

They may not apply to this section, but I know now the permitting process demands that you have a development permit, a building permit, and an occupancy permit. I just want to know when I should be asking about that.

Hon. R. Lantz: I guess it depends on the question. Development services....

P. Bevan-Baker: Which is up next, I think.

Hon. R. Lantz: You asked about development permit, building permit, and occupancy permit. I think the occupancy permit is issued after the building code is determined to be good, so we can talk about that in inspection services here, right now.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Chair, can I go ahead, then?

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

So, I know when we adopted the building code – and I was grateful for that and a huge supporter of that, but – it seems to have created this triple-necessity for permitting which did not exist before, with the development, the building, and the occupancy permit. I'm wondering whether there's anything you're doing to get rid of this red tape that seems to have appeared because of the changes we made.

Hon. R. Lantz: It never existed provincially, but in the City of Charlottetown, it's existed for a dozen years

or more. It's a bit of an anomaly that the Province didn't adopt the National Building Code of Canada. I think that's relatively standard. Although many people, yes, find it annoying to get a building permit, it's pretty standard practice in just about any jurisdiction.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. Maybe I should have made that distinction, recognizing that there were some parts of the province where that existed before, but large parts – my district, for example – did not require all of these steps. It's created some delay, some frustration, amongst people who are waiting to get going on a particular project.

What are we doing within the department to try to streamline this – I guess that's my question – so that the permitting process is as efficient as it can be?

[1:20 p.m.]

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, first of all, it's a public safety issue. Building to safety codes, accessibility codes, energy codes, and all of those things that are in the code are a good thing, but most people find it a nuisance. Because it's reasonably new for the province, I think we still need to build up a little capacity in our building inspector services.

They're very difficult to find, qualified building inspectors, but we did create our interim building inspector or junior building inspector positions. They're not fully qualified building inspectors. They're on a path towards there, but we can task them with permitting smaller, simpler projects. That's taking some pressure off those inspectors who can be used to inspect larger, more sophisticated projects.

P. Bevan-Baker: I really appreciate that response minister, and I 100 percent agree with you. I don't want to leave you or anyone else with the impression that I don't think the permitting process is important; it absolutely is. I'm just looking at how we can streamline it better, and make sure that these things happen efficiently and don't cause unnecessary delays to those folks who are trying to build in an already very difficult environment.

So, I appreciate that initiative you just described; I wasn't aware of that. And I do hope that we can staff up with these folks because it really is a problem for a lot of people.

Thank you, Chair. I'm good for this section.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Development Control

“Appropriations provided for the administration of the development control function of land use planning. This section manages and regulates property development and subdivision to ensure all development conforms to a pre-determined set of regulations, policies, and standards.” Administration: 8,800. Equipment: 4,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 7,000. Professional Services: 7,500. Salaries: 1,561,300. Travel and Training: 26,000.

Total Development Control: 1,615,400

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So, property development officers. You just mentioned earlier that you have six, and then you have one junior, in your complement. Where are those six placed across the Island?

Matthew Praught: In terms of placement across the Island, I don't have that data with me in my listing here, but that is something I could probably return with.

Hon. R. Lantz: Which positions was it?

Hon. H. Perry: Property development officers.

Hon. R. Lantz: Property development officers. Yeah, I don't know the exact distribution. I know some of their names and where they are, but I can't tell you off the top of my head how many are in each district.

Hon. H. Perry: Do you know by each district/region what needs are? I'll be a little bit more specific on that – what the wait times are for a development permit?

Hon. R. Lantz: Wait times? I have the exact number. The median wait time for a development permit is, I'm going to say, 22 days. It's reduced over the last year.

Hon. H. Perry: So that's the median. Is there anything specific to regions? Is there one region that maybe lagging a little bit behind, or are they all pretty close to that 22 days?

Hon. R. Lantz: I'm going to say they're all pretty close to that 22 days, but if we have a regional breakdown, I can provide that.

Hon. H. Perry: I would appreciate that because I haven't heard anything recently of people coming in just inquiring about it. Because at one time, there was quite a delay. But 22 days doesn't seem to be, to me –

Hon. R. Lantz: I'll tell you what one of the biggest delays used to be, is that people would come in with incomplete applications, and then the process of trying to squeeze the information out of somebody, the back and forth would delay it a lot. Now we've got our property inquiry coordinators, or I can't remember what we actually call them –

Hon. H. Perry: Property inquiries coordinator.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, at each of our land offices. Their job is to be like an intake officer and make sure that they understand what it is the person's applying for, and then they communicate all the different requirements that they're going to have to have, and make sure their application is complete so that when the application is submitted, the processing can start right away.

[1:25 p.m.]

Matthew Praught: Bit of work up front to save later.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, it's working well.

Chair: That was a great idea.

Hon. H. Perry: If you could bring that back, just the breakdown of where the property development officers work out of, that would be greatly appreciated too because I know there was some ask up west

for the property development officer – I can't remember what the numbers were at that time, but it was a part-time position – to be put to a full-time position. I'm just wondering if that ever happened or if it is in the works to happen.

Hon. R. Lantz: I can bring that back for you. I think there is a part-time position there. I think she may work from home even, part-time. The exact situation I can clarify for you a little more.

Hon. H. Perry: And with that, if it is correct – what we said; it is part-time – is there any possibility, or is there any consideration, or any chatter about putting that position up to full-time?

Hon. R. Lantz: I believe so, but I'll have to confirm. O'Leary-Inverness is nodding his head back there.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: I'd just to speak a little bit about special planning areas because I know there have been some changes there. Can you just explain what the changes were, made by the previous minister, and if that has created any budgetary demands on your department that didn't exist before?

Hon. R. Lantz: I'm not sure about the budgetary demands. I think you snuck that part in there just to make sure it was just a legit budget question. [Laughter]

P. Bevan-Baker: That's fair.

Chair: Better than previous.

[Laughter]

P. Bevan-Baker: I learned from the chair.

Hon. R. Lantz: I'm exactly certain what the previous minister did on the SPAs, but I will say they're an archaic land use planning tool. We're looking closely at them and what we can do with them. I'll just say that for now. They should disappear entirely once we get our land use plan completed, but we'll take a look at what we can do in the interim to deal with those. They're not serving the purpose they were originally intended for.

P. Bevan-Baker: Sure. One area where I suspect that – and the money will have to move somewhere else in the larger scheme of the province budget, but – as new municipalities develop and manage their own planning – I’m thinking of my own district in West River. I attended a planning meeting there last week, for example, on a proposed subdivision.

I realize we’re not faced with dozens and dozens of new municipalities with the capacity to do this, but are the new – and I’m thinking of Three Rivers and West River being the most recent examples. Have you noticed that making a dent in the requirement of your provincial division to provide development services, and therefore in savings?

Hon. R. Lantz: Absolutely, yeah. We went from the Province administering land use in 90 percent of the land mass to I think 82 or 83 now, so it has to have some effect. With just the acceleration of development, it’s probably a relative effect. But it’s great that West River and Three Rivers have taken on that responsibility and they can now take control of the vision for their own communities. I hope that more communities do the same.

P. Bevan-Baker: Just on that point, I want to commend the minister on the process – again, I’m speaking specifically about the West River area, the public meeting I attended regarding this proposed development – very well organized, well publicized, well attended, great presentations from the potential developer and a number of concerned citizens – and a number of supportive citizens – who live in the area.

I just thought to myself: this is exactly the way that local development should be handled. So, I just wanted to thank you, minister, for being – in no small part – responsible for encouraging the establishment of these municipalities that have the size and capacity to do that. I just wanted to get that in at this point.

[1:30 p.m.]

The description of this section says the section manages and regulates property development and subdivision. I’m

wondering how that distinguishes the Development Control section from the Land Use Planning section. How are they different?

Hon. R. Lantz: The land use planning is around the actual legislative and regulatory framework. We have, I believe, three registered professional planners. That’s the work that they do; they are land use planners. They will have some involvement in the land use plan process as we go ahead with the consultants that we employ, but land use planners are professional planners.

P. Bevan-Baker: I’m good for this section.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Just a couple of questions. It was commented that there is a 22-day wait time for development permits. Are we referring there to subdivision approvals?

Hon. R. Lantz: Development permits, yeah, it was a median time. Again, I pulled 22 out of my head; it’s somewhere in that vicinity. It used to be a bit higher. Yes, it would.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. I just want to make sure that when we say development permits, we’re talking about approvals issued to private citizens’ applications for subdivision of land.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yes.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, thank you. What’s the –

Hon. R. Lantz: Oh, yes.... Well, a development permit is for the actual – it’s the site plan for development on a lot. If I’m going to build a house on a pre-existing lot, I have to come in; I have to show a schematic site plan that shows where the house sits on site. It has to meet the setback requirements, it has to have approval from Highways for access to the roads, Environment has to check the box that there’s not wetland on the property, and so on, and so forth. That’s a development permit.

In my 22-day median, I'm unsure – I don't think that would include if I come in with a proposal for a 50-lot subdivision development. It's once you actually start to put dwellings or buildings of some sort on a site, that you require a development permit.

M. MacFarlane: Right. I guess my question is, if someone comes in with eight copies of a survey plan from a Prince Edward Island land surveyor just to carve out a lot or two – not 50 or 10; maybe carve a lot off of a field – to me, that's not a development permit. That's simply stamping a subdivision plan approved because you're creating a new lot. I guess I'm wondering what the turnaround time would be, if you knew, with respect to that.

Hon. R. Lantz: Subdivision approvals? I don't know off the top of my head.

M. MacFarlane: I'm just looking at the salaries section there – if this question was already asked, I'll withdraw it. I may have missed it. I see a half a million dollar increase in the salaries. Can you explain the new positions that would...?

Matthew Praught: There would be some previous roles that were established already that are being filled now, so we would have the system navigator for permit efficiency, senior development officer, and then we also have two new client service officers to help in that process as well, and there would also be some collective bargaining increases in there as well for the section.

M. MacFarlane: Would those individuals that you've just described, in their positions, have anything to do with fairly simple subdivision approvals?

Hon. R. Lantz: Which two are they?

Matthew Praught: There's these couple.

Hon. R. Lantz: System navigator and which one?

Matthew Praught: And a senior development officer.

Hon. R. Lantz: A senior development officer likely would, yes.

[1:35 p.m.]

The system navigator, permit efficiency is a position we're going to establish to help shepherd permit applications across departmental lines because development permits, as I just said, will touch on my department, Transportation, and Environment. That position will make sure that that flow is efficient, and as quick as possible.

M. MacFarlane: One more please. My last question would be further to the question from the Leader of the Opposition. Did I hear that there were six people across the province? Six senior development officers?

Matthew Praught: Is that the property development officer?

M. MacFarlane: Yeah.

Matthew Praught: Yes, there would be six.

M. MacFarlane: Would those senior development officers all have the ability to approve simple subdivisions of land?

Matthew Praught: I don't know specifically what would fall under their role. Certainly, it would fall within this section, but I can't say for certain that that falls on that position.

Hon. R. Lantz: I think that simple subdivisions, yes, they'd all be capable of dealing with that.

M. MacFarlane: The only reason I've asked this line of questioning is it's my understanding that there are serious delays with respect to getting subdivisions of land approved. So, I was hoping within that line item that there were additional salaries considered for additional employees, to expedite the subdivision of land for simple subdivisions that don't involve a fairly extensive professional planning officer or planning development officer intervention.

Hon. R. Lantz: As I just said, the development officers may not be the bottleneck there. There have been some improvements in the cross-departmental approvals that need to take place. So, it's not just a matter of sheer numbers, but more on the efficiency side I think, where we've made some recent improvements.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that, Chair. Thank you.

Just looking at the title of this section, Development Control. I'm thinking about how coastal development – the ideas, the rules, the sort of accepted possibilities for development control in coastal areas are very much up in the air at the moment.

I know that Nova Scotia had a piece of legislation they brought in a couple of years ago, but it seems like they're abandoning that; they're not going to go forward with it, and they're going to download that responsibility to municipalities for coastal development control.

Here on the Island – and I know we have the report from the climate change lab recently, but – are we going to have to wait for a provincewide land use plan before we will know what the potential restrictions on development in vulnerable areas will look like?

Hon. R. Lantz: I don't think so. Recently, we had a briefing about the coastal protection plan and the shoreline plans. Their work is ongoing. There's some discussion through that process about hazard zones and everything else, and how those need to be dealt with.

There's a lot of planning and policy work to be done, but I don't think some of which you're talking about needs to wait until the full land use plan is in effect. Our land use planning, as you know, is separate from some of this coastal policy.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate this conversation. I recognize that there are environmental concerns that have to be brought forward in terms of the development of our coastal regions, but there's also the potential, from a planning perspective, for government to set down a list of expectations and perhaps areas where development which might have been considered – and perhaps there are even developed lots which have approval for

development now – in areas where we would not do it now.

So, yes, there are environmental concerns, but from a strictly planning perspective, will we see anything from that? Any changes in the *Planning Act* related to the coastal protection work that's being done?

[1:40 p.m.]

Hon. R. Lantz: I think, yes. Whether it's specifically *Planning Act* or coastal policy, our hazard areas are public information. There's a GIS layer that you can view online. As you know, this was part of the discussion that held up the approval of the official plan in West River.

P. Bevan-Baker: I remember it, yeah.

Hon. R. Lantz: I do know that the coastal work that's happening is going to involve some identification of hazard areas and how that is worked into policy; coastal policy or planning policy. It should be information that's available, for instance, to realtors. It should be disclosed of what the hazard risk is and what the implications are in terms of insurance and everything, and your ability to develop property in those.

All of that, yes, will be part of the policy discussion going forward on a couple of fronts, I think.

Chair: The Chair's biased interest in this has led us into a policy debate again. So, I'll remind members to come back into appropriations provided in this section.

P. Bevan-Baker: Sure. Like you, Chair, I'm very interested in this.

Chair: Interesting, but we should get back (Indistinct)

P. Bevan-Baker: I'll finish my line of questions here, but I have to say that I appreciate the forum that we have here in this Committee of the Whole to have a sort of protracted, less confrontational, perhaps, conversation about stuff like this that is difficult to achieve anywhere else in this room. So, I appreciate that.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Land Use Planning

“Appropriations provided for the administration of land planning and the *Lands Protection Act* regulations. Land use planning is the process of regulating the use of land by a central authority to promote more desirable soil and environmental outcomes as well as a more efficient use of resources.” Administration: 9,600. Equipment: 3,900. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 11,700. Professional Services: 450,000. Salaries: 477,300. Travel and Training: 18,700.

Total Land Use Planning: 971,200

Shall the – didn’t think so.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: [Laughter] Thank you, Chair.

I see that there’s a bump here in the land use planning staff. I’m wondering what position or positions have been added there.

Matthew Praught: There’s one new position that was brought in since last year, the manager of land use planning. That would be the difference there.

Hon. R. Lantz: Megan Williams, who was on the floor here at one point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, yes. Great.

Looking at the budget for professional services, I see that both that and the salaries we’ve just discussed have gone up. Maybe the first question is: What are those professional services for?

Matthew Praught: I can say for next year, we have included some professional services in here for the land use planning work. We’ve got an amount in there for that and that gets underway and moving here. That would be a chunk of that line.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. I figured that’s where the money was going. There was, I think, an additional \$200,000 in the budget for developing of the land use plan. Is some

of that going in services that we’re farming out to land use planning capability and some to create more positions in government?

Hon. R. Lantz: That line, that \$450,000, I think will be primarily allocated to the process; most likely a lot of consulting services there. We will be developing an RFP to get to the next – there’s consultation phase here shortly. It’s under development.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I know we’ve had, understandably – to a certain extent, anyway – a moving target in terms of when we will have this province-wide land use plan in place. Do you have an update on when – I see you smiling and frowning simultaneously.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah. Well, I wouldn’t call it a moving target. It’s been described that way in here a couple of times. I think when I first landed in that seat over here, I think I suggested it was probably going to be three years.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, two, I thought.

[1:45 p.m.]

Hon. R. Lantz: I don’t know where two came from. I’m pretty sure I’ve been aiming for three. I’ve seen sort of a draft overview of the phases that we need to go through and the timeline wrapped around that. I’ve told my staff that there seems to a healthy dose of skepticism about our commitment to this process in this House. I’m not sure why, so maybe we need to do a better job.

But I’d like to make those timelines known to the House and to the public of what we’re working on. This first step for the *State of the Island* report is just about complete. I’ll have that for you soon. We’ve moving immediately into the consultation phase to spend that \$450,000 to do a land use plan that should have been done decades ago.

P. Bevan-Baker: Hear, hear!

[Interjections]

Chair: Shall it carry? [Laughter]

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: It was a good answer, but not that good, Chair.

Absolutely, I thump my desk along with everybody else here, minister, because I think we're all frustrated with how long this has taken.

I think the two years came from the last campaign, the last election, where there was a promise – I believe it would have been from the now-Premier during the leaders debate – that we would see this within two years. You've said three years from the start of your tenure, which was a year ago. So, I guess, are we looking at two years from now, Islanders should expect to see –

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, 2026 is the target.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, two years from now we should expect to see a land use plan on Prince Edward Island, from tip to tip.

Sorry, I didn't hear –

Hon. R. Lantz: I sure hope so, yeah.

P. Bevan-Baker: We all hope so. Will we see a land use plan in 2026 from tip to tip?

Hon. R. Lantz: All the work is planned to get us to that end goal, yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I realize I'm not going to get anything more definitive than that.

What do you expect the total cost – I know we're putting aside \$200,000, and looking at the cost of a professional land use planner, that strikes me as not getting a heck of a lot of extra help here. But do you have a total cost, at least from a planning point of view – I realize there will be other expenses too – but from a planners point of view, the salaries specifically, to get us to that finish line in 2026, as you've just told us?

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, I can't speak to what the budget requirements will be in the coming years for that project yet. I'm sure that staff are kind of working on what the resource requirements are for each phase, but I'm not there yet and I haven't seen it. But are we talking about this \$450,000 line?

P. Bevan-Baker: No, I'm looking at the two years before Islanders have a land use plan in 2026, what the full cost to government is going to be to accomplish that. Not budgeted.

Hon. R. Lantz: I don't know the full cost of the land use plan. My staff probably has some sense of it, but I don't know if they've fully gone through the process of fully costing out each phase that will occur over the coming two years.

And I think that maybe depends on this consultation phase to determine exactly what the requirements are for coming phases. I'm not sure if we can say right now. Maybe my staff will prove me wrong, but I'm looking at the year ahead.

P. Bevan-Baker: I think this is absolutely fundamental to the budgetary process. If we're making a promise to complete a very important, big task in a particular timeframe, and we don't know what the full cost of that is, and this year we're being asked to approve \$200,000 of new spending and you can't tell me whether that's going to get us halfway there or whether that's the full cost, that makes it very difficult from the point of view of somebody sitting in one of these seats to go, "Oh, we're on track; \$200,000 is going to be enough to provide all of the planning services to get us there at the end of this year, and then next year we will cross the finish line."

Maybe my question is: Can I ask you to bring back on Tuesday, next week, a fully costed sort of budget for the entire development of the land use plan for Prince Edward Island so I can say \$200,000 is enough money?

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, \$450,000 is what's budgeted for this year, and I can tell you I'm confident that that will get us through what we require to do for this part of the year. I'd be happy to get an estimate on the full cost of developing the whole plan to bring that here, but not if it's contingent on passing this section because this is this year's budget we're debating.

[1:50 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Sure, and I suppose that's fair, minister. Again, we're being asked to

approve a \$200,000 increase to the budget for this section and that was something that was highlighted in the budget speech. I just want to have confidence that yes, that money is exactly the right amount of money for this year, but I can only tell that in the context of what the end goal is and the cost of that.

Hon. R. Lantz: I've heard numbers of about \$1 million to complete it. I don't know if that's a detailed costing out of the whole thing or a guesstimate, but thereabouts is a reasonable budget. It may be larger, it could be smaller, but that's been a number tossed about as a full cost.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

My question would be with respect to the *Planning Act*. In my practice, I've had some dealings with the *Planning Act*. It's kind of cumbersome, it's lengthy, and it's not easy to navigate. Are there any plans contemplated by the department to do a full-scale review/update of the *Planning Act*?

Hon. R. Lantz: I think we will have a brand-new *Planning Act* to go along with the new provincial land use plan.

M. MacFarlane: And you had mentioned earlier, minister, with respect to the special planning areas, which are captured to some extent within that act; that'll be addressed as well?

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, as I said earlier here, those will completely disappear because they will be incorporated into a larger provincial land use plan. But I would say, even in the meantime, you should probably expect some changes to those special planning areas. I don't know if they ever served the purpose they were intended to, or they're certainly not anymore.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you. I appreciate that answer. My district has a longstanding concern with the hands being tied under the special planning area.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, the previous member made us well aware of that. [Laughter]

M. MacFarlane: That's good to know, and I may continue that –

Chair: Continue the tradition. [Laughter]

M. MacFarlane: I may continue the tradition, to some extent.

With respect to agriculture – and I don't know if this is the right place to ask it or not – the Throne Speech from last year, and I'll use the wording, said: "The land use plan will help support our agriculture sector, primarily through ensuring agriculture land stays in agriculture production."

Is there anything earmarked specifically to keep farmland in production in this year's budget?

Hon. R. Lantz: Specifically in this year's budget.... I think that's an overarching goal that is sort of codified in lots of legislation here, certainly the *Lands Protection Act*, *P.E.I.*

Land transactions – the primary consideration is the quality of the soil. The SPAs were intended to do that, although they're probably not a good tool for that.

Matthew Praught: Yeah, I don't think there would be a specific budget (Indistinct)

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah. I think I might have even been asked that last year, but I think that is bought and paid for through many different pieces of budget lines in different departments.

M. MacFarlane: So, within this section that we're focusing our attention on now, with the diligence of the Chair, there's nothing to speak of?

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, the provincial land use plan – it'll be a huge component of that. I mean, it's largely an issue that's driving us through this process. So, in that sense, there is money allocated to that because it's a large part of it.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Municipal Affairs

“Appropriations provided for the oversight of municipal government, advisory services and training, including equalization grants and municipal services tax credits for municipalities.” Administration: 6,100. Equipment: 4,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 7,100. Professional Services: 100,000. Salaries: 787,200. Travel and Training: 5,400. Grants: 39,834,200.

Total Municipal Affairs: 40,744,500

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

[1:55 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

I noticed under professional services, it looks like you overspent last year by \$200,000. What was that addition for?

Matthew Praught: There would be various different matters that we would have with municipalities through the year. Part in this year, there would be some costs allocated there for negotiations with the municipalities that are ongoing and coming up. There would be some support for some municipalities that would be dealing with different situations that they have. Specifics; if I go back to that page....

Hon. R. Lantz: Professional services?

G. McNeilly: Yeah.

Hon. R. Lantz: There would be some additional consulting services required for the issue in Rustico.

G. McNeilly: It sounds like an ominous thing that happened in Rustico for \$200,000.

Hon. R. Lantz: I think it's well-known that there's a special audit taking place around the arena project.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Was there anything in the budget around any issues in Murray Harbour?

Matthew Praught: There would be a small component to that, too, just supporting the municipality in that matter.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, we've agreed to cover some of the costs that they're going to incur if they don't have the money.

G. McNeilly: There was an issue with the councillor there about some different things. How much have we spent out in that, as a Province?

Matthew Praught: I don't believe there would be much in prior years. This is kind of a more recent item. There may be a little bit of a cost to that going forward as well.

Hon. R. Lantz: Some of those costs have probably not even been realized yet; maybe not even invoiced. There would be a small amount that we would have covered for a consultant that Murray River hired to do some investigative work for them.

G. McNeilly: I know that you've hired a legal team to look at that. How much are you anticipating the Province is going to be on – taxpayers are going to be charged for that?

Matthew Praught: Well, the budget we have in there for the coming year for this whole section is \$100,000.

G. McNeilly: Is it going to be more than that?

Matthew Praught: This is what we have estimated, so we would have to see how the work progresses and go from there.

G. McNeilly: So, we don't know how much we've spent on that situation where there were negative things said, in my opinion; borderline issues. This was supposed to be rectified and dealt with. It wasn't. It was put forward. How much money did we spend on it and how much money are we forecasting to spend on this issue that's happening?

Matthew Praught: I don't have further specifics on a detailed breakdown on that, but we know there will be some costs involved in here.

Hon. R. Lantz: It's an ongoing issue, so we can't tell you exactly yet.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'm wondering –

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Chair: The hour has been called, members.

Hon. R. Lantz: 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.

[2:00 p.m.]

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hour has been called.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member for O'Leary-Inverness, that this House adjourn until Tuesday, March 12th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a good weekend, everyone.

[The Legislature adjourned until Tuesday, March 12th, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.]