

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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The Legislature sat at 2:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to welcome my colleagues back to the Legislature for another important day.

I'd just like to have a couple of mentions to some special Islanders today. A legend in Morell is turning 90 today; Joe "Bomber" MacDonald is turning 90. He started fishing when he was 14 years old and fished in the boat every year right up until this year and it was only the threat of COVID-19 that kept him out of the boat this spring. He did help in getting the year ready and I'm told he keeps a pretty good eye on the landings of the day and other matters of importance to the fleet. He also spent 10 years in the Navy, he's a special individual. I wanted to wish a happy birthday to Bomber.

I also wanted to – I got a lovely email from Bob Gray, who is, among other things, a wonderful fan and supporter of the UPEI Women's Basketball program. He wanted me to point out that PEI's Jenna Mae Ellsworth of the UPEI Panthers basketball team was named the women's basketball Player of the Year in the AUS Conference and the U SPORT national women's basketball Player of the Year as well. She led the Panther's team to a national bronze medal which took place just before COVID arrived and she is now in the running for the U SPORT Women's Athlete of the Year for all Canadian universities.

Over the last 50 years, there have been a lot of very special student athletes that have had impressive seasons at the University of Prince Edward Island, but certainly by my memory I believe that the 2019/20 season of Jenna Mae Ellsworth, is the greatest season of a student athlete in the history of UPEI. So, best of luck to her.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: I urge all Islanders to go on the website at U SPORT to cast your vote

for Jenna Mae because she certainly deserves that.

Finally, today as we know is budget day. Minister Compton will deliver a speech later today. I just wanted to send a huge thank you to the very hard working professionals in the Department of Finance and the other finance officials within the individual departments of government, who have really worked for weeks and months in preparation for the initial budget and then the second run of this budget.

I think I can speak for all of us in here and on behalf of all Islanders that, this being Public Service Week, we are extremely blessed to have the high-end professional and talented staff of the public service here on Prince Edward Island. I'm very proud to say that day in and day out, regardless of who's sitting in these chairs or what party is being represented, that they are the true heart of the government of Prince Edward Island. So, all the best to all of those individuals.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I appreciate the Premier's remarks today and, echoing what he said about Public Service Week and the Finance Department has obviously done – putting together one budget is hard enough but to essentially put together two budgets back to back, just an enormous amount of work. Very much appreciate all of their efforts.

Within the public service, of course, there are so many different facets, but I think I'd like to mention two people who look after us here in this building and that's Stewart and Gloria, who come in here before we arrive in the morning and clean things up and clean things in between; whether it's the washrooms or the plexiglass here or our offices. So, a great thanks to Stewart and Gloria for the work that they do.

This is Bike Week and Friday is Bike to Work Day. Now, of course, many people are still not at their places of work but for those

who can, I encourage you to cycle to work on Friday.

The Lennox Island band is going through a process of renaming, currently known as the Lennox Island First Nation. They're having a vote to choose a new name. Not to change the name of Lennox Island, the Island on which they live, but of the First Nation themselves.

They have three options; one is to maintain the name Lennox Island First Nation. The second option is to choose a Mi'kmaq name and there are two, actually, options; Kikji-sipukwek is one of the options that they're choosing and in Mi'kmaq it means the place where it stretches out and follows close to the shore. That's lovely, as most Mi'kmaq names are, they're very descriptive of the geography of the place. Kikji-sipukwek is the second option and the third option is Malpek, which is of course very close to the word that we know as Malpeque, which is again a description of that area. Malpek in Mi'kmaq means shallow water.

Everybody who is a member of the Lennox Island First Nation is voting right now online to choose a new name and I believe that they're going to announce that on National Indigenous Peoples Day, which is June 21st. So, we'll know very shortly which name they choose.

Congratulations to them and Chief Darlene Bernard, who's been facilitating all of this.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I, too, would like to rise and thank all the public servants in recognition of Public Service Week and a big shout-out to all Islanders watching today, they're on Eastlink or livestream.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just wanted to rise to say a special shout out to Jenna Mae Ellsworth and her family, as well. The Premier did talk about that today, but the season that she had, and the UPEI Panthers, was truly extraordinary. Congratulations to all the Islanders who play on that team and Matt Gamblin, who's the coach, and Jenna Mae's mother, Tracy, and Paul Ellsworth who is her father, and Jordan and Alex. They do things like a family and they really did the Island proud.

So, get online, I want to echo that, and vote for this outstanding athlete. This is one of truly the best athletic performances of all time in Prince Edward Island history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: No other members?

Hon. members, I'd just like to say a few words too.

I notice that every year, the town of Souris puts up summer sceneries on their banners on the telephone poles in the town. This morning when I was leaving home, I noticed that the summer sceneries weren't up, it was the graduate pictures of all graduates, not only from SRS but École La-Belle-Cloche also, the graduates from the two schools. It's also great to see the two schools get together to do this and it's an honour for these kids to have their pictures on the poles. You know, that's quite an honour.

I'd also like to thank École La-Belle-Cloche. Every year for nine years now, they invited me out to say a few words to the graduates and it's always nice to speak to the graduates every year. I just love it but because of COVID-19, I'm not able to go and speak. The reason for that is the more people they can keep out of the gym; it allows more family members into the gym. I understand that for the graduates. So I did an online video for them from the Chamber here.

They're also, on graduation – they're having a parade. It's going to leave the rink parking lot and it goes to the school and the graduates will be traveling with their parents in antique cars. Actually, one of my cars is in the parade. One of the graduates are using it.

If COVID-19 taught us anything, it's taught us how to think outside the box. This is exactly what the graduates are doing. The graduates came up with the idea and partnered with the town to use their poles. So the graduates came up with this idea themselves, so that's what they're doing; everybody is thinking outside the box.

As I watch the news and social media, I see different areas doing different things – coming up with new ideas. So it's great to think outside the box, sometimes we have to learn to do that. So if COVID did anything for us, it's to teach us to think outside the box.

Thank you, members.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

COVID Trigger Points

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For months now, we have been preparing for what the government has termed a new normal. Now, as a province with no active cases and a limited number overall, we are fortunate enough to be adjusting and adapting to just that, a new normal way of living for Islanders.

For as long as COVID-19 has been around, the government has been fully anticipating a second wave to hit, potentially as early as this fall.

We have already seen setbacks in other provinces. Take New Brunswick, for example. This has left many concerned Islanders uncertain. Many of these concerns are about the so-called trigger points, what it will take for the province to experience setbacks and what these setbacks will actually look like and how they will be dealt with.

Will we follow New Brunswick's game plan for only locking down certain areas or communities in which the virus is prevalent or will we take a different route? These are the questions that concerned Islanders have and I believe it is high time for this

government to release their plan to deal with the second wave.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Take Our Streets Back

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the unintended pleasures of COVID-19 crisis has been the incredible reduction in car traffic. Why you can now walk the streets and breathe the unpolluted air and even stave off the sidewalk to maintain your social distance of two metres without risking your life.

At the same time, our bars and restaurants are having to adopt to the new separation rules that cuts the capacity to less than 50% and many are now trying to expand the capacity outside. This makes a lot of sense downtown, be it our big cities or small villages, we should close or reduce in size more streets to allow for outside seating as well as other pedestrian friendly activities.

Scheduled deliveries at appropriate times of day and if cars do need to travel through, let them drive at pedestrian speed. For people who cannot walk, set up parking areas with shovels, preferably by horse buggy or electric bus so activities are available to all. Suburban roads are right for taking over as well. Our kids already know that there are perfect ball playing and skateboarding areas in the summer and perfect rinks in the winter. The only hindrance is cars that insist on driving by at 50 kph.

While feeder roads and throughways may need the traffic to move that fast, there's absolutely no reason that smaller suburban roads need to be high speed. Take all those roads leading nowhere and make them heavens for kids, walkers and bikers and protect them with substantial speed bumps or other speed control. People can, of course, still drive their cars to their homes and accept deliveries, but it will be understood that they do so only at very carefully at pedestrian speed, such as they do in parking lots.

Meanwhile, our country roads offer no such option. The tragic accident last weekend show how dangerous our country roads are. There's no sidewalk at all and the place for a path is usually occupied by a ditch. Even if the paved area of the road can be widened, the fact is there's such a strip right next to cars speeding at 100 kph is both unsafe and unpleasant for bicyclers and pedestrians. What is really needed are paths set well back from the road. One way to get them is to negotiate right of ways with private land owners. The ATV Association negotiated such access for their members, so maybe there's hope for bicyclers and pedestrian paths as well. Whatever the method, it will take time and incentives so we should start now, creating such paths should be part of any public road project.

In some cases such as Royalty Oaks, the land to do so exists already, but a usable network of paths that is well connected and well set back from the roads is going to take decades to accomplish so we better start now. It's about time. The streets are for all people, not just for those driving cars.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Eugene's General Store

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This past fall, the iconic landmark, Eugene's General Store in Tignish was destroyed by a fire that devastated the community. Today, the new and improved store will be reopening in its entirety for the first time in a number of months, much to the excitement of all. The citizens of Tignish have grown accustomed to hardworking, easygoing, friendly lifestyle and Eugene's was a place that brought all of this together.

The store was first purchased by Anne Marie and Eugene Perry in 1948. For years, they lived above the store while raising nine children, all of whom played a critical role in the store's operation at one point or another. It is well known around the community that Anne Marie and Eugene were two of the most generous souls you could ever meet. For years, they made sure

the community was fed regardless of if they had the money to pay for it or not. Anne Marie and Eugene would sell the business in 1976 only to have their son; Tommy and his wife Joanne buy it 10 years later. Tommy's colourful personality and Joanne's business savviness turned the simple store into an Island-renowned gathering spot and butcher block. They owned and operated the store up until 2018 when it was purchased by Carter Morrissey.

This was an exciting time for a young entrepreneur but unfortunately, there would be much adversity to overcome going forward as fire tore through it not long after. Luckily, Carter was up to the task. Eugene's is a place where you go in for a coffee and if you do, you better be prepared to stay for awhile because there will always be someone up for a chat.

Eugene's is not only a Tignish landmark, it's an Island landmark.

I want to congratulate the Morrissey family, Carter, Joey and Trudy, for all the hard work they have put into this rebuild and I wish them the best of luck going forward.

Thank you.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Yesterday the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke asked some questions with regards to incentives, remuneration for nurses here on the Island, as well as some of the recruitment. I just wanted to bring back some details.

Effective March 2020, the Nursing Recruitment Centre Program was adjusted as follows: for graduate RNs and NPs, the incentive went from \$1,100 to \$5,000; experienced RNs are also now at \$5,000 and experienced NPs incentive is now at \$15,000.

This past December, 12 new RNs were hired through the accelerated program. This past spring, Recruitment and Retention made job

offers to 60 new RN grads. These new RNs will start working throughout the spring and summer of 2020, and there are an additional three outstanding offers pending.

Nursing Summer Student Employment Program, upwards of 83 nursing students, Bachelor of Nurses and LPNs were eligible through this program to work in Health PEI, as well as private facilities. To date, 77 offers have been accepted. This is double the amount of nursing students that we have ever hired before, but with the COVID-19 pandemic, we felt that these additional qualified nursing students would be necessary required on our front line.

In addition, Treasury Board approved our request to increase the rates of pay for nursing students, which had a positive effect on the number of acceptances we saw. The first year it went up to \$17 an hour, second year \$19, third year \$23.71; I might add, that in 2019, the rates of pay ranged from \$14.25 to \$17.29. So we saw a fairly generous increase there.

Just to finish off; the Alberta recruitment trip in January of 2020, staff of Recruitment and Retention traveled to Alberta and held events in Calgary, Edmonton and Fort McMurray. Four separate events were held at the University of Calgary, University of Alberta, Keyano College and Mount Royal College, all of which have nursing programs.

In addition, various meet and greet events were held for experienced RN and health practitioners in the province where job cuts are looming. This initiative resulted in 10 new (Indistinct) applying to Health PEI and many of them are already here on PEI working. We continue to receive strong interest from Alberta.

In response to questions raised by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, I just wanted to bring an update as I promised with regards to Cousins Shore. Due to an unexpected manure spill, testing was conducted at Cousins Pond and the run. The initial testing was conducted on Saturday, June 6th. The testing results that we have back so far are extremely low. In fact, the first test came back clear. So the fact that water from the run with these low counts

gets further diluted by the tidal gulf waters, it means the risk is extremely low.

We have also have to take into account that there can already be microbes from wildlife activity in the pond where the water comes from, or even further upstream.

The spill on Wednesday, June 3rd, impacted about four kilometres between the stream near Irishtown to the North Shore at Cousins Pond. Silt fences and a series of three dams were constructed and installed to stop the flow product into the waterways, and that was completed as of 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 3rd. At that time, the product was no longer entering the stream.

Conservation officers will be re-sampling the pond towards the end of this week and likely again after a rainfall which may stir up the pond or create conditions for any remaining manure material in the spill zone to be carried into the pond and possibly at the run.

It's possible that they will leave the run closed for awhile until they are confident conditions have returned to normal. Any person who is in the Cousins Shore pond run should self-monitor for any gastro intestinal symptoms, such as abdominal cramping, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting. If they have any of these symptoms they should contact their physician or visit a health clinic. They would not be tested unless they do have symptoms.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

On May 20th, government announced that this province would be opening to cottagers with applications being accepted on June 1st. A week later, the Premier amended that announcement by stating that the opening would be a phased approach with cottagers from Atlantic Canada being approved first, then Western Canada second, and then lastly Ontario and Quebec. And of course the reason why Ontario and Quebec were last

was because there were, and there still are, a high number of new cases being diagnosed in those two provinces.

Approval of applications from Ontario and Quebec

A question to the Premier: How many applications for cottagers from Ontario and Quebec have so far been approved for entry to Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I think as of yesterday the number I had, it was somewhere around the vicinity of 850 that have been approved. Whether any of those from Quebec or Ontario were amongst those, I will double check with staff. I don't believe that they initially were in the first phase, but we might be running through the process more quickly, so maybe some have – we're now into Ontario and Quebec. If the hon. Leader would allow me to just double check momentarily, I will provide that information as soon as I can here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Maybe I can provide some of the information myself to the Premier. Considering the amount of public attention this concern has generated over the last couple of weeks, I'm a little surprised that the numbers weren't right there.

However, I've been personally informed of at least five families from Ontario that have already been given authorization to arrive. In fact, they're going to start arriving within the next week; the first family scheduled to arrive on June 20th, just three days from now from Ontario.

A question to the Premier: How is it that you don't know that cottagers from Ontario are already being approved and they are scheduled to arrive as quickly as that?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: As I said, I'm not actually approving where they come from. We have a very solid staff and a process that are in place that are approving these applications based on when they arrive and a number of factors. As I indicated in my first answer, there may very well have been to a point where some are getting processed, but I can do the best I can to share the information with the hon. leader.

I would reiterate that our process has been thorough, it has been cautious and every seasonal resident of Prince Edward Island that is coming back is being asked to self-isolate, to have a self-isolation plan and will be tested for COVID at the 10- to 12 day mark before they are released from that self-isolation.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, the concern that's generated, Islanders were deeply concerned about the opening of our borders because cottagers from areas of high infection rate were potentially going to be arriving and causing an issue. I appreciate the Premier describing it as a cautious and gradual approach that has been put in place, but we've now discovered that this staggered approach means that people from those high-risk areas are coming, yes, after the others, but only a matter of days after the others, maybe or 3 or 4 days after Atlantic cottagers are being admitted.

Question to the Premier: Why do you provide Islanders with this false sense of security if you intended to follow your original plan all along?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, our plan all along has been to bring in a maximum of 500 seasonal residents a week. So far, we haven't gotten to that number. When I look out based on the information that was provided yesterday to me, I think 350 were in the initial 350, 360 range. The following week it was 160. The following week was less than 100. Then, the following week was 66. It is a very staggered approach.

I would also caution the hon. member, I know he knows this better than most, but Ontario is a large province, there are lots of aspects of Ontario where there hasn't been much COVID-19. If you're from downtown Toronto where there's been some hotspots, that's something that we would be checking up on our whole application process. We want to have confidence in where you're coming from.

I will do the best I can to provide the most up-to-date information that I can. It is a staggered approach and if you would look at the correspondence I've been receiving from seasonal residents who are eager to get to Prince Edward Island, they are frustrated with how staggered the approach is.

I will get the information back, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During every sitting of this Legislature so far, I have asked questions about the creation of a TOSH registry that will track any health complications that may occur for students and staff due to the mishandling of asbestos that occurred during the renovations at TOSH.

Since the election, this registry has moved from the department of health to the department of education and has somehow now landed in TIE. In February, I was informed that an independent private sector professional has been contracted to complete this assignment.

TOSH registry re: asbestos

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Who is this private sector professional and what will they be doing?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the hon. member is quite aware how this file ended up with me. She was in my office to meet with me about it – has been

communicated with from the department as to what was going on.

What we did is we felt that the best approach would be to get somebody independent because clearly, that's what we were being told by the parents and that's clearly what we had been told by the opposition. So we reached out to who we thought would be the best people to do it and it was HRA.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Other than a commitment from this government to create a registry, we still know very little about it.

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: What information will this registry contain and where will it be housed and for how long?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have engaged a professional organization to help us work on this registry. A lot of the recommendations will come from them. We were going along quite well before COVID and obviously, I diverted all of my staff to the pressing needs of the day, which were protecting Islanders. We're only recently getting back to it and I actually met with my staff about the registry this morning. A lot of those decisions won't be made yet. They'll come in a form of a recommendation or they'll come in a form of a full document, which will be presented to our department and I'll no doubt bring to our Cabinet for a discussion.

At this point, none of those decisions have been made. We want to be meticulous that we're doing this in the best possible manner and that we're not leaving any stone unturned and we're doing our very best to make sure that we give the people in Summerside who want this what they want.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Okay, so I guess that goes back to my original question about what the private sector professional will be doing. That gives a little bit of information. So the private sector professional will be providing recommendations, it sounds like, on what the registry will look like.

HRA engaging with parents

Do you have a guarantee – question to the Minister – sorry – of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Do you know that this professional or this organization will be engaging with the parents who have expressed concerns about what happened at TOSH?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So I think there's a lot of information readily available. I haven't given instruction to the company, specifically, on who they should talk to. We told them what we wanted. We told them what the parents had originally asked for. At this stage, we're in the process of development – or they are, and they're going to present it back to me.

As normal with a lot of the activities in the department, I try not to interfere. I think that political interference over the years has made for terrible governance in this province and I'm committed to letting the professionals take care of it. I hope the hon. member will allow that to happen too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a bit of a confusing answer to me because if we're talking about not having political interference in this process, yet you're the only one providing information directly to the professional involved or

who's engaged to do this, I'm not sure how those two messages really work together.

Access to registry

Ms. Altass: I'm wondering about, as well, who will be able to access this registry and – sorry, I should have said – question to the minister: Who will be able to access this registry and how will it function, most importantly, to track health data over time, which was a key element of what the registry needs to do?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to clarify here that when this fell into our department, a lot of the work that had been done in Three Oaks had been managed by the department. I'm not giving any information. It's not me at all. It's actually the staff that are in my department who have a lot of knowledge and experience – who have provided a lot of information right from the start.

As to the question, I'll go back to what I said before. We have engaged a professional organization to help us come to a resolution on this. The file rests with them. I wait for a report from them. I intend not to interfere politically on this and I ask the minister to not also politically interfere with this because it's the hands of professionals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'm hearing some confusing messages here. So we started out by hearing the – I should know exactly why this registry is in TIE, but then I just heard the minister say it fell into TIE, so I feel like there's still a lot of confusion as to why this registry that should be tracking health data has been situated within Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

As well, I want to note that the parents who have advocated all along for this registry to exist have not been informed since they met

with the minister in November of what would be taking place as a next step.

Engaging and informing parents of registry

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Why have you not reached out to the parents to let them know that this professional will be engaging in this work and what information do you plan to share with them moving forward throughout this process?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, have only heard from the parents once since November and that was actually yesterday. I think the communication strand works in both directions here in PEI. I committed to Toby and her group that I would take care of this. I engaged the people in my department who I felt were the best people to take this file. They felt it best to reach out to a public body to give it a true independence. I trust in the advice I've been given in the department. I trust that the organization who has this now will do it in the best, independent manner possible. They will reach out to the people who they feel the need to reach out to, they'll provide a report back to government and we will implement it. As far as what's in it, as far as data and information and whether there's health information or how it's used or what it's connected to or who gets to see it and how you register for it and all that, that is in the hands of this independent consultant and that's why we hired them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the health minister for bringing back the update. It has taken some time to get this unpacked but I can't help but notice that the minister is advising us that Cousins Pond has come back with clean testing as of Saturday. That tells us nothing about the state of Cousins Shore on Friday when we

know multiple people were in contaminated water.

Information on risks and exposure (further)

My question to the minister is this: You have yet to provide us with information on what these people have been exposed to, specifically, and what actions someone who is immunocompromised or pregnant needs to be taking, not your average person, but someone in these unique conditions.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

This spill occurred approximately four kilometres away from Cousins Pond, which essentially acts as a filtration pond that then has a run that goes to the shore where the beach is that the hon. member's referring to.

The spill happened on Wednesday, June 3rd. By 7:00 p.m. that night, there was three berms built. Silt, filtration, fences were put up as well. Officials from the department did reach out and were in contact with the watershed group in the area, asked them to put up cautionary tape. The staff from environmental health were on site on Saturday, ensured that all the necessary signage was in place, did testing, did not indicate at that time that the actual beach was contaminated. The first test that came back for the pond itself, which again acts as a filtration pond before the run before the beach, the first test came back clear. The qualified individuals within government, within environmental health deemed that there was no concerns with the beach.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have to assume that we believe there are some concerns with the beach because your department did see fit to put up signs there on Saturday. You have to assume if they went through the effort to do that, there was a reason, minister. This is a gross failure by

both the minister of environment and the minister of health and I have a hard time to believe that after this failure, the result is to do nothing.

Question to either minister who would like to answer it: Tell this House what you did proactively to let people know that if they were at Cousins Shore Beach, they were exposed to contaminated water and what they should do with it.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Again, the officials who are the people that are qualified to make these decisions and qualifications deemed that the beach itself was not contaminated. Therefore, there was no public health alert put out, but as I stated earlier that if there's anyone, anyone experiencing abdominal cramping, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting or gastrointestinal symptoms, they should reach out to their family doctor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Signage posting at Cousins Shore re: manure spill (further)

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Okay. Question to the environment minister: Why did they put up signs on Saturday if the water is fine?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Ms. Jameson: The department was – thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question.

Certainly, the protocol – we did follow it through and I'm advised by my staff that all methodology in terms of how we communicated with the department was followed through. That being said, we can always do better and in retrospect, I have ensured that we will do a briefing with both my colleague and his staff to ensure that,

going forward, we are in a position whereby there is never a time delay in any of these matters.

So, again, thank you for bringing this forward and I promise we can do better going forward.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, we're getting really conflicting information. Protocols have been followed. Protocols have not been followed. The water was contaminated and signs went up. The water was not contaminated but signs went up. Signs were up in advance. Signs were not up in advance.

Minister of environment – question: Which is it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I want to stress again that the unfortunate spill of manure happened approximately four kilometres away from the pond itself. It entered a small stream. Some of it made it to the pond, which acts as a filtration system. Then, any product – any contaminants that may have made it out of the pond through the filtration and through the mediation protections that were installed that evening on Wednesday – if anything made it through the run and made it to the beach, any tidal activity would have taken care of any contaminants.

So again, the qualified individuals in the department of environment felt that there was no situation to be concerned about with the beach.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An issue that comes to my attention more than I would have thought is the issue of mistakes being made, and as a result, overpayment on social assistance cheques. I often hear from people who have their cheques withheld until the overpayment is repaid in full.

Process of repaying overpayments

In light of the Minister of Social Development and Housing not here, perhaps I'll pose this to the Premier: What is the process for repaying these overpayments?

Speaker: Hon. member, we don't recognize when people are not in the House.

Ms. Bernard: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I do wish that my colleague, the Minister of Social Development and Housing were here –

Speaker: (Indistinct) –

Premier King: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I need to have a way in to telling the hon. member that I don't have the answer for the question that maybe she would like, but I can clarify that here shortly. If a certain person who we're not allowed to speak about is back, they might be able to provide a more fulsome answer, but my apologies. I will text a staff member here now and see if I can get the process very quickly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I do apologize.

I think perhaps I'll skip my next question but kind of summarize it. So, what has been happening is people have been having to pay that back in full before getting another cheque, so, expecting people – you know, a lot of these people are single moms. A large majority of single moms are on social assistance, and so when moms suffer, children suffer, and we know that children need access to healthy food, shelter, and that

they are affected by the stress of their parent and it can impact their health.

Supports to families

A question to the Minister responsible for the Status of Women: What steps is your department taking to support these families?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question.

As the member is aware, child care is a very important issue for me, as well as food security. I've certainly been in touch throughout this entire pandemic on an hourly – daily basis with my colleague, the minister of education. In terms of ways in which our government has supported families and children throughout this unprecedented times, we've provided emergency child care services, temporary rental assistance benefits, lunch programs – since March 30th, 2020 – respite programs.

We certainly understand the need for child care and worker safety in terms of child care and we are very much looking forward to Phase 4, whereby we will ensure 75% capacity at our child care centres. There's still so much work to be done and I can certainly assure you that I'll be working with my colleagues and the Premier to ensure that families and children fell supported.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This isn't so much about child care and that sort of thing. We know that living on social assistance is on a spectrum from challenging to near impossible when you're trying to find housing within the rate, even if it's a ceiling amount, pay for food, medication, basic necessities on the current monthly allowance, it's often said that we have more month than money.

Another disturbing story I hear all too often is of women fleeing domestic abuse. Despite

repeated calls to case workers to have their cheques sent to a new address or requests for pick up, their cheques continue to be sent to the home of their abuser.

Challenges on social assistance

Question to the Minister Responsible for Status of Women: How is your department working with Social Development and Housing to have this rectified immediately.

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you for the question.

Again, this specifically with regards to domestic violence and family violence has been a priority for me and hence, at the onset of the pandemic I was a strong advocate to ensure that we established the family violence prevention committee, so whereby we can work across departments. It's not a function of simply dealing directly with one colleague, it's all Cabinet members where this has to become a priority for all of us and it is a priority for us and all government.

So, thanks very much for the question.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The PEI Energy Strategy, which was released in 2017, stated that a new 30 megawatt wind project was proposed to take place in 2019. We now know that this project will take place in Eastern Kings at their wind farm but we are now six months into 2020 and it remains to be seen whether this expansion will actually take place.

Update on wind project in Eastern Kings

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Last fall we heard that the plan was set, although steps in the public process have yet to be taken such as municipal, federal and – municipal, provincial, federal assessments and approval. Can you provide us today with an update on this project?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're still working our way through the process. The environmental assessment is still being completed and we're waiting for the results from that. As far as our other planning goes, we have all of our plan in place; really nothing has changed since last year.

We have 95% of the land owners signed on and all of the landowners in that area are quite happy with the situation. We've been in constant communication with the council up there as far as what the plans are. Currently, we just sit and wait until the process finishes itself out and hopefully we'll get to construction after that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

40 megawatt project for 2025

Also in this document was a 40 megawatt project that was proposed with a date for 2025. As of now, the project site has not been identified.

Minister: Is this project still expected to take place.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is still scheduled to take place; it's still on our long-term plan. I think we need to look at maybe how we do projects, it'll not be going to Eastern Kings, I can pretty well tell you that for 100% sure.

We have to look at how we are working our windmills and, quite frankly; I think that when we talk about the community aspect of it, I'm much more interested in how we can make community-based projects and how we can have community involved from the ground level

That's kind of the approach that I'm hoping to take moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We learned in 2018 that Skinners Pond was being considered as a potential site for the next wind farm project – the one, sorry, that ultimately went to Eastern Kings.

Skinners Pond project

Question to the same minister: Skinners Pond is an area that has been looked at for a number of years by private developers. Landowners are excited about this. The community is excited about this.

Will you today commit to the community that they would be the recipient of the 40 megawatt project scheduled for 2025?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a big ask for a budget day but the member is right, Skinners Pond was one of the two spots that were looked at. In the end of the day, Eastern Kings went out because the transmission line had been built there and there's a substation that's owned by the Energy Corporation that's right there. It fit better into what infrastructure that we had. For Skinners Pond, there has to be an upgrade in infrastructure to make that happen.

I certainly welcome having a conversation and I know recently I've been getting a lot of emails from residents of the area asking that we give them serious consideration. I'd love to have a conversation about how the community could benefit and how we could make a community-based project, but if you'd like to be part of that conversation with Skinners Pond, I'd be more than happy to go up and have that conversation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Many hardships were experienced over the last three months. Anxiousness, uncertainty and stress were felt by many, whether it was caused by things such as being separated from loved ones, or simple uncertainties surrounding what was to happen next. Oftentimes, these feelings are carried by some of the strongest people in our lives: our spouses, mothers, grandmothers. The women in our lives are often the backbone of our families and as the stats show, women are bearing the brunt of the economic turmoil we find ourselves in.

It is clear that the recent pandemic sparked a female recession. From March to April on Prince Edward Island, the unemployment rate for men was 0.4%. It was up almost four times that for women to 3.9%. Furthermore, across the country, unemployment in Canada rose 2.4% for men and just 1.1% for women.

Women out of female recession

Question to the Minister Responsible for Status of Women: How does the government plan to help women get out of the female recession?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you, hon. member for this very important question.

It's no doubt the impact of COVID-19 is certainly magnifying gender and other inequalities. I was certainly assured by our Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture that this is a priority for him, it's a priority for his department and it's a priority for our government. We need to make sure that there's a focused attention that no one is unintentionally left behind and certainly women in all of this.

If I look at the phased approach, I'm hopeful that in the third phase, we'll definitely see an influx of women having entered it and I believe the June Labour Force Survey will capture both the impacts of Phase 2 and

Phase 3. It is anticipated that this will show a greater impact of females returning to work. The June Labour Force Survey is scheduled to be released on July 10th so that's good news. We've done so much for women throughout all of this (Indistinct)

Thank you.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you for that answer.

Mr. Speaker, child care has been and remains a significant concern during this pandemic and it's still top of mind to many women and families today. The Liberal opposition has been vocal on this.

As Islanders, we adapt to the constantly changing and evolving guidelines and recommendations. Families were often left scrambling for child care that, at times, was nonexistent. This will not be acceptable going forward.

Plan for child care re: second wave of COVID-19

Does the province have a stable plan to deal with child care in the event of a second wave of COVID?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, thank you hon. member for, again, another extremely important question around child care. Throughout these last few months and especially as we move forward, again, I am relieved to know in Phase 4 we will see our child care centres at 75% capacity and that will certainly alleviate some, not all, of the burden on families.

Certainly, the \$75 subsidy per-week per-child until the end of the school year was a great asset to many families here on the Island. I know that in speaking with my colleague, the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning, the department and himself, they're working towards a real well thought-out plan for September.

I'm rest assured that I know that we're well taken care of and we're in good hands here.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Many women have been out of jobs for an extended period of time now. When one is not working, the skills that they need to perform the tasks at work can easily be forgotten.

Women re-entering the workforce

How does the government plan on ensuring that women feel they are adequately equipped with proper knowledge and skills to enter back into the workforce?

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

Ms. Jameson: Certainly, this government is committed to equity and I was very much assured whenever this recovery council was announced – I reflected on the members and it was so great to see such strong representation from women.

Just in terms of some of the programs that the women's secretariat has funded which support women directly in terms of entering the workforce – the East Prince Women's Information Centre – that's, again, direct support for women entering the workforce. And the Women's Network – an excellent organization that does such wonderful work here on the Island for programs such as Trade HERizons, which the member might be familiar with. That is to help women specifically to enter non-traditional occupations.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

My question today is to the Premier.

Islanders living with COVID-19

On several occasions, the Premier has said that Islanders will have to learn how to live with COVID-19. Will the Premier please explain what he means by this?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Leader of the Third Party for the question.

I guess what we mean by that as we begin to get on the path back to some kind of new normal or creating what that new normal would be, we do so with the realization that COVID is still here. It hasn't magically disappeared. And until such time as there's a vaccine that is created and broadly distributed, we will need to find a way to continue to work towards some kind of normal life with knowing that the potential of COVID is all around us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we move forward and we live with COVID-19, as the Premier says, how will government define a level of acceptable risk to Islanders going forward?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a good question. It was asked three weeks ago by the Leader of the Opposition and what I told him then is the same thing I will tell the Leader of the Third Party now, is that the Chief Public Health Office has a very detailed sheet and a process in terms of how they measure our ability, as a province, to contain COVID if it is to reappear here. That wouldn't necessarily mean if we have one case that we would cancel everything. I think that not every case of COVID, as I have said before, is created equal, and that if we find that there's an outbreak, for example, we would look then to contain and make some steps backward. As we move forward in phases, we would move

backward in phases. That's the general principle of what it is.

Just commenting on his statements by members earlier, I believe PEI would just continue to act as one unit. The Chief Public Health Officer this time has advised me and others that she didn't think that we would have regional breakdowns because of our size, but that could change only if there was a dramatic outbreak in one particular region.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

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

MacIntyre Avenue, a street in Montague, is – well, it's not in very good shape and it's the street that our hospital is on. A lot of seniors like to walk to the hospital. It's kind of right in almost the centre of the town and there's no sidewalk on the street. You have ambulances trying to dodge the potholes as they're going to the hospital.

Now, the minister had a post on Facebook – on Facebook –

An Hon. Member: – (Indistinct) ambulance dodging potholes –

Mr. Deagle: – had a post on Facebook looking to pave dirt roads but we can't even pave the street that's in front of our hospital.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Paving MacIntyre Avenue in Montague

Mr. Deagle: Minister, can you look into getting this street paved so our ambulances don't have to dodge these potholes when going to the hospital?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Mitchell: It'll be done today.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, unfortunately, the shape of the roads that were left to us by the previous administration –

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Myers: – it's going to take us a little while to get them all back into shape and I dare say that an ambulance who was driving on about 90% of rural Prince Edward Island has to dodge potholes, but it won't be when we're finished.

I know and I remember I was up to MacIntyre Avenue with you and I had a look at it. I think that we have to do some communication with the local town council there. I think there's probably some work that they can fit into it, but we will commit to fixing that road up, at least to where the ambulances go –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – and we'll also commit to fix other roads so ambulances will have to dodge less potholes in all of rural Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's very good news. Speaking of – you know, we'd really like to see a sidewalk down that street and –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Deagle: – well, we're talking about the active transportation fund and I know that this money can be accessed but what I did find out was that a lot of this money this year is being spent in Charlottetown, Stratford and Cornwall. Rural PEI seems to have perhaps been forgotten about a bit.

Paving for rural PEI

Minister, why is so much of this money being spent in our large city centres and not in rural PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We added four kilometres of paved shoulders on the Georgetown Road this week which means now you can bike from Charlottetown to the capital city if you wish to. I guess the question why there's that much money being spent in and around the city area, it's because there's an organized effort between Cornwall and Charlottetown and Stratford to put bike lanes and walking lanes into their communities.

When we came forward with the fund, they came to the table quickly and I would recommend if Montague wants bike lanes, then Montague should reach out and have a conversation because all of the other municipalities are reaching out and having conversations. That's the way work gets done.

An Hon. Member: Talk to the MLA.

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

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Luckily, we are looking at paving some dirt roads and hopefully going to get the street that our hospital's on at least paved before we get those looked after. I guess Charlottetown will get bicycle lanes paved before we even get our roads paved out in rural PEI.

Minister, can you at least have someone in your department, the staff, reach out to these smaller, rural municipalities that perhaps don't have the resources available to put the time in to get an application in to get the funding so that we can get treated the same as Charlottetown, Stratford and Cornwall?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess we can reach out to them again, even though they didn't show any interest the first

time. Part of the reason that the hon. member over there amalgamated Montague with the rest of us was that they were going to be able to provide the same services that Charlottetown and Stratford and Cornwall had.

I'm here; I'm ready to play the game. It's time for them to step to the plate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Confederation Trail in Mount Herbert is a beautiful and scenic but disconnected part of the trail. It's disconnected from the growing community of Mermaid. I've heard numerous constituents who would like to use the trail more but the Fort Augustus Road is high traffic and narrow, making it dangerous to walk or cycle to that part of the trail.

Active trail for Fort Augustus

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Will the Fort Augustus Road be a consideration for the active transportation fund and if so, when is it scheduled to be completed?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, and this summer.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: That's great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to hear it.

The Fullertons Marsh segment is required to connect the Confederation Trail into Stratford and this was part of the capital plan for 2021.

Status of Fullertons Marsh segment for trail

Question to the minister: What is the status of that project and when is that expected to be completed?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll have to get back to you with the full details. The last time I got a briefing on it, there was land that we needed to purchase in order to connect them together and we were having trouble acquiring that land. The landowner, I don't think, wasn't exactly on the same page as us but we're working through those issues.

We are committed, yes, to connecting that all together. It's going to be a real integral part to connect the trail system that Stratford is building and then some of the work that we're doing to connect their trail system to Charlottetown and to Cornwall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you, minister because I agree, when you have municipalities that are on board to expand trail systems to work in line with the province, I think it's excellent to have that partnership.

I do have a question about the MacEachern Road which is located in Mermaid. This is a partially paved road and the unpaved part of the road has not had structural work done to it in many years. Much of the material has washed away and it's been an issue. I've been told that this road, along with the Fort Augustus Road, has been flagged as a road that would need work but it has to be prioritized.

State of MacEachern Road in Mermaid

Question to the minister: Will MacEachern Road be prioritized and receive additional aggregate to the unpaved portion of the road?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, if it's the priority of the member, it'll be a priority of mine and we'll put it on the list to be done.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford, final question.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: What else do you want?

Premier King: Get the bike lanes, go for the bike lanes.

Ms. Beaton: It wasn't actually my priority; it was actually my constituents' priority. It came up because my constituent was made aware of a Facebook post on the ministers personal Facebook account asking Islanders to identify roads that they would like looked at and improved.

The challenge for my constituent was that, because he wasn't a Facebook friend of the minister, he did not have the ability to comment on the post and flag his road.

Mr. MacEwen: He maxed out.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Beaton: So this would mean, if you're not a friend of the minister, your input cannot be received.

Question to the Premier –

Premier King: A question to me?

Use of private social media accounts

Ms. Beaton: Are you aware of your ministers using private social media accounts to collect public feedback and is this a new public engagement tactic that you'll be continuing in the future?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was pretty effective; I do understand there were some limitations. I didn't expect to get the feedback that I got. I apologize to your constituent who's not a friend of mine; I'm at my 5000 friend limit.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: I'll have to switch to a page, which I feel is very impersonal and I'd rather not do that if I didn't have to but I still have email. We took a number of email requests on that post too. I was more musing at how the back roads that I grew up in kind of fell apart and fell into disrepair. I was kind of musing that: Hey, maybe we should be fixing them up and cutting them back.

I certainly did not anticipate that I was going to get the feedback that I got. Probably in the future, yes, I would choose to do that in a different manner because it's left my staff with a tremendous amount of information to try to glean out of my Facebook page, which I agree is completely unfair to them if not to these other people who aren't able to reach me.

I'll either try to do it by email or maybe I'll get a second Facebook account.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: [laughter]

Speaker: Hon. members, at this time we'll take our 15 minute recess.

[recess]

Speaker: Okay, hon. members, we'll get back to our daily routine.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Clerk having reported that the petition Praying for *An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate the St. Thomas D'Aquin Society* is in acceptable form. I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West

Royalty that the said bill be now read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate the St. Thomas D'Aquin Society*, Bill No. 200, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, an explanation.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This bill provides for a name change for the Société Saint-Thomas D'Aquin, the spokesperson organization for Acadians and francophones in Prince Edward Island. By majority vote at its 2019 annual meeting and by resolution of its board of directors, the society has resolved to change its name to Société acadienne et francophone de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard.

To make this change, an amendment to the 1920 act that incorporated the society is required.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, that the said bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Rules, Regulations, Private Bills and Privileges for consideration and report.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Thank you, hon. leader.

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the written responses that I brought back regarding questions from the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot and the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, 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

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I present herewith a message from Her Honour, the Lieutenant Governor which said message is signed by Her Honour.

Speaker: Okay, hon. members, I'll ask the Clerk to read the message.

Hon. members, I'll please ask you to stand while the message is read.

Clerk: Dear Mr. Speaker:

Her Honour, the Honourable Antoinette Perry, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Prince Edward, Island hereby transmits the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure required to carry on the public services of the Province for the Fiscal Year ending March 31st, 2021, and also until the passage of the estimates for the Fiscal Year ending March 31st, 2022.

In accordance with the provisions of the *Constitution Act, 1867* and the Prince Edward Island Terms of Union, Her Honour recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

By command,

Paul T. Ledwell
Clerk of Executive Council
and Secretariat to Cabinet

Honourable Antoinette Perry
Lieutenant Governor

At Government House, Charlottetown
Prince Edward Island
This 15th day of June 2020

Speaker: Please be seated.

The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, by command of Her Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, I present herewith the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Province of Prince

Edward Island for the Fiscal Year ending March 31st, 2021 and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance that said estimates be now received and do lie on the table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I move seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance that consideration of the Estimates in Committee of the Whole House be added to the orders of the day until such time as they are dispatched.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Premier that Motion No. 76 be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Motion No. 76, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Deputy Premier move, seconded by the hon. Premier, the following motion:

BE IT RESOLVED that this House approves, in general, the Budgetary Policy of the Government.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure to rise today, kwe', bonjour, good afternoon.

2020-21 Operating Budget Address
Minister Compton

Gwe', Bonjour, Good Afternoon.

Mister Speaker, it is my honour to rise today to present the annual operating budget for 2020-2021 for the province of Prince Edward Island.

A year ago, I rose in this Assembly to present our government's first budget. A

balanced budget. Four months ago, we were projecting a budget with a small surplus.

So much has changed over the past 14 weeks and the fiscal picture I present today is very different.

More than ever, it is the time for us to believe in each other. Believe in our ability to come together and tackle any challenge. Believe in the value we place in community and supporting the needs of each other. Believe in our resilience, our ingenuity and our commitment.

Our government believes that NOW IS THE TIME to reflect; to support; to plan; to deliver; to shape our future; to connect; to invest and to move forward.

The time to remember the main priorities held dear by Islanders. Family. Community. Wellness. Learning. Climate. Resources. Enterprise. Culture.

Our budget reflects all these priorities. At the heart of it all, our focus remains on the people of Prince Edward Island, as we learn to live with the impacts of COVID-19 and recover and grow together.

Now is the time for Government to respond and be responsible. Now is the time to put Islanders first.

NOW IS THE TIME TO REFLECT

One year ago, we all sat in this Assembly with great anticipation. We were looking forward to setting a course together that would position Prince Edward Island for greater social and economic opportunity for all Islanders. We did not foresee COVID-19. Indeed, we did not anticipate supply disruptions due to rail blockades as well as many uncertainties on the world stage which affected global markets, pricing, and supply and demand. We did not predict Hurricane Dorian, school security challenges or the malware attack.

Through it all, we adjusted and responded.

No foresight could ever fully prepare us for the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. COVID-19 has impacted us in all respects – emotionally, socially and economically.

In mid-March, Islanders, and all Canadians, found themselves in a state of emergency unlike any other. People were advised to go home and stay home. Businesses were closed. Streets were empty. Our economy had the door slammed shut. Not just for days but for weeks.

Government's focus was, first and foremost, on public health and public safety. We made difficult decisions to protect Islanders. With the leadership and direction of our Premier, Dr. Morrison and Chief of Nursing Dowling and their respective teams, the Island responded quickly. We have been effective in mitigating and containing the pandemic. Because of strong public health measures, we have seen a low number of cases – all of which are now recovered, none of which were the result of community transmission, and none that required hospitalization. While we continue in the recovery phase, we know that planning must continue so that preparations are in place for any second wave or setback.

As only Islanders can do, we will get through this by working together and focusing on one another.

NOW IS THE TIME TO SUPPORT

Prince Edward Island entered the COVID-19 pandemic in a strong financial position.

At the end of 2019, Prince Edward Island's economy was outperforming the national average – leading the country in estimated GDP growth. Economic growth was broad-based in 2019 with 19 of 20 industries in both goods and services reporting growth. The sectors that contributed the most were construction, agriculture, forestry and fishery, real estate, and manufacturing.

Our employment growth in 2019 was 2.6% – the second fastest among the provinces – with more Islanders employed full-time last year than ever before. The rate of our population growth was strong, outpacing all other provinces.

Our net debt to GDP ratio had strengthened to levels unseen since prior to the economic crisis in 2008. We were prepared for some rainy days. None of us expected the economic storm brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we have debated in this Assembly, the COVID-19 pandemic required immediate spending and short-term investments to help bridge the shock experienced by workers, families and businesses. Our Government responded quickly, working with industry, stakeholders, community organizations, the Official Opposition and the Third Party. We did not wait for federal programming. We did not wait to see what our sister provinces were doing. We did not create red tape; we cut it. We were flexible and responded to the needs of Islanders. While providing these supports, we also made investments to ensure our health care system was ready, and remains ready, to respond to COVID-19.

Overall, we have provided nearly \$200 million in direct and indirect supports, including:

- over \$45 million in direct supports to individuals and families;
- nearly \$40 million in direct supports to businesses;
- over \$100 million in loans and working capital made available to businesses, including \$50 million for tourism; and
- over \$14 million in additional supports for health care.

Government has committed to payment deferrals for provincial student loans and property tax.

We have been successful in preventing the spread of COVID-19 to this point.

However, we need to be prepared for the second wave or any potential setback. For that reason, we have provided for restricted contingency allowances in our budget. Now is the time to be prepared, be ready, and be able to respond in order to continue to protect all Islanders.

NOW IS THE TIME TO PLAN

Now is not the time to shy away from the challenges that lie before us. Now is the time to work together as Islanders to turn our threats into opportunities. Now is the time for Government to be with Islanders

and support our collective efforts to both recover and grow.

Mister Speaker, Budget 2020-21 projects a deficit of \$172.7 million – a result of both the economic shock and increased expenditures as a result of COVID-19. This number is large, however, our Government is committed to the people of Prince Edward Island and ensuring our health and well-being in the midst of a once in a century global pandemic.

As we look to the future, we know the world around us has forever changed. Now is the time to chart a new path forward.

The Premier's Council for Recovery and Growth has been established to generate recommendations for both recovery solutions and innovative growth strategies. As difficult as the past few months have been, we have an opportunity to reset. As the Council proceeds with its work, we will draw on the counsel of leaders and sector champions and ensure all Islanders have an opportunity to provide input that will shape our future.

Now is the time to challenge “the way things have always been done”, and to reimagine our future. To do this we have to be bold, we need to be brave and we need to be mindful of our greatest gift – one another. If the past few months have taught us anything, it is that by working together you accomplish great things.

NOW IS THE TIME TO DELIVER

Budget 2020-21 is an important step on the path to recovery from COVID-19. While taking a measured response to the pandemic, with this budget we are also advancing the mandate we have been committed to since last year. We have heard from Islanders and collaborated with all parties in order to frame this budget.

Health, education, environment and the social and economic needs of Islanders remain our core priorities. Many new and some ongoing initiatives will also play a key role in our recovery efforts, including:

- a Small Business Tax Reduction that will bring us to the lowest levels in the region;

- an increase to the Island Advantage Bursary that will make post-secondary education in PEI more affordable;

- a School Lunch Program, offered in partnership with local providers, that will provide healthy food to more Island schoolchildren;

- a Pathway to Net Zero and Sustainable Communities that will set PEI on path to full energy sustainability;

- as well as the creation of:

a Social Sector Community Partners Fund that will provide more secure core support to our key partners and advance special projects;

a Telework Adaptation Fund to incentivize smart work remotely; and,

a Climate Challenge Fund to build better solutions for Prince Edward Island.

Government also intends to accelerate key infrastructure projects as outlined in the capital budget in order to help jumpstart our economy through development and employment.

NOW IS THE TIME TO SHAPE OUR FUTURE

Health Care

Now is the time for government to continue investing in health care priorities for Islanders, including enhanced primary care built on a collaborative model that allows health care professionals to work to their full scope of practice, more accessible mental health and addictions support, and increased investments in seniors care, virtual care and wellness.

Access to Care

Working with a Primary Care Roadmap to transform the delivery of primary health care within the province, we will be investing in collaborative team-based practices to provide continuity of care and access to multiple health professionals, including:

- establishing collaborative health centres in Stratford and Queens East; and,

- strengthening existing team-based collaborative practices such as those in the Souris, Montague, Cornwall, South Shore, Alberton and Tignish areas.

As part of increasing access, we continue to prioritize the recruitment and retention of health care professionals. To that end, we are investing:

- \$315,000 to increase the financial incentives for Graduate Registered Nurses and Graduate Nurse Practitioners;
- \$250,000 to advance our partnership with the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island for "Doctors Recruiting Doctors" initiative;
- \$1.7 million for five new specialists – a cardiologist, nephrologist, hematologist, rheumatologist and urologist – to address wait times and reduce the need for Islanders to travel out of province;
- \$1.3 million to reduce orthopedic surgical wait times for Islanders;
- \$850,000 to increase the complement of nurse practitioners, nursing and allied health professionals in each geographic area of the province; and
- additional funds for a new family physician for the East Prince region.

Health Programs

Our budget makes significant investments in diabetes management, the public drug program, dental health, influenza vaccination, and will introduce a new program supporting fertility treatment.

We will invest in supplies and access related to blood glucose test strips and also provide additional support to the Insulin Pump Program, extending benefits to Islanders up to and including age 25 to assist more than 15,000 Islanders that live with diabetes.

We are allocating \$1.4 million to extend coverage for 13 new cancer drugs and supportive treatments under the provincial drug formulary.

And, we are investing \$1.25 million to expand and enhance dental health care

benefits to seniors and low-income Islanders.

Now more than ever, we must take the steps we can to protect Islanders. We are investing a further \$435,000 in 2020-21 to expand the provincial influenza immunization program. During the 2019 general election, we listened to Islanders and made a commitment to those needing access to fertility treatment. We intend to work with Islanders requiring fertility services and develop a grant program that will start this fiscal year. In addition, we are continuing to develop midwifery services.

Seniors and Home-Based Care

Our senior population has been one of the most impacted communities during this pandemic. We have worked diligently to protect them both physically and socially but we know more needs to be done.

Islanders want to remain in their communities for as long as possible, even if they can no longer remain in their homes safely.

Our government is making investments to enhance and expand access to home-based care, including:

- \$400,000 for additional allied health, nursing and other support resources to assist seniors who want to remain home, safely;
- \$417,000 to increase evening home care services delivered by registered nurses in eastern and western regions of the province to align with services currently offered in Charlottetown and Summerside;
- \$361,000 to subsidize necessary essential medical supplies to Provincial Home Care clients; and
- \$300,000 to enhance two programs offered under the provincial Mobile Integrated Health Program.

We are also focused on improving care for Islanders living in long-term and community care homes – both public and private by including an investment of more than \$7 million:

- to support private long-term care homes and community care facilities as they adapt their operations to public health guidelines and practices due to COVID-19;
- to support residents in both public and private long-term care homes who need to travel to medical appointments; and
- by providing expanded allied health staffing and a renewed staff scheduling system in public long-term care homes.

We are working with the private sector to establish 12 new long-term care beds in the West Prince area that will be operationalized before end of this fiscal year.

Mental Health and Addictions

Given the significant pressures that Islanders have been under, now is the time for us to provide more accessible delivery of mental health and addiction supports. COVID-19 caused us to serve Islanders differently. When it comes to mental health and addictions, access is our priority - whether it be in person, in group therapy, virtually, or by other means.

We are investing \$1.23 million in new psychiatry positions to support acute adult in-patient care and community-based mental health services. We are also continuing our partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association to extend services available in Kings County.

This fiscal year, we have allocated over \$800,000 to deliver programming through the new Structured Support Home and the Adult Day Treatment Program; services that will provide important support to clients who require complex medical and psychiatric care in a structured living environment.

We are also launching the Mental Health and Addictions Mobile Crisis Response Program this year. This new provincial community-based service will include a toll-free mobile crisis line available to Islanders 24 hours per day, seven days per week, as well as in-person response teams available 12 hours per day, seven days per week.

As a government, we recognize that our community partners play an important role

in supporting the delivery of mental health and addictions supports to Islanders. In 2020-21 we are extending our operating grant to Lennon Recovery House as they help Islanders in their recovery from addiction.

Virtual Care

During the pandemic, as we adjusted to physical distancing, Islanders and health care professionals shifted to the valuable benefits of virtual care. It has become clear that Islanders are ready to access medical services through technology. Virtual care is a step forward in modernizing health care delivery and complimenting in-person care when appropriate, often with improved access for patients. In partnership with Health Canada, we are investing \$813,000 to support in the development, expansion, and implementation of virtual care tools.

Wellness

As a government, we have an important role in supporting Islanders in actively making choices to pursue a healthier lifestyle. Put simply, wellness matters. This fiscal year, we will be launching the Live Well PEI initiative to educate and support Islanders in living a healthier life. We will also increase funding for the go!PEI initiative. Knowing that organized activities can be expensive for families, we are also pleased to be offering a Children's Wellness Tax Credit to assist with these costs.

Continued COVID-19 Health Care Response

Our government and our health care system are working together to ensure that we are prepared for the potential of a second wave. This year's budget accounts for approximately \$25.7 million to support the COVID-19 response efforts over the coming months. This funding will support the acquisition of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), provide the testing required, the operation of cough and fever assessment clinics, and the provision of mental health services to those who need it.

Education

Mister Speaker, now is the time to continue investing in our students, educators and

resource supports. The last few months have shown just how resilient our children and youth are. However, we need to be more adaptable and be better prepared for any further disruption. Going forward, effective learning with flexible delivery models will allow our students to reach their goals and provide for greater opportunities.

While we are working toward a full return to school in the fall, we have committed \$8 million to assist in any adaptations required should a second wave or setback occur. This may include enhanced e-learning, staggered classes, community programming or using additional facilities. Working with local service clubs, we will form a partnership with Imagination Library to bring children's books directly to homes of young Islanders by mail each month to support literacy.

We are also increasing the core budget by a further \$2 million this year to hire an additional 24 teachers and 15 educational assistants to support the needs and skills of a growing school population.

We understand that food insecurity is a concern for many Island families. Earlier this year we began piloting a School Food Lunch program, providing healthy and affordable lunches to students. In the face of COVID-19 and as students were learning from home, we worked with partners to ensure that students in need continued to receive a healthy meal and some snacks each day. Even when schools were closed, 6,000 healthy meals were provided to students across the province, every week. Our government will continue to invest in the health and the well-being of Island students, providing \$1.8 million in funding starting this July to continue the initiative established during COVID-19 and kickstarting the launch of the School Food Program in September.

We are continuing our commitment of investment in French-language education and the vibrant schools and community that exists among our Acadian and francophone population. This year, we celebrate the 300th anniversary of the first settlement of Acadians in Prince Edward Island.

We are committed to helping students continue their education by investing an additional \$700,000 to increase the Island

Advantage Bursary in an effort to support Island students in their pursuit of post-secondary studies on Prince Edward Island. Increases to base funding provided to the University of Prince Edward Island and Collège de l'Île will help maintain low tuition fees for students. Funding allocated to Holland College will see valuable initiatives such as the Transitions Program and Adult Education provide the skills and training required for students to positively contribute to our Island workforce.

Early Childhood

We have said clearly that the people of Prince Edward Island are our top priority. Now is the time to focus on their families and to make it easier to transition back to the workplace. To do that, we must continue to make strategic investments in Island children to give them a strong start and to help lay the foundation for their success into the future. Every child is important and each child deserves to be treated that way. Now is the time to invest in our future by investing in our young people.

In 2020-21 we are investing \$600,000 to designate 6 additional Early Year Centres, ensuring the delivery of quality child care services that are accessible and responsive to the needs of Island children and families.

We are investing \$700,000 to increase the salary grid for Early Years Centres staff, autism assistants and special needs assistants to acknowledge the significant role of our early educators in caring for our children. Our government is further increasing Early Years Special Needs and Autism Grants to increase caseload capacity. These investments will support growth in the sector and, in turn, lead to more spaces and better access for children and families.

Community Partners

Prince Edward Island's network of community partners plays a vital role in supporting Islanders. Many of these organizations depend on stable operating funds offered through Government. Each year they patiently await this Budget address to ensure their core funding is renewed. These organizations should be focused on the delivery of services and not on keeping their lights on. Starting in 2020-2021, our

Government will work with these partners to establish multi-year funding agreements.

We recently implemented the 211 PEI service with the United Way of Prince Edward Island to assist Islanders in finding their way during difficult times.

We also know that our partners, now more than ever, need to lead in new initiatives and projects. To support their valuable work, we are pleased to announce \$1 million to establish the Social Sector Community Partners Fund. We have witnessed innovation in delivery of services over the last few months by community partners. This deserves to be commended and encouraged.

Investing in Housing

Budget 2020-21 allocates \$6.4 million in additional investments in 2020-21 to support new mobile rental vouchers, new rent supplements, housing construction projects, and operating costs for new Government-owned housing builds through the Housing Action Plan as we work toward our goal of creating 1,200 affordable housing units in five years.

We are also investing \$1 million to support emergency shelters, supportive housing, and community outreach. Our government is continuing to support expansion projects for various non-profits who provide valuable residential care services to some of our most vulnerable through a \$2.1 million investment in 2020-21.

Supporting Vulnerable Islanders

In December, our government increased food rates for Social Assistance and Assured Income clients at an annualized cost of \$6.4 million. An additional \$8 million in annual investments have been earmarked in 2020-21 to extend supports for Islanders through the AccessAbility Support Program.

We need to ensure that children and our families can grow up in safe and healthy environments. We remain an active partner in expanding access to the Positive Parenting Program and provide additional resources to support those most vulnerable through Child and Family Services. Our government is here for Island children and

families and we are increasing funding for the Childcare Subsidy by \$740,000 in 2020-21.

We know that there is more work to be done to find real solutions to tackle poverty among Islanders. We continue to move forward with the Secure Income Pilot to help vulnerable Islanders entering the workforce ensure their basic needs are being met and will continue to be prepared to work with the Federal Government on a Basic Income Guarantee Pilot.

The investments we have made during our short time in government – in affordable housing and emergency shelters, social assistance rates, child care and education, health care – have been a substantive and positive step forward in supporting the most vulnerable Islanders.

Employment Supports for Islanders
We want Islanders to be able to find and keep jobs. We have witnessed abrupt job loss as a result of COVID-19. And while it has been good to see many Islanders begin to return to work, we need to support both employees and employers in weathering downturns in the economy. We will continue to work with our federal counterparts to ensure their programs reflect the needs of Islanders.

We are also committed to modernizing the Employment Development Agency. Changes have been implemented for 2020 to improve the Jobs for Youth Program and the experience for students, including lowering the minimum age, changing the application deadline and collaborating with WorkPEI to improve online options for employers and job seekers.

Clean Energy and Sustainable Environment
Mister Speaker, as we have faced a global pandemic, Islanders are acutely aware of the growing effects of climate change in our natural environment. Communities and industries are directly impacted and there is a real sense that we must act now to sustain future generations of Islanders.

We have committed to putting a climate lens on the decisions that we make and leading by example as we work toward a greener government.

There is a lot of work underway to mitigate and adapt to our changing climate and its impacts on our province and the region. We will take advantage of every opportunity and leverage every great idea. With that in mind, we are investing \$1 million to establish a Climate Challenge Fund to generate the best ideas from communities, First Nations, academic partners, sectors and businesses that address ways to mitigate and adapt to climate pressures. Our government will move forward with its Pathway to Net Zero and Sustainable Communities initiatives and begin a partnership of work with communities across PEI in a collective effort to become sustainable.

Prince Edward Island's watershed groups and the PEI Watershed Alliance make extensive contributions to environmental quality across the Island. In 2020-21, our government is providing an additional \$250,000 in funding to the Watershed Management Fund that will directly support the work of 24 watershed groups across the province through habitat rehabilitation and enhancement, outreach and education, as well as monitoring and research.

We have experienced an encouraging uptake in the provincial Solar Electric Incentive Program over the past year, which provides financial incentive for Island homeowners, farms and businesses to install solar PV panels. As we look ahead to 2020-21, we are significantly increasing funding allocated to the Solar Electric Incentive Program from \$500,000 to \$2 million. Solar incentives help reduce our overall greenhouse gas emissions by over 500 tonnes annually and create approximately 20 jobs in our province's renewable energy sector.

Our government has established the \$5 million Active Transportation Fund, that will be used to improve and grow the Prince Edward Island's active transportation network. Under this fund, we will build new walking and biking paths, widen paved shoulders, and better connect existing walking and biking trails across the province. By creating this active transportation network, Islanders will be able to conveniently enjoy healthy living opportunities, while also reducing their carbon footprint.

This year, our government is also investing \$500,000 to establish the Telework Adaptation Fund, providing support and incentives to the business and non-profit organizations alike, to find innovative and smart ways for employees to work efficiently from home. This approach will further our collective efforts in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and revitalizing our communities.

Agriculture

Islanders are incredibly passionate about our land. Land has been at the centre of our history and continues to be a primary driver of our economy. Our government has committed to a wide-ranging review of issues of land ownership, land planning and land use in the province to protect and enhance a resource that is finite. This year we are launching an extensive and exhaustive public consultation and legislation review process that will engage Islanders in conversations about land issues and policies to assist in developing a Lands Protection Act 2.0, including a land bank.

We will create a soil health development coordinator position that will allow us to conduct testing and hold workshops on soil health and expand efforts to educate all landowners and land users on appropriate protection and enhancement measures to improve soil health and support a crop study that explores alternative crops for Prince Edward Island.

To increase the viability of Island agriculture and livestock, our government is investing \$50,000 this fiscal year as we work with experts, industry leaders and partners to modernize the Animal Health Act, an important step toward delivering on our vision for a stronger, healthier province.

We are also investing \$300,000 to enhance the Pollination Expansion Project in 2020-21. Working with the PEI Beekeepers Association, we will grow our local bee population and overall pollination capacity in our province, which will greatly benefit our agriculture industry.

Aquaculture and Fisheries
Aquaculture has become an important contributor to Prince Edward Island's economy, creating employment and

opportunity in communities across the province.

In order to raise public awareness and confidence in this industry, our government is allocating \$50,000 to a public trust program for aquaculture – providing education and awareness about our shellfish industry, its benefits and the delicious food harvested from Island waters and through our Aquaculture Division, we are investing an additional \$46,000 to support improvements to our fish health program.

Our government recognizes the importance of ensuring that commercial shell fishers have access to our rivers and bays across PEI. Currently the province maintains approximately 100 such sites and will invest an additional \$41,000 this fiscal year to repair and maintain these access points.

We will also continue to invest in the Food Island Partnership, which has had great success growing Prince Edward Island's reputation as Canada's Food Island, increasing the number of new food entrepreneurs in the province and increasing our value-added product offering. This work is more important than ever as we work through the COVID-19 pandemic.

NOW IS THE TIME TO CONNECT

Building Stronger Communities
Mister Speaker, Islanders themselves know best the priorities and needs of our province. Our government is working together with major and smaller internet service providers, communities and businesses to address broadband connectivity inequity across the province. Projects are moving forward under the PEI Broadband Fund, but frankly we need to move faster and farther. We have heard from our communities that we need to invest more and invest faster in broadband. This will provide for our small towns to be sustainable into the future.

Budget 2020-21 commits to the development of a rural transit plan to provide better, safer and more environmentally friendly transportation links across Prince Edward Island.

We will continue to work closely with our municipalities to strengthen local government and services. Equalization

grants to Prince Edward Island municipalities will increase by \$253,000. This funding will allow Island communities to continue to deliver basic services to their residents at comparable costs.

This past year, the Vital Signs Report was released by the Community Foundation of Prince Edward Island and Institute of Island Studies, of which our government was a proud funding partner. This report examines our quality of life using well-being indicators to measure and reflect the vitality of communities. Our government is investing \$100,000 in 2020-21 to further the work of this initiative.

All Islanders deserve to live in healthy and safe communities. Our government works closely with communities and law enforcement agencies to ensure appropriate policing services, education and health supports are available across our province with a focus on community safety and well-being. Our budget this year includes investments that support alternative justice and reduce the impacts of illegal activity in the province:

- investing over \$900,000 to ensure appropriate drug enforcement resources are available for Prince Edward Island;
- investing in a two-year pilot program to increase the use of restorative justice in adult and youth criminal cases;
- working with Justice Canada and investing \$100,000 to develop an Indigenous Courtwork Program for Prince Edward Island; and
- investing in the Indigenous Justice Program which builds relationships and partnerships with government departments, agencies and other parties involved in the justice system.

Mister Speaker, our relationship with our Indigenous peoples is important to all Prince Edward Island. Budget 2020-21 continues the deep commitment to the Mi'kmaq of PEI and the path to reconciliation that we have embarked on with a commitment of \$500,000 for the advancement of the Framework Agreement being developed with L'nuey and our federal partners. Our budget continues with commitments to the

Native Council of PEI and the Aboriginal Women's Association and the important work they undertake in their community.

We also know that as a community we need to do better with education and awareness of race and gender and the systemic discrimination that continues in our society today. We are committed to review legislation, regulations and policies and will work with representatives of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) community, as well as the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, to ensure their representation and voices are included as we chart our path forward.

To assist with increased gender and diversity analysis in government, there will be a new research position created within the Interministerial Women's Secretariat. This resource will increase the capacity for all departments across government to provide this important lens to policy and program initiatives.

Culture

Prince Edward Island has a vibrant and dynamic arts and culture community. To Islanders, arts and culture not only help to define who we are as a people and a province, it also contributes to our economic, social, health and educational well-being.

Our government appreciates the impacts COVID-19 and the public health measures put in place to protect Islanders is having on our arts and culture community, including performance venues. We are committed to working with organizations and venues so that they can continue to operate during these unprecedented times by increasing direct supports to them.

In 2020-21, our government is also increasing funding for the provincial Art Bank, which will include an earmarked commitment for Indigenous art.

NOW IS THE TIME TO INVEST

Stimulating the Business Sector
Mister Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not reference our resilient business community. This Island has watched businesses "pivot and adapt" to how they do

business with various solutions, including e-commerce, curbside delivery, takeout services, and drive-thru access. We know that these adaptations did not compensate for the reduced revenue, but we need to acknowledge the true grit of entrepreneurs who have inspired us all during these challenging times.

We know that our tourism industry has been greatly impacted. Now, more than ever, Prince Edward Island needs a strategic focus and marketing approach to engage Islanders in an effort to stimulate inter-provincial tourism.

Our government is committed to working with industry to develop a new strategic plan with the ability to support growth in the industry. Tourism PEI is currently working with the Tourism PEI Industry Board and the industry's Strategy Steering Committee on implementing the "COVID: Immediate Action Plan". When our borders begin to open – and, Mister Speaker, we are all cheering on the potential of some regional travel bubble – this plan will be succeeded by a "COVID: Recovery and Re-building Plan", which will be developed in cooperation with industry partners.

Now is the time to support local grocers, businesses, restaurants, artists and accommodation providers as these owners, operators and employees are our neighbours, friends and loved ones.

Now, is the time for us to explore everything Prince Edward Island has to offer. It's time for Islanders to create their own PEI Bucket List. Visit that community you've never been to or eat at that restaurant you've always wanted to try.

For the summer of 2020, we will be launching a drive-in festival across the province to showcase local musicians and entertainers while adhering to the direction of our Chief Public Health Office. Mobile drive-ins will move around the province to communities big and small and partner with local vendors and community groups to create a safe and memorable experience to ensure our arts and culture sector is celebrated during a summer we no doubt will never forget.

When the time is right, we look forward to the day we can safely welcome back tourists to our beautiful Island.

Mister Speaker, our economic growth over the years has been because of hard-working Islanders, as well as the strength of our business communities and primary sectors. As a government, we are here to make the necessary investments and to help stimulate, grow and sustain our economy. Part of our approach means leaving more money in the hands of Islanders and businesses through a series of tax and revenue initiatives, including:

- increasing the Basic Personal Income Tax exemption level by \$500 to a new threshold of \$10,500;
- reducing the Small Business Rate by 1% to an overall rate of 2% – the lowest rate in the Atlantic provinces; and
- investing \$1.2 million to extend the Marked Fuel Program to all farm plated vehicles.

Now is the time to continue delivering on our commitments to the business community.

As a revenue measure, our government will table legislation during this legislative session to increase the tax per gram on tobacco to 27.52 cents, and the tax on cigars to 75% of the retail price. These increases, which will bring tobacco tax in line with regional averages, will be effective the day following Royal Assent.

NOW IS THE TIME TO MOVE FORWARD

As I conclude Mister Speaker, now is the time to move forward.

We know that this is not where anyone wants to be in terms of a budget bottom line or in the current economic reality for our Island. But we also know this is where we all want to be to respond to the current circumstances.

Many in this Assembly have recently commented on how Prince Edward Island is the best place to be, and I couldn't agree more. We draw our strength from the land

and the sea, from community and people. We have been doing that for centuries and we will continue to do so as a province.

As a government, we remain committed to supporting Islanders and communities so that we can all move on from the COVID-19 pandemic – not just recover, but grow. To support one another. To learn. To adapt. And to succeed.

Prince Edward Island has always surprised the country and the world in what we have been able to achieve – using our small size and our unique geography as a strength. We have always outpaced the predictions set for us. And we will again.

Our economic and fiscal fundamentals are strong. We can – we will – weather this storm and succeed together. We will be led by our people – our workers and business leaders, our teachers, first responders, health care workers, our children, volunteers and community leaders.

As we move on from the COVID-19 pandemic, providing the supports necessary to recover, we will set our ambitions on how we can thrive as a people, and as a province. We can create a future where every economic and social sector succeeds. Foster a culture of competitiveness where businesses thrive. Build connected communities where people want to be. Offer world-class education where people excel. Become a sustainability leader where all of PEI benefits.

Our plan, Mister Speaker, is certainly focused on short-term recovery in this year. But it also sets in motion an ambition for true growth and sustained success..... for many years to come.

And it is Islanders who will take us there.

Wela'lioq. Merci.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, could I have the podium?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to express my appreciation for the Department of Finance. I know that creating this budget, the multiple times, plus the COVID spending budget was an extremely huge task and so I would just like to express my appreciation to the department.

We appreciate the difficulties government is facing due to COVID-19. The pandemic has thrown a wrench into the plans of many people, including governments. We are pleased with this budget and see it includes what we, the official opposition, presented to government as priorities.

Our budget submission advocates for issues that are always important; issues that were made more evident when COVID-19 hit. It was formed by what we had heard from Islanders and what they indicated as needs and by the excellent research done by our MLAs and support staff. Without listing them all here, I'd just like to broadly express what we had included in our budget submission.

We'd asked for extended funding to NGOs. Incredible that it was included in this budget. Increasing the wages of those Islanders working with and taking care of our youngsters; I can't express how important that is.

Supports to our agriculture sector; it's one of our most important sectors and it can't be overlooked and thank you for including them.

Greater health funding, including expanding dental coverage and addictions support. The dental coverage for seniors is invaluable.

Green MLAs are proud of the evidence-based approach we always use in developing policy, programs and services. Last year's budget was warmed up Liberal leftovers. However, government now has a year on the job and it has to establish its own record. I suppose we're happy government has realized the Green recipes for success are much more healthy and beneficial for all Islanders. We are glad that government considered our research and policy work to determine a better approach to governance.

This budget is definitely not a Liberal budget of free and irresponsible spending. It

really isn't a complete PC budget either. We asked government if they would commit to introducing a budget that was not an austerity budget and on its face, it appears that this budget is mostly new spending, not cuts.

In actuality, this budget seems to be more reflective of a Green budget of what it would look like. It's thoughtful and supported by evidence, it's got solid research and reflective of what Islanders need.

Mr. Myers: Let's vote on it today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Order, order!

Ms. Beaton: We do have an important note of caution for government. It is not enough to throw money at issues. Government really needs to understand what the issues are and determine appropriate methods to address the underlying concerns. Spending millions of dollars to invest in new physicians and nurses doesn't matter if government isn't doing the work to retain those physicians on PEI.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Beaton: Piecemeal increases to wages for early childhood educators does little to finally address the issue of retaining those skilled workers in that sector. Funding Band-Aid solutions is not the right or effective way to address the fractures in our society that many find themselves slipping through. We have yet to see this government demonstrate an ability to be aware of the deeper issues and address them in a meaning and appropriate way.

I'm happy to see the investments across PEI, including rural PEI, especially in health care. I'd like to highlight the investments in diabetes supports and supporting fertility treatment. These are so valuable to Islanders and will make such an important change in many Islanders' lives so I commend you for adding that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Beaton: Increased dental coverage; this was an ask from the official opposition.

People who are accessing these dental programs were often facing large wait times to access them; up to 12 to 18 months. Can you imagine having dental issues and having to wait 12 to 18 months to get them fixed? I hope this funding will allow some of our most vulnerable and our Island seniors to access important health care services in a timely fashion.

I'm happy to see the investments in long-term care and home care. It's really important to keep our Islanders home as long as they possibly can be; that's where they're happiest, that's where they're safest, as long as they have access to all of the needs to make it easier for them to be at home.

I'm glad to see the launch of the mental health and addictions mobile crisis response program. This is hugely invaluable. I hope it's something that receives even more investment next year as it desperately needs it.

In education, we're happy to see more funding for the school food program. We know that students learn best when their bellies are full and they can actually focus on the work that they need to do. The Green caucus has been long supportive of this program. It plays an important role in ensuring that our kids are ready to learn.

Increased funding in post-secondary education; the expansion of the Island Advantage Bursary will help lower-income students in need. We would have liked to have seen more contingency funds available in case enrolment decreases at our institutions as a result of COVID-19. We don't know what the travel restrictions are going to bring. We don't know what the enrolment numbers are going to be. It's important that we're prepared for that and that contingency funds would help us do that.

Although we have asked for more investment than what's in the budget, we're happy to see these investments in education for our early year workers.

NGO funding. No caucus has ever been more vocal than ours about the need to provide multi-year operational funding for NGOs who provide essential services to

Islanders beginning with those in the social and housing sector.

Thank you to this government for bringing this forward.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Beaton: One million to support emergency shelters, supportive housing and community outreach is good. Is it reoccurring, though? This is a big deal and problem for these organizations.

I'm happy to see the investments in social assistance and accessibility supports. Our most vulnerable Islanders need support now more than ever. Under the previous government, these essential supports were more or less ignored for years. The Green caucus was strong advocates on this issue. We were happy when government accepted our proposal to increase the investment in this area, especially in the food allowance. I will draw attention on this area of the recent Auditor General's report. There is much work to be done in this area and I do hope that that is part of the plan of this government under this year.

We also have concerns about government's commitments to PEI's climate legislation. For example, it could have made better investments in the electrification of transport, our largest source of emissions. Looking forward to seeing what government is imagining for the climate challenge fund. We know what the biggest sources of emissions are and we hope this money will directly impact those key areas instead of tinkering around the edges with low-hanging fruit. We need to be bold with our climate change action.

We're happy to see supports for solar installations. We hope to see better supports for farmers and businesses in this way. Right now they get much less of the subsidy than the rest of the Island.

Supports for people who work at home. We have seen through COVID-19 how important it is to allow Islanders to do that.

The active transportation fund, wondering if this is being funded by carbon tax revenues and we would caution government that, at a time when Islanders are struggling, the

money from carbon tax really should be going back to Islanders, directly into their pockets in the form of a dividend.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Beaton: But I will point out that the climate change department doesn't even measure the carbon abatement costs of different mitigation options, so it's hard to say if we're actually getting the impact from these investments that we could be.

This speaks to our biggest concerns with government's ability to address climate change. There is so much that needs to be done and the timelines are incredibly tight that it's critical we have a coordinated, evidence-based plan to get there. We have yet to see governments set a zero carbon date. We have yet to see the environment minister give natural areas the credence they deserve in addressing climate.

In addition, \$250,000 to our watershed groups is very good news and welcomed. They're an essential partner in protecting our environment and improving our climate resiliency.

In agriculture, I'm thrilled to see support for the Pollination Expansion Program increased. It will be interesting to get details on how this funding will help Island beekeepers meet 100% of the pollination needs of growers and processors. This was an opposition ask based on what Island beekeepers were asking, to close the border to protect their bees.

I look forward to the discussion on the lands protection act 2.0 and, I would say, that's overdue. \$100,000 of investment for an alternative crop study. This was one of our asks, but this came from the UPEI Climate Adaptation Recommendations Report and its long overdue. That report was written in 2017 and that was an immediate action as a recommendation. So I'm thrilled that based on our ask, that this has been done.

I appreciate some of the investments to support alternative justice. These kinds of initiatives generally lead to better outcomes for both offenders and their communities. I notice there is \$900,000 under justice spending to ensure appropriate drug enforcement resources are available for

Prince Edward Island. Drug issues don't exist in a vacuum. It would be nice to see such amounts invested to support Islanders who are struggling with addiction issues. At a time where members of the public are asking for a critical review of law enforcement budgets, it seems a little ill-timed and premature to make this investment. It's important that we are investing to address the root causes of crime, not treating symptoms.

It is great to see efforts to support reconciliation with a \$500,000 investment for the advancement of the Framework Agreement. I'm happy to hear the commitment from government to work with representatives of BIPOC communities and the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to review legislation, regulation and policies. While it is nice to hear this commitment, it's important that government makes a good faith and active effort to do the work that's desperately needed to support these communities.

I would mention a tweet that Senator Brian Francis put out this morning about us having to do the work, us having to do the work. Not being taught by members of the BIPOC communities or the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. We need to do the work. We need to research it. We need to understand it so that we can speak to it. That is so important.

I'm also happy to see that a new research position will be created to support gender and diversity analysis in government. Women make up half the population, yet are underrepresented – my tongue is starting to get dry – underrepresented in leadership positions. As a result, decisions don't necessarily reflect women's interests or needs.

It's helpful to keep in mind that when policies are good for women, they're good for all Islanders.

I would have liked to have seen more specifics regarding culture investments. Island cultural performers have almost no ability to perform or earn income. I'm sure the vibrant and dynamic arts and culture community appreciates the kind words, but as they say: Exposure doesn't pay the bills.

To close, while we are still in the pandemic and the response to it, we must plan for the future. And have a unique opportunity to choose a different path than the status quo.

Our plans including current investments and expenditures should consider the foundational changes that we can and should be taking now to redefine what prosperity looks like for all Islanders.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear! Hear!

Speaker: Hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you Mr. Speaker, and thank the hon. minister.

I obviously know the feeling sitting over there and after you're done it's a real relief, so enjoy this for what you can.

Even as the hardship of these times weigh upon us all, I believe in the capacity of Islanders to shoulder a great burden. As a province, we have lived through difficulties before. And even after the terrible costs of war, economic depression, and illness, we have always emerged with strength, maturity and in time, good cheer. We will move through this time as well.

With history as our guide, we will learn to adapt, grow, and excel.

I want to pay special tribute to every Islander who has worked so hard to protect our collective good through individual sacrifice.

Striking the balance between the desires of an individual with needs of a community is the truest of people and as Islanders, I believe we have acted in the most responsible, sedate and clear-eyed way. Unlike many parts of the world, Prince Edward Island retains enormous reservoirs of faith in our institutions and our leadership. We look towards governments, experts, local leaders with respect and as a result, our social cohesion withstands even great tests and struggles.

In part, I believe this resilience is founded on the intimacy of our province and the true

respect and deference we both offer and expect from one another. In that way, our smallness is the wellspring of our success. Over the last several weeks, the members of the Liberal caucus have consistently urged the province toward a clear, articulate plan to deal with the ravages caused by COVID-19. In our role as opposition politicians and as citizens, we will remain concerned. As I will address later, we are extremely concerned with some of the projections in this budget. We are concerned that government are sugarcoating some of the realities we may have to face in an effort to hide its lack of real planning and challenges.

In health care, Islanders understood the need to flatten the curve, to take the steps necessary to avoid the terrible danger of overburdening our health care system. All of us fully understood that challenge and again, it is to our province's credit that we listened to the warnings and avoided the dangers that may have overwhelmed us.

There is a lesson from this. Our task now must be to build a plan that copes with the threat of a second wave, while simultaneously ensuring that access to surgeries, primary care and treatment is unimpeded.

In education, we have pressed government to describe its plan for students and families and most especially in the context of a potential second wave. We simply cannot allow a generation of young Islanders to lose too much time in a world that will place new and extraordinary demands on their knowledge and their talents.

Economically, the members of the Third Party are deeply worried about the prospects in store for small business and the thousands of Islanders who keep our province moving.

Our first issue must be this: How do we protect, sustain and improve the capacity of Islanders to succeed in a changed world? In that context, I want to draw attention to the role of essential workers. In many ways, the lockdown phase of the pandemic was a massive reminder of the role played by many individual Islanders: truckers, grocery store employees, long-term care professionals. In every case, we truly learned the meaning of the word essential. I continue to believe, as do all members of the

Liberal caucus that we need to speak about fair pay for hard work and that a reevaluation of the way we distribute our collective wealth is required.

If government takes full advantage of the opportunity to renew our approaches, there are other areas that require a deep examination. Over the years, several generations of politicians have made commitments to better Internet access. During my time in government, we pledged better service, but as everyone in here knows, we did not deliver as much as we tried. We need to move beyond bland assurances of hope. Over the past couple of months, we have seen just how essential Internet access is. It's needed to keep in touch with family members, it is a prerequisite to learning and our small businesses clearly need the best possible access to the Internet. For all those reasons, we need to move beyond target dates that shift with political timetables or the passing complaints of the day and move toward real action.

Similarly, I believe we also need a rapid understanding of the opportunities government can provide to students and families in the post-secondary field. Too often now, I'm hearing from people who may want to take a gap year or whom may be content with the long wait toward recovery. I think as community leaders, we need to underline this reality to all Islanders. The coming months can be used. Distance learning for university is an opportunity. Skills development through Holland College may be a real option. Getting a GED or learning how to type or develop bookkeeping skills, all these solutions are out there waiting to be taken. All of this is available and this coming year may be the time for thousands of Islanders to seek education and skills improvement.

Government needs to get on the case. Government must engage with its educational partners and with Islanders to put in place the kind of vigorous, imaginative, educational agenda that will truly help individuals move forward. In other words, we can use this time to our advantage.

As a result of the pandemic, most jurisdictions are beginning from a level

playing field. New advantages will emerge and those places that are best capable of responding to a changed world will best succeed. In many ways, that was the effort made by our former Liberal government. We were not a flashy government, but we did our best to keep the government running well and we worked hard to build an economy that truly encouraged prosperity and growth for everyone.

We also recognized the dangers that always circle our world and that is the main reason we ran successive budgetary surpluses that totaled more than \$130 million. We did that to provide a cushion, a safeguard against a rainy day. Well, today it is rainy and looking back, we are very proud of the fact that we did all that we could to prepare for that humbling and difficult reality of COVID-19.

Today, we see government's response to those difficulties. We recognize the trials and tribulations of the last several months and we are just as aware of the grim dangers that surround us still. We are very, very concerned that today's budget does not truly reflect the realities of our economy. In recent days, the minister of tourism has offered bleak forecasts about revenue losses this year and yet, unbelievably, government is forecasting an increase in retail sales tax revenue.

In this part of the House, we are absolutely mystified by a belief that sales taxes this year will rise and frankly, that point alone raises serious questions. Similarly at the time when thousands of Islanders are depending on federal income programs and expectations that income tax revenues will rise exceedingly optimistic. There appears to have been little effort by government to control any aspect of its spending in light of the crisis. In fact, budgets for every single government department have risen. Now we understand perfectly the need for continuity of services during a difficult time but rising budgets for every department is puzzling.

We are extremely concerned that instead of a reinvention of many government programs, we have simply seen a government that spends more and predicts infusions of cash that may not be realistic. It is one thing to be optimistic; it is another matter to engage in lack of caution. Perhaps in the days and weeks to come, we will see

an economic boom. Perhaps government will see its HST revenues rise and income tax and business tax and property tax. Perhaps this magical world will come true. Perhaps it makes sense to substantially increase the budgets of every single department while Islanders look anxiously to the news every day waiting to find out if federal income support programs will continue.

Perhaps, the caution we have advised is too pessimistic. Perhaps we just need a little jolt of budgetary optimism to move our economy forward and pass the worst crisis this planet has ever seen since the Second World War. Perhaps parliamentary democracy finds its best outcomes after stern and serious discussion because issues faced by citizens deserve sobriety and difficult questions geared toward the promotion of new solutions.

After the first review of budget documents, we are not seeing a government that is truly willing to deal with many of these issues. Islanders need a plan for our future. We need a vision and a realistic understanding of the situation we are in to ensure our future, our Islanders' future, is protected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. member, do you want to adjourn?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that debate on the motion be now adjourned.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, that this House adjourn until June 18th, at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The Legislature adjourned until Thursday, June 18th at 2:00 p.m.