

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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The Legislature sat at 1:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back to my colleagues in the Legislature and all those who are tuned in at home, particularly the members who participating via our hybrid model, welcome.

I wanted to just begin my brief remarks by saying that PEI Fashion Weekend is a go this weekend, produced by Jem's Boutique, organized by Julia Campbell and Bianca Garcia. It's the first ever fashion show – music, pop-ups of local designers, celebrating the diverse, rich style and fashion sector that we have here in PEI. I will speak for myself and many members of our caucus in here that it's probably a good idea for all of us to take that in and see if we can get a little more up to date in our fashion.

I also wanted to wish Team Schut from the Cornwall Curling Club. They left this morning to participate in the Canadian Junior Curling Championships in Stratford, Ontario. Mitchell Schut and Chase MacMillan, Cruz Pineau and Liam Kelly along with coach Pat Quilty. I think a good experienced team heading up here from PEI and I wish them well.

I also want to congratulate a young farmer from out my way, Konor Younker from Wheatley River with his Easter Beef Show ring debut yesterday showing his 1,025-pound cross-bred heifer, a family tradition that continues on there. I do look forward this afternoon to participating at the Easter Beef Show and getting around and talking to farmers and Islanders about the exciting news yesterday with the potato ban being lifted and some optimism that might come with that for the agriculture sector in general. I encourage all Islanders, of course, to get out and take in this wonderful Island tradition.

And all my colleagues in here, I wish them a successful day and a good weekend.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker. I think you're very dapper today, Premier, by the way, just from this vantage point.

One of the things that has really affected all of us in all of our regular routines over the last couple of years is that our activities were really disrupted. We weren't able to see the people we typically saw. Many of the groups that we may have belonged to had to disband and events were cancelled or postponed because we simply just couldn't get together.

One of the distinguishing features of our little province is this strong, really strong sense of community connections that we have. I think Islanders responded – and I don't know what's happened in other provinces – but I see it really strongly here in Prince Edward Island where Islanders responded to that loss of connection by setting up a whole bunch of Facebook groups in order to stay in touch with their neighbours and friends and people who had similar interests.

I look at them now as a really invaluable resource when it comes to knowing what's going on in your communities and staying in touch with those people who we used to see on a very regular basis. I know in my own district, there's a few of them which sprung up and now have hundreds, if not thousands of members, ones like the Argyle Shore group, the West River Friends and Neighbours, the I Love Canoe Cove group, the Bonshaw News, Events and WI notes, and some of the community hall in my district as well – the Emyvale Rec Centre and the Afton Hall – they have obviously, a physical presence in their communities, but they also have a strong online presence and are there to remain connected, or allow people to remain connected at this time.

So, whether it's a lost dog or a weather and road report, or if you're just trying to find a local plumber or a dentist, they've become the place to go in order to stay in touch with

your friends and neighbours. There's something quite charming about that where technology can be beautiful and, in this case, I think we have maintained, again, that really traditional sense of bond that we have in our communities and across this Island through Facebook groups and things like that.

I want to thank all of those people in my own district, District 17 New Haven-Rocky Point, and also across this whole Island who took the time to set up these groups and maintain these groups that provide such an important service for all Islanders now. I suspect that even after things open up and we return to whatever normal looks like in the future, I suspect that those groups will remain there and allow us this other option of staying in touch and maintaining those strong bonds that typify what's one of the lovely things about living on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise in the Legislature and say hello to everyone back in Evangeline-Miscouche and all Islanders.

I'd like to wish everyone at the Easter Beef Show all the best this afternoon. Try to get over and take a walk through. It was great news yesterday to see the borders soon opening and I wish the potato industry all the best going forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today. I wanted to welcome all the social workers that may be watching this from across the province. I want to recognize that March is Social Workers Month. With their unique training

and experience, social workers can help people dealing with a range of issues, including relationship problems, stress, depression and anxiety, grief and loss, abuse and bullying, or the pressures of a caregiver.

My department is fortunate to employ many social workers – a lot, mostly in child protection, but also social programs and clinical assessments – who deal with some of the most heart-wrenching situations on a daily basis.

I want to say thank you to all social workers on PEI. You've continued to provide an integral service to Islanders during some of the hardest times of their lives while facing challenges of your own.

While I'm on my feet, some people have – many, actually, have commented on the little brooch I'm wearing. It's obviously a Ukrainian flag. Of course, we're all aware of the tragic invasion happening over there. I'm wearing it to show support for the Ukrainian people. It was made out of beads by Thea Craig of the 4-H Wheatley River Club. She gave those to all the members and judges last week and so, I wanted to thank her for her support of the Ukrainian people, as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

And I want to give a shout out, say hello to all of the great people that maybe watching up in District 26. As we all know, coming up next year in 2023 from February 18th, to March 5th is the Canada Games, the Canada Winter Games. And coming up on April 7th is the Canada Games Volunteer center grand opening, so I certainly want to thank all of the ones that have signed up already to be volunteers for the Canada Games coming up next February and into early March. And certainly, encourage all Islanders that they would volunteer at this great event.

I also want to recognize corporate sponsors that have come forward. Just very recently there have been an additional four corporate sponsors including: Grant Thornton,

Maritime Electric, Coach Atlantic and the Dairy Farmers of PEI.

Finally, I would like to echo comments from the Minister of Social Development and Housing on social worker month and the importance of social workers. Social workers are an important part of our health care system, especially in the mental health field. They provide invaluable support to Islanders, making a positive difference in people's lives each and every day, and I do want to thank them for the work that they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to rise on this rainy, icy Friday. I know there's lots of kids and families at home, so I hope you're all having a good day and I certainly want to thank my parents for taking my children today, always appreciated, mom and dad. And I know sometimes they'll tune in with the kids as well, so that's great.

Also, just a big hello to all the folks in District 9, Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

Along with my colleagues, the Minister of Social Development and Housing as well as the Minister of Health and Wellness, I, too, want to recognize the amazing work that social workers do on behalf of Islanders, especially our children. Social workers can play an invaluable role in supporting the mental and emotional well-being of our students through our student well-being teams for example. The work they do is so vital, and I also want to thank our social workers for all they do for us.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I hope everyone has a great day today.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And a happy Friday to everyone. I'd like to say hello to everybody back in beautiful District 8 Stanhope-Marshfield.

Yesterday was the Easter Beef Show, and I just want to give a congratulations to Parker Smith. Parker is a 4-H'er that had the grand champion animal yesterday. Parker, I coached in baseball, even last year I coached him and Parker's from Sherwood; a city boy. A city boy that was destined to be born in the country, because he's 100% farmer and he's a really great young man. And he works hard at this, and he deserves that 100%. So, I'm rushing out to the sale this afternoon, and it's been probably 15 years I've worked this sale and it's something I look forward to every year.

Even before I got into politics, I got to see politicians there, I got to meet them. I encouraged them to spend money like the used to on animals. I know our caucus was there last year, and I didn't the other caucuses there last year, so a little challenge to get out and at least see you there.

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct)

Mr. Thompson: Have a great day.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I forgot my printed note upstairs, but welcome to online visitors, especially those from Charlottetown-Brighton, my district.

The Leader of the Third Party recently complained about the high oil prices and the cost of filling his tank. Now, the hon. leader is not a constituent of mine, but every constituent of mine who still heats their house with oil is in the same situation. Prices have skyrocketed, and that situation is true for every homeowner in this province who still heats with oil. The high prices of course, (Indistinct), punishing us for still using oil, which we shouldn't. And for homeowners, the high prices are at the same time also the carrot. It always pays to make your house more energy efficient, and if our oil prices are double, so will your return on investment to improve energy efficiency in your own house also double.

You can of course get even more carrots though Efficiency PEI, who will even give you a heat pump and other measures for free if your income is low enough. Whatever you do, I guarantee that your return on investment will be much better than the long-term savings account.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party also is promoting that the government simply cuts gas prices. While the government of course could do that, it is a terrible idea. I mean, just look at the past and see the effects. The Liberal government in fact did reduce gas prices twice, a couple of cents under the Ghiz government and two more cents under the Wade government, which this government has continued now for three years.

So, we have spent well over \$100 million of taxpayers' money encouraging more use of gas, and the result is that Islanders are now ill-prepared to make the necessary steps to lower their gas costs. I recently announced in this House the departure of my trusted van, and I thank the many members who gave me personal condolences. So, I now share my son's car, and we are both very pleased. He really likes that I fill the gas tank and I really like not having to worry about buying a new car right now and also realize real savings such as not paying a \$600 insurance bill. Still, it was shocking to pay \$120 to fill my tank and I know that about 100,000 car owners on PEI are in this same situation. The best way to fight this is of course to fill the car with passengers who contribute to the cost. Four people in the car will reduce the cost to a quarter, and I know many smart Islanders are already doing this. So, I'm encouraging smart Islanders to keep doing that, and the hon. MLAs here in this House who have to drive far, to share their car as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's a pleasure to rise. Hi to everyone watching from District 5 Mermaid-Stratford this morning and everybody joining us online.

Many have spoken about social workers today, so far, and I would also like to add my voice to how important social workers are. A couple of weeks ago I spoke about a young woman in this Legislature and her experience after a traumatic event and the fact that there is a wait time, 10-12 months in order to get counselling services for that traumatic event. I was on the phone last night with a social worker who was trying to help me – sorry – get her counselling. I think that that speaks volumes to what social workers do for everyday Islanders when government lets them down.

So, to every single social worker out there that goes above and beyond to help each and every Islander the way that you do, thank you, because you're picking up pieces of people's lives that others have left behind. So, on March, this Social Workers Awareness Month, thank you for everything that you do, because you truly make a difference in Islanders lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

Today I want to rise and recognize a very important group of people that do tremendous work, on behalf of all Islanders. Quite often while we're asleep in our beds in the middle of the night, staff from the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and private contractors that we work with are out on the roads to ensure that when we do start our commute in the morning that the roads are passable and safe to be able to do so.

So, as I said, while many of us were probably still asleep. We had crews out on the roads spreading brine. We had supervisors out inspecting roads. We had people in our dispatch centres as well as monitoring the weather conditions to see what the weather patterns were. And working closing with the Public Schools Branch and the Public Service Commission to just see what measures should be put in place to ensure that Islanders would be safe this morning on their commute.

I would like to thank and let these individuals know that they're greatly appreciated; although we don't always see them, they are there to help us.

With that, I'd also like to remind the travelling public that it is very important before you do get on the road to make sure that all of your windows, not just your windshield, but all of your windows are scrapped appropriately so that you have a full vision while you're on the road driving.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to everybody tuning in from Charlottetown-Victoria and from all over the province, and good morning to my colleagues. Happy Friday.

I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank social workers as well; I wish I could do more than just say thank you to them.

There are so many children and youth and their families in this province in crisis right now and suffering in silence. I had a conversation with someone the other day, who was calling to just talk about how we need to change the system and talking about how sometimes government doesn't realize when their own get in the way of helping families in crisis; you know, calling for the *Mental Health Act* review, looking at how accessibility supports does include mental health now, yet counselling services are not under that umbrella.

Government has to look at how its own system is contributing to families suffering in silence. So, to our social workers who the Member from Mermaid-Stratford said, are left to pick up the pieces that have fallen all around these children and their families, thank you so much.

You understand unlike people who are not in the counselling realm, you understand how much time and energy goes into creating consistent therapeutic relationships where trust is built, and harm and trauma are reduced. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I know that your stretched thin. I know that you're not able to provide the

level of care and service that you know is best and that you want to provide. And that, you know, anything – any trauma or any tragedy or anything that comes out of this, you know, if you've done your best, that is not on you, that is on the system in which you work. That I myself, and I know my colleagues are working very hard to change.

So, to all those social workers out there thank you. Keep doing what you do; it is so valued, so needed in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to recognize all the parents who are out there with all the kids home today. Also trying to work from home, I'm one of them here today, so you might hear some kids in the background as I speak today time to time, but we're all trying to walk this balance through these troubled times.

I'd also like to recognize it's not just hard work it's – it takes a truly empathetic person to be a good social worker and being in that position and being empathetic is something that wears a person down.

When I was out door-knocking, I talked to several former social workers who had just been worn down by the system. There's no way you can help everybody and being unable to do so just wears someone like that down, so the good workers take on extra emotional load and it just wears them down and the turnover and burn out rate in that profession is far too high. We have to find a way to both help them, pay them, and address the issue overall.

So, a shout-out to everybody that makes those sacrifices for those who are most vulnerable in our society.

On a happier note, I'd like to wish a happy birthday to Harper yesterday, belated, she's one year old today, so yay, happy birthday my baby girl. Also, to Oliver, who's birthday is today, seven years old today, so happy birthday to Oliver.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Importance of Representation

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've been thinking a lot this week about how important the make-up of our House is.

The *Emancipation Day Proclamation Act* spoke to why representation in this House really matters and yesterday's equity report card again showed us the impact representation has on this House. While the increase on the report card was only about a five-point gain, it is nonetheless the highest grade a government has ever secured and while there is inarguably more work to do, it is worthy of taking a moment to celebrate that gain.

There are some studies that suggest the magic number for having women's involvement fundamentally change things in a group is 33%. On average, you don't see significant changes in how decisions are made as the result of having only one or two women on a board or a committee or what have you. But when you reach a third, things really begin to shift and you're seeing that direct outcome in action.

The last two years have seen more women's issues discussed in this House than ever before, and we know that it's a direct result of having women involved. My colleague from Charlottetown-Victoria Park often says that women in decision-making positions bring their families and their communities with them to those tables.

There have been more conversations in this House on sexual assault, date rape drugs, pelvic floor health, UTIs, non-disclosure agreements, period poverty, women in the economy, women's working conditions, poverty elimination, the safety work that women do; I could go and on.

Even still, I find myself thinking about all the conversations that aren't taking place in here because they aren't someone's lived experience or lived experience that an MLA is familiar with. As legislators, we need to make sure we are doing everything possible

now to ensure that future versions of this space are as diverse as possible in every sense of the word.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Wait Times for Sexual Assault Survivors

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to take a moment to just put a trigger warning out because I'll be speaking about sexual assault.

On December 8th, the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Center publicly shared that the waiting time for sexual assault survivors to receive services was 10-12 months because there's a lack a resources. Let's be honest, resources equal funding. Sexual assault survivors are waiting 10-12 months for services because this government didn't invest the money to help them. It doesn't get more downstream then that.

The Minister Responsible for the Status of Women shared that the government is going to make the funding available on April 1st, the new fiscal year to address it, but why didn't we just fund it when we found out about it?

An Hon. Member: Hear! Hear!

Ms. Beaton: I've seen this government put forward special warrants for pavement, but when it comes to people, they wait for the next fiscal year, it doesn't make sense to me.

This province does not have a 24/7 service to support survivors to the hospital, to the police, to court. This province does not have any services to support survivors of sexual assault under the age of 16 years old.

Yesterday, this House unanimously passed a motion supporting investment in upstream mental health initiatives. One in five children are abused and many of them are sexually assaulted. This is an adverse childhood experience. This is an issue that requires fundamental change.

So, what does upstream look like here? It's education. Address the root of the problem

so sexual assault doesn't happen. A sexual violence prevention and public education coordinator, that is not a pilot project to do the community-based education that is needed to change culture at a very young age and throughout the adult's entire lifespan.

But we have to also address the current need. Mid-stream investment means positive support for a survivor from day one by providing a single point of access to all information needed. It means providing a resource that will follow the survivor through the process, including immediate trauma counselling.

We owe this to survivors; we cannot abandon them anymore.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Bruce Donaldson

Mr. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the significant contributions that Bruce Donaldson has made during his 16 years as the head coach of the UPEI Women's Hockey Team. Bruce Donaldson, as you may be aware, is stepping down as the head coach of the UPEI Hockey Panthers at the end of the season, which we are all in this House hoping is late, late Sunday evening.

Donaldson's coaching highlights with the UPEI Women's Hockey Team include winning the AUS Championships in 2011/12 in the final game that was ever played at the Dalhousie Memorial Arena and also the Sport PEI Team of the Year, winning that in 2013.

In addition, Coach Donaldson was an assistant coach with the World University silver medalist Team Canada back in 2015. He was also a recipient of Hockey PEI's President's trophy in 2016, and that was for his leadership and commitment to the development of female hockey here in the province.

Donaldson has worked tirelessly off the ice to improve the women's hockey program,

and also noted that his proudest accomplishment from an academic standpoint has been the number of Panther graduates who have successfully pursued their careers as optometrists, doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, and of course, many of those Panthers here on PEI.

And of course, I bring this information forward as Donaldson and the UPEI women's hockey Panthers are hosting the country this weekend. UPEI women's hockey Panthers will host the top-ranked Concordia tonight at 7:00 p.m. at the Bell Aliant Centre in the MacLauchlan Arena in their quarter-final matchup.

As a coach of girls' hockey myself, my hope is that the rink will be full cheering on our UPEI women's hockey Panthers as they push towards a national title.

I wish Coach Donaldson, who I am privileged to call a friend, also a friend and a champion of girls' hockey here on PEI, the best of luck this weekend, and also, congratulations on such a distinguished career. I hope that you get to spend more time with your family; of course, lots more time with the grandkids. All the best in your future endeavours, Coach Donaldson.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thought the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot was going to leave the Chamber for a second, but I wanted to stand in response to an important series of questions she asked yesterday; one in particular to me about the funding for foster parents and the funding that is provided under the grandparent and Alternative Caregiver Program.

I think I would just begin by saying that I've had numerous meetings in the past, or since I've been Premier, with Don Avery and Dr. Christina Murray and others, but it had been a little bit since I had been totally familiar with the program, and rather than not giving

a fulsome answer, I wanted to take a little time to review.

Essentially, I think both programs are extremely important. Under our grandparent and Alternative Caregiver Program, there are about 200 kids in care. Under the foster parent program, there are about 90 kids in care; very, very important that we provide for those. I think – I appreciate the passion and perseverance that the Member from Summerside-Wilmot has brought to this issue, as I appreciate the care and attention and direction that the Minister of Social Development and Housing and the staff have put on these issues.

I think it's fair to say that the grandparent and Alternative Caregiver Program that was brought forward in 2017 has grown by leaps and bounds but requires some tweaks.

All of that to say, that I have directed the minister and his staff to work as fast as they can to bring consistency across the board in the funding of these programs, with the overall goal and focus being on the kids they serve, not so much the people who provide the service.

So, we will endeavour to get this done immediately, and the focus should always, and must always be, on the kids we serve, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the hon. Leader of the Third Party asked about government supporting Crown corporations to ensure fees did not increase for Islanders this year.

The Island Waste Management Corporation is the only self-sustaining government Crown corporation which will be identified to receive a one-time financial grant to prevent a fee increase.

This is one more way and one more area that our government demonstrates support for Islanders during these challenging times.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

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

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

As has already been made note of this morning in the House, yesterday, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women released its Equality Report Card.

While it highlighted some of government's successes, and there were certainly some, it also noted areas where government has failed to make progress.

It's widely recognized that democracies with proportional representation are far more likely to have more representation of women.

Proportional representation prioritization

A question to the Premier: Knowing this, why did you fail to make a citizens' assembly on proportional representation a priority in this Budget?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I agree very much that the makeup of this Legislature and the various and different backgrounds that we all come from have made for a very productive Legislature and I think one that all Islanders are very proud of.

This Legislature passed a motion with a citizens' assembly to bring it into development and we have committed to do that. As I said, it's something that we can do within our operating budget. It's not about money. I think when we get through the Legislature and we get some of these things that we're dealing with that are most pressing dealt with, that we will proceed with that. I've been a big proponent of looking at our democracy and making sure that we always look for ways to improve it.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

There's a quote that stands out for me in the report card and it's this, and I quote: "The pandemic exposed and worsened long-standing crises in our system."

However, this government did very little to analyze impacts on different populations. They did even less to address the different impacts.

Addressing impacts affecting women

A question to the Premier: After failing to address these different impacts for the past two years, why should women and other Islanders believe that you will actually address them going forward?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, that the grade reflected in the report is a positive one. It shows that we've made some strides, but it also, as the Leader of the Opposition highlights, that we need to continue to do more. We're trying our very best through some difficult challenges to navigate our province through and that will continue to be a priority for us. I hope we can build on the successes that we've had to identify the shortcomings and work to make things better for Islanders, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

On that vein, the report card notes that a committee was struck in November 2020 to develop a provincial health strategy for women and Islanders who are gender-diverse. Of course, this women's health strategy was one of the signature promises in this government's last election platform.

Women's health strategy

A question the Premier: Will Islanders see this women's health strategy before the next election, or do you plan to recycle this

commitment for your next platform?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: It's certainly an area that we are very, very focused on. By my count, there's still a lot of time left in the mandate to continue to get things done. I'm trying our best. As I say, we've had a few distractions along the way here, but it remains a focus for us and I think it should be a focus for all Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The report card itself applauds the introduction of new emergency leave under the *Employment Standards Act*, which does many things, but for example, allows workers to take unpaid leave in COVID-related circumstances.

However, like so many things, the devil is in the details. This emergency leave is only in place as long as we remain in a state of public health emergency. Our current public health emergency declaration is set to end on April 7th, the same day that we are expected to move to the final stage of the Moving On from COVID transition plan.

State of emergency/access to leave

Question to the Premier: Are you expecting to end the state of emergency on April 7th, and with it, workers' access to emergency leave?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition talks about the state of public health emergency that we have been in for two years now, believe it or not. I will confer with Dr. Morrison as we lead up towards whether or not we need to extend that, but I've been in conversation with the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture and even if it were to end at some point, whether it's April 7th or April 30th or

whenever it would be, that we would continue that program into the fall for workers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks for that response, Premier. Glad to have that on the record.

Based on community perceptions, one of the Province's greatest failures when it comes to achieving full gender equity is in addressing poverty. That's one of the worst marks across the report card that the Province got.

Poverty is exacerbated by the challenges that we're seeing, things like inflation of housing and discrimination and, as I mentioned in my first question, the pandemic. It's easy, fairly easy to implement Band-Aid fixes, but we need bigger picture solutions that deal more deeply with access to and with addressing and eliminating poverty.

Change for elimination of poverty

A question to the Premier: What structural changes is your government proposing to eliminate poverty in our province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a deep and complex question for sure, that probably will require more than the time than I'm allotted to answer the question. But I do fundamentally agree that a lot of the challenges that we are facing as a province, whether they're from health, from mental health, and from other components, are all tied to where we come from and how much money we make, or how little money we make. And I think that those are the areas that government continues to focus on. A lot of what we're trying to do through initiatives like the Alliance for Mental Well-being is to make investments in key areas up and down the stream to avoid some of those challenges or to help mitigate them into the future.

So, I say it's a bigger discussion than what I could do here, but it's a top of mind issue for our government.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday we finally got a glimpse of what the government wants to do about carbon pricing, and the short version is that they're going to kick it down the road. All we have is a one-year stopgap bill that we're going to have to renegotiate next year.

Long-term solution for carbon pricing

Question for the Minister of Finance: Why do you still not have a long-term solution for carbon pricing? Did your negotiations with the federal government fail?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, that gets negotiated in my department; common knowledge that that is negotiated by my department. And the reason why we don't have a long-term agreement is it took us two years to get a one-year agreement with the federal government because we want to protect Islanders in the middle of a pandemic. We didn't want to see gas prices go through the roof in the middle of a pandemic because of a carbon tax.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: And then, there was a federal election and now the federal government is telling us we have to have it done by April 1st. So, if you don't want it, you go talk to your federal counterparts over there from the Liberal side. You talk to your federal counterparts if you don't want it. We are working with the federal government, we're bringing it in, and we're negotiating our three-year deal right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Normally when government makes decisions that will have a financial impact on Islanders and Island businesses,

it's common courtesy to give advance notice like we do with the minimum wage increases. We let them know in advance so they can plan. Now we're seeing the carbon change come in with a week notice.

Impact on Islanders re: carbon tax

Question to perhaps the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action: How is that respectful of Islanders and Island businesses?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: Everyone knows it's coming.

CBC was talking about it on the news back in October. They were saying, "Where is it?" And they knew that we had to bring it in. And we didn't bring it in because there became a federal election and then we were asking for things – we were asking to keep some of our exemptions in place so that we didn't hurt Islanders in the way that obviously some of these other parties want us to hurt them.

You know what? I think that was the responsible thing to do. So, Islanders have been aware because it's been in the news for a number of years; federal government has laid out clearly what their plan is. So, any Islander is free to go and look at the federal government's mandate on this, and what their intentions are to do. And quite frankly, that's our deal, because there's no way for us to say we don't want that. That is what we're going to get, and as carbon tax continues to increase, it's a federal mandate and that's what our arrangement will be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives were in opposition, they strongly opposed the carbon tax. The current minister of environment even said –

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: The current minister of the environment even said that he didn't trust government with the revenues. Now these

same Conservatives seem to be addicted to those revenues and are keeping most of it for themselves instead of rebating it back to Islanders, all Islanders, as is done in most other provinces.

Carbon levy rebate to Islanders (further)

Question to the minister: Why don't you trust Islanders enough to give them back their own money?

Ms. Beaton: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Clearly, I didn't trust the Liberals and I still don't. So, nothing has changed in my stance.

I have been quite honest with this House, I don't necessarily agree with a carbon tax, but what we're trying to do is help people beat a carbon tax by turning PEI carbon neutral. That's what our net zero plan is about, so people will not be impacted by a carbon tax.

Quite frankly, the deal that was in place by the previous Liberal government stays in place. Every new dollar that's collected from this new deal will go back to Islanders. If the hon. member over there wants us to undo what the Liberals did, then Islanders will get, not a four cent increase on gas April 1st, they'll get a seven cent increase of gas on April 1st, because we're paying \$13 million now keeping that lower so Islanders aren't impacted.

So, if the hon. member wants seven cents on gas, say so.

Mr. McNeilly: Watch the ratings.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We recently learned that the Queens Arms hotel is being torn down. This hotel houses many people in need of transitional or supportive housing, and it is a great loss to

both the government and the people who call this place home for the moment.

Hotels may not be the ideal option, but it's better than nothing.

Plans for Queens Arms residents

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: What contingency plans are in place for the people who seek shelter at the Queens Arms hotel to ensure that they still have access to shelter?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Queens Arms hotel is one of the places we use; we call it scattered housing. They provide a very valuable service and I want to thank them. It's some of our most complex clients that go in there, and they're in very difficult situations often.

I think maybe the member across might have some misinformation. I think it was printed in the media that it was being torn down, but it was since actually changed and retracted. In fact, they're not tearing it down and they're going to build behind it.

But it's still important to have contingency plans in place, and that's why we have multiple partners that we use for that sort of transitional housing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That certainly is a relief.

Giving people shelter in hotels as a long-term solution does not work. In fact, I heard of a single mother with two teenaged children. The department gave her and her children shelter in a hotel and say they are helping to find her a suitable home. She's not able to find a suitable home, and now Child Protection Services is threatening to take away her children because they are sleeping in the same room.

Shelter for families

To the minister: What would you say to this family?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The details of individual cases are extremely challenging at times, and this would be one of those cases. I know the department works with every case to find the best outcome. I won't comment on this specific case. I do know the department is looking into it and they're looking for that.

Really, I'm not sure that what the member's suggesting is entirely accurate, but again, I won't comment completely.

Anyway, I know the member across brings lots and lots of individual cases to the department, and in every case, we work with her and her constituents to resolve them, and that's what we'll do here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: The problem is they should not have to come to their MLA to have these problems resolved. And these are not just one-off cases. I did not ask you to speak to the individual case.

Supports for housing clients

We need to be supporting people to find suitable housing. One of government's solutions is to put people who are in need of support to live independently in seniors' independent living apartments, and this is not working. There are so many cases of this. Often, they cannot function healthfully enough to live peacefully with neighbours.

The minister admitted this was a problem months ago.

To the minister: What are you doing about this?

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

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, I think this is an issue, and this is something that's extremely challenging.

We have people with complex needs. They need to be housed. We have various transitional housing that we use, including the Queens Arms and other hotels, and we have other transitional housing as well. I think I tabled a document with all of that listed.

What we're working to do is provide additional transitional housing, housing that has the proper supports in place and the wraparound services, much like we do in other places. In fact, those particular situations where people have been put into seniors' buildings where it hasn't been successful, what we do is we work to provide them a different place where hopefully they can be successful.

People are on a continuum where they need different supports, and sometimes, their position changes. We may think they may be suitable and then they're not, and so we work with them to provide supports for them where they're at.

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

Ms. Bernard: I've reached out to the department a few times about individuals in similar situations of requiring supports in order to live healthfully and safely, and I'm usually told something like: There are numerous supports in place, a collaborative team is involved, and that the goal is to provide assistance required.

The problem is that I hear from organizations and individuals that there are supposed to be collaborative teams involved, and then they never see them. This was also backed up in the *Through the Cracks* articles. In fact, we have lost contracts with landlords over this.

This affects Islanders.

Proof of collaborative teams in housing

Question to the minister: Do these teams actually exist and can you please table any proof that they do?

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

Mr. Trivers: The Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park is making some pretty large allegations there against the frontline workers and the organizations that do this great work. They definitely do exist. They definitely do the work. In fact, some of the stories even that the member has referenced, these teams have been there, they have been collaborating, they have been looking after these people.

The flipside of this coin is we have to respect people's human rights and that's what we do. If they don't want to go somewhere where we suggest they do, then we can't put them there. I mean, there's lots of cases I can tell you where people should go to a community care facility and we work to get them there, but they say, no, that's not where I want to be. So, we end up putting them somewhere else. We put the supports and services around them, and we offer them those supports and services, but we respect their right to choose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Recently, I asked the minister of transportation if he would lower public transportation fees for seniors as the government has done for children. So, it was welcome news to hear the government announce that it is lowering monthly transit passes for both seniors and students to \$10 for the month of April.

Free public transit for seniors (further)

Question to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure: How long will this reduced transit pass be available?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

First, a slight correction on that. The pass for those of 18 years of age and older including seniors has actually gone from \$58 down to \$20. For those under the age of 18, it's no charge currently.

It's a well-known fact that we have a rural transit pilot out there right now where, also, you can get a ride for \$2 from Souris to Charlottetown. I mean, that's cheaper than a cup of coffee in the morning.

As we move forward as this pilot develops and we learn more from it, we'll be reviewing all fares and routes.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Is this an early April Fool's joke? Will you commit to extending this reduced fare for seniors and students for the rest of the year so they can plan ahead on their transportation needs?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

I don't know what the reference is to an April Fool's joke. We did announce this back several weeks ago. I have a very important announcement today as well with regards to the expansion of our rural transit pilot for western PEI. As I said previously, as this pilot develops, as we get more feedback from the ridership and users, we certainly will re-evaluate all programs that we have within the transit system here on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we take a hard look at the realities of work on PEI through the eyes of workers, it becomes clear that we have a long way to go to make PEI the best place to live and work for everyone.

Nova Scotia and PEI are the only two provinces in Canada in which overtime pay doesn't start until 48 hours worked per week, with the majority of provinces starting overtime at 40 hours.

Overtime pay and recruitment

Question to the minister of economic growth: How does tying for the worst overtime pay in Canada support recruitment and retention of workers on PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Exactly this is why we're doing our comprehensive review of the *Employment Standards Act*. These are all issues that need to be looked at and these are issues that they are going to be looking at. It's well underway as well as this and many more, but we'll have to wait until that comes back.

Obviously, change is going to happen. We just have to wait and see what happens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, Canadian Institute for Health Information for 2021 ranked PEI dead last regarding cataract wait times; I've said this before. The minister's previous responses – of health – did not include how many times the 11 individuals have had their surgeries cancelled or postponed. I want to recognize the reality of surgery postponements.

I have a constituent, who I will call Danny, has been waiting one year for cataract surgery. It's been postponed twice in 2021 and is rescheduled for later this month.

Since his first cancelled postponement, he is now legally blind and on social assistance.

Cataract surgery wait times (further)

Question to the minister of health: What are Danny's chances of getting his cataract surgery this month?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

He's certainly been a great advocate for his constituents and for Islanders since he's went into opposition.

But with regard to the chances, you know, these are the wait times. I agree, and I agree with the hon. member, that we do have to work towards addressing those wait times. Certainly, we look over the last couple of years, the number of cancellations as a result of various factors, but certainly, the pandemic has impacted this.

But with regard to the specific question of the chances of getting the cataract surgery this month, that certainly is in the hands of our professionals, but I certainly feel optimistic that he will.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, before cataract surgery is performed, a pre-op visit with the ophthalmologist is required, which Danny has done twice, yet no surgery.

The distance between O'Leary-Inverness – and I could take many different spots on that – is actually 240 kilometres as a minimum, and for an individual in my area who is on social assistance, legally blind, complicates the process, not to mention it's a costly drive to the QEH for a medical appointment with gas prices going up.

Those who can't drive have to rely on the goodwill of friends and family.

Dollars provided for medical travel

Question this time to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: How much does your department provide those on social assistance for a medical appointment to travel to the QEH?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't have that number right in front of me. I will bring it back. But I do know we work with NGOs and we do provide some supports as well for those on social assistance. So, I'll get back to you on that.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Henderson: I'll help the minister. He probably could have got some assistance from the minister sitting next to him. But Danny has been told by his social worker it's \$46.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Henderson: With gas prices today, that does not cover the costs.

Danny went to his two pre-op appointments; surgery was cancelled twice. And that makes it very difficult to find another person to take him, keep taking him down here.

Question to the minister of social development: Danny says it's very hard to get anyone to take him for these appointments that keep getting cancelled for \$46. Will you increase this to at least a minimum of \$75 as soon as possible so Danny could at least buy them a coffee when they take him down there?

Mr. McNeilly: Great question.

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a real issue, definitely. I thank the Member from O'Leary-Inverness for raising this.

This is part of, really, what our government is trying to do. We're trying to solve these problems. I think that my colleague, the hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, may have a transit announcement that's coming soon that may help address this issue.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. McNeilly: The Minister of Social Development and Housing entered into a service contract with the Salvation Army on December 17th, 2020.

One aspect of the contract identified supportive housing services the Salvation Army must provide. The value of the portion of this contract for Island taxpayers to pay is almost \$650,000.

The contract has been in place now for 15 months, and yet, we have no data or no information. According to the contract, as a first phase, Smith Lodge, a 28-unit facility, the Salvation Army was to provide housing supports for nine men starting on December 29th, 2020, and further implement a second phase on March 1st, 2021.

It's been now over a year since phase two was supposed to be launched, and it has not happened yet.

Minister, your government said Smith Lodge can accommodate 28 individuals –

Speaker: Question.

Mr. McNeilly: – and there are only nine spaces there.

Phase two for Smith Lodge housing

Question: Why has phase two part of the contract not been implemented now?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, for the member to stand up and say we have no data, maybe he hasn't seen the data yet, but I can definitely tell you that

my department works very closely with our NGOs, including the Salvation Army, to monitor this. We have lots of data.

I'll work with the department to see what data I might be able to bring back to the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty to give him a better picture of the situation.

Again, this is a challenging file and things change. We work and we move forward the plans to help our most vulnerable Islanders.

Mr. Speaker, instead of trying to answer this in the next 10 seconds – I know you want me to sit down already – what I'll do is I'll commit to bringing back a full report on the status of this project to the member across.

Speaker: Sold me out.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct) contract –

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The contract further requires that the Salvation Army use VI-SPDAT assessment tool to determine appropriate levels of support needed for each Islander accessing the services, and the community table determines priority for housing placements.

I have since found out through a written question that the community table is made up of the same members that are on the outreach centre working group that's supposed to be independent, but strangely enough, it's chaired by government.

Assessment and support in housing

How many Islanders have been assessed through the process, and how many Islanders have successfully moved from the nine units at Smith Lodge to stable housing over the last 15 months?

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

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot to unpack in those questions there.

First of all, the working group at the outreach centre and the group that manages

our shelter are made up of NGOs that are fantastic. I think the member across would agree. And just because it's chaired by government doesn't mean it's independent.

I would even challenge the assumption that it's supposed to be completely independent. We work together. I think the same member asks me questions – well, how come government is not stepping in and telling them what to do – half the time.

So, I will bring back that information the member has asked for. There was a lot of information in that question. He threw a question in right at the very end.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McNeilly: You can't seek feedback and chair the meetings at the same time. It's impossible. That's an independent thing. You're supposed to be trying to get the information and data for that.

Plus, you stand up in the House and you talk about human rights is a tough issue. Well, housing is a human right, minister, and that's what I'm trying to get at. What are we doing to get people in and out of these programs? I can't get the data on that, and that's very important.

Look, this contract is worth \$160,000 quarterly. That's what you pay. That's what taxpayers pay quarterly to get services for Islanders, and you've made this problem worse. We've lost transitional housing.

Support in scattered units

Question to the minister: Exactly how many Islanders are being supported in the scattered units, and can you provide some of the locations?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would challenge the notion that we've lost transitional housing.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: In fact, what we're doing is we're expanding transitional housing, and we're going to continue to do that. Right now, Deacon House is taking up some of that –

Mr. McNeilly: That's not transitional housing.

Mr. Trivers: That is transitional housing.

Speaker: Minister has the floor.

Mr. Trivers: And I actually tabled a document very recently that lists –

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – all of the information that the member just asked for.

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

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

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct)

Mr. Perry: As you would agree, Mr. Speaker – you have an extensive background on this – volunteer firefighters provide an invaluable service to our Island. They sacrifice personal time with their families and their friends, they attend regular training sessions to develop their skills, and they go above and beyond for the communities that they serve.

These brave individuals risk their lives each time they attend a call, and the unfortunate truth for many is the incidents that they witness that do not leave their minds when they clear the scene. The trauma experienced puts them at a significant risk for the development of PTSD, which can develop instantly, years down the road, or anywhere in between.

Mental health supports for firefighters

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Can you inform the House of what your department currently offers for mental health supports for volunteer firefighters?

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate this question. I think we have to appreciate every volunteer firefighter on this Island. They're running in when most of us are running out. They're invaluable assets to our communities across this Island, tip to tip.

I recently met with a firefighter that has PTSD. We sat down and we talked, and I said we have to do something about this. And I've spoken to the Speaker about this many times. That's why we've created Public Safety Calls. It's an online portal where they can get confidential mental health counselling. It's not the end-all, be-all, but it's steps, and they will help you get the proper counselling that they need.

It's just been introduced and I'm quite proud of it. I hope every firefighter – it's not just firefighters; it's all first responders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Yes, that online can help, but it's volunteers helping volunteers that are doing that. We need to do what we can to help our first responders.

With ambulance response times across the province being unacceptable and dangerous, fire departments who offer medical first responder services are being dispatched to medical-related 911 calls more frequently than ever, in turn exposing them to levels of trauma that they could never have imagined.

Support for first responders

Question to the same minister: Maintaining medical first responder services in PEI volunteer fire departments now more than ever is crucial to the safety of Island communities, but they are burning out. How will your department support volunteer fire departments and companies so they do not

cut back on the lifesaving services that they provide?

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These are great questions, and I commend the member for bringing this forward.

Our firefighters are so important to us, and our first responders, all of our first responders, our ambulance drivers to our policemen to Search and Rescue. And they all have access to this, and it's not volunteers. This is a partnership. Public Safety Calls is with the University of Saskatoon. These are professionals that are helping people who call in on this and giving the counselling.

So, through this – and it's also for dispatchers. We will continue to work with the PEI Firefighters Association across this Island to make sure that the public health of all our firefighters is addressed, and I'll commit to that, and I'll champion that as well, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

And again, those calls can be beneficial, but they have to be timely. Sometimes these calls are only returned 24 hours after. So, minister, I cannot stress enough how proactive an approach needs to be taken on this.

In saying that, I have two suggestions for you.

A short-term effort would be to allow all volunteer firefighters across Prince Edward Island to the PEI government Employee Assistance Program, giving them access to a wide variety of supports including counselling.

And thinking into the future, hiring a professional within the PEI Fire Marshals office that understands the trauma

experienced by volunteer firefighters and who is able to provide preventative educational services and support to the fire departments and companies rather than only having someone available after a critical incident.

Mental health supports for firefighters (further)

Minister, will you commit to bringing this back to your department and to the office of the PEI Fire Marshal to be a proactive issue?

Mr. Henderson: Solutions.

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

Premier King: (Indistinct) he's one of us.

[Laughter]

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

He does still have some great ideas, and I will commit to meeting with him and taking some of his suggestions and working with the Fire Marshal's Office. It's important that we address the mental health of our firefighters in a proactive way.

We are also working with the Workers Compensation Board to put on a conference for our first responders to identify mental health issues. I hope that will be this summer. We are just – that's early stages of that, but the Workers Compensation Board was excited to do this because they know the importance of it as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, child care access can be a challenge for a variety of reasons; even knowing who offers spaces in your area can be very challenging.

Available spaces for child care

Question to the minister of education: How is your department working with the child care sector to match families with available spaces?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

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

Certainly, the PEI Early Learning and Child Care Registry has been in existence for a number of years, so it provides families with an easy way to search and sign up for waitlists for licensed early learning and child care centres across Prince Edward Island.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I agree, the registry is a powerful tool, but I think there is a gap there. Finding space in private child care centers in your area can be even more of a challenge for some families.

Available spaces re: private child care

Question to the minister: Are there any strategies being looked at to improve awareness of available spaces in private child care homes, or could they be added to the registry, for example?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As part of the agreement that was signed with the federal government, there are significant dollars in place to encourage private home centres to look at becoming licensed family home centres. Once they are in that licensed sphere, there is certainly an expectation that they would be listed on the registry.

Already, since doing two town halls in the last couple of months, we've had about seven private home centres come forward and looking to be licensed so, we'll see that registry continue to grow and hopefully

parents and families will see more available child care within their area.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank, your second supplementary.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With our population growing, we have more people who are new to our communities and may lack the on-the-ground knowledge of what's available and, in some cases, language barriers may also present an additional challenge. I received a few of these calls in the last few months, myself.

Incentives for child care registry

Are there any extra incentives to get more operators of all types to sign on to the registry or more marketing of the opportunities available?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Again, Mr. Speaker, great question, hon. member, and thank you for posing it.

Certainly, one way in which we're moving more on licensed centres to designated centres is by truly providing those designations and shortly we'll announce five new designations to early learning centres also, again, recognizing that there are hundreds of private home centres doing incredible work servicing families and children.

We are, however, looking to provide incentives to encourage them to become licensed. They'll benefit if they do, in fact, sign on. They'll benefit for professional support. They'll be eligible for different quality programming that the department will provide – capital grants in the amount of \$25,000. Also, the parents and families will benefit because the centres will be receiving funding to compensate for the reduction of fees.

So, again, really great, really wonderful to see those seven centres that have come forward and shown their interest in really trying to encourage you all, as MLAs, to spread the word to these private home

centres across the Island because we'd love to get all of them onboard and licensed here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Mr. Speaker, a school counsellor's day is supposed to be divided. A chunk of their time, absolutely, should be dedicated to proactive work but in practice, their case loads are so large that counsellors are spending almost all their time in reaction mode. They rarely are in the classroom doing that upstream work that we talked about in the House yesterday. This has a huge impact both on the students and their teachers – all mental health is impacted as they see their students struggling.

Additional counsellors in Island schools

Question to the minister of education: How do you intend to get more counsellors into Island schools, both in the short term and in the long term?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last budget, as the hon. member will remember, we added 11 permanent new counsellor positions to our budget and that was the first time in decades where we've seen that increase and I think that's something that we can be really proud of.

I think today, and we've said it many times in here, the work that our school counsellors do is critical but we also recognize that we need to lean on other experts within the school such as occupational therapists, our Student Well-being Teams, our school psychologists. Together, it is through these supports that we're offering supports to students.

Again, recognizing the work of school counsellors is wonderful and I'm really happy we were able to add those additional positions to the system.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm concerned that the minister does not know that Student Well-being Teams, occupational therapists, all of the people that she's just mentioned cannot be leaned on more than they're already being leaned on. You need more counsellors.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lund: Mr. Speaker, years ago the department saw a shortage of counsellors coming and they had the foresight to proactively create a Master of Education in Counselling, in collaboration with the department, UPEI and Acadia because there are not easy ways to get the master's degree in counselling in PEI. It was a great initiative and it encouraged people to get into counselling who otherwise wouldn't have but as far as I can tell, it's only ever happened once.

Question to the same minister: You've mentioned that you're looking to me for ideas. Here's an idea. Will you look to re-establishing this connection so we can get more counsellors and, in our schools, where we need them?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Ms. Jameson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, it's something I can absolutely look into, but I do have to note that we haven't had any issues filling our counselling positions this year and we don't foresee any additional concerns going forward. I'm in touch with the HR at PSB and CSLF daily and certainly, this year that has been a concern.

I do understand, again, the role of a counsellor is incredibly important for the health and well-being of our students, and of course, our staff, but we have added a tremendous amount of frontline staff to our school system. In the 2021-2022 budget, we added 86 additional staff and through the contingency funds, we had 117 new. In this Budget, we added over 40 again.

So, together, I know with schools' counsellors working alongside all of these professionals, our students are being supported. And we all recognize these are challenging times for all, so I just want to say thank you to all who are working in our school system to make this a success.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The PEI Housing Corporation owns 1,600, or more than 1,600, rental units across the province that support low- and moderate-income families, individuals and seniors.

One of those homes is just down the street on Richmond, and it's been sitting vacant since 2017. It's in a serious state of neglect and is now slated for demolition.

Maintenance of social housing

I know the minister has been receiving the same emails that I have from a number of concerned citizens who want to know why this department has received millions of dollars from the federal government for maintenance and renovation of existing housing stock, but is letting this government-owned social housing sit and rot on the street.

Minister, can you answer why?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, the information being provided is right on the money from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

You know, one thing is, it takes time to sometimes undo bad decisions by a previous administration, and I would say this one of them.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct) this is your mess.

Mr. Trivers: I mean, 2017, I came into this role. We had a vacant building. There were no plans. (Indistinct) trying to get it into place.

So, we're taking the bull by the horns here.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: We found that this building was indeed in very, very bad repair. Now, we're working with the City of Charlottetown to see what can happen to this building. We've got some preliminary design plans in place if we were to replace it. In fact, increase – right now, it could house a family of four. We want to have at least nine people living there in a new structure, this sort of thing.

So, we want to increase housing, we want to use the existing space the best way possible, and under my watch, we're going to make that happen.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Rural Transit Expansion Prince County

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to announce two new public transit routes supporting Prince County residents beginning Tuesday, April 19th. One route operating during peak commute hours will connect Tignish to Charlottetown via Route 2 to Summerside and onto Borden Carleton and South Shore communities such as Crapaud and Bonshaw.

The second will stay within the West Prince region to provide intercommunity public transportation with a midday trip to Summerside. Full route schedules will be posted in the coming weeks.

With the introduction of these new routes and the ability to transfer to the municipal public transit system, we are providing Island-wide public transit opportunities for Islanders that cost less per one-way trip than your morning cup of coffee.

Having reliable public transit for Islanders has widespread benefits, including our carbon footprint and reducing transportation barriers for people in rural Prince Edward Island.

We will continue to look at ways we can connect more communities to public transportation options by adding additional routes and partnering with local municipalities and organizations to decrease the need for personal vehicle use.

The goal is to create a fully accessible, affordable and sustainable Island-wide public transportation network that will help reduce transportation emissions and support Prince Edward Island's ambitious goals to be the first province with net-zero emission by 2040.

Anyone with ideas or suggestions about the rural transit program on ways that the Island can improve the Island-wide transit network to best meet the needs of Islanders can email islandtransit@gov.pe.ca.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: This is, of course, really, really great news and I really appreciate that the minister's department get five stars for, not only making promises, but actually, delivering on the promises.

So, thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hammarlund: Of course, public transportation is essential, not only to reach net zero goals, but also to increase possibilities for people all over the Island to get to work, get to appointments, et cetera, et cetera.

It's now up to Islanders, with or without the help of the government, to get to the buses. That, of course, is not an easy thing, but they can carpool. I hope the government is considering as an idea that I have mentioned several times – to support carpooling to bus stops – so for that essential connection

between people who don't live actually right next to the bus stop, which is most of the people, that there's help for them to get there. This is really great.

I just want to come back to the question earlier this morning. I'm sorry if I offended the minister with my April joke thing. I think that was not really right on. I think anything to get people using public transportation, including specials for the month – be it April or not – because it's a great thing. The supermarkets do it to great effect so, if we can get more use of government services by having a special in a month, so be it.

As for ideas that you're looking for, I'm going to save myself an email by coming up by one here. I earlier asked the question to the minister why he wasn't using the electric school buses for public transportation. I completely understand that, really, it's difficult. You can't really do two things at the same time. You only have the one bus and the one driver, and their primary function is to get kids to school.

But here's an idea. There are times when school is out, like March breaks and summer – the whole summer months. Why don't you use those electric school buses to bring kids to the ski hill or seniors and kids –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hammarlund: – to the beaches on a regular basis.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hammarlund: I think we badly need something like that. It's particularly geared towards lower-income children, for instance, during the March breaks, those that couldn't afford to go away. They should be able to go skiing and stuff like that, even if they don't have parents with cars to get them there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Henderson: I won't be quite so apologetic as the Member from

Charlottetown-Brighton is there, Mr. Speaker. Not that I'm opposed to the announcement; I would rather have made the announcement say it's from Charlottetown to Tignish versus Tignish to Charlottetown. People from Charlottetown should be going west and seeing some of the great amenities up there. I'll put it in a positive spin in that regard.

I'll always say it's good to have public transportation. I did bring up an issue earlier today. It doesn't sound like it's going to do much for poor Danny, but on the same side of it, it may help some people somewhere along the way.

The bigger question that I have on this: Are you going to be able to get to the smaller communities? It's one thing to go right down the main highway, but as the minister would know, it's a long drive from West Point to Coleman, or it's a long drive from Cape Wolfe to get to the O'Leary Corner. Those create certain challenges.

The other question: Will it be flexible enough, though, to take somebody like a Danny, who's blind, who has all those types of issues? Will it be appropriate enough to get him to his appointment on time, get him back, get him down to his surgeries on time? Probably not. I'm not so sure somebody is going to want to get on a public transit bus that's just had eye surgery.

These are the types of things that it may not help in all cases, but a help is a help and if we can make sure that we have the supports around other people that aren't as impacted.

The other question I would have: Is it flexible enough in its hours of time? As an example, in rural communities, lots of people work around a wharf. They have to be there at 5:00 a.m., usually. These are situations that are going to be – are buses going to be going by a community like Haliburton or Freeland?

An Hon. Member: Good idea. Move the wharf.

Mr. Henderson: What? Move the wharf.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) to the wharf.

Mr. Henderson: Great idea but will it do that? That's question. I don't think it's going to. We're not talking a fisherman here; we're talking about people who work around the wharf. Or how about for dairy farmers? Will it pick somebody up at 7:30 p.m. after milking to get somebody back home?

These are things that – it gets hard to create all of these activities so that means people still are going to require transportation, or their own personal transportation.

I would argue that in my riding of O'Leary-Inverness, will people be using this enough? Will they feel this is a supplement for the extra hike that this government is going to be doing in increasing gas taxes? These are the types of things that they may not feel that this is an ample trade-off, for toonie transit or whatever it might be in other places.

It's great to talk about all these things, but Prince Edward Island encompasses a lot of ridings: 27 ridings. We are still predominantly a rural riding and we always have to take into account the challenges that those people in those ridings have.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: End of statements by ministers.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker, the Clerk, having reported that the petition praying for *An Act to Amend the St. Dunstan's University Act* is in acceptable form. I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, that the said bill be now read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the St. Dunstan's University Act*, Bill No. 200, read a first time.

Speaker: Explanation, member.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a bill that's going to change the composition of the board. It speaks to the appointed three-year terms for board members. It also clarifies wording around board members being appointed versus elected.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, that the said bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Rules Regulations Private Bills and Privileges for its consideration and report.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Tabling of Documents

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

Mr. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the funding agreement signed on December 17th, 2020 between the Government of PEI and the Salvation Army outlining the service amount and reporting requirements. Additionally, the minister tabled the shelter bed uses and not transitional housing supports as previously spoken about in Question Period, and I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

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

Mr. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of the Standing Committee on Health and Social Development, I beg leave to introduce the report of the said committee on committee activities, and I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party that the same do now be received and do lie on the Table.

Pursuant to Rule 110(5) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, I'll be moving the motion for

adoption of the report on Tuesday, March 29th, 2022.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Orders of the Day (Government)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the 19th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 19, *An Act to Amend the Climate Leadership Act*, Bill No. 60, order for second reading.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Premier, that the said bill be read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

I ask to resume debate on the said bill.

Speaker: Do you want to start debate?

Ms. Bell: I do.

Speaker: Let the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere start debate.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to finally be talking about carbon pricing in the House, after so many years of it being one of those things that we don't talk about in the House.

Carbon pricing is about recognizing the cost of pollution and accounting for those costs in daily decisions. Putting a price on carbon pollution is widely recognized as the most efficient means to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while also driving innovation.

Since 2019, every jurisdiction in Canada has had a price on carbon pollution, including PEI, even if we don't talk about it. Canada's approach is flexible and so the provinces

have had a flexible approach. Any province or territory can design its own pricing system tailored to local needs; or can choose the federal pricing system.

In PEI, we have the system that was agreed and designed by the former Liberal government. I was in the House when we were briefed on that initial Liberal carbon pricing bill. I remember the minister and all of his team coming into our office in the basement and having to sit on the floor because we didn't have enough space or chairs for everybody. And at that time, that was when we found out about the number of exemptions that were going to be placed on many of the fuels that we use here in PEI, including heating fuels, cruise ships, and I also remember how shocking it was to hear that what we were actually going to be doing was rebating that carbon tax – that carbon price at the pump. And, most shocking of all, free drivers' licenses.

Well we know that this government adopted that same carbon pricing plan, minus the free drivers' licenses, and that's what we've been under for the last couple of years. During that time, we have had the opportunity to negotiate with the federal government knowing, as the minister for environment previously stated, knowing that this was coming, that we were going to have to have by 2022 something in place that would allow for a \$50 per ton carbon pricing. And then allowing for a \$15 per ton increase for every year thereafter to 2030.

This is pretty straight forward, it's something that we've known about, that we've planned about, and planned for but, the government has been remarkably silent on this until now. In fact, we now see this bill coming forward the week before it's due, because it's due to be the law and if this bill was not presented in time; we would be going under the federal backstop as of April 1st.

The federal backstop, honestly, is not a bad thing. The federal backstop, or the federal pricing scheme, is what's in place in Saskatchewan, in Manitoba, and Ontario and in Alberta.

What that means is that the guidelines that federal government expects to be in place are being honored in those provinces and

what that means is that 90% of those rebates that are collected through carbon tax are being returned directly to the citizens in those provinces. What we have instead is a hybrid, and hybrid is good, we wouldn't be able to be participating in the Legislature as we are today if we didn't have a change to the rules to allow for hybrid sittings. And when you have a hybrid approach, ideally that means that you have something that's been created for Islanders, by Islanders and honors and respects the unique circumstances.

And you know what, we do have that in our provincial pricing scheme. We have, for example the exemption on marked fuels for agriculture and aquaculture, which is unique in the country and is something that we celebrate, it's something that actually the Green party is always fought for, back from when we first built our first carbon pricing approach, I think in 2016. My colleague may have to correct me, but that's how long we've been talking about an Island built approach for carbon pricing. Because we've known, even when other people wouldn't talk about it, that this is what we were going to have to do if we wanted to take climate change seriously.

Now, when we were talking about it, we were the bad guys. We've always been the bad guys talking about this, and now here we are, funnily enough, with a plan that looks exactly like the plan that we have talked about since 2016, 2017, 2018 back when carbon tax was a bad word.

So, in 2018 the Liberal's sat on the floor in our office and told us about how they were going to do free drivers licenses and excise tax exemptions and basically nobody would notice that there was a carbon tax and that would be fine. But now it's 2022 and we have to be honest about it. And being honest about that is also being honest about the choices that this government is going to make with the *Climate Leadership Act* – air-quotes, the *Climate Leadership Act* that they are presenting to this House.

I cannot understand for the life of me, how when you've had two plus years almost three years to negotiate with federal government in good faith, that this is the best that this government could do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: Negotiations usually involve some form of compromise. Certainly in this House we've talked about compromise and collaboration enough, but I don't see compromise and collaboration in here. What I see is something that's designed to keep the maximum amount of revenue taken from every hard-working Islander in the province and putting it into general revenue for this government to do with it what they choose to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: We would be better off adopting the federal backstop that we've been advocating for from the beginning. Because then 90% of the revenues collected; 90% would be returned to Islanders in the form of a rebate cheque on a quarterly basis just like they're getting in Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Instead, what this bill brings is a complicated taxation amendment that will provide –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: – Islanders who earn less than \$50,000 a year, a one-time payment. One payment of \$140 for the whole year; \$140, that's not enough –

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: – to allow the average Islander to offset the rising cost of living or offset –

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: – how much they're spending with the carbon tax that's being deducted off the money that they spend when they fill their gas tank. It doesn't give them the incentive to transition to a greener lifestyle.

Mr. McNeilly: That's right.

Ms. Bell: 75% of that carbon tax revenue is being kept by government.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) – expect to change people, get them off (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: Perhaps if you let me finish my remarks, you'd hear me say that. Why don't just take a moment? 75% –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: If you're saying you want (Indistinct) Robin Hood, you should (Indistinct) –

Ms. Bell: 75% of the carbon tax revenue –

Speaker: Member has the floor.

Ms. Bell: I have the floor. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

75% of the carbon tax revenue currently being deducted and continuing as we go into this new plan is being kept by government, who will pick winners and losers, instead of letting Islanders decide how to spend their money?

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Your call.

Ms. Bell: Oh, it's tough hearing the truth.

Ms. Beaton: (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: On the list (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: Free heat pumps are a phenomenal program, it's really unfortunate the minister doesn't feel he should stay and listen to this. Free heat pumps are a great program, but not everybody can get one. What do they get? Rebates that aren't accessible to everybody are not equitable. The Green party is the only party that speaks about equity for all Islanders. When we talk about all Islanders, we mean everyone.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: Giving money that they have spent, directly to Islanders lets them decide how they can best reduce their emissions, and that will look different for different families. It gives them a better ability to make the right choices that they know are right for them and their families. This is better than trying to cobble together some one-size fits all government program at the

11th hour, especially when what you're offering Islanders only covers a portion of the costs that you're incurring. And you can't participate if you don't put up a portion of the funds.

I am disappointment that the Premier is choosing to withhold tax relief from Islanders because that's what this program does.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: Let's be clear, the carbon price, the carbon tax is intended to encourage people to save money by reducing their fossil fuel use. The rebates are in place so families aren't harmed by the carbon price, but could save even more money if they drive less, or install more efficient furnaces, better windows or the heat pump. A carbon price incentivizes a change in behavior, it is not, nor has it ever intended to be seen as a revenue source.

We can afford to do both. We can afford to provide the rebates to invest in public transit, to incentivize Islanders to make green energy choices and encourage Islanders to make that transition to energy efficient sources, to greening, to decarbonizing and we can incentivize them with the carbon rebate as well. These are not mutually exclusive.

What is happening, is we are doing exactly what the carbon price is not supposed to do. We are taking that money to fund programs that government decides, that is not how it's supposed to work. It goes against the very nature and concept of carbon pricing. It is undermining the whole process and thought behind why and how a carbon pricing process works.

Ms. Beaton: And to trust Islanders.

Ms. Bell: Absolutely. We have to be able to trust Islanders to make their own fiscal decisions. I cannot tell you how many times I am having to explain to ordinary Islanders why they are not getting the cheques that their friends and neighbours and families are getting in other provinces.

How can I explain to Islanders that they should be getting \$1,000 a year on a quarterly basis and instead, we might give

them \$140, if they're lucky? That's not any way that I can explain.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: And this government is on record as saying that they don't trust Islanders to be able to make those decisions. They don't trust government and now we're seeing the proof in the design of these programs.

We are able to find money when we want to for just about anything, whether it's an alliance for well-being at \$15 million, whether it's helping homeowners out with their Waste Watch fees at 1.5 million. Those are great programs. We can do that and rebate the tax fund.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: So, if we want to have a fund that enables everybody to get who is eligible, whether they be low-income at 35,000 or 50,000 or whatever number we're going to pick, we should fund that from the funds that we have available – maybe do a little less paving –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: – because if it's really a priority, you make it a priority by showing that and putting your money where it is, but you don't do that by taking the money out of Islanders' pockets.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: We can afford to do both. We can afford to incentivize Islanders to make the green transition and reward them with money back in their pockets by returning the revenues from the carbon tax to Islanders. I cannot make this any clearer. We have to trust Islanders to make their own fiscal decisions and this plan does not do that. This government –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: – does not believe in that.

It is very hard to sit in this House and hear, day after day, how this government speaks for all Islanders – how they want to put money back in Islanders pockets, how they

listen to Islanders when they are not listening to them about this.

Carbon tax is a reality. This is no longer up for debate. We are no longer discussing the impact of climate change. We absolutely know we have to do this, and we have less than eight years. We have less than eight years to move. We cannot wait any longer.

But this approach in this legislation is actually going to make it more difficult because without that extra money going back to Islanders, they can't make those choices. Instead, they are feeling upset and angry and abandoned by a government that said that they thought that everybody mattered –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: – and they don't.

I am absolutely in favour of every program that we can do in putting every priority, including choosing not to do other projects if necessary to get everybody into a green heating source, into more effective transportation by investing in public transit, by making everyone available to be able to get off oil and into green solutions. But we cannot do that while taking money from Islanders and using it for the projects that we choose. We have to give people both and we can afford to do that if we choose to make it a priority. This legislation does not.

I look forward to hearing from other colleagues, their thoughts about the carbon tax, including my colleagues from the third party who may have some explaining to do about whether they are in favour of taking money out of Islanders' pockets and not giving it back.

But we also have the debate when we come to the legislation on the floor. What I am hopeful for is that it will be very clear how government intends to spend that money and is able to clearly demonstrate how they are going to make it as equitable as possible because right now, this is not about all Islanders. This is not about being fair. This is not about taking care of everyone. It's not about thinking that everyone deserves the same.

That's what we stand for. That's what I stand for and I'm proud to be able to say so today.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What a missed opportunity this government just wasted. Under this King plan, Islanders will get a one-time, once-a-year \$140 cheque. Other provinces, under the Liberal plan, the federal Liberal plan, families will get back up to even \$1,000. If you consider the amount of families living from pay cheque to pay cheque on our Island and this number just continues to grow every single day, how can we not want to put all the money we can in Islanders' pockets, and this is the way we can do it?

Fuel prices, home heating prices, groceries, clothes, medications – all these necessities are getting more and more expensive and salaries are not going up to meet this; they're not growing at nearly the same rates.

I can speak for everyone in the House, everyone in this Island, everyone in the world when I say my children need new clothing almost every single season. They grow like weeds. Whether we like to purchase these things or not, they're necessities and children grow.

A car needs gas. People need food. We can't just cut back our way out of this. Islanders need a government that supports them when times are tough, and PEI is seeing some of the toughest financial situations we've seen in years.

Let's talk about what an extra roughly \$900 a year could mean to a family, to any Island family. \$900 can fill an oil tank, if you're lucky, because we know those prices are skyrocketing. This can keep a family warm throughout the whole winter. \$900 can feed a family for a couple of months, if we're lucky to keep within the same price ranges.

We have very concerning poverty rates on Prince Edward Island. How many children

are going hungry today? That number is high. This money could change that. Even if it's not for the whole year, we could make a child not go hungry at some point in time with this.

\$900 could buy birthday, Easter, Christmas presents. Being able to provide gifts to your children are so important to parents. \$900 could outfit children for sports, registration, gear – all of that stuff that we know is so expensive for Island families. It's so important that children stay active and involved and it's getting harder and harder and harder with the increase in prices everywhere.

We have very aggressive targets to meet through our *Poverty Elimination Strategy Act* and what an opportunity this government has right now with this proposed legislation to address some of that. I do not see this government understanding this. It baffles me, Mr. Speaker. Do you have a plan with a magic money tree to address the poverty that you say that you're going to do and that you are actually held by law to do now? Do I need to remind you of that?

Premier, you and your government say in here over and over and over and over again that you get it, but clearly, you do not. Or, honestly, you don't care, and I hate to say that, but I don't what else this looks like. It's completely in line with a Conservative government so it makes sense, but we can't just say that – this government can't keep saying how different they are because this is just proof that that is just not the case.

Let's talk about poverty rates. You may say, but what about the environment? If we want to talk about the environment, we must move towards a healthier and cleaner environment. We all know that. I joined this team, this party, because of my dedication to improving the environment for every person who lives in it. The foundation of a Green strategy to improve the environment is done equitably, which this plan is not. A Green government would not take money out of the pockets of Islanders who need it just so that they can hit their targets.

This government thinks they know better than Island parents who are the experts at caring and raising their children. They are

working tirelessly through these ever-growing prices to clothe their children, to feed their children, to ensure that their children are healthy and active. This government has forgotten how expensive that can be.

We don't need you to tell us that we need a heat pump. We need money to buy our kids a pair of cleats so they can participate in a sport that they love this summer. We need money so that we can fill our car so we can get them there and we need money to buy them healthy food so that they have the energy to grow well and to do these activities.

Just yesterday, we talked about the importance of upstream investment. That motion passed unanimously, but do we understand what that means. We need our children to be invested in and this is a way to do it. You can't take money from families during a financial crisis. That leads to more poverty, not less, and a heat pump isn't going to help.

We're asking you, pleading with you, to step up and do the right thing. I've heard too many stories from Islanders whose lives and the lives of their children would be changed by \$900. I know \$900 might not mean much to the people across the floor, but it does to Islanders, and I represent Islanders.

I do not support this version of this legislation as it stands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This is an opportunity for all members of this House to have a full and a deep discussion on the principles of this bill.

When we go into committee of the whole there are opportunities to ask questions and to have a back and forth with the promoter of the bill, but an opportunity to actually delve deeply into what the principles of any piece of legislation are as offered in second reading.

In my opinion, it's an opportunity that we don't take often enough. Of course, we get bills of varying size, of varying complexity, of varying profundity and not all would require, or demand, or benefit from a long discussion on exactly what the intent and the principles and the purpose of the bill are, but some bills absolutely do call for this House to pause, to take time, and to think carefully and deeply about a piece of legislation before it.

I remember while during the debate on Bill 38, and during the previous administration when the question of Charter Rights bumping up against proportional representation and being able to have a fulsome conversation about that prompted our party. At that time, there were two of us sitting in the Legislature to call for debate at second reading. It was a very valuable conversation, I believe. I look back on that and I remember, both the work that was required in order to bring forward the speaking points to illuminate the concerns that we had and for those not just in House, but for Islanders to hear those concerns expressed in a broad way within the context of what our core concerns about this piece of legislation were. You could've looked at Bill 38 and imagined it was simply a piece of legislation about setting rules regarding a vote on the plebiscite and on the surface, that's exactly what it was. But in debating the purpose and the principle of the bill, we had an opportunity to shine a spotlight on what some of the other layers of the legislation were.

It was big bill. I understand that the bill we're now debating at second reading is not a voluminous bill as Bill 38 was, but I think they share one thing in common and that is that they are extremely important pieces of legislation. Bill 38 was important because it was – at a particular time it was related to a particular topic and Prince Edward Island at that moment was the place where the next round for those of us who believe that proportional representation is an important tool for improving democracy was going to be. That's where that debate was going to happen, and it was I believe in retrospect the right thing for us to do, not just because it was an important topic but because of the potential Charter issues related to the way the bill was written they we have a deep and lengthy discussion and we did.

I know personally, I learned a lot from doing that. I know from the media attention that that got that many Islanders were engaged in a way that they would not have been had we simply gone as we typically do from first reading to committee of the whole for a discussion. It would have been an entirely different kind of chat.

Why bring this bill forward at this point and create an opportunity for all members of this House to debate a bill, which again on the surface looks like a very simple bill? It's not a large bill, but I think it has large implications. That is why my colleagues, so far, the Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere who moved the motion to debate this at second reading and I thank her for doing that. I also thank her for her, as always, passion and her eloquence and clearly the depth of understanding that she has on this topic and the way that she expressed those concerns in her remarks; I thank you for moving that, Charlottetown-Belvedere. More recently, the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park to come forward with her concerns.

One of the beauties of debate at second reading is that MLAs with different focuses, MLAs with different passions, MLAs with different opinions can bring those forward and have them heard.

I am the third MLA to speak to this bill at second reading and I hope there are many others that take this opportunity to use this time to tell us what you think about climate change, or climate emergency, or climate chaos, or climate breakdown, or whatever phrase you want to use.

Because we often talk about COVID as being the defining moment of our generation and in many respects, it is; I think the history books will look back and say that indeed it was an extraordinarily important and pivotal moment in human history, but I also think that those history books will look back at climate change, climate emergency, climate chaos, climate breakdown and we will – future generations will look back and put those two side by side and will conclude without any doubt that while COVID was extraordinarily disruptive, extraordinarily expensive, extraordinarily deadly and affected the whole world. I think the impacts of COVID will pale in comparison to the

impacts of – and again, I hesitate to use the word climate change because it's far too tame a phrase. I will perhaps use a number of phrases to describe what is happening currently with our global climate –

But the point I'm trying to make is COVID is bad. COVID will be looked at as terrible and an awful thing that humanity went through from 2019 until whenever it ends and that is still unclear, but the fact that we were fully aware – COVID of course came out of the blue.

Although we've had global pandemics before and we have and it was entirely predictable that at some point in time humanity would be faced with another global pandemic we couldn't, of course, determine the time, nor the place, now the severity of that pandemic, but it was pretty odds on that we were going to have one. It so happened that it began in 2019 and it continues to this day and it's likely to continue for some time to come. That was predictable that it would happen, but it was entirely unpredictable as to when it would arrive. We reacted with extraordinary speed and we reacted with a sense of global community, which I think – and I'm going to come back to this later on in my remarks – I think demonstrates what humanity is capable of and is a real beacon of hope for me.

When I look at the issue of climate chaos and think, my goodness, this is going to require a global effort and a global consensus and a global coming together in a manner that we have never perhaps ever done before. And it's in seeing how we have managed to do that through COVID that I am given hope, that we can indeed come together and do the work required to combat the climate emergency.

Here on Prince Edward Island our contribution to combating that climate emergency is done on an individual basis. Each of us make choices every day in terms of what we eat, how we travel, where we spend our money, how we heat our homes. Every one of those choices has climate implications because every one of those choices involves using energy. And at this point, much of that energy is still derived from fossil fuels. So, we make individual choices, but the reality is that regardless of

how thoughtful, how progressive, how carbon friendly our individual choices are, it's the collective choices that we make which will overshadow regardless of how wonderful those individual efforts are. If we don't get our collective choices right, we are going to be in big trouble; I would suggest we already are in big trouble.

Those collective choices are made through democracy, they're made through governing, they're made through legislation which is brought forward in the Houses of Parliaments around this world. And it is up to the elected members of those various institutions to come forward with legislation which will reflect the will of the population, in this case, to act conclusively and to act decisively on climate change, on climate emergency, on climate breakdown.

That is where this bill fits in. This is how we here on Prince Edward Island will define – there are other bills of course on the statue here on Prince Edward Island that have an impact here as well – but this specific bill is where we will demonstrate and express to Islanders and to the world what our commitment is when it comes to combating the climate emergency. And that's why this is such a pivotal piece of legislation.

I mentioned earlier that each MLA has different motivations for being in this House. Different life stories, different things which have caused them to want to reach out and put their hand up to be in public service.

For me, and I go back a very long time, my motivation came after my first child was born; well over 30 years ago now. And, although I perhaps couldn't express it clearly at the time, the motivation that I brought forward in that first election in 1993 where I ran as a Green party candidate in Leeds and Grenville in Ontario in a federal election, was if I can put it this way, to create a habitable planet for my daughter and for any children that she might have.

As I sit here today over 30 years later, that daughter does indeed have a child, my grandchild – and my inspiration has not changed. My motivation for sitting in the seat as the Leader of the Official Opposition and representative for New Haven-Rocky Point has not wavered. It is first and foremost and above all to ensure that we

have a habitable planet, for not just my children and grandchildren of course, but for everybody's children and grandchildren.

When I look at the lack of action and the lack of commitment from so many people around this world, it motivates me, and it certainly causes me to stop for a moment and recognize the privilege that I have; I am such a privileged person on so many levels. But to sit in the seat that I do, to have an opportunity to actually be part of those big collective decisions – which as I said earlier are going to overshadow whatever individual choices we make – we've got to get it right in a collective level. And here I am in a position where I can do something about that. That's an enormous privilege, but it's also an enormous responsibility.

It's my intent to use this opportunity to talk about this piece of legislation, to try and persuade others, because this is Parliament, this is the speaking House, this is the place where ideally members of this House come with open minds and a willingness to learn and will listen to debate and will listen for strong arguments, and will change their minds, and will change their hearts and will be moved to adopt a position that perhaps they did not have before. I realize that that may sound fanciful and it may – it's certainly not what happens with every debate in this House or Parliaments around the world, but the opportunity exists. I think this is one of those moments where we have an opportunity for those of us for whom this is the pivotal issue that motivated them to get involved in politics. This is the moment where you have an opportunity to express that to the fellow members of the Legislature, in hopes that they will listen with open hearts and open minds. And perhaps change the course of this piece of legislation through this Legislature.

I referenced a few minutes ago my first foray into politics as a candidate in 1993. I remember very vividly the opening few sentences of the first political speech I ever made at an all candidates debate, and I was terrified, I was shaking, my voice was probably not good.

I started my speech like this: Future generations will look back at the decades that we are now living through, and they will call them the crazy years. That time,

when humanity with full knowledge of the consequences of their actions carried out the systematic destruction of their only home, planet Earth.

Those words are seared into my mind. Back then, there were opportunities during all candidates debates to expand as we have here in the House at this very moment when we're debating at second reading the principal of Bill. At some length, concerns that you had and ideas and important things that you wanted to bring forward as a candidate. And I remember I was given like 10 or 12 minutes as opening remarks during that all candidates debate. Unfortunately, that doesn't happen anymore.

Typically, in all candidates debates they are structured so that we have maybe a minute opening remarks, opening remarks sometimes of even being abandoned completely. But, that opportunity to provide context for a complex subject, that opportunity to expand and to create a much more nuanced and a sense of the complexity of an issue in a way that you just cannot do when you have a minute or 30 seconds or whatever it is; to try and form your arguments and your thoughts. That speeding up of debate is sort of indicative of way the world has sped up over the last little while. I think to great detriment. I think there are too few times when we stop and, as I said earlier, pause and give ourselves the space to think carefully and deeply about certain things.

One of the regrets and the challenges that I face as a politician is that, by definition, we have to be generalists because we are, particularly as the leader of a party, you are having to keep your finger on so many different topics simultaneously, and that's very difficult to do. I find that I often do not have opportunities to dig down into concerns and issues in a way that I would like to. I find like I skim across the surface of too many things, and that's sort of out of necessity.

So, I really appreciate and I savour a moment like this where I do have an opportunity to talk at length about something which is of core importance to my life as a politician, to the process of democracy which allows us to have a fulsome debate. And we're lucky; I

recognize that not all parliaments give members the sorts of opportunities that we have here on Prince Edward Island to expand at length on topics. There are often very strict speaking time limits. Some days, I wish we had the same in this House, and perhaps some of you are sitting there thinking the same thing right now.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Leader of the Opposition: But it is a great pleasure and it is a great privilege that in this House, in the PEI, Prince Edward Island Legislature, we are given opportunities to dig down and to expand and to talk about things that matter to us, and hopefully to use that opportunity respectfully and to make sure that what we say is thoughtful, that it is not too much of a departure from the issue at hand – in this case, how are we going to deal with the climate emergency and how are we going to – and of course, I will get to the substance of the bill shortly – how are we going to redistribute the money which will be collected through the carbon pricing tax back to Islanders? And we'll get to that shortly.

But this opportunity that we have, this privilege that we have is something I think we need to take – we need to recognize how precious that is and to use it sparingly, but when we do use it, to use it thoughtfully and to use it in a way that hopefully illuminates debate, does not cloud debate, that it's not used as some sort of partisan tool, but is used to really try and expand understanding and provide information on a big topic. And that's what I hope to do this afternoon.

In that opening speech that I cited from the 1993 campaign, I also said, and I talked about the various aspects of climate change and how they were maturing around us. We see that all the time, in terms of extreme weather patterns, whether that be floods or fires or tornados or whatever. And how, as those concerns, as those realities of climate change mature, I said in the speech, I also want to be able to look my children in the eye 20 years from now – this was back in 1993 – I want to look my children in the eye 20 years from now and to be able to tell them that I did everything I possibly could to make it different.

While I feel I've done my bit and I continue to do my bit, I'm very, very aware of how inadequate the things that I have done as an individual and as a parliamentarian are when it comes to meeting that promise to my children. I have not done everything I can, and there are days when I sit in this Legislature and I wish I could speak every day about the climate crisis. I wish I could stand up and scream about the climate chaos which is happening and the unravelling of so many systems, because it breaks my heart to watch that.

But as a politician, of course, we have many concerns, and it's absolutely right that we speak to all of them, whether that be housing or health care or potatoes. There are so many things that, as politicians, we have to stay on top of and talk to. So, I'm going to use this opportunity to make up for all of those times that I wish I could have spoken about the severity of the climate crisis and to bring those thoughts together in what I'm going to say around second debate of how I feel this House should be dealing with this piece of legislation.

While I do feel like I look my children in the eye, I feel that there is more work to be done, and the work today, at this moment in this place on Prince Edward Island, as a legislator, is to work as hard as I can to persuade the rest of this House that the plan that this government has brought forward is simply not good enough.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: Governments – and I say this often in this House: governing is tricky, governing is difficult, governing is complicated. I hesitate to try and simplify the act of governance, but I think for the context of the debate that we're having right now regarding climate chaos and climate emergency and the spending of funds from tax revenue collected through carbon taxation and pricing, I think it's really important that I do try and simplify one way of looking at what governance is.

I think one way that I understand what governments do is to break it down into three separate siloes. Don't like to break things down into siloes, of course, but in terms of understanding, sometimes that's a good way of doing it.

The three areas that I sometimes consider – and it's not always the way I look at governing, but I think for the context in this debate, I think it's helpful – I think government has three principle roles.

Firstly, it's to provide rules; rules for living in our society and in the jurisdiction. In this case, it's Prince Edward Island. We do that through creating laws. Those rules allow us to live with a certain degree of comfort and certainty and belief that we will be able to live together successfully. Tells us the things we can do and tells us the things we can't do and the reasons for that. So, government sets parameters and rules.

It also provides services. That's the second thing that governments do. Public services; things like education, things like health care, things like transportation, public transportation, things like social services.

The third thing that governments do is that they redistribute wealth. Those services – the three things: governments set rules, they provide some services – not all services, but they provide some services – and they redistribute wealth. And if you look at governments world over, they choose to do those things in different ways, depending on where they sit on the political spectrum and also the political environment within their jurisdiction. But those are essentially the three things that all governments do.

That redistribution of wealth is done through taxation and it's done through providing services. The money comes into government, government makes decisions on how it wants to spend those moneys, it makes priorities, and it redistributes the money. That's what the budgetary process is. That's what we're doing currently. It's what we've been doing for the last three, almost four weeks in this House, is debate on the Budget, which is government setting priorities for how it feels we should spend funds.

This bill has to do with the collection of revenue through carbon pricing. Now, as my hon. colleague from Charlottetown-Belvedere pointed out in her remarks, there are a number of provinces who have decided to utilize the federal backstop. In essence, how that works is that the federal

government collects the carbon tax and redistributes that money to the households of those provinces.

We have some figures recently released and in a couple of provinces – and it varies depending on what the predominant energy source is from one province to another and that will vary depending on the economy of the province – but in a couple of provinces, the annual rebates to households of four people or more is over \$1,000. \$1,000 of revenue collected through the carbon tax is directly rebated through the federal backstop to households to the effect of over \$1,000 – \$250 each quarter.

I don't know about you, but the economy of late here on Prince Edward Island – and we're really no different from other provinces, although, perhaps we are different because we have by far the highest inflation rate but we're different only in terms of scale – the economy everywhere is in a state of crisis, I would say.

We have rapid inflation. We have stagnant wages. We have increasing costs of absolute staple fundamentals, things like food and housing, transportation. The ability for more and more Islanders – and we can't anymore talk about low-income Islanders or poor Islanders who are being affected by the cost of living. The concerns related to the way the economy has unraveled – I use that word advisedly – over the last couple of years has made its way into very many middle-income households here on Prince Edward Island and struggling to make ends meet from week to week and month to month is a problem for an enormous number of Islanders.

We have a very high food insecurity rate here and, as I said a minute ago, we have the highest rate of inflation. We also have, traditionally and historically, the lowest wages in the country. There was a time when those low incomes were matched by a low cost of living here in Canada's smallest province, but that is absolutely no longer the case. We have more and more Islanders, as the prices of – particularly of those commodities like food and especially housing – if you look at the increases in the cost of housing over the last few years, they are quite literally out of the reach of more and more Islanders.

So, government has a responsibility as it takes in money through taxation to make sure two things. Firstly, that those taxes are collected in an equitable and fair manner. I would argue that's not how we do that here on Prince Edward Island.

We've looked at increases in the basic exemption which clearly benefit those in the higher tax brackets more than they do a large number of Islanders who are either very low income or perhaps have seasonal jobs – seasonal, minimum wage jobs. There are thousands of Islanders who are faced with that reality that they work seasonally, and they make minimum wage.

Raising the basic exemption for them is worthless and yet those who are making \$150,000, \$200,000 and more get the full benefit. I think there is a lot of work that could and should be done in terms of making our taxation system here – and that's just one example, I could talk about others – that's just one example of how I believe our tax system is not working as it should, which is to ensure that the taxes are raised equitably, that's part one, but the second thing is to make sure that those revenues, when collected fairly, ideally, are then distributed in a thoughtful way. That those dollars – every single one of them – is spent carefully to provide maximum benefit to the maximum number of Islanders.

And now we're getting into the crux of this bill because – I'm almost tempted not to talk at all about the previous administration and how they completely botched this and how it was an absolutely naked political attempt to gain votes prior to the last election, which failed, of course.

It was quite astounding to be in this House and listen to members of what is now the Third Party firstly name this bill the *Climate Leadership Act*. That dates back to the previous administration. I mean, talk about Orwellian. I think I said I wasn't going to talk about that and now I am.

But it's just too tempting because it was – I mean, there are lots of wonderful things about politics and I mentioned earlier of how privileged I feel to do the job that I do, how lucky I am to have an opportunity to take part in debates like this, how lucky I am

to be surrounded by smart, kind, hard-working people. It is an enormous privilege.

Politics can be beautiful, but politics can also be brutal, and it can also be nakedly partisan and nakedly self-serving. When I look back at that attempt at climate leadership, I almost don't have words. I'm going to get past that now.

I recognize that the current administration inherited something which was just fundamentally flawed, absolutely fundamentally flawed – did not do what it should have done, did not return money to Islanders equitably, failed at the most basic level of good policy.

I understand there was a problem when this government came to power that they were faced with – we've inherited this terrible piece of policy. It's scheduled to finish in two years or – I can't remember exactly the deadline on that was.

Had we been government, I can guarantee you that we have set to work right away, on day one, shovels in the carbon pricing ground, to make sure that we would have brought forward – when that agreement expired – the best replacement agreement we possibly could for Islanders. This government failed to do that.

It's not okay to say at the last minute: Oh, we have to get this done before next week because it's going to run out and we can't tell you all the details of how we're going to spend the money and what we're going to do with it, but we have to pass this. That's not okay.

You have had two years to deal with this. Absolutely, we had a federal election last fall, not entirely unpredictable. That's a lame excuse for not having got your ducks in a row and put together the best climate change policy that you possibly could related to carbon pricing that should have been presented in this House right now, instead of this piece of legislation which is so sorely lacking.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: What would we like to see? We would like to see something that we talked about back in 2018 when we

produced a white paper on carbon pricing and fee and dividend. It's the model that the Green Party has been promoting, both here at a provincial level, and at a federal level.

It, in essence, is exactly what the federal government chose to do as its so-called backstop. That is to collect the revenues from carbon taxation and to redistribute them directly to citizens, to trust citizens to make good choices.

Citizens can make choices in two ways if you use that system, if you give people the freedom to make their own choices. And if you bypass, as our current Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, who is so distrustful of government with dollars – don't worry about that, minister. Don't take the money. Don't keep the money. Give it directly back to Islanders. Allow – trust Islanders. This government seems to not trust Islanders, and that's a huge problem.

Give that money directly back to Islanders and allow them to make choices in how they would like to spend it, because currently, the way this government – and again, it's uncertain exactly how they plan on spending the full revenues coming from carbon taxation, but it's very clear that only a very small portion, perhaps a quarter of it, is actually going to be rebated directly to Islanders.

This is happening at a time when more and more Islanders are in desperate need of every bit of financial support this government can give them, and you're withholding that. You're not trusting Islanders and you're not giving them the money that they deserve to have.

A fee and dividend system works by collecting the carbon taxation, whether that's on gasoline or diesel or heating oil or whatever, natural gas, propane, and as that price increases – and currently the incremental increases, 2.2 cents per litre every year – and I know I've heard the environment, energy and climate action minister, I think he described it this morning as carbon taxation hiking up the price of gasoline.

That's not the only issue, of course. It's not the only thing which impacts the cost of

fossil fuels. We just have to look at the geopolitical unrest, which is occurring in the world now, which has created a volatility in the cost of fossil fuels, which far outshadows any increase in the price related to carbon pricing.

So, let's not pretend to Islanders that the increases at the gas pump or when the heating oil truck shows up to fill up your tank, that that is as the result of the carbon tax. A minimum amount of that is the result of the carbon tax, but the far greater reason why we've had the massive spike in prices recently has nothing to do with carbon pricing and everything to do with the unrest which is happening in eastern Europe right now.

We cannot suggest to Islanders that this is a result of carbon pricing because it is not. Carbon pricing is something which happens at a very predictable and steady way, and the great benefit of a fee and dividend system is that the money which is collected through carbon pricing is distributed equitably amongst Islanders, whether you are a low-income Islander, a middle-income Islander, or a high-income Islander.

Let me tell you why that's important.

We all pay a carbon price as we fill up our gas tank, as we fill up our oil tanks, and also indirectly, as the cost of goods go up, because transportation impacts everything. We all pay a carbon tax. But those with low incomes, because they have less money to spend, spend far less carbon tax than those in the high-income brackets.

In fact, the lowest quintile spends far, far less than those who have several homes, for example, or a private jet or go on several vacations every year or perhaps have a yacht; those sorts of massive carbon footprint (Indistinct). And every time you spend money, you're buying something which has embedded energy in it, and therefore a carbon footprint.

The distribution of funds back to Islanders – whether you're a low-income, middle-income, or high-income, you get the same amount of carbon rebate back. Those in the low income will be getting back more money than they spend on carbon, more

money than they are spending on the carbon tax.

So, this, in essence, can be a wealth redistribution scheme, as well as a scheme to try and reduce people's use of carbon and of fossil fuels. It's a win-win.

That's why the fee and dividend system is such a great idea. It not only has the full effect of persuading people to move away from fossil fuels, and that's where the Liberal *Climate Leadership Act* failed so miserably, but it also has the benefit of disproportionately giving more money to those people who most need it. Those people in the higher quintiles of income have far higher carbon footprints; therefore, they pay far more in carbon tax, yet they get less back in carbon rebates.

That's one of the beauties of a well-designed fee and dividend system. It's a way of redistributing wealth. It's a way of making sure that the carbon tax has the intended effect that we all want, which is to get us off fossil fuels. But it also has that beautiful way of redistributing wealth to those who most need it.

In direct opposite to that, we have a government – by the way, let me very clear because I know that the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action is very good at misrepresenting what Greens say, whether it's that we're against bicycles – oh yeah, right – or whether it's that we don't want people to get free heat pumps – yeah, right, minister. None of that is true. Of course, we want people to use bikes, and in fact, I would hasten to add that – I would say that every single member of our caucus uses a bike on a regular basis.

I digress. What I'm trying to say is that we want the people who most need the money from carbon taxation to receive that money. Instead, what this government is doing is providing rebates – and we want these rebates. Again, don't get me wrong. We want to encourage people to own electric vehicles. We want to encourage people to have heat pumps in their homes. We want to encourage people to fully insulate their homes. We want to encourage people to have solar panels on their roofs. All of these are enormously important and valuable tools as we move towards carbon neutrality.

But more fundamentally, we must not use the carbon taxation as a way of redistributing wealth to the people who least need it, and that's what this government has been doing. We have been, and from what I understand, will continue to disproportionately use the funds from the carbon taxation, from carbon pricing, to allow people who own houses to continue to install solar panels on their roofs. Again, a wonderful thing, don't get me wrong, but we need to set up separate programs to encourage that. We do not need to be using the carbon tax for that.

Let's redistribute 100% of the revenues that come in from carbon taxation and give it back to Islanders. Let's give Islanders back the money they deserve. Let's trust Islanders to spend that money wisely. Let's not give it to governments, particularly a government that seems intent on giving it to those people who need it least.

This government is withholding money from Islanders at a time when they need it most, and that is not acceptable. Let's set up programs to maintain the fantastic record that we have here on Prince Edward Island of encouraging households to put solar panels on their roofs. Let's continue the program to encourage Islanders to switch to hybrid and electric vehicles. Let's do all that we can to provide opportunities for Islanders to insulate their homes. Let's do all of those things; and we can create, and should create, government programs to do that.

But let's also, at the same time, make sure that all of the money we create and collect from carbon taxation goes back directly to Islanders. That's the best way of using this money, it's the most effective way of implementing the carbon tax, and it's by far the most effective way of redistributing the income that comes from it.

One thing that I've been struck with when it comes to this government, the current administration, is that they seem more and more like a government of inaction when it comes to the really important files. I'm talking here about health care, and particularly mental health. I'm talking here about housing. There is – it's almost a caretaker approach from this government, that they've inherited some huge problems, and I won't pretend otherwise.

These are complex – these are wicked problems that are going to require an awful lot of work, and I include climate change in this, by the way; that's the link that I have here to the speech I'm making. We have a government which is more and more in my eyes a caretaker government that seems unwilling or perhaps unable to make difficult choices on important issues.

Again, whether that's housing – we've seen a desperate lack of spending, a desperate lack of inaction, a desperate lack of prioritization of providing affordable housing for all Islanders over the last three years. And I think the most – it appears that the most recent chapter in that sad story will be yet another delay when it comes to the *Rental of Residential Property Act* renewal and replacement. We don't know what's happening with that, but all signs are that that, again, is being delayed.

We see – oh my gosh, I've called out the litany of failed promises when it comes to health care here on Prince Edward Island for the last three years, and again, particularly mental health. But there was – whether it's the mobile mental health units or the hospital, which still has not even started, or the hiring of personnel. I mean, there are so many failures at a mental health point of view. And the fact that we are still waiting for a review of the mental health – I mean, it's just so many things which have not been done by this government.

After three years, one would hope that they would at least have come forward with the amendments to the critical legislation underlying both of those issues that I brought forward as examples of inaction, namely mental health and housing. And climate change would be another one. And government says, oh, but you know what, we've been dealing with COVID, and look what a fantastic job we've done on that.

And indeed, it's been – there's nowhere else I would have loved to have lived in this world and on Prince Edward Island for the last three years. We've dealt with this in a fantastic way. But let's be clear why we were so successful.

Firstly, we're an Island. We have geographic advantages which allowed us to get through COVID as well as we did until very

recently. We had fantastic leadership from Dr. Heather Morrison and the Chief Public Health Office and the Public Health Office in general. And as the Premier has said many, many times, he has never questioned the advice that he has got from her.

So, we've had fantastic leadership, not from the Premier but from the Chief Public Health Office, which he has followed. And I have to say that part of good leadership is knowing when to listen to the exceptional advisors that you have around you. So, I'm not suggesting that there has been no leadership here from the Premier, but when we hear repeatedly that he is just implementing exactly what he is advised to do by the Chief Public Health Office, then we know where the leadership actually lies here.

And thirdly, the money which has supported Islanders – Island businesses, Islanders as individuals – through this pandemic has come almost entirely from the federal government.

So, we have the geographic advantage of being an Island, we have fantastic leadership from the Chief Public Health Office, and we have money from the federal government. So, in all of those areas, the provincial government has really been a secondary player.

And we have got through COVID well, absolutely, but this government has not shown leadership when it comes to any of the critical files that are affecting Islanders' lives right now today: housing, health care, poverty, cost of food, the cost of living, the day-to-day struggles that Islanders are now facing. And that inaction for the last three years is starting to be felt, is already being felt, by Islanders on a day-to-day basis, and this government has to stop being a caretaker government. It has to start taking control.

And in this case, climate change, one of those other wicked problems that this government has not taken control of, is – the plan as far as I can see is to kick it down the road, just like all of the other things. We can't deal with this, we're not willing to deal with this, we don't want to make the hard choices, we don't want to have a hard discussion on the floor of the House when it

comes to this, so we're going to bring it forward a week before we're going to try and implement it and force it through.

Our caucus is not going to permit that to happen. We are here to have a fulsome debate on this piece of legislation. We are here to make sure that Islanders' concerns – and really, this bill is about so many things. It's about climate change, and it's about how this government is going to approach its primary efforts to combat the climate chaos, and it's also about the cost of living.

Let's be absolutely clear about this. This bill presents an opportunity for this administration to put money back in the pockets of Islanders, and they are not taking that opportunity. They are keeping the money for themselves and they are using it to redistribute it in a way which is not for the benefit for those Islanders who need it most. And that is poor governance.

We are really at a pivotal moment, as I said earlier, when it comes to our residence here on planet Earth. We have been around as a species for, really, a blink of a geological eye. If you look at the length of time that planet Earth has been part of the cosmos, five billion years or so, our species arrived only very, very, very recently. If we were to divide those five billion years into a day, it's a few seconds before midnight that our species arrived. And yet, in that tiny space of geological time, we have altered this planet enormously.

And of course, the climate of this planet has been constantly changing. For much of those five billion years, it was entirely inhospitable. But for a very long time now, we've had a relatively stable climate for many thousands of years, many tens of thousands of years, and that has allowed humanity to blossom, and of course, we've had many other periods during Earth's history where other species have dominated the earth and they have come and gone for a variety of reasons. But we are really the only species which has, in its understanding and within its power, the ability to recognize that a stable climate is an absolute necessity if we want to continue living on planet Earth for as long as the sun shines.

And we should be able to do that. We're a talented species. We are smart, we have

enormous abilities to change the things that we find around us, to dig things out of the ground and to make other stuff out of it, to cut down trees and to build houses, to dig up minerals and to produce crazy things like cellphones and cars and airplanes. I mean, it's quite extraordinary what we as a species have done in our short tenure here on planet Earth.

There's a lot to be proud of. There's a lot to look back on and to think, my goodness, humanity is extraordinary.

I'm going to divert here just a little bit to talk about Ovide Mercredi, who probably many of you would know: an Indigenous person who was the chief of the Assembly of First Nations for a while. I met Ovide Mercredi, again, probably 30 or so years ago, at the beginning of my political journey.

I remember him saying to me: White man is amazing; the White man is extraordinary. He went on to talk about helicopters and he went on to talk about nuclear power and the ways that we have learned to alter our planet. I mean, he was an extraordinarily wise man, but he went on to say: But we do not understand the power that we have created, and that we are destroying the very planet on which we depend for our wellbeing.

Coming from an Indigenous person, firstly, that recognition that technology and science has brought us so much, and indeed it has, and the extraordinary things that we enjoy in our lives. The fact that I'm sitting here in Bonshaw, looking at a plastic screen, speaking into a foam-covered microphone, and I'm able to communicate with you who are sitting in the Legislature and any Islanders who happen to be at home today or are watching on Eastlink or whatever they're doing – those are extraordinary feats.

The fact that we have tamed so much of this planet and used it for good use, to great advantage, to have comfortable homes, to be able to sit inside on a really crappy day like this. I look out the window and I'm not sure if it's still freezing rain but it's not the sort of day that you would not want to have shelter.

We have done extraordinary things to transform this world to make it habitable for ourselves, but we have not always recognized that some of the things that we are doing are causing great harm to our home, planet Earth.

Ovide Mercredi, as an Indigenous person would, of course, came from a tradition of respecting elders, a tradition of making sure that decisions would be sound in the long term, of redistributing what one needed within your community, of ensuring that you treated Mother Earth with the care and respect that she deserves, and that we would pass on a planet to future generations which was at least in as good of shape as when it was inherited.

I think what he was saying in a very subtle way was: There is a great deal of wisdom in Indigenous teaching if you would listen to us. The extraordinary and wonderful, though some of the many things that settler peoples have done, they have also wrought great destruction, and that it's time that we look at that.

I think climate change is perhaps the issue which will demonstrate to us that the success that we have had in settling planet Earth has also brought with it some great dangers, some great perils.

The climate, as I said earlier, has changed frequently in the past, and species have come and gone, but it is the rate of change of climate currently which is the real problem. In the past, the climate would change and species would have time to adapt. Trees were rarely at the edge of a zone where they could not continue to grow successfully to their conclusion. These days, it's hard to know where to plant a red oak. It's hard to know whether the trees that we are planting that are at the edge of their tolerance will be able to live out their lives in a climate that is going to support them.

The rate of change of climate now is where the real problem lies. Climate change, of course, brings with it all sorts of problems. We have seen in our agriculture industry here over the last few years the challenges that farmers on Prince Edward Island have had, either to get a crop in the ground, to ensure that there is sufficient moisture there for that crop to grow well, that there's not

too much moisture there at harvest time, and that we have access to markets. That's not a climate issue, of course, but all of those other things have been real challenges for farmers and will continue to be challenges for farmers into the future.

We have, on Prince Edward Island specifically, issues with erosion. I made note the other morning in my greetings of Dr. Adam Fenech with the climate change lab here on Prince Edward Island and the work that he has done with computer simulations of what exactly will happen to our dear province, our beloved province – I was going to say “if sea level rise occurs”, but it's already happening. “When sea level rise accelerates” is really a more accurate description of what almost certainly lies ahead, and the picture is not pretty.

If we look at our largest city, Charlottetown, the vulnerabilities of some of our finest and most valuable buildings and infrastructure on the waterfront are in peril. So much of the land around the periphery of our province, the coastal land – the most valuable land, the most sought-after land – is going to be in peril. Much of our transportation infrastructure, whether that be roads or culverts or bridges, are also in danger because of accelerated climate change.

All of these things are not peculiar to Prince Edward Island, but here, we have a vulnerability which is really much higher than most other places because of the nature of the geology – the sandbar and the sea, as we think of ourselves – and the fact that sea level rise is going to be a particular problem for islands everywhere on the globe.

It's interesting to see that some of the global leaders, when it comes to the conferences that we have – whether those are the COP conferences or the UN conferences or the IPCC conferences or any of the large climate change/climate emergency conferences that we have – often, the most vocal proponents for substantial, really strong climate action are the small island nations. The Maldives, Tuvalu – oh my gosh, the list is very long – not large players when it comes to the global economy but places whose very existence as a jurisdiction is under threat because of sea level rise.

Here on Prince Edward Island, we would fit into that community of small, vulnerable islands, perhaps not as vulnerable as some of the ones I mentioned, but we are in particular danger here. It is our duty as legislators to protect the land that we serve and the people who live on that land and whom we serve. That's why getting it right with our climate change legislation is so important.

Of course, we are a small part of the global population. Our contribution to greenhouse gas emissions globally is very tiny and we are indeed a small part of Canada. We are 0.5% of the population, although our greenhouse gas emissions per capita are much higher than our fair share, and of course, Canada, as in terms of our global greenhouse gas emissions per capita, are far higher than our average – share – almost three times what they should be. But we are still relatively small producers when it comes to the overall emissions from burning fossil fuels, but that does not mean to say that we do not have equal responsibility and it's up to us to do the best that we can because for two reasons; firstly, we have to make our fair contribution. If everybody, for example, when it came income tax time said, oh well you know it's just my income tax, you know there's 160,000 other people here on Prince Edward Island who are going to be paying their taxes they won't even notice if I don't pay mine.

Well, if everybody adopted that attitude we'd be in really big trouble, so there's a personal responsibility to do what's right, but above that because we are more vulnerable than others. We have to be the ones who are setting the way – we are the ones who have to be leading the way and setting an example of how we can live well and how we can get to net zero.

I know the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action is very keen to talk about that. That's how he's going to ensure that Islanders are not hit by the carbon tax and that's a wonderful, wonderful idea and I fully support him in that, but realistically, we cannot do that in the next three, five years. We just cannot do that. We're going to have to have an incremental step towards that, but it's really critical that those incremental steps are the right steps.

In going back to this bill, that's why it's extraordinarily important that we make this bill as good as it possibly can be and that's why we are going to be arguing at length for this bill to be amended, and that this bill come forward in a way that provides the maximum benefit to Islanders, and does our bit as a member of the global population of the global community to lead the way and to show others that you can live carbon neutral. You can live net zero. You can live a life of comfort and you can do that while reducing your fossil fuel consumption. It's absolutely possible, but you have to do carefully you have to do it in a thoughtful way and you have to do it in a manner that impacts the people who will be impacted by this; particularly low- and middle-income islanders. You have to protect them as best you can, and this government is not doing this with the way this bill is currently structured.

Dealing with climate change, of course, is an extraordinarily complicated thing. We perhaps have never tackled an issue like this ever before as a global community. You could say, well, what about the ozone layer, what about COVID and indeed those are in the case of COVID and were in the case of the ozone hole. They were crisis which threatened the well-being of the entire population of this world. The difference here though is for both COVID and the hole in the ozone layer there were very clearly identified single reasons for that: in the case of the ozone hole it was CFC's; in the in case of COVID it's the virus. We could take strategies focused exactly on where the problem lay and create alternatives or treatments in the case of COVID and protect ourselves.

We did a fantastic job when it came to the ozone hole, something which was discovered by chance back in the 1980s – I believe it was – but very quickly the scientific community recognized that this was a threat to humanity. The loss of the protective coating the ozone provides us with to protect us from UV rays and therefore all of the problems associated with that was recognized by the scientific community. We realized what the cause of that problem was, use of CFC's and we very quickly found alternatives to that HCFC's and other ways of phasing out CFC's.

Although that ozone is still there – by the way – it has not grown and in fact, I believe it's now diminishing in size and because it was over the poles, it didn't mature to the point of creating a threat to humanity, but it was a very simple: here's a problem, it's caused by this one particular thing and we can solve it by replacing that one particular thing with something else.

Climate change is not like that. We know that climate change is caused by burning fossil fuels. We know that every part of our economy is dependent, currently, on energy and for the most part that energy comes from fossil fuels. Many of the products that we use come directly from fossil fuels and so to find alternatives for so many fundamental things, which are critical to our society and to our economy and to our well-being is very, very difficult to do and it's going to require a concerted effort by humanity across the whole globe.

The experience that we have had with COVID – and I think I said this earlier in my remarks – has given me some sense of optimism that actually the global community is able to come together in a time of crisis, put aside differences, work together, and come forward with solutions for what is potentially an existential threat.

I also said a minute ago that climate change, I believe, is not only a far bigger problem than COVID, but it's also a far more complex problem. It's multifaceted, it's multilayered and it's going to require work at so many different levels in order for us to successfully combat that and for us to move through this threat of the climate emergency and come out the other side with an intact society. A society which is still able to function as we currently do with all of the things, which are available to us, but with an intact planet. One that is able to support future generations of people here.

I think, it's important that we make a very clear distinction between the erratic weather that we experience and climate because there's still some concern – well, you know, the weather is always unpredictable and that's true and perhaps nowhere more so than in the Maritimes and Canada.

I know just a few days ago on – I think it was – there was day when 10 years ago the

temperature here, on that particular date in March was over 25 degrees just 10 years ago, and today on that day 10 years later the high temperature, I think, was minus one, or something. That's weather, that's weather and that is the date – looking out the window, well what is the weather; well this is what is at this very moment.

That's not climate. Climate is the averaged, weather if you like, over a long period of time; typically, 30 years is what climatologists use when they talk about shifts in climate. So, we're not just looking at the variations from one day to another, or one week to another, or from one particular day 10 years ago to a day today, we're looking at the changes that occur over a huge timeframe and when we do that, we can actually see long-term patterns, which are indicators of true climate change and we're seeing without doubt that that is happening around our world today.

Those 30-year studies are clearly showing that we are very much in the middle of a climate emergency and that that climate emergency is caused by humanity burning fossil fuels. The great thing here is we have the opportunity; we have the control to do something about this and the big question is whether or not we will.

Many people talk about the costs of action and indeed there are costs associated with that, whether it's in terms of higher costs for fossil fuels of replacing our cars with electric cars, of putting solar panels on our houses, of making our energy grids distributed rather than centralized, of insulating our homes so that we use as little energy as possible, of just consuming less stuff. I will talk a little bit about growth in a little while, but for now, there are indeed costs in action, but there are enormous costs associated with inaction. And the costs of not dealing with the climate emergency right now will be dwarfed by any costs that we need to come forward with to move us away from fossil fuels.

So many studies tell us that, that the costs of inaction are far greater than the costs of action, that we will reach certain points along the way when – tipping points or feedback loops, as they're known – where unless we take the action prior to that point being reached, there is no way back. And we

look at the tundra at the poles. We look at the ocean currents, the deep-sea ocean currents. There are a number of places where, if things flip, then it will be literally impossible for us to regain control of the climate.

But currently, we are able to do that. We do have a choice, we do have an opportunity, and we cannot squander that. This bill presents this Legislature with an opportunity to do that.

One of the things which makes action related to climate change particularly challenging is that we have always assumed that a healthy economy is a growing economy. Indeed, all of the projections that you see in budgets, whether that be from companies or individual households or provincial governments, are related to growth, to the idea that growth will continue.

One of the problems is that perhaps what makes – as we have understood it conventionally – a healthy economy is exactly the thing which may be a great peril to a healthy environment. This requires a little bit of explanation.

I think for me, it's the biggest challenge that we face when it comes to combatting climate change and creating a habitable planet for all future generations, and that is that in striving to create what we consider to be a healthy economy, we may actually be creating the situations to make the climate emergency worse.

Let me explain.

The words “ecology” and “economy”, as you might imagine, are closely linked.

“Ecology” comes from the Greek word *oikos*, which means “home”. Ecology is the study of this home, and in this case, the home being planet Earth. Ecology is the study of planet Earth.

“Economy” comes from the same root, the same Greek root, *oikos*, but it is how we manage that home. The economy is basically how we choose to live on Earth. That's a way of looking at the economy, of literally talking about what the economy means.

At the moment, the economy, in order for it to be healthy in the conventional way that we look at it, has to grow. And as the economy has grown, humanity has – our numbers have grown here on planet Earth, of course. We are now closing in on 8 billion people. When I was born, there were less than 3 billion people. So, we've seen, as exponential growth tends to be, it can take off very suddenly. We have gone from a population which was very comfortably and manageably living on planet Earth to a situation where we have occupied every habitable corner of this planet, and some uninhabitable corners.

The world is full. The world went from being empty of humans, or you know, very few humans, to a situation where we have now filled the world. We are in danger of overrunning, and in some cases, I think we have already overrun the carrying capacity of our planet to support humanity.

That is a huge problem because if our goal is to grow the economy further and for us to have more stuff, for us to consume more stuff – and 70% of the economic spending is in consumption by individuals – and yet, we may have already blown by some of the carrying capacity of this planet, how do we reconcile that? How do we bring back and marry together again a healthy economy with a healthy environment?

Because if everybody in the world were to live to the same standards as we do here in North America – and that would include us in Prince Edward Island – driving the same number of cars per capita, living in the same kinds of houses, eating a North American diet, having closets full of unused clothing, all of the things associated with living in the developed world in the 21st century, if everybody in the world lived like that, we would need four more planet Earths to provide the resources in order to do that; clearly not possible.

How are we going to deal with that? How are we going to reconcile the fact that perhaps growth in our economy, while it could be good from a strictly economic point of view, may not be good from an ecological view? How are we going to reconcile that? I believe that is where the greatest challenge of our time lies. It will take enormously wise individuals in

positions of authority and power to understand how that's going to work and make good collective decisions.

I think it's time for me to pass this debate on to the next person. I hope I made my point that this is an extraordinarily important piece of legislation. I really hope that we debate this fully and carefully and thoroughly, and that we do end up with a piece of legislation which not only is capable of providing Prince Edward Island with a tool to have effective action against the climate emergency but also provides us with a tool which, again, returns the money collected through carbon taxation to the people who need it most.

This is a bill with two extraordinarily important parts. One is to be a tool to help us attack the climate emergency, and the second is to be a tool to help attack poverty on Prince Edward Island, and particularly those who need this money most at this time.

I would encourage everybody in this House to think carefully about this bill, to debate this bill at second reading thoroughly, and to allow us to make the best decision we possibly can for Islanders here today, but also for future generations of Islanders to come.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Hon. members, at this time we're going to take a quick five-minute recess.

[recess]

Speaker: Next to start debate, the hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak and I'll do it much more briefly than others to give others an opportunity to weigh in, which I always think is of critical importance. We're elected to represent Islanders from tip to tip from a wide variety of views and backgrounds, and it's important that we hear those voices. I'd like to add mine.

I will try to provide some facts to the case which I think will, I hope, maybe give

people more information and allow them to make more informed decisions.

Just by way of history, when we were elected in 2019, we inherited a plan that was active. This is a federal legislation. Provinces are obligated to either implement a carbon plan, or the federal backstop would be the other alternative, but the alternative has never been to have this or not have it.

The plan that we inherited was one that saw money rebated to pay for drivers' licenses and car registrations. I thought when it was implemented, I thought when I was running as a leader for the party, for the leadership in my party, and I thought when I was running to be Premier, I thought that that was a failed process. I thought that that didn't do anything to help Islanders reduce their reliance on carbon. In fact, I thought it enticed them to continue doing it.

When we came into government, we changed that program. We implemented a plan that helped Islanders transition to get away from the use of carbon. Because whether or not people agree with a carbon tax or agree with some of the principals, I think Islanders from tip to tip all want to see our environment improved and they all want to see our carbon footprint reduced and to end eventually our reliance on fossil fuels.

I believe that and that's what I've always believed. I think that our plan – I think I'll talk about something that not many people have talked in here yet and that will be about the actual environment, and the reduction of carbon –

Ms. Beaton: (Indistinct)

Premier King: – which the plan is about to – I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, if I rankle a few feathers by talking about the environment in here.

Ms. Beaton: I think you did.

Premier King: But I guess I have been called the green Premier and I've had lots of people from that party meet me in the street and say thank God there's still one in there, so we're here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: However, I digress Mr. Speaker, I digress.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct) whatever suits.

Premier King: So, we inherited this plan and we changed it, and our philosophy has been we have set collectively in here, the most aggressive carbon reduction targets in the country, in North America and maybe in the world. And to get there, we have to incentivize, and we have to assist, and we have to help Islanders reduce their use of carbon. And that is exactly what we're doing.

There are plans out there – I mean, we don't live in Vancouver, we don't live in Toronto, we live in Prince Edward Island, where our population is spread out and it's diverse, it's spread out across urban and rural lines. So, we can't expect a Vancouver plan will work in Prince Edward Island, so we're working on a Prince Edward Island plan. I've been calling it a hybrid plan, and I think it's our responsibility as a government, if we believe in carbon reduction, if we believe in reducing carbon in this province, that we have to help and assist those Islanders in the process. This is a journey that we're on, it's a journey. We set these goals that we need to aspire to, and we have to work to get toward, but we also have to live while we're here. And when those costs increase, we have to pass on the money to those Islanders and to help them through incentive programs and that's exactly what we're doing.

We've invested the money in things like free heat pumps, active transportation routes, rebates on transit, toonie transit, and rebates to help people convert to cleaner sources.

I think that's a noble goal. I talk to people across the country who are fascinated by what we're doing. In the fall, I accepted an award on behalf of all Islanders from the Clean 50 for the innovative approach we've taken to the environment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: I met with federal party leaders; Jagmeet Singh, who was just totally fascinated and captivated by the approach that we have been taking to the environment here; Annamie Paul, who was the leader of the federal Green Party and we spoke in my

cabinet room for 45 minutes and she was blown away by the approach that we have taken and how aggressive we are in our carbon reduction and how proud she was that our province has taken this approach.

So just for some facts: the plan that we inherited is based on \$30 a ton for carbon. And that money under the previous agreement, 3.7 or eight cents was – or \$13 million went toward lessening the provincial gasoline tax. The remainder of the money went to drivers' licenses and car registrations. The \$30 plan that we have in place, the money that goes in to heat pumps, the money that goes into active transportation, the money that goes into transit route, the money that is incentivizing Islanders to actually reduced carbon will continue.

As the price of carbon increases, it's going to go this year from \$30, to \$50. So, we've already had one year of a benefit of cushion because it didn't go to \$40 in the province, but it's going to 50. And the hybrid approach that we're putting forward is because we know Islanders need assistance in transitioning off of carbon, that we will continue to use the \$30 a ton to offset and help and transition Islanders from the reduction of carbon. And every individual increase year over year will be used into our rebate program.

So the rebate program we're implementing this year will be \$140, next year it'll be \$310. The year after that it'll be \$500 and it will continue to grow year over year as the price of carbon continues, hopefully to a point where that number will start to go down as the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action has talked about because we will have reduced our reliance on fossil fuels.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: And as we (Indistinct) heaven forbid, as we reduce our usage the carbon tax that we collect will be less. But we will help people transition in the meantime and at the same time through our hybrid model, put money into the pockets of Islanders because they need it.

And people have talked in here about lived experience and all those things, I grew up in

a low-income house; I know what a low-income household is. And I can tell you, I told me colleagues this, if you went to Lionel and Cattie King's house in Georgetown Royalty and said here's \$800, they would have taken the \$800 and they probably would have put \$150 on the phone bill that was two or three months past due. They would have taken \$150 and put it on the electric bill which was probably almost going to be shut off because it was past due. They probably would have put some money on McConnell's Clover Farm because the bill was getting up there with eight kids and they probably would have put some money on the Stewart and Beck's account.

They would have appreciated the money, they would have needed the money, and they would have used the money. But it would do nothing to help them reduce their reliance on oil, which they couldn't afford to have from Irving Oil, for example. They didn't have enough good credit to get the oil so they would put the oil in the tank \$100 a time or whatever.

But if you gave Lionel and Cattie King a heat pump, now you've changed the focus for them. Now they have a consistent heat source, they reduced, they don't need credit from Irving, they don't need to go with a jerrycan to get furnace oil. They can pay a bill to Maritime Electric for their heat, for the electric and it can catch them up a little bit. And that's how you help people.

But at the same time, Lionel and Cattie King will also get \$140, and the next year after that they will get 310, and they will get \$500. But I can't reduce carbon in those low-income homes if we don't help people. So, you have to help them transition. You could not go to my dad and say, put in a heat pump Lionel and we'll give you back three quarters of it in six months' time. He wouldn't have the \$4,000 to do it, he wouldn't have it.

So we can't live in this world to think that we can just say, give people money and they will do this. The people, yes, they will need more money, we know that the cost of living is increasing; 100% that the cost of living is increasing. And people will need more money; and we're helping in that process. But if we're serious about reducing our carbon, if we're serious about making our

province greener and cleaner and more healthy, if we're interested in being part of that global footprint that we all talk about, well, it starts on your doorstep. To make the world greener, you've got to start on your doorstep. And government has a responsibility to help, and that's what we're doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: I've heard debate in here that there's rebates of \$1,000 for families, in Alberta for example. Now, as I just told you my background, I also know a little bit about retail politics in this province. And I think if you asked any man, woman and child in this province, you said: would you rather \$100 or \$800, I think I know what the answer would be; it would be \$800.

But this \$1,000 that they talk about in Alberta, is part of the federal backstop program because Alberta doesn't believe in carbon reduction, they're not focused on carbon reduction, they don't want to work with the federal government on carbon reduction. They also pay 13 cents more for furnace oil, they also pay more for all of the other things that we are working here to try to keep lower.

So, I don't know how giving people more money on one end and taking it from the other does anything other than just move the money around. But I know it does nothing to reduce the use of carbon. The four provinces that have the federal backstop that the Leader of the Opposition is asking PEI to have; Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Manitoba. Four provinces that said to the federal government – first of all, they sued the federal government when it came to carbon tax. They didn't believe in it. They didn't want to be a part of it, didn't want to participate in it.

So now, we said when we got in, well, we're not going to be part of that. We believe in climate change. We believe in the initiatives that are needed to reduce carbon in this province and we're going to invest in it. And we did.

Now, we have the leader of the Green Party saying I wish we'd used the Jason Kenney approach. I wish we'd used the Doug Ford approach. I wish we'd used the Scott Moe

approach to this. I don't know how he'd do the job in this chair – that's not the way I'm going to do the job in this chair.

I believe in climate change. I work with our federal partners. The Prime Minister of Canada, in our first meeting, I said to him: You have goals to make this country greener and cleaner. Islanders support that. I want to work with you to make it so. What a refreshing response he said to me was, thankfully, there's one of you that will do that.

Thankfully, there's one of you (Indistinct) work (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Premier King: We'll work with you.

Catherine McKenna, who I would say is not just a pioneer and a leader in climate change, in climate change adaptation and improving the environment – I wish they would do it more like PEI does.

It is difficult for me to sit here and listen to some of the political rhetoric that was taking place. I understand that the philosophy that – I don't understand the philosophy. I understand the need to put it forward. The philosophy the Green Party is putting forward here is one that, I think, in the initial introduction of the motion talked about us being Conservative over here. The philosophy they're putting forward is very, very Conservative, in my mind.

When have you ever heard anyone say from the Green Party, give everyone back their money and let them decide?

Ms. Bell: Today.

Premier King: I know, but we're not sure where that's coming from because, when we said the same thing – when the federal government under Stephen Harper said we're cancelling child care. We're just going to give parents \$1,250 and let them make up their own decisions, they lost their minds. You can't do that, (Indistinct), you can't do that. I think people are having a hard time understanding the concept of this.

I think what's lost in the debate and has been lost in the debate from the beginning is this isn't a carbon tax. This is about carbon reduction. It's about cleaning our country and playing the role in cleaning our world. That's what's lost here and that's why we're using the funds to give to Islanders to help them reduce their reliance on carbon because that's what people who care about the world and making a greener environment should be focused on.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: I also want to say that April 1st is the beginning of the fiscal year. I don't think anyone should be under the false illusion that if somehow this PEI bill isn't passed that on 12:01 a.m. on April 1st that the federal backstop is going to kick in.

As I say, we're willing partners and negotiators with the federal government. They know where we stand. They hold our place up, actually, as the gold standard of what they wish other provinces would do.

We already have told them because of the timing of our legislation and because they have had to delay this a couple of times for not one but two federal elections that they're willing to work with us. There is no pressure to put on a federal backstop April 1st. They know we're working through this process and they know the carbon plan that we're putting forward is one that they want to support.

So, if this happens to get passed on April 3rd, that will be fine. The minister has talked to his federal colleagues. Our officials are in touch every single day. I don't want anyone to think there's any kind of rush or panic or that we've sneaked something in that we don't want debate on. We can debate this until the middle of June if that's what it takes.

There's no fear of this being talked off the floor to the point where the federal backstop will kick in. As long as I am the Premier of this province, I will not join the forces of others who don't believe in climate change and have the federal backstop kick in.

I will work to have the best plan that we can possibly have to make sure Islanders, who have been leaders for generations, to

continue to be leaders in how we actually go about reducing carbon and cleaning this province.

That's the commitment I made when I started. That's the commitment I made on the stage in Summerside when the Leader of the Opposition and I were talking about this during the election. It's what we will work toward each and every day here.

I would just say, to conclude my remarks, that this doesn't have to be a debate that rips us apart. I understand that this isn't exactly the way other parties would do this. I think we've seen how the Third Party would do this. I think we're hearing a lot about how the opposition party would do this.

How we have approached it, I think, is the Island way. It's the hybrid model. We're helping those who need help. As we work through, as we work on low-income Islanders, we're now expanding the criteria of who can get a free heat pump. That will continue as we make our way through. We'll expand it and we'll help Islanders. We'll help them on the lowest end and then we'll get to the next stage and then we'll get to the next stage.

As the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action has said time and again, maybe then we'll start working with them and we'll help them put solar panels on. We'll continue to invest in them and to invest in our environment to reduce carbon.

Let's not forget, that's what this bill is about. It's about reducing carbon. It's not about distributing wealth. It's not about changing any of that. It's about reducing carbon. We have aggressive targets. We need to meet them, and Islanders need help in meeting them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: So again, just to recap, if I could. \$30 a ton, what we have been charging for carbon tax will continue to be used to help Islanders with free heat pumps, electric vehicles, rebates, electric bikes, bike lanes, active corridors, many other initiatives that the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action has been a national and international leader on.

We are not going to give up on that. We are going to continue to do that, but we're also in our hybrid model to meet the opposition party at least part way. Anything we do in here I know is never enough. I know that. I know the job of opposition is to say we need more. Thank you, it's not enough. I get all of that, but our plan is meeting them on the journey.

We're rebating money back. We'll rebate more and more each year but we're not going to end the programming and we shouldn't end the programming that assists those Islanders that need it to reduce carbon.

I think the members of the Third Party should be supportive of that. I believe that is their philosophy. I think they should be supportive of that. I would be shocked if they didn't support this bill. I would be personally disappointed. I think I know where the opposition stands. I would be personally disappointed if members of the Third Party didn't take a stand to right a horrible wrong. They've got us into a mess; we got them out of it.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier King: – to right this wrong.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) not playing politics.

Premier King: – to right this wrong. They could do it. They should do it. They're progressive. Their co-leader, their new co-leader met with me in my office, Jagmeet Singh. Their new co-leader.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Premier King: He supports it, Mr. Speaker. He supports it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: I know you're all singing from the same song book now and I'm glad for that. Both of your party leaders support it so I hope you can get on board with it.

But in all seriousness, Mr. Speaker, this is an important debate but it's also important to also bring it back to what we're actually debating here is a bill for the Minister of

Finance to actually collect the tax. It's not about how we spend it.

The bill here that we're debating that's been hijacked for the day is, should we collect carbon tax that we're federally obligated and legally obligated to collect? That's what we're debating here today.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would adjourn the debate and thank you for the opportunity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: We need a seconder.

Premier King: Sorry. I'll adjourn the debate seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance.

An Hon. Member: You're shutting down discussion.

Ms. Lund: I'd like to reintroduce the debate, please.

Mr. Myers: We're no longer trying to take the bill to the floor.

Ms. Compton: Yeah.

Premier King: What do you want (Indistinct)

Speaker: Hon. members –

Mr. Myers: We're not going to debate (Indistinct) –

[audio malfunction]

Speaker: Did you get a seconder?

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Speaker: You got the seconder?

Hon. members, shall it carry?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Some Hon. Members: Carried.

Speaker: Hon. members –

Ms. Lund: (Indistinct) anyone else has to say –

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to have a show of hands to do a vote. All those voting –

Premier King: Yeah, what did I do?

Speaker: – to adjourn –

Ms. Beaton: You adjourned debate. You shut down debate.

Mr. Aylward: No, (Indistinct) just adjourned debate.

Premier King: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Adjourned isn't shut down.

An Hon. Member: It's government time. We want to move on to another piece of legislation.

Speaker: Okay, hon. members.

Premier King: We haven't passed the bill, we're just –

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Hon. members, those in favour of the adjournment, show your hands.

All those against the adjournment, show your hands.

Hon. member, the adjournment stands.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to call Order No. 1 back to the floor, seconded by the Premier.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Chair (Perry): (Indistinct) Whole House to further consider the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

A request has been made to bring a stranger onto the floor. Shall it be granted? Granted

Hon. members, we are on page 36. I will start off with reading in one moment.

Minister?

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

So, the takeback questions, they are complete. My staff worked on them last night until 7:30 p.m., so thanks for everybody that chipped in last night. I'm trying to get them here over the next couple of minutes, so please just be patient and continue asking questions. They're en route.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Would you please state your name and position for Hansard?

Shannon Burke: Yeah, it's Shannon Burke, Director of Finance, Department of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Chair: Thank you very much, and welcome.

So again, members, we are on page 36, Department of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Apprenticeship

“Appropriations provided for administration of apprenticeship training and certification of tradespersons.” Administration: 12,100. Equipment: 4,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 13,500. Professional Services:

140,000. Salaries: 543,600. Travel and Training: 23,400. Grants: Other: 100,500.

Total Apprenticeship: 837,600

The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Chair.

First of all, just a general comment, I really do enjoy that we call them “takebacks”. It’s interesting that we’ve taken on that term and that’s sort of the new term, that – takebacks, okay. That’s a PEI Legislature unique term, I think.

Overall spending in this section is well below what was expected for 2021-2022. Can you tell me why that is?

Shannon Burke: Yes, the majority of it relates to a couple of federally funded programs that we had, Blended Learning for Apprentices and Women in Construction Trades, and it was just an estimate of how much revenue we were receiving. So, it was reduced in relation to the reduction in revenue.

Ms. Altass: Why would the expected revenue have changed so much?

Shannon Burke: Because we’re making an estimate of how much we’re getting in a previous fiscal. We’re usually making those estimates in December or early January.

Ms. Altass: And again, I know this will be coming in the takebacks, but this is another area where it’s helpful to see what the breakdown of the revenues is, just to get a sense, but I’m sure that’ll be coming back soon.

So, I guess there’s – do you have any sense if there will be a similar lower level of revenues coming in, or is it again just sort of a guessing game? I’m not sure how that works.

Shannon Burke: Those two particular programs have ended, as far as I’m aware, but if there were to be more contracts entered into, then we would have to go through Treasury Board and Executive Council to increase the revenue on the

associated expenses via special warrant, but it would be revenue offset.

Ms. Altass: And in terms of what funding does come in, then, from the federal government, do you have an opportunity to engage with the federal government on providing suggestions, or the PEI contacts, what sort of programs we really need here? Or is it just sort of whatever they send down, we go with that?

Mr. MacKay: No, we have constant communication with them. They’ve been great to deal with.

Ms. Altass: Do you have any examples of programs, then, that have been either implemented in full or changed in some way to be more PEI-specific through that negotiation?

Mr. MacKay: Yeah, we would. I don’t have any with me, but I can certainly get some for you. A lot of the negotiations are done through the departmental level and the director. So, yeah, we can get the list of them, but there’d be quite a few.

Ms. Altass: And just specifically the Women in Construction Trades, is that one of the ones that is – it looks like it’s significantly underspent and there’s no funding for 2022-’23. So, is that one where the federal funding just didn’t come through?

Shannon Burke: Correct.

Ms. Altass: That seems like a real shame. Was there any sort of reason for why that program ended that was provided?

Shannon Burke: We would have to take back the details on that.

Ms. Altass: I mean, I know that there are other programs that would support women getting into construction, but I know that obviously construction is an area where we have significant labour shortages. That’s certainly not new, and there are opportunities for workers who would be interested in engaging in new learning opportunities in this area, I’m sure.

I think having programs that are specifically geared to the needs of women and their

experiences is really critical here. It's not an area where women have traditionally felt welcome to engage in this type of work and making sure we're taking down all barriers for them, for women to participate, would be certainly a great resource for that industry.

So, can you elaborate a bit on perhaps what other – because we've lost this program, Women in Construction Trades, what other avenues women have to be supported to engage in construction?

Mr. MacKay: Yeah, certainly. I can get a list of what they've been working on now through the department, but I know there's been quite a bit of work done on this. I think all that's happened is we've expanded the program itself into a little different format, but I know that the department had meetings over the last couple of weeks, and they're continuing to do so.

I'll bring back everything on that because I don't think the program is dismantled; I think it's just refigured.

Ms. Altass: Yeah, thank you. That would be really, really good to know, and certainly, would be welcome news if it wasn't dismantled completely, because again, we really need to look at those innovative solutions and expanding opportunities for a diverse range of Islanders to engage in all different types of work that perhaps there have been barriers before that haven't allowed for that.

Those are all the questions I have in this section, Chair. Thank you.

Chair: Shall this section carry?

Some Hon. Members: Call the hour.

Chair: The hour has been called.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe, that this House adjourn until Tuesday, March 29th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a good weekend, everyone.

The Legislature adjourned until Tuesday, March 29th, at 1:00 p.m.