

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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Second Session of the Sixty-sixth General Assembly

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The Legislature sat at 1:00 p.m.

Appointment of Pages

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, that the following students be appointed as pages for this, the 2nd Session of the 66th General Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island;

Isabel Campanaro, Bluefield High School; Frida Schneider, Charlottetown Rural High School; Malcolm Orford, Colonel Gray High School; Melanie Watson, Ecole François-Buote; Lucas Nguyen, Grace Christian School; Simba Hove, Kensington Intermediate Senior High School; Margaret Wooten, Montague Regional High School; Paul Weber, Morell Regional High School; Marissa Howlett, Souris Regional High School; Oliva McNeill, Three Oaks Senior High School.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Resolution of Sympathy

Speaker: The hon. Premier

Premier King: Mr. Speaker I move, seconded by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the following Motion:

BE IT RESOLVED that the following Humble Address be presented to His Most Gracious Majesty the King, expressing the heartfelt sympathy of this House on the death of Her Late Gracious Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, and also conveying to His Majesty the happiness felt by the residents of Prince Edward Island upon his accession to the Throne:

TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY:

Most Gracious Sovereign:

We, Your Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island, in session assembled, humbly beg leave to approach Your Majesty to express the profound sorrow felt by this House and by the loyal

people of this province with Your Majesty and all the other members of the Royal Family, at the irreparable loss sustained by you and them in the death of our Late Beloved Sovereign Queen Elizabeth II.

In common with our fellow subjects in all parts of the Commonwealth, we mourn keenly the death of our Revered Queen, whose deep sense of responsibility, whose devotion to the duties of Her High Office, and whose wise and sympathetic leadership we acknowledge with profound gratitude. We pray that Almighty God may abundantly comfort Your Majesty and the Royal Family in your poignant grief.

With feelings different but very deep and sincere, we now hail Your Majesty's accession to the Throne of Your Ancestors. We beg to assure Your Majesty of our devoted attachment to Your Majesty's Person and Throne, and to express the fervent hope that Your Majesty's reign will continue for many peaceful and prosperous years.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Address be engrossed and sent to the Governor General of Canada to be forwarded to His Majesty the King.

I have a few words, Mr. Speaker (Indistinct)
—

Speaker: Yes, the hon. Premier.

Premier King: Obviously, Mr. Speaker, this is in recognition of Queen Elizabeth II who, for more than 70 years, reigned with dedication and dignity. Her Majesty had a deep interest in Canada and in Canadians in general.

In fact, she visited more times to Canada than any place outside of the United Kingdom and made four official visits to Prince Edward Island during her reign, first as Princess Elizabeth and Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh in 1951. They returned again in 1959 as Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip.

Five years later, in 1964, Queen Elizabeth returned to officially open the Confederation Centre of the Arts. They were back again in Prince Edward Island in 1973 to celebrate the centennial of Prince Edward Island's entry into Confederation.

Her Majesty has been a most dutiful monarch, actively participating in everyday duties, constitutional affairs, and public engagements. Throughout her 70 years as our sovereign, the level of engagement in her job was an inspiration to all of us. She truly lived up to the pledge she offered in 1947 when she took her oath and said, and I quote, “My whole life, whether it be long or short, will be devoted to your service.”

On behalf of the Government of Prince Edward Island and the citizens that we represent in this Assembly, I would like to offer my heartfelt condolences, once again, to the family of Queen Elizabeth II, her children and grandchildren, and all of those within the Commonwealth who mourn her loss.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the Premier’s remarks.

For those who are not privileged or able to sit in this House, before we open the doors and allow the public in, we say some prayers. The first one is to His Majesty. In so many ways, that jarring change from what we’ve known literally, for almost all of us, for a lifetime, is still in yours ears.

It doesn’t feel natural; it doesn’t feel normal right, yet.

The Queen, of course – the first two lines of the British national anthem are, or, at least, I should say more accurately, they used to be, “God save our gracious Queen/Long live our noble Queen.”

For seven decades, Queen Elizabeth reigned with extraordinary grace and nobility.

Her reign, of course, spanned a time of unparalleled change in our world in terms of both the scope and pace and of the attitudes of society. And much of what would have been familiar back in 1952 has been replaced, or superseded, by things that would have been literally quite

unimaginable to the young woman who assumed the Throne so many years ago.

She carried out her duties over those seven decades as gracefully and as nobly as she did – is a real testament to her courage and to her personal attributes as the most public of public figures.

I think it’s sometimes easy to forget that people in public roles are in essence people and faced with the same sorts of personal and family challenges and emotional struggles that we all have. And there is no doubt that, particularly in her later years, Queen Elizabeth faced many such trials, and it was of course through birth and through ancestry quite an extraordinary life, but it was also, in many respects, a very ordinary one, subject to the full range of human doubts, of challenges and frailties that we all experience, and she appeared to have a really uncanny way of creating comfort and calm around her, which would almost be the last place that you would expect to find that.

She was a steady and she was a calming presence in what was, for much of her reign, a very volatile world. So, like so many Islanders I feel immense gratitude and admiration for her lifetime of service, and I wish her son, His Majesty King Charles the third, all best wishes in his new role and as the motion says, with “...the fervent hope that Your Majesty’s reign will continue for many peaceful and prosperous years.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, on the behalf of the third party caucus, we join Islanders, Canadians, and citizens around the world in offering our sympathies to the Royal Family on the passing of her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

For the past 70 years, Her Majesty has reigned over our country with dignity, compassion, and respect. Her sense of duty and devotion to a life of public service will forever be cherished and admired. The Queen’s sheer presence has brought joy, peace, and solidarity to individuals across the globe in some of the most challenging and divided times in our history; an ability

very few individuals will ever have, and one that is deeply respected.

On behalf of the third party caucus of Prince Edward Island and the Legislative Assembly, we join everyone in mourning the profound loss of Her Majesty, and thank her for her service, leadership, and grace she brought to our province, country, and countries around the world.

Our thoughts are especially with our new sovereign King Charles as he assumes the royal duties and responsibilities while also mourning the loss of his beloved mother.

May Her Majesty rest peacefully.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I move, seconded by the Leader of the Opposition, the following resolution of sympathy:

WHEREAS Mr. Robert “Allison” Ellis, former Member of the Legislative Assembly for 2nd Prince from 1978 to 1993, passed away on October 25, 2022;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House recognize the contributions made by the late Member, Mr. Robert “Allison” Ellis, to this province.

I just would offer a few of my own personal comments – I think the Leader of the Opposition and I had talked about this in the past – this is one of the conflicting parts of our jobs as legislators we get to stand up here and recognized the contributions of many, but we have to do so in knowing that they have passed on from this world, and it is an honour to be up here today to recognize the late Allison Ellis.

Throughout his life, he was – as an MLA of course we knew him best for – but throughout his life he was a staunch champion for agriculture for rural communities, and for rural health care.

Allison was a proud product of the Greenhill School. He worked as a farmer, a fisher, and

a manufacturer of farm machinery before entering politics. He was among a generation of young farmers who, at that time, were heavily involved in the National Farmers Union, and many of them eventually found their way to seats in this Legislature and beyond.

I think of the late Wilbur MacDonald, I think of Eric Hammill, and of course my friend and neighbour Wayne Easter, who for 28 years consecutively was a Member of Parliament for Malpeque. And they all trace their roots back to that movement within the National Farmers Union.

First elected in the general election of 1978, Allison would go on to be elected four more times to represent the people of 2nd Prince until his retirement in 1993. He served as a member of the Cabinet in the government of the late premier Bennet Campbell in the late 1970s, as well as in the government of the late premier Joe Ghiz in the 1980s. He also served as the chair of the standing committee on agriculture and as opposition House leader during his time in this Chamber.

Many groups benefitted from Allison’s time and energy. Among those the Lions Club, the Masonic Lodge, the Athletic Club of O’Leary, and of course, the National Farmers Union, which we just mentioned, where he sat on the national board.

In recognition of his many efforts, Allison received a commemorative medal from the Canada 125 Committee, and he is a former Citizen of the Year at the O’Leary Potato Blossom Festival.

Of all the things that Allison was passionate about, nothing trumped rural health care. I got to know Allison around the year 2000 more personally, when he had changed political allegiances and was working, then, for Eva Rodgerson who was a PC candidate in West Point-Bloomfield, I think it might have been called then, that district.

The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness would know it well; he might have been on the other side of that battle at that time. I talked to the member about this – I talked to Bobby Morrissey, the Member of Parliament who knew Allison very well – and some people might have thought Allison stubborn.

I would say he was principled. He believed very, very deeply in his principles. He believed very deeply in rural Prince Edward Island and in rural health care.

Those were issues that he just was not flexible on. That caused some changes within his political life over a number of years, although both the member and the current member of parliament said he “found his way back home,” in their words, toward the end.

He was a passionate person who wanted West Prince to make sure they got their fair shake. If they didn’t get their fair shake, he was the first one to stand up and say they didn’t get their fair shake. He took on friend and foe alike; whatever was needed. He was proud of his roots. He was proud of his community. He was proud to be from West Prince, and I just think he’s just one of the many who have contributed so much to the rich tapestry of our Legislature over the years.

I think Allison serves as a shining example of the many of us who are in here now, who have the privilege to represent our communities, the citizens who live in these communities. He did so ably, and I think he set the bar for all of us.

So, to all of his family and friends, I would pass along my deepest sympathies on behalf of the Government of Prince Edward Island and the citizens of Prince Edward Island.

I extend my condolences to the family, and I thank Allison for the immense contribution he made to our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier has done a wonderful job of chronicling the contributions and the life of Allison. I really don’t have much to add to that other than, as the Premier said, he moved around politically a little bit. He sat awhile as an independent because he felt that he had been misled by a member of his caucus.

So, he’s clearly a man of principle. He stood up for O’Leary hospital – he stood up for the whole community, of course, but he was most actively involved and best known for the work that he did to make sure that the O’Leary hospital came into being, and that the emergency room there would stay open.

I know that he has passed the torch on to others since then, representing West Prince. I had a lovely chat with O’Leary-Inverness before we got going today, who told me some interesting stories about Allison. I, too, like the Premier, want to pass on my sympathies to Melba, his children and grandchildren, and of course, the wider community of West Prince that he served in so many ways over his years in office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I, too, want to convey condolences to the family of Allison Ellis, whose actual name was Robert “Allison” Ellis, but who was always known in our community as just Allison.

He was a constituent of mine and resided in the community of West Cape in the riding of O’Leary-Inverness. He certainly was an advocate for the farming community in his time as an NFU member, but also, when he sought the Liberal nomination in 1978, actually, my father was his running mate at the time. My dad had been the incumbent; he was elected in ’74.

Allison was actually quite involved with not only the farming community, but he was a fisherman. He owned lobster gear, and his family still holds that gear. I think his grandson is fishing the gear at the moment.

He also was known for his bee-keeping prowess and making honey, and also, maple syrup was another thing. If anybody went to his house for any particular event, I can remember going to some anniversaries and some birthday parties, Allison was always the man responsible for the ice cream. He could put together homemade ice cream and always had good flavours and stuff.

But the other thing, he was always a very innovative and creative guy when it came to equipment. He always could seem to take a piece of farm machinery and somehow modify it to maybe work a little more to what he thought it should.

In fact, when he was an MLA for 2nd Prince, he represented the Tyne Valley rink. That was in the riding at the time. They were looking to – I think they had met with my dad and Allison about trying to get a Zamboni for the rink, and Allison said, “I’ll make you one.” And sure enough, he went and looked at some others around and came back and made a Zamboni for the rink. It was actually the ones that go behind the tractor at the time, but they were pretty popular for many years.

But like I said, he was first elected in 1978, and he was the running mate of my father. When they’d be campaigning in the Freeland area in general, that was kind of one of the bigger polls, they’d always come to our place for supper. It was just the opposite if they were campaigning up in the West Cape area. I could always remember the laughs and the stories that him and dad would have about who they saw and where they went and some of that stuff. It was always something that sort of intrigued me a little bit about politics, I guess.

But he was reelected in the general elections of ’79, ’82, ’86, and ’89 for the riding of 2nd Prince, and like I say, that pretty much is most of the riding of O’Leary-Inverness today, although there’s a little bit in the Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke area, that old riding. First, ’78-’79, he was the minister without portfolio, which back in those days, that was a bit more common. Today, that’s very rare that anybody is a minister – which just basically means they sit in Cabinet; they aren’t responsible for any particular item, but they might try to push an agenda of government to the people and whatnot. In ’86, he was appointed minister of energy and forestry, and I want to elaborate a little bit about Allison’s contribution on the forestry side of things.

If you recall, there was a program to try to put a lot of biomass burners in schools, I’ll say probably a bit before its time because the technology wasn’t quite to what it is today, but at that time, there was a lot of

schools, and I remember I think the O’Leary high school and Westisle, all those, have these biomass burners. Some of them have been adapted now to more modern technology, but he was responsible for that.

And the other thing he was responsible for was minister of the PEI Liquor Commission. Of course, I was minister of the PEI Liquor Commission for a period of time too, which always was an interesting conversation when he and I would get together and we’d talk about the stories. Maybe back in the early days of the Liquor Control Commission, things weren’t maybe as up and up as they are today, but anyway, it was just always interesting.

We were both responsible for, I’ll say, modernizing the Liquor Control Commission’s footprint in O’Leary. I think Allison made sure that the liquor store was in the back of the community where nobody could see it, as Allison was kind of a bit of a temperance man. I guess when I became minister, I put it right on Main Street.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Henderson: Anyhow, in the end, it all worked out and he understood the value of why we did it and why we put it with the Co-op and that it made a good – and he was also a chair of a standing committee of agriculture.

But Allison certainly was a big contributor to the community, and as the Premier mentioned, he was recognized as Citizen of the Year at the PEI Potato Blossom Festival in O’Leary.

But I think there was one thing that he really had an active passion for, was the Masonic Lodge. He was the local president of the Masonic Lodge as the Master of the Corinthian Lodge in O’Leary. In 1968, he became that, and eventually went on to become the Grand Master of the PEI Masonic Lodge in 1991.

He certainly had a lot of awards and farm awards, again, with the Atlantic Salmon Federation, for soil conservation. He was a member of the Acadian Fishermen’s Co-op Association, which, obviously, he was a fisherman; local president of the National Farmers Union; and he also chaired the PEI

Land Development Corporation, and a member of the O'Leary athletic association, which would be the rink.

But the one thing, as the Premier mentioned, he was extremely passionate about the Community Hospital in O'Leary and was willing to put his career on the line for that facility. He advocated on every capacity, in the community, outside the community, in government, and in any way he could.

It was interesting that, actually, the last call I received from Allison – now, this was probably about maybe two weeks, three weeks before he passed away. It was about the current government, who pulled – abruptly pulled, I might add – ambulatory care services out of the O'Leary hospital. Allison was quite displeased about that. I did inform him that I had been working on trying to get it reinstated.

The ironic part of it all was, it was reinstated on October 25th, the day he passed away later that evening.

I certainly always enjoyed my visits with Allison and I certainly will fondly remember the stories and the issues of politics that he always was so passionate about. Will never forget his campaigning style. He was a larger-than-life constituent.

I certainly want to pass on sympathies to his wife, Melba, his sons, Michael and Merle, and daughters, Amber and Melody, and their extended families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I, too, want to rise to pass my sympathy on to Melba and the whole family. Certainly won't go into the details of my colleague, who has done an excellent job of recapping the life, the contribution of Mr. Ellis to the West Prince community.

If there were two politicians, as we look back from the West Prince area, that if you

stated their first names, it would be Bob and Allison and everybody in the West Prince area would know exactly who you were speaking about.

Both of those politicians, Bob Campbell, Allison Ellis, they had great passion for their area. I think somebody had, with reference to Allison, had mentioned the word "stubborn." Passion is what I felt from knowing Mr. Ellis, from sitting on committees, boards with him. He had a passion. He had a passion for agriculture, definitely. He had a passion for health care as the Member of O'Leary-Inverness alluded to; the Masonic Lodge.

But I think it could all be wrapped into one thing, and that is that Allison had a true passion for his community. He would stand up for it and he would fight for it.

With that, once again, my personal sympathies, condolences to Melba and the whole Ellis family.

Thank you.

Speaker: Will both these motions carry?

Some Hon. Members: Carried.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier

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

I already feel, in the early moments of the first day of this session, I'm overexposed, but I will again stand up here to welcome my colleagues back to another session of debate. I look forward to the debate and to continue to work on projects and programs and policies that are important to all Prince Edward Islanders.

I want to begin by saying hello to all those who are watching from home, all of those in our media who help bring the news to Islanders who aren't able to be here. Also want to say that since we last gathered here, we've been through some challenges, I guess, to underscore the obvious.

During Hurricane Fiona, I think we've all been changed a little bit. We've all been damaged a little bit and we've all seen what has happened to our province, the devastation. It's been hard on the heart and it's been hard on a lot of families and individuals.

But throughout the beginning and throughout Fiona, there's been wonderful first responders, line workers, utility crews, military and so many other communities and volunteers who have done so much in the face of difficulty.

I want to begin by thanking them and for all Islanders for trying to band together to do the best that we could facing one of the most difficult things we've ever had to face. That will need to continue as we make our way into winter.

I want to also extend my congratulations to the UPEI women's rugby team, the Panthers, who won their first AUS championship last weekend, a very hard-fought victory over Acadia. They had beaten their nemesis, St. FX, prior to that. They're on their way now, I think they're in British Columbia. They'll play Ottawa tomorrow at the Youth Sport Championships. I'm just so happy to see come to fruition so much hard work.

I especially want to point out a player on that team, Emily-Anne MacQuarrie, who lives in District 15, where I am privileged to represent, but Emily has worked at my wife's farm for about 10 or 15 years. I've seen her grow up, and I'm so happy to see her meet this dream and challenge and wish her all the best. She always has a smile, and we certainly miss her around the farm, but we know she's doing great service with UPEI as she continues her studies.

I also want to take a moment to recognize the passing of Alex MacAulay. Alex, many people would know, would be a brother to Lawrence MacAulay and to Jimmy MacAulay and the family. If you were familiar with PEI political history, Alex was the chief of staff for former premier Joe Ghiz. If you met Alex, you never forgot him, I think would be the best thing I would say. He was firm and fair; more firm than fair sometimes, in his own admission. But he was a gem. He was smart. He was fun to

be around. He was wise. He was a great athlete.

I know he's had some hardship over the last nine years of his life. He spent the last nine years at The Mount. When I had written my first book, I went in and read him some of the stories from it and it was a great opportunity to share some laughs with Alex.

Just to all of the family, to Clare-Anne, to Maria, Jonathan, Jack, and Sam, I pass on my sympathies. I know all of us in these positions don't get here without having tremendous people to help them along the way. I have no idea how many people work in the opposition office, but I know they provide wonderful service. It's the same thing in my office, it's the same thing in the third party office, and I know Alex provided that service to premier Ghiz and so many others during his time.

I also wanted to acknowledge the empty chair here. Our member is dealing with a health issue, and I've chatted to him a couple of times via text. Just because he's not here doesn't mean he isn't watching or he isn't advocating for District 24, that I can tell you. He's very anxious to get some news moving on the Evangeline school, and I join him in that as well.

Just finally, we have some municipal elections taking place. We have a school board election taking place as well. I got my mail-in ballot for the school board election. It's on the way. I just want to thank all of the candidates who have put their name forward. I still believe, although it's difficult and we can all relate in this House how difficult it is to be in elected office some days, but I still think it's a higher calling. I think it's an important calling, and I think we need to have more faces from all walks of life so that the community that we serve can look into these institutions and see themselves within it.

So, to all those people who have stepped forward to run, I wish them well, I thank them for their contribution to democracy, and I look forward to seeing how the people will determine those outcomes, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'd like to echo the Premier's welcome to everybody who's watching from home after a long drought of not being able to watch the greatest show on earth, and welcome back.

Also, to the folks who are here in the gallery today; I see some familiar faces. I see Pauline Howard, I see Toby MacDonald, and I see Debbie Graham and Bev Cornish, so welcome to you, amongst others. It's lovely to have people back in the gallery again.

Like the Premier, I'm aware of how much exposure one gets at the beginning of a session like this, and I'm anxious to get to the business of the day, so I'm going to keep this short.

I would like to mention a constituent of mine who was featured this morning in a CBC story about 4-H competitors who, after a three-year absence, are getting to go to the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto. That's Grace Hughes, who's from Kelly's Cross.

I've known Grace since she was a very young girl. She's now 21 and is about to age out of 4-H, although she's going to stay on as a leader in that organization. She's been with it for 14 years, and she's an extraordinary young woman. She's just completed a two-year diploma in dairy business management at Dal, the faculty of agriculture in Truro, and she now works as a dairy herds person on a nearby farm here in District 17.

I wish her well, and I wish all of the Island competitors who are going to the fair later this week, well.

Finally, just to mention the extraordinary effort that the community on Prince Edward Island gave and came together to provide following Fiona. The Premier mentioned, of course, the volunteers, the first responders, the lines people; an enormous number of folks who came together to get our Island back on its feet again after being stamped on so horribly.

I want particularly to mention in my own district the folks at Afton Hall. There were many, many warming centers and community resources across this province that opened their doors out of necessity – absolute necessity – for people who were without power for two weeks or longer, in order to give them water, heat, be able to charge their cell phones, and in the case of Afton Hall, to provide hot meals three times a day. They provided upwards of 4,000 hot meals, which is an extraordinary effort for a tiny community – and not the only one in my district and again across the province.

In my own district, the Kingston Legion and also Emyvale Rec Centre, they did the same sort of thing. But I have to point out the scope of the effort that was made at Afton Hall and the number of volunteers that came forward. I want to thank the EMO chair, Shaun MacArthur, and the other folks who put together the extraordinary response: Mayor Helen Smith-MacPhail and the CAO of the new municipality, Laala Jahanshahloo. They just did an extraordinary job of bringing the community together and providing what people really needed in an extraordinarily difficult and stressful time.

Thank you to everybody across the province who stepped up and displayed that traditional Island neighbourliness and care for each other and got us through which was really a very difficult time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West.

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise and welcome all the colleagues back here, and all the staff, Pages, as well, – you know, the standing committees have been very busy and I want to just take a second to acknowledge everybody, all the staff that worked hard over during the standing committees.

It's funny because, on the last presentation – I'd seen it before but one of the presenters couldn't get his slide deck to work, and I said to the presenter, I was like: Oh, just watch that door, somebody will appear and come and fix it instantly. And that's exactly

what happened. They work very hard and they're there for us.

Welcome everybody watching in the gallery, it was great to chat with everybody quickly beforehand, and I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

As well, everybody was – Fiona hit us hard, and I was out in the neighbourhood trick-or-treating, and doing that, and had a lot of conversations, and it was great to see the kids being happy, they normalize, as the parents all talked about what happened to them, in little groups around the neighbourhood. It hit us hard, and I think communities around Prince Edward Island stuck together.

Another thing that hit us hard is, there's been some loss throughout the community, and I just want to acknowledge everybody in the district and everybody in here that might have experienced some loss along the way. We acknowledge your pain, and we sympathize with you.

I want to echo the Premier's sentiments where he talked about Alex MacAulay. He was the President of Holland College from 1995 to 2005. And you don't just get there, you've done something great in your life, and this gentleman had done a lot for Prince Edward Island and shaped the footprints of Prince Edward Island. There's MacAulay Court right now that athletes play on and work their hardest on and that'll forever be known as MacAulay Court as the athletes and the people around the community work hard on that. That was a sentiment to Alex, so my deepest sympathies to his family.

Lastly, I just want to say – also just talk about an empty chair around the way, so if the person in the empty chair is watching, we're thinking of you, and get some rest and we'll see you soon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and say hello to all my colleagues here in the Legislative Assembly as well as everyone watching

from home from the great district of Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

I also want to say hello to Pauline Howard, Toby MacDonald, Debbie Graham, and Bev Cornish, who are here in the gallery today; these wonderful women who I have so much respect for. It's wonderful to see you here.

Just to mention quickly, Debbie Graham and I have known each other for quite a while; we met at CUPE 1870 when we were both members of that local, and I have such respect for Debbie and for the work of unions across this province who I got to hear from at the PEI Federation of Labour Convention this past weekend. I always appreciate that opportunity and I look forward to fighting and bringing up issues that those workers at that convention shared with me and with all members who were there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome back to all of my colleagues and everybody tuning in from all over the Island. It's wonderful to see familiar faces and new faces in the gallery today, thank you so much for joining us.

I'd also really like to welcome our new Pages. That's always an exciting moment that tends to just slip right by, so thank you to our Pages. I look forward to getting to know you better.

Finally, October 21st was Canadian School Library Day, a chance where schools from all over the Island celebrated events around literacy. Just a huge thank you and shout-out to our school librarians across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome again to online followers from Brighton and elsewhere. I also want to

congratulate the hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for his new position and note that I, the oldest member of the Legislature, will be the critic of the youngest member.

Mr. Hammarlund: The hon. member may not yet have his wisdom teeth. Mine, of course –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hammarlund: – mine, of course, have long come and gone, as you can see. But I have great faith in the power of youth and I'm looking forward to the hon. minister giving good answers to my questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Now you know why I wanted to go before him instead of after him. How are you supposed to follow that?

I just wanted to take a moment to recognize community groups who were absolutely critical to the well-being of our community in response to Fiona. Most recently, we've seen the Charlottetown Y's Men, which is now called the Y's Service Club because they've started accepting women. How amazing is that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: Yes, exactly. They just conducted a food drive. They were really worried that they weren't going to be able to meet the kind of targets but they have actually exceeded the amount collected last year – over 18,000 pounds of food and cash donations, and donations are still coming in, and that's because the need is really great.

Before that, we also saw 4S Catering, the Sikh Association, Charlottetown Mutual Aid, of course, and in my own district of Park Royal, Danny's Angels, who are a group who take care of the citizens there and actually fed all the residents of Park Royal for five days during the height of Fiona. I want to extend thanks to people like that that

show up when nobody else is looking and do the hard work to keep people safe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Mr. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to welcome all of our colleagues back today and also, last night, as the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty mentioned, a lot of people out treat or treating. Actually, a lot of the residents in Sherwood, specifically on the Mount Edward Road area, were out trick or eating.

I just want to say a congratulations to the Mount Academy. Students were in the neighbourhood last night of Sherwood and they were collecting donations for the food bank. I just want to commend them on the great work that they do and making sure that they're being a good part of Sherwood and a part of the community there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It's a pleasure to be back in here today with my colleagues. I want to say hello to all those in the gallery, to those who are watching online, especially to those in District 27 Tignish-Palmer Road.

I want to express my belated birthday wishes to the Speaker who, I think his birthday was last Friday. I won't say his age but he is CPP eligible.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Also, I think there's another birthday in the House, correct me if I'm wrong, but Premier, is it a birthday celebration today for you also?

Premier King: Yes.

Mr. Perry: Okay. I'd like to wish the Premier a very happy birthday.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: It's All Saints' Day. Today is All Saints' Day.

Speaker: I'm going to say a few words since it's the Premier's birthday. I didn't think anybody noticed, but thank you, Deputy Speaker.

I'd just like to welcome everyone back today to start a new session. I'd like to welcome the people in the gallery. It's always nice to see people in the gallery and, of course, our best friends, the media; everybody likes the media.

I'd like to thank all staff, and that's on the fourth floor, third floor, first floor. I don't want to mention no names, you'll miss somebody with names and there's too many to mention. There are people behind the wall, there's people across the street, here, and especially our Pages. I'd like to thank the Pages. Those are the ones that make our coffee. Of course, Marissa makes my coffee every evening. She works at Robin's in Souris.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Speaker: She makes my coffee for me.

Marissa had an older sister, Julia, that was a Page in the House. She had another sister, Megan, that was a Page in the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Actually, I sat in here all through the three sisters, so your mother's going to have quite a photo album because I make sure I send her mother a picture every year. Welcome, Marissa.

I just wish everybody a happy session. We'll have a happy session, the way the thanks – everybody's thanking everybody in here to start it off. So, I think it's going to be a good session.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

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

Richard Guimond

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

After hurricane Fiona, many communities found gaps in emergency services and preparedness under this government. Moving forward, looking out for one another will be a community responsibility. The community of Lennox Island knew this even before Fiona happened.

Volunteer firefighters across this province and within the riding of O'Leary-Inverness went above and beyond the call of duty during the devastation caused by Fiona. I want to thank them for their extraordinary efforts.

I want to highlight one such constituent who has dedicated his life to the service of others. Richard Guimond of Lennox Island has been a member of the Lennox Island Fire Department for 32 years. He joined when he was a teenager; if you look at the look of him, he must have been.

Since then, he held many roles within the department; the role of Fire Chief for the last seven years. During that time, he also sought elected office and was elected to the Lennox Island Band Council. He recently retired from the Lennox Island Fire Department but his service to the community continues. He's now taken on the role of Emergency Measures Coordinator for the Lennox Island Band.

His skills and experience were vital during Fiona. He made sure residents had access to the community warming centre, fuel for their generators, and even provided generators and check-ins to residents in need.

He has always served his community with pride and distinction, without any expectation of recognition. I want to convey to Richard Guimond a heartfelt thank you, on behalf of this Legislature and the citizens of O'Leary-Inverness, for your service.

I wish you and your partner, Mary Jane, and your family, every success in your new role, protecting your community from unexpected harm as the EMO Coordinator for Lennox Island Band members.

Thank you, Richard.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Trick or Treat

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

A young child shows up at a house. “Trick or treat,” they say. The adult who answers the door reaches into the trick-or-treater’s bag and pulls out a fist full of candy. Then, they give some of it back to the child – not all of it, but some of it, back to the child. Trick or treat? That’s a very good question.

Yesterday was Halloween. It was also the day that this government chose to give Islanders back some of their money, which they had recently taken from them as excess tax revenues. As the Premier loves to say, he put money in the pockets of Islanders, but only after he first took it out of there himself.

We’ve all lived through one of the most challenging times in our province’s history. People are more stressed than they have ever been before. Massively higher prices, as a result of country-leading inflation, has cost thousands of Islanders thousands of dollars in runaway prices, not to mention added taxes, as a result.

This has left lots and lots of folk living month-to-month with growing stresses and ballooning debts while government hoarded their cash.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: Money that was needed by tens of thousands of Islanders to make ends meet, and to ease the deep distress that was throughout our province.

Yesterday’s announcement, welcome as it undoubtedly was, was not crafted around the needs of all the Islanders who have suffered through the last few unparalleled, painful months; but rather, around the political needs of this government. A government that would have known months ago that this

surplus was accumulating, and yet, chose to sit on it –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: – to sit on it, deflecting attention from their dreadful mismanagement while telling Islanders to tighten their belts, just so they could maximize the political benefit that this would bring.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: And as welcome as this money is, let’s be clear: \$500 will not get you a family doctor in this province, \$500 will not help you buy a house in this province –

Ms. Lund: Exactly.

Leader of the Opposition: – and it is not a plan for a solid future or a plan for a replacement for the bold leadership that Islanders so desperately need at this time.

So, thank you, Premier, for finally recognizing the suffering in our communities, but shame on you for withholding this money for as long as you did, and shame on you for pretending that giving back candies that you’ve just taken is somehow an act of generosity or kindness. This was far more trick than treat.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Evictions from Residential Properties

Ms. Lund: Mr. Speaker, government wanted to take their time with the RTA and take their time they have, but I hear from people every day who don’t have time. The failure of government to act with urgency has had real-life impacts on people, and their stories keep me up at night.

I have a mom with a little girl who raised concerns about mould in her apartment for months before anything was done; months that she and her little girl lived in a mouldy unit. On IRAC’s advice, she filed a

complaint with Environmental Health, and guess what? The problem had been left so long that it was now grounds for eviction.

But this story isn't unique. Every time I hear that the condition of an apartment has been neglected, I know there's a good chance that my constituent is going to get evicted. If you have mould or leaks and your landlord doesn't act, you currently have two options: you can file a complaint that could be grounds for eviction, or you can live with it.

If I, as a tenant, don't live up to my end of the agreement and fail to pay rent, I'm evicted. If you, as the landlord, don't live up to your end of the agreement and maintain the building, I'm evicted.

These are the gaps that government has left open for years so they could take their time. This vulnerability is even more pronounced in a housing crisis because people have nowhere to go. Think of the creative housing solutions that we could have invested in with \$58 million.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

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.

Many Islanders have been feeling frustrated with the rollout of Fiona supports. We've heard of countless people having to stand in line for hours and hours, often driving long distances, only to be told the quota for the day has been reached; there are no more golden tickets.

For a lot of people, it's just not worth it to take time off work, to find somebody to watch their kids, and burn \$50 or more of gas while they stand in line for hours and hours and maybe get \$250.

A lot of seniors, people with disabilities, people with chronic pain and other medical conditions, people with young children,

simply cannot stand in line for hours, but tens of thousands of Islanders are being told, if you want help, you have to go and do just that: stand in line.

Rollout process for Fiona funds

A question to the Premier: Do you think Islanders are right to feel frustrated about this process?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. leader for the question.

I think that the last number of weeks, and really, the last number of years, have brought a lot of frustration to Islanders. Whether it is COVID, whether it is hurricanes, it's been a challenge that we've all had to face, and we've been working hard to deal with it.

On the whole, as I've said before, we've been able to get payments out to over 60,000 Islanders within a three-and-a-half-week period, which is I think a good number. There hasn't been a perfect rollout, it hasn't been without its challenges, for sure, but we've tried our best to get the money out the door. We continue to try to do that. We are working with all different agencies to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be the first to say, though, it's been an imperfect situation for all Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I'll take as a yes, and indeed, it's been a frustrating time for all Islanders, and it's government's job to ease that frustration, not to add to it.

The Red Cross confirmed last week that the eligibility for the \$250 Fiona relief program is determined entirely by this government. On top of that, Red Cross sends a list of people that they need to be authenticated to government, and government decides who has to stand in line.

Question to the Premier: Why did you make tens of thousands of Islanders stand in line for hours and hours, sometimes day after

day, to get the help that they needed and deserved?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I again thank the member for the question.

I don't think the situation is as cut and dried as he tries to articulate, here. Government did put forward money, \$18 million, which we asked one of our agencies, such as the Red Cross, to help us distribute. We've done it with the United Way; we've done it with others.

Having gone through what we went through earlier in the year, trying to get money out the door fast, we thought this was the best way. At the same time, Islanders do have to have faith in the government that they're not just giving away money to people.

There are a lot of bad characters out there, and a lot of bad actors. I know there have been many incidents where offshore people were trying to get money. So, we didn't want to throw \$100 million out the door and have to come out here and say, "Why did you give away a whole bunch of money to people you didn't know?"

The process, for the most part, has been somewhat efficient. It's been not without its challenges, but overall, as I say, we've gotten payments out the door to over 60,000 Islanders within a short period of time. It's never perfect. I can never match the bar of perfection which the opposition party's trying to hold me to. That's their job; I respect that.

We've tried to do the best we can, and that's all I can do in this chair, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'm not looking for perfection, I'm looking for decency. I'm looking for adequacy. That is not (Indistinct) –

I asked Red Cross when they were here the other day, "How many people have been declined these payments?" They couldn't

answer me that. I suspect because the number is either zero, or very close to it. So, let's not overplay what the Premier just said about (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: The Red Cross has also confirmed that they know full-well that a third of people are not getting timely and accessible help. They are the most vulnerable people in our community, those who need help the most.

Let's be clear, this is not the only way to deliver supports, but that is what the Premier chose to do.

A question to the Premier: Why do you do you believe that vulnerable and marginalized Islanders don't deserve timely and accessible storm relief, like everybody else?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader the for the question.

I believe we try our very best to help those who need it quickly. We rolled out an incredible amount of money in a short time, targeted towards those who need it most. The \$250 program that we rolled out through the Red Cross was just one of many programs that we've tried to roll out.

We're in excess of \$80-some million, getting money out the door to Islanders. We're trying our best to help in this very difficult situation. Each day we work hard to try to alleviate some of the challenges that arise. As I say, it hasn't been perfect, and we're just going to continue to try to do the best we can.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to turn now to the Premier's announcement yesterday, on inflation relief. Don't get me wrong. I'm really glad that after nearly a year of dragging his heels, the

Premier finally decided to help Islanders out, and to help them deal with the inflationary pressures that they've all been feeling every day, but we've been pushing for that since last winter.

Payment relief program to Islanders

To the Premier: People have been suffering the effects of high prices for months, and months, and months. Why did it take you a full year to finally put this payment relief program together?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I know the facts are a little inconvenient to the Leader of the Opposition, but I'll share them with him.

We did come out in May with a \$50 million package of relief, the biggest in the region. We're out again with another big pocket of money. We're trying to help Islanders through this difficult time. We know the winter that's coming.

I dare say that you could go through the history of this province, from the beginning of its joining of Confederation, and there's never been a government that's been more responsive, and put more money out to try to help people –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: – in the history of this province.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

This massive surplus that we found out about yesterday is hardly surprising. This government and the one before it have been underestimating revenues –

An Hon. Member: Exactly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: – for years, and years, and years.

Part of the reason they always seem to find magic extra money is because they've been consistently underfunding critical public services. Services like health care and education and transportation and energy.

Timely access to relief payment

To the Premier: You've known this massive surplus was accumulating for months. Why did you decide that now was the time to finally give some of that money back to Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I want to thank the leader for the question, and I'll smatter some facts around to try to bring a little bit of levity to the situation here.

The four departments that he referenced all overspent their budget projections. They didn't underspend them, they overspent them. They overspent them.

When we went into COVID, as we all know, there was a tremendous amount of uncertainty in how the economy was going to react. Every single business was shut down. Every person was sent into their homes and told not to leave. Every forecast showed that that was going to be a difficult time for our economy.

We've seen an influx of money from the federal government. We've made record investments to get money into the pockets of Islanders and the end result of that has been the economy has outperformed what we thought – \$82 million in surplus.

We've given back \$58 million yesterday. We have given out over \$80 million into Fiona relief and that number will grow. The Minister of Social Development and Housing will be announcing more money for our social assistance clients for housing.

I don't think anybody in this Legislature should say we've underspent any money, I can tell you that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Well I can tell you, there's at least eight people in this Legislature who will be saying that. Yeah, absolutely.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) technology.

Leader of the Opposition: Let's not forget that, of every dollar that was spent in COVID relief, 98 cents came from the federal government. Can't take credit for that, Premier.

Yesterday's announcement came only days after the Premier hinted, perhaps quite strongly, that we might see an early election next spring.

Islanders can see exactly what you're doing here. They can connect the dots.

Buying votes from Islanders

Question to the Premier: Why are you trying to buy Islanders votes with their own money?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, if anyone in Prince Edward Island is shocked that 2023 is an election year, I think they should take a look and look within.

I said to the media 2023 will be an election year. That's the fact. I don't know if that fact is inconvenient for anybody; that's a fact. I don't care about the election. If I was trying to be self-serving, I would have had an election two years ago.

I'm trying to do my best to help Islanders. We have a better financial position than we've had and we're sharing that with the people who deserve it. That's what we're trying to do.

When the election comes, if people think others should do it better and they vote for them, I'll be the first one to say good luck because you'll do it the same way I've been doing it.

You have to try the best you can do, with everything (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's interesting that the Premier said that he is sharing the money with the people who have earned it.

The Premier announced a retention bonus for health care workers on the front line, but only some of the health care workers on the front line will receive it, not all of them.

This is only causing more division and conflict because all workers on our front line matter, every single one of them. They all put in the hard work in this health care crisis.

Excluding some health care workers from bonus

Question to the Premier: What reaction did you expect to get by giving a bonus to some frontline health care workers while excluding others?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Again, Mr. Speaker, the facts. We are under incredible pressure as a province with some of our health care workers. We know there's a crisis across the country. We know there's a lot of individuals leaving the profession.

Here in Prince Edward Island alone, with our RNs, we've lost over 80 to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Through our consultations with those unions in those leadership positions, they have said if we could put together a retention bonus structure for return in service agreements, that might help keep people who are looking at retiring. It might help people who might be looking at other options in other jurisdictions. That would be something that we could do that could help.

That's what we did. It isn't a bonus. It isn't anything other than we're trying to keep those people who deliver the services on the front lines every day. We've said from the beginning we're open to talking to so many others.

We appreciate all of the people who play a role in the delivery of health care services. We've asked them to do a lot.

I've told my individuals in our Cabinet and in the public service, that we have to do better in the collective bargaining process. We have to pay people more. We're working with RCWs to make sure we pay for their training. We're offering retention bonus, recruitment incentives, we're doing everything we can and I'll stand here today and tell Islanders that I will work with every single member in this health care system to do everything I can to keep them there, to get them paid more, to improve their life balance – their work-life balance, and to make sure they're happy and healthy employees of this province.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If the Premier was actually willing to work with every single health care worker in this province, he would have invited every single union to the table. But he didn't do that, and if he thinks that there are modalities out there that aren't struggling with the day-to-day of keeping people in their positions, he's completely out of touch with our health care front line.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Beaton: The Premier himself was quite happy to stand up and announce his bonus knowing how important frontline health care workers are and how many of them were excluded.

We have endured almost three years of a deadly respiratory virus, and he excludes respiratory therapists.

Resigning of health care workers

Question to the Premier: Can you really blame the health care workers for resigning

under your government, the government that continues year-after-year to ignore and disrespect them.

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think if you talk to people in health care they would tell you there's probably nobody that's working harder to try to change health care, to try to improve the delivery of health care –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier King: – and has been a genuine partner in that. I had 40 people around the table Friday, from all different professions in health care. Everyone who is interested in trying to do everything we can to improve the service delivery for Islanders. We're trying to improve the delivery service for Islanders who receive it and to try to make life a little bit better and easier for those who deliver it.

I don't know why people want to try to divide in this; it's going to take all-hands-on-deck to do this. We have been very open and honest in our discussions. We've never made this about money, I've already said, my colleagues can attest many times, we'll spend the money that needs to be spent to show up the service, and that's what we're trying to do.

I appreciate every single person who delivers health care service in this province. I want to make sure they're rewarded for it; I want to make sure they're appreciated. We'll continue to work to clean up some of the mess that was left behind.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The people that divide are those that decide who the winners and losers are.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Beaton: Because when you exclude people from conversations, you're never

going to get a complete solution, and that's what the problem has always been.

I was disappointed to hear in committee that the excluded front like health care staff who included respiratory therapists, your physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and all of the support staff, they weren't – the oversight wasn't made by mistake, it was deliberate. It was a deliberate exclusion.

Excluding some health care workers from bonus (further)

Question to the Premier: Why did you deliberately exclude so many frontline health care workers?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I think we've been the most inclusive government, and I'm proud of that. I'm very proud of it. I say it over and over again because it's true.

There's been more people sitting around that table in the Cabinet room than at any time in the history of this province. I'm open to work with everybody; I'm not trying to exclude anybody. We need everybody, and we need more.

We're investing in retention. We're investing in recruitment. We're investing in helping individuals get into the fields of study. We're doing everything we can; we're changing scopes of practice. We're trying to help those within the system, and it's a challenge. It's difficult. But we're working on it, we're not afraid, we lean into the challenges over here, and we try to be a unifying force, and that's all we'll ever do in this job.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier keeps saying that he's going to throw me some facts, well here's some facts. The Premier would have known about the trouble that this tiered and unfair announcement was going to have. I can't get

my head around how you could make a mistake this large to exclude so many health care workers. It was a horrible mistake.

Question to the Premier: Who warned you about the trouble deliberately excluding health care workers would cause, and why did you choose to ignore them?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps on the other side of the House giving \$8 million in retention for return in service for those people in our health care delivery service, is a mistake; it's not over here, Mr. Speaker, we're proud of it.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

After Fiona hit and communications started to open up and news started to roll in, I went to check on seniors in Huntingdon Court, and what I discovered was heartbreaking. Seniors left to sit in the dark, hallways pitch-black, wet floors, scared of falling – people had fallen, and had been seriously injured. But the only help they really got from this government was some garbage bags to throw out their spoiled food. That's not good enough.

An Hon. Member: That's not good.

Lack of support for seniors after Fiona

Ms. Bernard: Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: You're the minister for seniors, and you're the landlord for seniors in these government-owned buildings. Is this really the best you could do?

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

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

Earlier last week, I listened to the legislative committee question my department on exactly this topic, and to my amazement, I watched certain members in the committee go at civil servants that do their job every day; accused of lying, to start, as well as

being called “slumlords” of – an individual that only started in the department 10 months ago, which I thought was completely unacceptable.

I’m the minister responsible, not the civil servants. The civil servants didn’t need that that day. No civil servants should have to put up with a line of questioning as ignorant as that. The questions can come to me; I’m elected.

I can tell you that I will be tabling a log – I was hoping to do it today – of all the visits to all the seniors’ facilities starting September 25th. I couldn’t bring it today because there’s personal information of tenants in there that I’ve got to retract, but I will be bringing that, the complete log of everything that was done over Fiona.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we’re to point the finger at who is the slumlord, minister, with all due respect. And let’s be clear, that presentation was full of untruths.

The issues with seniors’ housing should be no surprise to the minister. Island seniors have been raising these issues about the terrible state of government housing for years, yet your government says it’s untrue.

Question to the minister: These issues were around long before Fiona, and your government failed to take them seriously. Why did you put the lives of Island seniors at risk with this kind of negligence?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One thing I can tell you is I, personally, myself, went down to Huntingdon Court after Fiona, and I certainly saw some of the issues down there and I’m not going to question that. There was a puddle of water on the floor that should have been cleaned up. The hallways were dark.

But the day I was down there, I was with the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture, and those seniors were very happy to see us. They had talked about – we asked what their issues were, and the big thing was no lights, and that they wanted power. At the end of it, I think I got a hug and a kiss on the cheek when I left.

And by saying there are no issues, there’s absolutely issues, not only with Huntingdon Court, with Champion Court, a bunch of buildings, and you’re going to see a significant improvement to all those facilities in the capital budget that’s coming here shortly.

Premier King: Hear, hear! Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Bernard: I would love to hear how many days in it was that the two ministers visited. Of course they were thrilled to see you. They didn’t know where you were. They felt completely abandoned. I wonder if that’s where the flashlights came from, because they were left in the dark.

We are only going to see more of these kinds of storms. If you don’t do something different, we’re going to see the same thing happen again and again. If this storm had of happened in the wintertime, we would be talking about completely different issues. It would be deadly for seniors.

Emergency generators in seniors’ homes

Question to the minister: Why doesn’t government-owned seniors’ housing have emergency generators?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That’s an absolutely good question. I’ve asked that question myself to the department.

A lot of the facilities are older facilities and they need significant upgrades to get the generators. We’ve even tried bringing generators in with Fiona to hook them up.

The fire marshal had shut those generators down because they weren't safe.

But what I can say is, in the capital budget, we are going to equip the seniors' homes with generators. It's going to take an extensive amount of work because the buildings are old and there needs to be upgrades in the electrical, but it is part of the plan and will be going as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is very welcome. I look forward to those numbers because this is the first that officially we're hearing that government has acknowledged that there is a huge issue.

An Hon. Member: Exactly.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you.

Seniors who live in government buildings were left in the cold and dark after Fiona. Their housing concerns have, as I've mentioned, been continually ignored by this government for years. Government says it cares about seniors, but actions speak way louder than words.

Lack of support for seniors

Question to the minister: I look forward to seeing what's in the budget, but how can you stand here and say you care about seniors but continuously act like seniors' lives are disposable?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess what I can say is actions speak louder than words. Once we get the capital budget passed, my department is ready. There's a list of renovations that need done in all those seniors' facilities, and it's not only now, it's into the future. We need to make sure these buildings are looked after. They're government facilities, and they need to be in tiptop shape.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier King: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to go on a little bit more on what the Member from Mermaid-Stratford, on these retention initiatives that government announced a while back.

In the Premier's remarks at the announcement, he spoke about how hard these individuals worked in the past three years navigating through the pandemic. They absolutely did, but so did many other professions his government seemed to forget about.

Everyone else at Health PEI, they had to settle for a tote bag full of flashlights – and I might add cheap flashlights – lavender seeds, and Cows potato chips.

Support for Health PEI workers

Question to the minister of health: Can the minister walk us through how he and his big city health guru, Gardam, decided what professions were going to get recognized with either a cash initiative or lavender seeds and flashlights?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

If the former minister of health has been looking at what's been taking place across the country, he sees, as we see, or should see what we see, that there's a shortage of health care workers right across the country in numerous professions, through numerous occupations.

I have, over the last week, met with IOUE, CUPE, UPSE, to hear their feedback.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: We are the most open and receptive government that there probably has been with regard to health care in

decades; certainly, in the last 20 years, without a doubt. We will continue to be.

And for a former minister to indicate, to throw dirt on the fact that, yes, we appreciate all health care workers, and we have taken the first step in a major retention initiative in the tune of \$8 million-plus. If he has problems with that, well, I'm not going to apologize.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Henderson: I'd like to know what other province offered its health care workers cheap flashlights and lavender seeds, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Henderson: Maybe I'll ask later what it costs, but I'd like to know, whoever signed off on that should be fired. That is the most disrespectful thing I've ever seen happen to our health professionals.

If only this government could have accurately forecasted its budgets, like it should have known lots in advance, maybe it could have done something with this. But this government says collective bargaining is important, and the minister just reviewed a few of these.

Collective bargaining agreements

Maybe the minister could recognize: How is the collective bargaining process going to recognize our unionized employees and have recently signed agreements, or how many are in negotiations, and how long will this take? Have they got their money yet? They haven't got a penny yet, that I know of.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the hon. member.

As I had alluded to in my last answer, yes, I have met with a number of unions; actually, will be meeting with another tomorrow morning, first thing, 8:00 a.m. in the morning.

The Premier, in one of his previous answers right here this afternoon, alluded to – with regard to the collective bargaining process, yes, we have to step up to the plate, and I agree 100%, we have to step up to the plate. We have to be flexible in the amount that we are going to reimburse our health care workers, all of our civil servants across the board.

I have had discussions with staff in my department, with negotiating, to be flexible. We have to pay them what they deserve, and we will, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

But it's always kind of interesting that we do know a little bit about senior leadership. They got an incentive bonus. I think they even got their money already. Yet our RNs, RCWs, and LPNs; *nada*, nothing yet.

Dollars for Health PEI senior leadership

Question to the minister of health: How much was spent on the bonuses for Health PEI senior leadership this past year, and did they also get the chips and flashlights, or just the cash?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, a former minister of health should know that it's a team. There's no "I" in team.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: We need our frontline workers. We also –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) cash.

Mr. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, if I could.

We also need our senior management. With regard to incentives, yes, that was brought

forward; that question was posed to me. I had a concern. I went back to Health PEI. There was no dollar incentive paid out to our management staff.

But with that, there were numerous ones over the last two and a half years that have put in extra upon extra upon extra hour. As minister, I want to thank them the same as I do all our health care workers.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, PEI has led the country in historic rates of inflation month over month, far outpacing the national average, and yesterday, we learned that government was profiting off of it.

Government says the surplus was the result of higher than expected federal transfers. It's our portion of the sales and corporate taxes; it's the people's money.

The government blames the federal government for not giving them enough money, and now they blame them for our books being off; whatever is convenient for the communication message at the time.

Surplus of dollars for province

Question to the Minister of Finance: When did the Province know it was going to have a surplus? It certainly wasn't late yesterday afternoon.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to sincerely thank the member for his first question, and my first question ever, in this House. Thank you very much.

First of all, obviously, we have a strong and experienced staff in finance. They're always looking to improve processes and access to data. I think people must understand that 18 months ago, when the budget was prepared, we were still much in recovery mode. We had some start-stops.

I think some governments across Canada have had issues in forecasting, so we're not unique to that. I think we also need to be cognizant of our businesses – who had to deal with planning issues, labour shortages – who produce such great results.

So, again, back to the forecasting question, it was prior to that tourism season, which drives a lot of revenue. Again, I see it as a positive that we have a surplus.

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

Mr. McNeilly: A \$110 million mistake; that's a little bit off, Mr. Speaker.

The only thing that saved this Province from deficit was the crushing inflation that was put on the backs of Islanders because of that decision. While Islanders were struggling to meet basic needs, the government was profiting from inflation, only to gatekeep taxpayers' money until closer to election time by sprinkling some back.

Household debt for Islanders

Question to the Minister of Finance: Why did it take a year of Islanders accumulating massive household debt or potentially being forced into homelessness before now having to wait another three months for some table scraps from this government?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to remind the hon. member that we did spend 137 additional dollars in the existing Budget, and we actually went past that by about \$50 million. We did not hoard any money in order to deliver services and programs to the residents of Islanders.

We've shown in the past that this government will always be aware of what's going on in the public. We want to soften that blow in the short term for this winter with record inflation.

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

Mr. McNeilly: You can't have it both ways. You've got a forecast and you're off by, as

the Premier said, 72 million. According to your Public Accounts released yesterday, the government departments did overspend by 72 million. So, if you overspent and you have a surplus of 83 million, that's a \$155 million mistake here in our province.

Forecast of Province's finances

Question to the minister: Please explain to this House how you can so inaccurately forecast the Province's finances when people needed help the most, and still, do you stand behind the slogan, "It's about people"?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier King: (Indistinct) Heath MacDonald (Indistinct) minister of overestimating (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question.

Again, we have a strong staff; they do this year after year. I think you need to recognize the start-stop part of the economy.

We're fortunate, however, in this position, to be quite honest with you. I think the conversation would be different if we had an \$80 million deficit. So, obviously this sets us up for continued investments, and I think you'll see it this week when we announce the capital budget.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Mr. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Six weeks ago, IRAC approved the largest annual rental rate increase in the organization's 31-year history, which is nearly 11% for some residents. That day, the minister for housing stated that it's not the time to introduce record-high rental increases in the province, full stop.

Rental increases from IRAC

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Do you still stand by that statement?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely, we do. There is legislation that will be tabled today.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Mr. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty had indicated he was out talking with residents last night. I did the same thing. Some of these residents of Charlottetown-Winsloe that I was speaking with are on the other side, saying that 11% was needed.

My question to the same minister is: How did you come up with that number while discussing both sides from the tenants' point of view, who were very happy with this number, but also from the landlords' point of view, where the 11% is something that they've argued for?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've met with the landlord association on a few occasions now. I most certainly know that they've been hit hard with inflation, as well: the price of fuel; interest rates are a big concern; property tax rate increases have gone up, as well as insurance.

What we're committed to do, we've got a working group together to sit down with the landlords. We know this is not the landlords' fault, which we can discuss a little farther as far as our inflation numbers and what they've looked like over the years.

We know the landlords aren't to blame in this but we know they do need supports. We know the tenants can't afford any more. There's a large population of the province, as well as the country, that's barely paying the bills.

We're going to work with the landlords to see what we can do as government to get some programs out there to weather the storm until we can build more units and fix the vacancy rate that we're dealing with.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Mr. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, you talked about the complexity of this because, again, you have the tenants who can't afford that up-to-11% increase but you also have the landlords who reached out to me, many who reached out to me saying that they can't afford to not receive any income.

Potential of further development

What that is doing to some people is going to scare away the potential of further development. I do appreciate the meeting with the landlords.

I'm just curious as to, what do you see as the most important ask from that side of the equation?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you for the question.

What's taking place right now is we've got a vacancy rate of 1.5%, Mr. Speaker. We've seen back in 2015, when the previous administration under the MacLauchlan government pushed our population at 160,000. What had taken place at that time, the building didn't come fast enough. We went from a 4% vacancy rate down to a 1.5, and now we're playing catchup.

Not only do we need to get the landlords through this time but we also need developers and landlords to work with us to build more units. In order to hit that 4%

vacancy rate, we need approximately 1,400 units in the market, and the only way to do that is working with government as well as developers to get there.

So, we're coming out with some very aggressive incentives, not only to help developers but help the landlords get through this, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Along the North Shore of Prince Edward Island, we were hit really hard by Fiona, in particular, and across the shoreline, there is a lot of debris. We're not talking small debris. These are not a few fishing buoys and a couple of nets. In places like the Hebrides, or off Grand Pere Point Road up in Cymbria, we're talking about appliances, we're talking about propane tanks, we're talking about whole houses that have been moved.

There's been a lot of talk about a shoreline cleanup program, but I can't find any details about it.

Shoreline cleanup program

Question to fisheries and communities: Is there a web page, a phone number, a text number, anywhere that we can find out more information about this shoreline cleanup program?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, within 72 hours of Fiona hitting, we started working with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and actually had one of their helicopters start shoreline surveying around the province.

We've also augmented that with – our crews are now out there under Mr. Blair MacDonald. He's actually working now to identify areas around the province that weren't cleaned up after Fiona.

These details are being put together. We're encouraging people to contact our department, which is happening from different municipalities and unincorporated areas.

We're working on actually getting the program ready, how we can get people to contact the office, and where is – that are of a sensitive nature that can be cleaned up.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Winter is coming, and frankly, my constituents are really worried if this cleanup doesn't happen before winter hits, it's important for a number of reasons, especially environmental reasons.

Speaking of the environment, this is a really tricky area along the shoreline. In some cases, to actually clean up the debris that's there, large debris, is going to require heavy equipment, and it's going into environmentally sensitive areas.

Cleanup and environmental sensitivity

I want to know, again, to the Minister of Fisheries and Communities: Are you working with the department of environment to make sure that this cleanup can happen in a timely fashion but also with the proper environmental sensitivity?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, last week, I had conversations with the minister of environment, and actually started a week before that, also. We're identifying these areas; we know the environment is very sensitive and we're going to be working on, actually, a plan to go out and hire small-base contractors with small pieces of equipment to actually go onto these shorelines and actually clean it up. The problem is winter is coming, and we need to identify these areas now.

I've also authorized this morning, there'll be another airplane survey being done by our Province into remote areas to find out and identify areas that we cannot see from the road to make sure that these areas are also cleaned up.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, another challenge with shoreline debris and cleanup is that the jurisdictions definitely come together. You have federal jurisdiction within the water and the provincial jurisdiction, and then you have immediately private land. Like I said, we have whole cottages that have been moved onto private land, in marshes, that need to be cleaned up.

Cleanup for private homeowners

I want to know exactly how this jurisdiction challenge can be handled. Can private landowners that have had major debris come onto their land depend on the government for help in doing the cleanup?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Going onto private land does possess a challenge because of liability reasons and so on, but I can assure the hon. member that we will be working with the landowners. Our crews will be assessing the shoreline, and we also have DFO on side with that to help us out as much as they can, too, with offshore stuff in the water.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In fall of 2021, we saw the first provincial Climate Change Risk Assessment: a comprehensive and sobering document.

A multi-day post-tropical storm with heavy rain, storm surge, and wind was identified as an immediate and ongoing high risk.

EMO and Climate Change Risk Assessment

Question for the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action: How has your department worked with the Emergency Measures Organization to ensure that the Climate Change Risk Assessment is being integrated into their plans?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's what our Climate Adaptation Plan that we released last week is about. It's about how we do integrate, how we get all the departments involved, how we plan properly for climate change, and how we put the adaptations in place that are needed to help ensure that we best protect Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Mr. Speaker, in the interim, while we're waiting for plans to come out, life keeps going, and the storms do too.

When the director of Emergency Measures Organization was in committee last week, she stated: Who would have thought that 100% of the Island would be without power? Imagine.

When she says something like that, we have a problem; just a little problem. This is literally one of the scenarios that an emergency measures office should be planning for, and it's one that's identified in the Climate Change Risk Assessment report.

Seriousness of climate change risks

Question for the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: You've had over a year to make sure action was taken, and it clearly wasn't. What confidence can Islanders have that your government is actually taking climate change risks seriously?

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member.

I have been in this role now for three months and I witnessed EMO, witnessed our volunteers, our firefighters, everyone who responds to emergency for not only Fiona but also a fire on the ferry. If you could sit in that EMO office and watch the people that come together to do the work that needs to be done, I will reach out and congratulate every one of them.

Is there more work to do? Absolutely. The fact that the whole Island lost power is a major event, we know that, and now that we have seen that happen, again, we are learning. We learned from Dorian, and now we're learning from Fiona. We'll continue to learn. That is what EMO will tell you, and that's what I will say as the minister.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, final question.

Ms. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I heard from many people who couldn't believe it when they were told that despite mobility issues or chronic pain, that they had to come in person and line up for hours in order to get a relief cheque, and if they couldn't, they were out of luck.

This is obviously discriminatory and could arguably be subject to a human rights complaint, and yet this wasn't a violation of the contract government has with the Red Cross.

Disability issues to access relief payments

My question is to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Why doesn't government require the organizations that they download this work onto to deliver aid in a way that isn't discriminatory?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think that's a very fair point. I had probably as many calls, if not more, than anyone in this Chamber of exactly the same situations, and it was unacceptable. I saw the challenges myself.

We reached out to Red Cross on numerous occasions and asked: What do you need us to do? Can we provide resources? What can we do to make the system work a little better?

In saying that, I know we certainly learned a lot through all this, and I think, once we get this finished, I think we do need to do a review of the contract and to see if the Red Cross can provide the service they said they can provide.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Ministers

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

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

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of this House, I beg leave to table a petition of private and non-profit nursing home staff to have fairness for retention and recruitment of staff, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member of Tignish-Palmer, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Clerk.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, please be advised that, pursuant to Rule 80(k) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island*, several documents were received intersessionally and tabled to members via email.

This list will be included in today's Journal.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

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

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Rental of Residential Property Act (No. 2)*, and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Overview, minister?

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, these amendments will set aside the recent order of IRAC, which set the maximum allowable rent increase for 2023 at 10.8% for apartments heated by furnace oil paid for landlords and 5.2% for units heated by the tenants or for units heated by landlords using heating of another type, such as electricity.

Instead, these amendments will set the maximum allowable rent increase to zero for all apartment types and mobile home sites for 2023.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Rental of Residential Property Act (No.2)*, Bill No. 80, read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Workers Compensation Act (No. 2)*, and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Overview, minister?

Mr. Thompson: Proposal of enhanced benefits of injured workers by increasing the cap on CPI adjustments from four to 6%; increasing wage loss percentage from 85 to 90%; changing the way we calculate maximum insurable earnings; and expanding the coverage for final expenses.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Workers Compensation Act (No. 2)*, Bill No. 68, read a first time.

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Island Investment Development Act*, and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Mr. Thompson: Adding the authority for the Department of Finance to appoint a representative that may be the deputy minister or another department employee. This is keeping with the language of the current – currently in the *Finance PEI Act*.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Island Investment Development Act*, Bill No. 67, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Roads Act*, and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Mr. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, this amendment will update our legislation to reflect our current practice with utilities to move their equipment at their own expense within an easement.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Roads Act*, Bill No. 71, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to*

Amend the Highway Signage Act and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Mr. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, these amendments will update the minister responsible for the *Highway Signage Act* from the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Highway Signage Act*, Bill No. 74, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *Land Survey Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Mr. Deagle: This act will replace the current *Land Survey Act* and ensure the new act reflects the current realities in surveying that have occurred with the increase in the number of, and complexity, of survey plans over the years.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *Land Survey Act*, Bill No. 82, read a first time.

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

Ms. Jameson: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Early Learning and Child Care Act*, and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Ms. Jameson: These amendments are part of an ongoing process to update the act and subsequent regulations for early learning

and child care. This bill will revise the act's definition of "infant", in order to create more child care spaces for children under the age of 18 months and bring the Island's legislation in line with other provinces.

It will also clarify terminology related to the certification of early childhood care providers and enable the addition of new levels of certification within the sector.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Early Learning and Child Care Act*, Bill No. 76, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to take a moment, also, just to acknowledge Matthew Murphy, who's in the gallery here today. Also, Matthew Murphy has his name on the election ballot for the school trustee board coming up. Congratulations, Matt, and all the best.

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Municipal Government Act*, and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Mr. Fox: The amendments of this act are minor and administrative. The proposed changes will clarify existing provisions, correct references, and align key dates with those of ministerial orders.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Municipal Government Act*, Bill No. 73, read a first time.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Plastic Bag Reduction Act*, and I move, seconded by the

Honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Mr. Myers: Mr. Speaker, PEI's *Plastic Bag Reduction Act* has been successful in helping remove approximately 16 million plastic bags from our waste management system, annually.

A minor adjustment is required in this act to align the legislation with that of other Atlantic Provinces that have passed their own bag legislation. The amendments will remove the 15-cent fee for paper bags at the checkout and will leave the discretion to businesses, whether or not they want to charge it.

Thank you.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Plastic Bag Reduction Act*, Bill No. 79, read a first time.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2)* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Ms. Compton: The bill updates references in various statutes to reflect the succession of King Charles III.

Clerk: *Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2)*, Bill No. 75, read a first time.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *Notaries and Commissioners Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister

of Transportation and Infrastructure, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Ms. Compton: This bill sets out the framework for the appointment and functions of notary publics and commissioners, and for the administration of oaths, affirmations, and statutory declarations for use in the province.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *Notaries and Commissioners Act*, Bill No. 72, read a first time.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Victims of Crime Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Overview, minister?

Ms. Compton: This bill amends the *Victims of Crime Act* to expand the number of representatives on the Victim Services Advisory Committee to allow for greater inclusion of community representation, and to better protect Victim Services records from being accessed by third parties.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Victims of Crime Act*, Bill No. 70, read a first time.

Speaker: End of government bills.

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's orders of government, I think.

Speaker: Yeah.

Ms. Compton: I am seeking unanimous consent to proceed to second reading of Bill No. 80, which was introduced and read a first time today.

Speaker: Hon. members, does she have unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Speaker: Hon. minister, you do have unanimous consent.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Rental of Residential Property Act (No. 2)*, Bill No. 80, read a second time.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Chair (Perry): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Rental of Residential Property Act (No. 2)*.

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

Shall it be granted? Granted.

Good afternoon and welcome. Would you please state your name and position for Hansard?

Vernon MacIntyre: Certainly. Vernon MacIntyre, and I'm a legislative coordinator for the Department of Social Development and Housing.

Chair: Thank you very much, and welcome.

Promoter, would you like to commence with a general statement on the bill's intent?

Mr. MacKay: Sure, Chair.

Like I said in my preview, these amendments will set aside the recent order of IRAC, which set the maximum allowable rent increase for 2023 at 10.8% for apartments heated by furnace oil paid for by landlords, and 5.2% for units heated by the tenants or for units heated by landlords using heat of another type, such as electricity.

Instead, these amendments will set the maximum allowable rent increase to zero for all apartment types and mobile home sites for 2023.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. members, is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be now read clause by clause, section by section, or open it up to general questions as a whole?

Ms. Lund: General questions.

Chair: Okay. The floor is now open and I'll start taking names.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, minister. Thank you, Vernon, for being here.

I'm glad we're having this discussion today and I appreciate you asking for unanimous consent in order for us to get this bill through the House, or at least to have a discussion on the bill; shouldn't presume anything.

My first question is the level of consultation you had with this bill, and we saw it for the first time last evening, and I'm wondering who you've spoken to regarding the bill.

Mr. MacKay: Yeah, certainly. We had preliminary discussions with the landlord association. Obviously, they were quite concerned with the remarks that came out from me when this IRAC increase came out, with my media remarks. So, I sat down with the landlords association on two occasions. Obviously, they want to see as much increase as they can, and in fairness to them, there is significant cost to landlords with the inflation.

I've had numerous calls with the landlords over the phone, as well, and their big concern, there are four concerns that I hear from everyone. It's the rising interest rates because a lot of the mortgages are coming up for renewal and the banks are between 6.5 and 6.8%, which is a major concern for landlords. The insurance costs have gone up significantly. Property tax is another one that I hear quite a bit from landlords because of the assessment going up with the real estate value. The last one would have been – taxes, insurance –

An Hon. Member: Fuel.

Mr. MacKay: Fuel, the fuel. And obviously, we've seen record fuel prices over the course of the year, and that's been a significant barrier for the landlords, especially the ones that are still burning fuel. They find it tough to even convert over to another source of heat because the rental isn't where it needs to be.

So, I understand what they're saying, and my message to those individuals is, unfortunately, we've hit a problem, and this has been a problem in the making for a lot of years. I took over this role mid-July. It didn't take me long to clue in we have significant shortage of housing. The vacancy rate is close to an all-time low. There was, I believe, in 2018 – was the worst year. But we haven't been able to build to the extent the population has grown.

So, what I said to the landlords is: The only way we're going to get out of this, we need to all work together. We know the tenants can't afford any more right now. If you look at some of the percentages that are coming out across the country of how many people are paycheque to paycheque, Islanders – obviously, we're leading the country with

inflation. We know Islanders can't afford any more.

I had hundreds of messages from tenants that just – and they were all very polite messages, basically saying: We can't afford this. We understand the landlords have a significant cost, but we just can't afford to take anymore. We just don't have the money.

What I suggest is we're going to keep it at zero. Government, you'll see in the capital budget, is going to put a significant budget together, not only for our own government builds but as well as some development initiatives because we need more units built, as well as I'm going to work with the landlords now to listen to their four concerns because I know this is not their fault and we need to figure out ways that we can support the landlords as well without increasing the tenants' rental rate.

That's what we're working on now with myself and the other department.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I appreciate the detailed answer there, minister.

I heard there that you have met with the landlords a couple of times in the exchange you had with the member earlier, and you received a number of emails from, or at least correspondence with tenants.

Did you meet with anybody else? Did you reach out to other jurisdictions, for example, that also have rent caps in place?

Mr. MacKay: We looked at what other jurisdictions basically had done, and where we're at, PEI does lead the country with rental controls. We're the leader, I guess, when it comes to rental controls. There's a lot of provinces don't even have any rental controls, which is hard to, I guess, see some other input from provinces when we're the province that leads with the controls like we do.

At the end of the day, it's the numbers. If we were to, right now, see a rental increase go up, the amount of tenants that couldn't afford, that would be out on the street, we

don't have housing to provide for them right now.

That's my big concern, is, one, we know there's not enough housing there, so what can we do to keep the landlords and the tenants – to get through these next 12 months until we can get more units on the market. Now, obviously, it's going to take more than 12 months, but we've got a very aggressive plan that I'll be able to share with the House here shortly on what that looks like.

But in saying that, like I say, I know it's not the landlords' fault. I don't expect them to take the brunt of this. I don't want to put them in financial trouble in any way. One thing I've learned through this whole thing is every landlord is different and every tenant is different. Every circumstance is different, and now I just need everybody around the table to put some ideas forward to see how we can get this until we can get to a vacancy rate of 4% that we need to be at.

Leader of the Opposition: You mentioned that, when it comes to controls, PEI is the leader in the country, but even with that, we're also the leader when it comes to rent increases in the last few years. So, those two things don't really add up, do they? If we have the best controls, why are we seeing the highest increases in rent in the country, 11.2% last (Indistinct) –

Mr. MacKay: Yeah, certainly. We went back to see what rent increases – so, this has been the largest increase that has been proposed in Island history, but it could also be in Canadian history. We have yet to determine that, but we feel that it's quite possibly there. The last increase of any level was back in 2008 at 7%, but traditionally, it's been 1-3%.

What has happened here now is obviously, the cost of living, inflation, and the shortage of homes have really impacted this. We even see that we have seniors or somebody wanting to sell their home and rent an apartment that they can't find, and that's the situation we're in. That has driven the real estate market up as well.

Like I say, looking now, I can easily see where some of the gaps have been at, where

we need to go, and how we need to get there. We went from an 8% vacancy rate in 2013; 2015 was 4%, and it just dwindles from there. I believe it was, 2018, it was 0.2, which is technically in the negative.

This has been coming for a while and now we need a significant amount to get us caught up, and it will take every ounce of resource we can get to get there.

You've described this, I think, as a temporary fix to get us through the next 12 months, I think is how you put it. I would agree with that, and I think there are some structural problems with the way that we have chosen to control rent on Prince Edward Island. It's not effective, it's not fair, the process is not open.

What are you going to do – because we're sitting here discussing this because IRAC came forward – an independent body who came forward – with recommendations about what they would suggest we do, and now government is interfering with that, we're going to, well perhaps, overrule the recommendations from IRAC.

Are you feeling comfortable about that?

Mr. MacKay: Yeah, absolutely, this isn't something I've wanted to do, but at the same time, this will push people further in the brink of poverty if we don't. I get calls every day from members of this assembly on the housing problem we are in. Where, if we were to go with this, it will force tenants out of the homes they're in. And we just can't afford to do that.

Now, in fairness, I do think it's time we need to look at how this happens through IRAC. I give IRAC credit for providing documentation, but I'm not convinced there was enough consultation done, I'm not convinced that the process is 100% accurate. I think this would be great for the standing committee to review and question some of how IRAC is handled and what we can do, because nobody seen this coming.

I learned about this and now we're – before IRAC came out. When you're looking – this was the largest increase in Island history, it was a significant amount. I think everybody got blindsided by it and, like I say to the landlords, I understand largely where you're

coming from, but I can't find any units right now for people to rent, let alone if we put two or 300 more people out on the street, or more.

It definitely needs to happen, but at the same time we need to put more housing in the market. I'm committed to do that, and I think once I can present the capital budget and everybody can see the government's housing plan, I think it would give a little peace of mind in what – the direction we're going.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair, and just to be clear, when I asked whether you were comfortable, was not with the recommendation that came from IRAC and pushing back on that, but the whole process that we've going through, and you answered that, I think, and you think. That's what I'm – we have an independent body providing advice to government and government pushing back, and that's what I was talking about.

You mentioned that nobody could see this coming, but I beg to differ on that. I think we've seen this housing crisis build for many, many years, both on the supply side and on the demand side. You talked earlier today about the population strategy employed by the previous administration.

We've also looked at a lack of investment when it comes to publicly funded housing here; a dramatic drop off in that. Also an unwillingness, or an inability, or a lack of willingness to come forward and regulate in the marketplace. All of these things would have, individually and collectively, I believe made a big difference to the housing situation we currently face, and mitigated it, to a large extent.

Looking forward, one of the things that could be done – I think it's important that we make a distinction between the many, many landlords here on Prince Edward Island who own one residence, for example, rent out their basement, or have created a suite attached to that, and are really struggling to even maintain that because they're being told: you can't increase your rent.

REITs, for example, real estate investment trusts, which own enormous numbers of

rental properties here, and if they're registered off-Island, which most of them are, they pay no provincial taxes whatsoever.

I would love to see this government really dig down into regulations that could be brought forward in order to make a distinction between the very many excellent landlords that we have here on Prince Edward Island just trying to make a living doing what they're doing, and the more predatory corporations and REITs from, largely from off-Island, who are very quickly swallowing up the real estate, and making housing, which, let's not forget, is a human right, impossible, inaccessible, unaffordable for so many Islanders.

I hope – yes, this is a stopgap measure, but I really hope that this government, after years and years of sitting on its hands, is actually going to do the work of looking at all of the mechanisms that are available to you to alleviate the stresses in the marketplace which have caused us to get to where we are today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: I do have a question, Chair. You mentioned one of the four areas where we – where landlords said there was a problem, was in property tax assessments. Property tax assessments, of course, fluctuate greatly, however there is a mechanism in place there to limit the increase that can happen in any one year. Don't know what the residential tenancy act is that you're going to bring forward later in this sitting, but in the previous iteration of it, you removed the cap, the increase cap on rents, which again, is very analogous to that cap on property tax assessment increases.

I'm wondering if that's something that we can, when we see the residential property act, in order that we don't go through this process again, are you going to bring that cap back in in that legislation when you table it.

Mr. MacKay: Yes, there will be a cap.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: I'll let somebody else take the turn now.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for bringing this forward to debate today, minister.

I know that we talk about housing a lot, and I sincerely appreciate how quickly you get back to me on issues and that we follow up on this.

I can tell you in the time that I have been the MLA for Summerside-Wilmot, I've learned a lot about the state of housing in Summerside and I have learned a lot about what works on paper, versus what works in practice. I know I've had a number of people say to me when we, in this House, have been talking about interfering with an independent body making a decision. I've had a lot of people raise that, and then on the flip side, I've had lots of seniors say to me, how is it possible that IRAC came to this consideration.

I think it's important going forward that we remember, IRAC is making decisions based on parameters that are laid out for them. It's super important that in our next iteration of the tenancy legislation that you put forward a really clear list of things for IRAC to consider. Obviously, the ideal pathway is not for us to be overturning independent decisions. We, as legislators, have to make sure that we've got a framework in place that allows decisions to go forward that we feel good about – the fact that there's no room in legislation currently to consider whether or not someone can afford it. We have seniors who are on fixed incomes who are living on their pensions that they earned, that they worked hard to have, and the fact that they can't meet their basic needs, if that isn't something that we can consider, then we've got a problem.

So, I'm just curious if you have plans to expand the scope of what IRAC is going to be considering when they're making these rulings into the future, because I don't want to be dealing with this every year.

Mr. MacKay: Yeah, certainly there's discussions and before I bring any bill to the floor from the RTA side, I will be sitting

down with the official opposition on both sides, and the third party as well. Obviously, we've put a lot of work into the bill. We've taken a large majority of amendments that were provided by the official opposition so we're ready – getting close to being able to sit down with both the official opposition and the third party and we can review everything, and hopefully be able to get it to the floor and get it passed.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate that; I want to reiterate I'm not looking for you to stall on that. If having conversations with us is in any way slowing that down, we can have those conversations in here. We need to see the RTA and it needs to be this sitting.

Mr. MacKay: Definitely.

Ms. Lund: Side of the desk of that, I would like to say, one of my concerns with the legislation that you're proposing, is that it seems to rely on tenants knowing that this order has been set aside. And I'll explain what I mean about that a little bit.

So, what I've discovered in practice, what works on paper, what works in practice, very different things. I have tenants who have received larger than the allowable rent increases, and they say, how can this be possible?

But if they don't know to appeal it to IRAC, it just goes through. There isn't a mechanism where rent increases have to be filed with IRAC. If I just give you a rent increase that's not registered with IRAC anywhere, IRAC doesn't then know that that's happened, because you don't have a rental registry. So, no one is keeping track of this.

If I say, hey minister, here is your rent increase, and you as a senior, who never rented before because you used to own your own house, if you don't know that system, you just assume you have to pay it. So, we can set this aside on paper, and if the seniors who live in my district don't know to hop on the IRAC website and go look this up, if their landlord doesn't tell them that this has been set aside, they're still going to pay it. So, how are you imagining dealing with that?

Mr. MacKay: That's a good point. That'll have to be something to discuss with my department experts that have been working on that. I'm sure they've talked about that.

I don't know, Vernon, do you have info on that?

Vernon MacIntyre: It is a good point. I mean, the act speaks to – the order being set aside – the act speaks to any notices that have been sent out that they are of no effect but –

Ms. Lund: In practice.

Vernon MacIntyre: Yeah, in practice, or in law, I guess. In practice, landlords may ignore that.

I guess we'll have to work on an airtight communication strategy to make sure that word is out to landlords and tenants that any orders that were given out properly on October 1st for January 1st are of no effect, that it's zero.

That's something we'll have to look into but thank you for bringing that forward.

Ms. Lund: That is a huge gap for me, I have to tell you, because I have seen so many tenants who have been given very large rent increases who just accepted it. They just assumed they had to start paying it because they were told they had to. They don't know and by the time that it had come to my attention, they were well beyond the point where they could appeal anything.

I feel like this has to be addressed in this piece of legislation or we're just hoping that the seniors in my district or the newcomers to Canada just know all of this.

Tenants, young people, students – I feel like there are tons of people who were just counting on the goodwill of their landlord notifying them or (Indistinct) –

Mr. MacKay: It's a valid point. I think we can go back to our office and see what we can do on that as far as a communication strategy or whatever it may entail.

Like I say, the important thing for us right now is that tenants know that their rent is not going up. I had one young lady, a single

parent yesterday, that is just beyond stressed. Can't sleep at night because they can't afford it.

When the landlords issued the January 1st and then the questions are coming – this needs to get out sooner or later. I want to relieve the stress of a lot of those individuals to let them know that the rent increase isn't coming and give them a little bit of comfort.

Valid points and I'll certainly take that back to the department and see what we can work on.

Ms. Lund: I mean this with respect, minister, but government's communication strategies up until this point have not been excellent, right? So, relying on that when I'm having those same calls from people who are extremely stressed, who are losing sleep about it, for whom it is impacting their health.

I feel like I know in our draft of the legislation that we had proposed, there were mandatory communication requirements where the landlord would be obligated to let the tenants know that these were being set aside.

Mr. MacKay: I'm more curious, and I'll be honest, I don't know how can the landlord have the right, in a sense to – if they're not entitled to it? To me, that would be illegal, is it not?

Ms. Lund: It is.

Ms. Bernard: You have bad actors everywhere.

Ms. Lund: It is illegal and that's the problem, but it relies on me having a really excellent understanding of my legal rights and knowing that and then going up and challenging it and putting together an appeal –

Ms. Bernard: Paying the lawyers.

Ms. Lund: – and doing all of that stuff. But I can tell you examples in my district of seniors who are 90 years old who are living alone for the first time after their spouse died and she's not going to go up against her landlord.

She would be afraid to, for starters, because she doesn't want to be unhoused and she would not know the process to go through this.

I do think it's very important that this stuff is laid out. I have sat with so many tenants who have gone through horrific situations that they shouldn't have.

Mr. MacKay: I don't disagree. I'll just be honest; I don't know if it fits this. I may be wrong, you can –

Vernon MacIntyre: Well, I guess there's a couple of points in terms of, yes, it would be – it's an illegal increase. We've made it very clear in this act that the rent increase for 2023 is zero and that any order that was given using the Form 10, the correct form, is of no force and effect. If a landlord comes in on January 1st and says I'm going to collect that extra 10.8%, they're breaking the law.

Now, the tenant won't have to appeal that process similar to what they would do for some other rent increases – again, we're talking legal rent increases – the tenant won't have to appeal that because it's of no force and effect so there won't have to be an appeal. That takes a little of that work out of there in terms of tenants don't have to.

But, again, if there is a bad actor who is taking forward that Form 10, I guess my presumption is that they won't file your order in terms of what you folks had written in, they're not going to say, oh well, I was planning on doing the leeway rent increase but now I have to deliver this note that says I can't. I'm a little unsure on that side of things.

If you're saying you're going to be a bad actor, they're going to knowingly do something illegal but if we put something in that says they have to deliver a letter saying they can't, that they won't.

I'm just not so sure on that versus getting this through today and then making sure we have a plan to make sure that Islanders – landlords, tenants, everyone is well aware that it's zero per cent period.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, I have quite a lengthy list of (Indistinct)

Ms. Lund: You can put me back on your list.

Chair: I can give you one more if you want —

Ms. Lund: Okay, I'll take it.

Chair: — and I'll come back to you.

Ms. Lund: I feel like it's really important to understand that we are relying on people knowing, because if you have already given me notice that my rent is going up and I've had that since October, by the time January comes around, if no one has ever corrected that and I just assume that that's still true, because I'm not spending a tremendous amount of my time on IRAC's website, perhaps they don't have the internet, perhaps I'm not familiar with the process of appealing any of this or of dealing with rent increases, I just assume I have to pay it.

Do I think that will be true for everyone? Absolutely not, but do I think that will be true for some people? That is very much my concern. I have seen rent increases go through that would not fall within the guidelines currently and people have been too afraid to appeal it.

I feel like there's validity in creating another form that we tell landlords they are supposed to deliver. Then, when you have tenants who are calling their MLAs and saying to me, "Hey, my landlord doesn't seem to be setting this aside. I'm afraid. What do I do," then I can follow up with the landlord and say, "Have you sent out the form you're obligated to send saying that this isn't going through?"

It shifts that power balance a bit to give something to point to. I don't know if there are any comments on that.

Mr. MacKay: I don't disagree. I'll be honest, I just don't know. We're asking the landlord to do something that technically they're not even supposed to be doing anyway.

Ms. Lund: But they've already (Indistinct) —

Mr. MacKay: I think government has a big role on the communications side of it. It is

government's responsibility because we're the ones that are basically saying we don't want to see this increase go. I think we have a huge role to play on the communication side of it.

I'm not sure if the landlords would even be willing to do that. The landlords are going to be very angry at this piece of legislation. Even though we're going to do whatever we can to help them through this next 12 months, there's still a lot of frustration from the landlords. Are they going to work with government? I have my doubts, and this is where I think our comms team would have to step up and really get the message out.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

This piece, you said you had preliminary discussions on two occasions with landlords. Have you talked to the tenants association about this piece of legislation?

Mr. MacKay: I've met with the tenants association, not so much on this legislation, but basically on the RTA and basically, the increase. This was before the 10.8 and 5.2 came out, but it was basically their concern of increase as a whole because how many tenants were struggling?

Mr. McNeilly: Did you talk to the landlords about this specific amendment?

Mr. MacKay: They know that we were coming with a freeze. We were working towards a plan for the RTA as well as working on a plan to help the landlords get through the tough times.

I had taxation with me on one of the meetings, as well as efficiency, as well, because another big concern is just how many are using fuel, still?

They know that we're coming in with a development package to help developers build more which, at the end of the day, they know we know we need more units as well but at the same time, if it's not feasible for them to do it, they're not going to do it.

Government needs partners; we can't do it as a whole. I do certainly think we've got a

big role to play and we need more government housing units but we certainly need the developers and landlords to help us out with that as well.

Mr. McNeilly: Because you just said the landlords would be very angry and we need our comms teams. What does the comms teams have to do with angry landlords?

Mr. MacKay: No, so the comms team come in with the message of the legislation going to zero, so the hon. member pointed out that not everybody is going to know that they didn't get our rental increase, so that was the comms.

The landlords, they are going to be – the landlords feel that this is not their fault, they didn't cause the housing crisis, and they're absolutely right, they didn't cause the housing crisis one bit. So, I certainly see how they are angry, and this is where we need to work with them to get them through the hard times.

We need them as partners, and I think they've been focused – it's always been about the tenants, and it's about both; we need both partners, we need tenants to be able to afford the rent, and we need landlords to be successful and be able to carry these buildings or there won't be future construction.

That's going to be my job as minister, is to try and improve those relationships with both sides and try and get us to a 4% vacancy that we all know we need to be.

Mr. McNeilly: So, if the five and 10% went through, because as an MLA, I'm looking at this, and I'm saying: Okay, well that's IRAC. When this first came out, I was like, that's IRAC, there's nothing that can be done, nobody ever goes against IRAC. Five and 10% came through. I said to myself, the minister's going to have to cover the difference, the government is going to have to come in and cover that 5% and that 10%. That would be millions of dollars, wouldn't it?

How much would that be if the province had to come in and cover that gap?

Mr. MacKay: We never calculated what that gap would be. But like I said, we listen

to the landlords, to their four concerns that every landlord has, the same four concerns. So, we're saying, what can we do to be creative, innovative, to help the landlords through it, so that's all being worked on now. This sitting we will have information of what that looks like, and as far as what we can do for the landlords, but right now it's through the different departments, calculating numbers and so forth. I don't have any financial numbers, but I will certainly have something for the sitting is out.

Mr. McNeilly: If you were in opposition, what would you have done if we, or the Liberal party or some other party, had decided to go against. What would you have said in opposition at that time?

Mr. MacKay: Well, I'd like to think I would've used my moral compass like I'm doing now and realized that hundreds of Islanders would be homeless if we allow this to go through.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Might be that moral compass (Indistinct) –

Mr. McNeilly: I'm just asking a question because it's –

Chair: Order! Order!

Mr. MacKay: No, and I think it's our job, and at the same time, like I say, I can't blame the landlords one bit. I've seen comments from tenants beating up on – not every landlord's bad.

I talked to a young fellow the other day, he's 27 years old; he's a landlord. He understands completely where I'm coming from, and he wanted me to understand where he's coming from. Here's a gentleman that is trying just to pay his mortgage, he's not trying to make any money, he's just trying to service his debt, right. So, the cost of fuel and taxes and everything gone up, he's not making it, and we can't afford to have those landlords lose them units.

This is where I assured him too, that we're figuring something out that's going to help them out.

And at the end of the day, we need more units, we know we need more units. The number that we've been going with right now is 1,400 units just to get caught up. That's not to fix any future problem, that's just to get caught up.

So, it's going to be a very aggressive 12 to 18 months in the building side here on PEI. I'm going to be able to share a lot more here in the coming days and weeks. Like I say, we're just going to do everything we can to get, not only the tenants and landlords both through it, but to get more units built.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, if you have one more question, if you chose, I'll put you back on the list.

Mr. McNeilly: What I'm hearing is there's a lot – and yeah, you can put me back on the list – but there's a lot about how this will affect maintenance, how this will affect – the units aren't there now. And what I said to you before is that the government would've had to come in and cover that difference between that five and 10%.

I want to know, how are we making that – you just said \$83 million, and this has been a problem for a very long time. This government hasn't built enough public housing. This government has decided to move into a rental voucher kind of theme, which has further complicated things, because the housing units aren't going to be fixed. The balance is off. So, for you to say we're coming in with 1,400 units – the units weren't built now.

That's my point, minister, is that we have to have this debate here because the balance is off. I'm glad of some aspects of what's happening here, but we need housing.

Mr. MacKay: So, you're absolutely right, hon. member, and I don't want to pick on you and your previous administration, but it should've happened way back when. It didn't, it didn't.

If you look, numbers don't lie – numbers do not lie – in 2015, when the population was trying to increase to 160,000, the previous administration wasn't building fast enough. The numbers – I don't have them right in front of me – the lowest housing builds ever

in the history of this province – we're talking pennies, pennies – when the population was increasing.

Now, we're left with a major issue. So, even though government – hold on, hold on, no, no – even though our government has invested, we haven't invested enough, and numbers don't lie. The numbers today have clearly shown where we need to go. There's no denying it, and that's what we got to try and get to.

It probably will – and it's going to be the largest housing ask in the history of the province, but it's also going to be the most aggressive housing plan the province has ever seen, and we can all say this – we need the units. We need the units; we need them now.

So, whatever we can do to work with the developers – and this is going to be a big project, and I'm sure there's ideas all across this floor that is going to be able to help me navigate this, and I need all the help I can get. This is going to be the biggest challenge that government has ever faced in any government – is to get to where we need to be.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Obviously, this is a topic that is near and dear to my heart as well. When it comes to trying to have a healthy rental market, you mentioned, you were looking at that 4% vacancy rate, and of course that was something we thought we were going to achieve, really, last winter, and then even with the dramatic increase in the number of rental units in the province, it didn't happen. The only speculation we have right now is that people couldn't afford to buy homes and move out of rental units so they're staying in there longer to come (Indistinct)

I guess what I'm getting at here is, with the zero percent increase available to the landlords, a lot of them may decide maybe that's not the business they want to be in. They might say: Hey, I can take my investment dollars and I can do better somewhere else, and possibly convert rental

units to condominiums and sell them off, and this sort of thing.

I guess, are you worried that by limiting this increase to zero percent, it might force landlords out of the market, and you might actually see the number of rental units available go down.

Mr. MacKay: Absolutely, that's a concern. A landlord is going to stay in business if they can't pay their bills. It's just reality, and I think that's where, like I said, we need to be aggressive on what government does, but also our future developments.

On one note, we have lots of landlords that basically say, we can't pay our bills, but we also have lots of developers and landlords that want to build right now, but the cost of infrastructure is too high. They can't find property; there's landlords waiting to build; another thing is red tape in government. We've seen what some of the challenge is on building permits, there's no denying that that's been part of our problem.

We have to do whatever we can to put more units in the market, and the only way that's going to do that is to incentivize a development.

Co-operatives is another big thing; we've been working with the BC Housing Corporation on how they structured co-operatives. That is a very aggressive plan that we're going to put in place here as well, because we need all the partners we can get.

Like I say, I'm hoping at this point landlords will know that we're not going to leave them hanging, we are going to come out with some incentives, because they do need it, and we're going to push as hard as we can over this next 12, 14 months to put more houses in the market and see a change in that vacancy rate.

Mr. Trivers: We heard from the Leader of the Opposition about how all landlords aren't the same, they're not equal across the board. I mean, he was trying to demonize REITS, which I'm not sure I entirely agree with that. In the same way, all tenants are not exactly the same either.

By limiting this increase to zero percent, as opposed to one, or two, or three, or four, I

mean, you don't have to go to the full 10.8 or the five for the two categories. You're really hitting everybody with the same – painting everybody with the same brush. There are some tenants that could absorb a small rent increase. There are some landlords that can also absorb a cost increase.

Did you consider going to a number that was more in the middle? Like say, limit the increase to, say, 5% and 2%, as opposed to zero percent across the board?

Mr. MacKay: Yeah, certainly, that was discussion around the table, but I think that the big thing is the numbers show that a vast majority of Canadians are paycheque-to-pay cheque, and just can't afford an increase like this. At the same time, we need to find a structured way, year in and year out, that we know what this looks like.

I don't know if what IRAC does is right or it's wrong, and I think this is what we need to dig into a little bit. At the end of the day, we're no different than any other province. There's a housing shortage all across this country. We see it everywhere.

Everybody talked about homelessness at one time as people that, in a sense, couldn't find jobs or so, but there's a large majority of homeless population right now that are just being priced out of housing.

I think the stat that came out – and I forget where I saw it – was 26% of homelessness in this country is people that just can't afford housing. This is the numbers we're dealing with. So, we did think about it, but at the same time, I knew we had to intervene on this one. We needed to make sure that everybody could stay in the units they're in until we get more units built.

In saying that, I knew we had to help the landlords out, here, which in the coming weeks, we're going to be able to offer some incentives to help them weather this storm.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Right, and I understand what you're saying. I mean, that's very decisive action, without a doubt.

When it comes to tenants and their incomes, they do vary. You could have a multi-millionaire who's renting a place that's thousands of dollars a month, who could easily swallow up an increase like this. Then of course, as you mentioned, anybody who's on a fixed income and possibly below the poverty line; that's a real problem.

Mobile rental vouchers, which of course, the official opposition doesn't really like, they actually serve that purpose. They are looking at 25% of a person's income as the maximum they'd have to pay. Of course, the big problem there is there's a maximum amount that a mobile rental voucher will cover up to, based on the size of apartment. Once the price of rent gets above a certain amount, the mobile rental voucher really doesn't provide any more benefit to the person.

So, that's another way where you quite possibly could have found some middle ground, allowing the landlords to have an increase, but then having the government step in, say, raise the maximum threshold of a mobile rental voucher, so that the people who need the money the most actually wouldn't be paying any more for rent. But of course, and in this case, the government would be increasing the amount they're paying out monthly, through this mobile rental voucher.

Is that a strategy that you considered?

Mr. MacKay: Yeah, that is something that's being looked at now. I hope there's a time that we don't need mobile rental vouchers, but we need them today. There's no doubt about it.

I believe those mobile rental vouchers cover about 1,700 tenants. When you're talking – I think there's approximately \$5 million. \$5 million wouldn't build us 12 units right now, with the market we're in. That's the problem we're in, with \$300 a square foot building cost, it's been a real challenge to get units built.

Like I say, between our department and all the other departments in government, they've been working on what we might be able to do to mitigate this on the landlords' side. I'm hoping to have an update for this House as soon as I can, as well as all the

landlords, but I can assure you, we are coming with something. We don't expect the landlords to bear the brunt of this. We know that a lot of the landlords are barely paying the bills, and some aren't even paying the bills.

So, we think the avenue we're going will keep tenants in their home, but it will also support the landlords until we can get more units on the market.

Chair: Thank you.

Next, I have the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness. On deck is the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe, and then on to my second – I will put the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke on this list, and then I'll move on to the second again with the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot and the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

So, the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, you have the floor.

Mr. Henderson: Thanks, Chair, appreciate that.

I think where I kind of follow this as I observe this – I've talked to developers in my riding. You made the statement there was no housing. Well, in my riding, there was a fair bit of housing that went on; growth was occurring. There hasn't been anything in the last few years. I talked to a couple that I know that were working on plans, and they said it's too volatile because we don't know where government is going with all of this.

I know of two developments that may happen, and there are multiple apartments that aren't probably going to happen with this decision. Now, you may come up with some incentives to try to sway the field a little bit and that, but as a government, how do you reconcile the fact that you're taken what was deemed to be an independent body – nobody likes them, I get that. They have a pretty tough job in the Island Regulatory Appeals Commission.

Overturning a decision that they made – I'll assume, based on sound judgement; based on a number of factors. From years in the past where they didn't have some increases, they understand inflation, interest rates, all the things you're talking about. How do you – I mean, that's got to be a tough part for you. You're a former realtor.

Mr. MacKay: Oh, 100%. I didn't want to go against IRAC, but at the time, I know the amount of calls that we all get of people paycheque to paycheque. We just heard 40 minutes of Question Period of Islanders struggling.

So, I know that we can't find units now. When I'm looking for half a dozen units for people, I can't imagine having to try and find 300 units for people, overnight, that can't pay their rent. I talked to an individual the other day; their rent's \$1,500 a month. If their rent went up – that would be a little over, I think it's a \$156 a month – the majority of the population, right now, do not have an extra \$156 a month.

It was a tough decision. This wasn't something that I took lightly, but I knew we had to do it. I do think it is the right decision. As far as the developers' side, I agree 100%, the numbers just don't work, and they haven't. I can give examples all day long, especially in rural ridings, and we'll use O'Leary-Inverness.

You take a residential lot in Charlottetown, or a duplex lot, they're probably selling in the vicinity of 90-\$95,000. It would be hard-pressed to get 90 or \$95,000 for a lot in O'Leary-Inverness. You'd be lucky to get half that, if you can afford – but the cost of infrastructure is the same for that \$90,000 lot in Charlottetown as it is for the \$40,000 lot in O'Leary.

This is why we need incentives to help the developer. We want to see rural areas and ridings like O'Leary-Inverness grow. This is what some of the incentive packages that are going to be coming out, is to be able to help those developers in areas like your own to build and be prosperous.

Mr. Henderson: But, when you overturn an IRAC decision, who is based on the information they have at hand, then where does the slippery slope end in this? You're

just doing it for one year. You're going to overturn it next year? The problem's not going to be resolved next year. Probably not the year after, and probably not the year after that.

What then, are you going to do about issues like diesel fuel, fuel, oil prices? All those things are going to be factors that come into this equation. Why are you picking and choosing that you'll intervene on this case, but you won't on the others?

Mr. MacKay: No, it's a good point. I've asked on the fuel issue, as well. Obviously, that's a world market issue right now, where the housing here is – this was created by government. The housing problem in PEI was created by government. It wasn't created by anybody else.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacKay: Now government has a role to fix it, and that's what I plan on doing.

Mr. Henderson: So, are you planning on just doing away with IRAC, then? Just doing away with that altogether, and just take on that responsibility as a government?

Mr. MacKay: Absolutely not, hon. member, but at the same time, I do think IRAC needs to be looked at, of how they come up with these decisions. I do think that seeing no increase for, how many years, to a 10.8, has caused part of the problem.

There needs to be – I think this is the first time IRAC's ever provided documentation how they've come to this conclusion. So, once again, I do think this needs to be looked at. I'm not doing this in any way to beat up on IRAC. I think they did what they had to do, but at the same time, it's created a bigger problem. This will put people on the street, out of their homes, that we just can't allow to happen.

But, you know, you made a statement that you didn't see this coming. I look at, you know, you're a realtor. You were in this industry before you got into this business of politics. You are currently a minister of the Crown. I question how you could not see it coming, based on the interest rates; we can see that's having an impact. Inflation, fuel

prices, housing shortages all over the world, basically.

Why do you feel that it's a landlord's responsibility to provide the social housing side of it? I get the landlords are easy to pick on in this –

Mr. MacKay: Oh, it's absolutely –

Mr. Henderson: – but I just think that they're –

Mr. MacKay: It's absolutely not the landlord's problem for social housing. It's government's responsibility. That's why we need to build more units. There's no doubt in my mind.

No, I'll be honest. I've never, never seen the numbers like I've seen. There was never a 10.8% increase in the history of this province. The highest was seven.

Like I said, I'm not picking on the previous administration, but when I saw the numbers and the way the trajectory went, I couldn't believe it. We should have seen this coming a mile long, not only our government, your government; your government at the time –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacKay: – should have seen this coming.

You can't bring thousands of people to PEI without building housing –

Ms. Lund: Exactly.

Mr. MacKay: – and that is what's taken place. I'm not blaming anybody. I'm not blaming landlords. What I'm saying: We have a problem today and we need to fix the problem today. The only way we're going to do that is if everybody's working together to get through it because it's a major ask. It's 1,400 units to get to a certain point.

I can't imagine anybody in this House not getting a call from tenants and saying, "Please don't allow this legislation to go through. I just can't afford it."

So, that's why (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Henderson: But I might add, you're the third minister of housing under this administration; the third minister. It's easy to blame a previous administration, go on on them, but I mean, if I look at my district, there was housing going on up until now.

I wonder what your situation is going to be when, like I say, if we freeze a rent increase for this particular time, but we see inflation, 8.4%, one of the highest in the country for quite some time now. That wasn't an issue under the previous administration.

The reality is, what happens if people still can't afford their rents because the cost of food and other expenses have gone up so much? Is the landlord still have to keep those people if they're not paying their rent, or how does this reflect that?

Mr. MacKay: Absolutely not. Once I get into our capital budget, you'll see the very aggressive housing plan government has to build our own housing.

We know that there is a big need for seniors' housing on PEI, we know there is a big need for social housing on PEI, and we know there's just a big need in housing in general. So, we need the developers to build the housing in general, and government is going to do whatever we can to build the seniors' units and the social housing to get us to that 4% vacancy rate.

Mr. Henderson: If I look at – you know, we have housing authorities across the province. I have one in my district, too, the O'Leary Housing Authority. They do some pretty good work and they do social housing. The reality is, we haven't really done any expansion of the social housing network. To me, that's where the direction needs to head in, in providing those components.

Do you feel that you're going to use the housing authorities to allow them to build, provide them the funding to build units?

Mr. MacKay: Absolutely. The Housing Corporation, through the department, hasn't really run like a housing corporation. It's been run, in essence, through the department. We need the Housing Corporation running like a housing corporation with a board, with exactly that,

the partners and so forth, and get it out of the department and let it run the way it should be run. That's been the biggest issue that we've seen.

We've seen that government tenders go out. We've seen that, sometimes, we don't get any bids back and so forth. That needs to change. We can't stall any longer. We need to make the process as simple as we can.

Absolutely, we need to use those housing boards. I hope they're a big part of play in this because not only do we want to see more units in O'Leary-Inverness but all across Prince Edward Island.

Chair: Okay, hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, I'll put you back on the list if you choose.

Mr. Henderson: I'll just say, I would support if you're putting money into O'Leary, or housing authorities, in general, and let the capital monies to build. That, I would support.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I want to mention, minister, you were talking about the struggling landlord with a small unit that was trying to make ends meet. You were implying if he couldn't make ends meet, we would lose those units, which is totally untrue. Maybe the young, struggling landlord just paid too much for the units and if he can't handle it, he will probably have to sell to some other landlord, which will take over the units. The units will stay.

I'm just commenting that. I'm a little bit disturbed with the talk of spending millions of dollars supporting landlords, keeping the rents at the same.

For a starter, I definitely approve the rent freeze that you're proposing, but you make it sound like the landlords are just hanging there and they can't do anything.

I can't really get over that this government, you mentioned zero for the tenants, but nobody's saying the word "net zero". Net zero, presumably, is our goal, included for

apartments, in 17 years. These units need to be upgraded.

There is help available: efficiencyPEI. I don't know why the minister there wasn't there testifying at IRAC that the landlords had many opportunities to do other stuff. If any money goes there, it should go to upgrading the units to net zero. In the long run, it will pay for itself.

I'm hoping that the government lives up to its promise and realizes it isn't just about standing up and saying that we are going to be the best in the country, it's about actually doing something like upgrading all the old apartment buildings in the province, and then the province will also make those units much more resilient if there's ever – when there's another power out, which is likely going to happen during the winter. They will sit there and hum along on their own much better.

I have a question. While I approve of your net zero, I was wondering if this covers other rent increases. I know, aside from this general rent increase, landlords can go in and ask for higher increases. I don't know exactly what they base it on, but I've heard rumours that they get as much as 30% or more.

Does this rent stop cover those too?

Mr. MacKay: Hon. member, thanks for your statement. I would urge you to talk to some landlords. There is a significant amount of landlords that are struggling. To say you overpaid and just go out and sell it, I don't think that's the best approach. These are partners. We need to fix our housing problem that we're in.

Every landlord is different, just like every tenant. I assure you, there is a lot of landlords struggling right now. I've sat down with some of these individuals and seen exactly where they're struggling.

I do think there's a big opportunity on the efficiency side, which we've had efficiency around the table. The minister of environment had sent some of his staff to meet with us to see what options we could do on that, as well.

I certainly think it's something that could be addressed relatively easy. I'm hoping that'll be part of our plan here, as well.

As far as the amendment goes, what this amendment states is basically of this increase of the 10.8 and 5.2% today, so by passing this amendment, we are stopping the rate hike, which I'm confident everybody will support.

It is much needed and I sure hope I can count on your support, hon. member.

Mr. Hammarlund: You have my support, but I would actually like to amend it so it includes other rent increases, as well. It doesn't seem fair that there's a portion of tenants get protected by this and then there's other tenants that suddenly have to be on the street because rent increases 30%.

Chair: Hon. member, are you moving an amendment or –

Mr. Hammarlund: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: We don't have an amendment (Indistinct)

Mr. Hammarlund: Well, I just got this legislation on my desk a couple of hours ago, so I didn't really have much time to walk around, but I could imagine an amendment that, for instance –

Mr. MacKay: It was sent to you yesterday afternoon at 3:00, hon. member.

Mr. Hammarlund: Okay. Well, I apologize. I didn't read it until just an hour before we sat here.

Chair: Hon. member, I'm not sure how you want to proceed. Are you putting an amendment forward or are you just thinking about it?

Mr. Hammarlund: I actually wrote something out.

Chair: Okay, sure, if you want to read the amendment.

Mr. Hammarlund: I hope to get some help on the wording from our Clerk, but basically, I'm amending 2. (1), adding (1.2), something to the effect of: Notwithstanding

the right of landlords to request rent increases for their specific properties. Such requests are also denied or nullified for the period January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023, including those rent increases approved previously but not scheduled to take effect until year 2023.

Chair: Hon. member, do you have copies?

Mr. Hammarlund: No (Indistinct)

Chair: Okay, we're going to take a quick recess and we'll arrange that with the clerks.

[recess]

Chair: We're back in.

Hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, you have the floor.

Mr. Hammarlund: Chair, I believe I acted at haste. After consultation with my caucus, I would like to get the unanimous assent to withdraw this (Indistinct).

Chair: Does he have unanimous consent to withdraw his amendment?

Mr. MacKay: Agreed.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

An Hon. Member: Certainly.

Chair: Okay, it's withdrawn. Thank you.

Hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, do you have any more questions?

Mr. Hammarlund: I still think other rent increases are concerns that I'm bringing to the attention of the House, but no, I don't have any more right now.

Chair: Okay. The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

I wanted to thank the minister for not only honouring his commitment to bring this legislation forward, but I also want to thank the minister for being the first minister that I've had in my entire elected time – I think you're minister No. 4 for housing, including the previous administration – be the first one

to actually say out loud, as a member of government, some of the things that we've been trying to say or that we've been telling the stories about for years.

It's been incredibly difficult, as an elected representative but also somebody who cares about their community, to be in this space and continually be told that what you're seeing and hearing and trying to speak for isn't true, or that you're making mountains out of molehills, or that you're exaggerating, or whatever.

Minister, your honesty in recognizing that this is a systemic issue, that it's years in the making, and that we've had lots of opportunities to at least do something about it and we haven't – but also that means that any time is better than not at all, right?

I really want to thank you. I can't tell you what a relief it is. It feels like a weight off my shoulders after having been feeling like I'm crazier, probably, than I already am, to actually hear you say it.

There's a lot there, but I really needed to tell you that and thank you.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: (Indistinct) minister.

You had mentioned earlier about meeting with the tenants association. Who was it you met with?

Mr. MacKay: I don't have the list in front of me but I'll get exactly who was on that call and bring it back to you tomorrow.

Ms. Bell: I'm asking for the clarification because I'm pretty connected with the housing world in PEI and there isn't a formal tenants association. We do have PEI Fight for Affordable Housing, who absolutely advocate for tenants and for tenants' rights, but there isn't actually a tenants association, mainly because there's no formal organization –

Mr. MacKay: Yeah, I might have worded that wrong but I'll get – I believe there was four individuals on that call, a Zoom call we

did. I'll get you the names of everyone that was there and the date and time.

Ms. Bell: I appreciate that, just because we have to talk about balance. I think my colleagues had mentioned it before. Absolutely, this is about a story of landlords and tenants and the market and all of the different players in there.

Tenants generally are – the power imbalance is real because tenants are in a situation where if they don't have an equitable outcome, they lose their housing versus a change in income. So, they tend to have a quieter voice at the table.

Hearing that you're meeting with taxation departments and tenants, landlords association, we need to make sure that that balance is there.

I know the Fight for Affordable Housing are a really strong group, but there are also a lot of volunteers on that group, that they don't have a structured, (Indistinct) don't have paid lobbyists.

Mr. MacKay: Definitely.

Ms. Bell: And, so, part of our job has been to be a voice for tenants, as well, just to try and kind of balance that out.

Saying that, I hear from both tenants and landlords and investors. There are absolutely concerns. I think some of the concerns that my colleague from O'Leary-Inverness raised are really important, and that's about stability.

One of the biggest challenges that we have when we have the limitation in our housing market – that we have when people can't move and there's no vacancy is – we know now, it ripples into everything else. It ripples into our recruitment and our retention. It ripples into people being able to buy and sell their homes. It's everything. If we don't have or find a way to get stability into our market, we're actually going to do more damage to our economy, and we are already seeing that. We know we've seen that when people say they can't move here for the work that they want. We can't get doctors to stay. That's one of the reasons.

Chair: Okay, hon. member, I'm going to have to cut there with the end of the – you can keep that question for the next time.

We are now at the end of government's time for today. I'll ask the promoter to –

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 a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Rental of Residential Property Act (No. 2)*, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Orders Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, I call Motion 73.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, Motion 73, Exploring alternative models for seniors' living arrangements, is currently [audio malfunction] and debate was adjourned by the second, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park to resume debate.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since the last sitting of the Legislative Assembly, I've had the absolute pleasure of chatting with seniors from across the province. Both before and after Fiona, seniors have reached out to me to share experiences, frustrations with aging in this province, and in particular, housing and aging on this Island.

Remarkably, many of their experiences are shared. I hear fear, frustration, sadness, loneliness, and there's some joy there, as

well as great humour. While these calls are often full of jokes and levity, there's some great severity there.

I often get off these calls feeling very frustrated and sad because it is the same thing over and over again, and no solution. At the same time, I feel honoured to be in this position to try and push for positive change in our communities.

Ever since I was young, I imagined being like the *Golden Girls* when I got older. Although the reasons and how I imagined that have evolved over the years, what a privilege to be able to live in a home that is accessible to the point where you can truly age in place throughout the aging continuum. I'm seeing a lot of nods over there so I can tell everyone is agreeing with that.

To be surrounded with your best friends, to be able to do what you want when you want, to be able to access supports in your own home if and when needed: situations such as this really should be the goal, to truly support people to stay in their homes with accommodations in place, understanding that these will change and evolve as time goes on.

This is what we say we do in this province, yet I have one senior in her 80s who's actively trying to get government to look at how they are not doing at all what they say they are. They're a couple who would really love to age in place in their home, and they are in their 80s and they recognize that their time living independently in their home is short. They want to try and get these things in place so that they can ensure that they can stay. In the words of this woman we were speaking to: I don't want to be a burden on the system.

Time is ticking for this couple, who have no familiar support in the province and who would just like to stay in their home for as long as possible. Isn't that what we all want?

This does not just happen by chance. Government must help, support, and facilitate this.

As I reflected on what I would say to this motion, I thought I would look at what we do have in place in Prince Edward Island

that may support a more autonomous way of growing older.

A quick Google search will take you to all the government programs on Prince Edward Island. The website will list out all of the programs available for seniors. There's absolutely nothing wrong with the programs that are offered, but many of them have two things in common.

One, they are reactive and not proactive. Several of the programs for frail seniors who are mostly homebound or in palliative care; we wait until they get into a position where they're not able to care for themselves at all before we offer in-home services that make a great impact. These do nothing for seniors who are vibrant and active and who do not want to become homebound.

Secondly, these programs often have strict criteria for who can and can't access this support. One example is who can access care provider funds. Currently, family members cannot. In many other provinces, the government understands that family is often the only and best option to provide care for their aging loved ones. This often means having to take time off of work or cutting back on hours to care for their loved one.

This is a huge financial strain, and one in which our government does not recognize. I brought this up to the health minister last year, and he said he was very, very interested in making this change, but again, action – or better, lack thereof – speaks way louder than his words ever could.

Now, don't get me wrong. As I mentioned, these programs are important, and the people delivering these services are crucial. There is simply not enough of them, and they are simply not proactive or progressive enough to make any changes beyond the current status quo.

Status quo is exactly where this government seems comfortable, and quite frankly, in this case and in many other cases, it is negligent. For a government who says it is all about people, I say: Which people? Not seniors, that's for sure.

Since Fiona hit our shores, I've been visiting with seniors from all over the Island. Fiona

exposed so many challenges that seniors have been facing for years.

As you're all aware at this point, some seniors were without power for 10 days after Fiona hit. The Maritime Electric crews did what they could to get our seniors power, but it took time. While the crews were out working from dusk until dawn, the Premier and his Minister of Social Development and Housing were content to sit back and wait. They waited while seniors lived in the dark for 10 days; no heat, no lights.

Several seniors fell to navigate the dark hallways. Seniors could not access hot water to clean their medical equipment. They could not keep their food or medications cold. Even worse, they lost their landlines in the power outage and had no way to call for help. They were afraid.

Even during an emergency like Fiona, this government chose to abandon seniors instead of proactively supporting them.

When I visited a publicly-owned seniors' housing complex seven days after Fiona hit, there was a large tree left resting on the roof just above an apartment, just out on the deck. The senior wouldn't have been able to access their deck. Seven days, and no one bothered to come around and remove a tree off the roof?

I've spoken to so many seniors over the past two weeks, and the fear and anxiety they have gone through makes my heart ache, and it should make your heart ache too. They deserve much better treatment.

As I reflect on the conversations I've had over the past few weeks and the things that I've seen, I am disgusted and furious at how our seniors were treated by their own government. The minister of housing is responsible for running these buildings. He uses taxpayers' dollars to provide homes for our seniors. He knew this was happening. I've been told by this minister and two before, there are people from the department in these buildings all the time. If that is true, the minister is, and previous ministers were, well aware of the situations that were happening within our seniors' publicly owned homes. They knew. They know.

So, they knew this was happening. He knew they didn't have power; he knew they didn't have generators. Our minister of health is responsible for providing safe homes for our most vulnerable seniors and our public long-term care homes.

Beach Grove, in Charlottetown, went for over a week without power. How is this acceptable? The minister, like his Premier and other Cabinet members, chose to turn a blind eye and abandon these seniors.

Seniors expect that government will support them in living a quality of life. They don't ask for much, but they do ask to be treated with respect and dignity which they so deserve, and in many cases, they are not getting.

A few days after Fiona, I happened to run into a member of the Abegweit First Nation's Emergency Response Team. What he said has stuck with me ever since, and as a province, we have a lot to learn from this group.

He shared with me that part of their emergency preparedness involves ensuring, first and foremost, that there is generator power for every elder. When the team is activated, the first thing they do – the very first thing they do, before anything else – is go check on their elders in their community to ensure that the supplies – that they had already thought of before, so they had on hand – to make sure they had their supplies at the ready, that their generators were going, and to make sure they had everything they need.

I'm going to stop there for a second and let that sink in. I want you to think about how our response differs from that. I see some uncomfortable faces over there. They should be.

This is how our elders should be treated and this is how they deserve to be treated. We have to think about our approach to elder care because we have not got it. We are not even near to doing it right. Sadly, it currently seems like a waiting game to the end. We must address and acknowledge the contribution of a person's life in a way that takes into account their background. We can learn a lot from the experience.

I was talking to – yesterday, I had the pleasure of attending the very first community discussion with the long-term care review. I was very disappointed to learn that this would be the only one happening in person. One of the questions asked was one that I had asked myself and put on a sticky note, to put on the parking lot. That was: How are we ensuring that we're hearing from the residents who live in these buildings? That is who matters. That is who we should be listening to.

I was sitting beside this woman who was there because her husband is in long-term care. She was so distraught. She shared with me what an interesting and charismatic man her husband was, and that he had written a little list of things that could be done within his long-term care facility to make him feel like he was in his home, rather than living in a room in a long-term care facility.

The worst part of that story is he has mentioned it to every single person he's come into contact with, and no one asked him for his list. Nobody asked to see it. Even the person who was facilitating didn't ask for that list. I asked for that list because I think it's important. I think that voice matters over anybody else's voice, and I care.

Diversity and inclusion in our programs, services, policies, and our long-term care homes and our community care homes is a must. Otherwise, how are we ensuring it is a home and not an institution? The trouble that so many seniors had to go through to get access to the \$250 relief funds is a great example of how this government does not take diversity and inclusion in account in its programs.

We can use the experiences of our elders and ask for their voice; for their help in the process of changing the way we look at and consider aging, as well as our delivery of programs and services. In fact, as I mentioned, that should be our very first step.

I attended the first and – I guess I already told that story, so I won't tell it again.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Bernard: (Indistinct) I could tell it again. No one would have noticed.

Mr. McNeilly: I wasn't listening.

Ms. Bernard: How are we ever going to know how to change if the very people they affect are ignored, even when they try to speak. Going back to this man, his wife said, quote, "He is a shell of himself." He feels voiceless, and he feels like he doesn't have any power.

I'm going to repeat that. One senior in our province feels voiceless, and feels like he doesn't have any power, living in a government-owned long-term care facility.

So, what should government be doing? I spent a long time talking about what they're not doing, but I'd like to end off by giving some hope. There's so much more that we could be doing for seniors to help them live independent and happy lives. Let's consider some initiatives from other jurisdictions.

Multigenerational homes, which are very popular in places like Mexico, China, India, as well as in many First Nations and Indigenous communities, have been on the rise; most recently, in Canada. The cost of living has actually forced people into these situations. As Plato has said, "Necessity is the mother of invention." As it turns out, the family support many find in these situations is a silver lining. We heard this in our housing forum that we hosted in the spring.

Elder care, child care, and care for those who are not well are shared. We did hear that loud and clear in our housing forum. I have to say, hearing the minister of social development and housing speak – like, there's actually a plan coming. Gives me hope that we're getting there, that government is starting to understand some of the issues.

In PEI, this multigenerational living may look like a family farm, divided into lots for family members. It may look like a nanny suite attached to your home. It may look like one large home that is designed to support family members as they progress through aging.

With some small changes made to zoning laws, this could easily be a solution for so

many Islanders, but this conservative government could not even do the simplest thing to show, (a) they understand the housing crisis and that it is past time to get creative, and (b) they care. Which they have failed in both of these areas.

Tiny home communities like the one announced recently in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where they will have common areas constructed with social connectivity in mind. I would love to see – I know that some of the questionnaires or surveys we have for residents ask if they're lonely. The Member from Mermaid-Stratford has been asking what we do with that information, because we were told that many of them are lonely. Why are we not considering this as we consider their homes, where they live?

There are gated communities for those living with dementia. These are communities that are full of social and stimulating activities; gardens, stores, et cetera.

Norway is rated number one for elder care. That is not to say that they don't have their challenges, but they have systems from which to build, and we could make our own made-in-PEI version from this for supporting aging well.

There, it is mostly a municipal responsibility. Private alternatives are few and far between, and most private operators operate on a contract from municipalities. They recognize the need for elder care to be separate from making a profit, proving they understand that housing is a human right.

In Norway, they have really taken dementia care and applied the technology to support those aging, in general. There are homes with assistive technology, designed for elders with dementia. This comes in the form of voice technology, which reminds them to shut the fridge door, or shut the burners off on the stove. These are designed to keep seniors as independent as possible for as long as they possibly can.

They have a community where residents either have their own apartment with this technology, or they move to the next level of care. All of these different levels of care are within the same facility. They have something stimulating to do every day, proper housing, and proper education on

their illness for themselves and their loved ones. They are encouraged and supported to be independent as possible throughout the aging process, within one facility.

They recognize that institutional settings – which, basically, is what we have here – are often disorienting, depressing, or even frightening for some seniors. So, they offer grants and low interest loans to renovate homes and build new facilities. They also provide financial compensation for assistive technology for devices, as I mentioned before, as well as things like electronic mattress sensors, so that if an elder gets out of bed at night, and they are out longer than normal, there will be a sensor that's connected to an alarm.

The Pilly dispenses medication instead of elders having to wait in line for a health care provider to deliver it to them. And elders report that this comes with a lot of surprising freedom. They feel as though they are not treated as a cluster of symptoms, but rather that they are seen as a person.

That's really important. We all want to feel like that.

From the stories I hear from elders and their loved ones, and those working in health and independence areas, what we are doing is not working. As we work our way through things like labour shortages and an aging population, we need to understand one thing: elders deserve to live with dignity, respect, freedom, and autonomy.

Let's consider the fact that currently, our long-term care homes, have been deemed as meeting basic care needs. What does this even mean? From our long-term care meetings in the Health and Social Development Committee, I can tell you, it's not a pretty picture. It's terrible; it is inhumane, and many of us in here would treat our dogs better.

We need a proactive strategy to keep our citizens healthy as they work their way through the aging process. That we find ways to keep themself safely and healthily in their homes for as long as possible should be the goal.

The fact that our seniors who are living in publicly owned, independent apartments are

saying things like, they do not feel safe, they don't want to leave their apartments because they're scared of so-and-so who lives across the hall. They are not supported to age in place. There are maintenance issues, cleanliness issues, there are people living in these buildings who are better suited for assisted living.

Government knows this, but they continue putting them there, despite the risk. And when there's an issue, rather than deal with it, they move them to another building. I see it all the time, despite the risk it causes to them and those who live around them, because there is nowhere else to put them.

It is way passed time to get creative. I'm just frustrated that I'm still talking about this. Sitting, after sitting, after sitting, I feel like a broken record, but here we are. This is where we are.

Talk to elders from across the province; do some research for other jurisdictions; and get to the work of changing this, because respecting our elders are not just nice words we say, they are actions by which we should be living our lives.

This government likes to say they care about seniors, yet they've been denying the state of the homes in which our seniors live. I think we've finally gotten to a point now where this government sees it – it only took three years to get here. Any time we would stand up and talk about these issues before we were told, I was being untruthful.

Ms. Beaton: It's true.

Ms. Bernard: That was a few months ago.

Ms. Beaton: Yes.

Ms. Bernard: These issues didn't just happen a few months ago, so I'm glad to see that eyes have been opened and truth is being accepted.

Ms. Lund: Some eyes.

Ms. Bernard: Some eyes.

So, we like to say we care about seniors, yet denying the state of the homes in which our seniors lived, you can't have it both ways. Either you care and believe seniors and

work to make life better for them through your actions, or you don't. Which is what you've been doing so far. This government's time is up when it comes to safe, healthy, and appropriate housing for seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you.

Thank you for bringing this motion forward. I think it's an important one. We are at a time where we need to do more for seniors. Like we said before, our population is rising, we're facing issues and stresses on our long-term care homes, on our government supported or – seniors home like Hunt Avenue.

We need to do more. I think if you want to look at alternative arrangements, good, but we have a long way to go just on supporting what we have now. Yes, we need a model, but we need a plan. If anything, I see in this government is that they just don't either plan efficiently for something like this, or it's just not there.

So, let's develop a plan where we can help our seniors age in place, at home, or in facilities that would be – a place they want to go to; a place they want to be part of; a community that's there for them.

We need to start by looking at things like the Seniors Independence Initiative and broadening the scope. Obviously now, the government has \$83 million – they can easily increase that threshold so seniors can stay at home.

I just found out – I was at a housing meeting, and in my area, I went to three housing meetings with housing staff, and they talked about that. Now we can see that Seniors Independence Initiative's now supports cable television. So that was something that I found out, so that's something that's important for seniors.

So, I'd like to compliment the government for taking baby steps to give people cable,

and I want to get people out there to apply for that, because it helps.

When we look at things, we can't look at people as just numbers. But they're people in their places and they need to live in dignity. Sometimes we don't do that.

When I went to Beach Grove Home during the aftermath of the hurricane – it didn't even need any communication. The look on the staff's face were – it said it all. It said, we're in trouble, we need help. And that's all it said.

I'll get into that more in Question Period as we get going, but we need to do a better job.

When the lights are out in our long-term care facilities, that has to be our number one priority. There are cords and cables, there's everything on the ground, people wandering – guess what happens? They fall. The staff was overwhelmed at the time. So, we didn't do a good job collectively, as a unit. We need to do better.

When you look at our seniors housing facilities, I want to give a shout-out. Unlike other people, I want to give a shout-out to the people that were working in the Department of Social Development and Housing for doing – going above and beyond, for going out into my area, and into the places that I represent. I heard from the people that they were there, and it made a big difference. So, they were there, and I know they were there and I know they spent a lot of time there.

Do you want to know the part that I don't think government did successfully on that, and I mean it comes with whatever, you didn't make everybody in government a housing officer. Everybody in government should have been a senior housing officer if they were home. They should have been there. It was all hands on deck to protect and make sure you were there. Because you tax a certain few people that went there for 12-, 15-hour days, and they were exhausted at the end of it. They need help and they need a big thank you because they were there.

We could have done better, to protect the over 1,500 people in those housing units. We need to do better at that. When a disaster like that happens, in my mind, everybody

becomes a long-term care officer, everybody becomes a housing officer. That's how we make change.

I mean, that's a little criticism, but I also wanted to give a thank you to the people that were there, they were just a little tired. And that comes with talking to them. That comes with understanding what they went through, and how much work they had to do. What they faced; they faced just like everybody else.

We want to make this better for people. We have to start with doing things like increasing the investment to our senior housing facilities. It's at \$800,000 now. I talk to the former ministers about this every year. It's \$800,000 for the entire province. Then there was promises given to Hunt Court at half-a-million dollars, and I remember getting that look – I don't remember that. It was promised. And it didn't happen.

So, it's things like that, where we can't forget. That's where our funding needs to go and we need to take care of what we have, but we also need to build better so that everybody feels included.

A couple of things I just want to touch on because I only have a minute. Falls prevention is key; falls prevention needs to happen wherever you are. Because during this, in seniors housing, people fell. People got hurt, because they couldn't see, because the lights weren't on. We have to come and understand that that is crucial. If a senior falls, that is not a good situation for them.

We have to do better as a province, in and out, every single time, of making sure we're there for people. And you want to know how we're going to do that; I'll tell you later on how we're going to increase that. That becomes number one, we have to make sure we take care of our seniors – make sure they're being active, and they look at taking care of themselves – but they need support to do that. So that might be increased physios for the province, occupational therapists, and others.

At this time, I'll adjourn the debate, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our government members call Motion 95.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, debate on Motion 95, Towards a renewed population strategy, is under debate and debate can be resumed by the next person on your speaking list.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this motion. When it comes to population on the Island and our population strategy, of course, we have to remember that, really, the lifeblood of this Island really are our people.

It's our population and the people that live here that make the Island what it is and allow us to be successful as an Island.

It's hard to imagine for me, if I look back when I first ran for elected office in 2011, that we'd be in the situation where we are today where we have so many positions that are open for employment across almost every industry, and to think back in 2011, it was the opposite.

Career Development Services had a list of people who were looking for work. They would go and they would find places. They had a small list of places they could go and they would match people up. Now it's really the opposite where we've got a huge number of positions and we are trying to find the people to put in those positions.

This really speaks to why population strategy is so very important. Back, I remember, in 2011 during my nomination speech, I was talking about how we should have tax incentives to attract people to come to Prince Edward Island that were going to be small business owners, employ themselves, possibly work for off-Island employers and bring money onto the Island that way by really exporting their services, primarily using the internet.

Of course, back in 2011, things were not quite where we are today. But I think that has been super successful and I think everyone around this Legislature knows many people who do just that and many people, in particular over the last couple of years, who have come to the Island and live here and work for companies that are elsewhere.

They come to Prince Edward Island because Prince Edward Island is really the best place to live in the world and they want to be here.

We were a safe haven during the pandemic.

That's good. It has seen our economy grow and flourish, but we need to renew our population strategy because of the pressures, of course, that are on our infrastructure.

We need to take a broad view of the interlocking issues that surround them and, of course, the unintended consequences that population growth can bring.

In this House, we talk an awful lot about the problems in Charlottetown and Summerside. The official opposition, that's kind of their two main bases, and even the third party, those are the areas they kind of represent and so, I understand that.

But there's a whole world, wow – okay, one of four, one of four. The Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty casts a large shadow as the third party.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Order. Order.

Mr. Trivers: At any rate, outside of Charlottetown and Summerside, there are huge opportunities for population growth.

In fact, based on the experience in my district which is, of course, Rustico-Emerald – this is the north-central part of the Island, all the way from Clinton on the west right through to Oyster Bed Bridge in the east and all of the northern shoreline there, and then all the way down to Hunter River.

I actually have in the southwest corner, I have one road, Trailside Lane, off of the Blue Shank Road. I go that far west and then

in the east, I also have part of Wheatley River.

It's mostly unincorporated area, but we are seeing really hundreds, if not thousands of people, who are moving into this part of the Island. The number of sub-divisions that I see that are on the books and being applied for now are massive.

Just on the Rattenbury Road, there's one, Granville Creek subdivision. I'm not even sure if they have gone through the full approval process yet but I talked to the developer and he's developing 180 units of all varying types, everything from the single-family homes on large lots to the duplexes and triplexes and possibly even condos.

He's got, I believe, there's a general store in the plan. There's also a disc golf course and a croquet pitch. He's developing, really, what is going to be an entire community down there.

Without a population strategy that's very strong, these sorts of subdivisions are popping up in places in an unplanned way, without potentially the proper water or sewer.

In this case, Granville Creek on the Water, I think is a very amazing developer who's putting in the proper water and sewer, but there's lots of ribbon development going on in my district, as well, little pockets of 10 homes or 12 homes here and there.

With a population strategy, we would know which areas we wanted the population to go to and we could do proper land use planning.

At standing committee recently, we had members come in, I believe it was the land planning association – I might have that name wrong – and they were saying that land use planning is possible on Prince Edward Island and we are falling short. They said the one thing that was missing was government has to make it a priority for it to happen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: I mean, this is something I've been talking about since my days in

opposition, as well, and it's something that, I know when I was around the Cabinet table and in caucus, we talk about an awful lot. I think we're getting there and I think we're going to see some incredible land use planning coming out in the near future.

In the meantime, the population is coming. People are moving to PEI because it is such a great spot to live and we need them here to fulfil our jobs. What's going on is, we're seeing these developments happen.

This is why a population strategy is so important. It really is the glue that connects these interlocking issues and really, to try to prevent these unintended consequences.

I just wanted to share some personal perspectives as an Islander by choice. Of course, I wasn't born on Prince Edward Island, but I grew up on the North Shore, I like to say – the north shore of Lake Huron, of course. It was fresh water.

It's amazing how similar, in some ways, the cultures are in Northern Ontario where I grew up in small town Northern Ontario, and how they are in Prince Edward Island.

Of course, I absolutely love Prince Edward Island and I am an Islander by choice. This is where I've made my home and it's incredible.

When it comes to population, I like to think that I've contributed to life on the Island. I've come here and I've helped make the Island a better place. It's so important that as we welcome people to Prince Edward Island, we have a plan and a strategy of where we want them to live.

We may have to make sure that they have the health care they need. We have to make sure that the schools can accommodate them because those are all key to life on Prince Edward Island.

The other thing I wanted to talk about is how we really need to look at how our transportation infrastructure strategy feeds into our population strategy.

Again, this was at the same standing committee, they were talking about how very often the population strategy and the

places where people live are driven by transportation limitations and policy. So, it's not like we plan to have people go to a certain spot or we plan to grow the population in an area because it's needed for economic growth, but it's like, "Oh, this is where the transportation infrastructure will actually allow development to happen; therefore, that's where people are going to live."

I think there's a lot of room for growth here. This is something, again, I've been advocating for since I was in opposition, and all through my time in government, as well.

But what we're talking about here is, for example, along Route 2, which connects, of course, Summerside and Charlottetown right through the backbone of our Island. Right now, the policy is no development off of Route 2. All that does is contribute to the urban creep of Charlottetown and Summerside.

What we need to do is figure out a way – and it's not easy – to have side roads that parallel, for example, Route 2 to allow that sort of growth to take place. Of course, we have to balance that with how we keep farmland in production because we don't want to take good agricultural land out of production, that's for sure. But I think there is a balance that can happen there.

So, that's one area.

And then, there are many, many cases where it's really inconsistent, where you see, like in Stanley Bridge, for example, there are several houses developed on the north side of the road going through Stanley Bridge, and you know, driveways that are relatively close together. I'm not saying the sightlines are unsafe, but they're approaching that limit. But then, I know right now today, there's another subdivision that's being proposed and trying to be developed across the road, and they're saying: No, you cannot have access off Route 6 in Stanley Bridge. You have to go off the Douglas Road and go around.

It's really hard to explain that to the people who want to build there, that they need to go around, because they see immediately across the road, there are these other driveways that are put in. It's a 50 zone, and of course,

speeding is an issue. So, I've met with the chief engineer for the Province and the minister and the deputy minister. I've done this for many years as well. I'm trying to get speed radar signs for my district to help slow people down, again, to help with this infrastructure as the population grows, and I've been promised them many, many times, with sometimes less and limited results.

Mr. Myers: I gave you one.

Mr. Trivers: I got one. One out of 10 ain't bad. Anyway, but it's coming, it's coming. So, I'm hoping to see more of those.

Anyway, the point is without a population strategy and without the transportation plan to go along with it, we can actually not encourage the growth in the areas we want to go.

One thing I'm really glad to see right now with our government is this movement towards the medical homes and the medical neighbourhoods; again, health being something that really feeds off a good population strategy.

One thing I would like to advocate right now for while I'm speaking is, I would love to see a medical home in Hunter River. It's on Route 2; I think it's a great location. It's central between Charlottetown and Summerside. People from south, people from north can access it. And I would like to see medical neighbourhoods that come out from those with that at the hub. I don't know if one is planned for Hunter River, but I think that would be an ideal location. There's already a clinic there that could possibly be expanded.

I would like to see a medical neighbourhood in North Rustico, where, again, there's a clinic of sorts. And there's a really great group of local residents who have been advocating for many years for the Gulf Shore Health Centre, and I want to give kudos to them because through their hard work, we do have a clinic, and they've been working to expand it. So, I would love to see a medical neighbourhood there where every day of the week, a specialist can come in that looks after multiple chronic illnesses, or, for example, just comes for people who need to give blood so they don't have to travel, because that is an excellent vision

that this government has, and I commend the Premier and the health minister for that. But I wanted to advocate again for a medical home in Hunter River and a medical neighbourhood in North Rustico.

There are so many reasons that a population strategy is key to the lifeblood of this Island, which is our people. It's amazing to see the people who have come to Prince Edward Island. I mean, 2023, as we've all discussed many times, is an election year and I'm really looking forward to getting back out and knocking on every single door in my district. Obviously, I've been travelling across the district in between elections, but just every time I go out to a community event, I seem to meet somebody new who has moved in recently to the area, and they are such interesting people that offer so many different things to the Island. So, with a population strategy, that can only build on that and make sure that we do continue to go in the right direction.

Anyhow, this is a really great motion. I think that with a population strategy, we can make sure that we have a strong labour force, which of course will help our economy. We can make sure that we have the best education and the best health care in the country, and we can make sure that the Island is set to continue to prosper for all the way out into the foreseeable future.

So, of course, I support this motion, and I want to thank the members for bringing it to the floor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't plan on speaking long to this, but I did feel compelled to get up and speak to it.

I was very shocked at the education and economic growth committee meeting where the department came in to talk about the population growth strategy. I was very interested, so tuned in, and was horrified to learn that we don't connect our population growth strategy to any mechanism, like housing or education or health care, that the two are not connected.

Let's think about that for a second. The two are very connected because people keep coming in; we don't have housing, we don't have health care – well, we do, but you know the issues in health care. I would say we don't have health care that we can consistently rely on. And here we are; no mechanism to say, "Whoa, okay, we just need to slow down for a little while. We need our housing to catch up. Okay, we're good there. Let's keep going." Or the opposite: "Wow, okay, we're ready for this. Let's do this."

But we don't have those mechanisms. So, despite the fact that we are in the midst of a housing crisis, people are still coming. Where are they going to live?

What I would find very interesting is to have a survey of people who have recently moved here to say: How have things been since you got here?

One of my constituents brought to my attention a message that had been put in Ask PEI, and it's a family who just recently moved to PEI, and the gentleman who posted, his wife is not well and has health care problems, and so was asking if he, himself, could invest in a non-profit physical testing centre so his wife could get the tests that he needed.

I absolutely do think that having a population growth strategy is crucial to our Island, and it must include these mechanisms that tell us when we can speed up and when we need to slow down, because this Island is a wonderful place to live, but if we don't keep tabs on the people that we are inviting to come in, without looking at what we have available for – where they're going to live. Who's going to take care of their health care needs? Are they going to be able to afford to live here?

If we don't take those things into consideration, then we are fooling ourselves, and a population growth strategy is pointless.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Keppoch.

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

I'm certainly pleased to rise today in this House to speak to this motion, which actually was tabled originally in the spring. This motion is every bit as relevant today as it was back in the spring when it was first tabled, and probably even more relevant today.

The province is continuing to experience sustained population growth, with the targets established through the Province's previous population strategy having been surpassed.

That population strategy was first introduced in 2017 by the government of the day and it was intended to be a five-year plan. So, here we are now in 2022, when the timeframe for that population strategy was set to expire, and we've already shot past those targets and are still experiencing growth. The population target under the previous plan was 160,000 people, and today, we sit somewhere north of 170,000 people who now call PEI home.

I commend my hon. colleague for recognizing this and bringing this motion because I think some of the challenges laid out in the text of this motion are ones that we in this Assembly have been grappling with for some time now. I couldn't agree more with some of the comments made from my hon. colleague across the floor, that a population strategy must and needs to be tied to health care, to housing, to education. Everything is intertwined within that, so we do need to ensure that any population strategy is done right.

In his opening comments, the mover of this motion made some good points when he spoke about how our province has been shaped by the growth of our population, both positively and negatively, over the years.

In particular, my attention was caught by one of the motion's clauses:

"AND WHEREAS the population growth experienced has contributed to pressures in the areas such as housing, infrastructure, schools and health care that require sound strategies to address this".

Again, this motion clearly speaks to what a population strategy needs to be and what it needs to include.

I feel that this clause is at the core of what we are talking about when we speak about population growth. As a province, we benefit economically, socially, and culturally from population growth, but as populations grow, the pressure on the capacity of existing infrastructure, programs, and services also grow. Those are some of the costs and benefits that come with a vibrant province and a growing population, so it's vitally important that the government factors those challenges into how it structures and delivers services to Islanders.

Now, this can be a very difficult balance to achieve, as predicting population growth can be an imperfect science that can be impacted by a whole host of external factors beyond anyone's control or best efforts, so I don't mean to be critical when I speak about this. But again, if you look at what's happening in Ukraine right now and the millions of people that have been displaced in that country over this invasion, over this terrible, terrible war, those individuals are looking for a new place to call home, and you know, PEI is a wonderful place to call home. But again, we need to ensure that we have the services in place to provide all the services required for growing a population.

I'm extremely fortunate to represent Stratford-Keppoch, and I have done so since 2011. I moved to Stratford in the mid-1990s, and the population of the Town of Stratford at that time was a little less than 6,000 people. Since 2011, I have had the honour, again, and the privilege of being elected and representing a large part of Stratford in this Legislature.

When I was first elected, the population of Stratford stood around 8,500 people, and that's according the Statistics Canada census data. At that point, Stratford had been long recognized as one of the fastest growing communities in Atlantic Canada. Fast forward to today, and the 2021 census data from Stats Canada put Stratford's population just shy of 12,000 people. That represents about a 40% increase in the town's population during that time.

During that time, all levels of government have struggled to support that growth: municipally, provincially, and federally. There's been tremendous progress accomplished, to be sure. In my district, during that time, we have seen a lot of development that supports the economic and community development of our community. I have a long list of accomplishments that we have seen impact positively with regards to Stratford and the growth of our vibrant community.

But you know, one of the things that really excites me for the future of Stratford is a project called The Crossroads. This is a development project by The Gray Group. Mr. Speaker, you may have noticed some new infrastructure went in this summer along the TransCanada Highway, a new roundabout and access roads off towards MacKinnon Drive that leads to either Sobeys or the Stratford schools.

But The Gray Group has a vision which I firmly buy into because, I mean, the hon. member behind me talked earlier about urban sprawl and how we need to stop gobbling up agricultural land to support housing. Well, what The Crossroads is going to be is, instead of going out, they're going to be going up. They're going to be building buildings, multiple storeys, with a lot of them, the ground floor will be commercial storefront. I really think that that is an investment that is going to really, really work for, in particular, the Capital region of Stratford. I should say Charlottetown, but to me, it's Stratford. It's a neither here nor there.

But we have developers here on PEI and we have forward-thinking individuals such as the great individuals that work for The Gray Group. Cory and Darren just recently lost their father, Wayne, who was an incredible visionary and contributed so much to the business community and the economics here on PEI. These two young men are continuing to do exactly what their father taught them to do, and that, again, is to foster growth on our Island, contribute economically to our Island, and support Islanders.

Again, as I said, I could go on and on and on with regards to the infrastructure improvements that we've seen in Stratford

over the last number of years, but I know that there's probably a couple more people that are on the list that want to speak, so with that, I'll sit down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to be able to rise today to speak to this motion.

I think many of my colleagues who have spoken about this already have identified the need to look at access to health care, the need for housing, and I think that we certainly need a plan that will account for all of these variables. That's the key factor here. We need a plan that actually is going to be proactive in ensuring that our population is grown in a responsible way, to ensure that everybody has access to what they need to meet their basic needs.

Now, I hear a little bit of exciting news that's been sort of mentioned here a couple of times. We're going to hear very soon about 1,400 units –

Mr. McNeilly: Wow.

Ms. Altass: – 1,400 units, wow, finally coming. Can't wait for that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Altass: Right? This is exciting.

What I find frustrating about this, and I want to just reference something that the minister had said earlier, that the numbers don't lie. The thing is, that we've known we've been in a housing crisis for years. My colleagues and I have been just constantly trying to stress this. We are in a housing crisis. We have far too many Islanders, far too many Islanders who do not have a safe place to live, who do not have access to affordable housing.

You know, one of the things we know is that if we are focused on growing our population without considering the basic things that humans – that's what we're talking about here, actual people – need, then we are being

irresponsible in how we are treating the people who we want to come to live here in Prince Edward Island, how we are treating everybody who is already here. We are not thinking about the needs of people in a way that is caring and thoughtful and just considering their basic wellbeing. I can't wait to hear the details of this announcement, I really can't, but I've got to say, we're getting this at the last minute –

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Ms. Altass: – and it kind of makes me think –

Speaker: Hon. members, the hour has been called.

Ms. Altass: You'll have to wait and see what I think.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Speaker: Adjourn debate?

Ms. Altass: (Indistinct) adjourn debate.

Speaker: Seconder?

Ms. Altass: Seconded by Summerside-Wilmot.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that this House adjourn until Wednesday, November 2nd at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The Legislature adjourned until Wednesday, November 2nd at 1:00 p.m.