

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE AND RECOGNITION OF GUESTS	5854
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS.....	5858
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Protecting Island Shores).....	5858
TIGNISH-PALMER ROAD (Rural Health Care in PEI)	5859
CHARLOTTETOWN-VICTORIA PARK (Hot 105.5 Holiday Food Drive)	5860
RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS TAKEN AS NOTICE.....	5860
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING (Absenteeism in schools)	5860
ORAL QUESTIONS	5861
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Low-interest loans for child care centres).....	5861
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Sufficiency of grants for child care centre)	5861
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Low-interest loans for child care centres (further)).....	5862
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Pay grid for child care centres).....	5863
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Growing list for child care spaces)	5863
SUMMERSIDE-WILMOT (Completion of lesson plans for students).....	5864
SUMMERSIDE-WILMOT (Support staff in Island schools).....	5864
SUMMERSIDE-WILMOT (Additional supports provided for teachers)	5865
SUMMERSIDE-WILMOT (Voting against paid sick days)	5865
MERMAID-STRATFORD (Respiratory treatments via pharmacies).....	5866
MERMAID-STRATFORD (Options for treatment re: illnesses).....	5866
MERMAID-STRATFORD (Reopen cough and fever clinics)	5867
CHARLOTTETOWN-BELVEDERE (Support for Islanders with disabilities).....	5867
TIGNISH-PALMER ROAD (Discussion on Health Services Payment Act)	5868
TIGNISH-PALMER ROAD (Concerns with Health Services Payment Act)	5868
TIGNISH-PALMER ROAD (Fixing DNR policies).....	5869
LEADER OF THE THIRD PARTY (Form of support programs for Islanders).....	5869
LEADER OF THE THIRD PARTY (Amount spent on gift cards for tourists)	5870
LEADER OF THE THIRD PARTY (Support for Island working poor).....	5870
STRATFORD-KEPPOCH (Wastewater discharge in Island waterway).....	5871

STRATFORD-KEPPOCH (Penalties for wastewater discharge).....	5871
RUSTICO-EMERALD (Qualifying for government programs)	5872
RUSTICO-EMERALD (Centralized means-testing role).....	5873
RUSTICO-EMERALD (Financial help for middle-income Islanders)	5873
TYNE VALLEY-SHERBROOKE (Extending conciliation at UPEI).....	5874
CHARLOTTETOWN-VICTORIA PARK (Housing units and population growth).....	5874
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION (Contents, timeline of report on soil health).....	5875
PRESENTING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS.....	5875
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING (Response to Petition tabled by Karla Bernard re: Residential Tenancy Act).....	5875
TABLING OF DOCUMENTS.....	5875
REPORTS BY COMMITTEES.....	5876
EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH (Adoption of report).....	5876
ORDERS OF THE DAY (GOVERNMENT).....	5877
COMMITTEE.....	5877
Supplementary Estimates	5877
THIRD READING AND COMMITTEE.....	5899
BILL 81 – Gasoline Tax Act.....	5899
MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT.....	5900
MOTION 132 – Calling on government to cease centralization of healthcare on PEI	5900
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION.....	5901
MERMAID-STRATFORD.....	5904
TYNE VALLEY-SHERBROOKE	5906
PRIVATE MEMBER’S BILL – FIRST READING.....	5907
BILL 130 – Zero-Emission Vehicles Act.....	5907
ORDERS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT	5907
SECOND READING AND COMMITTEE.....	5907
BILL 130 – Zero-Emission Vehicles Act	5907
ADJOURNED.....	5913

The Legislature sat at 1:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back to my colleagues for another day of debate in the Legislature today, all of those who are tuned in watching us online, and those who are joining us in the public gallery. I can see a couple of faces there of individuals that I know; a couple of radio celebrities, for sure; Corey Tremère, Darcy Campbell. I see Susan Hartley from the – still the Three Rivers capital of Georgetown, I think we'll still call it that, and welcome. Our friend, Mr. MacDonald from the food bank, thank you very much, and all those who are here. I can tell lots of stories about Corey and Darcy, but I won't today. They're probably here on official business. But welcome.

I wanted to say that the Easter Seals have announced their 2023 ambassadors yesterday. I want to congratulate twin sisters Meghan and Katelyn Rogers; they're Grade 5 students at Eliot River School, daughters of Kevin and Andrea. We look forward to getting to know them a little bit better as they begin to take on these important duties. Also, wanted to say thank you, to Vaeda Matheson. I would say that Meghan and Katelyn have big shoes to fill with Vaeda. She was a great ambassador and I'm sure she'll pass on all of the tricks to the trade for this coming pair, as we look for another good campaign for Easter Seals.

I also wanted to offer my congratulations to Nicholas Herring down in the southeast of Prince Edward Island who recently won the Atwood Gibson Writers' Trust Fiction Prize for his debut novel, *Some Hellish*. Nicholas is a writer and a carpenter from Murray Harbour and that's a tremendous start to a writing career, one that seems to be off to a much more prolific career than my own. Good for him. *Some Hellish* is about a lobster fisher who struggles with his existence, Mr. Speaker, something maybe that someone like you who fished for so long could relate to. According to the author, fishing is the perfect metaphor for everything. I'm sure we could agree to that.

Sounds like a great Christmas gift, so congratulations to Nicholas.

I also wanted to say congratulations to George, Mark and Melody Beck for 90 years, the great business down in Montague, Stewart and Beck Limited, celebrating a very important anniversary. So many great memories of being there with my father, and I talked to George often about the times and tribulations of running a small-town store in rural Prince Edward Island through many difficult times. George was certainly good to my father, my family and to me, so all the best to that family and I wish them 90 more years of success.

Finally, today is Giving Tuesday, which is a day where people are encouraged to be kind. If you're able to make a donation to a charity of your choice, given the time of year, that would be appreciated. So, I'll make a deal with the opposition: You be kind today, and I will make a sizeable donation to my friend Myron Yates of Big Brothers Big Sisters and we'll get off to a good start.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, I'd like to hear what you have to say.

Leader of the Opposition: It's always hard to follow the sweetest Premier in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: I, too, would like to start by welcoming some of the folks in the gallery. I see Darcy Campbell; I see Corey Tremère, who provides me with sometimes a smile, sometimes a moment to ponder in the morning. He always puts up a really thoughtful tweet and I look forward to that, actually. A lot of things on Twitter I don't look forward to, but I do look out for Corey's thoughts every morning and they're lovely. And Mike MacDonald, of course, from the food kitchen here; lovely to see you all.

As well as Susan Hartley, who is the president of the Island Green party and I think beside her is Boyd Allen, underneath

that mask. Lovely to see you, Boyd; welcome to the Legislature. I think the first time you've been here this sitting.

The Premier, the sweet Premier, talked about the 10-year-old twins, Katelyn and Meghan Rogers, who – talk about sweet. A wonderful, beautiful set of twins from Cornwall, who, of course, have been chosen as the 2023 Easter Seals Ambassadors. Their motto is, “Believe in yourself and don’t give up.” It’s a lovely motto and I think one that we can all embrace.

I also want to – and I think the sweet Premier mentions Vaeda Matheson – that’s three donations so far, Premier – Vaeda Matheson, who was the Easter Seals Ambassador for three full years for a variety of reasons, mostly due to COVID. Vaeda was just – she was so wonderful in the job that she did. As the Premier said, the sweet Premier, Katelyn and Meghan have some big shoes to fill. I know that Katelyn and Meghan were inspired by Vaeda and the work that she did, but they’re involved in dance lessons, they’re involved in wheelchair basketball, and I understand they’re really awesome little singers. They love to do karaoke. Maybe we’ll get to see some of that along the way. They make their first public appearances officially in the New Year and then, of course, in April they’ll embark on that tip-to-tip Easter Seals PEI School Tour.

I wish Katelyn and Meghan and their parents, Andrea and Kevin, all the best as they embark on this really exciting journey and adventure.

Closer to my own home, this coming Saturday night, the Argyle Shore Women’s Institute are going to host their 4th annual Christmas Tree Lighting event. It’s a beautiful event at the Argyle Shore Community Centre. It takes place from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m., I think, this Saturday. As always, it’s a lovely, warm affair. You see it in small rural communities all across Prince Edward Island. There’ll be popcorn for the kids, movies, hot chocolate. This year, they’re doing – and I’ve seen this in a few Christmas events, now – an in-memory fundraiser. It gives you an opportunity to remember a loved one by hanging a memorial ornament or a light or something on a tree. They’re going to do that for the

first time this year. It’s a lovely little addition to so many Christmas traditions which are happening across the province.

I hope everybody has a great week here in the Legislature and I’m really looking forward to this kind day ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Well, I guess I better say something nice about the Premier. You’re a pretty nice Premier –

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Gallant: – and we have a pretty friendly Leader of the Opposition. Of course, all members of this Legislative Assembly are very pleasant to deal with.

Mr. McNeilly: Nobody can do it better.

Mr. Gallant: I’d also like to welcome everyone to the gallery, our radio celebrities and Mike MacDonald and all our other special guests. Also, say hello to everyone back in Evangeline-Miscouche district and all Islanders.

As was mentioned earlier, today is Giving Tuesday and it is a good day to remind ourselves to say hi to an elder or be nice to our neighbours; just do a gesture of kindness to someone that could probably lift up their day.

We, too, in Miscouche, have an annual celebration this time of year. It’s Thursday night at 6:30 p.m. in the church yard. We light up a Christmas tree. It’s called Home for Christmas. It’s a fundraiser, as well. It’s in memory of our loved ones that have passed on. It’s something that’s done every year. I want to thank Robin Gillis and the Gillis family and the fire department for their initiative to do this. They set the tree up on Saturday. I was going to go over and watch but it was raining, so I thought I’d stay home. Normally, I help, but I just didn’t feel up to going over on Saturday, but thank them and all parishioners. I hope you have a wonderful evening Thursday night.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we've heard, Giving Tuesday, a global movement to unleash the power of the people and also to offset the consumerism of Black Friday and Cyber Monday; despite the ask for everybody to be kind, I'd also remind people that giving comes from the heart and altruism is giving without needing to have something in return. Giving can be money, it can be volunteering, it could be fundraising for others, it can be an act of kindness. This is a time to think about who it is and where we want to give, not just now but all year. I'm particularly keen on a way that we can fund drives that keeps the support going all year round – the Upper Room has, and then the Food Ministry has a campaign to do a weekly donation, and so does Blooming House. Those are the two that I'm going to be supporting in the coming year with a weekly or a monthly donation, and Mr. Speaker, I'd encourage everybody else to do the same.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Keppoch.

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

It's certainly a pleasure for me to rise today and bring greetings to the residents of the Stratford area. I'd be remiss if I didn't say a special hello to three very special ladies in my life: my mother-in-law, who I love dearly, Doreen MacPhee, Alice Pickett and Shirley Cleveland, who are residents at St John House. They are probably two of my greatest confidantes with regards to what's happening in the Stratford area and I always rely on their sage advice.

I'd also be remiss if I didn't recognize some of the individuals that have joined us here in the gallery today: Mike MacDonald, of course, who lives over in my district, and Mr. Corey Tremere. A lot can be said about Corey, being a radio personality. I also, like the Leader of the Opposition, look forward to his tweets every morning.

In addition to Corey, there's a very, very powerful person beside Corey in Corey's life and that would be Autumn Tremere. I had the pleasure of working with Autumn back when I was in Cabinet. She was my comms person in health. I just couldn't begin to say enough great things about Autumn, Corey, and their entire family. You've set the bar, as far as what a family should be and how to present yourself. Thank you for that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aylward: On Saturday past, I had the extreme pleasure, along with the hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford and apparently the leader of the opposition now, to attend the Cross Roads Fire Department long service awards. I don't know if she read the program, but she received a pretty significant promotion on Saturday.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aylward: I'll send you a copy.

We're very blessed in Stratford and area to have such a great, great group of volunteers and families that support these volunteers. The men and women that make up the Cross Roads Fire Department are to be commended, as are all volunteer firefighters across Prince Edward Island.

In particular, the volunteer firefighter of the year award went to Billy McPhee. I also want to recognize a very, very special, first-time recognition from the board of the Cross Roads Fire Department, went to Don Himelman.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all of our volunteers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was at the same dinner, obviously, as the member across. You never know what's going to be printed in a program, I guess.

So, when you get there, you go with the flow.

I'd like to say hi to everybody who's in the gallery today. Thank you, it's great to see you all today. Hi to everybody in Mermaid-Stratford and to my colleagues.

I was also, as I mentioned, at the dinner for the Cross Roads Fire Department. It was such a great evening, full of laughs and sharing those little nuances that all of the members go through. They're a pretty tight-knit community.

The service pins that went out were astounding; everywhere from five years up to 40 years of service. Billy McPhee and Ricky Sentner, from my district, were both honoured with a more than 40 years of service pin, which is really astounding. They were there the day that it was decided to start the Cross Roads Fire Department, which is amazing.

I'd also like to mention the Women's Institute dinner was on Friday. What a great turnout that was; an amazing effort by the Women's Institute, and a great fundraiser. That all went to Western Hospital and the Community Hospital of O'Leary.

I had the pleasure of sitting with the Western Hospital auxiliary members who, I will tell you, they sold their cake – they made a war cake and it sold for \$510 in their cake auction, which was amazing.

Anyway, with that, I will say have a great day, everyone, and I look forward to the proceedings today.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to rise today. Welcome back to all my colleagues. Hello to everybody watching in District 9.

A special hello to my parents, who are watching my sick six-year-old today. I do appreciate it, Mom and Dad. Thank you, and I love you.

Also, I want to recognize some of our guests here today. Thank you for joining us here in the gallery. We have Corey and Darcy and Mike MacDonald, and as well, Barb Ramsay, a councillor from Summerside. Thanks for being here.

I know the Hot 105.5 food drive is certainly well on its way, as well as the Ocean 100 Toys for Tots drive. Thanks for everything you're doing for Island families here, especially during the holiday season.

I just want to echo some of the comments that were said today, just around Katelyn and Meghan Rogers. I had the pleasure of meeting them yesterday, and they are going to be incredible Easter Seals Ambassadors. You could just see the light in their eyes yesterday, and I'm really looking forward to getting to know them over the next year.

Of course, Vaeda Matheson; I've said it here before in the House and so many times over, Vaeda is magical in every way and I wish her all the very best. I know she's going to be an incredible mentor for both Katelyn and Meghan.

Finally, today is the PEI Business Women's Association Symposium. I was able to take part in their opening ceremonies this morning. We are just so lucky to have such strong businesswomen leaders in our province. I really do wish them all the very best in today's events.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise a few days late with a proper pink shirt and purple tie. I realize that violence against women is an issue important to all men. Violence against women is not just an issue for other people; every wife, daughter, grandma, or granddaughter is at risk or already have experienced violence. It is up for us men to do something about it.

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 the folks in the gallery, including Summerside city councillor, Barb Ramsay. Hi Barb, good to see you.

I had the pleasure of attending the Holiday Home Tours this weekend at Lot 16 Hall, which was a lot of fun. Fudge was great but I just wanted to just mention a couple of other events that are coming up at the hall this Christmas season. This Saturday, they are having pet photos with Santa. You have to book your appointment in advance, but you can bring your pet to the hall, get a photo with Santa. It's usually dogs, I'm not going to lie, but if you have other pets, I'm sure they'd be open to that; rabbits, cats. Santa loves all pets and appreciates that people have pets as part of their family. We love Santa for that.

As well, we have a Christmas concert coming up on December 11th with Kim Albert and Faces. That will be a lot of fun, too. Lots happening at Lot 16 Hall and I hope you'll check it out.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Mr. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and, of course, recognize some of my former colleagues: Darcy Campbell from Hot 105.5 in the Morning Hot Tub, and my good buddy Corey Tremere from Ocean 100, and as well, Mike MacDonald and Barb Ramsay. I just wanted to welcome you publicly and also just wanted to say a big congratulations.

The SEDMHA hockey tournament was taking place this past weekend in Halifax with a lot of Island teams. Saw a few Central Storm team banners coming home back to PEI, as well as the Mid Isle Wildcats. Just want to congratulate all the girls on a great weekend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Did I miss anyone? Couldn't have. You all must want to get on the radio; you're long-winded today.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Protecting Island Shores

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

Like many Islanders, I love walking on our beaches. It's an essential part of life here on Prince Edward Island, and I think if somebody were to introduce a law that said we could no longer do it, there would be an absolute revolution.

But thankfully, we do have laws that make sure that all 1,100 km of our Island beaches are accessible to everybody. At least, that's the way it used to be.

We all know that people break laws: it happens all the time but at least when those people are found out, justice typically prevails. It is through people's confidence in our laws that the rules make sense and that they are just, and that they are fairly and consistently applied that the glue of society holds tight. That's why it is so alarming that many Islanders' confidence in our laws, and in this government's desire to uphold them, has been deeply shaken.

We now know that this government is completely unconcerned about major developments going ahead without permits in place. In Fairview, for example, not a single permit was issued from multiple departments for a major development, and there was no consultation with a municipality that is on the very brink of bringing in its own official land use plan.

An Hon. Member: Shameful.

Leader of the Opposition: No permits, no discussion, no public consultation, nothing.

And this government just shrugs it off, or even worse, it defends what is going on. It's

almost unbelievable, except that it's really happening.

And in Point Deroche: Want to demolish a heritage building? Sure, there's a permit for that. You want to build something within the setback area in the buffer zone that's twice or three times the size of the previous structure? Sure, there's a permit for that. You want to bring in thousands of tons of armour rock and dump it on a beach, blocking public access? Sure, there's a permit for that.

It sometimes seems that it would be almost impossible for the new landowners to actually break any of our province's laws given this government's willingness to grant permits without question. Or more likely, no permits were ever issued in the first place, since that appears to be this government's preferred way of doing business.

Islanders are shocked and disgusted by this government's casual attitude, and by their complete lack of concern about protecting our beautiful Island from harmful and haphazard development.

Islanders need a government that will stand up for them, that stands firm and says: Take that monstrosity away –

Ms. Lund: Hear! Hear!

Leader of the Opposition: – and give us back our beach.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Rural Health Care in PEI

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

For the past five weeks, I've been questioning the Minister of Health and Wellness about the house of cards that is presently rural health care in this province.

For the last five weeks, I haven't received one answer from the minister as to why he is allowing the constituents that he represents, and all rural Islanders, to be treated as

though their lives are less important because of where they choose to live.

Every answer he provides blames the previous administration, promotes initiatives that have had no noticeable impact on our health care system, or lets on that this is the first time he is hearing about the horror stories that are happening in his own backyard.

West Prince constituents are seeing through the oblivious nature of this minister, as evidenced by an email that I will table today, one of many that I have received.

Here is a quote from an email by a constituent whose mother had to sit in emerg for the night, because they would not sign DRN paperwork for admission to the O'Leary Hospital: "In October I met with our minister of health to discuss issues surrounding health care. One of the issues I asked about was the DNR Policy at Community Hospital O'Leary. So, imagine my surprise when watching the November 25th sitting of the Legislature and minister making it sound like it was the first time that he had heard about this."

This is beyond appalling, and disrespectful to the people he sits in that chair and is supposed to represent. The minister and the premier have accused me on multiple occasions of playing politics when it comes to health care in our province.

To that, I say this: If playing politics means that I'm standing up to ensure that Islanders across this province are not forced to choose between signing their right to live away to get a hospital bed; if it means advocating for the doors of our rural hospitals not to be locked when people need them; or if it means making sure it won't take an ambulance two hours to get to an emergency in Tignish, then, Mr. Speaker, I'm guilty as charged. And I'm not stopping.

This minister needs to stop living in the past and the fix the problems of the present.

On behalf of my constituents, and yours, shame on you, minister. Shame on you.

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

Hot 105.5 Holiday Food Drive

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With your indulgence, I would like to recognize some people in the gallery today. I'd like to welcome Darcy Campbell and Corey Tremere, both members of the Stingray management team. I'd like to welcome Mike MacDonald, the executive director for the Upper Room Food Bank and Soup Kitchen, and Susan Hartley and Boyd Allan, who are here representing the Montague Food Bank today. Also, I'd like to welcome Barb Ramsay and Matthew Murphy back with us again today.

Islanders are struggling to make ends meet and never is that more obvious than as we head into the holiday season. With inflation, this year is worse than ever.

Food bank usage is up significantly. Mike MacDonald of the Upper Room Food Bank and Kitchen reported that the months leading into summer saw a significant increase in the number of clients. The month of May 2021 as compared to May 2022 saw a 40% increase. They normally see that jump in numbers as we enter a school year or going into the winter months, so this is significant.

While the need increases, the budgets for giving naturally shrink. That is why I'm thrilled to announce that the Hot Holiday Food Drive is back in Prince Edward Island from November 28th until December 2nd.

The following is when and where you can drop off your donations: Monday at Spring Valley Building Centre in Kensington – yesterday; today, Tuesday, at the Credit Union Place in Summerside, and that's where Tannis Bruder is today – that's why she couldn't join us. She will be broadcasting live from there this afternoon and at every location this week; Wednesday, you can drop off at Founders Food Hall and Market here in Charlottetown; Thursday at Mike and Andrea's No Frills in Stratford; and Friday at the Royalty Crossing and Super Store.

If you are not able to make it in person and would like to donate, you can send an e-transfer to fundraiser@hot1055fm.com.

All funds and donations raised will be donated to food banks across PEI.

I would be remiss to miss this opportunity of thanking all the other amazing community initiatives happening to support families for the Christmas season. I will name a few; I'm going to exclude some, but I'll name a few: CBC's Feed a Family and Turkey Drive happening November 28th until December 16th; Lions Clubs Island-wide; Gifts from the Heart; Ocean 100's Toys For Tots; Santa's Angels; 4 Love 4 Care, who are providing free hot meals this Christmas Day, just to name a few.

I encourage everyone to help where and when they can.

Thank you, Hot 105.5, for caring about your community, and I hope, from the bottom of my heart, that this is the most successful food drive yet, as the need is great and we want all Islanders to have food and to feel the love that comes from having stocked shelves.

I hear many families this year who have decided to forgo gift-giving, and instead of drawing names this holiday season, as a family, they plan on making a donation to a food bank. To them, I say thank you, as well.

If you are able to give, please do so and help Hot 105.5 in their quest to fill the PEI food banks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: End of member statements.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

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

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, on November 25th, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot asked questions about policies related to absenteeism in schools and alleged a reluctance of Child Protection Services to investigate cases of absenteeism in schools.

There's no reluctance. Child Protection Services investigates any report of

absenteeism that could be related to neglect or abuse. Any Child Protection report where a parent is preventing a child from attending school or not providing them with the necessary skills, tools, services to attend school would meet the criteria for an investigation.

I understand there's a working group led by the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, which is staff from Child Protection Services participates in. The working group did establish a comprehensive list of initiatives to encourage attendance and engagement within the school system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

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

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

Last week, I asked some questions about a child care centre in the Souris area that is in imminent danger of closing permanently, and I also talked about one in my own area where the infant program had to be closed down last Friday.

In responding to my questions, the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning said that, and I quote, "There's a number of different grants that we've been rolling out..."

End quote.

So, my first question surrounds these initiatives.

Low-interest loans for child care centres

A question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Do any of the measures that you listed that day provide low-interest loans for capital expenditures, which is actually what's urgently needed in both of these cases to stop these centres from closing?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, official Leader of the Opposition party, for raising the concern.

Certainly, I recognize the challenges associated with infrastructure needs for child care centres, and that's precisely why I have been advocating with the federal government. But certainly, as a Province, too, we are looking at various options in terms of low-interest financing. I have been working with my colleague beside me on some possibilities moving forward, so I do look forward to being able to announce those sooner rather than later, hopefully.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Well, absolutely, it needs to be sooner rather than later. We have one daycare centre on the verge of closing. We have one that desperately needs to find a new location within the next few months.

Ms. Lund: Exactly.

Leader of the Opposition: So, I hope you're doing more than looking into this, minister. This needs to happen right now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: Among the programs listed by the minister last week for centres like the two in question, which are both privately run, was – and again, I quote, "...capital grants to support renovations or purchase equipment..."

Merry Pop-Ins, the child care centre in my area where the infant program closed last week, needs to relocate by the middle of next year or they're going to be forced to close as well, leaving close to a hundred families without child care options on the South Shore.

Sufficiency of grants for child care centre

Question to the same minister: This capital grant that you mentioned last week, is it sufficient for the capital needs of the owners

of Merry Pop-Ins, who absolutely have no choice but to relocate?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. member knows, in partnership with the federal government, we are investing heavily within our early childhood sector. We have seen a number of success stories whereby new centres are opening in rural settings. I know the staff have been in touch with Merry Pop-Ins on several occasions last week, and they are working to find some solutions for Merry Pop-Ins.

The last thing we want to see is a child care in a rural setting closing because, recognizing, again, in order for folks to, in order for any of us to be here today who has small children, we need child care. We need reliable child care.

We are going to do everything we can to support Merry Pop-Ins in achieving this relocation and I look forward to further conversations with the Leader of the Opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

I noted in the minister's opening greetings that her parents are looking after her kids. How lovely, but how lucky you are to have that option. Not every Island family does and as you say, without child care, people are unable to carry on their lives, to go to work and pay their bills.

I have received many emails and calls over the last few days about the potential closure of Merry Pop-Ins and one of the asks in those emails is for this provincial government, not the federal government, but the provincial government, to provide a low-interest loan for capital expenditures. In the case of Merry Pop-Ins, this is going to amount into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. They're not asking for a grant. They don't want a handout. All they want is a loan, an extremely low-risk loan that would

ensure that child care is maintained in the South Shore area.

Low-interest loans for child care centres (further)

To the same minister: You keep mentioning this federal program that's coming sometime in the future but these child care centres need help now. Why is your department not stepping up with the low-interest loans that these centres desperately need to stay in operation?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are investing in our early childhood sector. I'm aware that Merry Pop-Ins has received, previously, a grant, and that's precisely why the department is working with Merry Pop-Ins and we are going to ensure their success. I know, my colleague beside me, we are looking at various loan options for Merry Pop-Ins.

I just want to remind the House what this government has done for early years. In the last two years, we've reduced parent fees to \$20 a day from \$36 on the high end. We've increased, on average, our wages for early years workers by 23%.

Despite what the Leader of the Opposition is saying, we are investing. We are committed to the early years sector and we will continue to work with Merry Pop-Ins (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

For seven years, I've been working with Helen and Neil to secure the future of Merry Pop-Ins that this minister is so concerned about. They have staffing issues. They have issues (Indistinct) related to relocation and they have trouble with financial viability because it's such a heavily regulated field.

The other challenges faced by both centres is in attracting staff, one of the things I've just mentioned. The restrictive rules that allow people to qualify on the wage group for child care centres and how an individual with a master's degree and many years of experience currently only qualifies for minimum wage.

The minister told me to bring back this specific situation to her personally, but I know that Merry Pop-Ins has approached the minister on multiple occasions about this without success.

An Hon. Member: Yes, exactly.

Pay grid for child care centres

Leader of the Opposition: To the same minister: I'm really not interested in finding fixes for individual cases that are really nothing more than symptoms of a dysfunctional system. I want you to fix the pay grid, minister. When are you going to do that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Jameson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Despite it taking a couple of weeks, I'm glad that the legislation around early years did pass last Friday. Some of the challenges that the Leader of the Opposition is addressing today around the wage grid will be addressed in the regulations.

Again, I just wanted to advise the House around some of the investments we've actually made in early years. I look at the increased wages in staff. We are rolling out a defined contribution pension plan. We have provided education grants, a return to the ECE profession grant, one-time retention grants, innovative retention practice grants within rural settings, and the list goes on and on and on and on.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure the minister recognizes just how tone deaf that response is to thousands of kids.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: The imminent closure of the two centres that I have been talking about will have a devastating effect on an already challenged system. They are only two of many centres that are in danger across this province.

Myself and my colleagues receive emails and calls every week from parents, mostly mothers, I should say, who, despite their best efforts, have not been able to secure child care for their children. These women are from all over our province. The desperation you can hear in these voices of these parents is heart-breaking.

If they cannot find child care then they can't work and if they can't work, they can't pay their bills.

Growing list for child care spaces

A question to the same minister: The list for child care spots has gone from 1,500 to 2,000 under your watch in the last two years. Clearly, your current approach is not working. How are you going to turn this around?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to take a moment to recognize the outstanding staff within the department who are tuned in today. I know they have been working diligently on this file. We are so appreciative of their work as well as the partnership that we've had with the federal government.

As I've said before in this House, Canada is leading the way in child care. I met with the federal minister a month ago, and this is precisely what she said, that PEI is leading the way. I recognize that we still have challenges. Currently –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Jameson: Currently, we've met our federal targets. We're at 62% of child care spaces on the Island here, with 4,444 spaces across the board. In the last two years, we've been able to increase the number of child care spaces by 443 spaces in the last year and a half. That is significant, and we're not stopping now.

That is precisely why we're going to continue that relationship with the federal government, and I just want to applaud all the staff within the department, ECA, everybody who's working so hard on this.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Mr. Speaker, if that's the response that parents get when they reach out to say there's a problem, that everything's great, it's no wonder people follow up with us after they've contacted you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lund: Norbert Carpenter told us last week that school absences across the province are at 13%. Obviously, that's a number that's quite high. With so many students already feeling the impact after the last couple of years, I worry about what this means for kids who are missing even more school days, and for teachers who are already overworked.

Completion of lesson plans for students

To the minister of education: What are you hearing from teachers about their ability to complete their lesson plans this year, if numbers continue like this over the winter?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, this was a concern right at the very onset of the pandemic. That's why the department has revised the curriculum to reflect some of the changes and learning gaps, and benchmarks and that.

We understand this is not ideal. We want our kids to be in the classroom. That being said, our absenteeism rate – yes, it's around 13% currently, but we have a lot of substitutes in place. I know the PSB as well as the CSLF, they engaged in some strong recruitment efforts over the summer. We have a lot of subs there to support our students and our staff.

I know I've already said it in the House, but we added significant amount of frontline staff within our schools this year through our operating budget. We went back to Treasury Board at the end of the summer and we added more, and then this last month, we added more again.

We're here to support the school system, and we'll do whatever we can to support our staff as well as our students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Mr. Speaker, even with these revisions, I'm still hearing from teachers who are constantly needing to catch kids up because of how many of their students are out each week –

An Hon. Member: It's true. (Indistinct)

Ms. Lund: – and it's putting them behind. We've been raising the need for increased support staff in schools for years.

Support staff in Island schools

To the minister of education: How does the number of support staff in Island schools compare to the actual need in Island schools?

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

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

I want to applaud all of our school staff within our schools. They do an incredible job. These have been extenuating circumstances, the last couple of years, especially, with COVID; with Fiona. That's precisely why we've invested in our

education system, because this government feels that education is the best investment this government can make.

So, again, looking back at the 2022-2023 operating budget, we added 40 more frontline staff. Again, we went back in the summer and just this past month to add more. Our staff are constantly in touch with the staff on the ground within the schools, and we'll do whatever we can to support them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it's great to applaud school staff, but I would encourage the minister to actually listen to them, because one message I'm getting loud and clear from the folks who work in the school system is that there are simply not enough supports in place to do what they need to do.

We had one school highlight for me that their actual need for EAs, as an example, is 30, but their allotment was 9. Right? When a student is out for a whole week, they need extra help to get caught up, and teachers need support to do this. We could use more supports in virtually every category, across the board.

Additional supports provided for teachers

To the education minister: What additional supports are you providing teachers to get them through this wave of illness that is impacting our schools right now?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I agree that our staff, they need the supports themselves. They need to be well to be able to teach and be there for their students in the classroom. There's been a high degree of PD this year, especially around social-emotional learning. We certainly recognize the importance of social-emotional learning and the mental health and wellbeing of our students, especially following the pandemic.

So, we have engaged with additional PD. We have a social-emotional consultant within the department, we have four new mental health consultants that are working across the school system, and again, all these additional staff to help support our school system and our students.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure additional supports in social and emotional learning are going to help catch kids up when they've missed a week of school. I'm not sure how that's related at all.

But the flip side of all of this, of course, is parents. Mothers are often the ones who are tasked at staying home with sick children. They make up the majority of child care staff and educational work staff.

Voting against paid sick days

To the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: With so many kids sick, why did you vote against giving mothers and child care workers paid sick days so that they could take care of their children without worrying about missing bill payments?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think all members on this side of the House recognize the importance of paid sick leave.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Jameson: I know that the work of the department of economic growth and development here is, they're going to be doing a comprehensive review, and certainly, I know that we're going to get to a place where we do have paid sick days on this Island.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, it's not a surprise to anyone that we're dealing with a lot of illness on this Island right now.

I'm hearing from constituents that are sick and they don't know where to go for help.

Respiratory treatments via pharmacies

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: What medications and treatments are available through the Pharmacy Plus program for respiratory illness?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Excellent question. There was, I believe it's 38 different assessments under the Pharmacy Plus program that pharmacists can deliver. Certainly, that information is online, but if the hon. member can't find it, I'll certainly be happy to bring it back and table it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

There wasn't 38 ways for them to help people with respiratory illness, and that's what I'm getting at.

I know pharmacists can prescribe cough suppressants, Tylenol, and Advil, but as soon as you get into an infection, they can't help. So, the question is, where do they go? Islanders with family doctors are finding it hard to even book an appointment with their physician with this uptick of illness. Some are waiting two weeks.

I spoke to a woman who has to wait until January to get her appointment. She has a doctor, so she can't use Maple unless she's got enough money to pay for it. She knows the ER isn't meant for non-emergency issues such as this. But what other options does she have?

Options for treatment re: illnesses

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: What should Islanders like this woman – where should they go so that they don't end up in the emergency room?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

It is, it's a great comment, a great question that's coming forward from the hon. member.

First of all, we've all heard the saying with regard to prevention, and at the start, I certainly urge all Islanders to make sure that their immunization right across the board is up to grade to help protect them against, whether it's respiratory illnesses or any other type of infection.

But we have put in place a number of different initiatives such as the access clinics that can be followed up on, subsequent –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Beaton: (Indistinct) Maple –

Mr. Hudson: After they access Maple. And I do agree, I see where the member is coming from with regard to patients who are not affiliated.

But certainly, it is an initiative; it's things that we are working on tirelessly to improve the system, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, that's not – Islanders are struggling to get a diagnosis so they can actually get medications to support them, and the only place for them to go right now is to the emergency room. We know that is not where they should be going.

Our emergency room is already overburdened, and our minister should be doing everything possible to keep every

single Islander out of there if it is not an emergency situation.

Question to the minister: You said that you're looking at every option. You're working hard at this. So, here's a suggestion: You closed the cough and fever clinics.

Reopen cough and fever clinics

Question to the minister: Will you reopen the cough and fever clinics while we're going through this wave of illness here so Islanders can get the help that they need?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I will never rule out anything. I certainly will consider anything. But we have to look – the hon. member referenced in each of her preambles – with regard to keeping people out of the emergency department. Certainly, one of the initiatives – and I referenced it before – but one of the initiatives that we have undertaken to help address that, to a certain extent, is the Pharmacy Plus Program. There has been substantial uptake on that program.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

People living with a disability often have significant expenses in addition to their basic needs that are covered through assured income or social assistance. In addition, many people who live with a disability are not on either income program, but they still receive other financial supports from the provincial government. For example, if they have specialized transportation needs or mobility equipment or even a service animal.

Support for Islanders with disabilities

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: I'm hearing from Islanders that live with a disability that they feel forgotten when it comes to policies and announcements from your department. What is your department doing to better support Islanders living with disabilities in these challenging times?

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

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

What we just done here approximately a month ago was increased all our social programs through the department as a whole. Right now, obviously, we've seen gaps in the policies, I'll be the first to admit that.

There's complete policy review happening within the department right now. Some are completed and some are still in the works. I will be able to give an update once they're all completed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While I appreciate the reference to that increase that you put forward earlier this year, it was 8%, and it went on the basic rate for people who get social assistance or assured income benefits. That means social programs, social housing clients, their increases to communication, optical, transportation benefits, all happening on December 1st, in two days.

But you know who didn't get that increase? People living with a disability.

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Why will you wait for a review when you can just commit to extending that 8% increase to AccessAbility clients, as well?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One thing I don't want to do is say something that is not 100% accurate when it comes to those programs.

What I want to do is go back to the department. If there's any gaps in any way, I'll get back to the department and see what we can do, hon. member, because I want to make sure that every Islander, everybody living with a disability has the needs that they need to survive right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

In this session of the Legislature, the government tabled an amendment to the *Health Services Payment Act* that would see that Physician Resource Planning Committee taken away, as well as the complement of regional billing numbers.

We've seen the list of government business getting smaller and smaller as the session goes on, but we have yet to see the *Health Services Payment Act* come to the floor for debate. This was supposed to make hiring physicians easier and quicker, something that we certainly need here but not at the expense of rural Islanders.

Discussion on *Health Services Payment Act*

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will the bill be brought to the floor this session or did you reconsider and finally realize the harm it could cause to rural PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

No, the bill will not be brought to the floor this session. Certainly, the hon. member is

quite correct that the intention of it was to eliminate red tape.

But on this side of the House, we listen to concerns, we take those concerns under consideration as compared to previous administrations who just barreled ahead. We take them under consideration, and we realize on this side the important of rural health care and we're dedicated to it.

We want to make sure that any legislation that comes forward will protect rural health care.

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

Mr. Perry: It just blows my mind that the minister made that statement. He was the one that is promoting that bill in this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Perry: It just goes to show how out of touch he is.

I'm all for changes that will help the ability to hire doctors, but not if it means someone from Tignish or even Souris has to take a day off work and drive an hour or two just to get the health care that they require.

Concerns with *Health Services Payment Act*

Question to the minister: Dr. Gardam was on *Compass* a few weeks ago, bragging and excited about the new power he's going to have come January. What was wrong with the bill? Who told you to pull it, or did you finally decide to listen to the concerns of rural Islanders?

Mr. Henderson: Yes, that's (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I have always listened to the concerns of rural Islanders, and I will continue to, and that's why we are going to not bring it forward this session, that we are going to make it stronger for rural Islanders to protect rural Islanders, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

Premier King: (Indistinct)

Mr. Perry: We've seen it with the *Residential Tenancy Act*, we've seen it with the supported decision-making act, we've seen it with the child and youth family services act, and amendments to our *Education Act*, and the list goes on and on. This government has an inability to (Indistinct) their commitments in a timely manner due to poor consultation, or having no vision, no plan.

Mr. Henderson: No plan.

Fixing DNR policies

Mr. Perry: Question to the minister: When you're working on fixing this act, will you be working on fixing our DNR policies? You know, the ones that you seem to have no idea about?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I could give about a 20-minute answer to that, but I've only got a few seconds here.

An Hon. Member: We know.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: So, the point that I'm going to focus on is his assertion with no plan. No plan. We have a tremendous plan, but the third party, when they were administration, they had one plan, and that plan was in education, and that plan was to close rural schools.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: Something that we're not going to do.

An Hon. Member: Shame. Shame. Shame.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) four when they left.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, tame it down.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct) incredible.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct) absolutely incredible.

Mr. Gallant: I don't know what happened to the niceness, but it kind of (Indistinct) –

Mr. McNeilly: Exactly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: Bring (Indistinct) back. Bring (Indistinct) home.

Mr. Gallant: Maybe we can extend the hour and get the other 15 minutes of that answer.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker –

Mr. Hudson: (Indistinct) with the Liberal caucus after.

Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, we've seen throughout the weekend and even this morning in some parts of the Island that winter is slowly creeping upon us. Temperatures are dropping and snow is in the forecast.

It's also a stressful time for many Island families with the holiday season fast approaching as well.

Last week, the Premier alluded to a suite of programs that will be released to help shield Islanders from heating costs this winter.

Form of support programs for Islanders

Question to the Premier: Will these programs be investments focused on support that will extend throughout the winter

months, or will they be in the form of another one-time gift card?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems that government giving people money through a gift card has really struck a nerve over in the third party's office. Most Islanders I talk to like the gift card. They'd like to get more of them.

But anyway, we have tried very hard to help Islanders through some of the most difficult challenges that we've faced in over a century, be it COVID, be it the biggest hurricane to ever hit the country, and be it the cost of living which is at an all-time high in the last 70 years across Canada.

So, we delivered a pretty substantive fleet of services to help Islanders. Some of them have been in the form of one-time payments, although this is the second time, so they'd be two-time payments. The Minister of Social Development and Housing actually will be bringing forward in the days ahead some additional programs that will be designed to help those people who will heat their homes with furnace oil, for example, which, again, is at an all-time high, as well.

So, we're trying to help the best we can, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the gift cards are great for some if they work and if they get them, but not all people are getting them, and they don't always work.

Islanders are taking on more household debt as a result of our province leading the country for inflation this past year, so it's safe to say that the January vote-buying cheques will go out, and they'll go towards debt rather than helping Islanders' bottom line at the end of the month.

Amount spent on gift cards for tourists

Question to the Premier: How much was spent on the gift cards provided to tourists over the years, and will your investment to

help Islanders with the cost of living this winter be of greater value?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, the handful of gift cards we gave out at the airport in the summer of 2020 –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier King: – would be pretty insignificant, I would think, in the big scheme of things. It was more of just a nice gesture, welcoming those people who couldn't come back. We just tried to do a little bit to put our foot forward to thank all of those who came to PEI and to welcome them back.

What we've given out to Islanders in this latest assistance program: \$58 million that will go directly into the pockets of Islanders. I would remind the hon. Leader of the Third Party that one of the biggest reasons we have the highest cost of living is because most things that come to Prince Edward Island, or leave Prince Edward Island, come on wheels driven by trucks that require diesel fuel, which the leader of his party in Ottawa is going to charge another 10 cents for, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct) put together a deal. You couldn't do the deal.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Whatever programs this government comes out with will ultimately be Islanders' money; money that this government made from the inflation profits. The merely \$150 support government announced for inflation support last March, which people didn't receive until July, didn't even go to the Island working poor.

Support for Island working poor

Question to the Premier: Will this initiative support the growing number of our Island working poor?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I think I need some clarity on the working poor, what he would refer to. I think most of the programs were targeted to those at the lower end. The people who made the least income actually got more money, but I guess I stand to be corrected from the Leader of the Third Party, as again, I think it's the job of government to try to do the best they can to help Islanders through these difficult times.

I don't think there's ever been a government in the history of Prince Edward Island who's contributed more to individuals or families or community groups, largely because of the challenges we've all faced as a province in the last three and a half years.

To steal a line from his hon. colleague from Tignish-Palmer Road, I guess if the charge is we've tried to give people millions and millions of dollars to help them through these challenges, I'm guilty as charged.

Speaker: The hon. from Stratford-Keppoch.

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

Preserving and protecting our harbours and waterways is an important issue for all levels of government here on the Island. Over the last decade, great effort has been made to reduce or eliminate the number of wastewater discharges into the Charlottetown Harbour.

Wastewater discharge in Island waterway

Question to the minister of environment, energy and climate change: What role does your department play when an unplanned wastewater discharge happens in an Island waterway, and where does investigative responsibility lie between the levels of government?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we are notified, we would take immediate action with whatever jurisdiction we were in, whether it was a municipality or if it's a government-overseen area. When

there's a discharge event or when there's something that requires investigation, we would turn it over to justice and we would allow them to investigate and report back and take it from there.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. from Stratford-Keppoch.

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

Back in August, there was an unplanned discharge of wastewater into the Charlottetown Harbour. Approximately 6,000 cubic metres leaked into the harbour, prompting safety warnings to residents around swimming and water-based activities for several days, after 2.5 Olympic pools' worth of wastewater spilled into the harbour.

Penalties for wastewater discharge

Question again to the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action: What sort of penalties are in play when an investigation determines fault?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, this is something that we would take very seriously, and in this case, it was turned over to justice for them to investigate. They found that it was accidental, and it was one of the few areas that the experts in my department had ever seen where the lines weren't actually on the city map.

So, the contractor who was working that area was not aware that the sewer lines were there because the City of Charlottetown did not have them marked on the map.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. from Stratford-Keppoch.

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

As I understand, the source of the spill came as a result of work being done by a contractor installing fibre optic lines when a sewer main was struck and then leaked 2.5

Olympic pools' worth of wastewater into the harbour over the course of about several hours.

Again, question to the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action: You say that it was deemed accidental, but at the same time, what measures are put in place and what penalties are in place, whether – I can't imagine it would ever be intentionally done, but there has to be penalties as well for an accident.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yeah, we take these, obviously, very seriously. The Charlottetown Harbour is kind of a very contained area where the largest part of the population of Prince Edward Island lives, so there's a lot of concern about the waterways. I know it has happened a few times over the course of history where wastewater is discharged.

So, we would charge the individual involved, and we would make sure that they face the highest penalty. Of course, that would be up to justice, on what that highest penalty or the ask would be.

I guess in this case, the person was found not to be guilty and it was accidental, and it was because of a mapping error in the City of Charlottetown. But on a normal circumstance where the contractor was wrong, we would charge them.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Like so many in the House, I have constituents who are struggling with the high inflationary costs. I'm not so worried because I know we have a lot of government programs, especially for low-income Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: But one constituent, a young father, recently separated, two children, wanted to qualify for the Provincial Dental Care Program but couldn't.

And then another one, a low-income, a couple of seniors, they had their GIS stripped by the federal government. They wanted to qualify for, again, several of the government programs like the Seniors Independence Initiative, but they can't qualify.

I looked into it. I said: Why is this happening? It's because they're using last year's income to qualify them, and this is not a new problem. We've heard questions in the House on this before, and I thought we had this fixed.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I know. I thought I had it fixed, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Obviously you didn't.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Question.

Mr. Trivers: I'm going to try the Minister of Finance on this one.

Qualifying for government programs

Minister of Finance, why can't an applicant's current financial situation be used to determine qualification for government programs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. member would know, obviously, we rely on Canada Revenue tax data, so obviously there is a lag in that, in people filing. So, again, it is not the most current to date, but it is the most current that we actually can use.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know that this can be fixed, and I'd ask the minister to continue to push forward at the Cabinet table.

When we look at these programs across different departments, like we've got the Provincial Dental Care Program in the Department of Health and Wellness, we've got the various efficiency PEI programs, heat pumps through environment, energy and climate action, and then, of course, we have many programs in social development and housing.

But really, the way we means-test is not consistent, and also, it's not very efficient. Every department has their own group that does different means-testing. It would be really nice if we had a direct line, for example, to the federal government, an agreement with CRA to do that in an efficient way.

Centralized means-testing role

My question to the Minister of Finance: Would you commit to pursuing a centralized means-testing role within government to make it more efficient and ensure consistency across government programs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the best approach to that question is probably to interact with each department separately.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. McLane: Obviously, each department and program has different needs and goals. So, I think to do one across the board may sound simple in theory, but may not be practical in delivering some of these programs.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, your second supplementary.

Mr. Trivers: Wow, Mr. Speaker, I think we could actually save money and make it more efficient and more consistent, and I think that's something that bears (Indistinct) looking at.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: We have a program, for example, the Down Payment Assistance Program that has a threshold of \$95,000 of household income to qualify, and a family making more than \$95,000 a year doesn't qualify, whereas the threshold for a free heat pump is \$55,000. One could make an assumption that this is an estimate of what government defines as middle income, between, say, 55,000 and \$95,000 household income.

These are the Island families who are working really hard. These are the economic base of our province; they are the fabric of what happens here on this Island.

We're in a high inflation period with cost of living increasing significantly –

Speaker: Question.

Mr. Trivers: – for all levels of (Indistinct).

Financial help for middle-income Islanders

Question to the Minister of Finance: What strategies are you considering to help middle-income wage earners with increased cost of living?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. McLane: Thank you; thank the hon. member for the question.

I think each department looks at some of these issues each and every day in order to help Islanders. Obviously, the inflationary support payments are one way in the short term that we can deal with these issues.

And again, back to your reference to the heat pump program, it's a stepped program; obviously, demand and our ability to deliver on that. So, I hope to see some more increments as we move up that program, especially with the announcement of the federal government support on that program.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: UPEI is currently in collective bargaining with three of its unions. After

more than a hundred hours of negotiation, the UPEI Faculty Association filed for conciliation on August 5th.

Conciliation is intended to be a short, focused process lasting 10 days, but the Faculty Association and UPEI remain in conciliation almost four months later, despite repeated requests to the minister to allow the process to move on.

The Faculty Association also reports that the conciliator appointed by the minister has scheduled very few meeting dates, further hampering progress.

Extending conciliation at UPEI

Minister, question: Why have you used your ministerial discretion to extend conciliation so far beyond the intended timeline, a move which impedes the constitutional right of workers to bargain effectively with their employer and which only deepens the current labour instability at UPEI?

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a very good question as the two parties are in the midst of conciliation. There was a large list. I think there was 30 items that they're working their way through. I heard the process isn't going quite as quick as they want but it is moving as fast as it can, and that we will, if we come to a point where we have to take action, we will, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In September, the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth received an update on the Population Action Plan and labour shortages.

Understandably, our growing population means a need to invest in frontline services, like health care and education, to ensure they're readily available to the public, and also a need to build more housing to accommodate this growth.

Housing units and population growth

Question to the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: Under the forthcoming population action plan, how many new housing units will be needed to meet not only our projected population growth but to achieve government's desired 4% vacancy rate?

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

Mr. Thompson: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, if she could repeat that question, I would appreciate that.

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

Ms. Bernard: The whole thing?

Mr. Thompson: Just the last (Indistinct)

Ms. Bernard: We learned in the education and economic growth committee meeting that we didn't tie our population growth strategy to anything. There are no benchmarks to say, oh, we need to slow.

A question to the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: Under the forthcoming population action plan, how many new housing units will be needed to meet not only our projected population growth, but to achieve government's desired 4% vacancy rate?

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you. I appreciate the member for repeating that and I apologize.

That is something we're working on right now. The strategy will be released really soon. We know the importance of it. It's a balance between housing and with the workforce.

An Hon. Member: We need to attach it.

Mr. Thompson: We need to attach everything, you're absolutely right, and –

Speaker: Let him answer.

Mr. Thompson: – that’s what the strategy will come with. I look forward to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, final question.

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

We’ve been monitoring the health of Island soils for over two decades now and that’s an extremely long longitudinal study to have on anything. Over that time, there’s been a steady decline in organic matter across the province, though with the most recent report, which was released in 2018, it suggested that trend may be bottoming out.

I’ve been looking forward to the next report, which was due last year in 2021, but as far as I know, it has not yet been released. I have certainly heard nothing or seen nothing.

Contents, timeline of report on soil health

To the Minister of Agriculture and Land: Do you know what’s in this overdue report and when will we see it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I do agree with you. The soil was declining in nutrients. I think all farmers realize that they need to give back to the soil and leave it in better shape than they found it.

I’ll contact my department right after Question Period to find out where we are with that report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Ministers

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

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

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Rule 78(9) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island* regarding responses to petitions tabled under Presenting and Receiving Petitions, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Prince Edward Island, and I move, seconded by the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture, that the said document be now received and do lie on the table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Tabling of Documents

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

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the Response to the Sixth Report from the Standing Committee on Health and Social Development, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By Command of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation 2021-2022 Annual Report for the period ending March 31st, 2022, and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the Response to the Third Report from the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth, and I move, seconded by the hon.

Minister of Finance, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the Response to the Third Report from the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability, and I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table an email received from a constituent of District 26, one of multiple ones I received over the weekend regarding the DNR policy in West Prince, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Mr. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As Chair of the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth, following receipt of a report on committee activities of the said committee on November 25th, 2022, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald that the report of the committee be adopted.

Your committee is reporting on its activity since the committee last reported on April 26th, 2022. Since then, your committee met 16 times to consider its workplan, and most recently, conducted a series of meetings on the topic of Hurricane Fiona.

As a result of the deliberations, your committee is pleased to make a number of following recommendations to the members of the Legislative Assembly. There is a total of 24 recommendations.

Our committee met on a number of different topics. We talked about large-scale assessments, we met on the topic of retaining international students after graduation, on the rights of children and youth, and of course, most recently, we had emergency meetings on the impacts of Hurricane Fiona.

Your committee does thank all those who have shared their knowledge and expertise during this reporting period. I do want to give a special thanks to all those who made themselves available on short notice for the series of emergency meetings on the topic of Hurricane Fiona and the impacts here in the province.

Your committee recognizes the work of the Standing Committee as well, of Health and Social Development, as well as the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability, who have also conducted their own series of meetings on Hurricane Fiona. Your committee would like to thank the members of all three committees for their work.

Just on that, too, I do want to make a special note. I want to thank, of course, all the members of the committee; but during this committee, our clerk, who works extremely hard, was Alysha Campbell on October 8th, and on October 9th, became Alysha MacEachern.

So, right after Hurricane Fiona, and then we had the number of meetings that were scheduled thereafter, she also had the time and the energy and the amazing ability to organize her wedding.

I want to thank her for all her time and congratulate her and Adam MacEachern on their marriage.

Again, I just wanted to thank all of the committee members for all their great work. I want to thank all of the people who came in to present, and I think that is it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

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

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

Shall it be granted? Granted.

Would you please state your name and position for Hansard?

Gordon MacFadyen: Gordon MacFadyen, Executive Director, Fiscal Management.

Chair: Good afternoon and welcome, Gordon.

Hon. members, we are on page 7, Schedule "A".

Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture

"To fund capital expenditures related to cost overruns, timing of project work and project scope additions at Basin Head Provincial Park and Mark Arendz Provincial Ski Park."

Total: 4,597,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Welcome back, Gordon.

A couple of quick questions on this section. It's saying it's for Basin Head and Mark Arendz. Could you just give us a breakdown of how much is for each of those projects?

Gordon MacFadyen: Within this request for special warrant, approximately 524,000 for Basin Head, and the balance around \$4 million for Mark Arendz.

Ms. Bell: Okay. So, we're looking at around 4 million for the Mark Arendz park which – is that work entirely associated with the preparation for the Canada Winter Games?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yes.

Ms. Bell: So, in that case, you've obviously shown a significant revenue offset, which is almost equivalent to the expenditure. Is that coming from funding associated with the revenue for the Winter Games, or is it from another source?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yes. There's a portion of revenue that is coming from the Canada Games group, themselves. They do some fundraising and have some funds from the federal government, along with funds from us.

Ms. Bell: Okay. So, in this particular expenditure, there's very little, if any, provincial money actually going on to that Canada Games expenditure is what I'm hearing. It's almost a match.

Gordon MacFadyen: Very close.

Ms. Bell: Very close, okay.

Just to go back then to the Basin Head expenditure – is that associated with the

additional cost relating to the dredging, and so on, that had to be done?

Gordon MacFadyen: Not entirely dredging; there was an engineering solution to try to prevent future sediment buildup. There was a system put in a little bit farther out the harbour to try to impede the infiltration of sediment.

Ms. Bell: Okay. This may not be the right place, but is there provincial expenditure on the Canada Games showing up elsewhere? This is the one that I could see that was a direct expenditure with an offset revenue. Are there other expenditures in this?

Gordon MacFadyen: Not in this particular document for this particular year end, or for this document for next year either.

Ms. Bell: Right.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: It's the gift that keeps on giving.

Okay, I'm good there for now.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

Just a quick question on the Mark Arendz park. With that construction, there was damage done to a waterway. Do you have – is any of the money allocated in this special warrant to repair those damages? Do you know how much that would have cost the Province to repair?

Gordon MacFadyen: I don't have the specifics on that particular repair. The funding for this project for this fiscal year would have been based on the planned work that was required for getting the site ready for Canada Games.

Ms. Beaton: Can you just talk about timing on this, because it came through as a special warrant, but we had approved funding for Canada Games. So, I'm interested in why the special warrant was required when we knew that this expenditure was coming up.

Gordon MacFadyen: As we've talked about several times in here, this was a multi-year capital project, so it was happening over two, if not, parts of three years. The process of getting the work planned and organized and delivered, kind of affected the timing for sure, of some of the cash flow. As well, the scope of the project was enhanced a little bit to further kind of show it as more of a legacy project. So, we're going to have a better Nordic site and a better downhill site as a result, I think the snowmaking equipment was upgraded – I'll say the clubhouse, where there was an elevator installed, there was parking improvements. I think at the end of the day, once they kind of get into it, they saw that this is what was needed for a showcase event.

Ms. Beaton: Those items that you just mentioned, Gordon, I would agree, looking forward would have probably been on a capital list of some sort at some point in time in that five-year period. So, was it not identified at the time of planning when we came forward with the original operational budget, what this would cost, or capital budget of what this would cost? Did we not have that allocated already?

Gordon MacFadyen: For sure, there were parts of it that were allocated. The one that I can recall specifically, was the enhanced snowmaking capabilities. They have a certain level and wanted to make sure that their older equipment would be running up to snuff, so they enhanced the equipment quite a bit. And as well, the roadways were identified after the fact, the accessibility. I don't know if you've been down the road; it's a fairly narrow road –

Ms. Beaton: It is.

Gordon MacFadyen: – with ditches. I think they've made some improvements for traffic flow out there that wasn't necessarily in the first. I think the biggest issue was, sort of some cost pressures related to the industry. Some of the earth works and some of the projects to building and the movement and constructing of the new ski slope course, I think, were a little more than they were planning for.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

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

Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Education and Lifelong Learning

“To fund expenditures related to: the School Healthy Food Program; UPEI for planning and start-up costs for the new medical school, the expansion of the faculty of nursing, and the expansion of the health and wellness clinic; and for year-end salary accruals.”

Total: 10,700,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

Can you provide the amount from this overall warrant that was from the Healthy School Food Program and what those expenditures were for?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yes, it was approximately a million dollars for the Healthy School Food Program.

Ms. Bell: And what was that to provide?

Gordon MacFadyen: Oh, what it was for?

Being the first year of operation there would have been some projections on what the actual cost of the meals and some of the supports to provide the meals was going to be and as well, the repayment, the “pay what you can” model, kind of lends itself to a little bit of the unknown territory for us and a little bit higher expectations, I guess on the actual suggested pay amount and that didn't quite come through.

Ms. Bell: Yeah, and that makes sense, given our current climate, as well. I guess it's the longer you go, the better we're going to get, probably, at estimating it, but while I appreciate, I still think it's a really small investment for the benefit, so just get that out there.

Regarding the post-secondary expenditures, you've got medical school, Faculty of Nursing, and clinic. We haven't started

construction on the new medical school, so this is just for planning.

Gordon MacFadyen: Some planning and some start-up costs; they had to, I guess, get a team together to work on – so, a project management team. There was a little bit, I think, on the expansion of the nursing that could go a little faster than the Faculty of Medicine.

Ms. Bell: And then the remainder of that was looking at the Faculty of Nursing and the health clinic? Can you just speak to what those investments were for?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, there's a small sort of health clinic out there now, and with the Faculty of Medicine coming on, part of the request was to build some additional space for a larger clinic. So, in the new Faculty of Medicine building, there'll be some space for an actual clinic on site at UPEI.

Ms. Bell: I just want to be clear. That expenditure, was that entirely then for planning, or is there any actual construction that's happened within that four-million-plus expenditure so far?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, again, because this was a special warrant issued in the summer when the project was authorized, this would've been the request at the time and the thought that where they would be.

In that, they would've had some money for some initial architecture as well. I think there was about 800,000 within that. I'm not sure where they're at with that part of the expenditure.

Ms. Bell: Okay, obviously I'm a huge fan of project management, but it just seems an awful lot of money.

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, to be fair, this is a grant to them. So, they're running the project. They have money from us to do the work; they have to account back for that the work was done.

Ms. Bell: So, we can imply from that that not maybe – because it's a grant, that money isn't necessarily all expended as yet. It's not under the same kind of requirements it would be for other projects.

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, I'd have to go back to the reporting requirements of the particular arrangement with education, and there is a committee there that is working with UPEI, so I suspect part of it would be reporting back on actuals incurred and where they're at with timing and cash flow.

Ms. Bell: I would look forward in seeing that just because it just really stood out as it's a large amount, when we look at it being primarily for planning. Like I said, I understand the costs, especially if you need to retain longer-term contract staff. It just seems a lot, so it would be really good to get an update on what's happening with that, if that's possible.

Chair, if I can ask another one?

Chair: Sure.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

The other piece was around the year-end salary accruals, which I'm guessing is that 5.4 million under financed admin for the public schools. Is that what I'm seeing there?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yes.

Ms. Bell: I know we've heard a lot about extra hires and so on, but that's a lot to be off on the salary budget. Is there any background on how we ended up so far off on the budget?

Gordon MacFadyen: Well, the school boards are almost all salaries, like the grants to school boards. So, they are in excess of \$200 million for salary, for grants for salaries.

At the end of the year, there are a couple of outstanding contracts, so they would be trying to foreshadow what those settlements might be, without getting into the specifics of what the bargaining positions are for government. But there would be amounts that would be set up that would have been, at the end of year, audited by the Auditor General to have the assumptions under which support the expense.

Now, again, this would be the planning side of it, where they thought they were going to be at for the year.

Ms. Bell: I actually remember having a discussion with you about this before. This feels very familiar. So, thank you for the diplomatic reminder of that conversation.

(Indistinct) in an overall salary budget of 200 million, this is a percentage of flex, which makes sense given the amount of transactional activity that would happen in a salary budget of that scale. So, thank you for that clarification.

The only other question I had in here was just, there was a thing in here around the professional services as an external line item; it was 325,000 for external relations in education and then 725 for grants, if you could just provide advice on what those indicate.

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, those two amounts relate to the School Food Program.

Ms. Bell: Oh, that's the – right. Got you.

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, so part of it would be the operations of the School Food Program and some would be grants to the –

Ms. Bell: Yeah, I had that in my totals as a million, rather than – not seeing it as the breakdown.

I'm good. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thanks, Chair.

Well, I have a few questions.

Around the grant to UPEI for the planning and start-up costs for the new medical school, you had mentioned reporting requirements. I would have to assume there is a document and there's an agreement between UPEI and the Province as to what they will deliver for that \$4 million that was granted to them.

Is that a document you can table?

Gordon MacFadyen: That's an agreement between the department and UPEI. I can ask to see whether – I don't have it. I can see if I can get a copy of it and see if they'll be interested.

Ms. Beaton: I would be really interested in that.

This is the first 4 million of approximately \$122 million that has been allotted for this project. Has there been a reporting document or a business requirements document provided to the Province to support that \$122 million commitment from UPEI? Has that been provided to government?

Gordon MacFadyen: The information that I've seen would support the capital cost of the construction of the facility along with some expected operating costs over a period of time. Between the capital costs and their interest costs on the project would form the basis of a grant to UPEI over a period of time into the future; in the future and into the future.

Ms. Beaton: Okay, great.

Who in government is actually providing the oversight of this project to ensure that all of the reporting is done as per the requirements?

Gordon MacFadyen: I'd have to check for you, but there is a committee that's struck. I'm not on it, so I'll have to get some details for you.

Ms. Beaton: The reason why I ask, Gordon, is because I've asked several ministers about this. I would really like to know which department, which minister, would be the one that is providing the oversight and accountability on this project. I haven't been able to identify that yet because nobody's really been able to say that they've seen a business case, for instance, or a plan on this.

I would love to know who that person is so that maybe they might have more information.

Gordon MacFadyen: I'll see what I can find out.

Ms. Beaton: Perhaps the finance minister knows which department might actually be responsible for the oversight on that \$4.2 million grant that has been committed to be spent.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) department.

Ms. Beaton: Just a department. I'd love to know which department. Is it actually under education and lifelong learning, or is there somebody else?

Mr. McLane: I would reference Gordon's last answer, again, back to the committee. That's done – and again, back on the 4.2, it relates to the pace of the project and why it's accelerated. So, that's why that number is advanced at this point, is that we increased the pace of the project.

Ms. Beaton: I wasn't sure that's what Gordon had said when he had spoken to the 4.2 million. It was for the project team and for the planning of the project. So, is there an acceleration that's happened with the – because my understanding is it's a year behind in what it was actually supposed to be opened.

I'm not sure why, how it's accelerated.

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, no, I think we said outpaced, not necessarily accelerated. But I think when this initial 4.2 million was provided to UPEI for the planning, there was definitely a very quick pace planned for this particular project. Since that initial sort of agreement was signed, there was some leadership changes at UPEI, in which case, the pace of the project is not quite as fast as they were planning.

So, that's why I said they definitely have our planning money, continue to plan with that particular amount of money; they're proceeding, as I understand it, into the space planning and into the architectural phase of it. I think they've identified a site on campus for the building to go and they are proceeding.

Ms. Beaton: In my experience, there would be on a project like this, project management prime or somebody who would be at the top of that project management team. Do you know who that person is?

Gordon MacFadyen: I do not. There was definitely, within the planning money, funds provided to develop a project management office and have a team in place to push the project along.

Ms. Beaton: Question, then, if I wanted to find out who would be the lead of that project, what minister would I ask?

Gordon MacFadyen: Well, this special warrant is with the department of education. They have the key relationships with the university.

Ms. Beaton: I did attempt to ask the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning questions on it and the Minister of Health and Wellness was the one that answered those questions.

I just don't understand right now why there is so little information as to who's actually the lead and at the Executive Council table who is the one that's responsible for this. I'm struggling with that. Is it the Premier? Is it the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning? Is it the Minister of Finance? Is it the minister of health? I haven't been able to get that information, Chair. I'm wondering if, perhaps, the Minister of Finance, when he is at that Executive Council table, can let me know who's actually providing reports back to Executive Council on the reporting requirements for UPEI.

Chair: Do you have any more on this or do you want me to – I can come back to you. I have others on the list.

Ms. Beaton: Yeah. Please put me on top of the list.

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

Mr. Henderson: It says here that there's also an expansion to the Faculty of Nursing. How much money is assigned to that of that 10.7 million and how many new seats, or new nurses, will that graduate? I'm assuming you start out with new admittances but – or is there any new admittances?

Gordon MacFadyen: There was an expansion of seats. It's from 64 to 70 seats; six more seats.

Mr. Henderson: Six more seats.

Gordon MacFadyen: Six more seats.

Mr. Henderson: Okay, that's not going to go a long way in trying to change the

trajectory of nursing vacancies on Prince Edward Island. How much money is assigned to that?

Gordon MacFadyen: Within the planning and the money that's on the table here today, talking – relatively small component – 85,000 for the costs of 4 million of the plan.

Mr. Henderson: Okay.

Gordon MacFadyen: Mostly, it's kind of built but there's a little bit of organization out at UPEI for the extra space that's going to be required now. It's only six students but I think the labs basically had to be enhanced a little bit.

Mr. Henderson: That amount is just for some additional expansion to the labs itself. I get the point that six more students in a classroom of 60 isn't going to change a whole lot in that regard but the lab space would be (Indistinct) –

So, the student-teacher ratio, none of that would be changing, I'm assuming.

Gordon MacFadyen: There would be a little bit of additional operating money over the period of time, as well. Within the relationship with UPEI, when the Faculty of Nursing was first envisioned, those were new salaries that went in, so the grant increased that we provide. Tuition comes off that, so it's a fairly iterative process with the university as to what our contribution to the actual Faculty of Nursing is but there will be an additional – but it has nothing in this 4 million. It will be in the next operating budget of future operating budgets for –

Mr. Henderson: Maybe I might have misunderstood. Did you say 85,000 is attributed to these six more nursing seats, or did I mishear that?

Gordon MacFadyen: Just for the planning money –

Mr. Henderson: Just for the planning is 85,000?

Gordon MacFadyen: – this particular.

Mr. Henderson: Okay. I'm with you now.

When it comes to – I mean, there’s \$10.7 million in total in this and we are talking a medical school. Something that I run into yesterday a bit – we had some meetings – is there going to be many renovations required to all our hospitals and health care facilities to handle these students that are going to be going out to their preceptors to be able to work in our facilities? I get the medical school part. Is that part of the planning of that money to also look at planning and renovating all our other facilities?

Gordon MacFadyen: When we were debating the Capital Budget, there was an allotment in there as well to – I’ll say expansions but enhancements, I guess, would be a better term to our existing clinics and hospital space to accommodate the new students. Now, it’s not next year; it’s a couple of years out yet.

Mr. Henderson: Right.

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

Mr. Henderson: Yeah, I think that’s all I have for now, Chair.

Thanks.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

In here, can you tell me how much is going towards the expansion of the Health and Wellness Clinic. Can you tell me how much is going towards the wellness clinic?

Gordon MacFadyen: This particular planning money, approximately 600,000.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit more about that wellness clinic? It’s the existing wellness clinic?

Gordon MacFadyen: Definitely within the new Faculty of Medicine building, there will be an enhanced clinic space built for the patient population at UPEI and whoever else they’ll see out there, I guess.

Mr. McNeilly: When is that clinic going to be open?

Gordon MacFadyen: I guess the building has to get built first, so –

Mr. McNeilly: But what I don’t understand is that, if the UPEI – the startup cost for the new medical school – that’s attached to the new medical school but it’s a separate line.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah. They had provided a little bit of a breakdown of their request for planning money. Within the 4 million that was requested and included in this special warrant amount, there was three components to it: expansion of the Faculty of Nursing, a new Faculty of Medicine, and significantly enhanced clinic space.

Mr. McNeilly: I mean, I understand about the Faculty of Nursing but why were those not joint as one request? It just seems like a health and wellness clinic would just be on the bottom floor, potentially, of a bigger building but here there’s two financial requests or breakdown. I’m not sure why that –

Gordon MacFadyen: This is one project within one contract with UPEI to deliver these three enhancements to their Faculties of Nursing, medicine – introduction, I guess, to the Faculty of Medicine and the requisite upgrades and enhancements to a clinic.

Mr. McNeilly: Is that going to be an out-patient type? Are we looking at out-patient, in-patient? Where do we –

Gordon MacFadyen: Oh, I don’t think it’s any in-patient spots. I haven’t seen the floor plan and the master plan and the program for it, but when they talk about a clinic, I envision kind of walk-in, walk-out services.

Mr. McNeilly: How does that fit within the medical home model that is currently being underway with government?

Gordon MacFadyen: Good question for the department of health. I assume it would be part of it. All the new models that they’re planning would have that same model.

Mr. McNeilly: Do you think the department of health is – we obviously couldn’t, we could barely find out what department we’re supposed to talk to here. Is the department of health involved in this portion of it?

Gordon MacFadyen: The department of health are experts on building clinics. They're not the experts of running medical schools because that's not what they do but definitely, I would suspect that they'll have some significant input on the clinic space. They don't do any teaching, so that's not their role.

Mr. McNeilly: We had mentioned – I mean, the last thing I heard is that there was an accelerated time for the medical school. Then there was a year-long delay. We see more money come in. Is that year-long delay still there or does this set us back even more? When are we looking at this place opening?

Gordon MacFadyen: I don't have that information here, the finance for the kicking the project off and the planning the side of it.

Mr. McNeilly: I guess, I thought that money was already allocated – we talked about that, there was \$4 million in the spring budget. Minister, do you know – when you're giving up this much money, as the new finance minister, do you ask, when are we looking at a goal to get the medical school up and operational?

Mr. McLane: Well, the short answer to that is we're really only talking about the 4.2 million in the supplementary estimates right now. It's not a cap – we're not debating the Capital Budget or the delivery of the facility. I'd prefer to stay on track, with again, the planning money and so on, so forth with regards to the debate.

Mr. McNeilly: But constituents want to know that if there's a four – if there's a whole lot of money being spent on this, that it's not just blindly put out, and we can punt this down the road for years.

They are the ones paying for this medical school, so I'm asking you, as the responsible person of this: When are you pushing for this to be open, Minister of Finance?

Mr. McLane: Again, the short answer to that is I'm confident that we've met the milestones so far. Again, there's been some challenges, again back to the loss of the proponent at the university definitely set the

project back, but I would think that we're back on track.

Mr. McNeilly: What is back on track? When can we expect this to be open? From a provincial government standpoint, and you as being the representative – what year are we looking at this place opening? We've been down this road for three years with other facilities.

Mr. McLane: Again – oh, go ahead.

Gordon MacFadyen: What information I have based on the last time they were provided an update to finance, for sure, on the project, was that they were proposing to start the first class in the fall of '24.

Mr. McNeilly: So, the fall of '24, is that going to happen? For the fall of '24? Can you guarantee that this building will be open by the fall of '24?

Mr. McLane: I am not a project manager. I don't have that expertise.

Ms. Beaton: (Indistinct) nobody knows.

Mr. McNeilly: There lies the problem. We don't even have a business case for this, as pointed out by colleagues.

I'm just worried, because you get down this – this is big, we want to do it right, and there's a lot of questions to this point. So, what are you going to do, as the Minister of Finance, to make sure that – with this information that it becomes clear that we need some participation or some keys between different departments and the university – minister, what are you going to do to make sure that everything runs on smooth for an opening of fall of 2024?

Mr. McLane: Well, I think with any project in government, again, we don't have a pulse on the day-to-day operations of every single bill that we do in government, so we do get regular updates, again, through the regular mechanisms. So again, we do trust that those departments can deliver on this, and any other kind of capital project that we have.

Mr. McNeilly: Just a little bit about – just a couple questions on the School Food Program. I missed how much was the allocation from this – 10 million went into

the over – over just for the School Food Program.

Mr. McLane: One point zero five – a little over a million.

Mr. McNeilly: And, now with that, I mean COVID was difficult, I mean they did a great job. The department did a great job of making sure that kids got food at home, if they needed it. Families got food at home.

Do you know if that added to the cost, or took away from the cost in the end of that, for last year? Is this – are we going to – if we do that again, obviously, are we going to make sure that those – that food gets to people at home?

I'm just trying to think back about how disruptive COVID was, and that we did well with that. Did that cost extra, for the program, or take away from?

Mr. McLane: Definitely there would be a little bit of transportation costs, when you go from delivering to a single point to many points. So there, undeniably during COVID, there were some additional transportation costs.

The lion's share, I think, of what we saw was the growing of the program, trying to understand what the trends on the pay-what-you-can model would yield. Again, those were estimates, and they would be a net cost to government, so if pay-what-you-can was down, the cost to government is up. There's some of that for sure.

And getting menus and getting meals out – I think the goal was to try to get menus that people would subscribe to, meeting the healthy eating options and still be able to do it, say, cost-effectively. But cost-effectively, as everyone does with their own home food budget. Again, the goal is to get meals out there.

I think they achieved that, and at the end of the day, on the first year of business, it ended up being more than they had funds for.

Mr. McNeilly: The food program – I know this government announced an eastern Prince Edward Island pilot program last year

for – I think it was \$250,000. Did that program start, and was it paid for by this?

Gordon MacFadyen: No.

Mr. McNeilly: No.

Gordon MacFadyen: The department of seniors and housing were doing that initiative.

Mr. McNeilly: Did it get off the ground?

Gordon MacFadyen: I'm not aware (Indistinct)

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

Mr. McNeilly: Okay. No, that's it for me, for now.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

So, for the \$4.2 million that's been spent, has the government received – so, you've received the reporting requirements. So, the first step of any project is to identify what the scope of the project is.

The original scope of the project was that we're going to build a medical school and it's going to have a 10,000-person clinic in it. So, we wrapped that \$50 million around that scope, and now we understand that this scope has grown because now it's going to include UPEI Faculty of Nursing and the PsyD program. It meant that was part of the reason why the bigger building was required and now this – so that's an increase of scope, therefore, an increase of budget of the overall project.

So, this \$4 million, is it spent, and if so, under that reporting requirements, did that come with a full business requirements document, like that whole scope document, in order to identify what that planning process looks like going forward?

That was a whole lot said in one sentence, yeah. Sorry.

Gordon MacFadyen: As I'd indicated earlier, the 4 million was provided to UPEI in '21-'22 fiscal year to start up the planning process.

As I understand it, as the planning process unfolded, they had been in contact with the (Indistinct) university, who we're getting the curriculum from, they're trying to replicate what's going on at Memorial.

They had some meetings and some initial – through the programming master plan, saw that the initial size of the building was not going to be quite sufficient to meet the needs over the long term. They definitely came back to government with a revised financial ask.

The reason they came back to government is two-fold – is under their act, they have to meet government's authority to borrow, and whether or not government would be on side with the plan as it was proposed. Government was on side, provided the additional authority to borrow, and amended the project.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you for that.

So, typically when you go through that project life cycle, there's different milestones within the governance process, right. So, at one point you'd be – it's going to be \$122 million plus or minus 100%, 50%, 25%, whatever, as you get further into your planning of the project, that variance, that surety of what the plus or minus will be gets much smaller until you get to launch, where you think that you have everything all squared up.

So, that \$122 million – this \$4 million would be identifying what that price tag would be and what all the requirements are to be accomplished in order to complete the medical school.

Do you know at what stage we would be at? That \$122 million, are we at a plus or minus 50% governance gating stage, or where would we be there? How sure are we that the 122 million is going to be the number based on the planning that they've done to date?

Gordon MacFadyen: I'm pretty sure that 122 won't be the number because within

that, there's a financing component based on future interest rates that we're going to have to come back to. Whenever – I indicated I'd go try to see if I can find who are on the oversight committee to provide that exact oversight that you're talking about. Where the minister and I sit at Finance, when there are times when the project is not meeting its targets, that's when they'll be back to us. If they're not back to us, we assume that they are meeting their targets.

Ms. Beaton: Gord, I appreciate that completely, that there's others within government that are more connected to this project. Not often said, I wish they were the ones sitting at the table so that I didn't have to direct everything at you. I completely appreciate that you always rise up to the challenge. I just wish that we had the people that could really speak in detail to it at the table because at the end of the day, this is \$4 million of \$122 million project which Islanders are asking about.

Lots of people are appreciative, really want to see the medical school come to fruition. Then there's also people who are like, holy smokes, \$122 million. Is that it or is it going to be \$200 million by the end of it? Is it going to be \$250 by the end of it? What is that number actually look like.

Unfortunately, this Legislative Assembly hasn't been provided any documentation to give us any certainties or even estimates as to where we might be in the current process. I do know that in the current process, if you've got good governance in place, we go through a very specific gating process to provide that information so that we can capture over-runs or under-spends or challenges or risks well before we get ourselves way down the path.

That's the kind of information that I'm looking for because I think if we're making decisions on \$122 million projects, that's the least that this Legislative Assembly can be provided so that we know that we're going in the right – or at least where we're going and what we might be looking at in the future. That might be maybe a topic that we put forward to the Health and Social Development Standing Committee so that we can dig into that a little bit further so the right people – and not that you're not the right people – but the people with the details

are actually sitting at the table so we can talk to them about it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Beaton: At this point in time, on this \$4 million, don't have any further questions. I just would like to say that reporting requirements document that was referenced between UPEI and the department, I really, really would like to see that tabled. I would just like to flag that, Chair, that I would like to see that document provided to the Legislature so at least we have something in hand to understand what the magnitude of this project is.

Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Fisheries and Communities

“To fund expenditures related to the Real Property Tax Credit Program due to higher property value assessments and higher construction than expected.”

Total: 675,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: You don't have a revenue offset on this, so you're talking about increased building, increased construction, but there's no additional revenue on this. What's the reason for not being able to offset it?

Gordon MacFadyen: The genesis of this program is when the HST came in, they used to have a provincial tax credit for municipalities to refund the provincial share of the sales tax. This is kind of trying to make a level playing field with the transition. As municipalities are incurring capital costs, they can apply back to get that portion of the tax refunded to them. It was a good building year for municipalities, so it was a higher budget year for the departments.

Ms. Bell: I am surprised that you didn't plan for higher construction numbers considering we have been forecasting them pretty aggressively, it seems. Is it odd that you under-estimated?

Gordon MacFadyen: To be fair, what they're planning to do and what they actually get done, sometimes, are two different things.

Ms. Bell: Yeah. Good point. We've just been talking about that, planning versus actual.

The province currently collects and keeps the majority of property taxes. You're explaining this is kind of like a program that makes a bridge for the municipality. How much do you actually, then, pass on to the municipality?

We're hearing from the Federation of PEI Municipalities that they would like to see the province get out of property taxes so that municipalities can increase their tax capacity, or at least have more flexibility in their tax capacity rather than just a patchwork program. How long do you think we're going to have to keep doing this? Is there something of a change potentially coming in terms of how we do property taxes? Might be for the minister.

Mr. McLane: You can answer that better than I can.

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, we have a very mixed service delivery here on PEI.

Ms. Bell: Yeah.

Gordon MacFadyen: You could look to many different jurisdictions that have a different tax regime on the property side. The history on PEI where municipalities were directly involved goes back to the days when they used to run education and social programs. They had all the capacity because they were delivering the services. We're in it because we're delivering services, as well. It is a forum and an ability to raise taxes. We are kind of the, say the landowner, but the land service provider in a lot of the unincorporated areas, as well. I think we have to be in the space for property taxation.

We run the tax system on behalf of all municipalities. We send out the tax bills. We collect on their behalf. We remit the taxes based on the assessments. We're responsible for all the collection. If the taxes aren't collected, that's on us, not on them. They

get full reign for it. They have their own mechanism to have a portion of it.

It is crowded, for sure, with provincial and municipal and Waste Watch and some for fire dues, and things like that, but I think the contribution is, again, just the general revenues. We'd have to make that up somewhere else to find the 130 million that we're collecting in property taxes.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Gord. I appreciate that.

Obviously, we've got to push for municipalities to deliver more through the – particularly with amalgamations. There's always that balancing act and I absolutely get, you know, you've got the difference between municipalities that are able to provide services and then, on the far side of that, you've got municipalities that are really struggling, and then you've got the unincorporated.

If we're making changes to how municipalities are meant to make decisions and deliver, then we need to think about how we provide them funding to do that, too. I get that this particular piece is specifically around that tax credit program, which is sort of an historic piece, but it also shows that you need to make changes to address and reflect the current circumstances. I'm certainly hearing, particularly from rural municipalities and some of the smaller ones, that they're really restricted in what they can do, and that tax capacity is one of the spaces. I'm not advocating for higher taxes; I'm just saying that that flexibility is one of the pieces in there. I guess it's more of a general piece.

The way you talk about things that you review – is this up for review or discussion at any point in conjunction with other municipalities? Is that something that's on the radar?

Gordon MacFadyen: Definitely, this department has a relationship with the Federation of PEI Municipalities. There are agreements in place with them that they are currently negotiating. That's where reform would come. Again, I should mention there's just a myriad of services trying to be funded by something and this is one of those somethings.

Ms. Bell: I think it's really encouraging to hear that it is the federation that is providing that voice because that's their role and they are very clear. I understand that there's a gap between, perhaps what they're looking for and what the province is willing to do because if they said that complexity is there, but that dialogue is really important to reflect the changing picture of what we need to provide.

I think I'm good for there, Chair.

Thank you. Appreciate it.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Social Development and Housing

“To fund expenditures related to salaries and grants supporting children in the care of the province and increased operational costs supporting clients of the PEI Housing Corporation.”

Total: 1,578,300

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm wondering if you could elaborate on the grants for supports.

Gordon MacFadyen: I'm sorry, which grants are you talking about?

Ms. Bernard: The grants supporting children in the care of the province. I'm wondering if you could explain those.

Gordon MacFadyen: As I understand it, it was more of a capacity issue. There were more children in care than the budget that was available for this particular section.

Ms. Bernard: A capacity issue; so, what was done to alleviate some capacity issues?

Gordon MacFadyen: I'm definitely not the expert on what funding goes out to support children in care, but there was more of them during the year.

Again, the process for determining a special warrant for the department – they kind of went backwards at the end of the year, '21-

'22, and see where all the variances are to try to understand where they may have been a little bit short, to try to provide some information for the House here as to how and why additional funding is required.

Ms. Bernard: I missed what you said at the end there. Did you say you would bring something back, Gord?

Gordon MacFadyen: No, I just said that they go through a process to try to identify variances, because at the end of the day they get voted a total sum of money to run their programs. When that money is not sufficient, they are in a deficit. A special warrant is required. They'd look backwards through the many spots and services they're running to try to identify some of the items causing some of the variance and this, children in care, was one of them.

Ms. Bernard: I'm wondering how much of these salaries went to new jobs versus wage increases.

Gordon MacFadyen: Mostly – I know there was a big push on during the year to take some casual and temporary positions and turn them into full-time positions, so that would be driving some of the cost variance for salaries.

Ms. Bernard: Do you know if there's any longer-term plan to improve wages for Island workers who work with children in care of the province?

Gordon MacFadyen: Those would be governed by a contract or a relationship agreement with the various entities and individuals. I think they're always discussing what's the appropriate amount of remuneration.

I know that from the government side, we're trying to get as an efficient and effective service going as we can. That's our job, to try to keep costs down, but I know there is pressure when you can't find people to do the work as well.

Ms. Bernard: It's a real struggle, and when you think of something like children in care of the province, you want to make sure that they're getting as much as they can. So, appreciate that.

What professional services were provided under housing?

Gordon MacFadyen: Under housing, I think it was some contracts for repairs. They do have a combination of staff and contracted support for housing repairs.

Ms. Bernard: What would be covered by administration, under housing?

Gordon MacFadyen: Administration would be related to legal services for purchasing properties. Some property tax increases would be also in that area. I think there were some costs out at the Queens Arms there for securing that site for some of the clients.

Ms. Bernard: Are materials, supplies and services a reflection of higher housing costs, or is it something else?

Gordon MacFadyen: It was more fuel costs for our own buildings.

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

Ms. Bernard: I'm good for now, Chair.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: I'm good, thank you (Indistinct).

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

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, can you just go over a little bit of the increased operational costs supporting clients of the PEI Housing Corp? Can you just go over – how much was that?

Gordon MacFadyen: Bear with me, here.

I kind of have it in two runs of information. Can you be a little more specific on what you're looking for (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: I guess, it says operational costs – this was done on October 18th, so that was after Fiona. Just wondering about – was that in response to Fiona, or was it just increased operational costs?

Gordon MacFadyen: No. To be clear, that this particular special warrant was issued on the 18th of October, was for the fiscal year '21-'22, so it ended in March. So, as part of the conclusion of the Public Accounts – as you recall, the last time we sat, there was a special warrant as well for social development and housing.

When the dust settled, when the accounts were finalized, there were further amounts that were required above what was authorized previously by the House. So, this would be kind of a settling up of what was actually booked or expensed for the department for '21-'22.

Mr. McNeilly: Increased operational costs – is that maintenance costs?

Gordon MacFadyen: That was fuel; additional fuel costs for some of the buildings. Again, we provide budgets based on the historic value of what furnace oil would be and towards the end of last year, definitely, costs were starting to rise.

Mr. McNeilly: There's an increased budget line in social development for next year. Are we going to see this happen again next year, or are we going to look at this in advance, or are we going to look at this after?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, no, the department's reviewing their accounts on a regular basis to see where they're at throughout the year. When they kind of get to a point where they see that they're not going to be able to manage their costs, they would be seeking supplementary funding through special warrant if the House is not in session, or supplementary appropriations if the House is in session.

Mr. McNeilly: Did we find the number for – how much did we underpredict on fuel?

Gordon MacFadyen: Underpredict? I think it was 300,000, I think – 251–

Mr. McLane: Two eighty-one.

Gordon MacFadyen: Two eighty-one, sorry.

Mr. McNeilly: So, that was 281 on fuel, and then that's all that was in that line, is 281,000 over –

Gordon MacFadyen: In this part of this special warrant was related – they identified as issue, or an overspend, for sure.

Mr. McNeilly: What is the total budget that we spend on fuel?

Gordon MacFadyen: Oh, I don't have that in front of me, for sure. There are many departments – DTI would be the biggest. They have fuel oil for moving vehicles, and buildings as well. Hospitals would have a budget; schools have a big budget.

Mr. McNeilly: Can we expect that number to double next year? The price of fuel has gone up exponentially. Are we looking at \$281,000 next year, or are we predicting – how do we –

Gordon MacFadyen: We passed the spring budget when prices were kind of peaking, so I'd assume that department's factored in some of that cost pressure. We're always hopeful that it's not going to keep at peak amounts for the whole year. It always seems to peak out when the heating season's on.

But again, that would be part of the department's budget build for what their outlook for the next year is.

Mr. McNeilly: As a critic for social development, I know this has to happen. I would rather see us, if we're going to overspend on this, that we actually build some housing or do something productive, rather than paying – well, we don't have a choice, but I guess that's what I'm looking for that I'd be excited about in special warrant over expenditures.

I just want to make sure that we look at the books, we look at the predictions, and if we have to spend in special warrants, that we're actually benefitting the taxpayer in some kind of way for additional services or improvements to living arrangements.

Great, thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Transportation and Infrastructure

“To fund additional infrastructure grants and municipal grants, small bridge repairs,

winter salt and sand, and winter and summer contract services.”

Total:19,200,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Chair.

The details show there’s over 10 million spent on grants. Could you tell us a little bit more about what happened?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, again, infrastructure is part of this, so we’re, again

Mr. Hammarlund: Yeah, no, I understand.

Gordon MacFadyen: – trying to manage the cash flow of the projects that we’re committed to with our partners and municipal and public sector partners.

Mr. Hammarlund: So, this is not additional projects, it’s just different cash flow happening with (Indistinct) project?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, there’s a fairly large budget in the department for the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, so again, they would go through a process of having a project approved, a planned cash flow for that. The department would build their budget based on the planned cash flow as presented by a municipality, per se. Then, it would be kind of updating and keep ongoing as to how fast they’re getting the project done. Some years were underspent; we have been underspent in the past. This year, we’re a little bit overspent on that particular line.

Mr. Hammarlund: I understand. So, is this 10 million going to be offset with a federal contribution to that amount eventually?

Gordon MacFadyen: Not fully. Again, when we’re building grant lines, we have to grant out the federal portion as well, so we have our share and the federal share, and then we collect the federal revenue on the revenue side.

Mr. Hammarlund: Okay. Further down on the maintenance, those extras, are they just

basic increases in the cost of the same materials, or are we using more materials?

Gordon MacFadyen: Definitely what the information provided by the department – we talked a little bit about this in the Capital Budget – if the heavy fleet and the light fleet – so, we would be having some repair bills in there for – can’t update them as fast as they would like them. We had some of our winter salt and sand, we had a little bit of a disruption in the salt supply there at one point in time, so we were kind of stockpiling for a while. So, some of those costs are up. And again, there’s another portion here for increased fuel costs.

Mr. Hammarlund: Road and roadside maintenance, there are substantial increases there. What’s the reason for that? I (Indistinct) at the date and it’s not fuel now. So, what is it?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, we do have contracts for the winter and summer maintenance that have fuel components, fuel riders in them as well. So, the contractors bid a particular price and then as their costs were up, we had to fund them a little extra.

Mr. Hammarlund: Just one last question.

Where will the costs for the extra work clearing the trees off the road, where will that appear?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, they were kind of building a little bit of a claim for disaster financial assistance, so I think the Department of Justice and Public Safety is organizing those costs, and Department of Transportation and Infrastructure for some of our own costs.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: I’m good, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: I’m good. My questions were asked.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

You mentioned the salt and sand; how much was allocated in there to that? You mentioned a disruption. So, that wasn't inflation, that was a disruption?

Gordon MacFadyen: Well, like I said, this time last year, we were uncertain as to where we were going to get salt supplies from. There was a strike at one of the salt mines in the Maritimes, or a potential labour dispute. So, we were bulk buying it at one point in time. That may not have been the best example because it kind of goes by how much goes on the roads, as what the winter looks like. Again, they would have a base budget for what it's going to take to keep the highways safe for the winter, and that's both sand and salt, so not salt everywhere; we do sand some roads, as well.

Mr. McNeilly: So, how much extra did the disruption cost? (Indistinct)

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, and to be fair, when we buy salt, we buy it and stockpile it. We would expense it, and then at the end of the year, there might be an inventory adjustment. So, it's really hard – no, it's not hard, but it is a little more complicated to see what the opening inventory was. We had a large stockpile come in with the closing inventory, and that's what – and they mentioned labour disruption; we'd probably be buying a little more than we would have normally been buying to stockpile. But if it's sitting in a pile, it's going to get counted as inventory at the end of the year. But again, it's (Indistinct) count a big pile of salt.

Mr. McNeilly: I'm just trying to figure out that if a strike happens again, have we rectified – is it going to cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars more because we can't get the salt? Or have we figured out some other way to keep those costs down?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, I mean, the commodity only comes from I think two places in the Maritimes right now, so trucking it is another component of it when they have to truck it over to us, so the rising cost of the diesel to truck it and the truck

costs. But again, this was a relatively small part of the special warrant; a million eight of the special warrant.

Mr. McNeilly: Did you say a million eight?

Gordon MacFadyen: 1.8 million, yeah.

Mr. McNeilly: 1.8 million seems like a lot for a strike when we're getting the same product we were getting before because of a – yeah, anyway.

Gordon MacFadyen: But again, a lot of it is usage. So, a complicating factor, I guess, more than anything would have been a concern about the supply and the potential –

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, no, it's a good discussion.

Winter and summer contract services; did those come in at the end of jobs, like cost overruns, or were the bids just higher?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, no, we have a fairly stable supply of contractors that would be providing service to government, both summer and winter. They would have a fuel rider in their contracts, so they get paid a certain amount, negotiated, and then a fuel rider as well. So, there probably was a little bit of an increase in the actual costs, and a little bit on fuel, for sure.

Mr. McNeilly: And is that fuel rider, is that adjusted regularly? I'm just trying to figure out, it gets –

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, it's adjusted regularly, based on when the work was performed.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, so then, you look back and –

Gordon MacFadyen: Absolutely.

Mr. McNeilly: – where the gas prices were.

Gordon MacFadyen: Absolutely.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay. Are you predicting that that number will increase for contract services in the summer and winter? Inflation is going up and it's more difficult to – are we budgeting enough for those contracts?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, you know, that's some of the work that the department does on a regular basis, is kind of manage those contracts. They're always seeking new entrants to the field, and that's the best way to keep prices low, is to have lots of competition and people interested in doing the work.

Mr. McNeilly: I don't know if I want to ask my next question. It's about the Beach Grove bridge but –

Gordon MacFadyen: It's a City of Charlottetown project.

Mr. McNeilly: Well, that's why I was going to ask it under municipal grants. Was there a grant provided for that from the Province? Would that be under this special warrant at all?

Gordon MacFadyen: I don't know for sure whether they got a grant for that particular infrastructure project.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, these questions are better served for the city, I think.

Thank you very much, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Oh, I just have one question. Your explanation on the grants on infrastructure was very good, but it's essentially – whereas fuel is extra money spent and gone, this is not really extra expenditure. It's the expenditure that's happening this year instead of next year. So, how do we know, in total, how much of the total appropriation is more money that's needed, and how do you know it's just a cash-flow problem?

Gordon MacFadyen: That's a good question, because the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program is \$367 million. That's leveraging some municipal money, it's leveraging some provincial money, and it's over a long period of time.

We're trying to get projects subscribed to utilize the fund and trying to get them done before the last year for the project, so that would be the challenge, is what will be the final report on that particular line of

infrastructure grants so that you can see year-by-year how much got done, I think, would be the best way to sort it out.

Otherwise, you're right, we have had a short fall last year because of the – nothing got done. This year, a whole bunch of projects were completed that I thought were going to get done last year but I have to fund this year.

I get the budget allotment one year at a time. It makes it very difficult to have this multi-year projects.

Mr. Hammarlund: Well, thank you for the explanation. It might be nice to have a star next to the numbers that is not really extra expenditure.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Special Warrants: 36,750,300

Shall it carry? Carried.

Shall Schedule "A" carry? Carried.

We are now moving to page 11, Schedule "B".

Transportation and Infrastructure – Capital

"To fund additional expenditures for paving, shoreline protection, bridges, and highways."

Total: 18,500,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

In the description you list shoreline protection as one of the items that this is to cover, but that isn't in the Order in Council, but it's associated with this expenditure. Can you indicate how much of that expense went towards shoreline protection?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, no minister, find out that it was 1.8 and it was related to the breakwater at Souris.

Ms. Bell: Breakwater in Souris?

Thank you for that clarification. Just a point that the Order in Council needs to match the –

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah. I had a discussion with the department on this, because when I was trying to do the same reconciliation, I think that you were doing, national collectors were a certain amount and bridges were a certain amount. They're having a great, internal debate as to whether to classify it as a bridge or part of the national collector that happens to be underneath the national collector.

I've advised them to get their accounting straight, as it makes my life a little bit difficult here.

Ms. Bell: I appreciate that I'm not the only one who went like, wait a minute, that doesn't match, it's the –

Gordon MacFadyen: Nope, nope I had the same moment.

Ms. Bell: Good to know. So, breakwater, Souris falls under national and collector highways. After the fact, there's a logic in that.

Okay, so just specifically, that there wasn't anything else. The remainder of that, under the national collector highways – do you get a list of the projects that that covers? Is that something that you can share?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, I don't have a specific list of what the plan was versus what the intention is. I know that, between these two categories – we'd mentioned this a little bit, at Capital Budget discussion time.

There were definitely two or three structures that were affected by Fiona that were added to the list and are part of this special warrant as well, because they are in the process of getting the work done.

Ms. Bell: That was going to be my next question. Obviously, I'm going to ask, when we've got this kind of level of additional expenditure. It was, how much of this is reflected – this is new expenditure because of Fiona or related expenditures, as opposed to just new projects?

Gordon MacFadyen: There was – the information provided by the department was definitely the cost for paving per kilometre was up this year past the budget that was voted and passed by the House last year.

As well, there were some plans for some Fiona repairs. I'm not 100% certain, but I believe that our bridges are not necessarily claimable or insurable under our insurance policies and/or regular disaster assistance will provide some of that offset.

Again, it was definitely mostly related to Fiona bridges, the breakwater that got going last year that was not in the plan but was in the forecast. As well, they cut the cost for inputs for the paving program.

Ms. Bell: I can see how that per kilometre cost increase, over the volume of kilometres that you do are going to have a really significant impact in terms of what was originally budgeted in terms of that.

That's a really good example of when a special warrant is actually needed. It's for the unanticipated cost on projects that have already been committed.

The other example in here is, following up – I don't know if you saw that there was actually an announcement of the expansion of the federal funding program through the co-op today; additional 300 million that's going to be going for communities to be able to apply directly. So, there may be some money coming after all, in which case we'll look for a revenue offset.

I know that there were a number of bridges that were impacted and had to be done as a priority (Indistinct) maybe speaking to the minister about the impact and what that looked like.

Are you anticipating any additional special warrants? I mean I know we're only in at this point, but at that end of your reconciliation, with the cost recovery, is still going to be a problem.

Gordon MacFadyen: No. We're coming towards the end of the construction season, so I would hope that they've got their pricing for the year in, and this would reflect on the capital side. There's no more to be done on the road infrastructure between now

and the end of March. The department itself has many other facets. It's not just the roads, they have some buildings and they have bridge structures. So, to say there won't be one, I can't guarantee that.

Ms. Bell: I wouldn't make you promise that. That would be unfair.

However, but then what we would also expect to see is potentially new projects in the estimates next year as a result of project planning that's longer term as a recovery from Fiona.

If there is federal money available for that, will that just go into general revenue, or are you going to see that as a revenue offset on those future expenditures?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, unfortunately, we can't report it as a direct offset, I think there's a schedule in the back of the budget book that would try to show the net effect for the cash flow for the Province. Again, when we, even though we capitalize and advertise capital projects, we still have to cash flow them. It's more of a cash flow schedule and operating fund, would be the answer for sure.

Ms. Bell: We just know that often, that federal money can be promised but takes a long time to come through, which is the other aspect. Cash flow absolutely is a piece there.

I know you've got the loans act coming later for exactly that reason.

I think those are all the questions that I had that I was looking for on this one, thank you.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

General Government

"To fund expenditures related to the Emergency Support Program for Islanders facing inflationary pressures."

Total: 15,000,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

Just to confirm, this is for the sales tax credit that was the \$140 promised, that was committed to in April and then delivered in July through the CRA, is that correct?

Gordon MacFadyen: Correct.

Ms. Bell: So, the response to recovery contingency section of the original budget had the 15 million for COVID contingency and 15 million for potato industry contingency. This is funding in addition to those contingencies, which is the result – which is why it's in a special warrant. So, those other contingency funds still remain with their 15 million commitments in each one? Is that correct?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yes.

Ms. Bell: Was this expenditure covered under the – did this come out of the surplus, in terms of being able to cover this expense? Did that just come out of general revenue?

Gordon MacFadyen: The surplus that was reported for '21-'22 is just that, a surplus. This is a '22-'23 expense, so say that we're – but, again, this is past the allotment that is provided in the Budget, so we needed additional funding as additional budget for it.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: I'm good. Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: I just have a question about these cheques. Cheques are always appreciated but I've knocked on many seniors' doors. They don't where the cheque come from. I know that there were some cheques from the provincial government issued by the federal government that was basically not marked. The people getting it had no idea what the money was for, whether it was carbon tax refund or whatever.

My question is if you have fixed that issue?

Gordon MacFadyen: Yeah, we're working regularly with the federal government to improve the messaging. I know that it's a

little bit (Indistinct), particularly if you're getting a direct deposit, as well. That's a further complication. The money just shows up in your bank account and you may not necessarily know where it come from, which is always a good problem to have.

But definitely, through the communications that the Department of Finance is trying to do, we're trying to get that messaging out on a regular basis to expect the payment, expect an amount. These are the kinds of amounts that could be coming.

Mr. Hammarlund: Well, I'm sure I'm like all Islanders. I never protest when something is deposited in my account.

I'm good, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Was this a separate thing that come, added onto your GST? Did it come out with GST or was it separate?

Chair: There was a number of payments that went out in July. I think we referenced the carbon tax rebate went out in July. This inflation payment went out in July. The low-income tax credit went out in July. An HST credit probably went out in July, as well.

Mr. Gallant: To your knowledge, were they lumped together or were they all separate cheques?

Gordon MacFadyen: Oh, no. They'd be one amount, for sure.

Mr. Gallant: One amount? Okay.

You have \$15 million here. Was that all spent? Was it all spent on help to Islanders or was there some administrative costs in that? What (Indistinct) –

Gordon MacFadyen: There's no administrative costs with the program with CRA. That's the budget. Again, that would be based on the taxpayers that we know should be eligible for it. Again, it would be dependent on them filing a tax return and having up-to-date tax records, for sure.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: That's it.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: You're welcome.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

General government

“To fund expenditures related to helping Islanders with financial pressures related to inflation and post-tropical storm Fiona.”

Total: 58,000,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair.

Yeah, so, 58 million – how much of this is going to post-tropical storm Fiona?

Gordon MacFadyen: I think the way the description, it's to support Islanders with those – Fiona, inflation – it would be all of them.

Mr. McNeilly: So then, what's the breakdown between inflation and the storm?

Gordon MacFadyen: (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: There's none? But why would you add post-tropical storm Fiona in? Aren't these inflation payments?

Gordon MacFadyen: I think it was to recognize all the hardships that are on the go.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, but I guess that's what just strikes me different. I'm looking at the press release that went out on October 31st and it didn't mention Fiona in the press release at all. Here, we've got post-tropical storm Fiona in here and these are inflation payments. I don't understand. It says in here that it's because you guys did a great job of managing the money. I mean, it doesn't say that in here. I just don't understand why post-tropical storm Fiona is in there. These are inflation payments.

I bring this up because the Premier said that all of the Fiona damage is going to be covered by the federal government, or most of it or a lot of it is going to be helped on by the federal government. I just don't

understand why you wouldn't just keep it in inflation in your writeup.

Gordon MacFadyen: Again, the writeup is based on the information that comes from the department describing the payment that we would be hoping to get authorized. It definitely went through Treasury Board and through the Executive Council process, and then here today.

I think it was more so to try to resonate with the impacts of everything that's on the go, not just inflation. There may be some people at certain income thresholds within here that may not feel that they're totally affected or impacted as greatly as some others on inflation. I don't there was any ill intent in it.

Mr. McNeilly: No.

Gordon MacFadyen: Just a description.

Mr. McNeilly: No, and that's why I was asking for the breakdown because the post-tropical storm Fiona relief didn't – maybe the 250 or the 500 – it didn't cover everybody. There were some – we're definitely missing some gaps and I thought you might have had some money put aside to have another separate program, but that's not the case here.

Gordon MacFadyen: I believe when the program was costed and developed, again, they looked at who would be in any particular band of coverage and what that amount would be for them. It turned out to be \$58 million for the program that was established. Again, I think they were just trying to get some words that would resonate with people that may receive the cheque.

Mr. McNeilly: Hence, that's why I was asking the questions because I just saw it in there and I didn't know what that meant, if it was all going to help Islanders with the inflationary period or if there was some there for post tropical storm.

Thank you very much.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

To be clear, the previous section we had, the 15 million was the initial inflationary response. This is the 58 million which is going to provide either \$500 or \$1,000 to households that earn less than \$100,000. It's going to be paid out in January?

Gordon MacFadyen: January.

Ms. Bell: January, yes. Thank you.

The legislation that we have recently, allows you to potentially do future payments should you wish to do so.

Do you anticipate there being future payments? Is there more extra money coming from somewhere that you want to hand out?

Mr. McLane: Not at this time.

Ms. Bell: Not at this time? Never say never, I guess.

This is a pretty significant special warrant at a \$58 million cost. How did you settle on that, being comfortable with that kind of level of expenditure?

Mr. McLane: I think, again, I don't think anybody envisioned that the global pressures that we were under would have that localized feel. I guess it was important for us to go as far as we could. It does touch about 117,000 Islanders. I think the rationale was to try and go as far into families that need support as far as we could.

Ms. Bell: I know that it's not apples to apples to talk about the surplus which, as you pointed out, came from the '21-'22, but the optics of this are that you announce a surplus and then you immediately announce a \$58 million expenditure. Whether or not you intend to, there is a very clear connection of, we've got extra money – we're going to hand out the extra money.

How do you make the decision that you've got the space in your Budget or, in this case, operational thing? Regardless of what you're supposed to do with the surplus, it certainly looks like it's a surplus, therefore we can hand it out.

When did you make the decision that you were going to be going ahead? Was it before you saw the surplus announcement or was it after this?

Mr. McLane: I guess it was a continuing conversation, again. I think we just kept looking again – the price of fuel has flattened out since then. Obviously, there were concerns about the severity of the winter that we are facing, and I don't think they've gone down. It is certainly going to be a very significant winter for a lot of families on PEI. I think the rationale was January, again, which is always a tough month for some people as they leave the holiday season. We just felt that it was appropriate to soften that blow. Obviously, it's going to help but it's certainly – we do have some significant unprecedented inflation to deal with over the coming months.

Ms. Bell: Okay, because we've had some – we had questions including from your own back bench this morning or earlier today about how you determine what the eligibility level is. For most government programs, your eligibility is really low.

We have a poverty measure set here in the province, a market basket measure which is about 38,000 for a family. Some of your programs are 20,000, some are 25,000, but this program is 100,000.

I think it's great that that many families are going to get that help because everybody's struggling, but at the same time, why is this program so rich in terms of the eligibility compared to every other program you do where – I don't think you've got a program where the eligibility is higher than 50,000 on anything else.

You're not following your own pattern, and I'm just really interested in why you thought that eligibility level was going to be appropriate, other than it gets it to the most possible Islanders; which is a good goal, but why wouldn't you do that for other programs too?

Mr. McLane: I guess the short answer again would be budgetary. Obviously, this is quite an expensive program to do. I think the rationale is just that the price of home heating oil is gone so deep into every

Islander's household, that it's important to reach as far as we can.

Any discretionary income, for a lot of families, would be evaporated by \$1,700 oil bills. So, again, we're trying to soften this blow. We understand it's not the be all end all. It's not sustainable, of course, too. Again, unprecedented times; trying to soften the blow for families.

Ms. Bell: I think everybody would agree, \$58 million is a huge investment, but it's not sustainable; you're absolutely right, because it's a one-time cash payment. It doesn't actually fix anything. What it does is pay for half an oil tank.

So, \$58 million on heat pumps; \$58 million, for instance, on paying to get as many houses as possible switched over to electric, so they won't have to worry about oil bills anymore; \$58 million on just about anything that was a longer-term solution would be a better spend of this money than a one-time cash payment that covers half an oil tank.

I know that everybody who gets this is going to be grateful, but you're not fixing anything. You're handing out free money in an election year, and it just seems really at odds with your other stated goals about trying to affect change.

I'm just really wondering about the rationale behind allocating this much money; this huge amount of money. This is more than you've spent on all of your other efficiency programs in the last two years. It just feels like a really weird place to put this much of an investment that doesn't affect sustainable change.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bell: I want to see people get money. I'm really questioning about the level of the cutoff when you have the highest possible cutoff is 55,000 for any other program that this government does, across all of the programs, and I've looked at every one of them.

It just feels like it's trying to achieve something different than what you're saying it's trying to achieve. I would really hope that you are as willing to make this much of a commitment, financially, when we need to

make longer-term decisions that actually help Islanders. Please, minister.

I'm done.

Thank you very much.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Special Warrants: 91,500,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Shall Schedule "B" carry? Carried.

Shall the Supplementary Estimates carry? Carried.

Mr. McLane: Mr. Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair, and that the Chair make report to Mr. Speaker.

Chair: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House, I wish to report that the committee has gone into supplementary supply to be granted to His Majesty and has come to certain resolutions, thereon, which said resolutions I am directed to report to the House whenever it should be pleased to receive same.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. McLane: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, that the report of the Committee be now received.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Chair: Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee be now adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, that the 27th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 27, *Gasoline Tax Act*, Bill No. 81, ordered for third reading.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to Rule 71(1), I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action that the order for third reading of this bill be discharged for the purpose of recommitting the bill to a Committee of the Whole House for further consideration.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, 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 Charlottetown-Winsloe to chair the Committee of the Whole House, please.

Chair (Z. Bell): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intitled *Gasoline Tax Act*.

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

Shall it be granted? Granted.

While our stranger is coming onto the floor, minister, do you have a note that you would like to read?

Mr. McLane: I do.

Chair: Before you do that, we'll ask our stranger to say your name and title for Hansard, please.

Ryan Pineau: Ryan Pineau, the Provincial Tax Commissioner.

Chair: Thank you Ryan, welcome.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Mr. McLane: We have a slight change; an amendment to the bill.

MOVED THAT

Bill No. 81 is amended in the proposed subsection 13(1) by the deletion of the words “the investigation” and the substitution of the words “the inspection”.

Chair: I believe copies are being passed out to hon. members. I’ll give a few moments, here, just for the –

I believe all the members may have a copy now. I’m going to open the floor up to questions.

Shall the amendment carry? Carried.

Shall the bill carry? Carried.

Mr. McLane: I move the title.

Chair: Bill No. 81, *Gasoline Tax Act*.

Mr. McLane: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. McLane: Mr. Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and that the Chair report the bill agreed to with amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House, having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *Gasoline Tax Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same with amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, I ask that Motion 132 be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Motion No. 132.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford, the following motion:

WHEREAS Islanders expect their elected officials to protect the systems that are important and critical to their health and wellbeing;

AND WHEREAS healthcare on PEI is in crisis due to a shortage of frontline healthcare workers;

AND WHEREAS healthcare in rural PEI is being especially challenged during this time of crisis;

AND WHEREAS rural communities should be supported through these challenges, not ignored;

AND WHEREAS the proposed removal of the rural PEI complement of physicians would remove the longstanding protections currently in place to ensure rural healthcare is supported;

AND WHEREAS centralization of healthcare on PEI would be a disservice to all Islanders, especially those living in our many rural communities;

AND WHEREAS the proposed legislative changes to the Health Services Payment Act remove important aspects of human resource planning and distribution across PEI;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge government to cease centralization of healthcare on PEI;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge government to retain the Physician Resource Planning Committee and the associated Resource Strategy;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge government to review and make any necessary changes to the Health Services Payment regulations to remove the requirement for all applications to be reviewed and approved by the Physician Resource Planning Committee.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition to start debate.

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

With your indulgence, I'd like to recognize a friend of mine in the public gallery this afternoon. Eddie Childs is here and has joined us for, I believe, the first time this sitting. Welcome, Eddie. It's just lovely to have you with us.

I think I need to start by acknowledging that when this motion was written last week, I think it was, the *Health Services Payment Act* amendments were on the floor of this House. The assumption we made, and I think it's a fair assumption, was that a bill that government had spent presumably a long time crafting, consulting with Islanders, working its way through the Cabinet priorities list, by the time it got to the floor here, that they were committed to this. Therefore, we felt that we needed to have an opportunity to express our concerns about the potential implications of such a bill.

We heard earlier today that the minister is not, now, going to be coming forward with this bill. But the fact that this government, although clearly confused or second-guessing itself – I'm really not quite sure what the pathway to removing it from the tabled list that we were going to debate this sitting, I'm not sure what that was, but our concerns remain.

We are consistent; unlike government, we are consistent in our concerns regarding the implications of what the *Health Services Payment Act* amendment bill that was before this House, and is now no longer before this House, what the impact of that was going to be on rural Prince Edward Island.

I have always lived in a rural area, whether it was on Prince Edward Island or other places in this world in which I have lived. I

think one of the reasons that I feel so at home here on Prince Edward Island is that the village in which I spent most of my formative years – Fortrose, in the Highlands of Scotland – is a small fishing and farming village on the east coast of Scotland. In many respects, you could pick up Fortrose, put it down here on Prince Edward Island, and it would not be out of place. The architecture may look a little bit odd, but in terms of the character and the personality of the place, the rural nature of a farming/fishing community, which Fortrose was and still is, is very reminiscent of many rural communities here on Prince Edward Island.

While each rural community here on PEI is unique, they share some common features. There's a tremendous pride in the independence of rural communities here. There's a tremendous sense of community in rural communities, and that goes back generations, of course, to the farming and fishing traditions and foundations on which all of our rural communities were built. There's a great vibrancy to our rural communities as well.

Rural Islanders are, with very good reason, protective of the fabric that makes our rural communities so strong. I mentioned, I believe, in – was it Question Period or a member's statement last week, I can't remember exactly – that I had attended and spoken at the South Shore Chamber of Commerce meeting. A large part of the discussion there was taken up with child care; the questions that I brought this afternoon related to Merry Pop-Ins child care centre.

But there was also a discussion about the ongoing challenges that I think almost all rural communities face, whether you're in Prince Edward Island or elsewhere, and that's the maintenance of the critical services that make those communities tick and prevents them from deteriorating and becoming less vibrant than they are.

Of course, there's a number of services that I'm talking about here. Schools – and we actually had, I believe, the Minister of Health and Wellness earlier today reference the historic, and thankfully overturned, efforts to close rural schools in many of our communities here just a few years ago, in

Belfast, in Georgetown, and many other places across the province. I remember, as a sole member of the third party at that time, attending some extraordinarily uplifting events in those rural communities that really demonstrated how proud they were of their schools and how they recognized that the loss of those schools could be a deathblow to their community.

Retail spaces, things like banks, recreational facilities in rural communities, even local governance itself is a real essential part of keeping rural communities strong and united and vibrant.

But perhaps above all else, the thing which often creates a situation from which rural communities do not recover is the loss of health care services at a local level. It can be absolutely devastating. In my own area on the South Shore, the loss of our sole general practitioner several years ago energized that community. It seized the South Shore community in a way that few other threats to loss of services I think possibly could.

I remember well the community meeting that we had in the Crapaud Community Hall, where hundreds of people showed up and eventually formed the South Shore Health and Wellness committee that went on to really fight hard to maintain access to local primary health care services in that region, and successfully. We now have two nurse practitioners. We don't have a GP in the area, but we have nurse practitioners providing wonderful health care services to people in a community where we felt threatened that we were going to lose that.

So, the maintenance of health care facilities in rural areas is absolutely critical for the wellbeing not only of the people who live there, but of the communities themselves.

Rural Islanders love their communities and they want their children and they want their grandchildren to continue living there and to reap all the many, many benefits of living in a small and strong community. Rural Islanders, when it comes to standing up to centralization, which has been a common theme throughout the world – again, it's not unique to Prince Edward Island – but we see a loss of services in rural areas and the centralization, whether that's in schools or health care or retail options; all of the things

that happen in an unfortunately modern, sort of inevitable so-called development in the modern world often leaves small communities, and that intimacy, those less tangible things which make communities so strong and so special. It erodes them.

Again, going back to the schools that were threatened to be closed: a school in a rural area is not just a building where kids go from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. each day. It's a place where we run community schools all winter, and adults go in there. It's a place where there are craft fairs, it's a place where there are hubs for events and musicals and concerts and community gatherings.

A building like a school in a rural community is far more than just a building. It's something which brings the community together, bonds the community together, and ensures the long-term wellbeing of so many places across this Island.

This government seems to be leaving rural schools alone – and thank you for that, we appreciate it – but they seem to be coming for our primary health care and our hospitals instead. While we haven't actually seen that articulated overtly, it sometimes feels that the writing is on the wall, in that respect, and it's not a pleasant feeling, to sit on this side of the House and worry about the continued access in rural Prince Edward Island to rural health care.

Centralized thinking, of course, is not a new thing, but I do implore this government to remember that more than 50% of Islanders live in rural areas. We're the most rural province in this country. Access to primary health care and hospitals, the rural hospitals that we have, are a really essential part of maintaining the vibrance and the integrity of these communities.

This government started by taking away incentives for physicians to travel to rural areas. Of course, that had an impact, and we see now, more often than not, that rural hospitals are closed than they are open. That's almost always because of a shortage of health care professionals.

One can only – it's not rocket science to be able to join up those dots and see that that loss of incentives for physicians to travel to

rural areas is at least part of the reason for that loss.

And now our minister of health, who of course lives in a rural community himself, has brought forward this legislation – although it's since been removed, maybe it will be back, who knows – which will remove the physician resources strategy and complement that protected our rural communities from having further centralized health care in this province.

This idea of a complement is really important to Prince Edward Island. It legislates that physicians have to be distributed equitably across our Island to ensure that all Islanders, no matter where you live, have local access to health care. It means that centralized thinkers, big city thinkers, can't come in and hire all the physicians in Charlottetown and make Islanders living elsewhere commute there for care. Unfortunately, that's happening more and more.

The legislation, which was before the floor and has been pulled, but who knows what the future of it lies, came to the floor and the CEO of Health PEI, when doing interviews, he was almost talking about it as if it had passed here in the House here already.

Ms. Lund: Exactly.

Leader of the Opposition: It was an odd thing to listen to. And apart from anything else, that's a dangerous precedent to begin with, but that's outside what I want to talk about today.

Bills like this don't just happen. You don't think that you're going to bring forward a bill like this. It takes months to draft it; you put it out for consultation; you run it through your caucus for support; et cetera, et cetera. It's been known by this entire government for a long time now, and not one of them stood up and said: "Wait a minute. Wait a minute, there's something here for my district, the people I represent, that I think proposes a threat to the continued access to health care services."

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: I didn't hear one of them stand up and say anything. This government, of course, was –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: This government, of course, was elected primarily in rural districts. I look across the floor, and the majority of members sitting on that side represent rural districts.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Aylward: That's right, how did they do?

Leader of the Opposition: So, bringing forward a piece of legislation that would impact negatively the communities and the citizens that they represent is quite strange. Health care – I mean, Islanders get worked about a whole lot of things, but perhaps the single most –

Mr. Hudson: (Indistinct) June 12th, 2018.

Leader of the Opposition: But perhaps the single thing that they get most worked about, and it's a perennial No. 1 issue in campaigns and elections, is access to health care. It's a service which most energizes Islanders.

So, I don't quite understand how this bill ever got as far as it did –

Ms. Lund: Right.

Leader of the Opposition: – given the implications that it would have for negatively (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: Time and again, we've seen that this government does not stand up for rural Islanders or represent them at the table, whether that's removing protections for rural health care, whether it is removing protections for our Island babies in child care spaces –

An Hon. Member: Truth.

Leader of the Opposition: – or whether it's allowing our shorelines to be abused in all

kinds of ways. This government has not stood up for rural Islanders.

A recent example: We were just debating the appropriations act, and all of the money that flowed for Fiona to the various communities and to organizations in order to get our province back on its feet again. The whole Island was in the dark for many of us for two weeks and more. That was a failure of a private company here on Prince Edward Island. Islanders from tip to tip were expressing their frustration that they could not – that they had lost an essential service for an extended period of time.

This government was not prepared for such an event, nor did they have a proper plan in place to do anything about it.

What did the Premier do when Islanders brought forward their concerns about this private company? Did he defend them? Did he come behind those Islanders and say, oh, yeah, this is terrible, this is absolutely unacceptable?

No, he did not. He spoke up for the company. He said that this company is good and it's working hard and so on. It wasn't about people; it was about bureaucracy. That was a real letdown for Islanders who were struggling, who were in the dark, who were cold, who did not have services, who were emptying stuff out of their fridges and freezers, and needed a premier to stand there and empathize and understand the hardships.

What did he do? He defended a company that has a monopoly here on Prince Edward Island. It was a really – it was a disappointing moment.

I know there are many others who would like to speak to this motion today, and before I close, I just want to talk a little bit more about how this government has descended and backtracked into behaviour and attitudes that are so commonly seen in previous administrations. I know that the Premier gets very spicy when he's challenged in here on his being no different from other administrations.

He says: "I'm not the same old, same old." It's an indignant cry that we've heard in here many, many times. But there's that old adage that your actions speak louder than

your words, and it's becoming increasingly clear to me, and I believe, Islanders, that when it comes to preserving rural Prince Edward Island, and specifically health care services in Prince Edward Island, this government is very much more of the same old, same old.

I think Islanders are done with that. I think they need a government that is going to stand up for them. I think they need a government that's going to stand firm and represent those Islanders whose voices absolutely need to be –

Mr. Hudson: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: – whose voices absolutely need to be heard in this Legislature. I look forward to the debate on this motion, and for it passing unanimously in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank my hon. colleague for bringing this forward and I'm happy to second it and speak to the motion.

If there's one thing I talk about in this Legislature, it would be the need to plan; the need to have your backup information and a really solid plan so that we understand where you're going in the future.

I could speak about that lots, to be honest, and I seem to have had to do that for many, many, many programs that have had a failed rollout from this government because, let's be honest, a failure to plan is going to be a fail. That's what happens when you do kneejerk decisions and you roll out programs without having sufficient planning behind it.

I can honestly say that I was looking forward to hearing the minister come to the floor with this piece of legislation to try to explain why it was going to be so good for Islanders, including his residents that live in his district and all Islanders across PEI, but especially for rural Islanders, because to be an elected representative of a rural

community and to put forward this legislation, there must have been something that was in it that he saw as good for his constituents.

I was actually at a memorial walk this weekend and I was speaking to a former RCMP officer who was the supervisor for the woman who had passed away, the RCMP officer that had passed away. He said: "I always valued her because she was a critical thinker and she had a lot of insight when it came to decisions." He said: "She always said..." – and this is Cheryl Duffy. She was resident of Stratford but was instrumental in bringing the Stratford Youth Council to the area. He said that she always said that a good decision needed to have three things. It needed to have something for you, something for me, and something for the community.

I've thought about that and I've said that numerous times over the last three days since Llew Robinson said that to me, shared that with me. I would love to be able to ask the minister, in this decision to bring forward this legislation, what was in it for him, what was in it for me, but what was in it specifically for his constituents, and why was it good for his constituents? I really would have loved him to have brought it to the floor so that he could defend it and to discuss it because it hasn't been talked about in this public forum before.

All across this country, we're in a human resource crisis when it comes to health care. I've heard several times that we're the only jurisdiction that has a complement system, so let's remove the complement system because nobody else has it. We often look to other jurisdictions to see what we should be doing from a legislative perspective. But when you think about it, PEI is the only jurisdiction that has a complement system, nobody else does, but this is a nationwide problem. That's what the minister keeps telling us. They don't have a complement system and they still have issues with their rural health care and being able to keep their emergency rooms open and being able to provide family doctors in all those other jurisdictions. I'm wondering why he wants to follow suit with that.

PEI is no exception. We have human resource issues when it comes to health care,

but what's the most important thing in order to get us out of that is to actually plan and have a strategy to get us out of that. Without that plan and without that strategy, we'll never get out of this circling the drain that we're currently in in our health care system that is in a systemwide collapse, as many people in leadership would actually tell you. We need that well thought-out plan, expert-led plan, from physician resources.

At the end of the day, I think that the Physician Resource Planning Committee is actually a good thing. It has really good value in certain areas. Now, this legislation would have removed that from legislation, would have removed needing to have that human resource guarantee. I'm wondering why the minister would not want to have a human resource plan for the province. He does say that that would go somewhere else, but not in legislation. He's not going to be the minister forever. The next minister may not keep up that planning, wherever it is. That's why you embed things in legislation, so that you can ensure, government over government, that you're actually going to have that planning in place.

It was interesting to me that the Physician Resource Planning Committee was identified as one of the big hindrances to be able to hire because they take so long to do their hiring practice. What's interesting is, their role in the whole hiring process is actually listed in regulations. It's not listed in legislation, so if they wanted to change the fact that the PRPC reviewed every single hiring, they could change that in regulations. There's nothing stopping that, so you wouldn't actually have to make changes to the legislation.

I will say, in the legislation, it says an application by a physician shall be referred to the planning committee, which shall assess it, taking into consideration the strategy adopted under Section 2.1. That's in the regulations. That could have been changed and they could have identified in what situations they actually refer to the Physician Resource Planning Committee, but they didn't; they wanted to scrap it completely.

I don't think that Physician Resource Planning Committee is a bad thing. I think that there's actually really valuable places

that you can use it. One example of that would be the neonatologist specialty that brought the NICU to Prince Edward Island. That was a new specialty that we never had before. But that went through the PRPC and they evaluated all the costs and what would have to happen in order for us to bring that specialist here so that we could have the NICU in PEI and at the QEH.

I think that was a very valuable process that the PRPC went through and it does show the value that they can have. They may not be needed to hire every single physician. You could remove that step, if you will, but, again, that is in regulations.

My colleague has already spoken about the importance of hiring physicians for our rural communities. I want to talk about that real important step of planning. I'm not so sure that we have seen the justification of removing the complement out of the whole process. But, again, I wish that maybe he had sat on the floor and he would have defended the decision that he had made to why it was such a good idea and why he put his name to the legislation in the first place.

The minister may say that the physician resource plan is being made even though he's removing from legislation, but let's be honest, everybody has good intentions. Maybe this minister believes that whoever comes behind him will maintain that, but there's no guarantee in that. To me, that's concerning. Legislation lies after the minister and after a government. It continues through, and the next government has to actually go in and make that change and do it here on the floor of the Legislature. I think that that's an important aspect.

I am calling on the minister to actually deliver an (Indistinct) plan of where the systemic issues are within this health care system and to give us that plan.

There is a thing here that, when we look at the greyness between what's the role of Health PEI, what's the role of the board, and what's the role of the minister, nobody else within the health care system can bring forward legislation. The minister signed his name to this piece of legislation. Obviously, he would have had to go through the planning in order to get himself here. But I don't see where they've ever told us how

this is good for rural Islanders. That's the biggest concern. The doctors I've spoken to in rural PEI have grave concerns. Even the ones in Charlottetown that I have spoken to, they have grave concerns.

Mr. Hudson: (Indistinct)

Ms. Beaton: The minister feels like this is good for Islanders. He felt good enough to bring forward that legislation in the first place. For a minister who represents rural Prince Edward Island, I would love to know why he thinks that not having a plan for rural health care is actually a good step for him to make as an elected official.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Beaton: With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure there's lots of people – I can hear them chirping – that would love to speak to this motion so I will conclude my remarks there and let you move on to somebody else on your list.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hudson: (Indistinct)

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well –

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Ms. Altass: There's so much to dig into here. I want to touch on something that the hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned.

Mr. Hudson: (Indistinct)

Ms. Altass: That was the interview that Dr. Gardam did recently –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Altass: – where he seemed to be acting as if the –

Mr. Hudson: So frustrating.

Ms. Altass: Yeah.

An Hon. Member: I hear you.

Ms. Altass: You feel frustrated over there, yeah. We feel frustrated over here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) health care.

Dr. Gardam seemed to be acting as though the *Health Services Payment Act*, the changes you were making, had already passed, and that's completely disrespectful and absolutely shows that the minister does not understand his role that he should be taking in leadership of his department.

With that, I will close debate –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Altass: No, adjourn debate. Adjourn is the language that I would like to use, and I will adjourn the debate, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Thank you.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Indistinct) debate continue.

Speaker: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *Zero-emission Vehicles Act*, and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *Zero-emission Vehicles Act*, Bill No. 130, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation would create a zero-emission vehicle mandate in PEI and require government, through regulation, to create a credit system that requires manufacturers to obtain a set amount of credits by selling

zero-emission vehicles or by buying credits from other manufacturers.

Annual credits required will be set as a percentage of total sales and rise year of year in regulation, all with the goals of increasing our share of electric vehicles supplied to PEI.

Orders Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm seeking unanimous consent to proceed to second reading of Bill No. 130, which was introduced and read a first time today very shortly ago.

Speaker: Hon. members, does the member have unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Speaker: Hon. member, you have unanimous consent.

Clerk: *Zero-emission Vehicles Act*, Bill No. 130, read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, that the said bill be – no, that's what I was supposed to (Indistinct) – read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, 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 Charlottetown-Winsloe to chair the Committee of the Whole House, please.

[audio malfunction]

Mr. MacEwen: – of environment, energy and climate action, we have one of, if not the most, aggressive incentive programs in the country.

The second thing we need to do is allow for the appropriate supply of EVs in Prince Edward Island. We need to increase the inventory of new and used EVs in PEI. Seventy-five percent of all EV registrations in Canada are in B.C. and Quebec. Lots of you are tired of hearing me say this, but why? It's because they have zero-emission vehicle legislation in place. This motivates manufacturers to provide dealerships with EVs to earn credits in order to avoid penalties.

We simply do not have the supply of vehicles to meet our emission reduction targets. We need incentives for consumers, but we also need sales targets for the provincial government as a way to increase supply from manufacturers.

I believe that we should emulate the B.C. and Quebec legislation. I'm sponsoring legislation that will require PEI government to create regulations that include provincial targets for zero-emission vehicle sales, compliance ratio for zero-emission vehicles for manufacturers, a credit system, and a reporting system.

The special standing committee on climate change recognized the need to electrify transport in PEI. In fact, the very first recommendation of this report is, and I quote: "Your committee recommends that government introduce legislation to enact a zero emissions vehicle mandate."

In summary, I'd like to create that mandate here in PEI through legislation and regulations that is modelled after Quebec and B.C. Medium and large manufacturers of vehicles will be required to obtain a set amount of credits by selling zero-emission vehicles or by buying credits from other manufacturers. Annual credits required will be set as a percentage of total sales and would rise year over year. The credit amount

per vehicle will be set according to a formula, with vehicles that have greater electric range earning more credits than lower-range vehicles.

Over 30 countries have EV mandates; the U.S. doesn't have a country-wide one, but they have 13 individual states that do; and we have two provinces in Canada leading the way, and they've also got the most EVs. I'd like to get ahead of that curve as well.

I believe this type of legislation is a necessity for PEI in order to meet our greenhouse gas emissions, and it'll send a market signal to other jurisdictions, and it'll get more EVs here on PEI. I firmly believe we need this.

Thank you, Chair, for allowing me to share that.

Chair (Z. Bell): Okay, thank you, promoter.

I'll ask if it's the wish of the committee to go clause by clause, section by section, part by part, or open it up to general questions.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) general questions.

Chair: General questions? Sorry, I heard general questions.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: Okay. So, there was a request for section by section, so we will go section by section.

We will start with Section 1, "Definitions".

Are there any questions on definitions?

Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct) do the preamble?

Chair: Oh, no. The preamble's done, actually, at the end.

Sorry, just for clarity for the members, the preamble on the first page, on page 3, is actually debated at the very end of the act.

So, we're going to move to Section 2, which is "Classification of motor vehicles".

Are there any questions?

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Section 3, "Credits".

Mr. MacKay: Chair?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

Can you just explain, hon. member, how the credit system works, and explain how, I guess, B.C. and Ontario do it, just so I can get a better understanding?

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah. In those provinces, the manufacturers are given goals by the legislation to reach a certain percentage of EVs that are sent to that province in order to be sold there. They put it in their legislation.

What my legislation does is it holds the government to account to do it, to put that in regulations, and to come up with a system by September 30th of next year.

Mr. MacKay: I'm still trying to get my head around – explain how government would do that? What does it look like? How is it formed?

Mr. MacEwen: How is the credit system formed?

Mr. MacKay: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: There's a formula that's created and manufacturers have to meet that. Take any type here in PEI, any sort of vehicle; they have to meet a certain percentage of vehicles that they send to PEI, and they earn credits for each one.

So, say you sent a fully electric vehicle. You would earn, say, four credits for that. This all has to be done in regulation, but I'm just saying what government could do. It's completely up to the department to decide what to do, hon. minister.

So, they would earn, say, four credits for every EV vehicle that they send. You could, for a plug-in hybrid, earn, say, two credits. You keep doing that up until you reach the percentage that is decided by government at

the time. If they meet that percentage, then everything is good. If they don't meet that percentage, a fine is levied.

Mr. MacKay: What kind of fine, or is that done in regulations?

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah. So, for example, in Quebec and B.C., the fines are in the act. They are upwards of – now, this is on the supplier, right? There's nothing on the dealers here, for sure. They are appropriated in the act. Here, I've pushed that to regulations.

Mr. MacKay: Have you talked to any manufacturers on this, and how it's working in Ontario and B.C.?

Mr. MacEwen: No, I haven't spoken to a manufacturer, but I can certainly speak to the data that's coming from B.C. and Quebec. They certainly lead the way. Often, when I speak to people, they say PEI's just getting their fair share, based on population. We probably are getting it based on our legislation, but by that route, Ontario would be leading the pack by a lot, and they're simply not.

Manufacturers around the world send their EVs – first of all, when they decide when they send them, they send it to places that have mandates in place. If you look at even some of the smaller states in the U.S. that have it, they're getting way more than their percentage share across the country. The same here in Canada, B.C. leads the way as far as percentage, and Quebec is second. Then Ontario is third, as you would expect, because of their large population.

So, two things: one, it obviously helps us meet our climate change goals, which is the whole point. As an Assembly, we voted unanimously in favour of pretty aggressive climate change goals. So, this is the best lever that I see to help tackle the transportation side. We've done the incentives, which is really, really important, and now we need to come with a mandate that helps get more vehicles here.

That's kind of the answer. It's a market signal to steer us in the right direction.

Mr. MacKay: I've just one final question, Chair, on this section.

This might be an unfair question, but do we have the physical infrastructure to allow this right now? The reason I ask, I'm just using my own community in Kensington, we only have one EV charger, and there seems to be one vehicle or two vehicles there at all times. Do we have the Island infrastructure to accommodate what you're trying to do here?

Mr. MacEwen: It's an excellent question. I don't think we have enough of the infrastructure. Do we have enough infrastructure for where we're going to get to, eventually? We need to keep building it.

If this bill passes, there's no changeover tomorrow, that all of a sudden, we're flooded with electric vehicles. We have months of regulations and consultation for government to do yet on that process.

But no, this certainly isn't a fix. We have a whole bunch of levers that we have to pull as a government. This government has done some of the recommendations from that committee report. This one isn't one that is done yet, but charging infrastructure is definitely one that we need to increase.

You and I, we get those same calls from – obviously, there's a very small percentage of our population that has EVs right now. Our infrastructure is improving. It's not where we need to go. If we didn't improve our infrastructure and then had an influx of EVs, we'd have a problem, but I've heard, certainly, the federal government and I've heard our provincial government commit to increased infrastructure, that we need it.

Certainly, the fueling stations are also starting to see that too. They see a shift that's coming, so they'll start adding them as well. But we have to incentivize them, as well, to do that.

Mr. MacKay: Sorry, Chair, just one more question.

This might be an unfair question, too, but it's something that has been asked to me a few times as of late because of what we're doing with our heat pump program and pushing EV. Does Maritime Electric have the physical capability to handle what we're trying to do? Have you touched base with them just to see if this is a possibility?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Just to be clear, there are no unfair questions. I'm sitting here in this chair, like you always have to do. So, ask away. It's important conversation.

No, I haven't personally talked to Maritime Electric, but it's – I don't want to say you missed the (Indistinct) – yes, we have to do that. I've heard the minister stand up in the Legislature, and he's been asked questions about that. Do we have the current infrastructure for the demand of electricity? We're always going to have to keep increasing that.

So, yes, we need that too. As I said, there are a whole bunch of levers that have to happen at the same time. Say we didn't have this mandated, okay? We're still going to have to increase our grid. Our government's goal is to electrify the system. As your government, we need to electrify the system.

I get what you're saying. No, I haven't talked to Maritime Electric about doing it for this bill specifically, but as a government, we need to electrify the system because of the other reasons. I'm not going to speak for the minister of environment, but we also need to make sure that that's a renewable source that's coming as well. We can't keep taking it from non-renewable sources off-Island.

That's another debate, but your point is well taken. Yes, we have to increase our grid, I guess, is the easy answer, and no, I haven't talked to Maritime Electric about it with respect to this bill.

Mr. MacKay: Okay. I'm good, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Member, as you know, I'm a big fan of electric vehicles, not just because they reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but I think they're a great way to travel. They're quiet, there's less odour, you don't have to go to gas stations, you can charge at home; I just think they've got lots of bells and whistles,

lower maintenance. They're just a great vehicle all the way around.

But I do believe that price is a barrier, especially for new vehicles.

In my family, we've purchased two used electric vehicles, and we were able to do that through All EV on the Island, which unfortunately closed their location recently. I was looking at Section 5, clause (b) –

Chair: Hon. member, I'm just going to stop you for one second. We are going section by section. We are in Section 3 right now, the credits.

Mr. Trivers: Oh, we're not in the credits, Chair?

Chair: We are. You said 5(b)?

Mr. Trivers: The credits and charges section?

Chair: Yeah. Sorry, that is Section 3, yeah.

Mr. Trivers: Is that where we're at?

Chair: Yeah, we are. Yeah.

Mr. Trivers: Great.

So, it talks about reconditioned motor vehicles. I just want to understand from you how this bill will help increase the number of used EVs on the Island that can be available to Islanders at a lower cost than new vehicles so that we can get more people driving EVs.

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah, absolutely. By the very process of introducing a lot more EVs to – I shouldn't say a lot more – increasing the supply of EVs to PEI, we will then start increasing the supply of used vehicles.

Now, are we going to have an influx of used vehicles right away? No, but we need to start now so that we can get those used vehicles on the market in the coming years.

Your initial point about the cost being prohibitive, it's an excellent point. I've been watching the prices of EVs like you have, member. I know that there's an inflated cost right now because of the demand for them; for used EVs, as well.

If we had an EV mandate, for example, right across the country, we would then see manufacturers produce EVs quicker and faster. Then, also, that competition will drive down price. We already know that every international manufacturer is already committed to EVs already.

Two things: One, that's how we get the price down. The second, to increase the number of used vehicles, we have to increase the number of new vehicles, as well, so that they become used vehicles, if I can use that analogy.

Mr. Trivers: I just wanted to be clear. When we're looking at 5(b) and it's talking about reconditioned motor vehicles, does that mean dealers on PEI can bring in used EVs and sell those to accumulate credits towards their EV total and therefore, that will help increase the number of used vehicles on the Island?

Am I missing something or is that the case?

Chair: Again, we are on Section 3. We're not on part 2, we are in Section 3, but if the promoter would like to answer the question. We are coming to that section, hon. member, but if the promoter would like to answer that question, you're more than welcome to.

Mr. Trivers: I'm confused.

Chair: Section 3 on credits is what we're on, with subsections 1, 2 and 3.

Mr. Trivers: I just thought we were going part by part. My apologies, Chair.

If you want to answer that question, I (Indistinct) don't have to ask it again later.

Mr. MacEwen: I just want to clarify that – you're making second guess it there, but by selling or leasing, you're asking me, will they get credits for used vehicles?

Mr. Trivers: Yeah. It sounds like they do.

Mr. MacEwen: I just want to confirm that, hon. member, that I can bring that back to you.

Mr. Trivers: Okay, thank you.

Chair: Thank you, hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald. Do you have any other questions?

Mr. Trivers: No, that's fine. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Promoter?

Mr. MacEwen: No, go ahead.

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, member, for bringing this bill. I'm just trying to go through it. It's the first time I'm seeing it.

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah, I understand.

Mr. Thompson: My first question: Do you drive an electric car?

Mr. MacEwen: No, I drive a hybrid.

Mr. Thompson: Okay. I guess I've been an electric car driver since July. I love it. I love the electric car. I wish everyone had an electric car. I see this as a positive step forward.

A few concerns I have with this, and it might be from my experience of actually driving an electric car is, this bill should have come with a mandate for government to have fast charging stations as well, with it.

We can increase our electric cars on the Island and that's fine, but when electric cars only – my experience is when I take my electric car off-Island, you want to talk about anxiety because the infrastructure in the other Maritime Provinces aren't – I don't even think they are as good as they are here.

With a 460 km range – and that's a range because it fluctuates – I can make it to Saint John, New Brunswick, for an FPT meeting, and I get there with 8% battery left. I go to a hotel. Check into my hotel, very nice hotel, and they don't have electric car chargers. I drive around the city to find an electric car charger, which is a 20-minute walk from the hotel, but I found a charger. My meeting is not over until – it is over quicker than – it's

just a slow charger. I go on my app and try to find some fast chargers on my way home. There's one in Salisbury, and there's one in Moncton.

I get to Salisbury; it's great, if you drive a Tesla. There are all kinds of Tesla's, but unfortunately, mine's not a Tesla. The first charger in Salisbury, there was a lineup; quite a substantial lineup. So, I go to Moncton. The one in Moncton's out of order. I did make it home. I made it to Borden with 7% charge. Got my charge in Borden, but I just think, with this, we have to have it mandated that the infrastructure is there for electric car chargers. That's just my experience.

I'm also concerned about car dealerships. When you talk to the car dealerships, is it just the car dealerships that deal in new cars, or is it used vehicles as well? Where does this mandate stop?

Mr. MacEwen: A whole bunch of things to address, there.

First of all, I applaud you for your leadership as a minister, and driving an electric car. That's important. I'm jealous of your connections in order to get that electric car. I've had one on order since early last winter, so to speak. Now, granted, I'm looking for a specific kind, so that's different. That's excellent.

I feel like you're making my point. This is exactly why we need mandates, so that it does force governments to bring in and help the private industry with chargers. We do need more chargers, absolutely. So, the more mandates that we have across the country, the more this is going to happen.

I'm sorry that – there's definitely – it's a mindset change that we have to have, right? I bet you the next time you go to a hotel in Fredericton, you're going to look for a hotel with a charger, and the hotel that has a charger is going to get more business because of it.

I know that the Chair and I were at a hotel on the weekend that had ample electric chargers in the parking lot. Just random, kind of thing, but you do see that more often. If we don't act – this bill isn't going to, all of a sudden, influx thousands and

thousands of electric cars into PEI where we overwhelm our charging systems.

I completely appreciate what you're saying, but if we could bring in more EV mandates across the country, we're going to see the demand for that charging infrastructure. Quite frankly, we – in the regulations, you're going to see different goals. We're not looking at 100% goal next year, right? This is a long process.

As I said, we have to up a whole bunch of levers. This is one avenue, and I appreciate your leading the way on it with what you're doing. Another lever is, certainly, improved charging infrastructure, and I don't think – putting a mandate in place now doesn't prerequisite that we have to have a charger mandate. That has to happen as well, kind of thing.

We do have to change our habits, absolutely. As you just say, we have to plan differently. Two years ago, it was a lot harder for you to take that trip. I'm getting sidetracked a little bit. I feel like that's a different discussion. It's one that we have to have, as a province, we have to increase the charging.

Right now, we're focusing on bringing more EVs to PEI, but we need to do that in order to meet our climate change goals as well. Transportation is the biggest bucket of where we spend our greenhouse gas emissions. We can't stop people driving tomorrow. There's a whole segment of vehicles that aren't ready yet. We're hoping by 2035 that they will be ready and electrified.

Right now, we're looking at that traveling public; we need to even do better with our credit system. What I'm trying to say is there's a whole bunch of levers we have to do. I take your point wholeheartedly, that we need a better charging infrastructure system as well.

Mr. Thompson: Thanks for that, and that was a good conversation.

Just on the dealers – we have a lot of dealers on the Island, I assume, that just deal in used cars. Are they required to have a limit, or is that –

Mr. MacEwen: No.

Mr. Thompson: What are they saying, the dealerships? I assume they'd be supportive of it. They want as many electric cars as they can get. Is this going to help them get that?

Mr. MacEwen: I believe it will. When I spoke to the PEI Automobile Dealers Association, they would prefer increased incentives and better charging infrastructure versus a mandate.

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

An Hon. Member: Extend the hour.

Chair: There has been a request to extend the hour.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Chair: No. I've heard no.

The hour has been called.

Mr. MacEwen: 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 intitled *Zero-Emission Vehicles Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that this House adjourn until Wednesday, November 30th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a good evening, everyone.

The House adjourned until Wednesday, November 30th, at 1:00 p.m.