

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Darlene Compton

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The Legislature sat at 1:07 p.m.

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

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

Happy Wednesday. I'd like to say hi to everyone in District 8 and my aunt Georgina, in the Prince County Hospital, hello. Welcome the guests in the gallery. I see Barb Brookins from the Nurses' Union, and former MLA Michele Beaton; it's nice to see you. Welcome, all our other guests.

Madam Speaker, as you're aware, the holiday season is upon us. I don't know about your calendar, but ours are filling up with invitations to functions over the next few weeks. One of my favourites is the Women's Institute Yuletide Gala, which is tomorrow night, Madam Speaker. I know you've attended before. It's quite a fundraiser. It's a great event. It's at the Delta tomorrow night. I'd like to wish the Women's Institute a huge success tomorrow evening.

Also, I was able to attend the PEI Potato Board AGM this morning and give greetings to the potato farmers on what seems like a pretty successful year. All the numbers aren't in yet but pretty good. I want to say thank you to a couple of retiring directors of the board, Jason Hayden and Chad Robertson. They've served their time and are stepping away. Welcome the new board members for that.

With that, Madam Speakers, our roads were in great shape this morning. I want to give the Minister of Transportation and his crew a big applaud because he was criticized yesterday but I'm going to say that roads were tremendous today.

[Laughter]

Hon. B. Thompson: With that, Madam Speaker, when you're on the roads, be mindful of the changing conditions. Take your time; there's never a big rush.

Thank you and enjoy the proceedings.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome those who are watching online and those who are in the gallery today, representatives from the PEI Nurses' Union, Barb, Stephanie, and Michele; nice to see you back, Michele.

Just one thing that as I was scrolling through on Facebook earlier this morning and I saw that the Santa's Angels had put a post out. Up until December 12th, they're going to receive applications, I guess, for families or individuals in need.

[1:10 p.m.]

The Santa's Angels is a group that group that travels right across Prince Edward Island. On Christmas morning, they deliver presents and foods to those who are in need. It's a great program. I did participate in the past with it and just to see the surprise when Santa knocked on the door and had a treat for them was just something that actually made my Christmas.

I hope anyone out there who feels the need to please apply online on the Santa's Angels webpage. For anybody who would like to donate to that program, I'm sure they would also welcome that.

With that, Madam Speaker, I wish everyone a great day in the House.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to welcome back all my colleagues, including the Pages today; Campbell, Gage and Evelyn. I'd like to welcome the people in the gallery here from the PEI Nurses' Union, and of course, all of the people in the gallery today – thank you for being here – and everyone tuning in from across the Island, especially those in Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

This weekend, as was mentioned, things are filling up. Calendars are filling up. There are all kinds of really fun events happening all across the Island.

This Saturday is one of my favourites, the Indigenous Artisan Christmas Market, being held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Confederation Centre of the Arts. There are over 50 Mi'kmaq artisans from across Epekwitk who will be there sharing their incredible talent and craftsmanship. Admission is free and you can expect to see beautiful quillwork, painting, beaded jewelry, baskets, Christmas decorations, apparel, books, and much more.

A good friend of mine, Sally Bernard from Barnyard Organics in Bedeque, has been chosen as a 2024 Nuffield Canada Scholar. In the agriculture community, Nuffield is a scholarship that awards successful applicants funds to travel the world exploring a specific topic related to agriculture and bring information back to their country. Sally's topic is on managed grazing in a cropping rotation, particularly under organic or regenerative practices.

This week she'll travel to Regina, and then in March, to Brazil to meet the other scholars from around the world who are doing the same project, followed by 10 weeks of international travel the next two years to study her chosen topic.

Anyone who knows Sally knows how passionate she is about farming; what a brilliant, strong advocate she is for farming practices. Especially in this era of climate change, she is a force to be reckoned with as she passionately tries to keep farming a strong force in the province. The scholarship is sponsored by the PEI Department of Agriculture. I'm sure all of us in here would wish her the best on that very exciting project and I look forward to seeing what she brings back to us to share with us here.

Just one last quick point: Santa's Angels. When I was a school counsellor, I worked diligently with Santa's Angels. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them and all the other organizations who are using their time, resources, and gathering everybody else's time and resources, to make Christmas a little brighter for people who could use it. So, just thank you to everyone

doing that work. Santa's Angels is an incredible example of that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

R. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Good afternoon to all the viewers at home and to all the residents of District 1 Souris-Elmira.

While I'm on my feet, I would like to acknowledge the good work of the staff from the Department of Housing, Land and Communities. Helping Islanders in housing needs can be challenging at the best of times, but when you are able to help, it can make all the difference in the world to that person.

Last week, I became aware of an emergency housing situation in my district with a constituent. I connected that individual with the department, and I am pleased to report that the matter was able to be resolved successfully. I later got a message from the individual, thanking the staff for their assistance, and I can tell you that it was a positive difference in their life with that decision.

I know that the men and women who work in our government departments work very hard to help improve the lives of Islanders, and it's not always a thankful task. So, today, I just want to extend thanks to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities and his department for everything that they do.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Hon. N. Jameson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to rise today. Welcome back to all my colleagues here in the House, thank you to those who are attending here in the gallery, and hello to all those tuning in from across the Island, but specifically in District 9 Charlottetown-

Hillsborough Park; obviously, the greatest district on PEI.

This is a busy week in Island schools. Teachers across the province are working on their final assessments and starting to prepare for report cards. Parent-teacher interviews are happening on Thursday and Friday, so these are really two full days for our teachers; a very important opportunity to connect with parents and guardians.

[1:15 p.m.]

Finally, this is also kindergarten registration week for the Public Schools Branch. So, if your child is eligible to start kindergarten next September, this is the week to get them registered either by going online to your school's website or by contacting the school administration directly. It's important, of course, for families to register for kindergarten so that we can properly prepare and plan for the next year.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

I don't get up to do greetings much, but I'll start off and welcome everyone in the gallery. It's nice to see you. Secondly, to the residents of Stratford-Keppoch, D6, thanks for tuning in.

I'm getting up today because it's my mother's birthday. To embarrass her, I'm going to do greetings today. Happy birthday, Mom.

Speaker: I thought you were going to sing.

[Laughter]

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. J. Burridge: I won't sing. That would be way more than what any of us can handle in here.

While I'm up here, I have to say hello to my grandmother, Rose Cheverie, Nanny Rose, and a dear friend of our family, Anna Mae Mullally, that tunes in every day.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just want to welcome everybody to the proceedings today and everybody watching at home, especially those in District 21 Summerside-Wilmot. We all know what the greatest district is, but someone stole the thunder, so we won't use that today.

I just wanted to let everybody out there know about the 44th annual swearing in of the junior mayor and council today in Summerside, this evening, at 6:30 in council chambers. My time on council, it was my favourite time to see the kids come in from the junior high and from the high school, come in and get sworn in. It's a little different this year; my nephew's one of them.

Also, out there, the deadline, November 27th, is coming close for entering in the Santa Claus Parade in Summerside. I just want to make sure that we get as many floats in that parade as we can. It's always a great show put on by the fire department.

One other thing I want to bring awareness to is Summerside resident Amy McFeely, who works at a school. She went out on her own to procure hockey gear for a couple of young students. They secured some ice time so they can get on and try hockey and all that. If anybody out there has some extra hockey gear for young kids 10 to 12 years old, reach out. I can get you in touch with her.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today to bring greetings to the wonderful constituents of District 24 Evangeline-Miscouche.

C'est toujours un plaisir de se lever pour saluer les résidents de la circonscription Évangéline-Miscouche. Je ne le fais pas

souvent, mais je veux vraiment mentionner le fait que j'apprécie leur support et leur appui dans le travail que je fais au niveau du district.

It's always a pleasure to rise and bring greetings to the residents of Evangeline-Miscouche. I don't do it often, but I really want to mention how much I appreciate their support in the work that I do for the district.

I know that most of my constituents are busy with many different events or activities, especially when we are entering the most festive time of the year for a lot of people, but I would like to commend the organizers and volunteers of last week's Christmas fair that took place at the Village Musical up in Abrams Village. Many vendors and shoppers took part in this wonderful fair. They had many vendors with fresh baked items and many artisans selling the most creative items. This year's fair was a real success. Congratulations to all that took part in that fair.

I would also like to send a shout-out to all the wonderful ladies and gentlemen from the St. Philippe and St. Jacques Parish Hall, who are busy making over 1,000 meat pies for their parish fundraiser. They do this activity every year and if they had more time and more hands, they could sell even more. A huge congratulations goes out to them for taking the time every year to do this and to take this task on. And Madam Speaker, they're among the best meat pies on PEI.

Also, a huge hello to Paula and Ernest Gallant of St. Raphael. They are faithful watchers of the legislative proceedings. The Premier had the honour of meeting them during our campaign in April and they were very grateful for his visit. Paula has been living with cancer for a number of years now, but she is the most positive person that I know. Keep going, Paula; you are a real trooper. I'd like to say a special hi to Paula and Ernest, who I know are watching today, and also to my Aunt Irene, who is a faithful watcher of the Legislative Assembly.

[1:20 p.m.]

Last but not least, my last shout-out goes out to the Club Richelieu Evangéline, which is a group of individuals that do a lot of fundraising. They do support the youth

groups throughout the province. They were able to share over \$15,000 in the last couple of weeks with different youth groups throughout this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

I, too, would like to welcome everybody in the gallery: Barb, Stephanie, and Michele from the PEI Nurses' Union, and of course everybody else. Lovely to see you all here.

I would also – at risk of being taunted into singing also, like the Minister of Finance – want to wish my son, Dan, a happy birthday today. Dan turns 30 today. Actually, my baby turns 30 today. He happens to be home on the Island at the moment. He lives in Toronto, but he's here today and he's having lunch with his big brothers somewhere. Probably Maid Marian's, I would guess, but I don't know. Anyway, happy birthday to you, Dan. You're much loved and it's lovely to have you here at home.

Also, today is National Housing Day and at the end of the day – I think it was last weekend – we'd had a rough day. Somebody in our office who shall remain nameless, but sits right in front of me, said, "That was a difficult day, but I'm going home now. I'm going home to my house now. Imagine if you were having a rough day and you had nowhere to go home to." I don't know why, but it was a moment when that really struck home to me.

Probably many of you who came into the House today noticed that somebody had written "homeless" on the pathway on the way into the Legislature here. I think we sometimes forget in our privilege that being able to go home offers us a sense of stability and physical stability to deal with all of life's challenges. If you are without a home, it just makes life so very, very difficult. Housing is not just a basic right, it's absolutely essential to our wellbeing.

So, on this National Housing Day, I'd like us all just to pause for a minute and remember those who are without homes and

what an incredible challenge that places on them day after day after day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome all my colleagues back here, as well as those in the gallery, nice to see you, and of course, everyone watching from District 18 Rustico-Emerald.

Today I was at the funeral of Rev. Barb Wagner and it was a really beautiful celebration of life with some great music. I was privileged to sing in the choir, and I reconnected with some people I hadn't seen in a long time. One of them was George Mason. He's a person with a lot of knowledge. One of the things he's always said: Is it "Our Father who art in heaven," or "Our Father which art in heaven"? That's something perhaps I can refer to the Legislative Assembly staff for them, the grammar on that one. But he claims it's "which."

At the funeral, Mark Douglas was there, a constituent of mine who plays the pipes and he just did a fantastic job again today.

Speaking of pipers, I wanted to talk about Dancing with the Stars this year. I know the Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe has danced with the stars in the past, as have I, as has Peter Bevan-Baker – or sorry, New Haven-Rocky Point. I'm sorry about that, Madam Speaker.

This year there were a couple of constituents: Susan Doucette who did a fantastic job with a very colourful costume and dance from District 18, and Peter McDougall, who's also a piper, did a fantastic job. I should mention that Eric MacPhail who is, of course, Anne Zakem's son – my girlfriend – Eric MacPhail got the Judge's Choice Award, which is basically winning the event. So, I wanted to congratulate him officially on the record. Of course, together they raised tens and tens of thousands of dollars for Hospice PEI. It's such a great organization.

I also wanted to recognize pipers Ryan and Sarah Simpson. At Remembrance Day ceremonies, of course pipers are a staple both in North Rustico and Cavendish. Matt MacLean does an amazing job in North Rustico every year. Either Ryan or Sarah plays at Cavendish on the cliffs overlooking the water; usually a stiff breeze. Sarah did a fantastic job this year.

But they also did a presentation in at the visitors' center: *Canadian Pipers and Pipe Tunes on the Western Front*. This was a lecture and a bagpipe recital. I didn't catch all of it, but it's incredible. I'd encourage anybody here that if you want to have that come to your district, just reach out to them.

[1:25 p.m.]

Lastly, Madam Speaker – thank you for bearing with me – one of the favourite hockey organization for the Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, the Mid-Isle Matrix, were at the Monctonian last weekend and they did very well across the front. My son was playing on the U15 team. They finished 1-1-1, but narrowly lost in that one tie and almost made the quarterfinals, which is a big accomplishment. But the Western Rebels were tied for fourth out of 12 teams. That's the new U16 team on the Island in that organization, and the Kensington Wild went right to the semi-final and had a narrow loss there.

Kudos to them and that great hockey organization.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. member's not going to need his member statement today.

B. Trivers: I've got more to say. [Laughter]

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Welcome to those joining us in the gallery this morning and those watching from District 23 Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, especially Shirley MacArthur, who watches every day, I was told.

Also, on the way down, I stopped in to wish Marjorie Somers of Travellers Rest a very happy 100th birthday, but she must have been out celebrating, I guess. She wasn't home. I'll just say happy birthday, Marjorie.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I do want to recognize Charlottetown-West Royalty. When I was in Dancing with the Stars, the member actually beat me; much better dancer.

I do want to recognize a business in District 10, Shaw's Towing, which you probably don't want to be recognizing them because I needed their services last night. I was down in the hon. environment minister's area for a hockey practice with four young ladies who were having a hockey practice, and on the way back, we blew a tire right in Cherry Valley.

Thank you to Shawn who, in moments – the very quick phone call – showed up and got me back to Winsloe safe and sound. So, I just wanted to thank Shaw's Towing and the great work that they do.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

As always, it's a pleasure to rise here this afternoon in the Legislature and say hello; a shout-out to everybody right across the province, but certainly the ones in District 26 Alberton-Bloomfield, the best district in PEI.

With that though, I think it's always interesting that we hear so many ones in here stand up and refer to their district as the best. That is as it should be because it shows the pride and the honour that each one of us has in this Legislature in representing the residents in our area.

Certainly, want to say hello to all of ones in the gallery here; ones from the PEINU, always great to see you.

Last evening, I had the honour to attend – this is a bit of a mouthful – the Canadian Technical Asphalt Association meeting and banquet. It's the first time that the CTAA has been hosted here in the province since 2006. At that time, the Minister of Transportation was also from the western part of the province, Gail Shea. It was interesting speaking with ones from right across the country and attendees at the CTAA. There were ones there from the US, there were ones there from right across Canada, but the comment made was – and they do have this conference every year – that the only time that a minister of transportation in any area of the country has ever attended has been in Prince Edward Island, back in 2006 and again last evening.

I also want to give a shout-out to the staff from my department who were involved in the organization of the conference. The feedback that I received from ones, again, from right across the country and from the States was just that it was a fantastic event and that it was organized so well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and I'd like to welcome everyone in the gallery today. I'd like to welcome all those who are watching from all across the Island, but especially from District 22.

I would like to mention with Michele here in the gallery, I did attend the GRAND-Families meeting last night in Cornwall, which was an honour for me to be there. Thank you for having me. It was lovely to meet those grandparents. I've met them in the past; it was wonderful to see them again. We had a lovely speaker there last night who was sharing her story as a grandchild raised by her grandparents. Anyway, it was a lovely evening and so it was a pleasure to be there.

[1:30 p.m.]

Also, today is National Housing Day, a day to recognize work done and work that still

needs to be done to improve access to safe and affordable housing for everyone in Canada. As the MLA for Summerside, District 22, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize LifeHouse Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing in Summerside for all the wonderful work that they do. Because of their work, women and children seeking a safe shelter and transitional housing can find that right in Summerside, District 22.

The service LifeHouse provides is very important for Prince County. I would like to recognize the founders, Margie Fowler, Susan DesRoche, and the manager there now, Jody Sentner, as well as Adam Binkley from the Summerside Boys and Girls Club, also known as the BGC Prince County, for all the hard that they do. I'm proud to show off today the Heroes of Housing t-shirt and thank them –

Speaker: Hon. member –

Hon. B. Ramsay: Isn't it beautiful?

[Interjections]

Hon. B. Ramsay: Oh, I can't do that? Sorry, I was told I could.

An Hon. Member: You can't talk for more than 45 seconds.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Sorry, can't do that, Madam Speaker. I apologize for that. I thought I could. But anyway, I'd like to thank the Boys and Girls Club of Summerside, and I'd like to thank the sponsors and the Province of Prince Edward Island for their support on this project.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: Hon. members, I know you probably all want to be here until the New Year, but could we please limit our greetings to 45 seconds?

[Interjections]

Speaker: There have been a number of people here who went over. If you have a lot to say, do it in a member's statement or a minister's statement please. We do have work to do and I'd like to see it accomplished.

I'd also like to say that District 4 is the very best district on PEI. [Laughter]

Thank you.

Statements by Members

Chair: See? I'm going to cut them off today.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Buns & Things Bakery

S. Dillon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Normally, my member statements are pretty quick and today I wrote a bit of a longer one, so I'm a little bit nervous. [Laughter]

I rise today to highlight Buns & Things Bakery, a local bakery in Charlottetown, formerly in Sherwood. It began in 1987 with Rob and Elaine Deblois. It started as a wholesale bakery supplying local restaurants and hotels with bread and other baked goods but grew into a bakery that provided "buns and things" to all. A Sunday Special always found its way to our table during Sunday dinner.

Raising three boys found me to be a regular at Buns & Things. But not just me; I remember a time when one of Andrew's friends was visiting, and I was making cinnamon buns. We were in the kitchen chatting when this young boy informed me that his mom also made homemade cinnamon buns. Her homemade cinnamon buns were picked up at Buns & Things.

And Madam Speaker, she wasn't wrong. I always remembered when Alex and Luke spent their summers at Belvedere Golf Course. I would offer to make breakfast before they left. They declined. When I growled about breakfast being the most important meal, they informed me that they eat at the golf course because they make the best toast. I was curious as to find out how to make the best toast when I discovered that the best toast was made because of the bread from Buns & Things and that Buns & Things was the supplier of Belvedere Golf Course bread. There would be many children in our communities that would share similar stories.

In addition to baked goods, they offer a selection of pre-made meals and a deli counter with delicious homemade subs and sandwiches.

In 2014, Rob and Elaine's son Bill returned to PEI to work in the family business. In 2017, Bill became an owner-operator after his parents' retirement from the business.

Rob and Elaine opened the bakery in 1987 with hard work, quality products, and a community focus. They grew this bakery into a thriving business and an icon in our community. Today, their son Bill continues with these same values. He continues to work hard and persevere through difficult times. He has expanded to open a second store, Cakes by Buns & Things. Bill has continued to be a strong supporter of our community. He understands the importance of giving back in many areas, as Bill is also the past president of the Chamber of Commerce and continues to sit on that board.

I always knew that Buns & Things was a great product, Madam Speaker, but I am inspired from what I hear in the community. Their generosity is overwhelming. They support our local schools' breakfast programs, local charities, as well as not-for-profits, and those are just a few things that I know about.

[1:35 p.m.]

Times are difficult, but this community business has maintained its dedication to our community for over 36 years and I can only hope that there are 36 more years to come.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Barriers to Accessing Maple

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Starting with my nomination speech in the 2011 provincial election, I have been an advocate for telemedicine and using technology to allow remote primary care. When the previous administration finally brought forward the Maple service, this was a huge step forward.

While canvassing during this year's spring election, I received great feedback from users of Maple, especially young Island families – with or without a family doctor – that found it efficient and convenient as a primary care stepping stone. In particular, the ability for Maple to refer patients to in-person physician appointments when needed was working well.

However, it seems that as the desire to use the Maple service has expanded, the ability to access it has declined. I had a constituent contact me recently who tried to access Maple unsuccessfully for four days in a row, being told each time, "Maple has cancelled your consultation due to high volume." She eventually went to the emergency department and waited for seven hours to see a doctor and get the prescription she needed.

Also, people with family doctors must still pay for access to Maple, even though our government promised that it would pay for access for all.

Reportedly, the problems with Maple are due to the inability to call on doctors from other provinces, budget, and red tape. All very solvable, and I have faith that they will be solved soon under this minister's leadership.

I still firmly believe that telemedicine will play a huge role in the future provision of both primary and specialist care, and I have introduced a motion to the Legislative Assembly to that effect. Audio and video consultation through services like Maple is just scratching the surface; connected devices exist that allow for more fulsome examinations, and Islanders should have access to them as soon as possible to help solve our primary medical care crisis.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mental Health Supports for Youth

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise today to bring attention to a matter of utmost importance that has been raised by a perceptive high school student within our

province. This young individual has expressed compelling concerns regarding the mental health challenges faced by students within our schools.

Ava Allain's insights shed light on the pressing need for increased attention around resources and support for mental health initiatives tailored to the unique experience of our Island youth. As we hear the voices of the next generation, it becomes imperative for this government to acknowledge and address the mental health concerns affecting our students.

Ava Allain is an Island high school student who is part of Mr. Trainor's political studies class, gathering meaningful projects. As part of Ava's project, she shared her thoughts and insights about an important issue on PEI: the mental health of high school students.

I'm going to read her words exactly as she provided them just last night:

"One emerging issue I see in PEI is mental health issues in people in high school. The lack of support right now is an issue that keeps arising and is very concerning. Mental health issues are a significant concern in Prince Edward Island as they are everywhere. Many individuals struggle with anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders.

"Unfortunately, there's a perception that the support available on PEI isn't meeting the needs of those who are affected. This can be due to the lack of resources, long wait times for therapy, or a shortage of mental health professionals. It's essential to continue advocating for improved mental health services and support to ensure everyone who needs help can receive it.

"In my personal opinion, improving mental health support could involve a few steps. We could increase the funds which could help be able to hire more professionals to reduce wait times for therapy and provide resources for those struggling. It's also crucial to spread awareness of mental health issues so people are aware and don't feel alone.

"Ever since the pandemic started and ended, people are feeling more isolated and struggling even more than before. Even with our modern technology at our fingertips, we still have people feeling alone and needing to be able to speak face to face about their issues. More care needs to be provided for people in need. Even creating support groups in the community or even in high schools across the Island for people my age or around the same age as my peers can have more support in high school.

"I would propose that you give these ideas serious thought and support with a possible implementation target for the beginning of 2024."

I ask the government to give serious consideration to Ava's recommendations and take steps to help them work through the many challenges they face every day.

[1:40 p.m.]

Thank you, Ava, for your important words. I am listening.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question for the Minister of Health. Everyone knows that our province is in the middle of a worsening crisis in mental health care. It's a challenge that affects nearly every family on Prince Edward Island, and quite frankly, it's heartbreaking. I have met with many people who badly want their family member to get treatment, and yet the care we should rely on just is not there.

Yesterday, I asked the minister about acceptable wait times for detox services. Of course, no answer. Frankly, I'm beginning to think that this government is worse than do-nothing. I'm beginning to think that this

government has no answers to the great challenges that we face here on Prince Edward Island.

Access to mental health care

My question: Are the current levels of service for community psychiatric services acceptable to this no-answer minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank the member for the question.

Obviously, mental health is a big file. We've done a few things over the last couple of years to improve services. In talking with the department, those who are the wait list, we do regularly check on them to ensure, when they're on the wait list, how they're doing. It's a constant monitoring of that wait list that we do have. We do have lots of services such as the mental health walk-in clinics that are very effective, that were stood up two years ago.

So again, I would acknowledge that we continue to work on the mental health file, and we will continue to do so.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

To the same no-answer minister: Are the current levels of service for community mental health services acceptable?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

How do I say "acceptable"? It would be a judgement call on a lot of people. We do have the intensive mental health day program that we stood up this year in January, and we had 81 participants take that program. It's very effective; it allows people to stay at home.

During my tour actually, they were the first booking at Hillsborough Hospital. It was supposed to be a solution-based tour, but basically, they just wanted to talk to us to tell us how effective it's been and to continue to do it, and possibly look at expanding that program.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The facts are available. So, if the no-answer minister is unwilling to provide information, I will do my best.

According to the most recent Health PEI Annual Report, about one in five people are receiving community mental health services within a seven-day period. That seven-day period is the target set by Health PEI. Therefore, this minister is failing people and families who need community mental health services. More than 78 percent of the time, he is failing them. It's a terrible performance, but even more, it's an absolutely tragic response to the heartbreak felt by so many.

How can this no-answer minister justify such a poor and inadequate response to the very real needs of so many Islanders who want help?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I think I'm doing a pretty good job of answering these questions.

I think it's also important to recognize – although they continue to criticize the mobile mental health units – the volume that that service is doing. I've mentioned it before in the House: my other counterparts in the other provinces were quite amazed that we were able to stand up that program and service people, especially after discharge, that we follow up with over 1,000 Islanders every year after they leave the hospital, which is scientifically the most

critical time to maintain contact with these patients.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Another question that really was no response from a no-answer minister.

As I said, my views on this government are now shifting. I'm starting to realize that the do-nothing approach of this government is due entirely to this government's inability to answer any of the challenges that we face here on Prince Edward Island. Maybe it's a lack of imagination. Maybe it's an inability to truly comprehend the challenges that we face.

In 2022-2023, nearly 70 percent of Islanders seeking community psychiatric services were not helped within a seven-day period. Again, this is such a poor record; such a failure, so sadly, that it hurts so many people across Prince Edward Island.

[1:45 p.m.]

Minister: How is this acceptable?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question.

Again, making a listing of some of the things that we've done just in the last 24 months include the intensive mental health day program, the structured housing, the expanded Lacey House, emergency short-stay clinic, which is going to be open, and of course, our mobile mental health.

So, I would disagree. I think we're doing as much as we can on the mental health file, and we'll continue to do so.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yesterday in Question Period, I had asked the Minister of Health questions surrounding the graduate nursing retention incentive bonuses. He couldn't tell us who had not received their payment, which I thought was rather astounding as a minister, but later that day in a media scrum, he said his department provided him with numbers, that they have it down to single digits who have not gotten their bonuses yet.

Nursing Recruitment Incentive Program (further)

Minister, do you still stand by that statement, that there's only been less than 10 graduates who applied and have not received their money?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do appreciate the question.

With a \$987 million budget, I'm sure I can't give you an answer on every spend within health care, but again, in checking the numbers, it is about 18 people that waited, but actually, pay day is today, so they're telling me that five or six will be dealt with. I do thank the member for the question because I've had three nurses reach out to me already today, and make sure that they're in contact, and we can work through this process. I thank the member for advocating for the nurses.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: So, it's 18. That 18 sounds like a little bit bigger number than being in single digits. In fact, I'm actually told it's closer to 30 that have not received a cheque. Now, maybe they might get some today. I also find it rather astounding that this minister thinks that \$13,000 or \$18,000 or \$16,000 is a trivial amount of money. It's a lot of money to a graduate, I can tell you that.

Minister, I had asked you questions on nurse grads that applied for the incentive program, and you were unaware of those numbers. Do you know, actually, how many did apply out of – we know 18 now haven't received any money, but how many did apply?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do appreciate the question.

Absolutely do we want to pay these nurses. It's frustrating to hear when they're not getting paid in a timely fashion. I want to be very clear – both the union and Health PEI, I think they're both mad at me today – that I was not blaming anyone. Again, back to the comments that were in the media, I did say I am not blaming either party. It's just frustrating. Again, we have to respect the collective bargaining process and all the intricacies of that.

I do feel for those nurses. I would agree with you, we need to pay them as best we can because we want them to be happy and satisfied in their jobs.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Maybe I'll inform the minister that I think the number is actually about 55 that actually applied that are on that list. I don't know why that was such a hard number for the minister to find out.

Also during that media scrum, the minister stated that the reason for the delays in getting these bonuses to graduates was because the union had collective agreements with Health PEI; stated that grads were caught between two collective agreements. I remember specifically him stating that in the media.

Does the minister know the difference between a collective agreement and a return of work service agreement, and can he explain why he feels that the PEI Nurses' Union is to blame for these grads not getting their bonus because of the collective agreement?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I'll restate, I was not blaming anybody. There were two groups; we had an employer and a union, and we want to follow all the rules of that process. It's unfortunate that some (Indistinct) the return of service agreement while the other collective agreement was in place, and then when it became time to issue the payments. We worked hard on that collective agreement. I'm very proud that we got it over the finish line.

Again, we do value our nurses. We want to work through them. We're going to work through these cases as best we can in partnership with the union and the employer.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, minister. I appreciate that you're not blaming them anymore, but you did blame them yesterday.

Minister, I'm also hearing your department has allowed each nurse graduate to determine where they want to fulfill their graduate return for work service agreement with Health PEI services. I'm also hearing that these nurses went to positions that there weren't really many shortages in, while numerous hard-to-fill full-time vacancies remain vacant, causing extra stress on where those shortages exist.

Can the minister confirm that besides full-time vacancies, that casual and part-time nursing vacancies filled by these nurse graduates are also eligible for the bonuses?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[1:50 p.m.]

As a former Minister of Health, the member should know that we are not the employer.

We do not direct hires; we do not make those hires. That question is not properly directed at me about where we put nurses within our system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Minister, as I recall, you are the minister responsible for Health PEI. That's your sole responsibility: the delivery of health care services to the people of Prince Edward Island.

Madam Speaker, this has become a complete debacle. It reeks of the previous minister's initiative of bonuses to RCWs by neglecting all the other hard-working professions. Now, one would think this government would learn from that particular mess, yet here we go again: another bonus, ill thought-out, ill delivered, inconsistent, and everyone, as we're seeing, are disappointed in you, minister. I've often used the argument saying, "Once bitten, twice shy." Surely you can figure this out a little bit.

Why would the minister and his department develop a program to incentivize nurse graduates to work at Health PEI but not develop a process where these grads would actually fill vacant and hard-to-recruit positions?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I think we all support incentive programs for certain job vacancies within our department. We're in a very competitive market. We've seen other jurisdictions leapfrog each other. We need to try to keep especially our Island graduates here, but also all our existing staff.

Incentives are very important. I think it's important to respect the collective bargaining agreement and try to work through with our unions, whoever they may be, to provide the best compensation. We all want the same thing. I want the same thing that the Nurses' Union wants: we want happy employees, we want satisfied

employees, and we want them to have great careers on PEI.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Madam Speaker, minister do-little over here seems to think that it's great to say these things, but you have to deliver on them.

In a recent press release, the PEI Nurses' Union stated it is concerned about the misleading information provided by the Minister of Health and Wellness recently.

Does he agree with this statement or can he clarify why they might put this in a press release by such a prestigious profession in our health care delivery in this province, minister? Explain this.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you.

Again, back to the former Minister of Health, obviously, when you do a media scrum, they don't use all your comments in the report, but I want to say I specifically remember saying I'm not blaming anyone. I want to be very clear on that. I was very clear about saying I'm not blaming anyone.

I feel for those nurses who want to get paid. They're tough emails to get and you want to help these people. We made a promise to them and we need to fulfil that promise. We need to work with our unions and with employer to make that happen.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question to the Minister of Health. I took a look at the patient registry this morning; over 35,000 people waiting for a family doctor, one in five Islanders. Since this government was elected, that number has soared. It's a disaster, and when both myself and 35,000 other Islanders look at it, we see

a government that is doing nothing to address access to basic health care.

Access to primary and emergency care

Question to the minister: What is an acceptable number of Islanders without a family doctor?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Obviously, the real answer is zero. We obviously know that. That's what we're trying to achieve. We've seen a lot of barriers come down. Very, very pleased of what the College of Physicians and Surgeons did on November 2nd in allowing licensure for seven countries. That is a huge issue. It actually helped solve our CaRMS residency placement issue, as well.

Kudos to our colleges that are bringing down barriers for us in order to increase that work pool. We used to have a pool of candidates this small; it's now this big. I think that's a great step forward for physician and health care recruitment.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Yeah, you can say that, and kudos to them for opening things up, but we've heard this year and year – for four years, I've heard this; we're doing this, we're doing this. The numbers keep growing. They keep tripling; they keep doubling. I'm looking at the nurses right now. From 2021 to 2022, nursing – NPs, RNs, LPNs – according to Health PEI, in 2021, 1,862; 2022-23, 1,847. It's going in the wrong direction, minister.

Will you confirm that the numbers are going in the wrong direction for our nurses in our system with Health PEI, minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[1:55 p.m.]

I think we've had this issue a little bit about kind of tracking. We even had a meeting with the union about interpreting those numbers with regards to full-time, casual, permanent, and all the classifications that they have. Again, all those barriers are being moved down. We've increased seats on the nursing side, we've opened up the IEN program. It should have done about five years, 10 years ago. It hasn't been done, but we're doing it now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: This was just reported on last week from Health PEI. How am I supposed to interpret this? It's one line. It says nurses.

Do you want the family physicians line? That doesn't get any better. It went from 126 family physicians down to 121. Please explain that line in this book because I don't understand it. Is it that people are working part-time, minister? Explain yourself.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's almost like a question of what time it is. It does change from that perspective. I know we've had a few family physicians move to hospitalist positions. They haven't left PEI. They're still within our system and they have that choice to make about how they want to serve within our system. Again, those numbers do change.

We have some positive recruiting numbers for this year. What excites me is the pathway. We're not fishing in the same pond anymore. We have a lot more opportunities to attract people to beautiful Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: You're doing a good job of starting to answer some questions now. We have family doctors moving to hospitalists.

My next question is: Why were there 76 people in the emergency room last night if we've got all these hospitalists in the QEH working? I don't understand it, minister.

What's the impact of the doctor shortage on the emergency rooms? Is it nurses? Is it family doctors moving? Is it them moving from hospitalists? What are you doing to solve this issue for Islanders? Sixteen-hour wait times is our goal. We're up to 75 hours people are waiting in that area to get into the hospital. What are you doing?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm not sure how to answer that question. I'm not a medical expert, but I don't believe our hospitalists actually work in our ER departments from that perspective.

We have seen massive population growth. I've said it before. At 6,000 people a year or whatever it is, we do require a new physician about every 80 days just to keep up with that influx of people. That's kind of an answer to your growing population – or patient registry, sorry. We are fighting against the current of population growth, there's no doubt.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, you know where all of them don't work, is the ICU in Summerside. How has that affected the pressures on the QEH? Minister, last year there were 96,000 visits to our emergency room. The year before that, it was 78,000. Why is this number ballooning? What are you doing to get it under control? And do you know the numbers at all?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I've got a pretty good stat for you. We went from 155,000 people on PEI in 2019 to 175,000. Everything from grocery store visits to ER visit to trips to the DMV are going up, sir. That's pretty easy math to do.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

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

Leadership roles in Health

Quick question to the Minister of Health: How many deputy and assistant deputy ministers of health are currently employed at the Department of Health and Health PEI, and has that number changed since 2019?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: I don't understand the premise of the questions. I will stand here forever and defend our staff at Health PEI. I can assure you that every single day, my deputy is the first person in the parking garage at this facility every single day. I can assure you that my two assistant deputies are also some of the last two to leave. We have a strong staff both at Health PEI and Department of Health and Wellness and they work their tails off.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I find it really difficult to believe that the minister responsible for health on Prince Edward Island does not know that number.

Hon. C. Deagle: He just told you.

Hon. H. Perry: He doesn't know the number at Health PEI. He did not say it. He said in his department. I asked –

[Interjections]

Speaker: Members.

Hon. H. Perry: Maybe I'll ask the question again. So, I said the Department of Health is what he answered. Are there any at Health PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Excuse me, I didn't really hear the full question. We can get into titles and our executive leadership team at Health PEI. There are directors, there are leaders of physician care, medical affairs, and so on and so forth. I can table the org chat if that's what the hon. member wants.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[2:00 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: I'm going to ask it officially: Will you table in this House a list of the deputies and the assistant deputies in health, all of health, and their titles and their salary levels?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I really don't understand the line of questioning. I guess we're questioning the management of our health system again. I would say these are hardworking people –

Hon. H. Perry: You said you were going to table it; table it.

Hon. M. McLane: The org chart. I'm sure it's probably even in the annual report for anything.

We do have a good staff there. They're trying to run our system. It's over 6,000 employees, so we need a strong executive leadership team. They do a great job, and they do work 24/7, seven days a week.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Reporting and contracts from outreach centre (further)

Question to the Minister of Housing: We have asked for the monthly incident reports from the outreach centre. Has the minister brought these back yet?

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

Hon. R. Lantz: No, Madam Speaker, if I'd brought them back, they'd have them in their hands, but it's something that we're working on. I told you that there are some privacy concerns. It'll take some time to go through those. We want to make sure there's no identifying information. I'm sure that we'll have that in due course, but it's something that's going to take time and effort.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

For the past two weeks, I've sat here listening to consistent questioning on concerns about my community. The Community Outreach Centre is in my community. The challenges are felt by myself, my family, and my neighbours. I don't just drive by. I don't just drive in. I live there, day in and day out. I do not represent one person or one Facebook page. I represent my whole community.

And we want solutions. Closing the centre is not a solution. The individuals who use the centre will not just disappear if we close it. They need help, and our community needs solutions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

K. Bernard: So, today, I'm here to talk about some.

Transitional housing

Question to the Minister of Housing: The number of people experiencing homelessness is growing exponentially. When will we see an increase to transitional

housing that will provide safe and consistent housing for unhoused Islanders?

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

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great question. I really appreciate it.

Our emergency shelters, particularly the Park Street shelter, was a response to a situation on the ground and it was something urgent that had to be done. I think we recognize now that emergency shelter is a last resort, and that if we can prevent people from using emergency shelters, they've got a better chance of recovering and getting back into stable housing in the community.

We're very much focused on supportive and transitional housing now. We're working hard to procure more spaces and I hope to have some announcements about that in the future, but certainly I recognize the premise of your question, first of all, and I want you to know that we're concentrating on that and working hard in that direction.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I appreciate that and look forward to those announcements, sooner rather than later.

This isn't the only thing that government is failing at to support vulnerable Islanders. We need more acute mental health supports. Wait times for detox are far too long. I've heard from individuals who were told when they called that they'd need to wait weeks or even months. When people are ready to get help, help has to be there now. There are not enough beds and there are not enough transitional addiction services to help Islanders recover after detox.

Question to the Minister of Health: Will you immediately add detox beds and resources to the transitional units and staff them appropriately?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I agree that we do have a crisis on our hands in terms of drug use and mental health on PEI. When you're in the health file, you learn some things, such as the prevalence of fentanyl. When it hits any province, the deaths and harm skyrocket. Last year in the US alone, they seized enough fentanyl to kill every American citizen, so you can understand the potency of that drug.

When I visited the outreach centre, I did come home to my kids and I said you just can't experiment anymore. The cliff is too close to what you do. So again, we recognize there are challenges in mental health and addictions on PEI. It's come to our shores. I'm confident that we can continue to support those people who need it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[2:05 p.m.]

That was not even – I appreciate that you understand that, but that wasn't my question.

My community is also dealing with public drug use and dangerous drug paraphernalia, like needles being left in our public spaces. You know what could actually help? Something that's been proven time and time again to decrease public drug usage, something our Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Morrison, has told us she supports and that our province needs: an overdose prevention site.

Overdose prevention site

Question to the Minister of Health: When will you identify another location for an overdose prevention site to help my community stay safe from dangerous drug paraphernalia and make sure that people don't die of drug overdose?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the member for the question.

I can't emphasize enough how important an OPS is to support those people on Prince Edward Island. We were disappointed that our application was not accepted. This is a valuable service; it does save lives.

Back to your comments about when they're ready to get treatment, even them participating in an overdose prevention site is an indication to us that they're not willing to give up yet, and that they want to stay as healthy as they can while they're using until they're ready to make that big step.

I would agree with the importance of an OPS site. It's evidence based and it's proven to save lives.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Today is National Housing Day, and yesterday, in our response to the Capital Budget, I emphasized that a government that continues to pursue aggressive population growth without an associated plan for meeting expanded housing, health care, and education needs is creating a recipe for disaster. We just heard the minister say we need a new GP every 80 days.

With current rates of population growth for which – I will remind this House – this government has no plan to deal with whatsoever, we need to build at least 2,000 new units of housing every year, and that's just to maintain the awful situation that we currently have, with vacancy rates being very low, skyrocketing rents, and housing crises.

Addressing the housing crisis

Question to the minister responsible for housing: What strategies beyond building new units, which take time and cost a lot of money, is your government putting forward to address the housing crisis on Prince Edward Island right now?

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

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

It's a loaded question. I could stand here and speak for an hour, probably. Let's let the Capital Budget speak for itself. We're increasing our capital spend by about 30 percent over last year's previous five-year estimate.

I was criticized in this House in the spring that quarter 1 for housing starts in this province were low. I can say that we've had great quarters 2 and 3, and we're on track. Quarter 3, in fact, is the best quarter for housing starts in this province in about 40 years, matched only by quarter 3 in 2019.

There are many things happening. Housing is a complex issue to increase starts. There are many facets that we need to work on. Certainly, the labour constraints is one that's very important that we also need to focus on, but we are moving in the right direction with programs, services, investment, money. This government is responding, and we're starting to see results.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, your first supplementary.

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

Well, the results I'm seeing are that we're falling further and further behind in meeting the needs of the growing population.

This is a government that has actively contributed to the housing crisis by failing to act on a rental registry, failing to act on essential repairs and maintenance on properties that they own and run, failing to act in the critical need for emergency shelters and transitional housing, failing to act on homelessness, failing to build more public housing; simply failing, for year after year after year.

To the same minister: Sure, there is more money associated this year than the pitiful amounts that most previous capital budgets have given us, but given this government's dismal record on actually getting things

done, why should Islanders have any confidence that this extra money will actually make any difference?

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

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

Again, this is something I could speak to at length.

[2:10 p.m.]

Let me say that we've built hundreds of new public housing units since 2019. We've purchased hundreds of new units. We are currently building hundreds of new units. The number of subsidized units in this province has doubled to almost 3,500; 3,500 subsidized units in this province.

We are making investments all across the board. The number of shelter beds in this province has gone from almost none to 105. We had very few supportive and transitional housing units here. We've got about 54 now. There are almost 40 under construction as we speak. We're moving ahead on all fronts, Madam Speaker. I could go on, but I see you checking your clock.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, your second supplementary.

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

We know that we need at least 2,000 units every year just to keep up. The number that the minister cited for third quarter, which I have not seen, and that 2019, the third quarter there, was the best – his best since then. It was 571 then. We're almost – we're in that ballpark for this quarter, but for the whole year, we are not.

We desperately need imaginative and bold solutions, not just investments to, as the Capital Budget put it, "start, complete, or initiate" – I have no idea what initiate means if it doesn't mean start – 560 new builds over the next five years. That's 112 builds per year, using my hon. member's great math skills, when we need over 2,000.

To the same minister: Our housing needs are immediate and they are severe. What is your government doing to leverage federal funding programs or our Housing Corporation assets or bringing forward regulatory changes which would make a difference, again, right now?

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

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

I believe that members of this House and maybe staff are in Ottawa right now meeting with federal Housing minister to see what we can do together.

We're looking at all kinds of innovative things. I can tell you that industry is responding in this province. It's incredible the way that private business will respond to needs on the ground. There are all kinds of interesting things happening in the construction industry to respond to the needs in this province based on the constraints that we have. And those constraints, by the way, are universal across the country. I would say that, certainly, labour is one of those. That's the same across Canada, but I understand that there is a shortfall between what we need and what we can provide. That's systemic and we're working to overcome those obstacles.

But we are tracking housing starts about equal to last year and the previous year. I think that would come to a surprise to some in this House who raised the alarm bells in the spring sitting of this Legislature.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

R. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have numerous constituents that have been on the family doctor wait list for years, which means they must use Maple, clinics, or emergency care for their health needs.

One of those constituents has been trying to access Maple for over a month now and each time they do their request for service, the appointment gets cancelled after

sometimes more than three hours due to volume. This doesn't seem to be a unique problem, as my hon. colleague here from Rustico-Emerald spoke about earlier in his member statement.

Access to Maple health app

My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness: How widespread an issue is accessing Maple for Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, member, for the question.

There's no doubt the utilization of Maple has almost doubled over the past year with about 2,000 visits per month. We do recognize the timeout issue, especially on Mondays and Fridays; I think seem to be the worst two days of trying to access the system.

I would remind everyone that it is actually eight to eight on Wednesdays on Thursdays. My family has had some good experience on getting through after supper on Wednesdays and Thursdays. I'll probably create another bubble by even mentioning that, but again, it does have its surges in the system. It's not a replacement to primary care. I want to emphasize that. It is just one of the doors into our health care system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Health and Wellness for that information.

[2:15 p.m.]

The backlog on Maple is from Islanders who do not have a family doctor and those who do have a family doctor but cannot get appointments to see them. I am hearing these concerns from people right across the province. These wait times are unacceptable.

Minister of Health and Wellness, my question is: What is government going to do to alleviate these backlogs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question.

It's a good conversation to have about Maple. It's also important to note that there is a referral path through Maple to our primary access clinics in order for service. The hon. member did mention prescription renewal in his statement today. I think we still struggle to let the people know – even though Pharmacy Plus is quite well known, I still get the odd email about prescription renewal. So, I'd encourage people to check with their pharmacist before they do.

We understand that the capacity of the system is definitely increasing, and we need to keep working on it. Some of our regulatory pathways will maybe expand our employment pool to provide that service in the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There are more and more platforms like Maple being used by Islanders to access some level of health care. The problem is that when people start doing it in larger numbers, the result is that it bogs down the system and just ends up becoming somewhat of a digital waiting room.

If we want more Islanders to use services like Maple, we have to make sure that they are working well when Islanders need them. If we don't, then this problem will only get worse, which increases the pressure across our entire health care system, including our fire departments and emergency medical services.

Question to the Minister of Health: At what point can Islanders using Maple expect to see some of these backlogs get cleared up?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you for the question.

We have actually onboarded another five additional physicians to help with the volumes of Maple. They still maintain their contractual obligations with Health PEI, so it's extra work for them, so to speak. I think it's important to recognize Atlantic Registry now that those physicians can now provide virtual care in four other provinces. Boy, we'd like to see that expand across the country because I think some places like northern Ontario or even the Northwest Territories with rural physicians with smaller practices maybe able to help on virtual care on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Our harness racing industry generates millions of dollars of economic activity for the province each year. There's the spend by the trainers, the owners, there's the spend by people attending the races, and there's spend from related services like farriers, veterinarians, and local feed stores.

Growth of harness racing industry

Question to the Minister of Finance: Does the Province remain committed to growing the economic activity and spinoffs from the Island harness racing industry?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

Harness racing on PEI is recognized as a cultural event and industry that we're supporting and have supported in the past. That will continue going forward.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Race dates are split between the two tracks in Charlottetown and Summerside, with about 28 of the dates out of over 100 dates happening in Summerside this season. Some have said that there's room to grow this market even further in Summerside.

Question to the Minister of Finance: How is the Province working with Red Shores and the industry to develop the harness racing market even more in Summerside?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burrige: I think where this lands is in the hands of the PEI Harness Racing Industry Association. That's why that was created. They can look to develop the industry and do exactly what you're saying you want to see done. That's where the Province would hand that responsibility, for them to grow it, in connection with Prince County Horsemen's Club, up your way. That's where the responsibility of that lies.

Thanks.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, your second supplementary.

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I think that a reasonable solution can be reached here. Adding some dates later in the season, like November, would complement other efforts to grow the shoulder season which would benefit the economy even further.

Question to the Minister of Finance: What will you do to help reach a positive outcome for the industry and have more race dates in Summerside at Red Shores?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

[2:20 p.m.]

We want to see everyone succeed in this industry, obviously. I was updated on this

and I think there was one race date added this year, and I think two race dates added next year. I think the way that's handled is between the PEI Harness Racing Industry Association and, say, Prince County. So, they sign a contract. They make an agreement and sign a contract.

So, again, those pieces are handled by the industry association. If there's disagreement or if the industry association isn't necessarily hearing Prince County, then I might have to take a look at it, but I would expect that the industry itself should be able to handle these pieces.

Thank you.

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

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

Question for the Minister of Justice: The minister admitted that the open drug use policy at the Charlottetown outreach centre was illegal. My question, again, was to the chief law enforcement office of this province, and the minister said this was illegal.

Open drug use at outreach centre (further)

As the Minister of Justice, do you have a responsibility to report illegal activity, and was this a crime?

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

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

As we wrap up the questions today, the question about the outreach centre and the drug use at the outreach centre is always an important topic and one that we are trying to address here. We support our Charlottetown police that are dealing with this.

At my recent FPTs, this was brought up by every minister across this country, about their situation and how they deal with drug use in their communities. It's frustrating for everyone, but it's not the addicts that we're trying to get. We're trying to help our

people with addictions, the most vulnerable people in our society, and we'll continue to do that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Statements by Ministers

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

Global Sustainable Island Summit

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We have learned a lot on Prince Edward Island since we started on our path to net zero. Staff in our department have studied best practices in other areas of the world, we have made important connections with leading-edge experts in climate change and in clean tech, and we want to share our knowledge with the world in return.

To that end, I am pleased to announce a partnership with Island Innovation. Island Innovation facilitates sustainable development and community-led change for islands worldwide. I spoke this year at their virtual summit that had 10,000 attendees including policymakers, academics, and NGOs.

I also spoke in person at their Blue Economy and Sustainable Islands Forum in Madeira this past June. I shared stories of PEI's leadership in wind and in clean tech. I shared our challenges with extreme weather, and coastal impacts of climate change. At the end of the event, I invited my colleagues from around the world back here to our province.

Prince Edward Island will host the first annual Global Sustainable Islands Summit in May 2024, in Crowbush.

The summit will bring together international researchers, policymakers, and industry leaders to discuss sustainable energy. With help from the Canadian Centre for Climate Change and Adaptation and UPEI Island Studies program, we will put on a world-class event.

Kings County is the ideal location for such an event. This builds on our recent partnership with UPEI to assess Georgetown as PEI's first net zero community. Understanding how towns use energy will help the community reduce carbon emissions and become more energy resilient. This will set a course for Georgetown to become the province's first net zero community. We will roll out the lessons learned in Georgetown to other communities across this province, and of course, we are moving along with the construction of the Eastern Kings wind farm, generating local clean energy from Kings County.

There are world-leading energy advances happening right here on Prince Edward Island, and I look forward to showcasing to the world our successes in 2024.

Thank you.

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

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

Firstly, this is a very exciting announcement and – next May, I believe it is – I'm looking forward to hopefully attending that summit.

Hon. S. Myers: (Indistinct)

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you very much.

[2:25 p.m.]

Also, I'm going to take this opportunity to say how grateful I am and how encouraged I am by some of the recent statements by the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

[Interjections]

P. Bevan-Baker: Indeed, it's a rare day in this Legislature. No, I mean this most sincerely. I've listened to the minister make statements on, most recently, the plastic issue that we're dealing with here and nationwide, and the situation that PEI finds itself in, and also his statements regarding how we have to start thinking long term and how some of the challenges that we face here on Prince Edward Island are very indicative of global challenges that we have

and how we can be, and actually in some ways are, a leader here on PEI.

The fact that we will be hosting the first ever Global Sustainability Island Summit is, I think, a perfect fit. I congratulate the minister for making that happen here on Prince Edward Island.

Islands are very instructive when it comes to dealing with limits. Our borders are defined, we know that we're not infinite, and for me, small Island states have often been the leaders around the world in dealing with environmental issues because of that understanding that there are limits.

For me, this summit holds the potential of dealing with the biggest policy challenge of our time, which is that we have two competing policies that we have accepted almost everywhere in government which is that we need to grow the economy and that we have to sustain the environment for future generations. Those two things sometimes work together, but sometimes they do not. Islands are a place where you see those limits and there are many examples of Island states that have collapsed because they overshot their limits.

Again, I realize I'm getting close to my time here, Madam Speaker, and I don't want to get slapped as I did yesterday, but perfectly appropriately. [Laughter] But I did want to take this opportunity to thank the minister. This is an exciting summit and I look forward to being there.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

211 Update/Reminder of Services

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and to do this statement.

We all need help sometimes and whether it is one of what life's smaller challenges like where to obtain a specific permit, or a crisis situation, 211 is there. 211 PEI is a free and confidential referral service that makes social, community and government

programs and services across the Island more accessible and easier to navigate for all Islanders.

It connects them to vital resources 24/7, 365 days a year, and it is available in more than 240 languages. 211 PEI refers Islanders to nearly 1,400 programs and services from more than 400 service providers. Just a few examples include addictions and mental health support, parenting programs, employment and training, disability supports, and supports for seniors to help them maintain their independence.

From April 2022 through March 2023, 211 PEI received more than 15,000 calls. There were more than 115,000 website visits. This service has been critical to Islanders through disaster responses, providing crucial information during both the COVID-19 pandemic and in the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona.

It is clear that 211 is there for Islanders in need of somewhere to turn. They can speak one-on-one with staff who take the time to truly listen, help them problem solve, and point them in the right direction for resources that will meet their needs.

211 is part of the Canadian 211 network. It is provided in collaboration with the United Way of Prince Edward Island, a trusted community partner who administers the service on behalf of this government. We share the commitment to making Island communities stronger and safer.

I am happy to say that government recently signed a three-year funding agreement with the United Way Prince Edward Island to ensure the valuable service will continue to thrive.

Life can be hard but finding help can be easy. Anyone can access their services any time by dialing 211 online or [pe/.2/1/1/.ca](https://211/1/1/ca).

[2:30 p.m.]

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And if anyone wants that clarified, I can do that.

Thank you.

Hon. S. Myers: 211.ca

Hon. B. Ramsay: 211.ca. Yeah? That'll do it? Okay. Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you for this.

Yesterday, the minister talked about no Island seniors that were hungry were calling her. It's because they're all calling 211. That's what happening.

This is an important service. This is way more important than anything on that page. This is a service that people can remember. Islanders can remember; just dial 211 if you need help. This government is lucky the United Way is there and took this on. I'm glad that they signed a three-year agreement and understand the importance of this because the United Way does so much in our community. On Friday night, they're fundraising until 11 o'clock at night at a basketball game.

Although we're funding this program, we have to do more for the United Way. I'm telling government right now to give them some more operational money because they do more than we know. I want to thank them for that.

This service for Prince Edward Island is really a game-changer. When people need the confidence to call somewhere, when they want to remain anonymous, they can dial 211. This is a great program in Prince Edward Island, so I thank the minister for this announcement.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister for bringing this forward today.

I would take it a step further. Not only is 211 critical to Islanders, it's critical to government because they do so much to get out the word, to help people navigate, and all those crucial things. I'm not sure what we would do without that 211 service.

I'm not sure how they keep up, honestly. The amount of things that they help with; more than 15,000 calls is incredible. I know

all we need sometimes is an ear and someone to help us navigate a system. That, I would say, is the most important thing that we can do for people. I can't say something like this without saying I can imagine how you feel when you're 211 and you're trying to help people navigate, when you get to a dead end, when there's not a service, when there's not a program there.

I'd like to thank the minister for this announcement. I'd like to thank 211 for their great work. A three-year funding agreement is so crucial for organizations. I know that often, our community organizations are funded through project-based funding, which just makes them jump through hoops and create the wheel all over again. Is that the right expression? They just keep doing the same things, when they know what would help the community, but they're forced to create a new project based on certain funding criteria.

I think this is super important and I'd love to see us do this to more community organizations. This is a great start.

Thank you.

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

National Housing Day and Closing Cost Support Program

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

Today marks National Housing Day. This year's theme is "Home is." It underscores the fundamental role that housing plays in the lives of Canadians.

For generations, home ownership was a rite of passage, a guarantee and common milestone of adulthood. Unfortunately, due to a tight housing market, large down payments, and high mortgage rates, it's no longer a guarantee for this generation. The Province of Prince Edward Island wants to help Islanders attain home ownership.

Through programs such as the Down Payment Assistance Program and the recently announced Rent to Own Program, we are helping Islanders who wish to move out of the rental market and into home

ownership. Today, I'm pleased to announce a new housing support program that will further assist low- to moderate-income Islanders looking to buy a house.

The new Closing Cost Support Program will provide Islanders up to \$2,500 towards the closing costs associated with the purchase of their first home, costs such as their insurance fees, legal fees and taxes. The program can be used in partnership with the Province's Down Payment Assistance Program.

To be eligible, applicants must be a citizen or permanent resident of Canada, be a first-time homebuyer, and have an annual household income of \$100,000 or less. Applications for the Closing Cost Support Program will be open December 1st through the Department of Housing, Land and Community's website.

Today's announcement, along with our continued investment in affordable housing construction for Islanders on the housing registry, programs and incentives to spur private housing development like the Housing Challenge Fund and the HST Rebate, and reducing red tape for the building and development process are some of the ways government is showing our commitment to creating a housing market that works for everyone.

[2:35 p.m.]

I want to take the time to recognize our many partners in housing, including federal and municipal governments, developers, non-profit organizations, landlords, and tenants. Housing is a shared responsibility and we need to work together to improve access to housing for everyone.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, and \$2,500 for closing cost is great if you can ever remotely get in the position to buy a house. That's what I'm hearing. People cannot even closely – they can't even go house shopping. It used to be such a thing that we did at a certain time. They can't do that because they can't afford it. They can't even fathom that.

So, this announcement is good on National Housing Day, when people get in, and I hope they enjoy the money, but it just shows the further “out-of-touchness” with this government. These programs are not there. We’re losing rental housing markets. In my community, we’ve got rental units moving to condominiums. It doesn’t make any sense. We have a lot of work to do, and this announcement is not going to cover it up on this side, and not going to cover it up for me.

I hope that people can take advantage of it, but we’re so far out of touch. We don’t have a housing plan for Prince Edward Island. We don’t have a housing plan. On National Housing Day, it would be nice if the minister could stand up and say that so we knew where we were going. That’s all I have to say.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I’d like to thank the minister for the announcement of this program. Home ownership is becoming increasingly the impossible dream, and as was mentioned, so many are just not even able to afford what would have been considered a starter home not that long ago; not that long ago at all.

People who are fortunate enough to have homes or have a roof over their heads, there was always, in my mind, with friends, this continuum: you buy your starter home and then you start to grow your family. There’s kind of been this trajectory that, really, we have taken for granted and that just doesn’t really exist anymore. At this point, you have a home and you stay there because you’re lucky to have that.

So, happy to hear another program. This is something that we’ve talked about, being able to support people in these costs. I guess, for me, the devil is in the details, looking at the eligibility criteria there, because I know from some other the other programs, people have reached out to me having been excluded for different reasons. So, I look forward to looking at this eligibility criteria, and thank government for bringing this forward. Let’s keep them coming.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

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

G. McNeilly: Madam Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table an article from today’s *Eastern Graphic* titled: “Society needs to keep moving forward, not backwards” and it points out that we need an anti-racism lens on legislation to ensure voices are respected and heard. I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Madam Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a copy of the letter I sent to my federal counterpart, Minister Sudds of Families, Children and Social Development, which asks to form a joint working group to assess the possible benefit and impacts of a guaranteed basic income program in PEI. I am also including the attachment sent along with the letter of Coalition Canada, a proposal for a guaranteed basic income benefit on Prince Edward Island. 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.

Reports by Committees

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As Chair of the Standing Committee on Rules, Regulations, Private Bills and Privileges, and following the receipt of a report on Private Bill No. 200 of the said committee on Tuesday, November 21st, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from

New Haven-Rocky Point, that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

K. Bernard: As a result of its deliberations, your committee is pleased to make the following recommendations to the Members of the Legislative Assembly:

1) Your committee, having considered Private Bill No. 200 (*An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate Amalgamated Dairies Limited*) finds it to be private in nature and recommends that the fee for the bill be set at \$80.00.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Government Bills

Motions Other Than Government

Orders Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, that the 10th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

[2:40 p.m.]

Committee Clerk (Lilley): Order No. 10, *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*, Bill No. 106, in Committee.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, 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 Morell-Donagh to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. MacEwen in chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*.

Hon. member, would you like to make a motion to bring a stranger to the floor?

Hon. H. Perry: I would. Thank you.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Robert Godfrey: It's good to be back. Robert Godfrey, director of policy and research for the Office of the Official Opposition.

Chair: Thank you.

Hon. members, we were in the middle of debating an amendment to subsection 3(3) of the bill. I have my list cleared.

Hon. member.

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

I have a question to the mover of this motion. On the deletion for the piece that we had in the original, the provision that government or the minister may support temporarily those businesses to transition and that, why did you remove that from your amendment?

Chair: The hon. Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population, will you entertain that question?

Hon. J. Redmond: Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the question.

We certainly want to help businesses when we make any kind of change that's going to impact them. This particular item here doesn't need to be within this bill because it doesn't need to be connected to law. We can set up programs and we certainly would want to look at programs and how we can support businesses when this moves forward.

Hon. H. Perry: But we had put it in our original amendment due to consultation –

again, primarily in this case – with the business sector and with the chambers that represent business right across the Island. This was something that, again, was in our draft, something we presented to them, something they really thought was helpful, especially to the smaller businesses in particular that might have some difficulty with very few employees and those that are open for only a shorter season.

How would your amendment support those businesses?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Chair.

[2:45 p.m.]

Again, with it not needing to be in this, or if it doesn't find itself in the legislation, we are committing that we will find ways to help businesses as we move forward through this.

Hon. H. Perry: So, you're saying today, and it's in Hansard – we can only take you for your word – that you will support businesses through this transition in some way, shape, or form?

Hon. J. Redmond: Can I just answer?

Chair: But your bill doesn't commit to any support though, right?

Hon. H. Perry: No –

Chair: So, you're asking a question (Indistinct) –

Hon. H. Perry: I'm asking about her amendment, and her amendment deletes the clause in our amendment that asks for financial support.

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

Hon. J. Redmond: One thing I can say to answer that is we would look to support any community group, organization, or business when we're putting bills forward. I would have to say, we would be looking back as a department, and a government as a whole, because it's not going to be one department

necessarily, that will find ways to support businesses going forward.

Chair: Promoter.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Chair.

I guess I'm only one person in here and one vote, let's say, but I know, again, back in the consultation process, this was something that we put in specifically to help those businesses. It's difficult whenever it's not in legislation for me to feel comfortable doing it. That's not to say I don't trust you and your abilities to look for ways to tell, but I would be more comfortable if in your amendment, it didn't delete that particular clause.

Chair: Are there any further questions on the amendment?

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I know we had a fairly lengthy discussion, I guess, yesterday on the actual practical implications of the amendment as it is currently worded and presented, and I'm wondering whether I can ask either the promoter or the stranger to give us their interpretation of what the impact of the amendment, as it's currently written, would have on the ability of Island workers to receive paid sick days.

Chair: Promoter, would you like to address that?

Hon. H. Perry: I'm not sure, which amendment are you referring to? The one that we're presently discussing?

P. Bevan-Baker: It's sort of an omnibus amendment if I could put it that way.

Hon. H. Perry: Well, right now, it's my understanding that we're discussing the amendment that was put forward by the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yes, and I think the first three parts of that – I don't have it in front of me, unfortunately – it was section 22-point – oh, maybe the Chair can help me.

Chair: There's quite a number of pieces of it.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I think it's the top section, Chair, where it's talking about after a year, one day, and then after two years, another day.

Can you give me your interpretation of practically what that would mean in terms of Island workers getting paid sick days?

Hon. H. Perry: What my interpretation is of this particular proposed subsection is that they wouldn't get – or be entitled to – three paid sick days until three years after employment began. That's my understanding of it. It would be accumulated over those three years, one each year.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Maybe this is a question for the minister who brought the amendments forward. It's silent; the amendments are silent on what happens following three years. I understand there are different interpretations of exactly what the amendment as written would mean, and I have a slightly different interpretation from the mover of the bill.

But can I ask the mover of the amendment, what would happen on year four? Can you ever accumulate more than three days? If you use three days' sick leave – let's assume the generous interpretation of the mover of the bill, that you have three paid sick days after three years – if you use them in year four, can you ever accumulate another sick day? Because the amendment is unclear to me on that.

Chair: Minister, would you like to address that?

Hon. J. Redmond: Yes. Thank you for the question. We did have a fulsome conversation yesterday, for sure, that probably everyone kind of got a little confused with.

[2:50 p.m.]

What we've put in is that the employee would be – it's an entitlement, so after one year of employment, you would get one after 12 months. After two years, you'd be entitled to two, and after 36 months, you'd be entitled to three.

Should you use – so, year four, you're working and you get ill, and you use your three days, the next year you get the three days. You're entitled to that. You're entitled to those benefits that you get as an employee.

If we use the other wording that we had talked about yesterday, carryover, it implies an addition, so three plus three plus three if you don't use them becomes – that's what carryover would have to meant to me as an employee in my past careers. I would have been like, oh, I get to keep adding.

But for an entitlement, they will always have three paid sick days per year after the 36 months of continuous work with that individual employer.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that's how the minister interprets these amendments. I'm not so sure. There is nothing, there is no provision in these amendments, nor if you add up the bill as amended, assuming this amendment would pass; it's silent on what happens after three years. Yes, it says after three years, you can accumulate up to three sick days, but if you use them in year four, there's nothing to suggest in there that in the next year, you will start to accumulate again. That, for me, is a big problem.

Can you absolutely assure the House – or I think perhaps we need a legal opinion on this because, again, it's silent on what happens in year four.

Chair: I'll ask the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population to talk about your legal help in drafting amendments.

Hon. J. Redmond: This has been reviewed legally extensively – we'll start there – and helping us work through this, for sure. When we say the employee is entitled and they have it, it's not like accumulated. For example, if they started employment on January 1, three years from that January 1, they have those three days. They don't have to accumulate them. You are given three days because that's what you're entitled to after 36 months of work. If you use them during that timeframe, you've had your three paid sick days, the next year, you have three paid sick days again because that's

what you've worked yourself to be entitled to.

P. Bevan-Baker: At the risk of going around in circles here –

Chair: No risk, we are.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. To me, there is nothing at all in the way that these amendments are written which actually confirms what the minister has just described. I appreciate that's how you interpret it, minister, but the scenario I have used, and the minister reiterated, around using all of your sick days in year four, there is nothing in this bill that provides me with comfort and confidence that in future years, further days would be accumulated.

I'm quite sure that that's the intention of what the minister wants to happen and I'm not doubting that, but I'd love a different explanation other than – if we use all the days in year four, can you show me in this amendment what clause tells me that in the next year of my employment – not year one of my employment, this is not year one of my employment – but in the subsequent year of my employment, I will get another sick day. Can you show me the clause?

Chair: Minister, would you like to address this again?

Hon. J. Redmond: In clause 4, it dictates entitlement. Entitlement means that they'll have that. So, after one year, you're entitled to the one day paid sick, entitled to, and such. I think that's all – I don't know what else to add to make it (Indistinct).

Chair: Shall the amendment carry?

Some Hon. Members: Carried.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Chair: I heard both sides. I'm going to ask for a show of hands.

All those in favour of the amendment, please raise your hand.

All those against the amendment, please raise your hand.

The amendment has carried.

Alright, members, we're on section 4.

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

[2:55 p.m.]

Hon. J. Redmond: I have an amendment that I would like to propose.

Moved that

1. Section 4 of Bill No. 106 is amended by the deletion of the words "on the earlier of a date that may be fixed by proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor in Council or 180 days after the date of Royal Assent" and the substitution of the words "on a date that may be fixed by proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor in Council".

Chair: Do you have copies?

Hon. J. Redmond: And (Indistinct) copies to be read.

Chair: Alright.

Members, copies of this amendment will be distributed.

Hon. H. Perry: Chair, do you mind if I ask a question on this amendment?

Chair: Yeah. Members, while it's being distributed, the promoter of the bill is just going to ask the minister for clarification.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much. That's exactly – what is the reason for this amendment to that particular section?

Hon. J. Redmond: We wanted to have a chance also to build good messaging, good supports, and appropriate regulations for this. In order to do that, those things do take time. We want to do what's good for Islanders and as soon as we can. Knowing that it does sometimes take some time to get businesses to appropriate regulations, we want to have that in place so we can ensure we do that well.

Hon. H. Perry: So, when you say supports, does that mean the financial support to businesses that may on a temporary basis have some difficulty?

Hon. J. Redmond: Supports would refer to all of the elements in this bill around communication and such that would go with that.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

We didn't pass section 3, right? We just passed the amendment?

Chair: That's correct. I need to go back and pass the full section after it was amended.

K. Bernard: I have an amendment for section 3. Would you rather me wait to present it until – right before you go to pass?

Chair: Hon. members, we'll deal with this amendment and then when we go back to carry the full section 3, then you can make an amendment at that time. My apologies. We'll carry on with section 4 until it's done and then we'll go back to section 3.

Are there any other questions on this amendment?

Shall the amendment carry? Carried.

P. Bevan-Baker: Chair, I'm sorry. I did have my hand up, but –

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you very much.

The change that's being made here is that the proclamation will be 180 days after the Royal Assent, substituted by "on a date that may be fixed by proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor in Council."

Essentially that means – and we know because this has happened with previous bills in this House – that that's an open-ended statement which means that it can be proclaimed whenever or perhaps never into the future. I think it's important that before we vote on this amendment, that – I'd like to know the reason why this change is being made.

Chair: The promoter asked that same question.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, my apologies. My apologies, Chair.

Chair: Okay. Are there any other questions on this amendment?

Shall the amendment carry? Carried.

Show of hands on the amendment. All those in favour of the amendment, please raise your hand.

All those against the amendment.

Okay, the amendment is carried.

Shall section 4 as amended carry? Carried.

Thank you, members. So, members, we're going to go back to section 3. I never carried the full section.

Shall section 3 as amended carry?

Some Hon. Members: Carried.

K. Bernard: No.

Chair: Okay, we have an amendment being put forward.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Before I present the amendment, since we're still on section 3 – I recognize the government amendment passed, but I guess I would just like to take one minute to recognize the fact that we all in here are privileged to have sick days. If we are not feeling well, we don't have to answer to anybody. We do what we need to do to make ourselves better; to not infect our coworkers.

[3:00 p.m.]

When I think back to my time in the education system, how privileged I was to have that sick time that could accumulate. I had to go off early because I had a really challenging first pregnancy, and thank goodness I had those sick days. I don't know what I would have done without them.

I would like for all of us in here to consider that five paid sick days is not too much to ask; yet government, for some reason, wants

to botch this and not give Islanders paid sick days. I find it very insulting.

Anyway, I will present my amendment. Do you want me to read the amendment?

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

K. Bernard: Thank you.

Chair: Yes, please.

K. Bernard: Moved that

Subsection 3(3) of Bill 106 is amended by the deletion of the proposed subsection 22.2(5) and the substitution of the following:

Rate of pay

(5) An employer must pay an employee who takes leave under subsection (4) an amount in money equal to at least the amount calculated by multiplying the period of the leave and the average day's pay, where the average day's pay is determined by the formula

amount paid ÷ days worked

where

“amount paid” is the amount paid or payable to the employee for work that is done during and pay that is earned within the 30-calendar-day period preceding the leave, excluding pay in lieu of vacation, gratuities or benefits, less any amounts paid or payable for overtime, and

“days worked” is the number of days the employee worked or earned pay, excluding pay in lieu of vacation, gratuities or benefits, within that 30-day period.

I believe the clerk has copies of that amendment.

Chair: Okay. Thank you, members.

Hon. member, we're actually going to take a quick recess to see if your amendment is actually in order, and then we'll come back with a ruling.

[The Committee of the Whole House recessed from 3:02 p.m. to 3:07 p.m.]

Chair: Alright, hon. members, we're back. We just wanted to confirm that it wasn't impacting something that had already previously been deleted by the passed amendment. The hon. Leader of the Third Party's amendment is in order and copies are being distributed.

Alright, hon. members, is there any discussion on the amendment?

[Interjections]

Chair: Alright members, are there any questions on this amendment?

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

So, the way that work has evolved – recently, anyway – is that people no longer enter a job out of high school or college or university or whatever and stay in that for their entire life. That's very unusual these days. It used to be absolutely the given, but that's not the case anymore.

This amendment is designed to be able to capture all of the various ways in which Canadians – Islanders, in our case – now work so that they would still qualify for paid sick days. I believe that every single Island worker deserves to have paid sick days. The way the original bill was drafted does not include people who work in, for example, the gig economy, where you may have two or three jobs. That's a very, very common way to make your living these days. Two of my own children do that.

[3:10 p.m.]

Given that you can't say – after full-time employment in a particular job for a year, you have earned yourself one paid sick day, many, many people will never ever get to that position because they don't have a single job. However, they're working 40, 50, 60 hours a week in order to make ends meet.

Another example is people who are paid piecework; I'm thinking here, for example, folks who pick berries. They are not paid a rate of pay per hour. They are not paid a salary. They are paid for a particular job to get done. That's work, it's hard work, and

yet those people would be excluded from the legislation as it currently exists.

This amendment is designed to make sure that the legislation captures all potential forms of employment on Prince Edward Island and therefore grants paid sick days for every single Island worker, which is, to my mind, a really important thing.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Members, we're going to now report progress and switch over to third party time.

Hon. H. Perry: 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.

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

S. MacEwen: Madam Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards 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 New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the 11th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk (Lilley): Order No. 11, *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act (No. 2)*, Bill No. 107, in Committee.

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

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

I move 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 Rustico-Emerald to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[B. Trivers in the chair]

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

Would you like to bring a stranger on to the floor?

K. Bernard: Yes, I do. I don't see her.

Chair: There's a stranger in the gallery (Indistinct).

[Laughter]

Shall it be granted? Granted.

Can you state your name for the record?

Michelle Patterson: Michelle Patterson, director of policy and research for the third party.

[3:15 p.m.]

Chair: Thank you.

So, we're just doing general questions on the act. If it's the will of the committee, we'll just continue along those lines.

Anybody have any general questions?

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: To the promoter of the bill: This is basically the same bill, asking for the same things. There are some differences in it. Leading up to this, we did have a conversation initiated by you saying it doesn't matter which bill; we'd like to see one of them get across the line.

So, I just need some clarity on – if that was the case, then why would you, today, bring four amendments to our bill – you brought one forward and it's currently under debate,

and you said you had three more – if you had your own bill coming on afterwards? Can you justify why you would do that?

K. Bernard: Yeah, and I appreciate the question. I was going to send you a text actually before I came up, and then I ran out of time.

Hon. H. Perry: I was sitting right here.

[Interjections]

Chair: Promoter.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I had initiated that discussion to let you know – just like you said – I want one of these bills to pass, and let you know that we had some amendments to come forward because despite which bill passed, we wanted to make sure that it was the best that it possibly could be, depending which bill came first.

Unfortunate timing today, we ran out of time, and that still stands; whichever one passes. We want paid sick days; whichever one passes first. It doesn't matter whose passes, as long as it's the best that it can possibly be.

Hon. H. Perry: Is there anything in your bill regarding any kind of financial support for businesses for the transition period?

K. Bernard: Yeah. We didn't make it too prescriptive only because we know it's government that has the purse strings, and that kind of has all the information they need to know which businesses they want to support. But the financial support program is in section 3(10). Do you want me to read it out?

Hon. H. Perry: Yes, please.

K. Bernard: Subject to subsection (12), the Minister may implement a financial support program to provide temporary financial support to be given to employers to help them adapt to any increased costs associated with paid sick leave provided under subsection (4).

Hon. H. Perry: So, that's similar to the provision that we have in ours in the sense

that the minister may provide some temporary financial support in the transition period of it.

Did you have any conversations with the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning on that particular clause?

K. Bernard: No.

Hon. H. Perry: How did you come up with that clause? Who did you consult with? What legal counsel gave you the advice that that clause would actually work?

K. Bernard: I'll start here, and let you take over if there's anything...

Where we landed with that was based on the support program that was available for workers during the COVID period, which was called – the fund that was there to help people if they were sick.

Chair: Intervention, hon. Minister of Finance?

K. Bernard: I just can't remember the name of the fund.

Michelle Patterson: The COVID support program.

K. Bernard: COVID support program. There were funds in there that we had kind of said all along: Why not use that fund for sick days? So, that's where that idea initially came from.

Michelle Patterson: I think that explains it. These are just provisions. They don't mandate the minister because we're not able to do that bringing a bill forward, but I think they were well received by the employer groups as well, to kind of point to the minister providing support.

Hon. H. Perry: There are some similarities to the provision we had in our amendment, and obviously that was deleted with an amendment put forward. When I questioned that – because it's really important, especially to the ma and pa shops who have a low number of employees.

I'm not looking at the Walmarts or Cavendish Farms or anything like that. I'm looking at more the impact it would have on

the ma and pa shops who are open, whether it's year-round or even for six months of the year, or eight months of the year, what have you.

[3:20 p.m.]

So, with that response, the minister – like I said, I had my own thoughts on it, but the minister basically committed that they would do everything they possibly could to support those businesses. I said I'd have to take her word on it, obviously, because if it was taken out, there's nothing in there with that provision saying that they would do it or may do it.

But I'm wondering now – because what was presented was that it wouldn't hold. That provision would not hold. I don't know how yours would hold any more than the clause that we had in, which was very similar.

K. Bernard: I guess we shall see.

Hon. H. Perry: True. There may be an amendment coming; I'm not sure.

K. Bernard: We can rest assured.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, that's it just for now.

Chair: Is anyone else speaking to general questions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee the bill be read clause by clause?

Would we like to call for the question?

An Hon. Member: Call the question.

Chair: Alright.

Shall the bill carry?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Chair: Okay. I think we'll have to get some more clarification.

All those in favour, say "aye."

An Hon. Member: Aye!

Chair: (Indistinct) carrying the bill. Okay, so one person wants to carry it.

All those against, say "nay."

Some Hon. Members: Nay!

Chair: The nays do have it, in my opinion.

K. Bernard: Mr. Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and that the Chair report the bill not recommended.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

B. Trivers: Madam Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act (No. 2)*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and does not recommend same to the Legislative Assembly. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

P. Bevan-Baker: Can I ask for a standing vote, please?

Speaker: Sure. A recorded division has been requested. Sergeant-at-Arms, you can ring the bell.

[The bells were rung]

P. Bevan-Baker: Madam Speaker, the third party is ready for the vote.

R. Henderson: Madam Speaker, the opposition is ready for the vote.

Z. Bell: Madam Speaker, government is ready for the vote.

Speaker: Hon. members, all those voting against the report of the committee, please stand.

[The Clerk calls the roll]

NAYS

Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Henderson
McNeilly
Perry

Speaker: Members, all those voting in favour of the report of the committee, please stand.

[3:25 p.m.]

[The Clerk calls the roll]

YEAS

Arsenault
Bell
Burrige
DesRoches
Dillon
Jameson
Lantz
MacLennan
Myers
Ramsay
Redmond
Thompson
Trivers

Speaker: Hon. members, the report of the committee has passed.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the 12th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: Order No. 12, *An Act to Amend the Residential Tenancy Act*, Bill No. 108, ordered for second reading.

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

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

I move, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: No, hon. member.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, sorry. I move that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: Bill No. 108, *An Act to Amend the Residential Tenancy Act*, read a second time.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your indulgence.

I move 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 Rustico-Emerald to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[B. Trivers in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Residential Tenancy Act*, Bill No. 108.

Would you like to bring a stranger on the floor?

K. Bernard: Please.

Chair: Is it granted? Granted.

Hello, stranger. Could you please state your name and position for the record?

Michelle Patterson: Michelle Patterson, director of policy and research for the third party.

Chair: Thank you.

Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill now be read clause by clause?

An Hon. Member: General questions.

Chair: General questions it is, then, seeing no objection. Any questions?

Oh, actually, promoter, would you like to make an opening statement?

K. Bernard: Sure. This amendment proposes to extend the renovation moratorium, which was put into place in

2021, given that we had such low vacancy rates, and when people were being evicted for renovation purposes, there wasn't anywhere else for them to live. Given the vacancy rate has actually gotten worse, and despite the fact that there are protections now with the RTA, we thought it was important to continue this protection for tenants until the vacancy rate improves, for one year.

Chair: Thank you, promoter.

I have no one on my list right now.

The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. R. Lantz: I understand there was a lot of debate about the original implementation of this moratorium. Obviously, I wasn't here at the time. I wonder if we could just go over some of the rationale for the implementation of the moratorium at the time.

K. Bernard: Yeah, sure. Did you want to speak to that?

Michelle Patterson: I can, or you can.

[3:30 p.m.]

K. Bernard: I'm sorry if I'm not answering your question directly; you can stop me mid-sentence if I'm not. At the time, we were seeing people getting evicted without any sort of protection in place before the *Residential Tenancy Act* was put in. At the time, while we were waiting for the *Residential Tenancy Act* to pass – before, it was the Rental of Residential Property Act, and there wasn't the protection for tenants in that piece of legislation.

Now, in the new *Residential Tenancy Act*, we do have first right of refusal after such an event and there are some other hoops for landlords to jump through when they are planning a renovation. So, there are things in place to protect tenants, including rental caps and that sort of thing. We were pleased with that when the *Residential Tenancy Act* was put into place.

We find ourselves now in a position where the vacancy rate has gotten worse, and at this point in time, given that we don't have

housing for people to go to, those protections in the RTA are rather a moot point if you don't have a place to go. So, we thought that we'd give it a year to see where we end up in November 2024, to see if things have changed, but it's basically just to ensure that we don't see our numbers of homeless increase based on people being evicted for renovations.

Hon. R. Lantz: I'm wondering, at the time, was there a sense that people were being evicted, or that the evictions for renovation purposes were being used as an excuse or being abused as a way for landlords in bad faith to get rid of tenants?

K. Bernard: It's not always in bad faith that these things happen, but there are cases where it was in bad faith that these things happened. People would find themselves evicted and then see their apartments being advertised for higher rents, which would be more controlled now under the *Residential Tenancy Act*, of course.

But again, given there's no housing stock or other units for people to move into, we kind of – not that we're in the same position; we're certainly not, but that vacancy rate is really, really hindering us from seeing the benefits of the new *Residential Tenancy Act*.

Hon. R. Lantz: So, in arriving at your position that we need to extend the moratorium, have we considered all of the provisions that exist in the new act and how, as a whole, they protect tenants?

K. Bernard: Yeah, absolutely. That was a discussion that we had in our office, and actually, when we first started talking about this amendment, that was one of the things that we thought of first. You know, when you're having early discussions on something and you're brainstorming, that was one of the things that someone in our office had brought up with the new *Residential Tenancy Act*.

I mean, it's not perfect, right? Nothing's perfect. It's not going to protect tenants from rent increases they can't afford, but it's going to put that cap, and people can kind of find comfort in the fact that they're not going to have to pay rents that go above a certain amount. They kind of know what to expect; landlords know what to expect

getting into the business. And so – I kind of lost my train of thought.

Hon. R. Lantz: Just considering all the provisions as a whole that are meant to protect tenants against bad faith renovictions.

K. Bernard: Yeah. We would love to see the opportunity to see the *Residential Tenancy Act* in action, to see how these protections do, how far they do go, but unfortunately, again, it's that vacancy rate that's hindering us from kind of seeing that because people just don't have anywhere to go.

Hon. R. Lantz: Okay. So, what I'm hearing is you don't necessarily have any reason to believe that the provisions are inadequate for protections, and that it would possibly be prudent just to evaluate how the provisions are working, but you're concerned that if they're not working and people are being put out, they have nowhere to go. That's the concern, right? Am I correct?

K. Bernard: I don't know.

[3:35 p.m.]

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, I heard you say that it would be nice to allow the act some time to work its way through the system, to test the act to see if it's actually providing adequate protection, but you feel that – this is what I heard, and you can correct me if I'm wrong, but you feel that it's better if we just extend the deadline, the moratorium, because you don't want to find out if it's actually working.

K. Bernard: No. No, the *Residential Tenancy Act* as it is: perfect? No, but much better, and we do believe that tenants have that protection. However, the problem is, it doesn't matter if you get first right of refusal back to your apartment if you don't have a place to go while your apartment is getting worked on.

So, this isn't about the merits of the RTA and the protections. I guess the protections – it doesn't matter what act we would really be under at this point. I shouldn't say that because there are certain protections. However, there's nowhere for people to go in that meantime. Regardless of the

protections that are there, if people don't have a place to live, they almost don't matter.

Chair: Minister, I do have others on the list.

Hon. R. Lantz: Okay. Sure.

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

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just wondering what specifically is missing in the current act that we have right now that would warrant this extension?

K. Bernard: There's nothing missing from the act, it's just the low vacancy rate. In the new *Residential Tenancy Act* – and if you know this, I'm sorry – the new *Residential Tenancy Act* gives a couple of protections for tenants, one of them being if you get evicted for renovation purposes, you get a first right of refusal. When the project is complete, you can go back and say yay or nay to that. And there's no astronomical rent increase that has happened because that protection is there, which is phenomenal.

Just the point being that the vacancy rate is so low that people are having – if they're lucky enough to find another place even – they just have nowhere to go. So, when people are renovicted, they're basically homeless.

It's not about questioning the merits of the RTA, it's just about people have nowhere to go when they're asked to leave their apartments.

Of course, there are still things in place. If a building is falling apart, well, you have to fix it. It's just those kinds of projects that might be able to wait a little bit longer until we see a healthier vacancy rate. That's the point of it.

Hon. G. Arsenault: Just one more. Do you have any evidence, any way to prove or anything there that it would make you believe that the bill is not capable of managing this process? Anything that's evidence based that you would have that would –

Michelle Patterson: I think just to reiterate, it's just that low vacancy rate. We know how much trouble individuals are having getting a home. It's not necessarily the bill. The bill has a lot of good provisions that will work well once we reach that healthy vacancy rate. This provision is just really important to tenants while that vacancy rate is so, so low right now.

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you.

Chair: Any further questions?

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Chair.

If I get it correct, the original moratorium that was brought forward was brought forward while the act was being developed. The act is there now, it's working, but you want to extend it a year because we have a low vacancy rate?

Michelle Patterson: Yeah.

T. DesRoches: So, it's working. The act is there. It's working now; got a lot of great things that we've heard about. But we want to extend the moratorium that was put in place while the act was being developed another year just because the vacancy rate is low? That's what I'm hearing?

Michelle Patterson: Yes, but actually, the act was passed with this clause included. Before the act was passed, we put this moratorium in place, and after the act was passed, we kept the moratorium in place a year ago because the vacancy rate was low. That was the justification for it. We put it in for a year so that we could reassess in one year.

We're back, and the vacancy rate is actually lower. So, we propose extending it another year and then letting the *Residential Tenancy Act* work as it does, once we have a vacancy rate that's helping, which I think – correct me if I'm wrong – is 3, 4, 5 percent. Right now, we're looking at 1 percent.

K. Bernard: If that; point something.

Michelle Patterson: Yeah, less than 1%.

K. Bernard: Thank you for that, Michelle.

[3:40 p.m.]

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you for bringing this forward. I have met with the Fight for Affordable Housing. This is their number one thing. They told me that this is a problem. This is their number one thing that they're seeing on the ground. They're not talking about an act not working like we're talking about here. They're talking about people being put out. That's the message that I got loud and clear.

At some point, we have to listen to the people that are on the streets.

K. Bernard: So radical.

G. McNeilly: Have you talked to that group, and what was the message to the mover of this amendment?

K. Bernard: We did talk to this group. Same message: this was the top priority, and they were very concerned about this, given the low vacancy rate. From conversations I had, there was really no mention of whether it be the Rental of Residential Property Act or the new RTA. There was no mention of that. It was simply that the vacancy rate is so low; tenants are terrified.

One of the big problems is, we hear from tenants who have issues in their apartment, but they're too scared to say anything because they're scared that they'll get evicted for renovation purposes. We have people living in fear that if they ask to have some fairly routine maintenance – or if there is a big problem – they're scared to bring it forward because they're scared they're going to be asked to leave their apartment, and where will they go?

It is a huge struggle for tenants right now; whether they be actually impacted or not, just that fear. There are so many things. There have been so many changes in the rental world in the last few years that tenants are really scared right now, and the *Residential Tenancy Act* was something that they had a lot of faith in. Of course, people are divided in what they feel about that.

Some think it's great where others have some issues, and everyone in between.

Right now, it's just that vacancy rate that has people scared.

G. McNeilly: That's what I heard, that just because we passed legislation – and we heard here with the taxation officer that we don't have the enforcement across the province to enforce a lot of what's happening in here.

The minister just said we're not giving this bill enough time to see if it's working. What I'm hearing is that people who have been renovicted will not come forward with what they're talking about. Do you get the same impression, that that's how it is with people who have been renovicted or left to fend for themselves in PEI?

K. Bernard: Could you repeat that, please?

G. McNeilly: What are the people saying? Have you talked to anybody that this has happened to, have been put out for various reasons or whatever? Are there any examples of that happening?

K. Bernard: Absolutely. When they're talking about it, they're not necessarily talking about the protections that the RTA offer. They're just simply saying: Where am I going to go? Because this doesn't stop all renovations, of course, but it does kind of stop the ones that it can. That's not a good explanation. It's not going to stop all renovations, but it is a step towards helping people in that case.

Like I said, they're not arguing the merits of the – they're not mentioning the RTA at all. They're just pleading with: Where do we go? Where do we go? What do we do?

We don't hear anything about legislation. It's desperation.

G. McNeilly: Talking to the group and others, when you're using – and landlords don't – this is a last step, is to come in where people have to leave the unit to renovate. A lot of things can be done and the person does not have to leave. It shouldn't be used – I think what was happening before, it was being used as an excuse to make changes or whatnot in a unit.

Would you agree with that statement? If a landlord was to use this, they can do a lot of the renovations without removing the tenant?

K. Bernard: Yeah, and there's been a lot of examples of people having to leave when the renovations weren't necessarily worth having to move out for, so this is just an added layer of protection.

[3:45 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: When I talked to the group, there's a lot of people in my area, Brown's Court and different places, who are marginalized and they're living here, and they're living in substandard conditions. They're scared. That's what I'm hearing about, is that they're petrified. Are you hearing same thing, that renovictions affect, disproportionately, marginalized people?

K. Bernard: Absolutely. That's where we see the Fight for Affordable Housing often standing up for more marginalized groups because they're the ones that tend to be, speaking statistically, more precariously employed, especially if you're a newcomer to the province. And if there's a language barrier too, there's even more of a barrier there to be able to advocate for yourself or to even try to make other provisions for yourself, to find a new place to live with that language barrier.

Absolutely, I would agree with that statement.

G. McNeilly: I'm glad you brought this forward because I was looking at it too, and not because we don't know if the RTA is not working or working. The minister mentioned bad faith, good faith; it doesn't really matter. It matters that we're hearing that this is still a problem in Prince Edward Island. This is not putting anything out. It's just adding protections to people who are scared because we screwed up the rental numbers in our province and there's no place to live.

I am going to support this, member, because I am just as worried. I see people living in conditions and they do not need this to worry about too. I will support your great amendment here to put this in place until we can see that the RTA works because right

now, this amendment – and I support it because it is about people and it is about people without a voice.

Thank you very much.

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

Hon. R. Lantz: I've heard it stated here that there is a problem. It's been three weeks since the ban has been lifted. You would think if there was a pent-up demand for large renovations that require people to be evicted from their apartments over the past two years that people would come forward, and they have not. I've spoken with the director of residential tenancies. There is no demand for this at the moment.

I would contend that with the provisions that are in here, the pendulum has swung so far to the protection of the tenants that it makes no sense for any landlord to propose a renovation so significant that the tenant would need to be evicted.

But it bears pointing out that the director has discretion to make that determination whether or not the unit actually needs to be vacated to do the renovations. It only makes sense given that the landlords can only increase their rent by a maximum of 6 percent a year – if they were to get three allowable and three greater than allowable – it only makes sense to wait until the unit is vacant.

I think that the provisions are so rigorous in here that it cannot be abused. I've heard this described as still being a problem, but I don't see it. People's fears of being renovicted is one thing, but it's legally very difficult to happen now. That was the purpose of that interim period of the moratorium, was to bring in these provisions. I think they're strong enough, but I'm still waiting to hear something that would convince me otherwise.

K. Bernard: Well, I've kind of said all that there is to say on this. I guess one thing I would say is, often people don't always reach out when this happens, right? You were saying –

Hon. R. Lantz: But who would reach out to who?

K. Bernard: You were just saying – who did you say no one reached out to? The director, or to your department?

Hon. R. Lantz: IRAC.

K. Bernard: To IRAC, okay.

Hon. R. Lantz: No one has asked to renovict anybody.

[3:50 p.m.]

K. Bernard: Yeah. I guess to that, I say this is preventative measure. We've heard from all of the advocacy groups that this really was important, so in the spirit of that, I guess anything to protect people in their homes right now. Just on my drive to work this morning, the amount of homelessness I see on a daily basis is growing. I'm not saying it's all because of this – certainly, there are lots of reasons for it – but any single measure that we can take in here to protect people's homes, I'm willing to do. This is one that people who work with tenants every single day tell us matters right now, and I have to believe them.

Chair: Shall the bill carry?

Some Hon. Members: Carried.

Chair: All for, say “aye.”

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against, say “nay.”

Some Hon. Members: Nay!

Chair: I'm going to ask for a show of hands.

All for, raise your hand.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'll make it easier for you, Chair. I'll call for a standing vote. Or we'll have to wait (Indistinct)

Chair: We'll have to wait. You can do that, member, but I'll let the Speaker look after that one.

All those against, raise your hand.

The bill is not recommended.

K. Bernard: Mr. Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill not recommended.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

B. Trivers: Madam Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Residential Tenancy Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and does not recommend same to the Legislative Assembly. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry?

P. Bevan-Baker: Standing vote, please.

Speaker: A recorded division has been requested.

Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms, you may ring the bell.

[The bells were rung]

P. Bevan-Baker: Madam Speaker, the third party is ready for the vote.

R. Henderson: Madam Speaker, the opposition is ready for the vote.

Z. Bell: Madam Speaker, government is ready for the vote.

Speaker: Hon. members, all those voting against the report of the committee, please stand.

[The Clerk calls the roll]

NAYS

Bernard
Bevan-Baker
Henderson
McNeilly
Perry

Speaker: All those voting in favour of the report, please stand.

[The Clerk calls the roll]

YEAS

Arsenault
Bell
Burrige
Croucher
Deagle
DesRoches
Dillon
Hudson
Lantz
MacLennan
Myers
Ramsay
Redmond
Thompson
Trivers

Speaker: Hon. members, the report of the committee has passed.

[3:55 p.m.]

Motions Other Than Government

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

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

I now call, seconded by the Leader of the Third Party, Motion 77 be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: Motion No. 77: Keeping ATVs off the Confederation trail.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point, moves, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, the following motion:

WHEREAS the Confederation Trail is widely considered to be a provincial treasure, unique in Canada in that it spans almost the entire province from tip to tip;

AND WHEREAS the Confederation Trail is the central active transportation spine of our province, to which many other active transportation trails connect;

AND WHEREAS there are multiple benefits, including environmental, health and wellness, and economic, to developing a comprehensive, interconnected active

transportation network across our entire province;

AND WHEREAS the area of experiential tourism is growing rapidly;

AND WHEREAS Prince Edward Island is already being recognized around the world as an ideal place to enjoy such experiential vacations with people being attracted by the peace and tranquility found on the Confederation Trail as it is currently utilized;

AND WHEREAS Tourism PEI specifically recognizes the attributes of developing tourism related to active transportation, saying in their most recent strategy: "... develop and execute a holistic walking and biking trail strategy ... with the outcome of an increased number of visitors whose main activity is experiencing walking and/or biking trails, with the additional revenue from longer haul travelers with significant 30+ nights stays";

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislature express its support to maintain the Confederation Trail in its current form, as it was originally intended;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Legislature urge government not to grant access to any part of the Confederation Trail for All Terrain Vehicles, other than at already designated crossing points.

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

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

It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and to speak to this motion. We've covered quite a lot of topics in this Legislature, and I'm quite sure that I'm not the only one who sits in this House who's been contacted on a regular basis by folks who want to talk about the Confederation Trail and the use of ATVs on it. It's a very hot topic in our province.

We don't have a lot of time to debate this, so I'm going to use what time I have to read some of the press release that was brought out yesterday by Island Trails. The title of their press release is: "Island Trails is

seeking confirmation that the Confederation Trail will remain a greenway." It outlines the history of the trail. I'm just going to read through the first part of the press release in the time that I have.

"In 1989, CNR announced it was abandoning the rail line in Prince Edward Island. Three Islanders, Donald Deacon, Gordon MacQueen and Ian Scott, collaborated to form a new organization to build a walking and cycling trail on the old rail bed. This organization became Prince Edward Island Trails Inc. (Island Trails).

"Island Trails is proud of what it has achieved since then. In partnership with the Trans Canada Trail and the Government of PEI, a new world-class active transportation route was created – the Confederation Trail.

"Several Island Trails members played key roles in the trail building process. Doug Murray worked first with the PEI Government sorting out land acquisitions and rebuilding the trail bed to accommodate walkers and cyclists. He also researched and designed 150 trail interpretation signs" – and those that use the trail will be familiar with these – "located along the entire length of the trail.

"When Doug retired, he continued to work as a volunteer with the Island Trails Board. Leo Gill followed in Doug's footsteps and also moved to the Island Trails Board when he retired. The Confederation Trail and Island Trails both turn 30 in 2024."

That's my son's birthday, 30 years old, and Island Trails, the same age.

"Initially the Confederation Trail extended from Tignish to Elmira, a distance of 273 km. In the years that followed, the Government of PEI, supported by financial contributions from the Trans Canada Trail, added a spur line from Cardigan to Georgetown, a spur line from Harmony Junction to Souris, and another spur line from Emerald Junction to Borden-Carleton.

[4:00 p.m.]

“In 2014, thanks to a \$1 million donation from the Garfield Weston Foundation and an additional \$400,000 contribution from the Trans Canada Trail, a new trail section from Iona to Charlottetown was completed. Subsequently, a spur from Lake Verde to the Pisquid River was completed giving the Confederation Trail a total length of 450 km.” The main spine, 273; the whole trail with all the spurs, 450. “The contribution from the Trans Canada Trail (TCT) exceeded \$3 million over this time period.” A massive gift.

“The \$1 million gift from the Garfield Weston Foundation in 2014 came with strings attached. The Weston family wanted assurances that the trail would remain a greenway into perpetuity....”

Madam Speaker, at this point, I will concede time to government.

I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that we adjourn debate on this motion.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Orders of the Day (Government)

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that the 7th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: Order No. 7, *An Act to Amend the Planning Act (No. 2)*, Bill No. 40, ordered for second reading.

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: Bill No. 40, *An Act to Amend the Planning Act (No. 2)*, read a second time.

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

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

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

Hon. R. Lantz: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Megan Williams: I'm Megan Williams, manager of land use planning in the Land division.

Chair: Thank you, Megan.

Minister, do you have any opening comments?

Hon. R. Lantz: No, I don't. We can get right into it.

Chair: Hon. members, is it the wish of the committee for a general overview or clause by clause?

Some Hon. Members: General overview.

Chair: Alright. Does anybody have any questions?

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair. Hi Megan. Thank you for being here today.

I'm just wondering if you can tell us what initiated this bill and what implications these changes will have.

Megan Williams: We received a request from several municipalities and developers and a second letter from registered planners as well, on initiatives they felt were needed to support the development process here on the Island. In order to address that request, this is one of the amendments that we're bringing forward.

K. Bernard: Thank you for that. I'm wondering if you've consulted with planners on PEI and if so, what their feedback was, some of the general comments that you heard?

Megan Williams: We have planners on staff that worked together with lawyers to put this amendment together. We also sent the consultation draft directly to the municipalities; they have planners on staff. We sent it to the Federation of PEI Municipalities, we've spoken with IRAC, and then, of course, we have the public consultation period for two weeks in a variety of places: news releases, social media, and other (Indistinct).

K. Bernard: The changes only really appear to address a very small number of appeals. I'm wondering how you see this changing timeframes for appeals.

[4:05 p.m.]

Megan Williams: It's going to provide clarity for IRAC when it comes to the types of appeals that they can see. It will give them a little bit more discretion when it comes to saying, "Okay, you're not considered an aggrieved person."

The appeals, when they come in, they won't have to go through that whole process. Someone will be able to look at the appeal request and say: "You're not considered an aggrieved person. We're not going to consider your appeal." So, that will speed up the process on that end.

K. Bernard: Forgive me if you said this, or if this is obvious thing, but how does that change from the way we do things now? What does that process look like currently?

Megan Williams: That's a good question. I don't know right off the top of my head. I can get back to you though if that's okay.

K. Bernard: Yeah, that's (Indistinct) –

Hon. R. Lantz: Well, I think that filtering just doesn't happen because it currently says anybody who's dissatisfied. So, basically, there's no definition of who's eligible to submit a notice of appeal. And this, while it does narrow that definition somewhat, it's still fairly broad in some of the groups that can also be defined as an aggrieved person.

K. Bernard: Just off that point, minister: before this piece of legislation, there wouldn't be that going through process. Would that mean that everything would be heard? Every application that was submitted would have a process to it?

Hon. R. Lantz: I think you're correct, yeah.

K. Bernard: Does IRAC still have the ability to set their own timelines on things with this?

Hon. R. Lantz: I think they set their own schedule, yes, and with this bill, we're not intending to define any timelines for them.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, one more, then I can come back to you.

K. Bernard: Okay, that would be great.

I'm wondering, in this legislation, are you trying to address outliers from holding house developments up? Is this going to help with anything that might get in the way of getting development going? Is this going to help that process?

Megan Williams: That's the intent, yes.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

You said that you sent this to IRAC. Can you elaborate on what their feedback was?

Hon. R. Lantz: Generally positive. I would say they're in favour of it. I think that they recognize that they sometimes see some frivolous appeals from people who shouldn't

really be described as aggrieved. They probably recognize that it does hold up a lot of developments, and in the case of residential developments that are delayed for years sometimes, it certainly adds to the cost of those developments, which is ultimately passed onto tenants probably.

Generally, we had this conversation and I think they're supportive of the amendment.

G. McNeilly: Can you table their feedback?

Hon. R. Lantz: If we have that in written form, yeah.

G. McNeilly: Do you have it in written form?

Hon. R. Lantz: I don't know. We'd have to go back and look for that, but if it's something we have, we can make it available.

G. McNeilly: So, we don't know that we have it?

Hon. R. Lantz: I don't. I only know about the personal conversation I had about this issue when I went to IRAC to talk generally about issues of concern and learn about what they do and their work volume and other things. This was something I discussed with them personally, but as part of any consultation on this amendment, I don't know what's on paper.

[4:10 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: I talked to them too about – I think that there's an issue. I want to solve the issue, too, of frivolous – I mean, we're in that together. We need building, we need construction, but I just want to know, was this something that you scheduled a meeting with IRAC about and then IRAC came back and said, "Hey, this will help," or is this just a conversation in passing? I'm just trying to figure out if we can make this stronger, better; if this is doing what it's intended to do.

Megan Williams: As the minister said, the response that we received from them was favourable. I wasn't privy to the conversation that happened between the two of them. It's just the feedback that I received through the folks who were handling the

consultation. It was that the feedback that we had received from IRAC was positive. We can look through the consultation records to see if we did get something in writing from them, and then we can table it at that time.

G. McNeilly: What other records did you receive from feedback? Can you table all the records about feedback for this amendment?

Megan Williams: I believe we received about 30 responses. They should all be written, and we can table those responses.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, one more, and then I can put you back on the list.

G. McNeilly: But we just don't know if IRAC's there. So, that's a problem because it goes to them.

I guess just moving off of that for a second. I received, I think, the same letter that the minister received about the municipalities coming together potentially. Will this affect municipality bylaws in any way or anything? Was there anything there that we need to...?

Hon. R. Lantz: No. It only affects the appeals process before IRAC.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Chair.

In conversation before the meeting on it, I had a couple questions. I just wanted to clarify one thing because I have a large builder in my area who's having this problem, and I'm quite sure they're watching online right now.

So, going forward, if someone had a project that was about to go, an appeal can't be put in by someone who's not directly affected. Someone at one tip of the Island can't appeal a building at the other tip once this is in?

Hon. R. Lantz: That's right. That's the purpose of this. In theory, right now, if I'm unhappy with a development that the City of Summerside has approved, I can submit a notice of appeal to IRAC and go through the

entire process. This amendment puts the onus on the appellant to justify that they're personally negatively impacted by the proposed development.

T. DesRoches: Thank you for that. That is a perfect explanation that will satisfy a lot of people.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm wondering, when the consultation was done on this bill, was it done on just this amendment or was it a wider consultation done?

Megan Williams: It was just this amendment.

K. Bernard: Okay. So, that was a quick turnaround. You said November 7th, it went out?

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, I think it was a two-week consultation period.

Megan Williams: Yes, two weeks.

Hon. R. Lantz: Two or three weeks, yeah.

K. Bernard: Do you feel that that was enough time for Islanders to contribute?

Megan Williams: Especially because we did receive quite a bit of – we felt that the support that we received through the municipalities and through the Federation of PEI Municipalities really did encourage us to get this done as soon as possible. In saying that, I do have the numbers for the number of impressions in posts, if you would like me to read those.

K. Bernard: Sure.

Megan Williams: The social media campaign, using the Info PEI channels X, Facebook, and LinkedIn, we had: 9,256 post impressions, that's the total number of times our content was displayed; 4,764 reach, that's the total number of unique people who saw the content; and 739 engagements, so likes, reactions, comments, shares, that sort of thing.

[4:15 p.m.]

K. Bernard: Is that something that is normally tracked by government? I've never heard anyone use those numbers before.

Hon. R. Lantz: It's a great metric.

K. Bernard: I guess so. It's nice to actually have a metric. Thank you.

I do just have one quick comment. I know that in general, from what I'm hearing from planners, there are no real concerns with this, that it's pretty fine. They just hope that it – they're not sure about the effectiveness; they're hopeful. Of course, with that –

Hon. R. Lantz: We can always do more.

K. Bernard: Always. Yes, I'm glad you said that.

Thank you, Chair. I'm good.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you.

Do you know how many permits have been delayed by the provisions in the current law over, I don't know – well, do you have any numbers on that?

Hon. R. Lantz: Going back how many years?

G. McNeilly: Last year, and then if you have that number, two years before.

Hon. R. Lantz: I think it's fair to say we don't have that here. We'd have to ask IRAC for the number of appeals they receive on building permits. But if you think of one prominent example of a large multi-unit apartment building that was proposed over here a couple of years ago, the developers are back with a new plan with much more density because it only makes sense now, after all this time, to do the project with more density. The costs have escalated so much between the time they proposed to do the development and a decision from IRAC from somebody who is not directly affected by it that it's an entirely different financial scenario now.

G. McNeilly: I know there are some big, big builds that have been affected, but when we don't have the numbers, we're trying to make – that seems like a very simple number to be able to come to this Legislature with, to know how many people and how many projects have been – and it's a good number that I think Islanders should know too.

Do you have a range of how many (Indistinct) last year or the year before?

Hon. R. Lantz: I don't. No. I can only go by my own experience on city council, the City of Charlottetown, the chair of the planning board; I was aware of all of our decisions that got appealed to IRAC. It would be somewhere in the order of two to six per year.

G. McNeilly: Is that something that you can bring back to this House?

Hon. R. Lantz: I think we could, but if you go on the IRAC website, all of their planning appeals are listed right there, so you could see how many planning appeals – I could pull it up on my phone right now and count every one of the planning appeals for this year.

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: Intervention by the minister? Sorry, I thought I heard something.

Chair: You didn't.

G. McNeilly: Okay. What does “in good faith” mean? Because you and I have talked about that for other projects. Who determines whether an appeal is made in good faith or not?

Megan Williams: That would be IRAC.

G. McNeilly: And minister, what does it mean in your eyes, what “in good faith” means?

Hon. R. Lantz: That the stated reasons for the appeal are, in fact, the real reasons for the appeal rather than using the appeal process for other purposes.

G. McNeilly: But isn't that why we have IRAC?

Hon. R. Lantz: To adjudicate whether it's in good faith?

G. McNeilly: They're the ones making the decision, are they not?

Hon. R. Lantz: Yeah, I think they are empowered to make those decisions, too.

G. McNeilly: The reason why I ask is, why not include a provision that IRAC may dismiss an appeal if it is determined to be frivolous or vexatious?

Hon. R. Lantz: They can dismiss appeals. They often do.

G. McNeilly: But why not take that further? If they're making the decision, why not look at that? Was that something that you talked about when you consulted with them?

[4:20 p.m.]

Hon. R. Lantz: I think that's what this gives them the ability to do, is to make a determination whether the appellant is an aggrieved person. If they decide that they're not, then the appeal can be dismissed. One of those is, rather than an individual who's personally affected, I think the clause you're looking at is 27(1)(d) where it says: “an individual who in good faith believes the decision will adversely affect the reasonable enjoyment of the individual's property...”

That is the individual clause. That's a determination that IRAC would make on each case.

G. McNeilly: Again, I ask these questions because I want to make sure that we know what we're doing in here so that it actually works. I want to see building projects go and I want to make sure that we haven't missed a step.

In the future – we talked about this before with another piece of legislation – would you be open to looking at, if this doesn't have the intended consequence, would you be looking at further going ahead to make sure that we get there, that these building permits are being looked at?

Hon. R. Lantz: One hundred percent. One hundred percent.

G. McNeilly: Because there are ways that if somebody from another place has a friend in another place and said: Hey, put this appeal through. You know what I mean? I'm just trying to figure out ways to do that. It's good that the minister is looking into this. I think I'm going to support this amendment.

Chair: Shall the bill carry? Carried.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you. Go through the ritual here. Thanks, Megan.

I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend the Planning Act (No. 2).*

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. R. Lantz: 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.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

S. MacEwen: Madam Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Planning Act (No. 2)*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

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

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

[4:25 p.m.]

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

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

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

Hon. J. Burridge: Yes, please.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Jordan McNally: Jordan McNally, executive director of fiscal management.

Chair: Welcome.

Minister, do you have any opening comments or anything you would like to table?

Hon. J. Burridge: I feel like my opening comments were probably done yesterday.

Chair: I suspect so.

Hon. J. Burridge: I won't waste everyone's time, but I do have a document to table.

Chair: Alright. the clerk will get copies to everybody.

We are going to start on page 5.

Capital Expenditure – Agriculture

Equipment and Other Capital Assets

“Appropriations provided for information technology system modernization and equipment purchases.” Equipment: 50,000. IT System Modernization: 78,100.

Total Equipment and Other Capital Assets:
128,100

The hon. Member for O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Minister, just on the capital assets, 128,000, not a significant amount, by any means, but can you give me some sense on that equipment? I see the IT modernization. But my understanding was that the Agricultural Insurance Corporation had a request in for some supports for vehicles and things of that nature because they’re out travelling quite a bit, and we’re going to hopefully be adding a price insurance program into the Agricultural Insurance Corporation.

Am I going with the assumption you’re going to continue to pay mileage to the insurance representatives on this if there’s no money for vehicles?

Jordan McNally: Agricultural Insurance Corporation is a Crown corp that is outside of the appropriation vote that we currently allow for.

R. Henderson: Okay, so they don’t fall under the Capital Budget is any capacity?

Jordan McNally: No, currently they don’t. The appropriation vote is just for departments and certain Crown corporations, like Housing Corporation, or Innovation PEI is another example. I think there is some more work there to be done to determine what the policy is on vehicles versus mileage. But yeah, it’s not in this Capital Budget.

R. Henderson: How do I find out whether they are doing that or not? Is it just simply a question to the Legislature or is it the – in these third-party organizations that are kind of funded, really, by government, or supported by government anyway?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think Question Period would be a good place for that, absolutely.

R. Henderson: Okay. No, that’s fine. I guess I was thinking it still would go under Capital Budget if those organizations, like the Grain Elevators Corporation would be another one, in their capital development projects that they would do. They basically don’t deal with the Legislature.

Hon. J. Burridge: I think that is something that they’re working on. I know I had a chat with my deputy minister because I was seeing that there were a few – what’s included in the Capital Budget and what isn’t. That is something that they’re looking at. Of course, a lot of those things are still going through – you know, expenditures over a certain amount still go through Treasury Board. There’s still certainly oversight by government.

R. Henderson: Well, maybe I will have (Indistinct)...

Would Tourism PEI be another one of these ones that nothing goes through the Capital Budget through them?

Jordan McNally: No, they are through the Capital Budget, through Department of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

R. Henderson: Now you’re confusing me. They do, but the Agricultural Insurance Corporation or Grain Elevators does not.

Jordan McNally: Yeah. Government actually owns the Tourism PEI assets. That’s why the appropriation goes to the department rather than Tourism PEI itself.

R. Henderson: Who owns the PEI Grain Elevators Corporation and the Agricultural Insurance Corporation?

Hon. J. Burridge: I’ll just stop here because I think this could probably go on for a while, and what’s before us is the capital expenditure for Agriculture, right?

R. Henderson: Yeah.

[4:30 p.m.]

Hon. J. Burridge: That’s what we’re discussing right now. I think you have valid

points, and I think that is a discussion for another day. But I think right now, before us – unless I’m wrong – this is what we’re discussing right now, right?

Chair: That’s right.

The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Well, I certainly don’t want to difficult about it, but I guess I’m still saying – so the Province owns certain organizations/corporations, and it falls under Agriculture. If I’m asking a question in the Legislature, I have to ask the Minister of Agriculture, but yet I can’t ask questions on the Capital Budget pertaining to an agricultural corporation that’s responsible under the Department of Agriculture.

I would like to see, as the minister responsible for the Capital Budget, that you set a policy that has some continuity within all of the different entities that the government is responsible for. If I use the argument – and I didn’t really look at this – but Health PEI. So, is there nothing under Health PEI under here? I’m guessing there probably is.

What inconsistencies could be more than that, right? Anyway, I’ll drop the questioning on that, but I hope my points are valid.

Hon. J. Burrige: It’s a good point. It is a good point.

R. Henderson: Okay.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Poor Agriculture gets – it’s the first one in the book and it’s not a big expenditure. We’re looking at a 300 and – it’s not a million-dollar thing. So, we tend to have energy and time to focus on the first things. But there are some important things to talk about here.

I see that in the budget here, there is money set aside to buy some ATVs. I’m wondering how many you plan to acquire over the next few years.

Jordan McNally: The plan for next year is for two all-terrain vehicles.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. I don’t know, but how much does an ATV run to these days?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, I’m not sure of the cost breakdown between the two ATVs, but that’s what’s in their plan for ’24-25.

P. Bevan-Baker: I see. So, the \$50,000 is a recurring thing – forever, I remember, Agriculture is \$50,000 – but we have some extra expenditures this time and it’s on that IT system. Can you tell us a bit about that and what it’s going to accomplish?

Jordan McNally: Agriculture has a bunch of programs that they run. E-CRM basically allows for one central repository for client information across various programs. It’s a way that they can track that client information a little bit better, centrally.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay, thanks, Jordan.

Compared to the last capital budget – this department was Agriculture and Land; now it’s Agriculture – I’m wondering, given the loss of responsibility, whether we will – the funding doesn’t seem to have gone down at all, so was there no funding associated with the Land portion of the department previously?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, most of the Land portion would have been vehicles for inspection officers, which, if they were new additions, they would fall under the department, but then essentially be owned by DTI as part of the light fleet.

P. Bevan-Baker: We’re all aware of our changing climate and how that impacts various parts of our lives and economy and communities, and agriculture is clearly one where that happens a lot. Is there anything in this Capital Budget to support – and I’m thinking here specifically about greenhouses?

As our growing seasons expands – and that’s one of the few silver linings that we

have here related to climate change – is there money being set aside to take advantage of that and expand our growing season here by providing grants, for example, for greenhouses?

Jordan McNally: If it was a grant program, it would fall under the operating budget. There's nothing in this Capital Budget for government-owned greenhouses. The only thing that comes to mind is under the Department of Environment for the expansion of the Gaudet Nursery. I'd have to look into what was involved with that expansion, but no, for a grant program, it wouldn't fall under capital.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I was thinking of new uses for greenhouses, and small – well, and large farmers use them.

Final question: I asked the minister yesterday I think, or maybe two days ago, about the land bank initiative. Would that fall under this section or would that be under Housing and Land, if there are any capital expenses associated with that?

[4:35 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: Or transportation, would it be? Sorry, it might depend on what land bank program. There's the buffer zone buyback program; that falls under Environment. Land purchases like for protection of land, Ducks Unlimited, that kind of partnership, that would fall under the Department of Transportation.

P. Bevan-Baker: I guess because we can't find it here, and perhaps not elsewhere as the minister said later or maybe that program is now not going to happen, but there's nothing in this department anyway related to that?

Jordan McNally: No.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm good for this section. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Capital Expenditure – Agriculture:
128,100

Shall it carry? Carried.

Capital Improvements – Buildings

“Appropriations provided for capital improvements and construction.”

My apologies, we're now in Education and Early Years.

Capital Repairs: 4,000,000. Construction and Renovations: 45,888,000.

Total Capital Improvements – Buildings:
49,888,000

Any questions?

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

We had \$4 million budgeted last year, and we overspent by almost \$1 million. I'm wondering if you can tell us why we don't expect to spend that higher amount, the \$4.9 million, this coming year.

Jordan McNally: There were pressures last year. Last year's budget was \$4.7 million, including all capital repairs, which would have been ceiling tile replacements. So, there was a bit of pressure with cost escalations in that specific project, which would have bumped that up a bit.

The department is allocated – it's just under the next line, construction and renovations – \$6 million for the new School Revitalization Fund. It's a similar type of thing; it's capital repairs and renovations. You can kind of view both lines similarly, but there is a bump up of \$6 million overall. That would be to address catching up on some capital repairs, or if they're larger, capital repairs that can't fit under that \$4 million. If you look at it that way, it's really a \$10 million allocation.

K. Bernard: I'm wondering if you can give us a list of schools and projects that are slated to be repaired this year.

Jordan McNally: These would be more on the major capital repairs. On the major capital repairs, we're talking Georgetown, Eliot River, and Montague Consolidated. Those would be projects that are upcoming in the fiscal year. Some of them are actually going to be completed this upcoming fiscal

year, but those are the major capital repair projects.

K. Bernard: We know obviously there's a lot of repairs needed across the province in a lot of schools. I'm just wondering what the total value of repairs that have been identified as necessary is.

Jordan McNally: I wouldn't have the total dollar value. I know that as part of the Public Schools Branch's letter of priorities to the department, they list quite a few repairs that are needed, but they don't set a dollar value. Really, that would be determined if the project was set to go ahead; they would have a cost at that point of what it would be.

K. Bernard: Do we have an idea of when these repairs would happen? They wouldn't happen during the school year. The ones that you have slated will happen in the summertime, so it doesn't disrupt the school year?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, the major school capital repairs that I listed, those projects, they are major school capital repairs and they're not allowed to occur during the school season, so they would happen during the summer.

Some repairs, if they're minor in nature under that capital repairs bucket or the new School Revitalization Fund, they might be able to occur during school. I'm not sure personally what the parameters are to determine it, but I know they could happen during school.

[4:40 p.m.]

K. Bernard: This might be going off the Capital Budget train a bit, so just let me know if it is. I'm wondering about safety processes in place if there's construction happening during the school year. Is there any significant cost to the Province to ensure students' safety?

Jordan McNally: I don't think it's separated in terms of costing. I know it would form part of the project itself. That would be included in the cost estimates, especially for a major school capital repair. I guess you're talking about repairs that are happening during school. It wouldn't be

something that's tracked separately, but it would be a cost if you're putting up things.

Chair: Hon. members, if we could all just speak up just a little bit so Hansard could hear us correctly.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party, one more and then I could put you back on the list.

K. Bernard: Yeah, that's great. Thank you.

Looking at the Georgetown project, it's at \$2.1 million, and the school was built in 1954, and therefore likely has asbestos in its walls. Will these renovations be completed while students are in the school, or would that be over summer break?

Hon. J. Burridge: I believe that one is wrapping up, is it not?

Jordan McNally: I think this one would happen outside of the school year.

Hon. J. Burridge: It's something we could look into.

Jordan McNally: I actually have it here. It would take place in the summer of 2024 and 2025.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

I guess I'll start with the school ventilation upgrades. We talked about that and we talked about 10 schools which needed to be upgraded, and then in the notes, it said work began in 2021-22 and is expected to be completed in '24-25, and then the next line said project was expected to be completed in '23-24 but has been delayed due to industry capacity. Is it still delayed?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think there are two tenders out for two projects that they just haven't been able to get bids on. I think Vernon River is one of them.

Jordan McNally: They've had trouble sourcing bids on these projects. I do have a breakdown of the schools and our percentage of completion, if you'd be interested.

G. McNeilly: Okay, perfect. Yeah, I'll take those.

Jordan McNally: I can run through the list. May not line up in the order of the way you have them in your sheet.

West Kent is substantially complete.

St. Jean is in progress; 60 percent complete. That's estimated in the fall of 2024 to be completed.

Cardigan, 77 percent complete; again, fall 2024.

Alberton and O'Leary, they're substantially complete.

Belfast is in progress; 70 percent complete.

Englewood, that's one that's expected more in the winter of 2024.

Parkdale was tendered with no bids, so it was reposted in early November.

Vernon River: again, tendered with no bids, reposted November 2nd, so it's out for bids.

Parkside is going to be complete in 2024 as well.

G. McNeilly: Did those two schools, Parkdale and Vernon River, go out for bid more than once?

Jordan McNally: Parkdale and Vernon River? My understanding is they went out for bids once and had no bids, so they've resubmitted the bid a second time.

G. McNeilly: On the 10 schools thus far, has that been done by numerous different companies?

Jordan McNally: I don't have the details of which companies did which project.

G. McNeilly: I just want to ask, minister, can you guarantee that those last two schools at least get started or get going? But I guess that's kind of impossible.

Hon. J. Burridge: Well, they're trying. I don't know what else you can do except to repost a tender.

Chair: One more, hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, and then I can move on.

G. McNeilly: Yeah, and I guess I'd just maybe urge the minister, and I know you're trying, I know everything's there, but this is important. This was, I guess, brought on by reports COVID; we've talked a lot about it in here.

When does that tender close, and is it open right now?

[4:45 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: I know it was reposted November 2nd. I don't have a close date my notes, but it would be a public tender, so it would be in the government tender website, for sure.

G. McNeilly: Back on the list.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thanks, Chair.

My questions are about the School Revitalization program. I know one of the things when I was Minister of Education, I found that so much money was always allocated to the big projects that none of the small – I call it client-facing, so student-facing, teacher-facing – ever got to it. Things like just painting the entranceway in the school, maybe minor remodeling, replacing railings that were dated, this sort of thing. Sometimes there were washrooms that had gaps in the stalls that just needed to be replaced, or the mirrors, the silver was flaking off them. Other cases you might have a music room like at Gulf Shore Consolidated School that didn't have a sink and they just wanted a sink, but they never could make it up on the priority list.

Is that the purpose of this School Revitalization Program?

Hon. J. Burridge: Yeah.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, it's really to – well, it would be between the school – it would be up to the school board to prioritize what's being done. But yeah, the intent is basically to catch up on capital repairs that need to be

done. Whether that will move those type of projects further up on the list is yet to be determined, but that is the intent, is basically that more capital repairs can be done from their list of priorities.

B. Trivers: That was my next question. I wanted to know if it was, indeed, the elected school board representatives with the various school boards that would be doing the prioritization based on feedback by groups like the Home and School Associations and, of course, the teachers and administration themselves at the schools. That sounds that it's right, correct?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, basically the parameters of the fund is that it's anything that can't be accomplished through their existing \$4 million capital repairs fund but wouldn't be so large as a major capital project, like an expansion, for example.

B. Trivers: I just want to say thank you. That's a great program. It was one that I was pushing for when I was minister and it's nice to see it formalized.

Thank you very much.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

I'm just going to ask some questions about Eliot River; not actually in my district, but many of my constituents have kids who go there. I see that there's \$1 million there to complete. That's going to be in 2024, but the construction began in 2021. I'm wondering whether it was originally scheduled to take that long.

Jordan McNally: I can't speak to when the original completion date was. I know with it only occurring during the summer months, it's a challenge to go any faster, but I know the total project cost is expected to be \$14.2 million. It started in the summer 2021, finalized in the summer 2024.

P. Bevan-Baker: Cornwall – I mean, there's a lot of fast-growing communities on PEI, but I think Cornwall is either the fastest or one of fastest growing communities. I'm wondering, this handout, would this include new classrooms? All of the renovations

would include additions of new classrooms, presumably, and construction.

Jordan McNally: It depends on the project. Eliot River, for example, specifically included a 7,000 square foot addition, whereas some projects may just have a – they're a large capital project that didn't necessarily need an expansion. One that comes to mind is Georgetown, for example. I don't believe there's an expansion component to that. It was just the need for quite a few renovations within the school.

P. Bevan-Baker: I'm good.

Thank you, Chair. Thanks, Jordan.

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

G. McNeilly: Thanks a lot. Just some questions about Queen Charlotte. In the minister's mandate letter, it says: "Take immediate steps to alleviate space pressures at Queen Charlotte..."

But here, it says work expected to be completed by 2027. Is that immediate?

Hon. J. Burrige: Well, I think it's as immediate as you get in construction these days. I mean, there would have to be a planning process in there, too, engineering, design, and then the construction, right?

[4:50 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: I'll take that maybe as a no. Capital projects – if you're talking about mobiles, there was talk in here about mobiles, about the school needing mobiles. They were in desperate need. The whole thing. It's a very old school. It's a well-used school. There are a lot of kids there.

Would mobiles be in the Capital Budget too? Is any type of thing – yeah?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, it was a specific request from the Public Schools Branch for \$1 million to buy four mobiles, which would be used for immediate pressures at various schools. I can't speak to where they're going to be placed, but there is \$1 million next year to purchase four mobiles.

G. McNeilly: There's \$1 million to purchase four mobiles that we don't have currently. Those mobiles are not here. We've gotten mobiles before. They've been set up at West Royalty. Did Queen Charlotte get mobiles under the last year's capital budget?

Jordan McNally: No, there's no mobiles currently at Queen Charlotte. There are other mobiles out in the school system that are being used or have been attached to schools, but none of them are currently available. So, no, this would be to source additional mobiles to go in wherever the priority areas are.

G. McNeilly: The initial plans will start next year. That's an easy thing to put in there. But I look at Queen Charlotte: there's no backyard, there's no front yard. There's a parking lot that just got paved. We had problems with that too because a lot of my constituents go there. It was paved late. There's only (Indistinct) to go. How do we know that the planning – how do we know that we can invest \$17 million? I don't know where it's going to go.

Hon. J. Burridge: To have a \$17 million project completed by '26-27 starting now, I would consider that a really good turnaround in construction of that magnitude. Having sat on a planning and construction committee for the Stratford school, you can see they want to consult with teachers that work in the school. They want to make sure that the allocation of space is done properly and that adjacencies are done well so that there's good flow within that additional space. There's a lot of consideration there from staff and others to be taken into account.

G. McNeilly: Great. I agree, that's futuristic. But in the short term, when you said that there's \$1 million for four mobiles and this is an immediate pressure – there's still an opportunity. Things get delayed all the time in this industry, as we just found out here.

Are those mobiles – are any of them going to Queen Charlotte?

Chair: The member has said already that he's unaware of where they're going.

Hon. J. Burridge: I would assume that the Public Schools Branch would make that decision, right?

Jordan McNally: Yeah.

Hon. J. Burridge: We give them the money through this budget process, and it's under their oversight of where they're going to put them.

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

G. McNeilly: Yeah, sure, but the mandate letter of the minister says the word "immediate". I'm asking questions to you and then you're saying it's the PSB's decision. How do I know that that's going to get done immediately? There are so many kids at the school right now. It needs immediate help. How do I as a member get that reassurance?

Hon. J. Burridge: The money is there. The mobiles are being bought. The money has been allocated; planning to have this completed by '26-27, this \$17 million project. That's good turnaround. That's getting done quick. How do you know? I would say talk to the Public Schools Branch and the new board because it would be their decision. Our job is to put the money in there for them.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm looking at the Montague Consolidated where it says \$100,000 to complete, and that the majority of the project would be substantially completed by winter 2023, which was last winter. So, I'm wondering what's left or what the hold-up there is?

[4:55 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: Winter 2023 would be this coming winter. So, it's expected to be done this winter. The \$100,000 for next year is really just what they call the deficiency phase. If there's anything after the renovations are complete that needs to be addressed, that's what that \$100,000 is for.

K. Bernard: So, in case something else comes up? Is that what you just said?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, usually there's a small period after construction where the school is ready to be fully utilized, but there may be something throughout the walk-through that needs to be addressed. It's called a deficiency phase, where the contractor needs to come back in to correct a small issue that was left over.

K. Bernard: When do we expect that project to be completed?

Jordan McNally: The department provided us with the details that it would be winter 2023, so this winter.

K. Bernard: Okay. So, the school ventilation upgrades: \$2 million in '24-25. This work is only done in the summer months. I'm wondering, what's the difference between these renovations and other renovations that we do all year long?

Jordan McNally: To me, it would be the fact that the ventilation systems run throughout the school so it affects multiple areas of the school, whereas if you're maybe replacing a boiler or something that's contained outside of the learning area, that could be maybe replaced during school. Ventilation runs throughout the school, so it would be larger.

K. Bernard: There are 10 schools which need immediate upgrades to the ventilation systems to meet the current standards, and I know work was supposed to have begun on this a long time ago, so I'm surprised that many of the schools are still on this list. I'm wondering which of these 10 schools have been completed.

Jordan McNally: That list is all of the 10 schools, not just the ones that are left to be completed. I kind of ran through the list with another member there, but West Kent is complete or substantially complete; Alberton, O'Leary, those are substantially complete. Others are in partial completion, or tenders went out again because they had no bids on the tender.

K. Bernard: If it's not complete, does that take the ventilation system out of

commission? Are there schools currently operating without a ventilation system?

Jordan McNally: I don't have the details to speak to that, to be honest, how that works in terms of the ventilation system. We could find out and get back to you.

K. Bernard: I'd really appreciate that information. I think that that's cause for alarm if there are schools without ventilation systems right now. So, I'd really appreciate that information back.

I've already heard you say that you weren't sure which schools would be getting the temporary classrooms. I'm wondering if that's something that you can take back, or is that something that you leave in the hands of the Public Schools Branch?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, because it's a purchase next year, it's certainly not information that we have at this point. I can see what the department can bring back on that though.

K. Bernard: That would be great, thank you.

Under construction and renovations, there's a large underspend in the current fiscal year; over \$10 million. I'm wondering what projects that were planned did not get completed or started.

Jordan McNally: One of the projects under that is Montague Consolidated, which is wrapping up in the current fiscal year, and that actually came in under budget.

Another underspend or delayed spending is the Sherwood School replacement. As you can imagine, in larger school projects, timing can swing quite a bit, especially with projects like Sherwood School or Stratford School. Stratford is another one that was coming in forecasting to be under their budget. It's not that the total project is under budget, it's just the delay in timing of when the expenditures are actually spent –

[5:00 p.m.]

[Interruption]

Some Hon. Members: Call the hour.

[Laughter]

K. Bernard: Well, really. Saved by the bell.

Chair: Thank you, members.

Hon. J. Burrige: 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.

[Hon. D. Compton in the chair]

S. MacEwen: Madam Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration the grant of capital supply to His Majesty, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, that this House adjourn until Thursday, November 23rd, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a good evening, everyone.

[The Legislature adjourned until Thursday, November 23rd, at 1:00 p.m.]