

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Darlene Compton

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The Legislature sat at 1:02 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 Thursday to everyone. Welcome everyone into the gallery today. I see Mr. Murphy is here, Dr. Jain, and Harvey Enman, from formerly Harvey's Sports –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. B. Thompson: – back in the day. Welcome. Back in my hockey days.

Madam Speaker, today is Thanksgiving to the people in the south of us. To all our American friends, happy Thanksgiving to them. I'm sure there'll be lots of Black Friday sales in Charlottetown and on PEI, Summerside, and all areas over PEI. Take advantage of shopping local and support our local businesses.

I also want to highlight an event that's happening this weekend. Courtney Hogan-Chandler is a fiddler, quite a famous fiddler from PEI, and will be putting on a show this weekend. Her husband, Scott, and two children will also be making appearances on stage, as well as world renowned Janelle Banks. I'm sure this will be an entertaining event, an evening of song, dance, and storytelling. It's at the Florence Simmons Performance Hall, Saturday.

Before I end, I want to wish Delma Good, a civil servant for a long time – she's retiring. Delma from the PSC is retiring Thursday. I want to wish Delma all the best. She must have started young; I didn't think she was old enough to retire, but I want to wish her happy retirement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

[1:05 p.m.]

It's a pleasure to rise and welcome all those who are watching either online or on television, especially those at the Tignish Seniors Co-op Home. They watch faithfully. A shout-out to the staff at that centre who go above and beyond to provide all the residents with some great food, great entertainment, and keep them occupied with some really good activities. I see a lot of the Christmas-themed activities that they're doing now, which is great to do and it's a great asset to our community in Tignish.

Also, I'd like to welcome all those in the gallery today. We have Matthew Murphy from the Borden-Kinkora area, a volunteer fireman in that area and a volunteer for many other organizations. Welcome, Matthew, and thanks for all that you do. We have Bethany Collicutt-McNab, Harvey Collicutt; welcome. Up west representation in here today. Trevor Jain and everyone else who's in the gallery today, welcome.

To all the members in this House, welcome back to Thursday and have a great workday.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Good afternoon to my colleagues and to our Pages, Ava, Kenneth, and Gabrielle. Good afternoon. Hello to everyone tuning in online, especially those from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

A special welcome to those in the gallery, I think we're going to name the same people here, but hi to Matthew Murphy and Bethany Collicutt-McNab and her dad, Harvey. Good to see you in here, Dr. Jain. I wish I knew everyone else's names because that would be really cool, but anyway, welcome all the same.

There's a lot of Christmas stuff happening. I don't want to take up too much time; I'd be here all day to name them all. But just to name a couple, there's a Christmas tree

lighting this Friday: a candlelight parade starts at Founders Hall at 6:15, leading to the official tree lighting ceremony on the upper plaza at the Confederation Centre.

Of course, the Victorian Christmas Market is happening this weekend starting on Friday. This is an open-air market that brings artisans, food vendors, and crafters from all across the Island together in downtown Charlottetown.

And the Christmas parade is happening this Saturday at 5 p.m. in Charlottetown. Donations of non-perishable food items will be picked up along the routes along with letters for Santa. So, get your letters for Santa done. We're working on those at home. Those will be picked up along the parade route. And it's not supposed to rain this weekend, so that's very good news.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise to say hello to everybody watching from District 14 and everybody in the gallery, especially Harvey, who's a constituent of mine. We have many great conversations and your wisdom is always well received here. So, thank you very much for all you've done for PEI too. And Shawn, too.

A special hello to Trevor Jain, obviously, who's here today. With Trevor, I'd like to welcome Tom Schmitz to the gallery today. Welcome. Dr. Schmitz is visiting from Brussels. He's an international expert in disease management – or disaster management, sorry.

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: (Indistinct) need both.

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: Exactly. Well, there you go.

Dr. Schmitz responded to the Brussels bombing in March 2016 and was involved in managing over 300 casualties. He's also an anesthesiologist and is an emergency

physician. So, I want to welcome him and hopefully he can somehow be a future physician, and his wife, here in Prince Edward Island.

[Applause]

G. McNeilly: So, I'll just say a special hello in Flemish.

[Flemish was spoken]

Mr. Schmitz, thank you for coming here today.

Thank you.

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

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

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to everyone in the gallery and the ones watching from home, especially from District 24 Evangeline-Miscouche.

Last evening, I had the opportunity to attend the first ever PEI Arts Awards ceremony, which celebrates the contributions of PEI's creative community. I'd like to acknowledge the award winners from last night's event. There was the PEI Writers' Guild, Music PEI, Lindsay Connolly, Megan Stewart, Melissa Peter-Paul, Gerald Beaulieu, and Fairouz Gaballa. So, congratulations to all those winners.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's not too often I get people here in the gallery, but one of my constituents, Harvey Collicutt, is here today and his daughter, Bethany Collicutt-McNab. I thought they were going to bring another former constituent, Anna MacDonald, here today but I guess Anna backed out maybe last minute. Anyway, I have to commend Harvey. He comes from Springfield West. Although it's not an incorporated

municipality, I'm quite confident if they had a mayor, Harvey would be it.

[Applause]

R. Henderson: Harvey always keeps a pretty good eye on his neighbours, and his neighbours are getting a bit fewer these days. I mentioned Jimmy MacWilliam passing away, and he was quite supportive of Thane and Faye Frizzell, who were neighbours of his. I always appreciate the updates Harvey gives me.

[1:10 p.m.]

He does try to keep me in line to make sure my tie is right and if I've got a certain question that I should be asking the ministers. I've always appreciated that. He historically always comes down to the Legislature at least once a year. He used to always come with constituents Shelton Barlow and Irwin Phillips, and I used to always appreciate that.

I also want to commend Dr. Trevor Jain. I had the chance to work with Dr. Trevor Jain when I was Minister of Health. He's a real good advocate and advisor for health care in Prince Edward Island, and I always appreciated his wise wisdom.

Thank you.

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

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

I, too, would like to welcome everybody to the gallery. I'm not going to go through all the names again, but we have two Harveys with us today. I don't know that that happens terribly often here. And, of course, Trevor Jain; so nice to see you, Trevor. I've enjoyed, as my hon. colleague has, many very interesting and fruitful conversations with Dr. Jain.

There's one person who has not been recognized, I think, from ADL. It's really nice to see you here today. We have a bill later on the floor regarding ADL and its incorporation. It's really nice to see you here.

This Sunday in my own district, in Emyvale, they're hosting a fundraiser for one of their youngest residents, Clyde, who is the son of Sarah Miller and Zack Hennessey, and the grandson of Alan and Mary Miller, and Alan is the mayor of the Rural Municipality of Kingston out there in Emyvale.

Clyde has been battling a very rare cancer-like condition since he was three months old. He was diagnosed when he was three months old and started chemo when he was nine months old. The hope of the team of oncologists who are helping him at the IWK in Halifax – and thank goodness we have that lovely reciprocal agreement with our neighbouring provinces for services like this – they are confident that after a full year of chemo, Clyde is going to be well by the time his third birthday comes around.

[Applause]

P. Bevan-Baker: The community is coming together this Sunday afternoon from three to five at the Emyvale Rec Centre, anybody who's in the area. They're going to be accepting donations to help the family out, tickets on a gift basket, and no doubt there'll be a 50/50. It will just be a lovely community event. When cancer strikes one as young as that in your community, it really pulls at your heart strings.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just want to recognize some of the members. I do want to mention Shawn MacLean, my friend from ADL. My son, Harrison, loves eggnog, especially this time of year. He wishes that it came all year long. Harvey Enman, while he's here; I've had so many great memories at Harvey's Sports. It's also Harvey's grandson Chris' birthday today. I just wanted to make note of that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

It's a pleasure to rise. I'd like to welcome everyone in the gallery today, as well. It's lovely to have you here. Say hi to everybody in District 22.

I just wanted to bring congratulations to junior mayor and council in Summerside last night. I attended the swearing in, and it was lovely. We had nine young people. They're from SIS, Summerside Intermediate School in Summerside. Today, they're spending the day touring all the departments within the city. Hopefully, in another seven or eight years, we have a group of new councillors in Summerside. They're a great bunch of young people and it was a pleasure to be there. I just wanted to congratulate them.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

Just wanted to say hello to everybody that may be tuned in from up in Alberton-Bloomfield. Say hello to all the ones in the gallery; certainly, Dr. Jain, always great to see you. Harvey and Bethany, welcome to the gallery once again. As my colleague from O'Leary-Inverness had stated, Harvey generally does come down. I get a number of messages from Harvey. I know that Harvey and my dad had worked on a number of different construction projects over the years, both of them certainly excelling at their trade. Welcome to the gallery.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Good afternoon again, folks. I just wanted to rise and say a few words, too. I don't up for greetings very often, but I want to welcome everyone here in the gallery. Dr. Trevor Jain, I had the pleasure meeting with you before in a previous career or life before Speaker. Everyone in District 4.

[1:15 p.m.]

It's really beginning to look a lot like Christmas out there. As we mentioned, a lot of craft fairs coming up. This Saturday at the Belfast Rec Centre, the Belfast Historical Society will be having their annual

Christmas market. I will be there with my creations. They had a couple of cancellations and I got a call this week asking if I would step in, so I would be happy to do that. It's a great place to see everyone.

I want to say hello to everyone at the Gillis Lodge. If anyone follows them on Facebook, they're way busier than any of us. They just are always having an activity and an event and going places. I think it's wonderful for everyone who is there.

Lastly, on Sunday, there is a celebration: the 100th anniversary of the Uigg-Kinross Women's Institute. A hundred years. They have a wonderful, very active group. They have an amazing Remembrance Day service. I just want to wish them many years more of success and thank them very much for what they do for the community.

Everyone, have a great day. Thanks.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Actions of Government

Hon. H. Perry: For three weeks, Madam Speaker, members have sat in this House and watched a do-nothing government grapple with the failures brought on by their own indecision and their refusal to accept responsibility for their reactionary approach to governance.

We are now well versed with this government's incompetence and its mishandling of the Community Outreach Centre's policies allowed by this government that permitted the open use of illegal drugs in a residential neighbourhood, a decision that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General confirmed was illegal.

This government's mishandling of the issue has attracted national attention, with a national news outlet having been in contact with our office on the topic of an illegal policy, as acknowledged by our Attorney General, to allow open drug use at a facility funded by this government.

But the outreach centre is only one example of this government's refusal to accept responsibility. For the last two days, we have sat here as the Minister of Health has failed to answer questions about the status of mental health and addiction supports in our province. This minister seems quite limited in his capabilities, defaulting to an approved set of speaking notes written for him, though it is easy to see why government officials might be nervous of this minister if left to his own devices.

But just two days passed, the minister managed to blame both his departmental staff and the PEI Nurses' Union for his own poor communication in an interview that obviously he wasn't prepared for.

Islanders know that things are getting worse. Residents feel less safe in their communities, people are feeling the financial pinch every day, and our health care system remains on the brink of collapse. All the while, this government can't seem to meet their own targets set by themselves.

According to Health PEI's own report, only 21 percent of priority patients waiting for community mental health supports are getting the help they need on time. These are Health PEI's own metrics. Even they know the system isn't working, yet the Minister of Health seems inclined to pat himself on the back. For what? I don't know.

And this government's poor track record of delivering supports to our most vulnerable doesn't stop at mental health and addictions. The Housing and Land Minister seems to require constant reminders that he is, in fact, responsible for ensuring that vulnerable people can safely access housing supports across this Island. In fact, he seems to have a particularly hard time grasping.

Nowhere is the Minister of Housing's out-of-touch, do-nothing approach better demonstrated than in the Capital Budget. With the numerous issues facing our housing market, this minister sat idly by while the Capital Budget outlined a diminished commitment to the PEI Housing Corporation, as their Capital Budget will shrink by \$47 million between now and 2027-28, in the midst of a housing crisis, with growing concerns from Islanders

struggling to access safe housing. What does it say about this minister if he is willing to sit by and let those in need "eat cake"?

Five years and two elections and this government is out of ideas, if they ever had any at all to start with. A do-nothing government, made up of do-nothing ministers, led by a do-nothing Premier.

Is it any wonder Islanders are left with less in their pockets, broken systems, and inadequate services when this government refuses to try anything other than to say anything, do nothing, and when all else fails, blame everyone?

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Recognizing Billy Bridges

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today, and I don't think I wrote enough pages after that speech we were just given by the hon. member.

[1:20 p.m.]

It's a pleasure to rise today and recognize the exceptional achievements of Billy Bridges. After nearly three decades of competing at six Games in para ice hockey for Canada starting at age 16, Billy is one of Canada's most decorated Paralympians, winning four Paralympic medals, including a gold in 2006. He is regarded as one of the most successful para hockey players to have ever played.

Twenty-five years after his initial national debut, Billy is competing as a member of Team Canada in summer sports shot put and javelin. Billy competed in shot put yesterday with a great showing, a top 10 finish, and will head into his favourite event, javelin, today.

His wife Sami Jo Small, a former four-time world champion goalie for Canada's women's national hockey team, inspired Billy to switch from hockey to track and field. The incredibly talented Billy has managed to pick up a brand new sport and excel at an elite world stage.

Billy Bridges, a native of Summerside, was recognized in Summerside back in 2018 with the official naming of the Billy Bridges Park, the city's first and only fully accessible boundless playground and park.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Souris Christmas Festival

Mr. Croucher: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I want to rise today and highlight the Souris Christmas Festival Parade and the festivities for the week, and I might even succeed in spreading a little Christmas cheer to my colleague over here from Tignish-Palmer Road. [Laughter]

Souris is known as the Christmas town, and we take Christmas very seriously. This is the Town of Souris' 43rd Annual Christmas Festival, and it happens from November 24th through December 2nd.

The Souris Christmas Parade is the longest running Christmas parade in PEI. The route will start on Chapel Avenue and end at the Eastern Kings Sportsplex. Please bring non-perishable donations for the Souris Food Bank. Also, donations of canned animal food for the PEI Humane Society will be accepted, as well as animal-friendly toys. Donations will be picked up along the parade route.

Children can bring their letters for Santa to the parade and Santa's elves will collect the letters along the route.

Many great events scheduled:

The Christmas Shopping Passport is in full swing, with participating businesses from November 10th through December 7th. For every \$10 spent, you get a stamp on your passport. Each passport holds 10 squares to be stamped; \$100 spent will fill your passport. Once your passport is filled and contact info is completed, you can drop it off to the box at Souris Town Hall for a chance to win prizes. They must be passed in by December 7th.

The Souris tree lighting ceremony, which I will be attending, will take place at the Main Street gazebo at 6:30 p.m. with entertainment featuring Ray MacDonald and Friends. There will also be hot chocolate, sweet treats, and candy canes.

There are many great events scheduled; so many in fact, that I can't list them all here. Please go to the Town of Souris website for a complete list.

I want to thank all the volunteers for their invaluable time and hard work in making this Christmas Festival and Parade happen. Santa Claus looks forward to this event every year, and I want to extend an invitation to Islanders from tip to tip to come out and enjoy the best darn Christmas parade on PEI.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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: Yesterday, the no-answer minister said that the problems in health care are due to growth in population. To quote the minister, "We are fighting against the current of population growth, there's no doubt."

Opportunities and challenges of population growth

As Islanders watch access to health care get more and more limited; as it gets harder and harder to get mental health and acute care services; as 35,000 people spend months and years on the patient registry, will the minister please explain how he is fighting against the current of population growth?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I may go over the time limit on the answer to this question.

Obviously, we'll talk about Pharmacy Plus, associate physicians, physician assistants, increasing seats at our nursing schools, increasing our residency seats for our physicians – let me see, can I keep going? – patient medical homes, creating the medical school.

I think that's a good start.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Madam Speaker, clearly this do-nothing government has struggled with the challenge of population growth, and we see it everywhere.

For instance, the challenge of vulnerable Islanders is clearly associated with population growth. I have watched in dismay as this do-nothing government has completely failed this sector.

[1:25 p.m.]

My question to the Minister of Health: When the minister sits around the Cabinet table, precisely what tactics is he proposing to fight “against the current of population growth”?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

There's no doubt, we continue to challenge on the mental health side. We are going with the Community First model to try to reduce acute care admissions. We've made the generational investment in the mental health campus, and again, I think that will help our mental health services that we have for Islanders.

Back to my other list that I already listed off, there's no doubt that we are not doing things the same, and I would look back to the 13 years that the Liberals were in government; I don't think the list is quite near as long.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Here we go resorting back to the blame. Say nothing, do nothing, blame others.

Let me take a simpler approach with this no-answer minister, who sits around the Cabinet table, with a do-nothing government.

Is the minister and his colleagues blaming all of these challenges in health care on population growth, as you were quoted?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Absolutely not. It is definitely one of the challenges that we face on Prince Edward Island. As I say, the secret is out. We have a beautiful place to live on Prince Edward Island, and people are figuring that out and they want to move here. I can't blame them at all.

Back to population growth, it's about 50/50; 50 percent interprovincial and 50 percent international. So, people are choosing PEI as a great place to stay, and we welcome them with open arms.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Question to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning: Time after time, we have heard excuses from this do-nothing government on this long-anticipated population strategy.

Population strategy (further)

Will the minister please explain to the House why this strategy has taken so long in coming, and what on earth is the delay?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question.

We certainly know that our population is growing. We know that we have an aging workforce and an aging population, and many pressures and opportunities come with that scenario, for sure.

The population framework that will be brought is about a cross-government approach, so all of government, all of our partners are playing a role in that as well, all of our communities are playing a role in that, and we are working hard to ensure that what we bring will be effective and good for PEI.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Opportunities and challenges of population growth (further)

Another question to the same minister: You sit around the table with the Minister of Health. In your position as one of the primary economic engines in this province, what are you doing to fight against the current population growth?

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

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

I certainly think that fighting against the current is not exactly how I would have phrased that. We want PEI to be an ideal place to live, learn, and work. Investing in students, which we've done to help support some of the health, is investing in that workforce, which is investing in PEI, and we'll continue to do that. We're continuing to work with our departments through immigration to do that targeted recruitment to help support the industries that have those gaps.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: You see, Madam Speaker, the central problem with a do-nothing government is basically this. All of you seem quite bewildered by the challenges that we face here on Prince Edward Island. The Housing minister has said the challenges of vulnerable people have just suddenly appeared. It's pretty clear he hasn't got the faintest clue what to do.

Again, to the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population: What are the first steps required to deal with population growth here on Prince Edward Island?

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

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

I think the steps that are taking place are essentially the collaborative efforts that we're making across our departments. Meeting with the Department of Housing is something that we do regularly to work on those challenges. They need workers in that industry. We are out recruiting. We are out working with our Construction Association for programming to help fill those gaps and to move forward in our housing.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: In part, the minister is a major part of the population growth here on Prince Edward Island, minister. I will read from the minister's mandate letter, which is provided to her by the Premier.

"Work with the federal government to find expedited routes for international skilled workers to join our province's workforce either on a temporary basis or permanently."

What is the minister's goal in 2024 for the number of people she wants to bring to the Island on a temporary or permanent basis?

[1:30 p.m.]

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

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

As I mentioned, we're working really hard as coordinated departments, and mine particularly, out to recruit the needed workers to come and help support PEI grow. We're continuing to work with our post-secondary institutions here as well, investing in Islanders that are choosing to live and stay here, but by continuing, also, to look at resources and opportunities that are elsewhere within the country and externally.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Another question to the same minister: There is nothing in this minister's mandate letter that discusses housing. Will the minister please describe the nature of the conversations that she has had with the Housing minister to meet the housing needs of the international workers that she is bringing to the Island?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for that question.

The Minister of Housing and I certainly connect regularly to discuss the challenges and the pressures. We also talk about the programs that will be coming into play that will help to support the housing pressures and opportunities that we are faced with, and how we can help. Around that, recruitment is one of those areas, for sure. How can we build partnerships with other associations in PEI to help as soon as possible? Going forward, what does that future planning look like to ensure that we have that housing that we need?

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Another question: Will the minister please describe the nature of the conversations she's had with the Health minister relative to the health care needs of international workers that she is bringing to the Island?

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

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

Similar to what I do with the Minister of Housing; I meet with the Minister of Health. We discuss the gaps that they're faced with and the challenges that they have and how we can help with our targeted recruitment. Where we go and how we work with their team is essential.

This is about collaborating together, to work together to get to the goals that need to be obtained. It is going to take everyone. We want people to come and live in PEI and we continue to invest in that to make PEI a great place to live, work, and play.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The problem is that this do-nothing government is incapable of dealing with the very real challenges that we face in this province, challenges that she recognized.

On one hand, the Minister of Health is fighting against population growth, and on the other end of the room, the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population is actively seeking new people to come to the Island. Personally, I believe in the great value of newcomers to Prince Edward Island, but if you are going to ask someone to come to your home, you need to be prepared. You don't just leave them outside with no place to get warm, nowhere to live, and no health care.

My question to the same minister: How are you balancing these competing concerns?

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

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

To work through, it's not only government that collaborates together. We certainly work hard with our community partners outside of government to ensure that those that choose to come to live in PEI do have access to supports when they're planning to come.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Question to the Minister of Housing: In the summer you said that Summerside would be getting a 24-bed shelter for the unhoused citizens before winter. This seems like a disjointed backtracking since then.

Just the other day, you said rather than that, you secured four extra spaces at a local shelter. Then, the Capital Budget two days ago, 25-bed shelter back in there. Then today, we heard in the media that you have reversed your emergency shelter promise to Summerside and have finally woken up to the needs of transitional housing.

But the problem is, minister, we have no idea, and the people of Summerside have no idea, what the metrics and methodology are that you used to come to this plan.

Shelter and housing in Summerside

Minister, without a guiding provincial housing plan, how did you come to the decision? Will you be tabling the documents to support your decision with what you're doing in Summerside?

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

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

Staff from my department have spent time on the ground in Summerside meeting with our community partners, meeting with vulnerable people in need of more stable housing, and assessing exactly what the requirements of the situation are.

Yesterday, an expression of interest went up on our website to operate a 10-bed emergency shelter in Summerside that will complement the four new beds that we recently announced; the expansion at another local shelter. We're responding to the needs of the people on the ground in Summerside.

[1:35 p.m.]

Yes, we're also looking at transitional beds that will help those people move from emergency shelters into more stable housing in the community. It's very much similar to the discussions we had here yesterday, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: This conversation's been going on for a while. If you would have said this in August, everybody would have been baffled, and here we are.

So, I just want to ask you a simple question: What exactly is Summerside getting, who is running it, and when is it coming?

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

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

I think I addressed the first two questions in my first answer. We'll find out who's going to run it when we get some responses to the expression of interest that's out there now. We'll have it up and running as soon as we possibly can, but what we discovered when we did our work on the ground is that people don't necessarily need emergency shelter.

We'll probably have more than enough capacity in emergency shelter when we get 10 more beds up and running, but what we really want to do is avoid people going to

emergency shelter when they don't need to. That's why we have people on the ground, and they've determined that we can move ahead with more supportive, transitional-type housing there that will support people directly in the community.

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

G. McNeilly: So, minister, what are the HIFIS numbers for Summerside?

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

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

I think the hon. member would know that I didn't come with those numbers here today.

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

School Revitalization Fund

G. McNeilly: Question to the Minister of Education: Minister, the school infrastructure revitalization fund is a welcome investment for students, teachers, and staff.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

G. McNeilly: Can you confirm that in your mandate letter, it is required for you to invest \$25 million over three years?

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

Hon. N. Jameson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. member for the question.

Certainly, I am very pleased that the hon. member is so happy with the revitalization fund. I know that members on this side of the House have been asking. We know that our school infrastructure is aging, and absolutely, we need to invest in it.

As it relates to the exact numbers, I'll have to get back, but I believe it was around that amount.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Will you defend every penny of that \$25 million over three years?

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

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

I know the hon. member is aware, but it would be the PSB and the CSLF that do establish their priorities. Absolutely, I will defend the decisions that they make with those dollars.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, it's to my chagrin that yesterday, we tabled the Capital Budget, and we heard in the Capital Budget that this money has been slashed to \$22 million and stretched over four years.

Minister of Finance: Can you confirm these numbers? Why did you slash the educational fund that the minister is defending?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

We did not slash; we added to that budget, because you'll see that we have a school capital repair program of \$20 million. In addition to that, we added \$22 million over....

[Interjections]

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

G. McNeilly: Well, that's good.

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: What am I supposed to say to that?

[Interjections]

Speaker: Members, members.

G. McNeilly: We'll debate it on the floor of the Legislature. I'll ask you some more questions on that.

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Just yesterday at 4:15 – and this is something to thump the tables about – we were advised that the Queen Elizabeth Hospital was at capacity and it would seem to remain that way for the morning. All hospital beds were occupied; 28 patients in the ER.

Health care capacity challenges (further)

Minister of Health: Is this the level of health care Islanders can routinely expect under your watch?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I do acknowledge that we've had some issues in the ER. Again, thank you to the physicians that are in the gallery today. I think it's also important to note, when I looked at it and was briefed on it, there are actually 14 people who are hospitalized with COVID, which is our highest number we've had in a long time. It's significant, and it gives me a chance to remind the public that immunization is important. We need to protect not only each other, but we need to protect our health care system and our workers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: We're two weeks in, we talked about this, and we know it's that time of year. You've got to do better, minister. I'm trying to implore you that this is a crisis right now. People are waiting too long for beds in the hospital they can't receive.

[1:40 p.m.]

What are you and your executive team doing to help ease the pressure on staff, ER doctors, ER nurses? People in there are

completely stressed. You couldn't imagine going into those work environments day in, day out for Islanders.

What are you doing and what are Health PEI executives doing to ease this crisis?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I've had the opportunity to speak to some of the ER doctors over the last few weeks, for sure. They also presented at the FPT conference that we had this summer. I think it's important to note and understand that there are some long-term care pressures. We have 10 new beds being opened in Andrews of Summerside, 12 in Tignish, 14 in Alberton, and another two at Atlantic Baptist, so that's a big move for us to free up beds at the QEH.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Okay, O'Leary-Inverness is coming in the ring now, Madam Speaker. [Laughter]

Speaker: Looking forward to it.

R. Henderson: Madam Speaker, cell phone service in this province seems to have deteriorated since the summer, or at best, it's inconsistent in the past year. It is becoming very expensive, unreliable, and massively frustrating.

Last night, I'm driving home, and you're trying to make some calls back to constituents, and I would say I probably had six or seven dropped calls between – it started at Winsloe, right through to Freeland.

Plus, my riding has many dead zones. I see Harvey Collicutt here from Springfield West. If he was to take a cell phone call out in his riding, he'd have to stand like a flamingo and hop on his kitchen table to try to get any cell phone service. We don't want Harvey all twisted up like that. [Laughter]

This government is responsible to ensure Islanders have reliable access to telecommunications in this province.

Cell phone service

Question to the Minister of Innovation: What are you doing to ensure Islanders are getting what they paid for when it comes to reliable cell phone service, and why are places like West Cape, West Point, when they call 911, the call goes to another province?

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

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for bringing that up today in the House.

The Province knows it is a major issue. We've been experiencing less than desirable results from our providers in the last probably 13 months, more so than we've seen in the last 10 years. We've been meeting with different stakeholders to address this issue. We know we've met with the Canadian Telecommunications Association, and we met with some providers as well. They have the data to be able to see and to prove to us how many calls are being dropped.

I'm on the road like you every day, and it is very frustrating. We're meeting with all these stakeholders, and we're trying to provide a reasonable solution. We do know that it is federally regulated, so we are working with our federal counterparts and these providers to make sure that we improve this situation that's been going on for far too long.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: It's so interesting. I get every member: "It's bad in my area, too."

It tells you, there's definitely a problem there here. I would say it has gotten worse recently, for whatever reason. I don't know the answers to all of that. But I do know that the Province has a significant contract with

Telus, one of the major cell phone providers in this province.

What are you doing, minister, to ensure that, with the money that you're giving this particular provider, to make sure that they are at least delivering the service that they say they're going to deliver? I can't get calls in my district, I've got areas there are no calls, and we're (Indistinct) dropped calls. Everybody is frustrated.

What are you doing to make sure that Telus provides a reasonable service?

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

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

Like I mentioned in my first response, we've met with our providers – Telus, to be more specific – in the last three weeks. We were actually not satisfied with the meeting that we had with them in terms of the feedback that we got, in terms of the timelines that we're looking at, because we also indicated to them that we know we're a small fish in the pond here, but we need services because we are providing services through government.

Government of PEI would be the biggest client for Telus here on Prince Edward Island. We're experiencing the same, so we're keeping our conversations with them, and we're meeting again with the federal counterparts to make sure that that regulation is in place to make sure that we have services. We're making them aware and we're writing letters as well, and having face-to-face meetings, and we are having more meetings, I think it's on December 8th, to see how that can be solved.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you very much.

The recent long-term care review highlights a number of serious challenges and includes some very important recommendations. One of the recurring concerns is related to the

inconsistencies between private and public homes.

[1:45 p.m.]

Long-Term Care Review

Question to the Minister of Health: How will you be addressing these inconsistencies to ensure Island seniors receive the same level of care and protection, regardless of where they live?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

It is a very important topic, our long-term care homes, both public and private. To give you a broad answer is that we will absolutely follow the 17 recommendations that came out from that review. We expected many of them and we intend to follow through on all of them.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Islanders rarely get a choice in which home they are placed. With a growing wait list, this not only impacts seniors but has a serious impact on our hospitals, where many seniors have to wait an inappropriate amount of time.

The recent Health PEI report shows how our alternate level of care days are increasing, which means more and more Islanders are sitting in hospital beds when they don't have to be. Our hospitals are perfect places to be when you need treatment or when you're sick, but they make poor homes.

Question to the Minister of Health: When will your government be increasing the number of public long-term care beds to help our seniors and take the pressure off our health care system?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Yes, capacity is definitely an issue in our long-term care sector. I think one of the things we've done really well is increase our community care staffing and services in the community. We used to average about 300 visits a month. We're now doing 2,500 visits a month. We know from research that it's better for people to stay at home, close to their family supports, as long as possible, as long as they're supported. That Community First community care model is working for us, so it's nice to see those numbers increase, but we continue to work on the long-term care review.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You've set up my last question beautifully. Keeping Island seniors out of long-term care by supporting them in the community is incredibly important for all of us. A serious problem that undermines the work is the significant increase in fees we've seen in some of these community care homes. Unlike rent controls, which limit the extent of annual increases for annual tenants, Island seniors living in care homes are offered no such protections. I've heard from a number of seniors whose rents have increased over 25 percent.

Rent in community care homes

To the minister responsible for seniors: Will you be introducing rent controls for community care homes to protect Island seniors?

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

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and again, I do believe the question is –

Speaker: Oh, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Sorry. I guess the report is very clear in that we need to balance out

our public and private systems so that they are very equal in all aspects. It's something we'll look at to go forward. We need to support both public and private. That long-term care review was very good at identifying some gaps. It's a great roadmap for us to action on, and we're already started on some of those issues already.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Earlier this year during debates on the estimates, the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, when he was asked about species at risk legislation, told the House that there are no plans for government to bring forward a law in the only province that does not have a stand-alone statute to protect endangered species.

Indeed, he suggested that I bring something forward. Our office, of course, only has a couple of staff, is mandated to hold government to account in all areas, and has very limited time on the floor to bring forward pieces of legislation; less than an hour every week.

In comparison, there are dozens of people working in his department focused solely on the issues related to their mandate and all kinds of time to bring forward and pass legislation should they wish to.

Species protection legislation

A question to the minister: Why, given that Prince Edward Island is the only province without species protection legislation, is this not a priority for government?

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

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

A number of things. I do agree government should be the ones to take legislation to the floor. We wasted a whole bunch of time here this session watching sloppy legislation being brought to the floor because you don't

have the staff to do the work that we have staff. I commend you for finally recognizing that because it's how I've felt this whole fall session to date.

On the species at risk, Kate MacQuarrie has been to committee and she has told the committee a number of times that the legislation and the regulations that we have in place already have all the protections of a species at risk legislation. That said, I know you have it written because I have it on my desk and it had your name on it. If you want me to scratch your name off and put my name on, well, let's discuss it through the winter and see if I can do that for you.

[Interjections]

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

[Interjections]

Speaker: The member has the floor.

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

A report last year from East Coast Environmental Law points out that, indeed, protections for endangered species here in our province are, what they call, non-existent.

[1:50 p.m.]

The *Wildlife Conservation Act*, as the minister just said, does indeed give you powers to protect species at risk, but over the 23 years that that statute has been in place, no minister has ever, ever used them. Our Province has never designated a species as at risk or endangered. This minister also has powers to establish an advisory committee to give him expert advice on which species need protection and how to do that. That committee doesn't even exist.

A question to the minister: Why have you taken no action to protect endangered species in our province despite the fact that, as you rightly point out, the means are present?

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

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

From my standpoint, I think I probably have the foremost expert on Prince Edward Island in Kate MacQuarrie. I put 100 percent of my faith in Kate. I'm not blaming her; I take her advice, and she is very good.

If you follow Kate on Facebook, she has one of the largest followings when it comes to wildlife on Prince Edward Island, on plant species on Prince Edward Island, on animals and their habitat on Prince Edward Island, and I think she truly cares more than anybody that I've ever met in my life about her field.

So, I think if she thought there was an issue, she'd come to my office. I know she was up there yesterday to have a separate discussion about something else. I'm confident she would come to my office and say, "You need to do this," and if she did, I would take her advice 100 times out of 100, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Kate is great, and I follow her page on Facebook. It's very, very educational. It is amazing, the stuff that she covers. But I bet you she'd be really pissed off about something that happened last week here in the province, and that was the sad plight of PEI's four bat species that was reported on, warning that two of these species could disappear in the very near future.

East Coast Environmental Law's report – the one I just talked about a minute ago – calls on the minister to, without delay, designate species at risk, put in protections for those species and their habitats, and to facilitate meaningful public participation in the process.

Question to the minister: Are you going to do any of that?

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

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

Like I say, we have these discussions in my office all the time about a number of issues. We have a number of issues on the go when it comes to wildlife here on Prince Edward Island, on habitat here on Prince Edward Island, on encroachment of habitat here on Prince Edward Island, what that's going to mean for species, what that's going to mean for forests, what that's going to mean for our overall ecosystem environmentally here on Prince Edward Island.

We're having these large conversations all the time on how we can best do our job in protecting what we have here on Prince Edward Island. If that's an issue, my staff will bring it to me that they think I need to deal with it. If they bring it to me, I'll sign off on it any day of the week.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I plan on asking some similar questions as one of the hon. members did already, but because I don't believe he asked the correct questions regarding Summerside and the shelter.

There is a definite need for these services and I'm glad to see the Province and City working together on this important initiative, although one would like to see it come to fruition as fast as possible.

Support services for unhoused in Summerside

Question for the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: Will this emergency shelter include any related support services, or how will clients acquire these support services?

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

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

Yes, we're continuing to work with our partners at the City of Summerside and with partners in the community about how to deliver services to those in need in Summerside. We hope to have the shelter up and running as soon as possible. There are still some meetings scheduled, I believe as early as next week, to finalize what those plans will be. I look forward to having those services in place as soon as possible.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, your first supplementary.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The need and demand for these services is growing as government and community groups are offering more and more support services.

Question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: When these emergency shelter beds are structured and built, will there be a plan going forward to take the next step and get some transitional beds so we can move these people on?

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

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

I would point out that there are 10 transitional beds under construction in Summerside right now that we made a significant investment into with the new LifeHouse housing there. We'll continue to make investments there.

[1:55 p.m.]

As I said, we've done a very quick and dirty needs assessment there before we go ahead with our emergency shelter and we do understand – as I've said several times already today – that transitional housing is a piece of the puzzle that we need to put in place there. We're working hard to increase the capacity in that regard.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, your second supplementary.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The minister recently talked about an expression of interest his department put forward when trying to secure a place for these beds.

Shelter and housing in Summerside (further)

Will the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities commit to meeting and talking with anyone that has a desire to talk about these expressions of interest, as I've already had a couple of groups reach out and wonder how they do it?

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

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

Yes, the expression of interest is up on the government's procurement website right now. It can be accessed by anyone; have a look at what it is we're proposing, what requirements might be.

I've talked with the hon. member about some interests in the community that have come forward and spoken to him, and I've indicated that I'm happy to speak with anyone that has an interest in participating in any way in the services that we'll be delivering in Summerside and that we are and will continue to offer in Summerside.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As predicted, landlords are getting out of the rental business all across the Island. There are rental units coming up for sale in many places, including North Rustico. I want to thank my constituent, Karen George, for pointing out that we have two six-unit buildings – so, 12 units – for sale right across from the church, right next to the seniors club, a short walk from the new wellness centre, really in a prime, prime location, right in downtown North Rustico. Frankly, people are worried that it's going to be purchased, torn down, and replaced with

housing that's not as affordable, turning those seniors out on the street.

Of course, the real answer is to fix the policy, but in the short term, I think it's a good candidate for sale to the province. I've talked to the minister about that. I really want to thank the minister for considering that.

Purchase of apartments for low-income housing

Question for the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: Will the Province indeed purchase these apartments for use as seniors low-income housing?

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

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

Yeah, it's certainly something we consider. We consider it on an ongoing basis. In fact, there's been discussion in this House about the government establishing a first right of refusal. My answer to that is that I believe that I have a de facto first right of refusal because it seems that somebody tries to sell me an apartment building once a week.

We are assessing those opportunities on a case-by-case basis because we know where the needs are throughout the province. We have a housing registry. We know where the demand is. We'll look at these on a case-by-case basis, and if it suits our needs, then we will consider it.

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

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I can guarantee you that the demand is there in North Rustico.

Being a landlord for older apartment buildings really is high risk for very little return. That's why landlords are getting out of the business. I've approached a few non-profit organizations to see if they might be interested, but right now they're even saying that the risk is too high for the amount of work it is to purchase and maintain older apartments.

We just had a great Capital Budget that was brought forward and is under debate with a lot of money for housing.

Question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: What sorts of supports will the Province offer non-profits perhaps to purchase and rent these apartments?

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

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

That's a great question. We certainly are looking at ways that we can leverage our budget to increase the capacity of affordable housing right across the housing continuum.

I'll just point out that in the past four years, this government has purchased about 140 units from the private market to bring into our supply of public housing, and we continue to evaluate those opportunities as they come. But in a demand-driven environment right now that we're in, increasing the supply of new housing that is unoccupied currently is really our priority. We need to keep up with demand, so build, build, build is my general mantra, but we do take the opportunity to jump on good opportunities that meet our needs.

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

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[2:00 p.m.]

I'm worried about these apartments because, really, it's a hard business case to make, and the reason is because of our rent controls that we have on Prince Edward Island. They are the most stringent in the country. They make it really tough for landlords to do business and offer the valuable services that they can.

Perhaps one of the most limiting rent controls, in particular for older rental units, is the inability to reset a low rent that was possibly set decades previously to more closely reflect the current market.

Rent control policy

Question for the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: Would you consider changes to policy in the *Residential Tenancy Act* to allow the rent amount for vacant rentals – these are rentals that are vacant – to be reset to more closely represent market values?

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

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

Generally understood that we have some of the most rigorous rental regulations in the country. Certainly, we have for a long time. That's always been to protect tenants against unreasonable increases in rent. We'll continue with that philosophy, but we also have to make sure that it's a balanced approach that keeps a healthy rental market here while we can continue to invest and increase our supply of housing.

As with any legislation or regulations, we'll continue to monitor how those roll out, how it affects the market, and make decisions going forward.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We all know that Queen Charlotte Junior High School has been over capacity for some time. The principal said just last night that they are about 30 students over capacity, but the teachers are struggling, the students are struggling; it's quite a situation and it's only getting worse, especially in town.

In your mandate letter, it requires you to "take immediate steps to alleviate space pressures at Queen Charlotte Junior High School..."

Now in the Budget, there's a plan to expand Queen Charlotte, which is very good, but we're not going to see that until 2027 at the earliest.

Capacity challenges at Queen Charlotte

Question to the minister: How are you going to deal with the immediate, and I mean the

over-crowding situation today, for the students and educators at that school?

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

Hon. N. Jameson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question.

Yes, I've had the opportunity to visit Queen Charlotte a number of times over the last number of years. I really appreciate the strong advocacy from the administration and the staff. They are set for a renovation. I'm really pleased that, the Minister of Finance, we were able to include that in our Budget. It's a \$16.95 million project and we're hopeful to be able to add 10 additional classrooms as well as six breakout or meeting spaces.

I know this is an immediate priority for government and the PSB. I know that the school has been able to be quite flexible in terms of how they use their space. Unfortunately, they had some damage as a result of Fiona, and they had to adapt accordingly.

That being said, there is a budget item of around \$1 million to purchase four mobile classrooms. I'm sure that the PSB will be looking at our schools that are nearing capacity or over capacity and will be allocating those mobiles accordingly.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: I didn't get an answer to the immediate problem. They're over capacity by 30 now. It could be 100 next year. It could be 150 the year after. We're not getting promises, which is good. I'm agreeing with you that that's good. But purchasing four mobiles for an entire province does not make sense for Queen Charlotte.

How many are they going to get? We talked about this on the floor yesterday. Are those mobiles going to Queen Charlotte? Can Queen Charlotte expect something, at least one or two or three or all of those mobiles,

minister? It's very unclear between both ministers what's going on here.

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

Hon. N. Jameson: Thanks, Madam Speaker.

This Budget was tabled on Tuesday, correct? We're Friday here today, so that's been three days. The PSB now is aware of the amount we have approved for mobiles. I know, given my relationship with Acting Director Tracy Beaulieu and the staff, I know that those would be conversations that they would be having this week. I know that they've likely reached out to (Indistinct) and I'm fully confident in the decisions they'll make moving forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, your final question.

G. McNeilly: Another thing that we talked about, too, is the expansion of early learning centres from 80 to 125, minister. But what I'm hearing is the managers are telling me that the additional support staff is needed. They need support with the additional support staff; cooks, cleaners. We're trying to increase the capacity, but the finances aren't there to support the people around the educators. Early years centres are in desperate need of support.

[2:05 p.m.]

Support for early years centres

Minister, when are the additional resources coming so they can help assist so we can get more people in and more finances in to help secure people and to secure early learners and the staff around them?

Thank you.

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

Hon. N. Jameson: Madam Speaker, finally, a child care question. It's always good to get one of those.

The hon. member knows how passionate I am about child care, and I could get up here and speak about it all day and the investments that this government has made in child care that we are extremely proud of. We are moving this system in the right direction, and I can assure you that any decision that is made is done in a thoughtful process. All of our stakeholders are engaged.

The regulation changes that the hon. member is speaking of haven't yet come to Cabinet. Obviously, we recognize that by expanding the number of spaces within centres, we're going to have to find a way to ensure that the centres don't lose out, or that they remain whole and that they're able to be supported financially.

So, those decisions are happening in conjunction with one another, and I look forward to providing more information to the House when those decisions are being made.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Statements by Ministers

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burrige: Madam Speaker, by Command of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table the Report of Borrowing. This report includes all loans and advances and any defaults on payments since the last report dated April 30th, 2023. I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Housing, Land and Communities, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a press release from earlier this week from Island Trails and their executive director, Tracey Gairns Brioux. I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table just something that was in the *Guardian* today. Traffic issues are increasing all over the province, and there was a really interesting piece in there by Jason MacKay today. I know that this is a municipal thing, but traffic issues are very important. He makes a lot of good sense, and we have to listen to people about future traffic issues. So, it's a traffic plan for Charlottetown from Jason MacKay, and I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. members, pursuant to section 59 of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, I wish to advise that I've received the 2022 Annual Report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I move that the report be received and do lie on the Table.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *Benevolent and Community Crowdfunding Act*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Bill No. 41, *Benevolent and Community Crowdfunding Act*, read a first time.

Speaker: Hon. minister, do you have an explanation?

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

This act clarifies the rights and responsibilities of persons who organize, administer, or benefit from informal fundraising campaigns and provides a default set of rules to govern informal fundraising campaigns based in PEI.

Speaker: Thank you.

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Madam Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *Reviewable Transactions Act*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Bill No. 42, *Reviewable Transactions Act*, read a first time.

Speaker: Hon. minister, an explanation?

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

[2:10 p.m.]

This act replaces the *Frauds on Creditors Act*, originally enacted in 1939. It updates the remedies available when the debtor attempts to avoid paying a debt or unfairly favours one creditor over another.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burrige: Madam Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *Appropriation Act (Capital Expenditures) 2024*, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Deputy Clerk: Bill No. 43, *Appropriation Act (Capital Expenditures) 2024*, read a first time.

Speaker: Minister, do you have an overview?

Hon. J. Burridge: A very quick one. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This is the legislation supporting the budgetary plan put forward in my House statement.

Speaker: Thank you.

Government Motions

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 1st order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk (MacEachern): 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.

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to further 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 back, Jordan. Could you introduce yourself and your title for Hansard?

Jordan McNally: Jordan McNally, executive director of Fiscal Management.

Chair: Alright, members. We left off last on page 7: Capital Improvements in Education and Early Years.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thanks very much.

The new School Revitalization Fund: minister, was that something that was in the campaign, whatever you call it, the campaign document, or what? How did that come to be? How did that come to be that we're putting that in place?

[2:15 p.m.]

Hon. J. Burridge: I think it was just identified by the school community that more money was needed for repairs and upkeep. They have a school capital repair bucket of money of \$20 million. Then they added this new \$22 million fund to support, basically, aging infrastructure and small repairs across the Island.

G. McNeilly: But like I said, in the minister's mandate letter, it says: "Create a School Infrastructure Revitalization Fund investing \$25 million over the next three years..."

Is that this fund?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think, together, what they're doing is, she's actually gone above and beyond her mandate, quite honestly.

G. McNeilly: What I'm reading in her mandate letter, she has a mandate. I'll just finish my – \$25 million over the next three years. You can say you're going beyond the fund, but I'm looking at comparing what's in the mandate letter to what the Department

of Finance is putting in front of me right here. Is that the same fund?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, that is where the fund originated from. When we're looking at the Capital Budget for education as a whole, we also have to look at fiscal capacity, as well as what can be accomplished within each given year. They have a large number of projects coming up in the next two years. The idea was actually to spread it over four years. The amount seemed adequate to be able to catch up on the backup of repairs but, yes, that is where the fund came from.

G. McNeilly: Can you confirm, minister, that's a cut?

Hon. J. Burridge: It's not a cut because now they have \$42 million to work with for repairs.

G. McNeilly: Your guest just talked about fiscal capacity, what we're able to do, spread it over a four-year period. In this, it says \$22 million over four years. In the minister's mandate letter, it says \$25 million over three years. Can you confirm that is a cut? We're dealing with the same fund.

Hon. J. Burridge: From how I look at it, I don't see it as a cut because they're now able to tap in to the \$20 million bucket, as well as now they have a \$22 million bucket on top of it. Schools are going to see, per year, more money allocated to small repairs and small capital projects than they have before.

G. McNeilly: But you're going from \$8.3 million down to \$5.5 million in the Capital Budget. That's a cut from what's in the minister's mandate letter and to what we just talked about here. The guest just said fiscal capacity of what's going to be done.

The reason why I'm asking, this is a new fund. This is something new –

Hon. C. Deagle: It's more money.

Hon. B. Thompson: It's more money. What do you not understand about that? It's more money.

G. McNeilly: You can say more –

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty has the floor.

G. McNeilly: You can say, and you can intervene with more money; our population is growing. We need this because you guys didn't act for four years and get your job done to increase school capacity. That's why we need this right now.

[Interjections]

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty. Do you have a question on the Capital Budget?

G. McNeilly: They just answered the question. Yes, I do have a question on this. After all that, we're talking about – we need this. Schools need repairs. I'm in opposition. I will lobby for every single dollar.

When I look at a minister's mandate letter of what has to be done, and then I look at a Capital Budget that comes out three months later and the Department of Finance has that now, it's a cut. It's a cut from what you said it was. Can you confirm that, minister, that we're cutting funding by a lot of money to schools that need it the most because of your mismanagement over there during the last four years?

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: (Indistinct)

Hon. J. Burridge: If you look at this –

G. McNeilly: I am.

[2:20 p.m.]

Hon. J. Burridge: – Capital Budget for schools, you're going to see a significant increase in funding, both through repairs and capital projects and expansion. This Budget absolutely speaks to the concerns that you are raising, no question. If the outcome of this conversation is, are the schools being taken care of financially to meet the demands that they're seeing today, this Budget is a big budget and the top three items were health care, housing, and education.

G. McNeilly: Exactly.

Hon. J. Burridge: And, so, there was a significant –

[Interjections]

Chair: Hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, could you come through the chair with your questions, please?

G. McNeilly: Certainly, sorry. Do I have one more?

Chair: You do.

G. McNeilly: I'm just wondering why, because we're all in agreement there, and we all know that we're behind. The minister just added 150 people last year and that's not enough. The school capacity is growing, so I'm not surprised we're here. We're here because we didn't manage this correctly and I'm wondering why – from one section in one mandate letter, and then we get the Capital Budget – in my mind, this is on the Department of Finance for saying that – we just talked about it: fiscal capacity.

What do we have fiscal capacity – and you have cut your own programs before they even got to the floor. So, do you think that's appropriate that we're sitting here – we all agree that we need these investments. I'm fighting for the \$3 million that your government has cut.

Hon. J. Burridge: Jordan, if you have something to say, go ahead.

If you were to speak to people in the education community right now, they are more than happy on what they're seeing through this Capital Budget. There's been a significant interest and dollars allocated to education. So, to say that there are cuts or not enough, there are more expansions, repairs, capital projects in this budget than you've seen in the past, quite honestly.

Hon. C. Deagle: Ever.

G. McNeilly: She didn't do anything.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm not going to continue on, but just make the point that unless there are funds that

have been moved around a little bit, they are not the same thing, and there was a cut there.

Under the construction and renovations, there's the \$45,888,000. Our handouts lay out what happens in the next four years, but I'm wondering what will be spent on these projects this year.

Jordan McNally: Included in that \$45 million, there's some money in there for Eliot River; Evangeline, to start the design tendering work; there's the ramp-up of the Georgetown (Indistinct) School capital repair; there's the completion of Montague Consolidated.

There are also the school ventilation upgrades in there as well; Sherwood School replacement is well underway; the completion of the Slemon Park centre expansion there, shelving and a lift for them; and there's the ramp-up of the Stratford High School as well.

K. Bernard: Did you say, for Evangeline, it's to start design – where are we on that project?

Jordan McNally: That one, the tender for design has been awarded.

K. Bernard: I'm trying to remember what year we announced the Evangeline replacement of the school, and we're just there now. I find that shocking. So, yes, we can say we talked to school staff and they're thrilled about the budget, but if we don't do anything with that money, if people have to wait that many years to have their schools done, "Don't get too excited," is what I would say to them about that.

Yesterday we were talking about the school ventilation systems, and I don't know if you've had an opportunity to bring those back. I'm wondering – we were talking about if there are schools operating right now without a ventilation system – did you happen to get that information?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, so this fund is actually for schools that didn't have a ventilation system. This is putting them in. In 2022, they put the portable HEPA filters in each classroom where there wasn't a ventilation system to begin. So, those would

stay in place until they have a ventilation system (Indistinct)

K. Bernard: Okay. So, wherever there's no operating ventilation system, there are HEPA filters in those schools. Okay.

[2:25 p.m.]

Moving on to Stratford. So, \$65.9 million for the school build over four years. I'm wondering if you can tell us what has been completed on that project so far.

Hon. J. Burridge: I know the details of this one. The engineering and design – so the planning and construction process has been completed. They're moving dirt on site right now, so the earthwork is being done right now.

If you have anything to add to that...

Jordan McNally: That's where they are right now, is sitework. I know that there's structural steel and foundation tenders that have been awarded as well. They're moving along in the construction process, really ramping up this year and you'll see that's really the biggest jump next year in this budget. It's going up to \$21 million, so construction will be active.

K. Bernard: Would this amount account for any potential inflation over the time it takes to complete construction?

Jordan McNally: Basically, when they get to a point where design is complete and they've gone out to start doing construction tenders, cost estimates are updated to reflect the most recent costing that they can. It would bake in, as best they can, the cost of inflation.

K. Bernard: The numbers that we're seeing here are dealing with current inflation numbers.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, this is what they believe is the full cost of the build. Now, it's \$65 million over four years; that doesn't include the full cost because some of it was in the current year. So, the full cost or budget of the Stratford High School is \$78 million.

K. Bernard: The projected capacity for this project, if I'm correct here, is 750 students. Is that how many students we're projecting to have in 2027 when the school opens?

Hon. J. Burridge: Just because I was involved, I know this one. Yeah, Public Schools Branch put that number forward based on their Baragar projection models, but that is the number that they put forward. On average in Stratford, you're going to see 150 to 180 students per grade.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, one more and I can put you back on the list.

K. Bernard: Yeah, sure. Just kind of following up on that, because we know we are surpassing our projected growth consistently, are we confident that that is going to be – are you working with the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning on this too, as hopefully the population growth strategy comes together? Because we've seen it happen before where a school opens and it's already at capacity. I know that we don't have a crystal ball, but I think that there are lots of ways in which we can be prepared, and I just want to make sure that we're doing that.

Hon. J. Burridge: I know, having been involved in the design of this school, they've added in and they've designed for an expansion on that school. They took a wing and they designed an expansion, knowing that Stratford is a rapidly growing community. That was factored in in the design.

K. Bernard: Can I ask just a follow-up on that?

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

When you say there's a design, does that mean there's a space – maybe like a wall that could easily be removed and then the plan would already be there for an expansion? Is that what you mean?

Hon. J. Burridge: It's a classroom wing that they would just push out and add two floors, which I think they designed for, I'm going to say, six extra classrooms, maybe

eight extra classrooms on the end. An easy wing they can push out.

K. Bernard: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Nice design.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

The new School Revitalization Fund: it says it's larger than repairs, but it's not a major capital project, and you're talking finances. What is that range?

[2:30 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: What it's saying is that it's what can't be supported within the current capital repair budget. It's not a dollar value per se; it's basically intended like they have \$4 million for capital repairs. What they can't accomplish within that \$4 million would be accomplished within this fund. There's no set value to consider it a major capital repair. In the past, it's typically a major overhaul to a school like Georgetown or expansion or a new school like Sherwood.

G. McNeilly: Oh, I checked too. That is a platform promise. It's black and white. It's right there, and it says \$25 million. It's \$22 million here, so I don't know.

Anyway, this \$6 million – I'll let it go, I'll let it go for now – the \$6 million: where is their top priority for that? Just give me the top three things that you will do with that \$6 million next year.

Jordan McNally: That's really up to the Public Schools Branch to decide what their priorities are in terms of taking care of the list of repairs that they have.

G. McNeilly: Are these the type of repairs that – are we going to see a planning phase next year, or are they the type of things that they should be able to move right into renovations or things right away?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, they should be able to move into it right away. They have a list of what needs to be done. They should be able to (Indistinct)

G. McNeilly: Are you at all concerned that – how are we going to provide – money is one thing, but what is the plan? What is the support plan if we don't have enough workers? We talked yesterday about two schools not being able to get ventilation systems because nobody applied for the projects. What is the support plan of government to make sure that we have enough workers to complete these projects?

Jordan McNally: The issue with construction delays is typically on the larger projects because those larger construction companies are quite busy. The type of capital repairs within this and the existing capital repairs budget could be done by not as large contracting companies. There will hopefully be capacity there to get them done.

G. McNeilly: Correct me if I'm wrong, Jordan, but typically education doesn't really get a lot of support from the federal government in terms of building new schools or wings, but they did particular with West Royalty. Our community got, I think, \$5 million, \$5.5 million to complete that extension on there.

Are there any funds or plans to lobby the federal government, and are there any programs set up right now that you can lobby to get funding support for these projects?

Jordan McNally: None that I'm aware of. I'm sure the department's looking constantly at what federal funding is available. I know for school buses, they tapped into the ICIP fund as well. But no, none have been identified, as far as I know.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, one more.

G. McNeilly: Thank you for that. We talked about the mobile school classrooms. I asked maybe a question about it today. When you purchase these mobile classrooms, when are they going to be – you give the money to the PSB; they purchase them. Is this something that will be in place by the fall? How does that work with purchasing mobile classrooms?

Jordan McNally: My understanding is they're essentially prefab mobile

classrooms, so it is quite quick. They can't really move on anything, of course, until the Capital Budget is passed in the House, but once it is, although the expenditure is in next year, they can place the order and time when it can be here.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Perfect.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I was going to ask this question specifically for Stratford, but looking at all of the new builds, is the plan that the new builds be net zero, or if not, are there any that will be designed as net zero?

Hon. J. Burridge: A lot of them are being designed. They're going to be delivered net zero-ready. I think a lot of them would have geothermal heating systems, solar panels on the roof. They may not be fully net zero, but I think they build them so that they can bring them to be full net zero as money becomes available.

[2:35 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: Yeah, a lot of the larger schools; so, any new school build is built net zero-ready, basically. They're built so that the roof can handle solar panels in the future when that happens. The only school that will be fully net zero ready is actually in the Department of Environment, the Cardigan Consolidated School. That was a pilot project where they're installing geothermal and solar panels to make that a full net zero school, but the newer schools like Sherwood and Stratford would be designed to a net zero-ready standard kind of thing.

K. Bernard: Looking at, again, all of the schools; in Stratford, if the population grows or if we end up starting at capacity, we have the option to expand. Is that the same for Evangeline, Sherwood, all the places we have new schools? Is that something that we're taking into consideration in the design?

Jordan McNally: I can't speak to those schools, if they're taking that into consideration or not, actually.

K. Bernard: To be fair, I think you knew that because you were at all the meetings. That might not be something that you would have.

Hon. J. Burridge: Yeah. I just knew Stratford specifically, just because I was involved, but I know that was a consideration. I'd be surprised if it wasn't being taken into account in other school projects, but Stratford, for sure, that was actually one of the design principles: room for expansion.

K. Bernard: Sherwood School: that project is expected to end winter 2024, so next winter. I'm wondering if you can tell us where that construction is. What's left to be done?

Jordan McNally: I'm not sure what's left to be done other than what's indicated in the projection of spending, kind of thing. So, over the next two years are really the heavy construction years, and it would be expected to be complete in that winter 2024 time period.

K. Bernard: You may not have this in your notes, but when would we expect that school to be open and taking students?

Jordan McNally: They're saying occupancy is expected for winter 2024.

K. Bernard: So, next winter, they will be in. Okay.

Chair: Do you want me to come back?

K. Bernard: No, that's alright. Thank you, though.

The École François-Buote; we have \$13.5 million over four years and planning started in '22-23. Where are we with construction there?

Jordan McNally: They have an application in for federal funding for the community portion of that school. So, until that's approved by the federal government – they're waiting for that approval before they can move forward with the design phase of that because, of course, that would incorporate the design phase. So, that's why – the design was expected this year – it's

actually going to start next year, pending approval of that federal funding agreement.

K. Bernard: Okay, that makes sense. With École François-Buote, there weren't any numbers on projected enrollment, what capacity would look like. Do you know what the capacity will be at École François-Buote when construction is finished?

Jordan McNally: I know that they're looking to add 10 additional classrooms. In terms of the total population of that school, no, I don't have that number with me.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, one more, and then I can put you back on the list.

K. Bernard: That would be great, thank you.

For Queen Charlotte School, it's budgeted \$16.9 million over four years, and the project is expected to begin in '24-25 and end in '26-27. I'm wondering why there are four years of funding.

[Interjections]

K. Bernard: Oh, maybe the planning. Okay. It's a two-year project but budgeted over four years.

[2:40 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: Yeah. There's typically a year where the planning committee has to get together, figure out the space program before they can go to design. That typically takes one of the years, then there are two years of construction, and then that following fourth year is really just for deficiencies; cleaning up anything that's left over from any of the actual construction phase.

So, it would be completed in three years even though the funding stretches over four. It's a very small amount in that fourth year.

K. Bernard: Okay, thanks.

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

G. McNeilly: Thanks.

So, the École François-Buote: it does say planning is '22-23, and you just explained with federal funding. They're still very much in the planning phase. Is that going to affect the '26-27 completion date?

Jordan McNally: No, that factors in that delay. Basically, they can still move forward with planning with the community space added. They just can't move to the design phase until that federal funding is in place.

G. McNeilly: I know the federal government does a lot for the Francophone schools. Are there any other situations like that with the French – Evangeline, École François-Buote, or any of the other schools on the list? Is there anything else we're waiting for the federal government?

Jordan McNally: No, Evangeline has a federal funding agreement in place already for their community space. That would be it.

G. McNeilly: Just some questions on the outdoor learning spaces. This is new in the fall '23 Capital Budget. I think that's great. I think outdoor learning space is fantastic. I thump on the desk for that. That's great. That's not a ton of money, \$300,000 over five years. I'll get to that in a second; not too bad.

Can you just tell me a little bit about that program? A pilot, I should say.

Jordan McNally: To speak to the dollar amount, we speak in those sheets typically over the five-year investment, but where that lines up is actually \$150,000 split over fiscal years '25-26 and '26-27. So, next year is really the planning year: What are the parameters? How does that look? Is it schools applying for this fund based on the ideas that they have? So, although it says over five years, really, it's a pilot project over two years, so \$150,000 per year.

Chair: Hon. member, you're in the next section. Would you mind sticking with Capital Improvements?

G. McNeilly: Oh, sorry, sorry.

Chair: But thank you for answering.

G. McNeilly: No, and I'll ask more questions over there. I think, Chair, that's all I have for this section.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I know this is a far way off, but it's something that I think about a lot because my kids go to Birchwood and I'm in Birchwood a lot and I see it's busting at the seams. And when we get the new Stratford junior high school, Birchwood's going to be virtually empty. Obviously, at that point in time there will be some sort of school rezoning activity and that school will fill up in no time at all.

There might not be an answer here, but I'm really curious to the process of what that looks like when you're considering something like that, because there will be a completely empty school.

With our population growth, I don't for a second doubt that we're going to be at capacity probably, regardless of how that works. I guess I don't really have a question there. It's something I find really interesting, the process for that to try to figure that all out. So, not really a question there, I guess. Sorry.

Hon. J. Burridge: That's alright. I think about this too, so I'm right there with you. This is something that I think about quite a bit.

I think that's why you'll see tied to that Stratford junior high item, you'll see in consultation with the Public Schools Branch because the Public Schools Branch, they have to do some work there. That's precisely why. It's giving them time to look at the Charlottetown greater area and look at population growth and try to figure out how that is all going to settle. That's why you'll see that note. Any time you'll see Stratford junior high, you'll see "with consultation with the Public Schools Branch" and that's because they have to do that work using their models, which generally underestimates, I would say.

In hindsight, looking back, you would see a lot of schools have been – I feel like the Baragar projection model gives a baseline.

What I've always advocated for is kind of like a – I picture it as a plug-in where we can kind of infuse local trends because I think sometimes that's missed. But that will be their work to do and that's why you'll see that note any time the Stratford junior high is mentioned.

[2:45 p.m.]

K. Bernard: For Westisle High School, I know that there's a needs and building assessment happening for that, or it's going to happen in '24-25, and it's for \$100,000. I'm wondering what the parameters are for that needs assessment. Are you kind of looking at the whole school, or are there specific things that you're looking at?

Jordan McNally: I believe the needs assessment is both what the current school needs as well as projecting out what the future needs are as well, just like we spoke to, what the population growth is there in terms of school age. So, it would encompass both of those things, but mainly, what the issues in the current school are that need to be addressed.

K. Bernard: Chair, I have a question for you. When you say are we good for this section, does that mean we would be passing Education?

Chair: No. We would just do that very first, Capital Improvements – Buildings.

K. Bernard: Okay. I'm good. Thank you, Chair.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Chair. I said I was done, and I'm not.

Chair: This doesn't surprise the Chair, to be clear. [Laughter]

G. McNeilly: Order.

We talk about ventilation and how important it was, and I think that we learned a lot over COVID, and we realized that's important. There are four schools with elevated risk of radon in our school systems. Is there anything in here to address that? There was stuff about ventilation. Is there anything in

here about radon levels in schools and what we're doing to address that?

Jordan McNally: There's nothing specifically in this budget for that. I'm not sure what that would involve in terms of addressing that, but no, there's nothing specifically in here for that.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Thank you.

Chair: I just have one question on the Stratford junior high school. It says \$1.5 million allocated to the project in the fiscal year. Does that mean that's when the planning for it starts, that \$1.5 million? Or is that \$1.5 million allocated to construction and the planning is now?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, once the budget is allocated to a project, the planning work can begin, a committee can be formed, and all the work of the Public Schools Branch would inform that, but it's really budget allocated so that there's an indication that a project is there.

Chair: Thank you.

Shall the Capital Improvements – Buildings section carry? Carried.

Equipment and Other Capital Assets

“Appropriations provided for information technology and equipment purchases.”
Childhood Recreation: 200,000. Classroom Technology: 2,212,000. Trades Training: 250,000.

Total Equipment and Other Capital Assets:
2,662,000

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

G. McNeilly: I appreciate the chair letting me just skip ahead because I was so excited about this section here.

T. DesRoches: Pen drop.

G. McNeilly: Pen drop. The outdoor learning spaces: we just saw that there will be nothing until 2025. It doesn't seem like it's that difficult of a thing to allocate for spending this year. Can you tell me why that decision was made to expand that to 2025

and not do anything with it in the immediate year?

Jordan McNally: It was really to allow that planning year, what the program looks like. If that happens quicker than expected, like you said, it's not a large amount, and budgets can be adjusted, of course. If they want to come back to Treasury Board and reallocate money, if they have slippage within the next year, that's always a possibility. Things can be adapted.

G. McNeilly: All we have is just what we see here in outdoor learning spaces. Outdoor learning spaces: new in fall 2023 Capital Budget. Outdoor learning spaces. Is this going to be about classroom spaces, nature walks, tree identification? Are we talking about invasive species searches? What are we talking about here?

Hon. J. Burrige: I think it's maybe a little bit of all those things. I think they want to create outdoor learning spaces, whatever that entails, but I do think that a big part of it is getting the kids outside and finding an appreciation for the outdoors and nature. This hasn't been designed, but I do picture an outdoor gathering area, but I do see a lot of that classroom learning experience happening in nearby areas, in nature walks and such.

[2:50 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: I think this is great. I think that there's an opportunity to bring our Indigenous friends and communities involved in this too. We've got to get out there and see things. I know that some teachers have come to me, and I think it might be the Morell area that talked about having a plan to take this whole thing outdoors. The idea was just unbelievable. So, I think we're on the right track. I just don't know what it is.

If it's going to go, can't we put a little bit more funding into this to make sure – \$150,000 across the schools. So many different schools. I don't know if you're set up for project-based funding, or are we going to do this universally across the province? I just don't understand. Do you know?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think that's what they're trying to figure out too. Jordan, if you have anything to add, go ahead, but I think that's what they're bringing together right now.

Jordan McNally: It is an initial investment. Similar to the school recreation fund that's been successful, if it is something that has a lot of uptake, it certainly could be considered in future budgets.

G. McNeilly: That's great, and I think it's a really good fund, and I'll continue to ask questions on it.

The Childhood Recreation Fund, it's a matching fund. Can you talk about the successes of that program and what we're looking at into the future, and how we're going to use that financing to build playgrounds?

Jordan McNally: From what we've heard, the program is going quite well. It's forecasted to be fully spent within the first two years of launch. I don't think there's been anyone that they've had to turn away or anything like that, so it seems like a good allocation. There's been no request to increase it at this point. From all accounts, it's going well.

G. McNeilly: So, the money is fully funded and people are happy, and then you said something: it's fully spent but there's been no request to spend more. If it's fully funded, obviously populations are growing, schools are growing – the other fund is creating an outdoor space. Is there any opportunity to move these two funds together and pool the money, and maybe increase the funding of the two funds that I talked about?

Jordan McNally: I think the idea was to separate them as separate ideas, just because the recreation – I'm sure there are ways to integrate the projects with the existing recreation on the schoolgrounds, but yeah, there is no discussion of combining them.

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

G. McNeilly: Sure. The only reason I say that is because the way I look at this,

childhood recreation is a little bit different. The other one, outdoor learning spaces, involves children but it also gets our high school and junior high kids out and moving around. If anybody knows about junior high and high school, it's harder to do that.

I think that if we can combine the funds or maybe invest more in trying to get our high school and junior high school students more active but learning at the same time, it's a win-win. I guess maybe I'll let the minister talk about that.

Hon. J. Burridge: I think the recreation fund, it's a playground equipment matching fund. So, that's pretty specific, and I think that's the scope of that fund.

I think outdoor learning spaces, that's a curriculum-based, probably, type of scenario. And I'm looking to the teacher in the room. I think they are two separate things, but I agree with you, hon. member.

Total sidebar, but my father was a teacher; taught that era. He started a course called ecology back in the '80s, but that's exactly what he was trying to do at that time, get the kids outside, because he felt that things connected for everyone – every student at every level – when you got them outside. So, you're preaching to the choir.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

[2:55 p.m.]

I'm going to jump ahead to the outdoor learning spaces. When I worked at Westwood, the year I left, they had started this outdoor learning space. There would be like, four little tree stumps that students could sit on, there were little reading areas, they were planning what plants they would plant where, shade from trees; that sort of thing.

It really is a really great space, and you can be fairly – when I'm looking at \$300,000 over five years, that's not much when you consider how many schools there are. I guess we're going to be just relying on nature basically, with maybe a few little frills here and there, for outdoor learning spaces. You don't need a whole lot. But that

\$300,000 over five years, it's a pilot so I guess this specific fund here will be targeted for specific schools? I know you wouldn't know what schools, but to say, "Here's \$300,000 for every school in Prince Edward Island" – as a pilot project, I guess that's why it's so small?

Jordan McNally: The \$300,000 over five years is split over really two years, so \$150,000 and \$150,000. Again, it is an introduction of a new pilot program, so depending on the uptake and the success of it, it can be considered for future years as well. Similar to the Childhood Recreation Fund, you introduce it; we need to put some parameters around it so the Public Schools Branch will kind of design – is it an application-based program where the schools have an idea of what they want to do and they apply? We're not such yet. They need to establish that.

That's why '24-25 is kind of the planning year, followed by two years of \$150,000. Like I mentioned, if planning happens quicker, it's not a huge amount, but it could be altered if they choose to do that; come to Treasury Board, update us.

K. Bernard: My last question on this. The one that we created at Westwood was done by teachers, counsellors, staff. We did it. I'm not sure about the tree stumps. I think we hosted like, a Saturday morning where people came. You may not have this either, but is this project something that is going to be kind of given to the schools to let the schools decide how to do this, or is it going to be that somebody hired comes in to create these spaces? Do you know that?

Jordan McNally: With it being a new program, no, we don't have that. That will be determined through the planning phase of this.

K. Bernard: That's very fair. I was just curious if you knew that yet.

The Childhood Recreation Fund: this is something that I think is very important. I don't think that we do this properly. I see playgrounds as extensions of a school. When I think about the inequities that happen when we have, let's say, a rural school that has a smaller population, a smaller fundraising pool, versus a larger

school. And even in there, the socioeconomics, the demographics of families.

I'm wondering, and you may not have this. The school community has to raise 50 percent. Is there ever a time where you're asked to bump up what we will give them because they can't raise the money?

Jordan McNally: I wouldn't have whether there'd be examples of that or not. I know the program parameters are set at the 50 percent. My assumption would be that's what's followed across the board.

K. Bernard: You wouldn't know then if there is any wiggle room there to support? I guess I'd need to look at the eligibility because if you do have a school that's smaller, you do have a school that the socioeconomics aren't as strong, where the pool is not there for fundraising, I worry about the inequities there because every child deserves and has the right to play.

I have concerns with the way we do this because I'm not sure that everyone necessarily should be treated equal in this case. We're looking at equity versus equality. I guess this isn't the place to ask this question because we're Capital Budget, but I think that we really should look at how we deliver that program.

[3:00 p.m.]

Has there been any talk about a change to that fund? I know people are having a hard time fundraising right now. Food banks aren't seeing the donations that they once were, and the list goes on and on of people who are not seeing the level of donations they were seeing before. Is there anything in this budget that has been put in there given inflation, cost of living, all of those things, to say people might not be able to fundraise for playgrounds anymore?

Jordan McNally: The budget has stayed at \$200,000, which is kind of what the department had come forward with. I know it would be up to them to look at what their program parameters were within that \$200,000 allocation. But yeah, there's no planned change from what information I have.

K. Bernard: Okay. I'm wondering, when we make playgrounds and recreational equipment something that people need to fundraise for, are you concerned that we send the message that these things aren't as important?

Hon. J. Burridge: That's probably more of a me question, I guess. I think prior to this – I think this is a step in the right direction – I don't think there was any funds put forward. I think that this is a good first step, but I hear you. But at least there's something in there now because there was nothing before. I think this is a first step and maybe it goes farther, but this is better than what we had.

K. Bernard: I appreciate that. To that, I will challenge you and say, is better than nothing good enough?

I'm good for now, Chair.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

Questions on the trades training capital, \$1.5 million over five years: Can you talk a little bit about that? I could ask where is the money going, is it allocated for right now? Could you talk a little bit about that?

Jordan McNally: Sure. It's funding that was increased last year or the year before. It supports courses like carpentry, welding, automotive, robotics, bioscience, where those courses are offered. Some of the pieces for those courses are quite expensive, so this would fund that equipment, keep them up to date, make sure they're safe, of course, but that's where it goes.

G. McNeilly: I don't think there's probably a more important program right now than this one for our futures. Can you talk a little bit about how schools can access this money? Is it predetermined from the PSB? How does it work, and is this money going to meet our needs for the next five years in this important field?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, like I said, there was an increase recently to meet demand and, of course, the escalating cost of some of this equipment, as well. There was no requested increase. I don't have the details

of how they determine where it goes. My assumption would be it would be similar in terms of they're looking at the age of the different equipment across the board, where there are requests coming in from the schools for replacement, those kinds of things.

G. McNeilly: You talk frequently, minister, about when you come to this financial determination; did you talk to the Construction Association? I talked to the Construction Association there and they're saying this is a crisis now and it will be way worse in the future. Are they consulted with on this funding and how did they play a role in the government's decision to allocate funds for this?

Hon. J. Burridge: Yeah, from our table we didn't necessarily consult. I've had, actually, a couple of conversations with them, Sam Sanderson. Coming from a background in construction, I completely understand how important this is. But I guess what we would look into is, I would suspect – I don't know – I would suspect that our trades teachers are very well aware of what they're tasked with and what industry is looking at. Input would have been given from the trades teachers, I suspect.

[3:05 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: Do you know in the past – it says annually, \$250,000 – do you know if we hit that regularly? Is all that money being distributed? I just don't understand. Can you get the same level of training if you're at Westisle, Charlottetown Rural, Colonel Gray? Where are our gaps in this right now? It's a tough one.

Hon. J. Burridge: I will say just a little piece. It's not going to fully, probably, answer your question. Back again to the Stratford project: we toured trades programs in multiple schools across PEI. It seems like a lot of things in education, if you have a teacher that's an awesome trades teacher, it elevates the education on that. For instance, you go to Montague, I think was one that stood out to me. They had a fantastic shop and trades program.

I will say, in the Stratford design, the trades are really celebrated in that design of that school. You will see clearly, if you look at

it, that there's an emphasis on trades in that school. That reflects what we're seeing in industry and the importance being put on them.

G. McNeilly: I would agree. I agree with the minister. I'm trying to say, have we done enough, and have we put in – we just talked about that. Good is not great. I think, PEI, we have to be great in this. I'll take the minister's word for it for now that we're getting to a place where we're investing in this.

I'm just moving on to classroom technology: increase of \$100,000 over the previous five-year budget. When did that increase come in? Was it this year it's coming in? Is that meeting a demand?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, that's this upcoming year that that's going to kick in. It's a \$100,000 increase over the five years. There is refresh schedules that are baked into there for Chromebooks, laptops, those types of things. It's just refreshing the existing stock.

G. McNeilly: So, when you say it's an increase of \$100,000 over five years, does this say the same thing? Increase of \$100,000 over previous five-year budget. Is that the same thing?

Jordan McNally: That's the same thing, yeah.

G. McNeilly: Okay, I'm just checking because it's just worded a little bit differently there. I didn't know if you were talking about an annual increase of \$100,000. We're talking about, really, a \$20,000 increase annually.

Jordan McNally: Correct.

G. McNeilly: When you say now in a refresh phase, what does that mean?

Jordan McNally: Basically, all of the technology within that classroom technology, they stick to a refresh schedule, so I believe Chromebooks are three years, laptops are four, and if there are any desktops, they're a five-year refresh schedule.

G. McNeilly: The budget reflects the current price and device cycle. That's what we're kind of talking about here, is that it's a three- or four-year cycle. What is happening? Are we able to refurbish or resell? What happens at the end of the life cycle of those devices?

Hon. J. Burridge: Actually, I think that's where Computers for Success might come into play.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, that's right.

Hon. J. Burridge: There's a program, Computers for Success. A lot of technology, laptops, iPads, I think even cell phones, they're doing now, go to that program, and then they're able to refurbish, and it will be passed on to maybe students who don't have a Chromebook at home or family that don't have it, or seniors, or really anyone can call that program and get a refurbished laptop. I think that's actually where it goes. It's recycled.

G. McNeilly: My last question is: Are there any gaps in the province? Is this equitable across the province? Does each kid have the same access to the same devices, no matter where they are learning across PEI?

[3:10 p.m.]

Hon. J. Burridge: I think I'd say the Chromebooks – I think they are. I think every student is offered (Indistinct). I do think that that is equitable, and they take care of students across the Island.

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

G. McNeilly: I am good for that section.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Vehicles

“Appropriations provided for vehicle purchases.” School Buses: 13,690,000.

Total Vehicles: 13,690,000

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Obviously really glad to see a bigger spend here, and us working our way to 100 percent buses. Can you tell us when the goal date is to actually be there and have 100 percent electric buses, if that is indeed the goal?

Hon. J. Burridge: That is the goal. I think we're looking to have a fully electrified fleet by 2030.

P. Bevan-Baker: How many buses does this reflect in the current year?

Jordan McNally: The base refresh is 25 buses. The increase there you'll see over the base budget is just buses that were ordered in the previous year that were late arriving. We can't account for them until they get here. So, the baseline would be 25 buses a year. There's an increase – I believe it might be seven buses – in that outer fifth year, but baseline is 25 buses a year.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Can you explain – maybe I'm just not looking at this right, Jordan, but last year the forecast was 50 percent more than the budget estimate, and you've just said that some of the buses didn't arrive but were counted this year. So, can you explain that, what seems to me like a discrepancy?

Jordan McNally: Sure. The budget for last year was to order 25 buses. Of that order, not all arrived in '22-23. The order from '22-23, some of those were late arriving and therefore are accounted for in '23-24, which is causing that forecast (Indistinct)

P. Bevan-Baker: Got it. I've heard – and I think this is an important question because we're talking about electrifying the whole fleet, and I realize this is not something that would appear in a capital budget, but – that there are issues in terms of maintenance and concerns with the electric buses. Do you know if there's a greater incidence of problems with the electric buses than there is with the old diesel buses?

Chair: Minister, I know that's not a capital budget question.

Hon. J. Burridge: That is an operational one, yeah.

Chair: Are you willing to entertain the question?

Hon. J. Burridge: No, I don't have the answer for that. That would be an operational question.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, do you have a note there – or maybe this is also an operational cost – of how much of this goes into maintenance and repairs, or is that entirely in the operational budget?

Hon. J. Burridge: Operational.

P. Bevan-Baker: This is just strictly for the purchase of the buses? Okay, great.

I'm good. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Just to remind the minister, and stranger too, that Hansard can't pick up the nodding. So unfortunately, you have to voice when you agree.

Hon. J. Burridge: Sorry.

Chair: That's no problem.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity for a question.

I did ask this the last time that the capital budget was on with regards to the electric school buses, and the answer at the time was it was something that we'd possibly look into. I have a lot of school bus drivers in my district, actually, and a lot of them have their buses at home.

With the fleet becoming electrified – and again, if this is an operational question, Chair, I do apologize, but – is there any update on the possibility of allowing for – because I'm assuming there are different chargers for the buses than there would be for a personal vehicle – but about giving school bus drivers a break or helping them with putting the infrastructure in place to charge their buses at home?

Hon. J. Burridge: That would be operational, so you'll have to apologize. [Laughter]

Z. Bell: Yeah, no, that's fair.

Hon. J. Burridge: It is operational, but I do know in Stratford, for instance, they're putting the bus chargers at the school. The construction design is for the chargers at the school. There are probably people working on that in the background that you could probably touch base with.

Z. Bell: Okay. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, minister.

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

[3:15 p.m.]

G. McNeilly: Just a couple of questions on – this is great. We're electrifying, and this is fantastic. It's a new thing. What happens to repairing those buses? What's the success rate with them being functional? Are we able to get people in to repair those? What's the cost?

Hon. J. Burridge: That would be operational.

G. McNeilly: That's operational? It's a capital expense. We've purchased those, but it's –

Hon. J. Burridge: Operation and maintenance of vehicles would be in your operational budget, Jordan, unless I'm wrong.

Jordan McNally: No, you're correct, yeah.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, are you good?

G. McNeilly: No, just before, talking about purchasing things, in the platform, I just want to ask a question on automated external defibrillators, AEDs. It's in their platform promise. It's supposed to be in all schools. Is there anything in here about that? Did we purchase those?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, I keep saying it, but based on the value of those, they would likely be operational expenses. Typically, equipment has a \$10,000 threshold to become capital.

G. McNeilly: I think the doctor who asked for them said it was a \$25,000 investment.

Will we find that in the Education capital budget?

Jordan McNally: It's not specifically outlined here. I don't know. That's all I can speak to is that it's not in this Capital Budget.

G. McNeilly: I'll just say this to the minister, I'll be asking about that later because I did meet with the Minister of Health on this. I'm just confused because it's a health thing. It's an important thing so I met with the Minister of Health, got a promise from him, but it's going in the schools. I'm just a little confused about – it's just my confusion about – I want to see those get into the schools.

Hon. J. Burridge: We can clarify that.

G. McNeilly: Okay. Perfect.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Just going back to the school buses again. I'm thrilled – thrilled – that we have moved as fast as we have to electrify the fleet. I'm wondering whether, as the years go by, the unit price on the buses is coming down because we were one of the first to jump on board and start ordering these, but typically, with a new technology like this – because electric buses were very new when we ordered our first one – the price will come down. Is that the case?

Jordan McNally: It's not reflected in the next five-year plan. It's based on current pricing. I don't know as a comparison where we're at. I think we're probably at the highest level. Whether they'll come down or not, I'm not sure.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Are we still getting them from the manufacturer in Quebec, I think it is? Lion buses, is that right?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, they were the successful of the most recent tender.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. On that note, Jordan, a large amount of money, obviously. I presume that went out to competitive tender, did it?

Jordan McNally: Yes.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, it did. Okay. One last question. How many suppliers are there in the region of this sort of thing?

Jordan McNally: That's not something I'm

Hon. J. Burridge: I'm not aware, either.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Thank you. I'm good, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Capital Expenditure – Education and Early Years: 66,240,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Environment, Energy and Climate Action

Land

“Appropriations provided for land purchases.” Buffer Zone Buyback and Restoration: 500,000.

Total Land: 500,000

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks. How much of the fund goes towards buyback and how much is for restoration? (Indistinct)

Jordan McNally: I don't have a specific breakdown between the two. I think most of the work that's been done so far is the acquisition at this point.

[3:20 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: We all know how expensive land is these days, and \$500,000 in a year doesn't sound like we're going to be making a lot of headway. I realize that the cost of land varies depending on the location and various other factors, but do have an estimate of how many acres or hectares – I don't how you want to count in your department – half a million is going to buy us?

Jordan McNally: The forecast for current year, based on acquisitions to date and what they're looking at to buy, is about 636 acres.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. Is there a plan as to what the highest priority land is? Because I'm sure there's a lot of farms – particularly if they're going to get market value for this land – I imagine that the number of potential sellers is very high. I'm wondering whether you have a priority as to what kind of land you're looking to buy first.

Jordan McNally: No, not other than ones that are along streams and rivers, kind of within establishing a buffer zone.

Hon. J. Burridge: I think watersheds with forest cover around them would probably take priority.

P. Bevan-Baker: Is the Watershed Association involved in choosing which parcels of land get ultimately bought?

Jordan McNally: They would be a partner in identifying potential land acquisitions. They would approach the department if they had a piece of land in mind.

P. Bevan-Baker: I know that over five years, we're sticking at \$500,000. I'd be interested to see how many acres we do actually end up buying for that. Given how important it is that we – particularly, I suspect if we do come with a full Island-wide land use plan, some areas which now we currently think might be developable – if that's a word – may not be in the future. I look forward to seeing how this – I'm really glad that we have this new program, don't get me wrong. My guess is that's nearly enough money to make a dent in the situation.

Thanks, Chair.

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

G. McNeilly: I had nothing on that section. Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Just to further on that discussion. We kind of said acres, but how

many farmers have actually sold farmland – not swampland, farmland – to your government?

Jordan McNally: I don't have a breakdown of the number of farmers. It's just the properties and the acreages.

R. Henderson: This is what I sort of see about this as a farmer, current farmer, former farmer, whatever you want to call me. I don't know why anybody would sell any kind of farmland to you or take any kind of land out of production to go to this. I totally get it. I've even had some inquiries about some swamp, want to sell some of that or whatever. I just don't see what you're achieving or you're getting by that particular program.

My guess is that the bulk of your money is going into restoration. I do know of some property that you have purchased in my riding, although it was basically marginal land at best; certainly no farmland side of it. That part is fine, and I know you're doing some restorations, some campground work, and things of that nature.

But I really question the way you're framing it. It's making it sound like you're this great, wonderful government on environmental sustainability, but it's smoke in mirrors.

Could you maybe explain the rationale behind that particular – why even have money allocated for Capital Budget for land purchases for farmland?

Hon. J. Burridge: We're talking about the buffer zone buyback and restoration, right? I think the priority would not necessarily be the whole fields. It would be the area around and close to the streams, rivers, whatever, that run through them and trying to protect them. I think that's exactly what it is, especially probably areas where the water quality maybe isn't the greatest would probably be priority areas or highly sought-after habitat for fish.

I think that's the focus. I think if you're getting into those major purchases, it would go through Transportation, likely.

[3:25 p.m.]

R. Henderson: This is my point. It is buffer zone. You can't farm the buffer zone from a row crop perspective. That's why I'm going back to – I don't understand the whole concept of what you're really trying to accomplish here, where what you really want to be doing is to try and acquire land outside the buffer zone from an environmental protective, but you have a program for that. It's called the ALUS program. I would argue that the ALUS program is way underfunded and does not have enough money to incentivize any particular farmer into participating in that program.

Like I say, it just seems to be ill-conceived, and ill-put together, and I question how much it's really having any kind of significant impact, and then when you add such a paltry amount of money towards it – you know your dad, he would know this program as much as anybody.

Hon. J. Burridge: The most criticism I get on this will not be from you guys.
[Laughter]

Chair: There's no invoking Freddie in the Assembly.

R. Henderson: I would think your father certainly would understand, and I think he would understand what I'm trying to say to you in this.

Hon. J. Burridge: Entirely.

R. Henderson: To me, you should take the buffer zone buyback out, deal with the restoration, and put your money into that. I certainly see the value and impact of that. Just my two cents' worth on that, Chair.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you. I appreciate your two cents' worth, member.

I just have a quick question, and it's regarding the duty to consult with the Indigenous community. We had a discussion in the House recently on creating a farm bank, a land bank. I know that one of the large obstacles there, and absolutely rightly so, is that in creating Crown land, there's a

duty to consult and implications with the Indigenous community.

Are there any concerns here? Because essentially, we're creating Crown land. What is the duty to consult with the Mi'kmaq here on PEI?

Jordan McNally: When a piece of land is identified, it is given, I guess, to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure who has the land staff to purchase them, and they would follow the proper processes for whatever that involved.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I don't have any further questions on that, but I appreciate that that's front of mind and is part of the process here.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Capital Improvements – Buildings

“Appropriations provided for capital improvements and construction.”
Construction and Renovations: nil.

Total Capital Improvements – Buildings: nil.

P. Bevan-Baker: I have a question on that, Chair.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: The question is, we have made commitments to do some substantial replanting here on Prince Edward Island, and I know there are other tree nurseries here on PEI, private ones, but the J. Frank Gaudet Tree Nursery is, as far as I know, the only publicly funded one. At this time, when we are post-Fiona, the needs for reforestation are higher than they've ever, ever been. How come we're not doing any expansion of the J. Frank Gaudet Tree Nursery this year?

Jordan McNally: This was actually the completion of an existing project. There were just costs that didn't all land in '22-23. Part of this project already spent was \$820,000 to expand the Gaudet Nursery. The \$132,700 was just funds that didn't get booked in '22-23 due to the timing.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks. I haven't looked ahead to future years, but are there plans to expand the J. Frank Gaudet Tree Nursery in future years?

Jordan McNally: No, there's no plan in this budget. I know the current expansion brought them up to \$1.3 million in terms of what they can plant in trees per year, but no, not in this one.

P. Bevan-Baker: It just strikes me as odd that we're not expanding or creating a new one. We're not creating a new tree nursery somewhere, are we?

Jordan McNally: No.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

Recognition of Guests II

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

R. Henderson: Chair, I just want to acknowledge recognition of guests, if you don't mind.

Chair: Go ahead.

R. Henderson: I want to acknowledge Gail Redmond in the gallery sitting beside the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke. I've known Gail I guess all of my life, but her parents are wonderful people. I knew them quite well. Victor is still going strong, I'm sure. Gail was quite involved with the Tyne Valley and Area Development Corporation during my time. I think she's still involved with West Prince Ventures, and a long-time employee of ADL. I'm having a little bit of ADL egg nog at the moment, here, Gail.

[Laughter]

[3:30 p.m.]

R. Henderson: That little pitch there for you. Anyway, I certainly want to welcome you to the gallery here today and watch the proceedings. Thanks, Gail.

Orders of the Day (Government) (continued)

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Equipment and Other Capital Assets

“Appropriations provided for equipment purchases.” Clean Energy Upgrades - School Pilot: 1,356,000. Corporate Land Use Inventory: zero. Electric Vehicle Charging Stations: 2,050,000. Field Equipment: 125,000. Laboratory Equipment: 245,000.

Total Equipment and Other Capital Assets: 3,776,000

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

How many charging stations are currently deployed across the province?

Jordan McNally: Government owned?

Hon. H. Perry: Yeah.

Jordan McNally: I know with what’s in the plan, including ’24-25 – so this would be the addition of the 33 – there would be 92, total.

Hon. H. Perry: So, when you said within the plan, that doesn’t mean presently. That could mean what’s present and what you have planned for this coming year? Is that what it is, a combination of those two?

Jordan McNally: Correct, yeah.

Hon. H. Perry: So, at the end of this budget year, 93?

Jordan McNally: Ninety-two.

Hon. H. Perry: Ninety-two, sorry. How many of those 92 would be fast charging?

Jordan McNally: Of that 92, 39.

Hon. H. Perry: Thirty-nine. How many of the charging stations are located in rural communities? Is there a breakdown of – I don’t need specifically each community that has one –

Chair: Sure, you do. Ask.

Hon. H. Perry: Let’s say rural versus urban.

Jordan McNally: I don’t have a specific breakdown of region, no.

Hon. H. Perry: But do you have rural versus urban?

Jordan McNally: I don’t have that breakdown, no.

Hon. H. Perry: Because it’s very important, I would say, for people in my area, one of the extremities from Charlottetown, that they have access to not only charging stations but fast charging stations too; not only for locals who are encouraged to buy electric vehicles, but also to bring tourism to the area too.

So, I would like to know those numbers and what the plans are for this coming year for the rural areas of Prince Edward Island in particular, for charging stations, and of those charging stations, how many would be fast charging, if that is something that could be possible.

Jordan McNally: Yeah. I do know that of the 33 that are within this year and next, 25 of them, the locations haven’t been determined. They’ve been ordered and they’ll be here and installed the next year.

I know Dalhousie University is completing a report to determine where they should go based on where they’re currently underserved. That report I think is expected to be completed in December of this year, so that would speak to where these chargers go.

Hon. H. Perry: So, obviously there’s no map right now that is showing where potentially they’re going to go because you don’t have the report back yet, but is there a map that is presently drawn to show the numbers that are already existing and their locations?

Jordan McNally: Yes.

Hon. H. Perry: Is that possible for us to have a copy of that?

Hon. J. Burrige: Yeah.

Hon. H. Perry: I’m not sure if it’s under this or not, but just regarding Hermanville, the wind farm. I don’t know where I would find in here where the Province has gone ahead and did the repairs to some of the main bearings – I think there was one that was broken and four that were at risk – and

there is a warranty on them but the Province said they can't wait; they're going to go ahead and do it and then try to recoup their money later.

Is there anywhere in here where those dollars might be allocated to repairing Hermanville?

Jordan McNally: No, that would fall within the PEI Energy Corporation.

Hon. H. Perry: That's under there. Okay, perfect.

Okay, that's it.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'm looking here at the vehicle-to-grid chargers that are part of a pilot project that's using charged electric buses to supply energy back to the grid, and I see that there are two 60-kilowatt V2G chargers. I guess my question is: Are all the buses that we have now capable of being used as a vehicle-to-grid source?

[3:35 p.m.]

Hon. J. Burridge: I'm going on a limb here, but I believe all buses are capable of it. The piece that we're trying out in the pilot project is the infrastructure you need to connect the infrastructure to the bus. I think those are what we bought this year on a pilot basis, to be able to see how it does, but you need to have that infrastructure in place. Does that make any sense?

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah.

Hon. J. Burridge: There's kind of like a piece of equipment that goes between the bus and what they're trying to power. But I think any bus can pull up to do that, or maybe it is something that they add to the bus. I don't know what it is exactly, but there is a piece of equipment that needs to be added on to the bus, or separate from the bus, in order for it to do that.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I don't see a cost here attached to that. Do you know how

much each of those 60-kilowatt chargers are?

Hon. J. Burridge: I'm going on a limb here, too; I don't have notes on it. I think they were \$100,000 each. I'm pretty sure.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I think the potential for this, when I think of future storms, for example, where warming centres, community centres – Jordan, do you have something to add?

Hon. J. Burridge: It was right. He was just checking my number, but I was right.

P. Bevan-Baker: Finance Minister is great with numbers, love that.

The potential to use our school buses and electric vehicles as a source of power when we really, really need it – because, as you know, we can't even use our solar panels when the grid is down – is really exciting to me. Are these two 60 kilowatt chargers going to be at community warming centres or where? Or maybe schools; maybe they're using them at school.

Jordan McNally: The plan currently is to put them at a warming centre or multiple warming centres. The location hasn't been finalized but, the pilot is for a warming centre to be able to run.

P. Bevan-Baker: Very cool. I think that's all the questions I have on this section.

Chair: he hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much.

It's just on corporate land use inventory. I'm not sure if it was asked or not, but last year there were no dollars estimated, but this year there was forecast to be \$47,100. What was that purchase?

Jordan McNally: The project was expected to be complete in '22-23. There were just some issues with the quality of images that were taken during that initial project, so the cost for that is just really doing images for certain areas of the province (Indistinct). That's the ending cost for that project.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. Just another question. The transmission line for the Skinners Pond

project: that would be under PEI Energy Corp also?

Jordan McNally: Correct.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Vehicles

“Appropriations provided for vehicle purchases.” Emergency Preparedness: 515,800. Vehicles: 50,000.

Total Vehicles: 565,800

Shall it carry?

P. Bevan-Baker: (Indistinct)

Chair: You do have a question? The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I do, just a very quick one. I see the list of vehicles here for which that’s going to buy. Can you tell us how they support emergency preparedness? I’m not quite sure how they fit into our emergency preparedness plan.

Jordan McNally: It’s specifically forest fire vehicles.

P. Bevan-Baker: Forest fire?

Jordan McNally: These are net new additions to the forest fire response. They would be as a result of an analysis they have done recently on what the forest fire fleet would need in terms of additional vehicles.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. That’s great. I’m really happy, happy, happy to hear that.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Capital Expenditure – Environment, Energy and Climate Action: 4,841,800

Shall it carry? Carried.

Finance

Equipment and Other Capital Assets

“Appropriations provided for information technology purchases and system

modernization.” Hardware and Storage: 6,213,000. IT System Modernization: 5,663,500.

Total Equipment and Other Capital Assets: 11,876,500

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Chair.

Can you provide the specifics on when the IT system modernization is going to take place, or what is going to take place?

[3:40 p.m.]

Jordan McNally: That involves quite a number of projects. There are two big buckets. You can see them on your handout there: Application Modernization and Digital Government. They’re similar in a sense, but they are separated. There are examples of both, so it’s not necessarily that one is going to be completed at any point. It’s an ongoing Capital Budget over the five-year period to address modernizing and digitizing government programs.

Hon. H. Perry: Are they at their projections for each year?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, they are. They put forward a request based on what they forecast needing every year. Obviously, project timing depends from year to year.

Hon. H. Perry: Is some of this going towards the upgrades to the clinical information system? If so, what aspect?

Hon. J. Burrige: That might be under Health.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, if it’s clinical information system, that might be under Health.

Hon. H. Perry: So, it has nothing to do with this particular...?

Hon. J. Burrige: (Indistinct)

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. So, I’m assuming that none of this will go towards any of the electronic medical records for primary care either then.

Jordan McNally: No, that would fall within the Department of Health. Of course, there's an ITSS-heavy component to all IT projects, but the budget itself would sit within the department that's doing the project.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay. Thank you.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I guess my first question is, are malware attacks still creating issues for the provincial government and its servers?

Hon. J. Burridge: I think the simple answer is, I think in this new world, there's always going to be malware attacks. I just know through work and now in this new life, it's something that you prepare yourself for because it's going to happen. I know that on our end, there's been significant investment into protecting government and government data, absolutely, against those.

P. Bevan-Baker: I know one of the reasons that we moved to Microsoft 365 was in order to create a safer environment. Is it too early to say whether that investment has actually paid off in terms of not having to pay millions of dollars to repair our system after a malware attack, for example?

Hon. J. Burridge: I don't know if there's been an evaluation on that, but it would have been an appropriate investment to make to go to Microsoft 365. You have the dual authentication pieces. I think the teachers were still on GroupWise quite honestly, which I thought was long gone. This is a while ago. So, the upgrades were significant. We're in a much better place than where we were. There's been significant investment into that.

P. Bevan-Baker: I felt sorry for teachers already, but you've just made that even poorer. Really, they're still using GroupWise.

Hon. J. Burridge: No, no, no, they're not now.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, they're not. Okay.

Hon. J. Burridge: No, they were. This is part of that upgrade that was done. No, absolutely, everyone's where they need to be right now.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm looking at the budget line for the IT system modernization and I see that we're spending quite considerably less this year than we did last year; a couple million less. I'm wondering why there's a decrease in that budget line.

Jordan McNally: I think it's really just the timing. They create their budgets based on what they forecast the project requirements are for the upcoming year. So, '23-24 was a large year. The budget put forward should address the projects that are upcoming for the ITSS system.

P. Bevan-Baker: I know there was a move – gosh, it feels like a long time ago now – for government to increase the amount of open data that's available to Islanders. I know that would cost money; creating a database would, and transferring data over in order that it would be available. Is there anything in here? I don't see anything in either the detailed list, and certainly not in the main budget document that would suggest we're expanding that open data. Are we?

[3:45 p.m.]

Hon. J. Burridge: I don't think that would necessarily be a capital item. I guess I would say just that putting more money into digital government and having the right systems in behind are probably going to allow us to do that more, I suspect, because with that comes a lot more data in digital format as well as reporting mechanisms. Like enterprise pieces of software: an enterprise system allows you to bring data to the forefront much easier than where we're coming from historically. So, I would suspect that that will become more prevalent as our systems internally are upgraded.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. A couple of times in the last year, year and a half, we have, through government, made emergency payments to Islanders. I'm thinking of the emergency inflationary payments and then, of course, following Fiona. We had to do that through CRA and/or Canadian Red

Cross. It was cumbersome, and it was clunky, and it took a long time.

I know there are other jurisdictions that have enough information and data and the capacity to send out emergency cheques – I use that term, of course, slightly loosely – to, in our case, Islanders, without having to rely on either a federal provider or some other agency.

I'm wondering whether any of the investment here is on a new system that would allow PEI to get money in Islanders' pockets quicker, if necessary.

Jordan McNally: Yeah, there is a project. It's just at the end of your sheet, just mentioned briefly: income tested benefit and payment system. That's what that system would be.

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, that's what that is.

Jordan McNally: Yeah. It is a multi-faceted project, of course. It involves a lot of oversight and potentially agreements with CRA depending on the type of payment that wants to go out, but it is a project that currently, if everything goes as planned, would be finished sometime in '24-25.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm so happy to hear that. That would be a real boost for government and a real boon for Islanders if we can get that up and running. I'm sorry, I didn't realize that's what that was referring to on the sheet. Thank you.

I'm good, Chair. Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Capital Expenditure – Finance:
11,876,500

Shall it carry? Carried.

PEI Public Service Commission

Equipment and Other Capital Assets

“Appropriations provided for information technology and system modernization.” IT System Modernization: 500,000.

Total Equipment and Other Capital Assets:
500,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Capital Expenditure – PEI Public Service Commission: 500,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture

Capital Improvements – Buildings

“Appropriations provided for capital improvements and construction.” Museum and Heritage Sites: 300,000. Visitor Information Centres: zero.

Total Capital Improvements – Buildings:
300,000

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

Are there any specific projects – I'm looking at the museum and heritage sites line here – planned under that funding?

Jordan McNally: That would be their capital repairs budget. They would have a list of the greatest needs, similar to the capital repairs with the Public Schools Branch or the French Language School Board. They would prioritize what they can accomplish with that funding. It is a line that was increased by \$100,000 in one year to help them get through some of their capital repairs needs.

P. Bevan-Baker: I was just doing the math here. Of course, the museum and heritage sites have gone up \$100,000, and we got rid of the visitor information centres; \$100,000 that was used. Was that moved over, or is that just coincidence that they're the same number?

Jordan McNally: It's just coincidence, yeah. The visitor information centre, not that you asked this, but it's for the Borden-Carleton location and that is wrapping up this current year. So, no, it's just coincidence.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'm good for this section. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Equipment and Other Capital Assets

“Appropriations provided for equipment purchases.” Aquaculture Access Points Repairs: 100,000. Confederation Trail: 100,000. Equipment: 25,000. Golf Courses: 500,000. Provincial Parks: 2,250,000.

Total Equipment and Other Capital Assets: 2,975,000

The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: What are some of those capital investments in provincial parks? Is Cedar Dunes on the list in any capacity?

Jordan McNally: Yes, they did get some playground equipment. It’s kind of lumped together; Red Point and Cedar Dunes is approximately \$90,000.

R. Henderson: Will that playground equipment be installed this year for opening of next year? Because it was supposed to be there last year; I think it was in the budget last year, but never was installed.

[3:50 p.m.]

R. Croucher: (Indistinct) Red Point as well.

R. Henderson: Ditto from my colleague next to me.

Jordan McNally: Sure. The note I have on it is that the latest that it would be completed, based on the current plan, would be May.

R. Henderson: I guess my only comment on that would be that that’s not giving you a lot of leeway because you’re usually open the middle of June. I would probably encourage you to try to see it be expedited as best you can to get the installation because, like I say, that particular campground went without any playground equipment because they had to remove the existing equipment because they deemed it to be unsafe. It just didn’t give the right experience for a family-oriented park.

I just wanted to raise that to the minister and maybe she can enforce the other minister to get the deliveries on some of these issues. I do have some confidence there from the Member from Souris-Elmira, who believes

in what I’m saying. I appreciate my colleague’s support.

Thanks, Chair.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks. I’m looking at the aquaculture access point repairs. I presume this is wharves or slips, something like that, is it?

Jordan McNally: That is correct.

P. Bevan-Baker: It’s not a lot of money. I’m wondering if that’s earmarked for a particular project.

Jordan McNally: No, it’s not particular projects, no. I think, based on this allocation, it is new funding. They’ll determine the greatest need and reassess in the coming years, I guess, as it comes up.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. And the next line down, Confederation Trail, I’m presuming that’s not for maintenance of the trail; that would be an operational cost. But what capital costs are associated with the Confederation Trail? Is that putting up bike racks or toilets or something?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, those would be examples. I think their focus is more on interactive displays. If you look at a board and it has a QR code, that’s an example of something that Tourism would install, whereas the maintenance or if there was a larger capital expense, that would fall under the Department of Transportation.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. Like my neighbour, I’m really happy to see the extra money going into provincial parks and that, particularly, it’s a five-year commitment. Some of our parks are in desperate need of some spit and polish, so I’m really glad that that’s coming.

One thing that doesn’t quite sit well with me though is that – you were talking about playground structures and things like that. That’s great, but our schools have to raise money in order to do that. Was that a conscious choice of government that you would fund playgrounds in provincial parks completely but not in schools? I realize it’s

sort of bridging two departments here, Chair. I hope you'll allow the question.

Hon. J. Burrige: It's a good question, but it's not one I have an answer to for you right now. It's a good point. I'll bring that back.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'd love to see some consistency there. It's lovely that we will have nice playgrounds in our parks and they will be used by Islanders, of course, and visitors alike, but the playgrounds in our schools are used every day by Island kids and it has always ground my gears that we don't provide enough funding to the Education department for them and the schools have to go and sometimes raise significant amounts of money.

Anyway, I'm glad that's on your radar, minister, and I would encourage you to do the same with the schools as we're doing with the parks.

I'm good with this section. Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Provincial golf courses: In there, the description of the summary of projects that you put forward said to protect and maintain their high-level reputation. I see there it went from \$250,000 to \$3.25 million over five years. Can you just expand or elaborate on that?

Jordan McNally: Just to clarify the dollars there, yeah, it's an increase of \$250,000 for a total of \$3.25 million over five years. That works out to about –

Hon. H. Perry: Sorry, \$3.25 million, you said?

Jordan McNally: Yeah, \$3.25 million over five years.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, the handout had \$6.25 million.

Jordan McNally: That would be the parks.

Hon. H. Perry: Oh, sorry. I'm looking at the wrong one; \$3.25 million, yeah. You're right. Sorry.

Jordan McNally: Okay. So, that's \$500,000 a year. I'm sorry, what was the question?

[3:55 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: Basically, I just wanted you to expand on it because basically, the description, the summary said to protect and maintain their high-level reputation. What are you doing to protect their high-level reputation? What projects are planned? Where is that money going to?

Jordan McNally: I can speak to what they did this year as an example. There are three golf courses that are under that: Brudenell, Dundarave, and Crowbush golf courses. In the current year, the \$500,000 was spent on a mower, 50 new golf carts for Brudenell and Dundarave, and kitchen equipment for Crowbush.

Hon. H. Perry: Okay, and what's projected to be purchased in the upcoming year?

Jordan McNally: For Crowbush, they're looking to buy a mower, utility vehicles, and doing some paving. Dundarave and Brudenell would be tee mowers, irrigation upgrade, zero-turn, another zero-turn, and a trap rake.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: That's fine for that one. Thanks.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Capital Expenditure – Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture: 3,275,000

Shall it carry? Carried.

Health and Wellness

Capital Improvements – Buildings

“Appropriations provided for capital improvements and construction.”

Construction and Renovations: 50,176,300.

Total Capital Improvements – Buildings: 50,176,300

I can't imagine there are any questions. Oh, there are questions, okay. [Laughter]

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks.

I guess my first question is related to the discrepancy between the estimate and forecast from last year. Is there a reason why we underspent by almost \$10 million?

Jordan McNally: It would just be a delay in the planned spending for that year. Overall, the plan is still a similar budget as a total basis, but it is just a delay in the project.

P. Bevan-Baker: That must be either one very large project, or a number of – can you tell us where that \$10 million was left unspent?

Jordan McNally: Sure. The largest chunk is the acute care hospital, the Hillsborough Hospital replacement.

P. Bevan-Baker: Right. I'm not surprised to hear that.

We see that the mental health hospital, of course, is in the Budget for this year, and I think the expected completion date is – I've got too many bits of paper – '27-28? Last year, we saw a big increase, but we didn't spend all of it. I'm wondering what you've put in place to ensure that we actually spend all of the money that we're about to, presumably, allocate and confirm this year. Are we going to make sure we spend all the money that's dedicated to this?

Jordan McNally: I know that the next two years, really next three years of this project are the construction of the acute care hospital, and that's really to ramp-up with that. There's about, on average, \$50 million a year, and it is a very large portion. I know that the project is moving along. As you can see in your handout sheet, there's a prequalification of general contractors there.

In terms of ensuring that the money is spent, I'm sure the project team is going as fast as they can.

P. Bevan-Baker: We had members of that project team here for a standing committee meeting a little while ago, and I was very impressed with the presentation they made. They were quite candid about the challenges

they faced, the most serious one being human resources, just getting all the folks who are available to do such a substantial build as this. I really hope that we do spend all of this money.

Looking at the mental health ER, that's expected to be completed just next year. Again, this is not in this budget, but as always, there's little point in building lovely bricks and mortar if we don't have the human resources to allow them to operate. Do you have a sense of whether Health PEI has been successful in increasing its staff level to the point where this mental health emergency unit is actually going to be operational, as we hope?

Jordan McNally: In the note, you're talking about the emergency department short-stay unit portion? I just want to make sure.

Hon. J. Burridge: (Indistinct)

[4:00 p.m.]

P. Bevan-Baker: Oh, I see, it's the top of that page, yeah. Yes, that's what I'm talking about. I'm so sorry.

Jordan McNally: No problem. Yeah, that is expected to be completed and transitioned to Health PEI in the current fiscal year. The staffing piece, of course, would be operational, but I did speak to where the staffing comes from. It would be a combination of Mental Health and Addictions staff currently in the existing emergency department, as well as some staff in the Hillsborough Hospital. I know there is a plan for staffing for that. I can't speak to whether all staff are hired and filled or not.

Chair: Alright, hon. members. It's now private member time, so we will report progress.

Hon. J. Burridge: 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.

Motions Other Than Government

Orders Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We would now like to call Order No. 11 to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: Order No. 11, *An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate Amalgamated Dairies Limited*, Bill No. 200, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Souris-Elmira, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: Order No. 11, *An Act to Amend an Act to Incorporate Amalgamated Dairies Limited*, Bill No. 200, read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, 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 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 An Act to Incorporate Amalgamated Dairies Limited*.

Would you like to bring a stranger onto the floor?

T. DesRoches: I would, Chair.

Chair: Is it granted? Granted.

Welcome. Please state your name and position for the record.

Jeff Cormier: Good afternoon. My name is Jeff Cormier. I'm a lawyer with Key Murray Law. I'm representing Amalgamated Dairies Limited. With me in the public gallery is Gail Ellis, associate treasurer of ADL.

Chair: Thank you.

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

An Hon. Member: General overview.

Chair: Alright, general overview it is. Any questions?

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Very quickly, I just wanted to say what an incredible part of our provincial economy ADL is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

P. Bevan-Baker: I can't go to visit my family in Toronto or Montreal without bringing a big stick of two-year-old cheese with me. They wouldn't let me in the door if I didn't.

[4:05 p.m.]

I guess just one very simple question: ADL has clearly expanded significantly and continues to do so, and that's wonderful. Are these changes necessary because of the expansion and the growth of ADL?

Jeff Cormier: These changes are not necessarily directed to the wonderful growth that ADL has experienced. These are modernization changes. A lot has changed in corporate law over the past 70 years and this reflects, really, two things. One, the consolidation in the dairy industry where there are now approximately 150 member producers of ADL. Secondly, it represents that most of these shares are not owned personally, but they're owned by various corporations who own the farms in PEI.

P. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

I'm good. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Any other questions?

Shall it carry? Carried.

Thank you.

T. DesRoches: I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate Amalgamated Dairies Limited.*

Shall it carry? Carried.

T. DesRoches: 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.

T. DesRoches: 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]

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 An Act to Incorporate Amalgamated Dairies Limited*, 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 committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm seeking unanimous consent to proceed to third reading of Bill No. 200, which was read a second time today.

Speaker: Does the member have unanimous consent? Yes.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Souris-Elmira, that the said bill be now read a third time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: *An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate Amalgamated Dairies Limited*, Bill No. 200, read a third time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Souris-Elmira, that the said bill do now pass.

Speaker: This is a bill introduced by leave of the House, read a first time, read a second time, committed to a Committee of the Whole House, reported agreed to without amendment, read a third time and it is now moved that the bill do pass.

All those in favour say, 'aye'.

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Speaker: Contrary-minded, 'nay'.

The bill has carried.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, 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 Employment Standards Act (No. 3)*, Bill No. 109, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Souris-Elmira, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act (No. 3)*, Bill No. 109, read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Souris-Elmira, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

[4:10 p.m.]

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. 3)*.

Would you like to bring a stranger on the floor?

Z. Bell: I would.

Chair: Granted? Granted.

Hello, and welcome. Can you state your name and position for the record?

Cdr. Rob Alain: Yes. My name is Cdr. Rob Alain and I am an employment liaison officer with the director of employment support programs, which is part of the vice chief of defense staff for the Canadian Armed Forces.

Chair: Thank you, Commander.

Would you like to give an overview, member?

Z. Bell: Yeah, a very, very brief overview. Originally, we had proposed a few changes to the *Employment Standards Act* but we ended up making one change. I don't want to take away a little bit of the thunder. My stranger has a few prepared notes, so with your indulgence, Chair, I'll pass the floor.

Chair: Go ahead, Commander.

Cdr. Rob Alain: Good afternoon, hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly.

First of all, it's really an honour and privilege to be able to come in here and sit and speak, because normally I just stand and stare at the clock.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

Cdr. Rob Alain: Thank you for that.

I'm sure most of you know me as the chief aide de camp to the Lieutenant Governor of Prince Edward Island, but that's not my primary role in the Canadian Armed Forces. As I said, I work as a liaison officer with the director of employer support programs, which falls under the vice chief of defense staff in Ottawa. My area of responsibility is Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.

The mandate of employer support is to enhance both retention and availability of reservists for their military duties by obtaining the support and cooperation of organizational leaders in Canada. We achieve that mandate through the use of a series of initiatives that promote the value of reserve service.

One of those initiatives is direct compensation for civilian employers and reservists who are away on operations or military skills training for periods of 30 days or longer. This compensation applies to private employers, self-employed, and also applies to municipal and provincial employers. We all know how hard it is to balance home life with busy careers, and

reservists are even more challenged to balance these obligations with their military careers.

Reserve training is all about maintaining individual readiness so that reservists are prepared to assist and augment the regular forces when required. That could mean a significant deployment to Latvia, or it could mean assisting at home with fires, floods, hurricane relief, or support during a pandemic. That said, many reservists leave the Canadian Armed Forces due to pressures from their civilian career. Obtaining time off for military skills training or deployment can be very challenging.

On PEI, we are very lucky to have the legislative support of article 23.1 of the *Employment Standards Act*. In its current form, it is already one of the most supportive policies in Canada. JPL varies from province to province, and it's also different for federal employees who gain their entitlement for military leave through the *Canada Labour Code*.

A couple of years ago, my directorate initiated a plan to standardize the military leave policies of all provinces and territories so that reservists would enjoy the same protection regardless of where they live or who they work for.

Using the *Canada Labour Code* as a template, we have already successfully amended the legislation in Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. We are also working with the Labour Minister in Newfoundland to get changes introduced during the current sitting there. Once that happens, and assuming that we can get the requested change made here, Atlantic Canada will once again lead the country in its support for reservists.

[4:15 p.m.]

Over the past couple of years, we have consulted with the committee reviewing the *Employment Standards Act* here on PEI, and through those discussions, we have narrowed our ask to only one amendment which pertains to paragraph 2(b) of article 23.1.

It currently reads: "An employee who ... has been employed by the same employer in civilian employment for at least six consecutive months ... is entitled to an unpaid period of leave for the purpose of that service." Service means active duty or training in the reserves.

We are asking to have that length of time be amended to three months, so that it may align with the *Canada Labour Code* and eventually to all other provinces and territories across Canada.

So, why not wait for this change to be enacted as part of the larger change to the *Employment Standards Act*? Three reasons.

One: The private member's bill here is being presented separately because of increasingly operational requirements in the reserves, coupled with the fact that this is a fairly simple, straightforward request.

Two: We're planning for an Atlantic regional celebration of these amendments to happen in spring 2024, when we may also ask for a declaration of a Reserves Day. The improvement to the ESA will be included in a media campaign, acknowledging the great support we have received from government employers while explaining to the public the value of enduring reserve service.

Three: These changes are very important to me personally, and my career, which started in 18 – 1983, not 1883. [Laughter]

Although it seems like it sometimes – will draw to a close in about 10 months, and I want to be able to walk away knowing that this project is complete.

[Applause]

Chair: Thank you, Commander.

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

An Hon. Member: Just an overview, Chair.

Chair: Alright, any questions?

The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I really appreciate you being here, Rob. I have to say, my heart skipped a beat when I saw you come in. Are we giddy up to try and close today? Is the Lieutenant Governor on your right hand? [Laughter]

Anyway, I really appreciate the words you just said. I appreciate the work you personally, and also the unit we have here; the reservists here on Prince Edward Island. I just wanted to thank you for being here, Rob. That's all.

Thank you, Chair.

Cdr. Rob Alain: Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you, member.

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Chair.

I also wanted to reiterate what the hon. member just said. I thank you for your work on this, and I thank you for your work outside of here too, and all of the great things that you do. I will support this bill. Again, thank you for being here today.

Cdr. Rob Alain: Thank you.

Chair: Promoter, did you have anything?

Z. Bell: If there are no other questions, I just wanted to say thanks to the Department of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population, specifically Patricia and Natalie, because we did work very collaboratively. Actually, originally, I had sent out a draft with some different pieces that were suggested to make amendments, and some of those on PEI are actually stronger than the *Canada Labour Code*, so that's why we only came with the one piece to change.

I do want to thank Rob for all his work and all his advocacy.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Applause]

Z. Bell: I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act (No. 3).*

Shall it carry? Carried.

Z. Bell: 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.

Z. Bell: 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]

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. 3)*, 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. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm seeking unanimous consent to proceed to third reading of Bill No. 109, which was read a second time today.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Does the member have unanimous consent? Yes.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[4:20 p.m.]

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, that the said bill be now read a third time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act (No. 3)*, Bill No. 109, read a third time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Z. Bell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, that the said bill do now pass.

Speaker: This is a bill introduced by leave of the House, read a first time, read a second time, committed to a Committee of the Whole House, reported agreed to without amendment, read a third time and it is now moved that the bill do pass.

All those in favour say, 'aye'.

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Speaker: Contrary-minded, 'nay'.

The bill has carried.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would now like to call Motion 72 to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Committee Clerk: Motion No. 72: Supporting Island small businesses.

The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, the following motion:

WHEREAS small businesses are the lifeblood of our local economy;

AND WHEREAS in response to the Covid-19 pandemic the federal government offered loans to small businesses through the Canadian Emergency Business Account (CEBA);

AND WHEREAS CEBA loans were issued to almost 900,000 businesses across Canada, totaling over \$49 billion;

AND WHEREAS as a term of condition of these CEBA loans is that up to a third of the loan amount can be forgiven if the outstanding amount is repaid by January, 2024;

AND WHEREAS due to lingering economic effects of the pandemic as well as ongoing inflationary and cost of living pressures, many businesses have expressed concern about the flexibility of repayment terms;

AND WHEREAS several business groups have joined calls for the federal government to work with small businesses on this matter;

AND WHEREAS among the concerns being expressed surround threats to the viability of small businesses striving to survive, potential for job losses, and possible increased costs to consumers;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge the federal government to work collaboratively with Island small businesses that have CEBA loans to develop greater flexibility in repayment terms in order to avoid further negative pressure on businesses which could impact employment and costs to consumers.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to my motion calling on collaboration between our provincial and federal government to assist the small businesses in Prince Edward Island in the state of our current economy.

Small businesses on Prince Edward Island are the backbone of our economy. Our local economy flourishes when the small businesses flourish. Workers earn wages, suppliers and sub-contractors generate economic activity, and wealth is generated and recycled within the community. These are all positive benefits for our communities, our economy, and our province.

I can appreciate the struggles that small business owners are facing. Before being elected, I operated our family dairy farm for many years. We also hauled milk into ADL. After my farm days passed, I worked as the manager of the O'Leary Co-op feed mill and retail store.

Small businesses on Prince Edward Island contribute to our GDP, they add jobs to the labour market, and they add invaluable culture to our province.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government created a Canadian Emergency Business Account. Loans were offered to businesses who were struggling during the pandemic with a loss of revenue and decrease in demand. This was a tremendous help to businesses, especially on Prince Edward Island, as our province missed out on a major tourist season.

[4:25 p.m.]

We all know the impact of tourism on small businesses on Prince Edward Island, and unfortunately, this hit caused some of our very own businesses to shut their doors indefinitely.

The Canadian Emergency Business Account loans were issued to roughly 900,000 businesses in the country and maxed out at \$60,000 each. Some businesses maxed this amount out, and some small businesses received various amounts in the thousands.

In Prince Edward Island specifically, there were 3,737 businesses approved for interest-free loans through this federal program. This is more than half of our total number of small businesses on the Island. To these small businesses, there was \$204 million dispersed, adding to our local economy and keeping our small businesses afloat during one of the worst economic times we have had to experience.

These loans were interest-free and had payback terms that allowed businesses to have a third of the loan amount forgiven. The terms tied to this loan forgiveness are challenging. There has been a deadline set of January 18th, 2024. This is in less than three months, as we all know.

Additionally, small businesses submitted a refinancing loan application to the financial institution that provided their loan by January 18th, 2024. If Island businesses are able to come up with this repayment plan with their financial institution, they do get an extended deadline of March 28th, 2024, but this is an incredibly short amount of time to come up with thousands of dollars.

We are living in extremely turbulent times. We know that there are people struggling to put food on the table, worried about paying their bills. For our small business owners, they are losing sleep over the economic turbulence, rising interest rates, and costs while dealing with the aftermath of Fiona, all while struggling to keep their small business doors open and having to stress about the repayment of this loan that was given to them in the summer of 2020.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that up to 40 percent of their businesses could be affected. I know here on the Island our primary industries faced a very difficult year this year, which would add to the pressure. The world we live in today, particularly as a small Island jurisdiction, we are being hit with the effects of inflation and the current cost of living to another degree of concern.

I am extremely worried about the ability of our small businesses to pay these loans back without some support and flexibility from the federal government; \$204 million is a lot of money, and for the federal government to have a repayment date of this coming January in this extreme time of pressure is incredibly concerning. Small businesses on Prince Edward Island are begging for help and they have been calling for the federal government to work with them.

The viability of our small businesses on this Island have a threat of closing their doors and causing even more intense pain to Islanders. This is the absolute last thing Islanders need right now.

This motion that I have brought is an effort to urge this Assembly to impress upon the federal government the importance of working with our Island small businesses that have Canadian Emergency Business Account loans. The last thing anyone wants to see is for more inflationary pressures

being added to small businesses as they are still trying to regain their footing after the pandemic, especially if those pressures trickle down into extra costs for consumers and job impacts for the workforce.

All premiers and territory leaders have asked the federal government for an extension. I think that there is an opportunity for the federal government to develop greater flexibility with the repayment terms to avoid, at most, negative pressures on our Island businesses, workers, and consumers.

I think this is incredibly important and I hope my colleagues can agree that we must protect our vulnerable small businesses. Everyone here can agree that in the past three years, these Islanders have endured hardships and hurdles in their business ventures that we would hardly ever expect them to experience.

As an MLA for District 23 Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, I have numerous small businesses in my own district. I feel it is utmost important to stand behind these businesses and the wonderful people who run them.

[4:30 p.m.]

I want to close my remarks by emphasizing how exceptionally important it is that we do everything in our power to protect these businesses. We need to urge the federal government, as provincially elected members of the Legislature, to do all we can collaboratively to support our Islanders.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Seconding the motion, the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise today in support of this motion and thank the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke for bringing it.

A lot has happened to our business community over the last couple years. It's been a very stressful and trying time for many. I look back, hon. member, when I was Minister of Economic Growth at the

time. There was a lot of pressure at the time, not only on the provincial government but the federal government. The business community was in desperate need of some help.

I want to start off by giving credit where credit is due. The federal government did step up in a big way when it came to supports for the business community over COVID. There are a lot of things I don't agree with the federal government at times, but I certainly appreciate everything they did to help the business community. They were there, and once again, I thank them.

I also want to take the opportunity and thank many people in the provincial government who supported the business community. At the time, the department at SkillsPEI and all their employees and staff there really stepped up. Innovation, Finance, and Tourism; everybody was phenomenal.

I remember when a lot of the programs came out provincially, it was those individuals through those different departments who worked hours upon hours developing the programs, but also rolling them out. It was nothing for some of the staff to be here until midnight some nights, rolling out money into the accounts of the business community to keep them going.

Time has passed, but at the same time, I look back and just want to thank them so much for what they've done, because they really stepped up and took it to a whole other level. Over that time, not only myself but everyone in this Legislature would have been getting calls from the business community.

The stress and anxiety they were going through, the unknown of what was going to happen, the regulations that were put in place, the questions that there were no answers to; it really created a lot of stress on that business community, and especially the small business that just didn't know how they were going to keep their doors open.

A lot has happened since then. The economy certainly picked up, but at the same time, it's definitely left a hole. A lot of those business incurred a lot of debt and a lot of loss. There were a lot of businesses that tried to keep their employees on and didn't want to lay

them off because they were scared to lose them to another job. I can't imagine as a business owner what the business community went through over that time period, but we did get through it.

We got through it because governments worked together, opposition and third parties in government worked together, and I think we worked well for the benefit of Islanders and the business community.

In saying that, there's still a lot of struggle out there. I agree with the motion. I really feel that if the federal government could look at this, and my provincial counterparts and ministers around the Cabinet table to push the federal government towards this – it's been a tough time. You look at the interest rates, you look at the inflation, the cost of living; a lot of things have happened since COVID and there's still a lot of stress and worry out there.

I do think this is a good motion. I think a majority will support it. We all have small businesses in our community. They make our community. A little rural community, from where I'm at, we thrive on small business. They're the makeup of our rural communities and I really feel we need to support them as long as we can.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[4:35 p.m.]

Speaker: Hon. members, before we continue, I had a text from someone who's watching, and I just want to point it out now. Excepting Kenneth now, but they pointed out that they were watching and: the clerks are female, the Pages are female, the Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms is female, and the Speaker is female.

I'm not your usual feminist, but I just would like to point that out. I'm not sure how all of these faces who are watching us around the room would feel about it, but there are no barriers here in this Legislature.

[Applause]

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

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

As Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Trade, I want to take a few minutes to speak to this motion about our Island business community. We can all agree that Island businesses and Island entrepreneurs are critical to our provincial economy. Whether it's a local mom and pop shop, a new business, or a well-established Island company, they're a part of the driving force of our vibrant Island economy.

The last few years have been difficult to navigate, with natural disasters to a global COVID-19 pandemic, rising interest rates, increased costs across the supply chains, and overall higher cost of living. There were no – and there are not – insignificant challenges and pressures; we all realize that.

Our Island business community has time and time again demonstrated resiliency, creativity, flexibility, and incredible perseverance. I will say that, like the province, the Government of Canada did step up and offer time-limited supports to the business community in those emergency situations, like the loans through the Canadian Emergency Business Account. We recognize how vital those supports were and continue to be for Island businesses as they are still feeling the long-term effects of these emergency events.

I think it's fair to say every one of us in this House knows and frequents local businesses that are still rebounding. I've heard countless stories of the challenges Island businesses are still experiencing as they're working through their recovery phase. Some are more ahead of the game, some are still feeling the pressure, but what's clear is that they're aren't where they envisioned they would be today.

This motion calls on us, as the 27 elected members of this Legislative Assembly, to advocate for the businesses across Island communities, the very people who contribute to our economy, who provide jobs to our families, friends, and neighbours, who have helped put PEI on the map as a world leader in both traditional and strategic sectors like agriculture, fisheries, tourism, aerospace, bioscience, clean technology, and so much more.

I wholeheartedly support our Island businesses and will be doing my part to ensure that our voices are backing Island small businesses to the federal government. Small businesses need more time, more flexibility, and I'm happy to lend my voice to them today.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this motion supporting Island small business. I am particularly looking at the repayment terms of the loans that were given out during the pandemic.

Up in District 18 Rustico-Emerald, of course we have many, many small businesses. A large number of them are either fishers, farmers, or tourism related. Of course, in particular, the tourism businesses were impacted by the pandemic. We've heard other members talk about that. The tourism businesses, it was difficult for them to pivot during the pandemic. That's why the loans were so important to get them through, although some were able to successfully.

We did see some record numbers on the books in the year immediately after the pandemic "ended." We just heard today that, in fact, we're back up to one of the highest number of cases ever of COVID in the QEH – which is one of the reasons that it is exacerbated – but we did have a great year of tourism.

However, it almost appears to be that it was a pent-up demand. What I'm hearing from some tourism operators is, in fact, numbers have been down this summer. Now, I think overall, from a tourism perspective – and perhaps the Minister of Tourism will speak to this.

[Interjections]

[4:40 p.m.]

B. Trivers: He's saying that overall, our tourism this year has been fantastic, and the numbers are one of the highest ever, but that includes the Canada Games numbers in

there, which of course was a massive event. So, I'm not sure the total reflects some of what happened during the summer season when in fact some of our numbers were down.

I think of some of the property management companies. Those are the ones that I heard from; some of the key businesses I did hear from during the pandemic, and I believe they did benefit – I hope they benefited – from some of the loans, but they're reporting that the numbers are in fact down quite a bit. Some of them, I know, have had to reduce staff.

It's really important we do what we can to support them, and if it's looking at the financing terms of these loans, that's a great way to go. That's why I support this motion. It's supports are hardworking Island small businesspeople.

We're debating the Capital Budget on the floor of the Legislature right now. We're talking about millions and tens of millions and hundreds of millions and even billions of dollars that are going to be spent over the next five years. Well, \$1.3 billion over one year – over five, pardon me. I was going to say, that would be a little crazy. Good thing we've got an excellent Minister of Finance at the helm here to keep things under control.

That money, Madam Speaker; as a former Minister of Finance yourself, I know you thoroughly understood and also expounded on this: that money has to come from taxpayers at some point to be given to government to spend. It's our Island small businesses who are the ones that are actually paying those taxes, employing people who are paying the taxes, and making this happen. Small businesses and large businesses as well, but small businesses in particular.

I'd be interested to hear the stat; I don't know off the top of my head the percentage of our GDP that comes from small business versus large business. I'm looking over at the Minister of Innovation to see if he can give me hint. There's another question set there somewhere.

The money does come from our businesses who work hard to produce products and

services that add value, that people pay for, and that's how the taxes get paid. Sometimes I think, when we get caught up here in debating the capital budget or the operational budget, we forget that. Sometimes, we say, "Hey, don't worry, most of that money's coming a federal program. It's coming from the federal government".

Well, guess what? Guess who's paying the federal taxes. The same small businesses. The same businesses on PEI. The same taxpayers. The hardworking Islanders here.

So, it's important to support Island small businesses because when we do that, it's a way that we're being fiscally responsible, and that's what we need. It's tempting to just spend, spend, spend. We've seen that at the federal government level, and we're in – some would say – some big trouble because of it. We're in an inflationary period. Anything we can do to help our businesses on PEI is a good thing.

We've been debating other bills on the floor. Everybody seems very keen to be the first politician, the first party to introduce mandatory paid sick leave, and it's been mentioned many times by many members in the House that it's our Island small businesses are the ones that will probably struggle the most with a mandatory paid sick leave.

One of the points I always bring up when people ask me about it is that in fact, almost all of our Island businesses already do offer some sort of paid sick leave; whether it's mandatory and whether government has to reach their big hand down or not, and say, "do it."

So, Madam Speaker, I support this motion and I support our Island businesses.

Thank you very much.

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

R. Henderson: Madam Speaker, 15 minutes to talk about the wonderful things about business in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness.

[4:45 p.m.]

I did have the opportunity to rise here, not too long, in this Legislature, and just talk a little bit about the challenges that a small business would have in a rural community. As much as the Member from Rustico-Emerald – I wasn't really sure, is he for this motion or against the motion? I'm a little bit the same way.

I would certainly say that there's a bit of disingenuous in the motion in regard to what – it's great. It's very easy to turn around and say, "Well, somebody else should help them solve the problem and support small business, but yet, I'm not wanting to do anything about it," so I would say that the provincial government does have skin in the game here.

It boils around issues around what I dealt with in a member's statement about a small entrepreneur who wanted to buy three acres. Three. You have to let that sink in. Three acres. Now, yes, he was buying it as a corporation. He goes through a process where he leaves his job, works out negotiations – with an existing neighbour I might add – to buy this particular business.

Decides to leave his job, going to set up his business, and he finds out that: "Hold on. You can't buy that particular business. You're a corporation and you've got to go through the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission."

An Hon. Member: Must be over five acres.

R. Henderson: No, no. This is the point. He's buying three acres. So, anyway –

[Interjections]

R. Henderson: Three acres. Yes. It's hard to fathom this.

[Interjections]

R. Henderson: Yeah, and I think that's about 1.75 hectares if we wanted to get a little more specific in that regard. But anyhow, he wants to buy three acres. So, he finds out, and: "What do you mean? I'm only buying three acres."

"Oh, no. Because you and your wife happen to own another three-acre parcel privately" – just a house on a small lot, has a little

gazebo in the backyard and a pool; pretty basic lot – “because your aggregate totals now equal six acres, you’re going to have to go through the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission.”

So, he calls me, as his MLA, and says, “How can this be?”

I said, “Well, gee.” The first question I asked him: “You’ve lived in this district for five or six years, so you’re definitely an Islander. You’re buying three acres, okay, I sort of get that part of it. I don’t know what the rationale behind a three-acre purchase would be.”

I want to commend the Minister of Housing and Communities on this because – well, I did reach out. I was getting a little mixed up on where the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission, what department it falls under. But anyway, the minister was great. He got back to me and we did seem to – we weren’t totally sure, and we wanted to try to follow up on what the problem would be. He said it must be his total aggregate holdings.

So, I did call the constituent back and he said, “Well, yeah, I do have a three-acre parcel.” I did suggest for him to contact his lawyer, but he was having a hard time reaching his lawyer. Anyway, once again, I appreciate the minister getting back to me, and there’s not a lot that can be done. But what I would argue is that in this Legislature, we do have an Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission. We do set the legislative standards. We do say if you don’t have aggregate holdings beyond five acres, you don’t have to go through this.

So, why don’t we make a motion that says let’s amend that? Let’s say we should be going to 10 acres, 15 acres, I don’t know; something that streamlines the purchase of allowing an entrepreneur to turn around and invest in his community. Like I said, there was no shore frontage involved here, this is in a municipality – I know it doesn’t have the municipal plan, but it is a municipality – it’s an existing business, we’re not doing any changes to anything, yet we have to go through this.

So, in his particular case, what does it take to go through the Island Regulatory – well, you’re going to have to have a lawyer draft

up a petition to go through that. You’re going to have to wait until they meet. So, we find out the next meeting: December 15th. Okay. This individual did give up his job a month prior, thinking he was going to be going by now. Now he’s going to have to wait until December 15th. Now he’s going to have to spend a little more money on a lawyer.

Like I said in my member’s statement, what happens if the poor entrepreneur decided, “I have to build a little piece on my building”? Well, if you did that, that means you’ve got to get a building permit – which I think we all agree to – but if anybody has tried to get a building permit in O’Leary-Inverness in the last year, you would know that it’s probably at least a six-month process.

[4:50 p.m.]

Now, once again, I’m going to commend the minister responsible for housing, land and communities. I think they’ve made a wonderful decision in finally providing some staff up at the access centre in O’Leary. They now have hired a person at least, that is there, that you can show up to and to get an application supported and filled out and done properly I suppose, and what information, and conveys that information.

But up to this point – this government’s been in power for close to five years now – there wasn’t even a person showing up there. They were working from home. I used to hear it every time, I’d hear people coming in to apply for a building permit: “Well, just leave it in the box over there. They come in about once a week and they’ll pick up the applications and go through that.”

What a process. If you’re trying to say you want to help small businesses in rural communities, have some people there to help them. So, now we do have a person. She’s a constituent, Dianne MacKinnon. The minister has created that position and I hope that will help, but that’s the problem we have.

We’ve got a government that has lost its way totally, has lost all sense of common sense when it comes to rural communities, and yet it stands up with a motion like this to say, “Well, the federal government, if you

could write off that loan, we're all good." And I support that; if you want to do that, I'm 100 percent behind that, but I think you maybe should step up a little more and deal with some of the issues when it comes to red tape and support that.

I look at other things that you could do when it comes to helping small communities. Like I say, if I looked at the situation – the government makes a decision – I've got to bring this up, Madam Speaker – the SkillsPEI office out of O'Leary.

Career Development Services, a supported organization by the provincial government; and it decides at an expense of – I forget the numbers now, but it was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars – extra money you're going to spend to take that and move it to an unincorporated community out of the municipality –

P. Bevan-Baker: No.

R. Henderson: I can't believe it. I was blown away on that one, too.

An Hon. Member: Annex them.

R. Henderson: Well, we can say "annex them and amalgamate." Once again, that's fine if you want to do that, but –

[Interjections]

R. Henderson: – that's the reality. If you're saying you want to support – what does it mean by moving this organization out of an incorporated municipality into a non-incorporated community owned by – I'll say – a fairly wealthy entrepreneur who was a former candidate of the Conservative Party of Canada, I believe? But anyway, having said all that...

G. McNeilly: Seems to be a trend.

R. Henderson: I don't know if that's a trend, it just may be – lovely guy, by the way. I certainly don't want to disparage him by any means – but what it does is it takes away the traffic flow that goes into an incorporated municipality that has to provide sidewalks, streets, sewage systems, town hall, fire services; the list goes on, and all those organizations usually have to come to small business and ask for support.

Souris-Elmira talks about the Santa Claus parade in Souris.

R. Croucher: You coming up?

R. Henderson: I don't think I'm going to make that one, but –

[Laughter]

R. Henderson: We do have a Santa Claus parade in O'Leary, too.

R. Croucher: Ours is better.

R. Henderson: I wouldn't want to debate that. It's like the ridings – who's got the best riding? Who's got the best Santa Claus parade? Our Santa Claus is getting awfully lean in O'Leary with this government in power.

[Laughter]

R. Henderson: He's losing weight fast.

An Hon. Member: Send him down to Souris. We'll (Indistinct).

R. Henderson: Well, that must be why everything is going east. If he wants to get his satchel a little bit bigger and the reindeers a little more muscular, he's going to have to go east first before he's getting west. He's going to be pretty lean.

That would be an example where this government is hammering small communities and hammering small businesses. That's the part of it that I struggle with in this particular motion. It's great to talk about, you want to support these small businesses, but on the other hand, you're taking all these things away.

I talked today about the issue of cell phone service. It's abhorrent how bad the cell phone service is in my district. Like I said before, I have a constituent here in the Legislature and like I said, he has to stand up like a flamingo at some portion of his house to try to get cell phone service. I get the same bloody thing when somebody contacts me, so ministers and what can give me a call.

Hon. S. Myers: Robert Ghiz not answering when you call?

R. Henderson: No, I'm not getting a lot of calls from any of my former colleagues. They bailed on this industry, totally.

[Laughter]

[4:55 p.m.]

R. Henderson: I've got to run around my house trying to find – like this – to try to get a decent bit of cell phone service. If I happen to ever go across the street, over to my barn or something, might as well forget about answering the phone there. So, if you want to support small business, give them bloody cell phone service that works around here. When I drove home yesterday, hit Winsloe on the phone; lost that person.

R. Croucher: Hope you're on Bluetooth.

R. Henderson: Well, yeah. There's Bluetooth in my car, I guess, as far as that goes. It's not the one on the side of your head or anything. But anyway, that's an example. Drive a little farther, get up just past the Premier's place there, go down a little dip in Greenvale, another spot, you lose service there.

Hon. S. Myers: That one's terrible.

R. Henderson: Yeah, it is. Then you go up to Hunter River, another bad spot. I've got to say to people, "I'm coming to Hunter River, I'm going to have to let you go." [Laughter] Unreal. Go a little farther, same thing again. When I get to my riding, now you're starting to – things start to get all fuzzy, and you hear crackling and banging and what's going on here? Then I get into Freeland, and I tell you, just up by Charlie MacKay's, and Carman Murphy's, that's a guaranteed other drop spot. One up by Mia's store, a small business in my riding; same thing, cell phone drops there. Drive you completely nuts.

Then, when I go into other parts of my district, where I might – the first part where I live, I do get some service sometimes; get out to Springfield West, it's gone. There's no cell phone service whatsoever out there. And we've had this numerous times; people call 911, and they're talking French on the other line, or it's in another province all together.

Hon. G. Arsenault: Have I answered your call? [Laughter]

R. Henderson: Well, the Member from Evangeline-Miscouche, I will say, he's pretty good to get back to me. All the ministers are pretty good in that regard. But the fact remains: these are essential services that give businesses an opportunity that they require to be successful and compete in the Island formula, but also in Atlantic Canada.

I'll talk a little bit about that, how that's going. The power lines are an issue. We had the Minister of Environment and Energy up in my district a number of times. We talked about HF Stewarts, a pretty successful business in my riding. We talked about three-phase power. Minister said, "Oh, I think it's coming." Well, we're into years.

Hon. S. Myers: I'll email it to you, right now.

R. Henderson: Oh. [Laughter]

Moving the power lines out of Howlan; these are things that have been lifetime commitments for me, and I've been in this business 17 years and I'm still fighting the bloody battle.

An Hon. Member: Seventeen years?

R. Henderson: I know, look at me now. I was a young whippersnapper; really keen on this business. Geez; half sick, half the session here.

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: How's the internet?

R. Henderson: The internet? Well, the internet is better, I'll say, in some places; a little bit better. Mostly because in one section of my district, we have FibreOP. Boy, what a difference that is. I do still have issues with the Xplore section of my district – certainly, some issues – but those calls have declined.

I give the Member from Kensington-Malpeque – he played a role in that. We have expanded those and improved those services.

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

R. Henderson: Oh, geez. [Laughter] Well, that's good, Madam Speaker. I have lots more to go when we bring this motion back.

[Interjections]

Speaker: Folks.

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hour has been called.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, that this House adjourn until Friday, November 24th, at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a good evening, everyone.

[The Legislature adjourned until Friday, November 24th, at 10:00 a.m.]