

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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The Legislature sat at 2:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of course, welcome back all of our colleagues to a further week of the sitting and further collaboration and good work to meet the needs of the people of this province.

Welcome our visitors in the gallery; small but mighty cast here today with the inveterate Eddie Lund, Jack MacDonald, the father of the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, Wilfred Richard. I want to say a special welcome to Orville Willis who came through the snow – for those who don't know, it's snowing up west – who started out in my district in York-Oyster Bed and likely where he learned a lot of the entrepreneurial skills that's he's applied to be successful in farming and many other ways.

Welcome to everyone in the gallery.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure to be back in the House on this Tuesday. It was a great weekend and welcome everybody in the gallery.

I want to give a special shout-out to Mr. Richard Pettipas. There was a benefit held in Miscouche on Saturday night which was very successful. I can even say that I baked a cake for the first time in my life and it was bid on.

Also, a special shout-out to the Kinkora fire department – they held their fourth annual ball in Kinkora – and to Chief Adam Baldwin who was unanimously picked as

fireman of the year. Adam has taken that fire department in great leaps and bounds and he's done a terrific job. He's added two great pieces of fire equipment this year to the fire house and has also really risen to the challenge on a strategic plan going forward.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to welcome everybody to the gallery.

I was elected in 1983. Today I received my first anti-immigration call in my 30 years. I am for freedom of speech; I'm not for discrimination against anyone. CBC had a report on their website today where Sarah Tamula asked the question: Are we welcome here? Well, I'm here to say to Sarah and I think every member of this Legislature and I think every member of Prince Edward Island: Sarah, you are welcome here. Everybody that comes to Prince Edward Island is welcome here, and all of us Islanders want you to stay on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

I rise in the gallery to welcome all our guests.

Want to acknowledge the great work that was done, particularly at the staff at Birchwood Intermediate, for their commitment and their involvement with Island Storm at making Saturday an event to celebrate Sports Day in Canada such a huge success, as well as other volunteers across the province on Saturday as well.

Want to acknowledge I had a wonderful evening at a very special 50th wedding anniversary. I must admit the first two to hit

the dance floor were the Member from Tracadie-Hillsborough Park and his wife Margie. If anything was a reflection of what they were burning up the dance floor, they've got another 50 years ahead of them.

Congratulations.

Thanks.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: First of all, I'd like to welcome my dad to the session. Also, Eddie Lund who is a regular.

Last night I had the opportunity to speak to District 4 AGM in Murray River and it's safe to say they're hard-working honest people. Back to some of the comments and one of the comments, we did refer to the Syrian refugee case and it was great to see the support in that group alone. One gentleman roared from the back, he says: We're Canadians and we don't turn our back on anybody in need. It's good.

Also, I want to recognize East Wiltshire School who are sending 19 students, I believe, to a We Day (Indistinct) campaign in Halifax this weekend. It's empowering a young generation of global citizens through an inspirational event. It deals with poverty and social change. Kudos to that school system. There'll be the people that'll be looking after us someday, so all the best.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, want to welcome all those watching on EastLink and online.

I want to acknowledge a constituent of the riding of O'Leary-Inverness. Orville Willis is here today. The Premier alluded that he started off in York-Oyster Bridge, but he ended up in O'Leary-Inverness and we've been all the wiser because of that, so we

really appreciate that. Orville has been involved with C.F. Willis Racetrack, he's involved with the Maple Leaf Curling Club, the O'Leary Lions Club and he's been very active – I sought his wise council when it comes to the potato industry. He's been involved in that for a lot of years. Even at age 80, and I think he's rather proud of that, he has accomplished a lot in the potato industry, as well as being a great person in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness. We certainly appreciate you coming here, Orville.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will attest to your dancing prowess also, as the minister has said.

I would also like to thank our guests here today, Eddie Lund and Jack MacDonald, and in particular, I would like to say to Orville Willis he was also involved in the Maroons hockey team. It was a great learning experience for me being associated with a community member such as Orville Willis and I always think fondly on those days of the O'Leary Maroons, so thank you, Orville.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, want to welcome everyone to the gallery and everybody watching at home from District 18 Rustico-Emerald.

A couple of congratulations to send out to the Gulf Storm Atom AA team. They were a championship team at the early bird tournament this past weekend. Well done there. I coached a few of them in soccer so I don't know how that translates to their hockey skills, but they're doing well.

I also wanted to wish congratulations to –

Mr. LaVie: Take the credit.

Mr. Triyers: – Herbie and Norma Gauthier, their 60th anniversary, to Herbie and Norma. So happy anniversary to you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to welcome everyone back after a busy weekend. Lots of issues in the district this weekend, which I always love to hear.

Welcome everyone here in the gallery and everyone watching at home, online and on cable 10, and a special shout-out to Tom and Minnie Carver, great community people in the district on Peter's Road. Minnie loves to watch Question Period and she doesn't mind sharing letting us know how we're doing. Just a shout-out to Minnie and Tom.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to rise today and welcome all those in the gallery and those viewing at home and online.

I would like to give a special shout-out this afternoon to another District 22 resident who happens to be my eldest daughter, Erin, who after achieving her bachelor of arts in archaeology and then a bachelor of science in geology yesterday successfully defended her masters in hydrogeology from the Engineering Department at McGill University. Congratulations Erin, and we look forward to the change you'll be in our world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to give a big shout-out to those watching from District 1 Souris-Elmira. As I was driving in today there was a big weight lifted off my shoulders, and I put a big thank you out to the minister of transportation for extending the guard rail at the Souris bridge at the dangerous corner. It takes a lot of weight off my shoulders. I've got to thank the engineers for it too, they realized it was a dangerous corner. Don Cherry once said: Saying sorry is showing that you're weak. Sometimes as MLAs we've got to push the envelope and sometimes you've got to open that envelope, and the squeaky wheel always gets the grease. That's how I do it in Souris-Elmira. I push the envelope, and if it doesn't work, I open that envelope –

Mr. Myers: Get him some more grease.

Mr. LaVie: – and I'm sure after last week, between the engineers and yourself, I just want to thank you for extending that guardrail and taking care of that dangerous corner.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and welcome all those in the public gallery, especially Eddie and Orville. I get to talk to Orville once in a while at some of our party functions.

I would also like to say hello to all the good people of Alberton-Roseville that are home watching either on the Internet or on t.v.

While I'm on my feet I would also like to wish a local curling team that's going up to Ottawa to represent the province in the Traveller's Curling Tournament up in Ottawa, and that's the Western Community Curling Club team of Freddy Fraser, Daryl MacDonald, Blaine Hutt and John Ellsworth. I wish them all the best and I

hope they take the title back here to Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

Meals on Wheels Summerside

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is my great pleasure to recognize the hard work and dedication of the Summerside Meals on Wheels volunteers.

Meals on Wheels has delivered hundreds of hot, nutritious meals to seniors in their homes over the past 12 years. This service requires many volunteers for one-and-a-half hour shifts, adding up to almost 5,000 hours per year.

After spending an afternoon visiting some constituents in my district around the noon hour, I was pleasantly surprised at the number of people utilizing this service. Many are benefiting from these meals, but also from the social interaction with the dedicated volunteers.

At an appreciation lunch held in Summerside, 30 volunteer drivers were recognized for over 10 years of service, with several other volunteers receiving awards for 25 years of service – a tremendous accomplishment.

Volunteers are the fabric of our community. When we work together to improve the lives of Islanders of all ages our province becomes a better place.

There are also Meals on Wheels chapters located in Charlottetown, Summerside, Montague, and Alberton. With an aging population, more volunteers are always needed. If you know the constituent who would benefit from this program or who would be interested in volunteering, please encourage them to contact the program coordinators in their respective area. To reach the Summerside program, you can call 902-888-8335.

I encourage all members of this House to continue to recognize and celebrate the impact volunteers are making in our Island communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Organ and Tissue Donation

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to take time today to remind Islanders about the importance of organ and tissue donation.

Currently, there are over 4,500 people in Canada waiting for organ transplants. As our population ages the need for organ and tissue donations will increase.

We need many donors, but not enough Canadians have made plans to donate. In fact, our organ donation rates are lower than any other countries, including the United States. We can do better.

It only takes a few minutes to become an organ and tissue donor. In those few minutes the opportunity to give the most precious gift – life – could be yours.

On the Island, Health PEI has made it very easy to register to become a donor. Last month Health PEI surveyed Islanders to determine their intentions to donate their organs and tissues. The information will be used as part of a provincial organ and tissue donor registry similar to the registries found in other Canadian jurisdictions.

While Health PEI is still collecting information for the registry, there are many ways you can still indicate your wish to become an organ and tissue donor including: when you apply for or renew your driver's license, when you apply for or renew your PEI health card by placing the red sticker provided on the back of your card, or when you complete a health care directive to indicate your consent.

I would like to thank all Islanders who have already registered themselves to become

donors and encourage everyone, the next time you head in to renew or license or health card, please remember that a single donation can give the precious gift of life to many people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Congratulations to New Chief Judge Nancy Orr

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a privilege to rise today to congratulate Judge Nancy Orr on her recent appointment as the new Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Prince Edward Island.

Not only did Judge Orr serve as the first female Provincial Court judge when she was appointed on August 17th, 1995, she's earned yet another place in the history of our province in being appointed as the first female to serve as Chief Judge of the Provincial Court.

Judge Orr's appointment, I believe, is a critical link in the progression of women in positions of leadership within our judicial system. I believe her accomplishments will serve to inspire more women to enter the field of law, and I know that her expertise in this field will greatly serve the cause of justice for all Prince Edward Islander's. Her 20 years of dedication to her profession on the Provincial Court bench has earned her great respect amongst the legal profession. She is well deserving of this appointment.

I understand that, during her five years as Chief Judge, Judge Orr will continue to hear cases in the Provincial Court and serve as well as a part-time circuit court judge in the Wellness Court in the Yukon Territory.

I would also note that Judge Orr during her legal career has devoted many years of service in the legal aid section.

On behalf of the PC caucus and I'm sure all members of this Legislative Assembly, I commend Judge Orr for her many years of dedicated service and extend my best wishes

for a rewarding career as she takes on her new responsibility as the Chief Judge of our Provincial Court.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Tryon River

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

Question to the minister of the environment.

Have you had any conversations or discussions with the minister of transportation in the last 72 hours?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, yes, the minister of transportation and I have (Indistinct) caucus today and had a discussion on several items.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Back in the last couple of months there's been talk in this government that every measure had been taken possible to deal with any possible damage or runoff to the Tryon River to lessen any damage to the fishery or to that river.

What measures have been taken in the last 72 hours? Because last night on the news we heard how the place had been flooded, it's been washed out, the berm ways have given way, and the river's now full of silt and everything else. What have you done?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to give an update to the House, yesterday, as you are aware, there was a heavy rainfall. Actually, 100 millimetres fell in the Tryon area. The (Indistinct) construction of that project started in July. The construction part ended on November 13th. The remediation to finish up the Branch Road in particular was in progress during this period. The remediation we're taking on that is to install a rock-lined ditch that will carry the water from the Branch Road into the Tryon area and then released into the river.

We have been in the process of finalizing and formalizing the environmental requirements there. The silt catchers are still in place. The department has been out there on site inspecting it. We'll continue to work with the contractor to ensure that the final part of that project is finalized and that rock ditch is installed.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question to the minister of transportation. I was actually out there on Sunday and I was out there again yesterday and I drove by there this morning. I didn't see any work being done.

I'm asking the question: Will there be a commitment from the department to do everything possible to lessen the damage to that river and to make sure this doesn't happen?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Again, thank you, hon. member.

Just to continue on with the explanation again, actually, during the construction we certainly did some improvements on the fish habitat area, as part of that project, to ensure that there's adequate structure in place for the fish transportation.

But also, in terms of the actual construction, as I said, it was on its final phase. We are

continuing to work with that contractor to finish up that project. Then, following that, of course we're working around the weather. We couldn't work on it yesterday, as you can imagine. We also will be doing hydro-seeding and mulching to do the groundcover for the winter. We will continue to monitor that diligently and ensure that that work is completed up as soon as possible.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Premier and Budget

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

Question to the Premier. How long did you serve in the role, Mr. Premier, as the Minister of Finance?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I was Minister of Finance from February 23rd until May 24th, I'll say, whatever was the date of the swearing in of our Cabinet posts after the election.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Would it be fair to say that you had a great degree of influence in making and developing the budget that's before us?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the budget that's before us, may I ask, does that refer to the capital budget or the operating budget?

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Operating budget, Mr. Premier.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the budget development process would have begun in the fall of 2014 through a process

that involved – included a public consultation and of course the development of management plans by the departments.

By the time I became Minister of Finance and Premier on February 23rd we were in a process that would be known as budget review. My role at that stage would be more in that of Premier, which is, as Premier one does, and I will in the future, chair that budget review process.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Premier and disinfection service cuts

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

When the issue of cuts to the potato disinfection service came out up to the committee, the minister says his hands were tied. The minister of agriculture said his hands were tied because the Budget was already set when he arrived.

Were you the architect, Mr. Premier, of these cuts to disinfection service?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

What I said at the committee was that when the budget came through those numbers were put in place. We took responsibility for that going forward, we brought that forward as was proposed, fully accepting that's the way it was.

We were asked by our Premier and by the government that we have to get to fiscal balance. Each department worked with that and found areas in which they thought they could level the playing field to some degree, find some dollars to help us get to that point.

That's where that came from. It was started in the previous government, when it was handed over to this, we took responsibility for it and brought it forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The question is – back last week the minister of agriculture said in the standing committee your hands were tied on the budget you presented. Your hands were tied.

My question is to the Premier or to the minister of agriculture: Who made the decision to make these cuts to the disinfection services? Was it the Premier or was it the minister of agriculture?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: That's exactly what – thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I explained in the standing committee was the fact that the budget was brought forward. When it was being brought forward, as the Premier has explained, when it got to our table and the new government came in, we took those numbers, looked them over, and decided we would take them forward.

We took full responsibility for that. That's what we put forward for budget. That's what was brought to the Table in the House, that was discussed in our budget at the Table, and was passed by the Legislature.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Disinfection motion free vote

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. We'll go back to the Premier.

The disinfection motion that we brought on the floor will be coming to the House, hopefully today. Will you commit, Mr. Premier, to allowing all members of your government – all members – to vote freely, totally freely, without any influence from your office on this issue?

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) pressure.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this is something that we're still discussing as a caucus and I'm not sure that it's in order in Question Period to be asking the Premier what his caucus is going to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Doctor's English-language test

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This spring there was a case of a doctor who wanted to work right here on PEI forced to take a test to prove that she could speak English.

To the minister of health: At the time when there was a shortage of family doctors on PEI, particularly in rural PEI, why is the PEI college of physicians forcing English-speaking doctors trained in English-speaking universities to take an English language test?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

As a department we take recruitment and the number of physicians that are located in communities across Prince Edward Island very seriously. I am very aware of the ongoing discussions publicly, but I do want to clarify for the Member from Souris-Elmira that the college of physicians and surgeons is independent. They have the regulatory responsibility to license physicians currently in the Province of Prince Edward Island. We are, have been, and will continue to have discussions at ways that we can continue to expand.

I would caution the Member from Souris-Elmira to refer to a physician shortage because currently 95% of the population of Prince Edward Island has access to a family physician and compensate some of the best salaries here in the Province of Prince Edward Island. We are very committed to

making sure that we alleviate the few shortages and are committed to addressing these issues, particularly in rural communities in Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would advise this minister to get outside the Charlottetown area and get in to rural PEI and see what we have for doctors in rural PEI. We've been talking about this issue now for four years. Premier came to Souris – you promised doctors in Souris, you promised them. You wanted District 1 seat, that's what you wanted. You promised –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) question.

Mr. LaVie: You promised the people of Souris four doctors.

The doctor withdrew from PEI. Within 48 hours she was approved for a medical license to work in another province in Canada. For some reason doctors who are qualified to work in other provinces in Canada are not qualified to work in PEI.

Minister of health: At the time of family physician shortage – particularly in rural areas – why is the college of physicians enforcing a higher standard to start practicing on PEI than other provinces use?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

I'm very well aware of the situation in the community of Souris. I want to reiterate to the Member from Souris-Elmira that as a department which oversees the *Health Services Act* here in the Province of Prince Edward Island, we're extremely committed to making sure that every islander has access to a family physician. We continue to build a very robust primary health care network across the province. I'm very well aware of the situation in Souris.

When we took government in 2007 we were on the brink of closing the hospital because

of physician shortages. We built it – the complement which was at four, which went down to three, and currently right now we have a third physician who is on a temporary locum license who is practicing, and we're very committed to make sure that we provide the best access we possibly can and to make health care strong and sustainable in rural Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This minister right here, he has full control right here, and Premier, you're over him. You're the one that promised the doctors, you didn't invite him up to the announcement, you have control over him, you make it happen.

This doctor who left stated that she felt this language policy is discriminatory against English-speaking Canadians who get their medical degrees abroad. The PEI college of physician applies a cookie cutter approach on applicants, which is failing our province.

To the minister of health: Why is government allowing the PEI college of physicians to have policies that discourage fully qualified doctors trained in international medical schools from practicing medicine right here on PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

I am very aware as the minister – I've been the minister responsible for health care in the Province of Prince Edward Island the majority of my time as an elected official. Very aware of the frustrations and the challenges. It's probably in all of our best interests currently that the elected officials not start getting into granting physician licenses here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

We are committed to working with the medical society –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct).

Mr. Currie: Very committed, Mr. Speaker, to making sure that we work on potential opportunities to improve access for Islanders here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

I do respect the work by the college of physicians. They have the regulatory responsibility, just like every other jurisdiction and territory and province in this country, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

College of physicians' policy on lack of doctors

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is well documented that not having access to a family physician in a timely manner negatively impacts one's health.

To the minister of health: Minister, are you aware of any policy or position the college of physicians has regarding the health effects of having no doctors available, especially in rural communities?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

I've said numerous times on the floor of this Assembly that the quality and the sustainability of how we service constituents in rural Prince Edward Island is the utmost priority here.

We understand the current challenges in sustaining a provincial health care system, but we recognize that the stronger our health care delivery is in rural communities to manage the volume of chronic disease, the stronger our acute service will be for all Islanders who are coming to Charlottetown and Summerside at the two major referral hospitals.

Very committed. I'm working consistently and working with the college of physicians to look at opportunities to continue to enhance our ability to attract and address the access issues in a number of areas which, I believe, I think there are possibly three

vacancies in rural communities across Prince Edward Island.

When we came in to government in 2007 there was 199 physicians working in this province. Today we have approximately 250 physicians, approximately a 48% increase. We continue to work hard. Our current residency program, which was implemented four years ago, we've retained 17 out of 25 physicians. The five that are graduating, I believe that two are from the community of Souris, this coming spring, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

He said they were from Souris, but will he let them work there? Or will these students have to take an English test?

To the minister of health: Are you aware of any recruiting support or strategy that the college of physicians has to address the shortage of family doctors in rural PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

The college is not responsible for recruiting physicians to the Province of Prince Edward Island. Their mandate is to license physicians that are coming. I recognize that we have seen an increase in the number of med students graduating from Canadian schools, but we're also seeing an intense volume increase from internationally trained physicians that are coming back into the country.

We're very committed. As I shared in the previous line of questioning, our numbers and the growth and the increase that we've made in attracting physicians has been positive. I'm very confident. We've got a very robust, very committed team on recruitment and retention working inside the department who works very closely with the college and the med society to make that we

continue to address the physician opportunities, particularly in rural communities, which I believe is in O'Leary and in Souris, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's the same answer I've been hearing for four years now, the same answer and you know it.

The minister is not aware of the college of physicians having any support for recruitment of family doctors. Why they're holding a higher standard of acceptance than another province. Or most importantly, why the College of Physicians are still turning away fully trained English-speaking doctors who are quickly employed by other provinces.

Mr. Myers: It's a country club, that's why (Indistinct).

Mr. LaVie: Minister of health: Why does the college of physicians have all the authority and none of the responsibility regarding the family physician shortage here on PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

I'm fully aware of the frustrations and the challenges. There's been public conversations from physicians who've been trying to come to the Province of Prince Edward Island and have been extremely frustrated.

Currently, under the *Medical Act*, the college of physicians has the regulatory responsibility to license physicians which is very consistent in every province and every territory in this country. We've been working very closely with the college of physicians. We've got a good working relationship. We've been working towards opportunities. I'm very committed to continuing to improve access for

constituents in various communities across Prince Edward Island, particularly in the community of O'Leary, the community of Tyne Valley, and the community of Souris. Very pleased at the progress we've made.

Our residency program has been very successful in retaining and attracting physicians after their second year of residency here. We're going to continue to promote our provincial health care system. I believe that we've got a strong health care system – not without its challenges – but we are very committed to making sure that we knock that 95% of people that have access and we eliminate –

Mr. Aylward: Eighty-seven per cent –

Mr. Currie: – we eliminate the 7,500 Islanders currently sitting on the registry to get us to 100%, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Aylward: Talk to your CEO.

Mr. Currie: Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister of health: Why does this government allow the chasing away of qualified family doctors in the face of shortages right here on PEI? Why not keep them right here on PEI, our family physicians?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

I think we're doing that we're doing a reasonably good job at attracting physicians. I did share that in 2007 we had 199 physicians practicing and working, some of which are specialists. Today we've got approximately 250. That's a 48% increase. If you look at the CIHI data that recently came out as far as how we're compensating our physicians here in the Province of Prince Edward Island, we're doing reasonably well so we've been able to retain and stabilize our physician supply.

We're currently looking at and reviewing our physician complement to make sure that we get good value and that our productivity numbers are consistent and balanced as we continue to improve access. I'll continue to work with the college of physicians, and have been working very closely with the college of physicians, to look at modernizing and looking at ways to be consistent with licensing practices with other jurisdictions.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Tryon River and local construction

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to expand on some questions that opened Question Period today from the Leader of the Opposition. Like him, I was at the Tryon River yesterday during the height of the storm, and like him I saw no government employees working, and certainly no mitigation efforts at all in the area of the worse siltation.

Heavy rainfall in the last few days has led to significant –

Mr. LaVie: Shame, shame!

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – runoff and siltation in the Tryon River, amongst others on the Island.

Last spring engineers with TIR promised fishers in the area that no silt would enter the Tryon River.

A question to the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Does she agree that the devastating siltation that occurred yesterday in the Tryon River is a direct result of the recent construction in that area?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I think you could hopefully agree that there's no 100% guarantee on when it comes to weather events, and I don't think there was a 100% guarantee given at

the time of construction. However, there was a commitment that every effort would be made to ensure mitigation measures were put in place to protect the surrounding areas. I know that was carried out.

Just to expand a little bit again, the Branch Road area of this particular project is still under completion. Unfortunately, during this period of time is when this rain event has hit, and we will be continuing to finalize the environmental side of that project to ensure that there is proper runoff that will prevent siltation. We had people out around yesterday, not on site. We had people inspecting. You cannot put machines on site to do mitigation measures in the middle of a 100-millimetre rain event.

However, to follow up on that, I drove from Tyne Valley to Charlottetown yesterday and every ditch I came by was running red. So I wouldn't say that –

Mr. LaVie: Oh, you're (Indistinct) doing your job –

Ms. Biggar: – it was –

Mr. Aylward: So was the (Indistinct) –

Ms. Biggar: – a one area event. However, anything that we can do to protect the fisheries in Prince Edward Island we certainly will do that.

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

Tryon River siltation compensation to fishers

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, like every other member of this House, has access to weather forecasts. I'm sure the department of transportation also has access to weather forecasts. It was no surprise that yesterday we ended up with 100 millimetres of rain.

Talking of the fisheries on Prince Edward Island and their protection, a million oyster seeds were planted in that river this fall, an annual practice that is carried out to sustain the fishery that supports over 70 families in the Tryon area. By the way, that gives a

daily economic activity of over \$30,000 in the local community, \$30,000 a day.

Will the government be compensating fishers if this siltation impacts the fishery?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our particular department works very closely with the oyster industry in providing assurances that they have access to their fishery areas. This particular year we did upgrades to the Hurds Point Road to help them access their fishing area. I work very closely with the PEI Shellfish Association to ensure that they have the funds there as well to provide programs, and we will continue to work with the PEI Shellfish Association and other fisheries for access to their fishing areas.

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I shall tell the two fishers I met with yesterday that I can't tell them whether they're going to receive compensation if this is an issue.

River protection standards

Climate change is projected to bring more storms and more extreme precipitation to Atlantic Canada. The situation that we saw yesterday in Tryon is going to become more commonplace as we go into the future. Does this government intend to increase standards for protecting PEI rivers into the future?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As part of this particular project, I think you would agree, if you drove by there when we installed that culvert, you wondered what was going on, but that was a plan for the future for our next 100 years' events. Part of our mindset in planning our projects is to take in mind climate change, just like I said with the Cascumpec bridge. We're raising that level as well to accommodate future

climate change events that may occur in different areas.

However, that is part-and-parcel of when we do a project, we do go through environmental assessment as part of our whole project assessment, and we will continue to plan any of those projects, keeping in mind – unfortunately, as I noted, this particular project, the final mitigation environmentally had not been able to complete and we will be continuing to finalize that particular project and putting mulch down there which prevent any further runoff over the winter.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Rural Action Plan update

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question's for the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. The Prince Edward Island Rural Action Plan was implemented in April of 2010 in hopes of reinvigorating rural parts of the province. This program has had numerous successes and has been the driving force behind some great initiatives. I see that progress has been made in several of the goals outlined in this plan.

There are also many new initiatives and programs coming from the Department of Economic Development and Tourism recently. Would the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism please give an update on the Rural Action Plan and if there'll be a new plan put in place once this one is completed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the Rural Action Plan was highly successful. There were 40 action items outlined in the Rural Action Plan and I'm confident every action has been addressed to some degree over the last number of years.

You need only look at the wind power development supported by the province over the last five years. We've installed new biomass heating systems. We've made

broadband Internet available across the Island. We've supported our primary industries, especially in rural PEI, with financing and grant support.

Mr. Aylward: That's not what we asked the other (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: We've provided financing grants and business development support to hundreds of companies across rural Prince Edward Island, including Aspin Kemp and Associates, MacDougall Steel Erectors Inc. and many others. We just had to record years in the tourism industry, which is especially important to rural PEI. We continue to support the Food Island partnership, which is usually important in our primary industries and again, in rural PEI.

Through the Island Community Fund we've supported dozens and dozens of community development projects across Prince Edward Island. We are in the final stages of developing a new water act for the province to protect our most precious natural resources.

Mr. LaVie: Answer!

Mr. MacDonald: All of this relates directly to the goals and actions outlined in the plan.

Mr. LaVie: Answer!

Mr. MacDonald: Now, as for the future plans, we await final details from the new federal government on how it intends to invest in rural infrastructure moving forward.

Mr. LaVie: Answer!

Mr. MacDonald: We will continue to consult directly with rural communities across the Island.

Mr. LaVie: Holy God.

Speaker: Hon. minister –

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: I must ask – hon. member, I don't –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) dead under you guys –

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) five minutes to say that?

Speaker: I just want to remind every member, please refrain from asking a minister to give a report.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Murphy: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

It was an update. I guess an update could be considered a report, for sure.

Job creation in western PEI

Supplementary to the same minister. Alberton recently suffered yet another business closure. Miminigash is also in need of a little shot in the arm. As you know, the federal government has singled potential investment and infrastructure in the Island. My hope is that western Prince Edward Island will benefit from this stimulus.

My question to the Minister: Does the department have plans to focus on the job creation component of this infrastructure investment, especially in the western part of the province?

Mr. Myers: Through a summit.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

We support rural economic development through many grant programs. When we talk about rural development, we talk about \$348 million dollars presently invested in Prince Edward Island through grant monies, capital grant monies, capital loan monies in Prince Edward Island, and over 80% of that monies is in rural Prince Edward Island –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald: – through Finance PEI.

On the other hand, we have \$20 million dollars through IPEI invested in businesses

throughout Prince Edward Island and 50% of that monies is in rural PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville, your second supplementary question.

Western PEI and government branch

Mr. Murphy: Thank you.

To the same minister: I've raised questions several times in this House asking the previous government and now I'm asking this government. The western part of the province is in my region – in my mind there's four regions in the province and the western part of the province is the only region that isn't home to a government department or some branch of government. I see this would be a great way to stimulate some economic activity in my part of the province. Will you bring this back to your Cabinet table for some discussion?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, we've been in this position for six months as a newly elected government and our mandate is entrepreneurship, and if we're going to create entrepreneurship we're going to look every aspect and every location across Prince Edward Island to do that.

We're going to invigorate our youth, we're going to invest in our communities, and our rural development, as I'd mentioned before. We're going to continue to do that. If there's opportunities in the western part of the province or the eastern part of the province or central PEI, we're going to be there for those opportunities to help these businesses succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton and the Government Whip.

Programs for start-up businesses

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. One of the primary issues facing business on Prince Edward Island is access to capital. It is often particularly difficult for new businesses who are struggling to get off the ground. I understand the minister's department has a number of programs.

I'm wondering: Is he considering any new initiatives or changes to current programs to help small start-up businesses get off the ground?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have and continue to do research to adapt our development funding and assistance to address identified needs in this regard. The most recent example of this development is a competitive start-up called the Ignition Fund. In our platform during election we increased this by up to 10 enumerations back to new businesses starting out at \$25,000 dollars each. That money sometimes is used to leverage other funding. A good example of that is most recently, last week, the minister of health identified that one of those companies actually is, through the Ignition Fund, providing some wait or wait time services in the hospital, so it actually does work.

On Friday of last week Innovation PEI's Development Commercialization and Pilot and Discovery fund opened for applications. This is another program that further supports new product and development getting to market. We'll be speaking a little more about that program later in today's proceedings.

Incubation and mentoring have been identified as key helps to businesses to get off the ground and we're working to identify subsequent supports through extensive consultation.

Mr. Myers: Could you table that?

Mr. MacDonald: We're working on a project with a network of world renowned business start-up incubators and are hopeful a made-in-PEI model will be announced soon.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to investigate what we can do to help with undercapitalization on PEI. It's not a new issue, it's right across Canada. The CEO of –

Mr. Myers: Question Period's a joke, officially. (Indistinct) you guys (Indistinct) joke.

Mr. MacDonald: – Capital Venture Association has stated that we're undercapitalized in Canada and we'll continue to work towards creating more capital for new businesses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not even too sure – this question could've been answered a minute ago but I couldn't hear over all the heckling going on over here.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, because you guys are making Question Period a joke.

Venture capital investment

Mr. J. Brown: Supplementary question to the minister. According to some statistics, about 10% of Canadian venture capital deals in the first half of 2015 took place in Atlantic Canada. That is despite the fact that Atlantic Canada has less than 7% of the national population.

However, the Canadian Venture Capital and Private Equity Association reports that there were no –

Mr. Myers: Question, question, question!

Mr. J. Brown: – venture capital investments in Prince Edward Island during that period.

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. J. Brown: Is the minister considering some type of initiative to channel venture capital investment into Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) making a joke, you're going to take 20 minutes making a joke?

Mr. J. Brown: You're the one making it a joke.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're always looking for new ways to capitalize on venture capital. Private equity, investment, angel investors, what have you. The report I think you're talking about with the 10%, that's based on the first half of 2015. If we go back four years to 2011, per capita, Prince Edward Island is on par through capital investment or venture capital. We're holding our own. It's been a little slow start to 2015, but I almost must add that our exports are up 18% over the next nearest province. We've increased our manufacturing sales by 5.9%. We're presently leading the country in many different areas, especially in tourism with the year we just had.

We're doing okay, but yes, is there room for improvement? We'll continue to strive to do this. We've just finished a new report in November 2015 on venture capital and recapitalizing businesses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Interest charge debt jump

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll try to make mine short, I guess. To the Minister of Finance. You've just released your second-quarter update. Shows that we've got another \$700,000 dollars in interest charge debt.

Minister, why has it jumped three quarters of a million dollars over budget in the first half of this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I had stated earlier in the House, there is a number of reasons why our budget has increased through that quarter. We had increases through Health PEI, we had increases through education, there were some additional costs with employee benefits.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, can you explain to this House how this is living within our means, something that this government is preaching?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think if you look at the last four years we've seen a continuous decline in our budget and it's continuing, and it continues again. We just went through an election where I think pretty well every household of Prince Edward Island was asking us to reduce our costs and get to balance. In order to do that measures have to be taken and we're clearly – we've heard other ministers talk about how well the economy is doing, what a great summer we had with the tourism industry, with all our exports being up.

We continue to work towards a balanced budget and expenditures need to be looked at, and at times we simply won't be spending in a number of areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Departments over budget

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the minister's update it also shows that a further \$19 million dollars has been added to the yearly deficit just for the first half of this year. Will the minister explain why seven out of the 11 departments in this government are over budget at the end of the second quarter?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at the second-quarter report, that's a time when a lot of our expenditures are being made and we don't necessarily see the total revenues coming in at this point.

But it also provides us an opportunity to look at where we need to be over the next six months. We go back to our departments and we readjust where we can find that we can. If it means reduced spending in some areas – it doesn't necessarily mean cuts, it just means that we're careful where we spend and whether we spend or not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, final question.

Balanced budget in April

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the minister's press release accompanying the fiscal update, the Minister of Finance pledges to get back on track and to balance his budget by 2016-2017.

Does this statement by the minister mean that government will be tabling a balanced budget in April?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said earlier, after the second quarter it gives us six months to look down the road and to see where we need to make adjustments. We have said consistently that we're working towards a balanced budget and we continue on that path.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

First Ministers' Meeting

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, November 23rd, Canada's premiers met with Prime Minister Trudeau

in Ottawa to discuss two issues of national and international importance: climate change and the upcoming conference of the parties in Paris, and Canada's part in welcoming Syrian refugees.

Given that there's not been a conference of Canada's first ministers since January 2009, the discussions proceeded in a climate of palpable goodwill and openness. Prior to the meeting with the prime minister the premiers, representing the provinces and territories, met as the Council of the Federation.

As a student of Canadian political history, I am pleased to observe that there's an alignment among the premiers and a spirit of collaboration with the federal government that has not been seen in Canada since the mid- to late-1960s and may indeed be unprecedented.

In the climate change discussions, Prime Minister Trudeau made it clear that he acknowledges and welcomes the initiatives and collaborations of the provinces and territories while clearly signaling a commitment to provide federal leadership and to go to Paris with a message that "Canada is back."

All leaders recognized the importance of the Quebec Declaration agreed to by the provinces and territories in April 2015 and the Canadian Energy Strategy adopted by the Council of the Federation in July of this year.

The intention of the parties at yesterday's first ministers' conference is to go to the Paris meetings with a common posture and a cohesive voice in terms of our recognition of the critical importance of climate change, and with a commitment to develop further actions and collaborations that will meet Canada's international responsibilities and refurbish our national brand as global environmental citizens.

There will be a further first ministers' conference before the end of February 2016 to pursue these actions and commitments through a coordinated Canadian strategy.

On the topic of Syrian refugees, all provinces and territories have made commitments to welcome and settle

refugees. These commitments from all of the provinces and territories total more than 26,000, indicating a collective intention to achieve the targets pledged by the federal government. Precise discussions focused on logistics, screening for security and health, resources, and the chronology of this national effort were the subject of our dialogue in Ottawa. Details will be unveiled by the federal government this afternoon.

I was deeply impressed by the goodwill and collective commitment demonstrated at yesterday's first ministers' conference and am confident that Prince Edward Island will be a constructive contributor to a strong Canadian federation and to our national affairs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'm glad to hear that the premiers had a chance to discuss with the prime minister areas of concern to us.

I know one area of concern to me is climate change and how it affects our infrastructure going forward. I think it goes back to what I had said, or what caucus has said before, about an infrastructure summit and how important it is to look at how climate change is changing the world and the effects it's going to have on our province, and with our infrastructure going forward, whether it be the CT4 unit or bridges and roads and stuff like that.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, I think all Canadians can say that we're really delighted that dialogue has

resumed between the federal and provincial levels of government here in Canada.

I'm also really pleased that the number one agenda item on the ministers' meeting was dealing with global climate change, an issue which will require a high level of cooperation and collaboration between levels of government, both within countries and internationally.

It's wonderful that our leaders are talking to each other and that this issue – which has been recognized and identified by experts, whether they be ecological experts or social experts or economic experts, throughout the world as the number one issue facing humanity today – I'm really glad that was dealt with.

I must also commend the Premier on his comments in an article I read about the relocation of Syrian refugees here to Canada, and at its essence it's about humanity. Indeed, that's what it is. I really appreciated what you said, Mr. Premier.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services

PEI Home Renovation Programs Update

Mr. Currie: Mr. Speaker, last month I announced a number of changes to Prince Edward Island's Home Renovation Programs and I am pleased to provide an update here today.

There are extremely valuable programs. They have already helped numerous Island families. During the last two versions of the PEI Home Renovation Programs we provided more than 2 million in funding and helped make necessary renovations to nearly 190 Island homes.

Based on feedback from Islanders, the department redesigned the programs to increase access and enable Islanders to remain safe and comfortable in their homes. The programs accepted applications until November 13th. During the two-and-a-half week period staff at the housing services

division received more than 620 applications.

Staff is currently reviewing the applications and we hope to have answers back to individuals about their applications in the next two weeks.

I would also like to remind everyone that there will be another intake for the PEI Home Renovation Programs this spring. To ensure easy access and a simplified process, those who have applied and qualify for the programs this fall will not have to reapply again in the spring.

This year these programs will provide 1.1 million to Islanders who need support to make necessary renovations to their homes. This funding is expected to help approximately 175 Island with necessary renovations to their homes like new roofs, windows, doors, or heating systems. This is up from 75 in previous years of the program.

These programs demonstrate the direction that government is taking to ensure the necessary supports are available to individuals and families to enable them to thrive as active members of the Island community.

I know these programs have made and will continue to make a significant difference in the lives of Islanders who need support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

I guess to start my response to the ministerial statement, I would like to thank the minister of health for actually knowing the proper location in the daily agenda where a ministerial statement is to take place. I applaud you for doing that now and not during Question Period.

We have heard for many years now Islanders that have been trying to access these programs. That's why we as an opposition have been asking questions for

the last number of years of: How can this program be delivered in a more fair and equitable manner?

I am very happy that the government has made some initial steps to make it more accessible, especially in regards to the application process. Literally at one point it seemed it was a lottery, which didn't surprise me. But it was administered that way, as lotteries seem to be a favourite sport of this government.

I'll put all that aside and just say that I am very happy that more Islanders are able to access these programs because as we know, on a daily basis, we are hearing from Islanders that are in need of roof repairs, heating repairs, window repairs, many repairs just to simply make their homes livable.

Any time that government can actually use Island taxpayers' money for what it is intended to be for, and that is for Islanders, we applaud that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, welcome this announcement. I think it was also a very good idea that this was a needs-tested program because that's going to put the dollars in the hands of the people who most require them. I do welcome that component of this.

I would also like to suggest that we need to go further with this. The Office of Energy Efficiency here on Prince Edward Island has told me that they are short of funds. The demand for their programs is outstripping their resources, so I would encourage this government to increase funding to the Office of Energy Efficiency in order to allow the same people who are accessing this fund to access money to renovate their homes in order that they have ongoing savings and economic benefits into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Pilot and Discovery, and Development and Commercialization Funds

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Island's entrepreneurs and small business owners are the engine that drives the provincial economy. These innovative and hard-working people put their heart and soul into their ideas and they are committed to turning those ideas into successful businesses.

Innovation PEI has two funds in place to assist entrepreneurs with early stages of their plan; the Pilot and Discovery Fund, and the Development and Commercialization Fund. These funds assist entrepreneurs to further research and test new products, validate their commercial viability, refine their ideas, and get products ready for market.

Almost 100 Island companies have benefitted since the inception of these two funds in 2008 including businesses like Job Site to Go, Employ PEI, Somru Bioscience Inc., and MAXIMUS Canada Services Inc.

Today we are pleased to announce that we have opened a new call for applications into these two very important funds.

The province is committed to expanding the Island's economy, throughout PEI I might add, increasing exports, reducing the trade imbalance, and helping create sustainable jobs for Islanders. By assisting new and emerging businesses in the early stages of their development we help nurture these companies and provide the tools necessary for success and future growth.

I encourage all Island entrepreneurs with new and emerging ideas to contact Innovation PEI for information on how to apply for these two important funds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do commend the minister on his announcement today. One thing with this new program, hopefully we see the funds falling in the right hands. There are a lot of good business ideas out there across Prince Edward Island that never get heard of, so hopefully, like I say, the funds get into the right hands and we focus, number one, on our own Island companies and start attracting some of our young people to take advantage of these funds and become entrepreneurs and work to build the Island economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As members in this House will know, Innovation PEI disperses \$22 million in funding every year. Between a third and a quarter of that is given as tax holiday money back to large corporations – \$6 million to \$7 million of taxpayers' money paid out. If that money were used for small entrepreneurs – and in the standing committee meetings earlier this year we heard a suggestion that as little as \$5,000 is all the sort of capital that is required in order for entrepreneurs to get going – if we took that \$6 million and were to divide it into \$5,000 chunks, 1,200 new businesses could be started here in Prince Edward Island every year.

If we have a success rate of 15%, which is considered the absolute lowest possible with no sort of supports, then we would end up with 180 new business every year on Prince Edward Island.

I think we have to ask ourselves: Do we want to continue funding through tax holidays the large corporations or do we want to encourage small, new businesses across Prince Edward Island with the same money and create at least 180 new businesses every year on Prince Edward Island?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Speaker: The hon. Clerk.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

In accordance with the Rules of the Legislative Assembly concerning petitions, I wish to advise that a petition has been presented at the Table from Amalgamated Dairies Limited praying for a private bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend an Act to Incorporate Amalgamated Dairies Limited*.

I wish to advise that the petition as presented is proper with respect to form and content, and that a draft bill will be prepared in anticipation of first reading.

Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling of Documents

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table written questions to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Rustico-Emerald, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Medical Act*, Bill No. 45, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services, could you give us a brief explanation?

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

With your indulgence, can I acknowledge someone from the gallery?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

Mr. Currie: I would just like to acknowledge Dr. Gerald O'Hanley and welcome him today.

Just in respect to the legislation for first reading, I want to be very clear that the government is not looking to take over the responsibility for licensing physicians in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

We are looking to provide, one, reasonable language testing, two, improve physician mobility between provinces, and three, increase accountability for the ministry of health. This will improve the ability of physicians to be licensed on Prince Edward Island by providing more clarity to the PEI College of Physicians and Surgeons on language requirements, and they will bring it more in line with license requirements in other jurisdictions.

I am very pleased to table this. We've been working on this now for a number of months and very pleased to be able to table this today.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. J. Brown: See how quick he goes with those responses.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct).

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that the 22nd order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 22, *An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act (No. 2)*, Bill No. 43, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act (No. 2)*, Bill No. 43, read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I will now call upon the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point to chair the bill.

Chair (Casey): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intitled *An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act (No. 2)*. Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be now read clause by clause or an explanation from the minister?

Mr. Aylward: Chair, an explanation please.

Chair: Minister, would you like to take someone on the floor?

Mr. Roach: Yes, I would like to bring a stranger on the floor.

Chair: Can we welcome a stranger to the floor?

Some Hon. Members: Yes. Agreed.

Chair: Thank you.

Welcome. Would you please introduce yourself and your position for the record?

Nigel Burns Director: My name is Nigel Burns, director within the Department of Finance.

Chair: Welcome, Nigel.

Minister, would you continue with an explanation, if you will?

Mr. Roach: Yes, it will be brief.

As everybody recalls we brought this to the floor in the spring. This deals with a \$250 individual tax break for the persons who reached the age of 65.

We had some conversations since then with CRA and we wanted to bring this minor fix to it to ensure that this \$250 also applied to a spouse or a partner. It's that simple. They just wanted to make sure that our act was adjusted. Very small.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair

Why are we not looking at doing something with the basic income exemption in raising that for low-income families who need it?

Mr. Roach: This particular act doesn't deal with that, it deals with the low income earners that we had spoken about last spring, this particular act here.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, do you have another question?

Leader of the Opposition: Yes. Still begs the question: Why are we not looking at it?

Mr. Roach: I think what we did say here in the House during the last session is that as we reach and achieve a fiscal balance that we would be prepared at that time to look at all aspects of the tax act.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Final question. Thank you, Chair.

Would the Minister of Finance take it under advisement or consideration that people out there are hurting and they need help? When I talk to constituents out there that's what they're saying is that they need help. I'm asking the minister to – when you talk about fiscal balance, yeah okay, I can understand that. We need to look at this now, not later.

Mr. Roach: Yes, thank you for that statement. We will take it under advisement. In fact, the reason why we had a lot of this legislation that took place, this particular legislation in the spring, was to focus primarily on the lowest income earners in the province. When we were able to show a tax break that's who it was given to first and we did that this spring. This act simply ensures that we cover everybody for that.

But, thank you.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much.

I just want to clarify. The minister when he spoke, he contacted CRA to make sure it applied to spouses as well, so this is deemed on the individual and not on your household income?

Nigel Burns Director: It's family income.

Mr. Aylward: It is family income.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

If you have two low-income earners in your household only one individual can claim it? That's correct?

Nigel Burns Director: One can claim it, but you can claim for yourself and for your spouse.

Mr. Aylward: And for your spouse, okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Chair, thanks very much.

Where it says: "...where the person who is the qualified relation of the individual for the year has attained the age of sixty-five years before the end of the year," I'm just wondering around making the application. Is that part of the provincial tax return?

Nigel Burns Director: Yes, it is.

Mr. Aylward: So it's not a separate application that you're applying to receive this credit?

Mr. Roach: No.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

I know the Leader of the Opposition spoke a little bit about the basic personal tax exemption and I appreciate your response. I've been talking about it now for five years and I look forward to the province in the day that we can get back to a balanced fiscal situation.

But over and above the basic personal tax exemption, where I'm hearing most individuals, particularly in my constituency, reach out to me – are those individuals that are looking for the age exemption. Now we have, I understand, the tax reduction of \$250 for low-income seniors that have reached the age of 65, but there are many more seniors that are on a fixed income and they might not be quite at what your government perceives as low income. Would you ever look at applying that to a higher level or higher bar?

Mr. Roach: I think what we would certainly do – I think if we get to the point where we're going to look at the act itself, any changes that we could make, I think that we'd look at more than just one thing, we'd look at an overall for sure.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair. Where it does say low income, what's the bench mark right now for an individual to be deemed as low income? Furthermore, is it different between a non-senior and a senior?

Mr. Roach: This particular piece of legislation applies to seniors only, this particular piece that we're discussing.

Mr. Aylward: Right, I understand that.

Mr. Roach: But we did have – as you recall part – and I don't have it here in front of me right now – but part of some of the adjustments we did had to do with single parents under a certain age scale and number of children. That was part of low income that we addressed and that's where, I think, we had talked about \$1.7 million in savings to those low-income earners. It wasn't subject to, or just seniors, only.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for that response because it actually answers part of my question, but my initial question was: What is the benchmark? What's the threshold as far as a person being deemed on the senior level as low income?

Nigel Burns Director: In the case of a single senior this measure affects that person up to somewhere closer to \$28,000 of income to get some measure of this benefit.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you.

Is that net income?

Nigel Burns Director: Net family income.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

I was wondering if you could define "qualified relation."

Nigel Burns Director: It's a spouse.

Mr. Trivers: Is it only spouse? Does it include common-law?

Nigel Burns Director: It would.

Mr. Trivers: Is there a place where it is actually defined in the legislation?

Nigel Burns Director: It's the same definition for just regular income tax, it's not a separate definition.

Mr. Trivers: It's the standard definition of qualified relations. Just making sure there's no loophole there. It would probably include same-sex couples as well as common-law and these sorts of things, is that true?

Nigel Burns Director: Correct.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

I was wondering if you could just help us understand a little bit more by working through an example of where you have two spouses, their incomes, and exactly how much they would have taken off their taxes.

Nigel Burns Director: Let's work through maybe a single senior. They would qualify for the basic amount, the \$300 for themselves. They would also be able to add on the 250 senior amount, so that's 550 provincial tax reduction. They would have that amount up to \$17,000 of net family income to count against provincial tax. That 550 starts to phase out starting at \$17,000 at 5% phase-out. For every dollar of income above \$17,000 their tax reduction is reduced by five cents. I don't have a calculator with me, but the \$550 divided by 5% I think takes you out to about \$28,000 before it turns to zero.

Mr. Trivers: I can do the calculations as well, but yeah, so, it zeros out at around 28,000.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: You just did the example for a single person. In this case, and again, based on the questions from the Member from Stratford-Kinlock, if two seniors were living together, they would both have to be seniors first of all, and they would have to have a qualified relationship, then they would both have to be earning less than \$17,000 in order to qualify.

Nigel Burns Director: In total.

Mr. Trivers: In total, yes. Total household income. I want to work through an example with two people just to see how that would work.

Nigel Burns Director: They would both get the base amount, so each would qualify for \$300, and both would qualify for the \$250 amounts.

Mr. Trivers: So, let's say in the example the total household income was \$17,000. Then they would receive \$300 times two plus \$250 times two, and that would be the amount that their overall taxes were reduced by at the very end of the tax form?

Nigel Burns Director: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: Do you have a – oh, sorry, Chair. Question.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Do you have an example of how this would be implemented, like an example of the provincial tax form?

Nigel Burns Director: The actual forms themselves have yet to be printed but they'll be due – they've basically been approved, the existing forms. The low-income tax reduction program is not a new program. The amounts were changed in the spring to increase them and a new line for a senior amount was added. When the forms are distributed early in the new year they'll be available. But as we don't have official forms as of yet this amendment proposed here is included in the forms to be printed.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Do you have a mock up of the form that you could share and table, perhaps?

Nigel Burns Director: I think we could provide one. I don't have one with me.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: That would be great because I find it's really much easier to understand some of these calculations when you see the form in front of you.

If the person deducted, for example, in the scenario we were talking out, it would be \$1,100 deduction at the bottom after they'd done all their other deductions. If the amount of tax they owed went below zero, would they actually receive a credit for that?

Nigel Burns Director: The amount is not refundable but it is transferable. While you might have taken your – as the applicant, you might have taken your provincial tax to zero. To the extent that there's some left over, you can transfer it to your spouse and reduce their income tax.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Yes. Continuing with our example, then, you would have two separate tax returns with a total income of \$17,000 or less so they're eligible, and of course they're in a qualified relationship. So you're taking \$300 plus \$250, it would be \$550 off the bottom of each of them, right? Not \$1,100 in total, but \$550 off of each.

Nigel Burns Director: The amount is calculated in – one person of the couple claims this reduction to the extent that their tax is taken to zero, and if there's some left over they can transfer that to their spouse to reduce their provincial tax.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: So just to confirm, if you had a couple, only one person would actually claim this deduction.

Nigel Burns Director: They claim it for both.

Mr. Trivers: Claims it for both, but it would only be applied to one person's return.

Nigel Burns Director: At first, and if there's anything left over, it gets transferred to the spouse.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: So what is the maximum amount of tax deductions that would result for a double, two-person income household?

Nigel Burns Director: There's also child amounts, so depending on the number of children in the family – if you have one, two, or three children, children amounts would add on top of that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: How would the seniors' tax deduction apply to the children?

Nigel Burns Director: Not in that specific case, but perhaps maybe they are looking after grandchildren.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Again, what would be the maximum amount that they could deduct in a two-person household?

Nigel Burns Director: They would be eligible to reduce their taxes by that \$1,100.

Mr. Trivers: Three hundred dollars times two plus \$250 times two is \$1,100. The maximum benefit of this tax credit would be \$1,100 for a household that fully qualified.

Nigel Burns Director: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: Okay, thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the bill carry? Carried.

Mr. Roach: I move the title.

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

Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Roach: I move the enacting clause.

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

Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Roach: Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair, and that the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intitled *An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act (No. 2)*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same with amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture, that order No. 20 be recalled.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 20, *An Act to Amend the School Act*, Bill No. 42, in Committee.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 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.

I'll now ask the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point to chair the bill.

Chair (Casey): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intitled *An Act to Amend the School Act*. Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be now read clause by clause?

Hon. members, we've already has this bill on the floor and we were just asking questions, just to bring you up-to-date as to where we were. We still in agreement that

we do that? Or are we reading it clause by clause?

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) we're still in questions.

Chair: Okay, perfect. Thank you.

Permission to bring a member of the department on the floor?

An Hon. Member: Granted.

Chair: Welcome. Would you please state your name and your position for the record?

Blair Barbour Coordinator: Blair Barbour, Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, legislative planner and coordinator.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Chair: Hon. members, it would be helpful if we would pay attention so that we could hear what's being said at the table.

Thank you.

Mr. Perry: Chair, if I may.

Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Perry: I just want to respond to some questions that were asked on the last day we were sitting here.

Response to comments on EA hours which was raised by the Member from Kensington-Malpeque. Government is committed to enhancing front-line services for students and have invested additional education assistant hours for our students with special needs. This will support and help address some of the class composition issues that teachers are now facing.

Students have a variety of needs and the EA support is given to students with special needs according to a set criteria. That is, a student has a personal care and mobility needs or the student has high-risk behaviours or the student is blind, deaf or has significant trouble communicating. If the students are eligible for EA hours then the needs are prioritized based on the severity of the situation. The school board has advised that there are cases where a doctor has

recommended an EA for a student with a learning disability or ADHD. They may not meet the criteria for needing (Indistinct) hours, but if a student is not eligible for EA hours the board offers other types of support for the student.

Another response was regarding the family of schools from the Member from Souris-Elmira. There is no change to the family of schools system here on PEI. There are 10 in the family of schools, along with the French School Board. The existing family of schools for operational and functional purposes remain business as usual with 10. But in order to organize the district advisory councils we have to pair them up with family of schools.

Regarding Rustico-Emerald's question on the transition team, there is a transition team working, as I mentioned, on the alignment of the school board into the department. The initial team consists of the deputy ministers, representatives from the department, representatives from the school board which includes the superintendent. There are also members with expertise in human resources and also in legislation. The transition –

Mr. Trivers: Are you saying the whole former school board?

Mr. Perry: Pardon me?

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Are you saying the whole former school board?

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure what you mean by the whole (Indistinct).

Mr. Trivers: You just started off with the representatives from the –

Mr. Perry: From the school board. That would be the superintendent, perhaps someone from operations within the school board. You're probably thinking of the school board trustees.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah.

Mr. Perry: Okay, no, this is the school board itself.

The transitional team will pull additional members as needed, for instance, as they begin discussion on curriculum alignment. They will include curriculum staff at the board level and also at the department level. Bring them in for a discussion.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

How will this affect curriculum?

Mr. Perry: You mean curriculum as delivery of the curriculum or the development of the curriculum?

Mr. Myers: Let's start with development. How will this affect the development of curriculum?

Mr. Perry: It will continue on as the day-to-day basis.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Given the opportunity, I guess, you represent yourself by making a major change to the education system, and given the fact that the governments in all of Atlantic Canada will soon be Liberal governments, why don't you work together and come with a curriculum for the whole Maritimes? What's the difference between delivering curriculum or the curriculum that you should deliver in Cardigan versus the Annapolis Valley? Math is math, English is English. There are very little differences between any of the provinces.

Why are all of these provinces spending money developing their own curriculum? Why don't we take this as an opportunity to work together?

Mr. Perry: We do work together on certain – whether it be, let's say, math for instance – where we will work together with other provinces and there are some that we do within the Atlantic region itself. Specifically some are just, I guess, pointed towards the Island itself and gear towards our schools and our system here on PEI.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: I guess it begs the question, when we talk about excellence in education and the fact that we have to be setting up for the 21st century learner and how we have to teach students so that they're ready to compete in a global economy against people from anywhere in the world, our curriculum is part of that focus. Like, how good our curriculum is.

I'm not knocking our curriculum, and I know there's a lot of money goes into curriculum development. I guess that's why I ask. The amount of money and resource that goes into development and curriculum when the curriculum in Alberta is probably the best curriculum in Canada, if you listen to the experts. Why do we spend so much effort recreating things that are already working in other places?

Mr. Perry: I do believe that we are using the curriculum (Indistinct) people from Alberta.

Mr. Myers: Are we?

Mr. Perry: I'm pretty sure we are. Again, curriculum is always evolving, always changing, and we're trying to keep updated with it.

As recently as a couple of weeks ago there was a request (Indistinct) coding in schools. That's something that we can go back to and look at and see if that's something we're going to incorporate into our curriculum program at the schools.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: I'm not opposed to any additions to the school system that's going to make the system better. It's the core skills that we've tested poorly on recently, they've been literacy and numeracy, our writing skills have been poor, and those would be the extreme basic components to education or to learning, period. Being able to read at a high level would be a skill that will help learn anything, right? Reading comprehension helps you learn other things. It's kind of the whole basis of our learning system.

Again, given the fact that we have relatively geographically a small area – you take the

Maritimes at least, if we take Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island – we're not a day's drive from anywhere no matter where you are at any corner. Given the fact that we're working together, why do we have our own curriculum development group and why does Nova Scotia and why does New Brunswick?

Mr. Perry: That's something, hon. member, that I will definitely take under advisement and take it back to our department.

Chair: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, just curious: Whose idea was it to dissolve the school board?

Mr. Perry: Whose idea was it to dissolve the school board? I guess it was a joint decision made was that the process was I would vote through our department. We had many discussions on what we wanted to do with the future of education and the final decision would have to go through Cabinet to have (Indistinct).

Mr. MacKay: The final decision was in Cabinet?

Mr. Perry: Everything at the end has to pass through Cabinet for –

Chair: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Last question.

Was the teachers' federation, were they informed of any decisions on this school board closure before?

Mr. Perry: Prior to the announcement, we did the day before, yeah.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

Just getting back to the EA hours and the set criteria; you did say that if the student is not

eligible for EA hours or help that there are other supports in place. I'm just wondering what those other supports are.

Mr. Perry: Those other resources in the school depending on the other needs of the child to be extra resource time.

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: When a parent approaches the school and is looking for help through an EA and they're denied, then are they referred to resource?

Mr. Perry: That would be the individual school could then look at the needs of that particular child and see if they have the resources available.

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Perry: Within that school.

Ms. Compton: So EAs are basically there for behavioural and health issues?

Mr. Perry: And physical, yes.

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct) so for children –

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

For a child that is behind as far as their class and their capabilities as far as learning, then they are referred to resource?

Mr. Perry: They can. EAs can assist a student with that also. But then they also do have resource available for those students who need help with their studies.

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

It's been my experience that the EAs in the schools that I'm involved with, EAs are there to keep the child from basically disrupting the rest of the class. On a regular

basis that's what's happening. That's what I'm told.

Mr. Perry: That's your understanding. That's not (Indistinct).

Ms. Compton: Well –

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) facts, hon. member, having been an EA –

Chair: Excuse me?

The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: Who is out of order?

Ms. Compton: Yes, who is out of order?

Ms. Biggar: Hon. Chair –

Chair: Do you have an intervention?

Ms. Biggar: I do, if I may.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: I can just respond a little bit to that.

As a former EA, before I was elected, the EAs do play a vital role as part of the IEP plan for that student and they work hand in hand. They're not just there in terms of what you just said, so I know they are a part of the IEP planning process.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

I can only speak to my own experience with the concerns that have been brought to me as the MLA in the district, and what the role is for the EAs that are in the schools in my district and that has been a concern by a number of parents, is: What is the role of an

EA and how does that help with the learning process?

Mr. Perry: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the minister for bringing back the transition team. I want to make sure I understand this because based on our conversation last time, and questions, they are critical for this process to come out and be successful. On the transition team you've got the superintendent of the school board, right? You've got an operations member from the school board, possibly –

Mr. Perry: Possibly. There will be three members from the school board. There will also be three members from the department along with the deputy of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture. There will be legal and there will also be someone there for human resources.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Okay, so all right. I'm going to have to review back at Hansard to get all that down, take notes.

Mr. Perry: I can give it to you after if you need it.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you. That would be wonderful if you could table that. That would be great.

Mr. Perry: No, I'll give it to you.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you. You don't want to table it for the House?

Mr. Perry: Table it? I would have to write it down first and then table it.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, that would be great. I was hoping you were going to write it down and give it to me too, so thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, do you have any further questions?

Mr. Trivers: Yes.

Chair: Great.

Mr. Trivers: Chair, in terms of process –

Chair: You have the floor.

Mr. Trivers: Do you want me to continue to raise my hand?

Chair: Yes, I would love you to indicate so we can attribute your comments in the Hansard.

Mr. Trivers: All right, great. You also mentioned that you're going to involve members of the department on the transition team.

Mr. Perry: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: Specifically, you said curriculum staff from the board and the department when needed –

Mr. Perry: When needed, yes.

Mr. Trivers: From the department, who are going to be the core team members that would sit on there? What would their roles be?

Mr. Perry: What will their roles be?

Mr. Trivers: Yeah.

Mr. Perry: To help provide input and advice into the transition and make it as smooth and as easy as possible.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: How many from the department, do you feel?

Mr. Perry: About three.

Mr. Trivers: Three?

Mr. Perry: Then others will be brought in as needed depending on the specific issue or the challenge at that time.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Okay, I'm getting a good picture now of the transition team. You've

got three members from the school board including legal, possibly operations, and the superintendent who was of course chairing the school board at that time. You've got probably three members from the department. I'm assuming those would be sort of senior members of the department –

Mr. Perry: They will be.

Mr. Trivers: – like the deputy minister –

Mr. Perry: The deputy minister plus three members.

Mr. Trivers: Oh, the deputy minister plus three members? Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you. I know you're going to write this down and table it, but who would the other three members be? Like typically – are you thinking right now from the department?

Mr. Perry: It would be a senior director for finance and administration, the senior director for learning, and the senior – or the legislation and planning coordinator.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Okay, great. I was wondering if you could – so those are nice, great specific people that you're pointing out there for the members from the department.

I was wondering, can you go over that again for the people from the board? There's a superintendent and the other three people you're thinking would be?

Mr. Perry: From the board?

Mr. Trivers: From the board, yeah.

Mr. Perry: I will get back to you on that. It would be the same. It would be senior level management from the board at the same time and others will be brought in specifically for issues that may – perhaps if it is curriculum, we will bring in the people from the curriculum division.

Mr. Trivers: Chair?

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Would it be fair to say that the senior level people brought in from the board would be roughly the equivalent of the senior people brought in from the department? Is that sort of the structure?

Mr. Perry: That's correct.

Mr. Trivers: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Of course, because the transition team is so critical to making sure that this new setup will provide excellence in education, as you said is your goal, although I would like to see something more specific and measurable and achievable as opposed to the broad excellence to education. I'm thinking probably one of the roles of the transition team will actually be to define these specific measurable and achievable goals, right?, so it's very important.

Have you considered including someone from the home and school association on the team, perhaps the head of the home and school association?

Mr. Perry: The home and school federation and the associations will have a great deal of input at the advisory council levels as we form those in January.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: What will the role of the advisory councils be with respect to the transition team?

Mr. Perry: They will provide input to the transition team and also to the department of education to move forward.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: How often do you see the transition team meeting with the advisory councils during the transition process?

Mr. Perry: I'm not certain on that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: At what stage would you say the transition plan is right now? Do you have something written down? For example, would you have a list of the different areas with tasks broken out in a nice, Gantt chart of how it's going to be broken down? Or where would you say you are on that process?

Mr. Perry: They are at the beginning of the transition. They have already met. I do not sit on that transition team and I did not ask specifically what was discussed at the meeting.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Do you think it might be a good idea for the minister of education to sit on the transition team?

Mr. Perry: I'm very confident in the people who are sitting on that transition team. They bring a lot of years of experience and some very valuable experience to that team and I am very confident in their abilities.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: What role do you see the standing committee on education playing in the transition?

Mr. Perry: The standing committee on education can make recommendations.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: How often do you plan to have the transition team meet with the standing committee on education?

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure if they will be meeting with the standing committee on education. The standing committee on education, as you know, does make requests.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: I'm understanding that it sounds like the planning process for this

transition is really in the very early stages. Since the last time we asked questions on these amendments or this bill proposing the amendments, you've come through. You've decided sort of what the roles are going to be on the transition team. You're kind of putting together a plan as you go. You're thinking about how you're going to engage stakeholders like the advisory councils. You're not sure exactly how often they're going to meet and these sorts of things. You're also not entirely sure how it's going to interact with the standing committee on education.

I would like to suggest that you meet, at the very least, probably every second week to have a report. Or maybe have them report to the advisory council every second week with a list of how things are going.

Mr. Perry: Yeah.

Mr. Trivers: Or perhaps, at the very least, every two weeks I'm thinking they could go and present to the standing committee on how things are going because I really believe this is such a critical thing. This is where everything is being set to make things go forward and if that doesn't happen, I'm afraid it won't happen in an open and transparent way.

Mr. Perry: I'll take that under advisement.

Mr. Trivers: All right.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, I've got a few more people on the waiting list. I'll come back to you.

Mr. Trivers: Absolutely.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, the family of schools district advisory councils, when will those chairs start meeting? Is that January?

Mr. Perry: January. Yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

They're going to start meeting in January, which means they should be having their chair identified fairly soon. If the chairs are starting to meet in January each family of school advisory council will have to start choosing their chair fairly soon. Right?

Mr. Perry: Hon. member, there will be a liaison appointed that will chair those meetings.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

But in order for each individual family of schools advisory council to pick their own chair to attend a meeting in January, you said there would be a liaison there to run them, they would have to be meeting now to choose their chair. Correct?

Mr. Perry: Letters have gone out to the schools asking them to either appoint or elect someone to represent.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: When did those letters get sent out?

Mr. Perry: I believe last week.

Mr. MacEwen: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: The Morell-Souris family of schools, the Kensington-Kinkora family of schools, they've been joined together. Why is that?

Mr. Perry: Why is that? Just joined together for the purposes of the advisory council. It's just basically to bring their numbers up as an operational functional existence they still have with the English Language School Board. But just for the purpose of the advisory councils, we brought them in together just to bring the numbers up, to make it more level right across the board, right across the Island.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: You say bring the numbers up. You're talking about the enrolment numbers?

Mr. Perry: Both the numbers in the schools plus the schools within that family of schools. Because, let's say for instance, the Souris family of schools would have one school.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: We in Morell started meeting last night, the Morell Consolidated School, I should say, to discuss about the local family of schools advisory council. A lot of questions, a lot of really good questions.

One was the perceived notion that we're joining the smaller high schools together, it's a symptom of things to come. What would you say if someone said that to you: Are we looking at closing down high schools? Because we're joining the smaller ones together.

Mr. Perry: This has nothing to do with joining them together. This is for a voice representing regions. As indicated in this House several times, there are no school closures this year or for the 2016-17 school year.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: So there are no school closures for this year or for the next year. We know we can take that to the bank for sure.

Mr. Perry: That's correct.

Mr. MacEwen: You mentioned about the regions. Region is kind of a relative term. You could say Summerside and the west are together and join them. Morell and Souris, I guess you could say, is kind of a region. You could say Morell, Souris, Montague is a region. I think the people of Morell and the people of Souris would consider themselves a region. It was a good question that was

raised to me: Is the Morell family of schools not worthy of their own advisory council?

Mr. Perry: They're very worthy. They will have their own advisory group within their school. They will have representation. Actually, they'll have two students from the high school plus an individual, whether it be a parent, that would be elected to that advisory group also.

Mr. MacEwen: Okay. Chair?

Mr. Perry: Each school will have equal representation.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: You're right. So there will be a representative from each home and school or parent advisory council. So we're talking individual family of school district advisory councils now. Right?

Mr. Perry: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: I want to talk about the representation on that. There are two high school students. That's two total from the whole family of schools?

Mr. Perry: Yes.

Mr. MacEwen: For example, the Morell-Souris combined one, there would be one student – you would assume one student from each school.

Mr. Perry: Possibly. Or two from one.

Mr. MacEwen: Okay.

Mr. Perry: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: That would probably be two from Morell. I'm not sure.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Then there is one representative from each home and school, or from each home and school or parent advisory council that's within that family of schools. Correct?

Mr. Perry: Pardon me?

Mr. MacEwen: So there's also a representative from each home and school association or parent advisory council within that family of schools?

Mr. Perry: Within that school, each school.

Mr. MacEwen: So, sorry.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

For example, the Morell-Souris one would have a representative from the Souris home and school association, a representative from the Morell high school parent advisory council, a representative from the Mount Stewart home and school association, and a representative from the Morell consolidated parent advisory council.

Mr. Perry: Correct. Four.

Mr. MacEwen: That brings their total up to four plus the two students, which is six, a regional director which is seven.

If I go to the Charlottetown Rural family of schools, they're going to have a much larger advisory council. Correct?

Mr. Perry: They will have – there are seven schools within the Charlottetown family.

Mr. MacEwen: Okay.

Mr. Perry: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: So that's a larger council than the Morell-Souris family of schools council. Because they'll have seven –

Mr. Perry: (Indistinct), yes. But they all, each school –

Mr. MacEwen: Plus two students –

Mr. Perry: But yet each school will have representation.

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah.

Mr. Perry: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: I guess what I'm trying – I'm just asking the question, not (Indistinct).

Mr. Perry: No.

Mr. MacEwen: Each family of schools advisory council will have a different number of representatives.

Mr. Perry: Yes, they will. Because each family of schools has a different number of schools –

Mr. MacEwen: Exactly.

Mr. Perry: – within the family right across the Island.

Mr. MacEwen: Exactly. Do you think that's a good idea?

Mr. Perry: Can you suggest something that might work better?

Mr. MacEwen: Good question. I would love to suggest something.

Mr. Perry: Okay.

Mr. MacEwen: I like this. I'm getting answers. We could switch anytime too.

Mr. Perry: We try to do it as fairly as we possibly can.

Mr. MacEwen: No, I understand that.

Mr. Perry: Within the family of schools, when you get into –

Mr. MacEwen: I'm not saying it's a disadvantage. Some people would say it might be an advantage to have a smaller committee. I don't know.

Mr. Perry: It may be, too, you know, just geographic regions. We tried to make it represent around the same number, roughly. But each school will definitely be represented. Each school will have a voice.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: In the Charlottetown Rural or Colonel Gray family of schools, they have intermediate schools, or Montague, some places. In the Morell family of schools they don't have an intermediate school. They have an intermediate curriculum.

Mr. Perry: Yes.

Mr. MacEwen: The seven-eight-nines are taught a curriculum similar to other places. Do you think that the group of seven-eight-nines in the Morell family of schools should have a representative like an intermediate school would have in the Colonel Gray or Charlottetown Rural family of schools?

Mr. Perry: I believe if you look at Morell and Souris – if you look at Morell alone, there are 554 students in Morell.

Mr. MacEwen: That's right.

Mr. Perry: I mean, when you look at Charlottetown Rural, there are closing in on 3,800 students.

Mr. MacEwen: That's right.

Mr. Perry: So there's quite a difference there. The representation, we're just going to make it more even. Each school will have somebody representing them and representing their school regardless of what grades are within that school.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: I won't, probably, take away a question that the Member from Souris-Elmira will ask later, but I guess I'm wondering: Was there consideration – I understand that, yeah, there are much larger enrolments in other spots.

Mr. Perry: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: But the issues for an intermediate group in rural PEI would still carry weight as intermediate issues would be in urban PEI. Was there any consideration given to a school that might be a K-12, or a school that's a 1-8, or a school that's a 1-6, or a 1-9, and breaking that up? Or was it just simply: There's your school so you get a rep based on population?

Mr. Perry: There was consideration given to all.

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah.

Mr. Perry: It's just trying to find something that's most fair to all. I'm sure we can all

suggest something a little bit different, but we tried to make it as fair as we possibly could so that each school across PEI was represented equally.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

The regional director of the PEI Home and School Federation for the family of schools, there are no regional directors in place now, are there?

Mr. Perry: Yes, there is.

Mr. MacEwen: Who would that be for the eastern?

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure. You'd have to ask –

Mr. MacEwen: And is that a – sorry.

Mr. Perry: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Is that an executive position on the home and school? I'm just trying to figure out what the regional director's role is for.

Mr. Perry: Regional director is –

Mr. MacEwen: Are they, is that a volunteer position?

Mr. Perry: The regional director would represent that particular area on the home and school federation.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Is that regional director, is that for King's County, is that for each family of schools there's a regional director?

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure the makeup of the home and school and how they geographically or select – not select, but have these regions and representation.

That's something that the home and school could possibly answer.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: So we could potentially have a regional director sitting on the Montague family of school advisory council, the Morell-Souris family of school advisory council, and I'm not sure, the Charlottetown Rural also stretches quite into the east as well and some of the west. I'm not sure if they would stand on that. You haven't looked in to that if they're sitting on multiple committees, or we don't know for sure?

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure what you mean by multiple committees but there is home and school, and potential especially for home and school representation on each and every advisory council at every school across Prince Edward Island.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Sorry, what I'm saying is each family of schools advisory council has a regional director of the PEI Home and School Federation on theirs, so if the regional director is east then they would be sitting on Montague, they would be sitting on Morell-Souris, and I don't know if they'd potentially be sitting on Charlottetown Rural.

Mr. Perry: I don't have the breakdown of what the area is that they represent in front of me, but I'm sure that it has been looked at.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, minister.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, the school board (Indistinct) in Stratford right now. What's the terms of the lease agreement there and pulling the board out of that?

Mr. Perry: I don't have the lease agreement with me and there's no suggestion that the board was being pulled out of it.

Leader of the Opposition: It's not going to be pulled out?

Mr. Perry: There's no suggestion that the board was pulled out of it.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: So are we going to keep the board, or pardon me, the department, spread over Summerside and Charlottetown or Stratford?

Mr. Perry: At the present time the transition team will integrate, especially with the curriculum delivery, with our curriculum development, but most of the HR, the operations, will stay in place with the school board as it is.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: How many buildings is the department of education spread over, not counting schools? How many office buildings is the department involved in or spread over?

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure what your question is.

Leader of the Opposition: We're taking the school board, we're getting rid of it.

Mr. Perry: We're not getting rid of the school board. The school board of trustees was dissolved.

Leader of the Opposition: You're getting rid of the trustees, not the board.

Mr. Perry: Trustees was dissolved. Right now, during the transition period, we have one school board trustee in place.

Leader of the Opposition: So how many offices in the province is the board and the department of education spread over?

Mr. Perry: I would have to get back to you with that number.

Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

Mr. Perry: There's a school board office in Summerside, there's a school board office in Stratford, and the department is located in Summerside.

Leader of the Opposition: Where is the actual French school board located?

Mr. Perry: In the French school in Evangeline. Ecole Evangeline. They're at the end of the school, connected to it.

Leader of the Opposition: Okay, thank you, for now.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

I had a question just about oversight and the fact that with the new system there won't be any elected representatives.

In the past, with limited success I would add, there's been an elected school board. It's been a long time ago since before you guys came around that there has been one, but at one point there was an elected school board that provided oversight for the system. There's some concern out there that with all the people and all these committees being appointed there's no real elected oversight representing the people and put there by the people. How would you respond to that?

Mr. Perry: Hon. member, there's an opportunity for people to be selected by their schools, by their organizations that they represent, and as an individual to sit on these councils. Of course, the principals' council will be made up from principals from each school, so that's obvious. The other two advisory groups will have representation from the community – parents, students, and within the education sector.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

Today's students, they've changed. They're not students of the past, for sure, and the students of today are no longer the students that the current system was designed to teach. Can you tell us how this new system

that you're implementing will best tackle that challenge?

Mr. Perry: What we're looking at to tackle that challenge, especially starting from the broader sense, is the learning partners. Looking at education from birth to formal training into the workforce, and focusing on the learner and on the broader base, so that way we have people from the education sector on there and individuals representing communities themselves, depending on how the selection process works for Engaged PEI.

On the district family of schools, of course, is representation from people of the community or parent organizations, school organizations, and students that would be sitting on that advisory council, too, will all be able to provide input and guidance.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: That's all well and good and I'm not opposed to having councils of people who are affected by different points of the system impacting it. I think there's more of a scientific measure that needs to be in place as well because there's more to it than how people feel the system may or may not be working for them. There's research, obviously, that's done all the time that would give you much broader range.

Can you tell us what you know about the latest research on learning and the brain?

Mr. Perry: The latest research on learning and the brain?

Mr. Myers: Yeah, what it actually says.

Mr. Perry: Can I ask you to elaborate on that, please?

Mr. Myers: There's been a lot of research on how students learn. Given that today's technology students have cell phones and they're growing up with tablets, they're playing video games, they have the Internet, that there's a much different interfacing world than the world, for example, I grew up in where all my conversations were face to face and I watched *Happy Days* at 5:00. That was as much TV time as there was because I had two channels and there was

nothing else to watch and I had to fit it into that one hour in the evening.

My life was much different than the kids today. So given that, the brain function has obviously changed. There's definitely more constant – there's things constantly around. I see it with my own kids, like they always have something, and can you tell us if you know what the latest research says on it?

Mr. Perry: I can tell you, first, I'm not a brain surgeon. But I do know that the classroom of today is not the same classroom it was 20-30 years ago. Whenever I was in it, or definitely, there always will be challenges and this goes back to the question you asked earlier about the curriculum. Curriculum is forever evolving and changing with the needs of our students and the way they learn.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Question. I think that the curriculum is definitely one point that I want to make, but the method of teaching is another one, so we're on to a different topic now. Your curriculum (Indistinct), I think you should do it collectively with the other provinces simply because it's more cost-effective for you and we know that there's pressures financially on government. I'd like to see the Member from Souris-Elmira get his doctor and his ambulance both, and if there's an opportunity to save money to – well, perhaps you, too.

But I know that there's pressures, I know government has pressures financially, so part of the measure that I would suggest is the financial challenge, but the other one is that there's really no difference between the math in Nova Scotia and the math in Prince Edward Island or the math in New Brunswick and the math in Prince Edward Island. That's why I brought that forward.

But the method of teaching has changed. I know there's a study, it's actually pretty old, it's 2009, that talked about the increased distractibility of students and it had to do with the cognitive control and the multitasking that happens from basically a world of devices that students from today are interfacing with. How are you going to tackle those challenges with the system?

Mr. Perry: What's great about the system is that now it's going to give an opportunity, again for people to have input, provide guidance. From the learning partners there will be people from the education sector that will be bringing in some great advice and a lot of years of knowledge into that advisory council providing input and guidance for our education system. We also have a great staff with our department, but we have great educators in our system who are ever adapting to the needs of today.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

With all due respect to the great teachers and administrators we have in this province, during a time of great change the people that are in the middle of it aren't necessarily the ones that can see the change the best, they see the system that's around them. Government is a great example, and having spent years working in government, people from outside could tell you much easier what's not working than people from inside. People from inside are saying: No, no, that works. Because we get what we want and Johnny gets to have his coffee at 10:00 every morning. Our system works.

When it comes to the high-end scientific learning things out there, there are very few people who are experts in that. It's a worldwide expertise. There are people that exist in parts of the world that are doing high-end studies on how people learn. It's going to be impossible for you to have those on any of these councils just because they're either not here or you can't have them, they're busy, or they'd be so highly sought after anyway.

Those are real challenges in the way that students interact with not only one another, how they learn and how they are like a device-controlled society now. I say that – my own kids are the same. It's almost like if I could talk to them through a video game I'd have great conversations, but otherwise it's kind of iffy. I really don't envy teachers who have to teach that (Indistinct). I mean, their jobs are obviously challenging.

How do we create a system where we are using the research of how children brains are

developing differently today than they were 20 years ago to ensure that the system is teaching – it's set up for them, basically.

Mr. Perry: I believe it goes beyond just the system itself and it also starts at home, too. That's (Indistinct) learning, it's taken from birth all through that formal school training and into the workforce. We all have a responsibility, as parents, as community, as educators, to help our children achieve. There are resources out there – we may not have them on the Island – but they can be brought in. For instance, this summer with writing, there was an expert flown in to do a day with the teachers.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: So there was also another study done in 2011 and it's called – actually, I think there's a book written on it – it's called *The Shallows*. It talks about how there's a shallower information processing now than there was. It also has to do with the Internet, with the fact that brains could be over-activated all the time because there are so many things for children to stimulate their brains, right?

Whether or not I can do more about that at home, sure I can if it means taking the devices away or making so that my house doesn't have the Internet so my children don't get that stimulation. But I'm only one and there are 20,000 kids in the system. You're not addressing the real problem when there are worldwide studies that are saying this is going on and it's a generational thing and this whole generation is going to grow up with it.

We have a system that's meant to – not even to teach me – to teach my parents. The system we have here on Prince Edward Island came in with Alex Campbell in the 1960s before I was even born. It's a system that endured and my children now are enduring, but nothing is different really from it, the very basis of it. I realize curriculum stuff has changed, but the very basis of the system has not changed since 1965.

This is your mark on the system, this is you taking that change that hasn't been made since 1965 and changed it. If you're going to make a full-scale change, I urge you to make

a full-scale change and investigate all these avenues to make sure that we're building a system for today's learner, not for me because I'm and gone, not even for the kids that are in grade 12 because they're done, it's going to be too late. For the kids that are just about to start – and there's numerous studies about their brains, their brain functionality and how things may have changed versus what they (Indistinct) 20 years ago.

Mr. Perry: Thank you for sharing that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services, and the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River are on the list, and hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, on the list, just so you'll know where you are.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Just to build on what the member here from Georgetown was saying, it's critical that we get this change right. It's very important, again to go back to the transition team, that we make sure that we have the right people engaged on the team and that the process is open and transparent. You mentioned many times that the whole vision for the education on Prince Edward Island with the broad goal of excellence in education is to integrate horizontally and go right from birth right into the workforce, right (Indistinct)?

Mr. Perry: Focus on their learning, yeah.

Mr. Trivers: What I'm wondering is maybe the transition team should have people on there from outside of what we define right now as our education system. The people that you've talked about so far are people that are representing the old school board and the department of education.

What about the people from the Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning, for example? (Indistinct) mentioned in the workforce side, in particular, of course people that are working with the institutions of, I guess that's the advanced learning portion, universities and colleges. Then, of course, on the other side you've got the

early years centres that come into play. I would imagine there are people within government that would have opinions as to how that should feed into the education system.

Again, on the transition team, can you tell me if you're planning to include people from the government departments that represent – and other groups – that are prior to and after what we currently define as our education system within government?

Mr. Perry: What you mentioned, hon. member, is exactly what we're doing. We're having people from all areas of the education sector, communities, representing many different organizations on our groups. Whether it's the more broader base with the learning partners, again, we go back to 10 members from the education sector.

That doesn't mean that they're from – like, the teachers (Indistinct), but they may be, but there's people representing early childhood education. They're representing all aspects. They're representing Workforce and Advanced Learning, they're representing Health and Wellness. They're all in that advisory group providing very valuable input to our direction of education. That's what's great about this, is that these groups actually have input and they can give us guidance. It's all about collaboration and engagement. Also, on the transition team if need be, the deputy ministers from both Health and Wellness and also from Workforce and Advanced Learning will be brought in.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: That is great to hear and the transition, again, (Indistinct) mentioned, I think, is very critical to get things off on the right foot.

Again, in that vein, how are you engaging the PEI Teachers' Federation? What advisory council are they part of?

Mr. Perry: The PEI Teachers' Federation will be on the learning partners.

Mr. Trivers: They're part of the learning partners' one, okay.

Mr. Perry: Advisory council.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: The teachers are represented as part of the principals' advisory council. Are they represented anywhere else?

Mr. Perry: The teachers are represented by the PEI Teachers' Federation, so they'll be represented on that, the learning partners. They'll also be represented by their principal of their school and the principals' council.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: I just want to make sure I get this opinion out that the teachers are critical because these are people that are living day-in and day-out. I know you've mentioned very often that your approach is going to be learner-focused. I think learner at the core, the teachers are probably pretty close to that (Indistinct), they've seen what works and what doesn't work. They're living it day-in and day-out. It's critical that they have input into this transition team.

Communication, I think, of what the transition team is doing, what their plans are like, the structure of their project plan, the tasks, the dates, the eventual goals of the education system that they come up with. I think it's very critical that's communicated and we've seen good communication from government recently, I think, with the water act consultations. They've done a great job of going out and holding forums, taking the presentations and making sure they got it on the website, making sure things are shared in an open and transparent fashion.

We had a commitment from the minister that they would put the environment advisory council report in its entirety in the public domain prior to the white paper being written from that report. Pardon me, it's the actual water act, the first draft, being written from that report, and the same thing from the democratic reform –

An Hon. Member: Renewal.

Mr. Trivers: Renewal, pardon me. Not reform. The democratic renewal, they've done a great job. Although in two different

spots in the government website and two different ways, because one is a standing committee, I think, and the other one is (Indistinct) –

Chair: Do you have a question?

Mr. Trivers: Yes, I do have some questions. I wanted to get out my opinions as well here.

Chair: Yes, sure.

Mr. Trivers: My point is I think you really need to work hard with communications. I was wondering what your plans are to communicate with all the different stakeholders, which is of course the challenge with education – that means pretty much everybody – during the transition process.

Mr. Perry: I have all the confidence in the world in that transition team, of their ability to provide a transition period that will be smooth and easy on everyone. It's business as usual in all the schools. There may be some bumps in the roads, but I am sure at that particular time they will deal with it.

The advisory councils will have representation on them and they will have an opportunity to provide input.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Do you anticipate having a lot of cost savings as you roll away from the English Language School Board and roll that into the department of education?

Mr. Perry: This is definitely not a budgetary exercise. We're doing this to focus on the learner and provide as much resources as we possibly can to help with student achievement.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Do you expect to have any cost savings?

Mr. Perry: Do we expect to? I'm not sure, but if they happen, great.

Mr. Trivers: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Just to be clear, 100% crystal clear, one of the goals of taking the English Language School Board and bringing it back into the department of education is not to achieve cost savings?

Mr. Perry: This is not a budgetary exercise.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: We were talking earlier on about maybe having the Member from Morell-Mermaid sit in as minister of education. I know I would like to see that someday. That would be neat, and I'm sure any MLA will say that. If you want to reach out to us for anything that we're hearing from our constituents, we would love to tell you that. Of course, the standing committee on education is there for that purpose.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) be like the guy from Souris.

Mr. Trivers: Just like the guy from Souris.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct).

Mr. Trivers: There you go.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct).

Mr. Trivers: One thing – I wanted to hear your take on this. You've mentioned that it's taking the learner at the centre from birth all the way through into the workforce. I also want to make sure – and this is a criticism we hear sometimes of the current education system. You're familiar with the Bell Curve, right?

Mr. Perry: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: So it's got a big number of people in the middle and then as you go out to the ends they have what they call the outliers so you have the high achievers at one end and you have sort of the low achievers at the other end, and you're hoping that you have that sort of 60% in the middle. Sometimes we hear that the education system caters to the middle and the lower end, but the higher end doesn't get

a lot of resources or time, kind of like they'll look after themselves.

I was wondering what your take is on that and how that all students, both the high achievers and the low achievers, will all be looked after as you get rid of the English Language School Board.

Mr. Perry: That's a great question. Our focus is on the learner so that each and every child has an opportunity to reach his or her full potential.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Do you have any goals or ideas on that or are you just leaving that to the transition team at this point?

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure specifically what you're asking.

Mr. Trivers: For example, one thing that I have heard mentioned as an idea is within any given school you could, across different grade levels, have the same subject taught at the same time. We hear these issues with so-called social promotion and people say even though the foundational learnings, all of them for a particular grade level, have not been checked off for a student. They haven't achieved those, that are still pushed on to stay with their age group. If you took and taught every subject at the same time within the school, then you would – grades – for example, I'll use Gulf Shore Consolidated, it's where my kids go to school.

Grades 1 through 9 would be all in math at the same time, for example. Everybody who was at a grade 3 level in math could go to the grade 3 classrooms. Everybody who is at grade 8 could go to the grade 8 classrooms. Then you could have people who are the age of a grade 6 student sitting in the grade 8 level math classes and vice versa.

I was wondering – and that's what I mean when I talk about ideas to allow all students, especially the high achievers who I think are sometimes overlooked, to continue to grow and achieve. I was wondering if those are some of the ideas you considered, and I would be interested to hear some of the ones you're interested in, or if that's going to be left to the transition team.

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure specifically if you're asking – the transition team is not going to go into the schools –

Mr. LaVie: Neither are we.

Mr. Perry: Yeah. Our focus is on the learner. This is what is great about these groups. We're going to have input from many different areas, many different people and communities.

Education is something that starts at birth, whether we have the Best Start Program, they move in, then, to the early learning, into our kindergarten programs, and then into our education system and they can go into post-secondary.

We want to prepare our students to be at the very least on a level playing field with every other student globally. We will do what we can to ensure this. The creation of these groups will ensure that we have a very collaborative and engaging forward movement to develop an education system that is focused on the learner.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Just before you move away from me, Chair, I guess I want to make sure that as you redesign the education system and you move through with this transition team that you are open to change and all sorts of change and creative change.

We had that motion on the floor about innovation and creative learning and that sort of thing, and I wanted to give this chance – this will be my last question for a while –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: I wanted to give the chance for the Member from Souris-Elmira to clarify some of my questions for me.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, you have the floor.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you say that the Souris K-12 is joining with Morell?

Mr. Perry: That's correct, just for the advisory councils. It has nothing to do with the function, the operating purpose or the function as they are now with the school board.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Why is that? Why do they have to join with Morell?

Mr. Perry: We're making geographic areas to try to make sure that the areas have – we try and make an equal representation. We're trying to – so if we just had – let's say, for instance, the Souris family of schools, there is only one school. It's best that we, at the very least, pair up - you in Souris have approximately 587 students at the school in the K-12, and then paired up with the 500-plus at Morell. Would put you probably around the same numbers that some of the other families of schools are across Prince Edward Island. You're in the lower end, but it's getting closer to what they represent.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Down in Morell he has a consolidated, junior high and a high school, if I am correct?

Mr. MacEwen: Two elementary.

Mr. LaVie: Two elementary, correct? So in Souris I have a consolidated, junior high and high school all in one.

Mr. Perry: All in one.

Mr. LaVie: What's the difference? Just because it's under one roof shouldn't we get the same representation?

Mr. Perry: You will have representation from that school. You only have one school in your area and you will have equal representation.

Mr. LaVie: Well –

Mr. Trivers: He gets three and you get one.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah, but I'm under one roof.

Mr. Perry: Yes.

Mr. LaVie: He's under multiple roofs, but just because it's under one roof, I've still got consolidated, a junior high and a high school, but it's under one roof.

Mr. Trivers: Even more students, total.

Mr. Perry: You have the Souris K-12 school and you will have equal representation from that school as every other school across Prince Edward Island will.

Mr. LaVie: So are you telling those people they're going to have equal representation?

Mr. Perry: They will have, their school will be represented –

Mr. LaVie: Are you suggesting –

Mr. Perry: – equally, as every school is across Prince Edward Island.

Mr. MacEwen: Could make an exception (Indistinct).

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Is Souris regional K-12 the only K-12 school east of Montreal?

Mr. Perry: East of Montreal?

Mr. LaVie: Yeah.

Mr. Perry: I would have to take that under advisement. I haven't travelled the schools in the Maritimes.

Mr. Trivers: At least you understand the question.

Mr. Aylward: Can we get back to Rustico-Emerald?

Mr. Perry: Yeah.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira has the floor.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, it is the only K-12 school.

Mr. Perry: I wouldn't know.

Mr. LaVie: I believe just because we're under one roof –

Mr. Perry: Actually, (Indistinct) correction, it isn't the only K-12. You have another K-12 school in your own area. It's the French school.

Mr. LaVie: French school. You're right. But it's not –

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) come back –

An Hon. Member: That's a bad slip up.

Chair: Order, please!

The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira has the floor.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) be angry now.

Mr. LaVie: I should have said it was the first one. But anyway –

An Hon. Member: Don't poke the bees.

Mr. Perry: Can't forget the French.

Mr. LaVie: I believe – no, we just worked –

Mr. Perry: No, you can't forget them. No.

Mr. LaVie: – together on a \$6.1 million school coming.

Mr. Perry: Eight point three.

Mr. LaVie: I think we should have the same representation. Just because we're under one roof, we've still got consolidated, the junior high, and the high school. Just because we're under one roof – we've still got the students. We've still got the grades. We should have the same representation as he's got. We shouldn't be joined together.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) I would welcome that. It would strengthen the committee.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah. It would. It would give the east end – and you said geographical earlier. We are quite a bit east.

Mr. MacEwen: The far east.

Mr. LaVie: The far east.

Mr. Perry: If you look at the Westisle family of schools, that encompasses from Richmond to North Cape, which is at least a one-hour drive.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah. But we've got a K-12 and we're only getting one. We've still got the same as everybody else. We've got a –

Mr. Perry: You're getting one of that particular school.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) is as good as any other.

Mr. Perry: You're getting one. Actually, you're getting one. You may possibly have three. You could possibly have four.

Mr. LaVie: No. Don't start –

Mr. Perry: Yes, you can.

Mr. LaVie: Possibly. No.

Mr. Perry: Yeah. You can. You're going to have a parent or someone representing an organization for that school. You may have a possibility of two high school students that may be from that school.

Mr. LaVie: That's not what you said earlier.

Mr. Perry: And your (Indistinct) home and school may be from that particular community.

Mr. Myers: Like the *Hunger Games*.

Mr. LaVie: So in other words, to help me out you're taking from him.

Mr. Myers: You fight for it.

Mr. Perry: No. He will have the same opportunity as anyone else. Each and every school across Prince Edward Island will have equal representation.

Mr. LaVie: So just for me asking –

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair. Just for me asking questions these last three minutes I'm gaining headway already?

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure where you're going.

Mr. LaVie: Well, before I had one representation. Now I'm getting two and three.

Mr. Perry: You were asking – you had one, there's one from each school. There's one advisory council from each school.

Mr. LaVie: From each school.

Mr. Perry: Each family of schools. Sorry. Right?

Mr. LaVie: Counting Morell.

Mr. Perry: Each school would have a representative (Indistinct) school.

Mr. LaVie: So Souris –

Mr. Perry: So you have one parent from your school or whoever's going – it could be a teacher, somebody from the community, that will be representing the K-12 school, English school, in Souris.

Mr. LaVie: So that's one.

Mr. Perry: That's one. You may have a possibility of having two high school students from that school sitting on that advisory council. You may have a regional director from the home and school association or federation that will be from that school too. So there's a possibility. But at the very least, you will have representation equal to (Indistinct) –

Mr. Myers: May the odds ever be in your favour.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Perry: – and every school right across Prince Edward Island.

Mr. LaVie: So he has three, I'm going to have three.

Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira has the floor.

It would be helpful if only one person was speaking at a time.

Thank you.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah. This is a serious issue.

Mr. Perry: Each school that is in the Morell family of schools –

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Perry: – will have representation. Each individual school will have representation. As will the K-12 in Souris. As will all schools right across Prince Edward Island.

Mr. LaVie: So you're saying it's possible for the K-12, Souris regional school could have three representations? Five?

Mr. Perry: They could have three or possibly more.

Mr. LaVie: Five?

Mr. Perry: Again –

Mr. LaVie: Is this a possibility or is –

Mr. Perry: You will have someone representing your school. It could be a parent, community member, could be a teacher. That selection is left to the organization within the school. You may have a possibility of having two high school students.

Mr. LaVie: Why the possibility?

Mr. Perry: If they're selected for the school, the school selects them. Maybe Morell may want them or maybe there may be one from each.

Mr. LaVie: So if Morell don't take them, I get them.

Mr. Perry: That's between –

Mr. LaVie: Oh. So –

Mr. Perry: – (Indistinct) the teachers.

Mr. LaVie: So this is how –

Mr. Perry: Then you also get –

Mr. LaVie: – this government works. Now we know.

Mr. Perry: We make sure they have representation.

An Hon. Member: Divide and conquer.

Mr. Perry: Yeah. So I'll go back to Tignish.

I have an elementary school in Tignish. It's a K-6. We won't have representation from a high school student there because there is no high school student at that school.

Mr. LaVie: I understand that.

Mr. Perry: But there will be someone from a parent or an organization within that school that represents that school, along with the principal. The principal at the K-12 in Souris will also have an opportunity to sit on the principals' council.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah. So I understand now.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

It's not necessarily Morell-Mermaid that's getting all the representation. He might not get any. I could get it. Really.

Mr. Perry: Each and every school will be represented.

Mr. LaVie: Really. It's true.

Mr. Perry: Each and every school will be represented.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, do you have another question?

Mr. LaVie: Yes I do, Chair. Thanks.

Chair: Okay.

Mr. LaVie: So, yeah, I can understand why I can either get one or I could get five. Or Morell-Mermaid might get one or he might get five.

Mr. Perry: Each school will have equal –

Mr. LaVie: Listen to this. Listen.

Mr. Perry: – opportunity to be represented on these advisory groups.

Chair: Good?

Mr. LaVie: No.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Do you think that the K-12 Souris regional school should be on its own? Like, shouldn't it have its own representation?

Mr. Perry: They do.

Mr. LaVie: No. But you're joining us in with Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. Perry: Each and every school will have someone representative –

Mr. LaVie: You're joining us in with Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. Perry: There will also –

Mr. LaVie: I'm asking: Should we be separated from Morell-Mermaid?

Mr. Perry: I'm not sure what you mean by should it be separated.

Mr. LaVie: You're joining us in to give us –

Mr. Perry: Not for the function or operation within the English Language School Board –

Mr. LaVie: Not for the function or operational.

Mr. Perry: – only for the purposes of the advisory groups.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) look after the operation of the snow removal.

Mr. Perry: Only for the advisory groups. That's the only reason they're brought into it. Souris would be represented with one school, then.

Mr. LaVie: With Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. Perry: So now, together, there's an opportunity for five schools. Four schools, I guess, if you count in Morell-Mount Stewart. Yes.

Mr. LaVie: Morell-Mount Stewart.

Mr. Perry: Yeah.

Mr. LaVie: Four. So we're not getting equal representation –

Mr. Perry: Yes, you are.

Mr. LaVie: No, we're not.

Mr. Perry: You're getting equal representation just like every school is right across the province. Each school will have one representative. Each school will have a principal. Those principals will also sit on a principals' council. It's equal representation right across the board for each and every school right across Prince Edward Island.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Chair, this is a rehearsed answer.

Mr. Perry: How is it a rehearsed answer?

Mr. LaVie: Four times, six times, I heard it. So I'm going to pass the floor on and I'll get back, I'll come back.

Chair: Great. Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services has the floor.

Mr. Currie: Just been following the discussions. Very interested in public education in the province as a former educator.

I've got two children that are in the school system and I feel I'm as engaged as I can be in respect to the ongoing dialogue with my

two daughters in respect to following student achieved success and the constant information that's coming up.

Those of you who do have children in the public school system, it's just an amazing tool to stay current. The other thing that's very current from a teaching perspective is that the majority of teachers now have blogs on curriculum and what's the instruction and what are the trends and expectations.

I find it very interesting – there are a lot of discussions that we're keying in on here right now. We're talking about representation and we're talking – I'm getting the impression, and I may be wrong, I'm getting the impression that the conversations going back to very focused elements of this conversation and everybody is – I hope that all of us not only in this Assembly but people that are going to be representing and be the voice of change, this is a very substantial policy shift in respect to the direction that we're moving public education.

I think that if we are all serious about really doing this right, I think that we all need to – and I would send this message out to constituents that I represent, that whether it be at Parkdale school or whether it be at Birchwood Intermediate and the parents of the students, that we step back and we take a big picture approach to: What is the quality of the student going to be into the future when they walk across that stage on that June night and get their grade 12 diploma, and how well are they going to be prepared to embrace new challenges of the 21st century.

I was at parent-teacher interviews last week. I did two sets at Stonepark and the Rural, and having conversations with the teachers that: How confident can I be that my oldest daughter, who is a very good student, is she going to be equipped when she comes across that stage in a year and a half as she heads out? I know that she's not competing just with students in Souris or Charlottetown Rural classmates or Colonel Grey or Westisle, she is competing on the global stage. She is competing against grade 12 students that are leaving high schools in Calgary and Toronto. How do I know as a parent, and how am I going to be reassured over the next year and a half that we are

building a model that – and we often talk about it.

We're small, 145,000 people. There's no reason why we should lower our standards and be nothing but strong in respect to what we're building towards. I'll ask the minister if he can just sort of maybe give me his thoughts a little bit about sort of the big picture conversation, how – because when I think about it, it must be a little overwhelming to sort of think of all the pieces to this that we currently have to pull together.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Absolutely. This is a big project and it's a bold move, but it's something that's needed. I said this many times before, we have to focus on the learner and student achievement, and prepare them for the global economy that they're going to face one of these days. You mentioned that you have kids in the system. I have kids in the system also and I want to make sure that they are prepared. I want to take every measure that we possibly can to ensure that they are, at the very least, on the same level playing field, if not exceeding that so that they can achieve.

With the creation of these groups, it's going to be a very collaborative and a very engaging movement forward. There was an opportunity for parents, for our frontlines, for our community, and for educators as a whole, and people in the education sector, to have an opportunity to provide input and direction, taking our children from birth through formal training and into the workforce, and prepare them for the future, and we need to make some changes.

Instead of working in silos and building barriers, instead of building bridges, we have to combine our resources, work together and focus on the learner achievement.

Mr. Currie: Yeah.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

Mr. Currie: Thank you, Chair.

I guess my concern is sort of – I follow the progress of sort of the work and the timelines as we get moving on this initiative, and I understand – like right now there's a window of intense goodwill by a lot of the key stakeholders, and I am confident that parents, teachers, administrators, board officials – I think that people want this to be very successful, but I caution the enthusiasm because there is going to have to be some gives and there is going to be substantial takes from the give. Because I don't think that we realistically – if our public school system looks very similar in two years' time that it sits today, I really, truly don't know if we will be able to make the inroads that we need to make.

I'll use an example. Just look at just infrastructure alone. If you look at the population in the Province of Prince Edward Island – and we know that enrollments are declining, but the challenge that is facing the classroom teacher today is the complexity of the composition of that class size of 30, for example. It presents huge challenges to teachers as they try to sort of manage the different levels of learning and the pressure puts on teachers to sort of meet their targets and meet their outcomes as you focus on curriculum.

I'll use the example of Birchwood Intermediate School, and I've shared this before. Birchwood Intermediate has a population of approximately 200 students, and the class sizes in that facility – and the MLA from Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park and I met with the staff and we listened to their concerns about the viability of that facility. It's a beautiful school and it's in downtown Charlottetown.

I guess my concern is: How do we make the decisions around sort of balancing that school population to optimize school learning? Because currently, right now, it's a challenge for that school and teachers to provide an optimal learning environment with 200 kids simply because of the current structure.

If you look at five minutes up the road the school that my daughter attends, Stonepark, they're exceeding 850 students which is probably about 300 beyond the optimal size for intermediate instruction. How do we find the balance in those students? Queen

Charlotte would be 550, so that would be an optimal – so how do we make the decision and how will parents respond to: Oh, we're going to decide that this population of students now will be going into Birchwood because it creates and establishes a stronger learning culture and environment, which is very important if we want to truly make inroads on learning and student achievement.

That means that somebody in this room, one of these MLAs, is going to have to go to a public meeting and be told that: I want to support the improvement of public education and I can't support the parents that are lobbying to avoid sending their students to another school that they traditionally would go to. It's going to be a challenge, but if we're serious about really raising the bar and doing what's right, I think we need to be all very engaged in sort of the impact that this will have and is going to have to have if we are truly – we all can stand up here and we can talk about wanting to be the best, but I think every member of this Assembly is going to have to realize that there's going to have to be decisions made that could impact them politically, and that's when the rubber starts really hitting the road from the big picture. I would just share that, and engagement and input.

At the end of the day, when our students come across the stage in June in high schools in this province within the next year or two years, we've got to say to ourselves that we supported an initiative and we all can be very proud that our students are going out into the world, into the 21st century, as best prepared as any other high schools students coming out of the system in this country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

Just a few thoughts on the whole process. I've heard the minister state, I think five times that I counted, birth to workforce. I'm still not sure what that means. It's a great catchphrase, but with this new model who is going to ensure that the decisions that are made are implemented?

Mr. Perry: The decisions will be made by myself and the department.

Ms. Compton: And you will ensure that –

Mr. Perry: It's a collaborative effort moving forward. We will have input and guidance given to us by these councils that are created from the education sector, from parents, from communities and the frontline. All of this will provide very valuable input and guidance as we shape the future of the education system for our students here in Prince Edward Island.

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

That's great, but again, we're looking at implementation. So the buck stops with you, minister, is the bottom line?

Mr. Perry: I'm responsible. I'm the minister of education so I'm responsible for the education system in the Province of Prince Edward Island and it's something I take very serious. Moving forward, I'm excited about having an opportunity to work with, again, all these stakeholders that are involved.

It's a very collaborative effort, it's a very engaging effort. Our focus is on our learner and on our student achievement. That's something that I take very seriously. It's something that our department takes very seriously, and something that the school board takes very seriously.

Each and every day our students go to school and parents put them on the bus, trusting that our system will provide them the best opportunity to succeed in this world, and that's something that I want each and every student and each and every parent to feel comfortable going to our schools –

Ms. Biggar: Call the hour.

Mr. Perry: – knowing we are doing the best that we possibly can.

Chair: Hon. member, the hour has been called.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration the bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the School Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The House will recess until 7:00 p.m. this evening.

The Legislature recessed until 7:00 p.m.

The House resumed at 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: You may be seated.

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

At this time, opposition would like to call back Motion No. 56, Protecting food safety in the Prince Edward Island potato industry.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Good to have a good debate on this motion.

I've already spoken on it, according to Hansard, for 11 minutes and 30 seconds. I think I've explained the situation we're in. I could do a brief review on that as well, though.

First off, the title of the motion is: Protecting food safety. The bacterial ring rot really has absolutely nothing to do with food safety. The food is completely safe. It's the disease of the potato and it's in the seed lot. So unfortunately that should not have even been

in this motion but that was what was brought forward.

We do recognize the fact, too, about the impact of the potato industry in our province and the impact of discussions that seem to be somewhat negative towards our industry. We have to make sure that we maintain the integrity of our seed stock and we are continuing to do that.

We've met with the potato board on several occasions, talked with them about our budgetary restraints, but also the fact that we could deliver the program in a very effective way from a different angle and different manner.

We are continuing to collaborate with the potato board on doing that and going forward. We see in other provinces – our province was the only province, as I mentioned earlier before, who did the disinfection for the potato industry. In our province the potato industry was the only commodity in which we did the disinfection at all. The other commodities were on their own.

Now we're going to move forward on this. We'll deliver a fantastic program that will fill the role of the disinfection, secure our mandate with regards to maintaining the integrity of our seed stock and we'll do that working with, in collaboration with, the potato board.

Through our Growing Forward 2 program there are dollars available there in which we will help our producers set up to put this program forward. Also, the equipment that we had, we've offered that to the potato board on a right of first refusal so they can have that equipment there.

Again, we've met with the board on several occasions. We continued the discussion and we will continue to do that to maintain the integrity of the seed stock here and we will continue to collaborate with the board.

Unfortunately, with the comments that were made in this motion, I cannot today support this motion. But I certainly do support the collaborative solution that was mentioned and the fact the potato industry is our largest economic generator.

There are a couple of lines in here that I actually do agree with, but as for the disinfection program itself, we are going to deliver that in a different way and in collaboration with the potato board and all members of this industry.

At that time, I'll just say I cannot support this motion and ask to continue the debate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good to be able to have an opportunity to rise and speak to this motion. I'm not going to be real long.

I represent the Alberton-Roseville district. It's probably one of the larger growing potato areas in the province. I've heard a lot from the farmers in the area, right across the industry from seed growers to process growers to table stock growers. They're all opposed to the discontinuation of the disinfection services that are being offered today and opposed to the form that's being suggested to let independent farmers do their own spraying.

I have many farmers in my area. I'll just mention a few of the bigger ones. There are two Rennie farms. There are two Wallace farms. There's Harry Dennis, Adair Shaw, the Rayners in Cascumpec, W.P. Griffin's, Wendell Dunbar, Corcoran's, Kent Smallman, Raeborn Donn, Callaghans in Miminegash, the Ramsays in Bloomfield, Barry Gallant, Bruce Adams, Alton Williams and I'm sure I missed a few.

My district is also home to the Elite seed farm. There was a story in the *Journal Pioneer* the other day with a former manager of that farm and he's a very successful potato producer in Russia. That's Alan Parker. He sees the discontinuation as an issue too.

With that being said, I stand up here to support this motion on behalf of my district.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This has been an interesting debate. It started a few days ago. The thing that sticks in my mind, and it was repeated today by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, was the call for a free vote, pleading for a free vote this morning.

I would like to suggest that we should never have to plead for a free vote. I would hope that we are all here first and foremost to represent our constituents first and our party second.

I just wanted to say that because – and I realize, of course, the intricacies and the complexities of politics, but this is not the motion that's going to bring the government down. I can understand a situation where one would have to be put in line to vote, but this is not one of those occasions.

I hope it truly is a free vote, for everybody's sake. But, again, I hope that would be the case for almost every vote that we have here in this House and it would become the rule, not the exception.

In my own instance, when I come to decide how I'm going to vote on an issue, of course I can whip myself –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: No. Never. Always in complete agreement.

But what I do, the decision on whether I will support a particular bill or motion or whatever the issue is is based on evidence. I'm a great believer in evidence-based decision making and that's where I'm going with my comments on this particular motion.

I've spoken to farmers in my district, I've spoken to farmers beyond my district, and I've educated myself in a way that I never imagined I would on potato ailments, from bacterial ring rot to potato wart to PVYn to all kinds of stuff.

I'm not quite as knowledgeable as the member from Alberton – well, you know who I'm talking about.

Some Hon. Members: O'Leary-Inverness.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: But I feel like I have a pretty good handle on this issue. Seriously, I feel I have a good handle on this issue.

I'm not going to support the motion. The reasons I am not going to support this motion are as follows. Bacterial ring rot is functionally eradicated in North America. There have been five cases in the whole of Canada in the last seven years. We are the only province that carries out this disinfection service. No other province does this. It provides PEI with no health or economic benefit. I could understand – if the potatoes, we could guarantee to the market, were disease-free and it brought us a higher price, there might be an argument for doing it. That's not the case.

From the farmers that I have talked to, the potatoes that are most at risk are the seed potatoes, which represent only 10% of the potatoes produced on Prince Edward Island. Yet we're disinfecting every table stock cargo that goes off the Island.

I'm also really pleased that this government is willing to reevaluate programs and to look at them again for their validity, for the: Does it make sense to be doing this anymore? Clearly, to me, there's a very flimsy case to be made for spending the amount of public dollars that we are for what I can see is very little benefit.

Ideally, I would also like to see, in a free market economy, which I would support, that an industry would absorb, internalize the costs of something like this rather than the public purse being asked to do that.

For all of these reasons I stand here in support of Island farmers, absolutely, but not in support of this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to express my position on this motion, make two precise points about the motion, and then speak more generally to the situation.

One, the title in my view is erroneous to be expressed in terms of protecting food safety, to pick up on the point about science evidence-based. This is not about food safety.

Two, and really it's the operative clause in the final paragraph of the motion which says – which calls on the province to pause its decision. That, to me, is in effect to ask the government to reverse the budgetary decision which was brought forward to this House last spring, and in fact, adopted by the House.

Let me speak to the general situation and that is, of course this government supports and works with the potato industry. Largest industry in terms of our exports, tremendous contributor throughout our province in terms of employment, in terms of participation in communities, and a very big part of how the world knows us. Of course we talked about all of that here last spring.

I spoke at the potato board's annual general meeting on Friday of this past week and said all of those same things directly to our potato farmers and the industry. There's no question that the government stands with the industry with this on this matter and is working with the industry to move forward. I think that's really where we are in the way this has all really come to the attention of the House and why it was in our budget last spring, is that it is 18 years since the current fee structure and operation, and indeed the overwhelming burden being borne by the taxpayer since that whole system has been in place.

In the course of the discussions that took place since last spring it has come to light, and there is no disagreement on this, that the real issue is on the disinfection of seed. Government is totally supportive of the disinfection of trucks, of warehouses, and of farm equipment that is dealing with seed potatoes with a view to confirming for the people who are buying our seed potatoes

that it is disease-free. Indeed, the farmers, under the new model of delivery that's being proposed and brought forward by government, in collaboration with the potato board and the industry, that reputation and that integrity of our seed will be protected.

The science is behind this. The further part, of course – really, maybe the key to this motion – is that we are indeed committed to collaborating with the industry, we're collaborating with the community, and we're working to move this forward in a way that isn't going to have the overwhelming burden on the taxpayer. That in effect is how this all started and that's how it will go forward.

In fact, we don't hear from people in the industry that they're against paying or contributing. In fact, I said to the potato board when I spoke to them on Friday, that we had on Friday morning as all hon. members would recall, the United Church Women here on behalf of alleviating child poverty and their passion and their plan over four years to keep advocating for that. I think that's really where we are as a Legislature and as a province, to make choices between where we can put resources toward situations which we know are priorities, where they might not otherwise be funded, and whether we should be funding an industry that is, in effect, a billion-dollar industry in its total contribution to our GDP.

We're positive of potatoes, we're positive about the industry, we're know this is a growing part of our economy, and we're proud of that and we're supportive of it. Our minister and our deputy minister are working very closely with the relevant players to have the go-forward solution that is going to be reasonable for the taxpayers, that's going to look after the reputation and the integrity of our seed potato industry. It's on that basis that the government has the position that it does and that I will be voting against this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Are there any other members that would like to speak to the motion?

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in favour of this motion and I do for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that my constituents and the potato farmers in my area have reached out to me and asked me to support them and stand against government on this measure.

The Leader of the Third Party talks about a free vote and standing up for the constituents. That's what I'm doing here tonight. I stand for my constituents and I stand for rural Prince Edward Island when I vote in favour of this motion to help protect this much needed service here on Prince Edward Island.

It's funny to hear the Premier talk about what a burden this is to the taxpayers, the contribution that the government has been making for the past 18 years, what a burden it is, yet we have an industry that's worth billions of dollars here on Prince Edward Island that employs people, that sells fuel, that gives jobs to truck drivers, that gives jobs to farm labourers, that spreads money through the farm equipment. All over Prince Edward Island there are many households who draw an income from potato farming here on Prince Edward Island.

I think this is something that we need to remember when we debate bills here in the Legislature and we talk about burdens, and what a burden is to the taxpayers and how the government is actually drawing back out of this very industry that they seem to be so dead against here tonight.

This is an industry on Prince Edward Island that we need. This is an industry that has great leadership of its own. This is an industry that needs leadership from within this government. Unfortunately for this industry, the leadership does not exist over there on that side of the floor and I think it's something that's become quite evident to them during this whole procedure, that there's no one for them to go talk to, that they're being told what to do.

When they sit down at a meeting they're being talked at, they're not being negotiated with, they're not being talked to. These are

all important things. These are things that this government said would be different. These are things that this Premier said would be different. When he came along he was going to bring a whole different level of debate to this province. A whole level of debate where, what, we don't debate? Where we don't oppose? Where we don't question him? That's not the part of a Legislature that I want to be part of.

I'm quite proud to stand for rural Prince Edward Island, I'm quite proud to stand for my constituents. If that means I have to stand against the Premier, then I will. If that means I have to stand against this government, then I will. If that means I have to be perceived as someone who isn't friendly with government, then so be it. I'm here for the people who put x's beside my name in my district. Those are the people who I represent, those are the people who I work for, and I will continue to work for them each and every day that I'm elected here on Prince Edward Island.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

I don't think that it's reasonable to say that this has been an overwhelming burden. This is a government who, last week, wouldn't talk about a \$25 million lawsuit that they have against them. This is a government who, last week, wouldn't tell us the legal fees for egaming. This is a government who won't talk about anything that happened with the money that disappeared into thin air. And this is an overwhelming burden? I'm not sure –

Mr. LaVie: Shame, shame!

Mr. Myers: I'm not sure if we shouldn't get a dictionary and look up overwhelming and burden and go back and look at the egaming thing and say: There's an overwhelming burden because it was a completely unnecessary burden to take taxpayers' dollars and put them at the risk that you put them at. This is an industry that already works. This isn't a gamble. We're not trying to become the potato capital of Prince Edward Island or potato capital of Canada, we are already are.

Mr. Trivers: It's a risk to remove it.

Mr. Myers: There's a risk to remove it. It's not an overwhelming burden. An overwhelming burden is when you take money and you gamble it away and won't tell taxpayers about it. GeoSweep, it's always been a gamble. When the gamble happens over there it's not an overwhelming burden. When we want to protect an industry that's been a long-standing industry here on Prince Edward Island that puts dollars in the pockets of a large number of Islanders – I don't even know how many pockets this industry would actually touch. A handful of dollars to protect that is an overwhelming burden.

An overwhelming burden. It seems like silly and petty words to use in an argument over an industry that's worth so much to Prince Edward Island, over an industry that's so valuable to Prince Edward Island.

I'll be supporting this motion because I support rural Prince Edward Island, I support farming, I support an economy on Prince Edward Island that requires these industries to do well in order to have a vibrant economy. We don't need to be striking out against any industry on Prince Edward Island, let alone a successful one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to the motion?

Are we ready for the question?

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, the mover closes debate.

Speaker: We will ask the mover of the motion to close debate on the motion.

Leader of the Opposition: I guess the first thing is: Where do I start?

We're talking about a motion and simply asking government to take a pause. We're not asking government to do anything beyond that. We're asking you to take a pause. Let's completely think about what we're doing to what I say is the most valuable industry in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

I'm actually quite upset at the government and the third party. You can't sit here and tell me that you have not heard from farmers in your district that are telling you not to support.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, you address the Chair when you're speaking to anyone.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I've heard from farmers all over the province.

All they're asking us to do is take a pause and what the effects of this could be down the road. We talk about an expert that will not put his signature on a document saying that the disease or a problem is totally eradicated or that we shouldn't have to worry about it again. Disinfection services in this province are worth a lot more than just bacterial ring rot. We don't know what else disinfection services in this province are stomping out, what they're preventing. We don't know that. Members of the government have said that this service is – it's not done in other provinces or not done in other states. We are an island, we're very unique. We are offering a service to an industry in this province that cannot be offered in the same way as it is in other provinces and states. Can't do that.

We have people like Mr. Orville who was here today and Gordon Dawson and Claire McCardle have been dealing with this all their lives. They're speaking out. They've been doing this all their lives and they're saying this is a service that we need to continue to provide. Do they have a PhD or do they have a doctorate? No, but we're talking about industry leaders that are just that. They're leaders in the industry that believe whole-heartedly in this system and the service that we're providing to a unique industry that we need on this Island. We talk about this being a Food Island, and I agree with the Premier that we can promote this Island as a food Island and that our food products that we supply and offer to the world are first-class, second to none. Why would we want to jeopardize that reputation?

It goes back to what I'm saying before. We're asking for a pause. Let's try to work with the industry, let's try to come up with

some kind of framework that everybody can agree with. Yes, maybe to lessen the burden on the government coffers, but to come up with some kind of plan that we can put forward.

I'm no farmer. I came from Carleton County, New Brunswick. My family has never had anything to do with the farming industry, but I am a business person and I can see from what I've heard, from people in this House, people in the province and New Brunswick have talked to me about it. This is an enviable service.

When I talk to old farmers in the area like Elmer MacDonald and guys up west, and the Birches and John Hogg and different people around – Mavis Visser, Alex Doherty, the Keenans down east who are actually from Woodstock, New Brunswick – they'd all support this and they're saying the same thing. Government is making the wrong move on this. We need to step back. Not one person has said to me that it shouldn't be a user-pay system and that they're for that, that they would look at a user-pay system. But they do not feel that we should just, bang, December 31st, shut the doors, send 25 workers home. Have a good day, thanks for your service but what you've been doing the last x amount of years doesn't matter because some expert thinks that we don't need it anymore.

I think I need to go back to: What else is this disinfection service stopping from happening on this Island to do with disease? Everybody's hitting about ring rot. What other things, what other diseases, is this probably possibly controlling? There has to be other – I believe whole-heartedly that there's other things that disinfections stop against, and I've been told that and we must remember that.

Something we haven't talked about in this House is: What about the other effect? Up at the disinfection station in Borden the building is owned by the PEI Potato Marketing Board. We saw CFIA pull out, which is the federal government who had access to controlling some of the stuff that was leaving the province. They (Indistinct) check stuff there, they (Indistinct) catch paper work, they would actually catch mistakes, and it's gone. That service is gone. Now we're going to take out the disinfection

service from that same building. Do we talk money? The CFIA rent's gone, disinfection service is gone, that rent's going to be gone. So now you've got a potato building up there that might not be able to stay open after December 31st because that rent's going to be gone.

So what happens if the potato board, because of this decision, says: We can't keep that building open, and they close the quality control inspection leaving this province? Now our borders are open, basically. Any product leaving the Island or coming to the Island, doesn't matter because we can't control it anymore. I know for a fact, I can tell you, that down in Texas back two months ago at one of the Lays potato chip executive meetings they talked about food tampering in the Province of Prince Edward Island and maybe they shouldn't be accepting any more product from PEI in the potato chips. How long is it going to be before they say: PEI's not disinfecting anymore? Is there a ripple effect? We're talking about a billion-dollar industry.

We heard from government and we heard in the standing committee that this is not going to affect the industry. Can we take the chance? Farmers are telling me this is going to affect the industry. Farmers are telling me that we can't take the chance at this. But we're going to gamble, we're going to throw the dice. Exactly what we're doing. We're throwing the dice at the end of the day if we discontinue this service without knowing the full effects. If by chance something happens next year, next spring, or whatever, and we have a major disease outbreak on this Island or something we could've prevented, what are we going to do then?

I've always said: You wonder how the economy's doing? You can go into my gas station, you can go into a country store and you see who's buying pop and chips. You go into the car dealerships and you ask the car salesman if he's selling cars. If we lose the potato industry in the Province of Prince Edward Island – and this can be the start of it. Manitoba was in the paper last week or the week before saying they're trying to position themselves as being the potato industry in Canada. What are we going to do then? This is a bad decision.

I'm going to go back to this so-called expert. I think the farmers are the experts in this industry. The farmers know what's going on in the field. He knows if this is a good move or bad news. The farmer knows how to pile. The farmer knows how to cultivate because he's done it all his life. It's been passed down from generation to generation. These people know what's good and what's bad and I haven't met yet a farmer that's told me this was a good decision. I haven't met a farmer yet that hasn't stopped me on the side of the road and said: Jamie, keep up this fight. I received phone calls from two federal Members of Parliament, Liberal Members of Parliament, that support this. Both of those federal MPs have told me: Jamie, you've got to keep up this fight, this is wrong.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) quiet now.

Leader of the Opposition: I went back home two weeks ago. We went up to the cottage, six of us, three couples, and I ran into a couple friends of mine out there, both of them potato farmers. They said, they asked me the question: Are you guys really looking at getting rid of your disinfection services? I said: Yeah, the government wants to cut it effective December 31st. What's that mean? I said: No more disinfection services. It'll be passed on to industry and they'll (Indistinct) the program and they'll let the farmer go into it if he wants to voluntarily. Then he said: I wish we had that over here in the province. I wish we could control the (Indistinct) like that.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: But anyway, I said: No, that's what the government is planning on doing.

I think it goes back to what I said earlier: We're just asking for a pause. We're asking for government to take a step back. I can understand the budget, but we're talking less than \$500,000, and it's actually less than that. It's \$300,000 based on a billion-dollar industry.

I want to read something, and I actually just found this today from a former seed farm manager. It says: PEI should maintain disinfection programming. The former manager of the PEI Elite Seed Farm says

that he has been hearing there have been no outbreaks of bacterial ring rot on the Island in five years. That's a good news story, says Alan Parker, who managed the seed farm until 1997 and is still involved in the potato industry internationally. But to Parker the good news story is tempered by the provincial government's decision to discontinue its potato disinfection services by year-end.

He's got no PhD that I know behind his name and no big, fancy title, but I think this man is an expert. I have gone before the court before to give an expert testimony and the judge said after: I declare this man an expert testimony in this or that. I've got no fancy PhD, but I believe in it.

He suggested it is time for industry and government to take a step back. That's all we're asking you to do, take a step back and consider how best to protect the industry. Not just from a bacterial ring rot, but also new strains of old bacterial diseases that have reemerged in Europe in recent years. We have a problem on this Island with wireworm starting. It goes back to what I said earlier: We don't know what disinfection services, right now, are providing in this industry. But here's a guy that's saying: This could be protecting from other strains. If they ever got a foothold in North America they would be extremely problematic for any seed production area, he warned.

The PEI Potato Board is critical of the provincial government's decision. Prince Edward Island has long held a well-earned reputation and it goes back to the Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that little piece of paper that says our stuff is good. Prince Edward Island has long held a well-earned reputation for high quality potato seed which could be jeopardized by this decision to completely eliminate disinfection services, the board advised. The board resists having the industry take over the entire cost of disinfection, suggesting it could affect the viability of seed potato growers.

I've got to stop here for a second because old Elmer MacDonald, a guy I've got the highest respect for – I talk to him every Sunday in church, when I can get there. He said: Jamie, there's something about this. He said: You've got to remember, if we

quarantine a field, say tomorrow we get rid of disinfection services and we find a case tomorrow in the field, it's not only that one field, it's the radius around it that could be expanded. It's the quarantine of that other area, so how far would that go if we get a case here maybe tomorrow and we have to do five miles or five fields or whatever? Next week we get another case and it's another five miles. It doesn't take long and the whole Island is going to be full of circles.

It's time they took a look at the bigger picture and identify the potential in real threats as well, and then sort out what's the best way to approach the whole thing and get value for the money. The Progressive Conservative opposition criticized the government's decision suggesting it will weaken the Island's food safety system. I believe that. I don't think we can take a chance in weakening our position in the world market. I don't think we can.

Parker suggests the PEI potato industry success in dealing with bacterial ring rot might provide an opportunity for the industry to reenter some of the past seed potato markets in eastern and western Europe. He recalls PEI used to enjoy seed active export markets in places like Portugal, Italy and Spain. Freedom from ring rot would be an important part of that, he said, adding the Island would have a better chance of making those inroads if it maintains disinfection services. As I said, I don't know this man, but to me it makes me take pause.

I believe there is more than black and white. I believe this government, as a member, that I have to be able to listen to all sides of the story and consider all possibilities. I have tried to do that with my life. I have tried to hear both sides of the stories, and over my life I have had to make decisions that affected people and in some cases have caused them pain. There were times I've gone home at night and I have really been affected by decisions that I have made when I was policing for 25 years.

I'm scared that with this decision we are making we're leading down the same path and that worries me. I'll go back and say it again: I'm not a potato expert. I'm surrounded by potatoes where I live and if

one member of this House told me it was snowing outside I might believe it and I might not. But if 10 of these people in this House told me right now it's snowing outside, I would believe it's snowing outside.

Mr. Premier, I can't believe how many people have reached out to me and left messages on my phone, sent me text messages, sent me private Facebook messages, pulled me off on the side and they said this is a bad mistake.

We have a government that has a tremendous amount of budget. I can't even think of the number. You've got \$600 million over there in the department of health, and \$150-some in the department of agriculture, and we're talking about \$500,000.

It goes back to what I said in the spring and back to what I said this fall: We always cut frontline services and the basic needs of people. Why do we do that? Why do we? Well, the budget is set and this is the budget that was presented to me and this is what I've got to live with, so okay, let's affect 25 people, cut the jobs there and let's affect rural PEI in what could be the possibly biggest way in the history of this province.

What happens tomorrow if we do away with this service and all of a sudden our seed potatoes or our exports are cut? Now we've got all these extra potatoes that are in the warehouses and we can't sell them across. We can't get rid of them. Now you've got farmers that are going to try and dump that crop maybe into the processing sector. You've got a processor up the road who says: Well, geez, now I've got an extra I-don't-know-how-many hundredweight. Instead of Mr. Contract Guy I'm giving \$0.12 to, now I can get a whole bunch extra over here because this guy's gotta get rid of his. You're only worth \$0.08 now.

It's as simple as that. What's going to be the ripple effect then, when right now farmers are telling me that they're only breaking even and they're having a hard time making a dollar and we go and we dump these extra quality potatoes on the market? That's another effect.

I think this is bigger than just the disinfection service, Mr. Minister. I know you have bureaucrats that provide you with expert information. I know you've been talked to, people have talked to you about this. You're the minister. At the end of the day, if things go south, you and that government are going to worry.

I want this to be a free vote. We know behind closed doors governments in the past said: This is the way you're going to vote. I'm asking us to be different. I'm asking for every member in this House to think about the consequences. Don't be thinking about your BlackBerry and what's being twittered to you right now or emailed to you. Worry about how this is going to affect the farmers. Worry about how this is going to affect the workers. Worry about how this is going to affect the reputation in the world market. Worry about what's going to be the headline tomorrow if something goes south.

I'm asking to take the red, the blue, the green out of the picture. This is not a political issue. This is about what's in the best interest of the Province of Prince Edward Island and every man, woman and child that's affected by the potato industry and how much that potato industry affects this whole province.

I said it in the past: If it wasn't for rural PEI and what they have given to this province, and the economical spinoffs that come from them, we wouldn't have much in the cities of Summerside and Charlottetown and every other little place. We've got to be very conscious about that. I'm asking the Premier to allow this and everybody vote on their own conscience. That's what I want to see. Because if we go down this road and we lose these markets, where are we going to be?

You talk about deficit control, you talk about fiscal responsibility and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, I agree with you. We have to get our house in order. But can we afford what the effect of this could be to the Province of Prince Edward Island? Can we afford it?

I support this motion whole-heartedly. I believe it goes right to the heart of the thing. With that, I think – the Premier spoke about this motion a minute ago and a couple of

things about the motion. Members in this House could have made amendments to the motion. They could have asked for wording to be amended. They could have asked for some kind of change but nobody did, nobody in government and nobody in the third party. I would have been open to amendment. I would have been open to some kind of suggestion. No suggestion came forward.

Have I talked to members of the government House? Yeah. Have they told me their concerns? Yeah. Amendments could have been asked for.

Mr. Speaker, with that I'll close debate on this.

I am asking for support of this House to take a pause. Let's take a pause for a couple of months and really think about this and really go back to the industry and come up with a solution that will speak to the heart of the matter and come to a consensus, an agreement.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: We are now ready for the question.

An Hon. Member: Standing vote, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: A recorded division has been requested.

Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms, would you ring the bell?

[The bells were rung]

Mr. J. Brown: Mr. Speaker, government members are present for the vote.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, opposition is ready for the vote.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

All those voting against the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, the hon. Premier and Minister of Justice and Public Safety, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services, the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, the hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, the hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche, the hon. Leader of the Third Party, the hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors, and the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Speaker: All those voting for the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Opposition House Leader, the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, the hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville, the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, and the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct).

Clerk: Sorry, hon. members.

The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale and the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Speaker: The motion is defeated.

The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

Opposition would like to now call back Motion No. 46, Prince Edward Island Infrastructure Summit.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance, would you please speak to the motion?

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion.

We do agree that quality public infrastructure is essential to Islanders. Our commitment to the infrastructure needs of the province was evident in our budget for the capital plan which was tabled last Wednesday in this Legislature. We have continued to invest in schools, hospitals, manors, and highways to ensure that the infrastructure needs of Islanders are met.

Anyone that visited one of the old manors before the manor replacement program was implemented would realize how important our health facilities can be to everyday lives of Island seniors.

Our first priority related to any federal infrastructure programs is to ensure the initiatives help with our province's needs. The federal program must also be established so that we can access it in a fiscally responsible manner.

We do not intend to increase the net debt of this province unless it makes sense and is absolutely necessary to do so. When the federal initiatives are known, we will establish an infrastructure program in consultation with our partners in the Island communities to best access the program. In the meantime, the province continues to consult stakeholders on a regular basis around its infrastructure needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased today to rise this evening in support of this motion. It's urging government to call together various Island stakeholders to discuss a new approach to the disbursement of infrastructure funding in our province.

Before I discuss our motion and our idea of hosting an infrastructure summit, I would like to, once again, acknowledge our lone Conservative MP from the previous government who was able to secure a record

of federal dollars for our province, close to \$1 billion.

With four Liberal MPs, one of which is a Cabinet minister, Islanders are anticipating continued record-funding for this province that will meet our future infrastructure needs well into the future. I believe it is critical the planning for the future for major projects must include input from the people and communities they impact.

We all know what happened with the \$30 million highway that no one really felt was necessary. While certainly there has been some benefits including new trails and park upgrades, one of the biggest issues was just who decided that this highway was a priority.

Government did not ask anyone. They decided this was the best place to spend those dollars. Yet we know there are, and were, bridges that were in need of repair, there were sewage lagoons and treatment facilities needing repairs. There are still hundreds of people waiting for seniors' facilities, traffic lights, and even fibre-op. There are still roads that are broken up and storm sewers that need to be fixed.

As I understand it, no one bothered to consult with Borden-Carleton when \$3 million in fake waves were built at their gateway. No one saw that one coming and people are still shaking their heads.

Did government seek community input when they built a huge parking lot in Borden-Carleton for truckers that was just too far away from food and heat to be used during a snowstorm so it never gets used? That failure involved \$330,000.

We anticipate, as well, that the new Premier will show some restraint and not allow dollars that were directed towards infrastructure to be spent in a frenzy of political pre-election promises and post-election spending similar to what occurred previously with this government.

Prince Edward Islanders do not want to see a situation where seven years of stimulus funding is quickly gobbled up and depleted in three years leaving our roadbuilders, our municipalities, and our construction industries floundering.

As one gentleman put it on a recent t.v. documentary: If it wasn't for the work provided through the expansion of newcomers and the Monks, our province's trades would have suffered even worse in terms of construction work. Coupled with HST on construction materials, it has been a recipe for disaster for our construction industry and certainly our home builders have suffered.

But as stated earlier, we have a wonderful opportunity to do things differently. I believe we all know that our residents are over-taxed already and cannot afford an increased tax burden.

When federal or provincial dollars are being expended we must ensure that those dollars are being spent wisely. Every penny counts and none can be afforded to be wasted or spent without careful consideration.

I believe that an infrastructure summit would be beneficial as well in providing a new spirit of collaboration amongst our municipalities, both large and small. It could also go a long way to ensure that those smaller communities have a greater opportunity to ensure their voice is heard and that their projects get consideration.

I would hope that one of the most beneficial impacts of such a summit would be that municipalities themselves, instead of simply finding something to spend infrastructure dollars on just because the money is available, would take on a new accountability and look at another community and say: We can wait for those dollars this year, we think that you need that money more than we do right now. Basically there could be trade-offs and negotiations between communities, there could be collaboration.

I believe that our infrastructure funding is aimed at ensuring that the needs of all our residents are being met and a collaborative approach will, I believe, make that happen. Basically I believe our motion is about our communities working together to improve our infrastructure and to create a fairness and accountability for tax dollars in disbursement of these funds.

I would ask each member of this Legislative Assembly to support our motion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, infrastructure is a necessary underpinning of a modern, vibrant economy.

Our road networks allow for the transportation of people and goods, the pipes in the ground deliver clean drinking water, our systems clean our waste and protect our environment, and our facilities allow for social, cultural, and economic interactions.

Municipal and provincial infrastructure is the glue that holds our communities and economy together and provides for a healthy population and a healthy environment. Through funding programs, asset management and land use planning we are aiming for affordable municipal services with limited impact on the environment wherever possible.

PEI believes in an infrastructure planning and funding process that is inclusive of municipalities who are generally in the best position to determine local infrastructure priorities. It is critically important for human health and environmental health, but also for community growth and development. I believe it is very important that applications, decisions, and allocations of funding address all of these needs.

Prince Edward Island has long spoken of our government's desire for long-term infrastructure programs that are flexible and adequate and that respect the needs of each province and territory. We've had positive results with the previous government with millions of dollars invested in municipalities across the province to support major capital projects through programs such as the Gas Tax Fund and the Build Canada Fund.

I am extremely encouraged by the prime minister's platform that commits to a green infrastructure program that will invest nearly \$60 million over the next four years and 20 billion over 10 years in green infrastructure.

As the minister responsible for municipalities I would like to draw attention

to the importance of municipal engagement when making these important decisions around infrastructure needs, and no one knows their requirements better than they do. I would strongly recommend that any discussions had on this topic are carried out in an inclusive manner so that we can understand the needs and assess priority areas moving forward.

As I said during Question Period on the very first day of this session, I will maintain an approach of working collaboratively with all stakeholders associated with areas under my department, such as watershed groups, environmental groups and those under the municipalities' umbrella when it comes to assisting with their infrastructure needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to the motion?

The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in support of this motion. It really is a really good idea and I was quite excited to be a member of a caucus that started off this Legislature session with the idea. I was a big proponent of it. We had excellent members speak to it right off the bat. It makes sense, this motion makes sense. You can't go anywhere in the public, you can't go out in the hall here and talk to other members and they don't say: Do you know what? That is a good idea. We should be doing that, we need to do more of that. I can't go to the rinks, I can't go to – that's the thing that people are talking about, they're excited to hear – working together. We kind of joke about it in here, but it's true, and that's what we need to do.

I've heard the minister talk a number of times about, well, we do consult, we bring in the groups, we do bring in the groups. They do, the groups are happy to come in and present their case. They come into the opposition caucus and show what their priorities are. We have municipalities that come into individual MLAs and do that, but it is, it's one-off. A number of the members here have talked about the one-offs that

happened and sometimes maybe the infrastructure isn't the best ideas that come out of it. We've already went through a number of the examples.

I'm excited by the fact that we can look through all of these things through a sustainable lens. Imagine a summit that has road builders and ECO-PEI at the same table talking the same talk, feeding off each other. Imagine a summit that has municipal planners at one end of the table and the seniors' federation at the other end of the table. That's going to make things happen.

Each of us have been involved in many infrastructure projects in our own communities, we've all been involved with development corporations, we're all heavily involved in our communities. When we do projects the first thing that we all do is we identify who are the stakeholders, who wants to be part of this. We don't go and call each one of them by one, by one, by one. We're a small community, we get them all in the same room. We can do them as a province, too, we can bring them all into the same room.

The minister mentioned a modern economy, and I think that's a great term. Imagine an economy that invites the new School of Sustainable Design and Engineering at UPEI. Imagine that they're at the table and they look at every single project that we have through that sustainable lens. They investigate our infrastructure priorities through those lenses.

I'm not going to speak long, I just think it's a great idea, I think it has the public excited, it has people's view of doing politics differently in here, and I really encourage everyone in here to support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to the motion?

If not, then we will go back to the mover to close debate on the motion.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks to all the members who did speak to this motion. I want to say thank you to all those members. They brought up a lot of points. Mostly they were positive points about being inclusive and being open and transparent and engaging stakeholders. Really, what we're not saying in this motion is we want to get rid of the current processes. What we want to do is work in the spirit that this government has promoted since they brought down their operating budget, which is working together and being open and transparent and engaging Islanders and moving forward.

The infrastructure summit is meant in addition to these other stakeholder consultations to help, as the Member from Morell-Mermaid just said, get everybody in the same room, people with disparate opinions and ways of looking at things, and really allow the government to come to the best decision. Now, in light of the new infrastructure money coming through from the federal government as well, we want to be proactive and be ready for that, but what we see this as is possibly an ongoing thing to get these groups together. Since we first brought this motion to the floor for a Prince Edward Island infrastructure summit we've seen the Capital Budget come to the floor. I have to admit I was very disappointed because the line items were not broken down in the capital budget and it was very clear that the Minister of Finance had those line items broken down. I would imagine other members of the Cabinet know what they are as well but they were unwilling to publish them and share them with Islanders and put them on a website for everybody to look at or to even table them in the House. The answer given was: You can ask us to go through this Capital Budget line by line and we will put them in the Hansard for everyone to see.

That was very disappointing and disturbing, and I think it speaks to why we've seen a lack of support for our infrastructure summit from the Premier and from the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, because we see they're not even willing to list the projects that are in the capital budget. So I'm hoping that changes. They did say they would consider publishing those line items and I sure hope that comes to fruition.

The other thing is I think it's good for government because it really helps come out with a better product in terms of what infrastructure projects move forward. It will allow projects like the hills of Borden to be nipped in the bud before they ever even happen, right? I can only imagine if the hills of Borden was brought to an infrastructure summit, I'm sure it would've been shot dead right off the top.

Speaking again, we heard the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy talk about the Stanley Bridge roundabout. Now, the roundabout is a solution that the community was not consulted about and, in fact, they found out about it when the tender was announced in the newspaper and of course they were up in arms. Once the project was explained to them and what it was supposed to resolve and some adjustments were made, they were able to go forward with it, right? Now, there's a lot of people who feel that possibly it's overkill for what was needed and perhaps, you know, as a first step put up a four-way stop sign, try that for a summer before we go and spend \$200,000 on a roundabout. But again, an infrastructure summit would allow more consultation so that communities aren't surprised by tenders coming out in the newspaper.

Now, again, we're coming back to big projects that are going on. We've got a \$68 million US diesel generator that's coming forward, that's \$90 million Canadian, and it's an ad hoc process for engaging stakeholders. At an infrastructure summit this is a way to get everyone together to talk about big projects like this and how the smaller projects fit into that.

Now, we know this government knows how to consult with Islanders. I'm going to try to dig deep down and really believe they want to be open and transparent, despite what's happening with the Capital Budget. I mean, we've seen with the water act consultations there's a lot of time and effort that's spent going out and talking about the water act. We've seen with the democratic renewal there's a huge amount of time and effort going out there. An infrastructure summit would be something that could happen over a three- or four-day period or perhaps even less. Over a weekend it could happen on the

Island, bringing stakeholders together to discuss that.

We've had this motion on the floor a few times now and it was moved several days ago. I'm hoping that perhaps even though we've heard some words saying that the motion is not supported that many members will reconsider their stance on this motion and how an infrastructure summit really will help this government do what's right for Islanders and really does reflect their own values as put forward in the operating budget and the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close debate on this motion.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Are we ready for the question?

Mr. Aylward: Standing vote, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you.

A recorded division has been requested.

Deputy Sergeant at Arms, could you ring the bell?

[The bells were rung]

Mr. J. Brown: Mr. Speaker, government's members are present for the vote.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, opposition's ready for the vote.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

All those voting against the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, the hon. Premier and Minister of Justice and Public Safety, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services, the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture, the hon. Member

from West Royalty-Springvale, the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, the hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, the hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche, the hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors, the hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville, and the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Speaker: All those voting for the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Opposition House Leader, the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, and the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Speaker: The motion is defeated.

The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

At this time, the opposition would like to call Motion No. 47 in support of the use of ex-servicemen, Military and police officers as commissionaires in provincial operated facilities.

Table Officer in Training (Emily Doiron): Order No. 47.

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

WHEREAS there are approximately 178 commissionaires employed in various positions across the province;

AND WHEREAS 40 of these individuals received layoff notices in September, 2015 due to the fact that the government of Prince Edward Island, through Health PEI, signed a four-year contract with a Vancouver-based company to provide security to provincial buildings and institutions in the province;

AND WHEREAS the previous contract was under a not-for-profit company called Commissionaires, a leading Canadian security services provider, led and managed by Veterans for Veterans;

AND WHEREAS this not-for-profit organization was established in 1925, to create meaningful employment opportunities for former members of the Canadian Forces and RCMP, serving those who have served our nation;

AND WHEREAS the Commissionaires delivers over 90% of its revenues back to its members, both veteran and non-veteran, by operating a thriving, self-sustaining business with revenues exceeding \$530 million annually;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly express its appreciation for the dedicated work of all of our Commissionaires who have watched over us and helped to ensure our security in provincial government buildings for many, many years across this province;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly urge the government to show its support for our veterans and ex-police officers by urging the provincial government to encourage the employment of our veterans and ex-police officers through the Commissionaires in all future security contracts.

Speaker: We will call on the hon. Leader of the Opposition to move the motion.

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

It is a great honour to rise today to move this motion that urges our government to use ex-servicemen, former military, and ex-law enforcement officers as commissionaires in our public facilities and our Island hospitals.

Frankly, I was shocked when I heard that the government planned on firing 40 of their commissionaires at our three largest referral hospitals. I can remember a meeting I immediately had after hearing it with one of the head officials with Health PEI over at the office building there behind the liquor commission. I was appalled to hear that it came down just to a few dollars.

I found it unbelievable that this government would treat individuals who dedicated their lives to service for our country and our province in such a callous and disrespectful way. I was told that we must look at free-trade agreements and other provinces and it all came down to that and money. I'm not against –

Speaker: Excuse me.

Hon. Leader of the Opposition, (Indistinct) the word “callous” and I believe I'm going to deem that unparliamentary.

Leader of the Opposition: Okay, I apologize.

Not only did this government lay off these individuals without any prior notice that their jobs were jeopardy, but they suggested that they would have to reapply for the jobs while they would be decreasing their salaries from \$13.65 to \$10.75.

I remember back about a month ago somebody had on an editorial and they said yes, but these veterans and these ex-RCMP officers have such wonderful pensions. If they had such wonderful pensions they wouldn't be out working part-time or making a few extra dollars to try and survive. These individuals were insulted and upset at this treatment. As one of these individuals put it, the government has been very demeaning towards the veterans. He told me that, yes, he had a pension, it was very modest, and that until he receives his Canada pension and his other old age supplements that he struggled, and his \$13.65 an hour job meant a lot to him.

The Canadian Corps of Commissionaires is an organization that has a stated goal to employ ex-veterans and law enforcement officers. These commissionaires who were working at the hospitals have been specially trained by the Atlantic Police Academy to deal with white code emergencies and aggressive patients. I must say, in talking with a lot of commissionaires in the hospital, my father was in the hospital back in the fall and I had commissionaires come up to me when I was going to see Dad and they appreciated that we were standing up for them and bringing this issue to the floor.

But a low bid put them out of their jobs. It goes back to what I've always said about administration and management: Just hack away at the little guy, don't worry about the guy that's making \$150,000 and \$200,000 or \$1.3 million as a psychiatrist. I have chatted with a number of our commissionaires and I have been amazed at the stories of service at home and abroad. I always enjoy listening to them. As I stated to the media at the time of these layoffs, to remove an established, not-for-profit service provider that largely employs local veterans and former law enforcement officers sends the wrong message about the value we place on the public service by the individuals.

I have to laugh. I must have made five phone calls and sent at least half a dozen emails to this great wonderful company called Paladin Security and they didn't even have the courtesy once to respond back and tell me why or give me an explanation or try to justify themselves. I've got a lot of respect for that company.

I believe we must always remember the service our veterans and our law enforcement workers who have often carried out the work that many of us would rather not have to deal with. They put their lives on the line for the duty to this province and our country. I read an article, I think it was yesterday in the paper, and it was talking about veterans and heroes and the difference between a combat veteran and a veteran. Well, I'm a veteran. I have never faced combat, but I have stood at the Czechoslovakian border and looked at the wall and saw people up on the gun towers watching down at me when I was there back in 1983 and it was a sight I will never forget.

Since 1949 commissionaires across our country and this province have been providing security for our public service. They have always shown dedication to their work, friendliness, compassion, and professionalism. I just thought a minute ago when I had that meeting with the staff of Health PEI, and I honestly think they felt bad. I think they felt bad for the decision they were being forced to make over the mighty dollar. Less than \$80,000 a year on a \$600 million budget, and we couldn't find somewhere to save some money, or take it from somewhere else and put it to these

veterans or the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires.

Many individuals who have worked for years in the public service have found their building commissionaires to be friendly. Their smiling, welcoming faces and helping hands have helped to cheer us and often comfort us. Yeah, they have. They have made us feel safe in work places. They have ensured that our members of the community who utilize the services of the government have found their way through the maze of government departments, always in the spirit of helpfulness and simple kindness.

I remember back two weeks ago I went over and met with the Minister of Finance. I walked in the door and there was a commissionaire sitting there on the left-hand side and there was the whirly-jig thing there you got to go through. He stood up out of his chair and he said: Jamie, I want to thank you very much for fighting for us. It took me back to about a month ago before that when I went over up to the department of transportation. There was another commissionaire there and he said: We really appreciate this. We never ask for much, at least you guys are willing to fight for us.

They have made us feel safe in work places. They have ensured that our members of the community who utilize the services of the government have found their way through – I guess I read that.

Their watchful eyes have ensured a level of peacefulness and security that has made our country the envy of the world. We are the envy of the world. Wouldn't want to live any other place. In many other countries public buildings are guarded by military people carrying machine guns, guns and bandoliers. I've travelled the Caribbean quite extensively. Out in front of every bank or jewellery store is a guy standing there with a machine gun. You go into a government building and you can't even get close to it. We have commissionaires guarding us in buildings not even armed. They're there.

It goes back to what I said at the beginning, (Indistinct) we were in Czechoslovakia, if you go into a third world country like that on the West German border and you look at what was there when the wall was up, in

some respect what is still there, it makes you take a pause. It is often quite intimidating just to walk by some of these government establishments. I know it was the first time I stayed down in Cuba. Truly, we have been blessed.

When this cutback was announced, I was somewhat enraged. I met with Health PEI officials to see if this decision could be reversed. I remember that day. I didn't take no for an answer. I was granted a meeting and I appreciate that. But at the end of the day it was all about a few dollars being saved at the expense of frontline workers. Disinfection workers, teachers, nurses, commissionaires, other DOT guys. We're always chopping at the little guy, never anybody else up above. As I stated the other day we never cut management. It's always the frontline who works hard to lower salaries.

I always get a kick out of these bureaucrats, sit up there in their ivory towers and they make decisions. I really have to wonder if they ever think about who they're actually affecting. You think about those 25 disinfection workers that are going to be laid off pretty soon and the affect that's going to have on their families over Christmas. What affects are these cuts on commissionaires going to have on their families over Christmas? But there's going to be people enjoying big, hot meals at home sitting behind a big, high desk.

Simply said, I believe the decision to employ an out-of-province company and to nickel-and-dime our veterans and ex-servicemen and law enforcement officials is wrong. I believe as Canadians we have an obligation to ensure these individuals who have faced so much for our safety and our security deserve better.

I can honestly say – and I apologize to every commissionaire out there. I will apologize to the commissionaires in this province for the position we put them in. I am ashamed. I want to reiterate our caucus's great appreciation for these workers. We appreciate their efforts, their hard work, and we will continue to push this government to reverse this poorly taken decision.

Yes, they've entered into a four-year contract with an option to sign for another

year. In four years' time, if I'm still here, God willing, I will continue to fight.

I would ask all of you in this Legislature to support our motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: I will call on the seconder of the motion, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

I'm certainly proud to rise today to second our opposition motion which outlines our support for the employment of veterans and ex-law enforcement officers as commissionaires in this province.

I just have to think back to earlier this afternoon when we were discussing one of the bills, I believe it was the income tax act, and we got into a debate or a discussion around low income-earning Islanders, what that threshold is.

What we really have to start to think about is this contract was sent out to tender – which I don't have a problem with. That's the way it should be done. But we have a company that came in here to Prince Edward Island, they came in and were successful with a lower bid, albeit I believe it's roughly \$80,000 on a \$4.2 million budget. They're going to be offering the employees that are going to be lucky enough to get hired on – or unlucky enough, I guess, to be hired on – to \$2.65 per hour less than the commissionaires were being paid.

The commissionaires were making a meagre \$13.65 an hour. When we're talking about an hourly wage of \$13.65, be it now \$11 an hour, we're truly talking about low-income Islanders. I've stood in this House countless times over the last five years since I was lucky enough, fortunate enough, to be entrusted with this seat by the good people of Stratford-Kinlock and I've argued, I've debated, for the basic personal tax exemption to be increased. I've also talked about the age exemption credit to be increased, but again, it continues to fall on deaf ears with this government.

Albeit they are saying now that once they balance the budget they will look at the basic personal tax exemption. This government has a tremendous record over the last eight or nine years of continually coming in with a deficit budget and we're seeing it again this year.

In addition to that, one week ago tonight we stood and we talked about the PEI Regiment and the 140th anniversary of this great institution. As a matter of fact, we had four great individuals here from the PEI Regiment.

There are countless members of the regular force, when they retire from the regular force, they come back and they do service with our PEI Regiment, but also they quite often are looking to pick up a little bit of extra income to make ends meet. Quite often that was as a commissionaire at one of our hospitals or one of our office buildings, so on and so forth.

Between last week with the 140th anniversary of the PEI Regiment, today talking about the income tax act and low income earners, I just have to think about my own constituents. I have a couple that live right around the corner from me. The gentleman, he was a commissionaire. He is no longer. Unfortunately his wife received terrible news last week that her employment at Home Hardware in Stratford was being terminated because that building is closing down. The hon. Leader of the Opposition just talked about the Christmas season and it coming. I can just imagine what kind of a Christmas this couple is going to have.

Again it's deplorable, I feel, to look at a \$4.2 million budget to affect already, for the most part, low-income earners based on \$80,000 of a \$4.2 million budget.

Commissionaires is a company which was contracted by our government in the past to provide security for various public buildings. Their duties include guarding, monitoring and (Indistinct), threat risk assessment, bylaw enforcement, identification and fingerprinting services, and security training. According to its website, Commissionaires was founded in Canada in 1925 following the First World War when there was no social safety net for soldiers who, upon completion of their

service, found themselves without employment.

Commissionaires were created first in Montreal, then in Toronto and Vancouver, to look after these men and women and provide them with transitional or permanent jobs, primarily in the security field.

In the early years these jobs most frequently involved guarding government institutions. From 1925 to 1948 Commissionaires expanded all across Canada. There are now 16 divisions representing all the provinces of Canada and three territories. Again, according to Commissionaires' website, the private not-for-profit organization employs over 20,000 men and women across Canada of all ages and from many walks of life, including former Canadian forces and RCMP personnel.

At this time I would like to adjourn debate on this motion, as was previously agreed to, to make time for the Leader of the Third Party.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: We will now call on the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors, that the 25th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Orders Other Than Government

Speaker: Mr. Clerk.

Clerk: Order No. 25, *Well-being Measurement Act*, Bill No. 101, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *Well-being Measurement Act*, Bill No. 101, read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point to chair the bill.

Chair (Casey): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intitled *Well-being Measurement Act*. Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be now read clause by clause?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Chair: Permission to take somebody on the floor with the member?

Some Hon. Members: Granted.

Chair: Hello, welcome.

Would you please introduce yourself and your position for the record?

Elizabeth Schoales Researcher: Elizabeth Schoales, sessional researcher for office of the Third Party.

Chair: Welcome.

The member of the Third Party is going to start off with an explanation and then we'll get into reading the bill.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I first want to thank the house leaders on both sides for offering me this opportunity to present a bill as a member of the Third Party. There's not every Third Party in the legislatures across this country that gets this opportunity and I sincerely thank you for making the time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Also, I have many friends to welcome tonight, but let me just say I look forward to the day when there are as many Greens inside the rail as there are outside the rail right now.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Before we go into a line-by-line debate on the bill, some members of this House have asked me for sort of an explanation as to the intent of this bill and I'm happy to take several minutes to do that, with the House's indulgence.

Indicators and accounts are powerful. What we count and measure reflects our values as a society and determines what makes it onto the policy agendas of governments. They can tell us whether we are better off than we used to be, whether we are leaving the world a better place for our children, and what we need to change.

I described governance last week in this House as succession planning on a community scale, and if I were to distill the essence of this bill, it would be that we should create a score card for government in order to gauge how we are doing that.

I think I speak for all members of this House when I say that we all want for our citizens of Prince Edward Island such things as good health and good education, more employment, less crime and mental illness, and a clean environment. The depth of our common commitment to those shared goals is matched only by our current unwillingness, and inability, to monitor whether they are getting better or worse.

At the moment, if we want to monitor whether we are getting better or worse or progressing as a society, we turn to Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, to inform us as to our direction. If GDP is growing, things are fine; if it is not, then hard times are upon us. While there is a certain validity to this outlook it fails to take into account so many facets of our lives that have a profound bearing on our sense of well-being.

Governing is about improving the lives of the citizens of PEI, and through this bill I am simply providing a mechanism which will

inform Islanders how well their government is protecting this unique, precious, and fragile thing that we all cherish – the Island way of life.

Measuring well-being is not a new idea. Other jurisdictions have recognized the limitations of GDP as a measure of collective wellness. Here in Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Ontario have all to varying degrees started down the path of adopting a wider, more comprehensive set of indicators in measuring their progress.

Just this year the country of Wales passed their own *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act* which aims to do exactly what our bill would do here on Prince Edward Island.

I, personally, have been working on well-being measurement for decades. Back in 1997, after one of my many failed electoral attempts, I was approached by the successful Liberal candidate, Joe Jordan, and invited to develop policy that would bring some of the Green ideas that he had heard and liked during the campaign into legislation that he could present to the House of Commons in Ottawa. The result was the *Canada Well-Being Measurement Act*, a motion that passed debate in the House, handily receiving support from all PEI MPs who were present, and a majority of the Conservative party, also.

A few years ago a version of the original bill was presented in the Nova Scotia provincial legislature by an NDP member. I say all this to demonstrate that this idea is neither new nor radical. Measuring well-being is seen as a perfectly reasonable and, some might say, necessary innovation in order to modernize the way that governments collect information to help build policy-making. Here on Prince Edward Island we also have an intimate relationship with measuring well-being.

In 2006 an in-depth study was carried out in Tyne Valley which aimed to discover what really matters to Islanders when it comes to their quality of life. The results of that study triggered a passage in the 2008 throne speech of the Robert Ghiz government, which committed to establishing, and I quote: "...an Office of Public Engagement,

whose mandate is to build a common foundation of knowledge and information from which both government and communities can assess and discuss public policy issues." In other words, measuring well-being.

In 2013, more recently, the Georgetown Conference discussed many of these same issues and concerns, issues that this bill will help address, in revitalizing and, for example, maintaining a vibrant and sustainable rural economy on Prince Edward Island.

I'd like to spend a few minutes explaining the limitations of Gross Domestic Product as a useful measure and of how expanding and modernizing how we monitor progress will be good for Islanders.

GDP counts the amount of money exchanged for goods and services, and it's a measure of production and consumption. It's been around since the 1940s and was a useful tool for governments to gauge their economic health following the war. But the world is a different place from what it was 70 years ago and the usefulness of GDP as our principal measure of progress in society is now seriously in doubt.

The assumption that economists and politicians make is that as long as the economy is growing then we are making progress, but today that is not always the case. We can make the economy grow by going deeper and deeper into debt. We can make the economy grow by liquidating non-renewable resources. If the wealth from that growth is not reasonably equitably distributed, then society is not necessarily stronger or more cohesive.

More than that, GDP makes no distinction between useful expenditures such as that that we might spend on education and growing our food, and regrettable expenditures such as those required when things go wrong, like the \$10 million this province spent repairing damaged infrastructure following last year's rain storms up west.

Just for a moment, let's view a house robbery from the point of GDP. The money spent repairing the home from damage increases GDP; the money spent to replace

stolen goods increases GDP; the police and legal time spent tracking down, prosecuting and convicting the perpetrator increases GDP; and then keeping the thief in prison is yet one more boost to Gross Domestic Product. And yet we end up with a more insecure community, fractured families, and increased burdens on the public purse. In this and many other situations I could recite Gross Domestic Product grows while we as a society are clearly going backwards. How can we reconcile these obvious contradictions?

That is what this bill aims to do, to develop a broader, more comprehensive and subtle set of measurements so that we can monitor how we are really doing. Is this precious thing called the Island way of life that we all cherish and want to preserve being protected by our government?

This bill is what I would describe as an enabling piece of legislation. It is not demanding much of this House in terms of money or other resources, and it allows the extent to which PEI would adopt alternative measures of well-being to be determined by a standing committee. My sense is that we already measure much of what would be included in the annual report card that would flow from this legislation, and all that is required is for that information to be collected and presented in such a way that it can be used to inform public policy, taking into account of course what Islanders themselves recognize as being of utmost importance to them. It fits perfectly with this government's stated pillars in the recent election: people, prosperity, and engagement. It engages people to determine what prosperity really means to them.

Aside from the ease and inexpensive nature of implementing this bill, if adopted, from here on decisions would take into account lifetime costs and benefits and it would steer Prince Edward Island towards sustainable prosperity, and likely saving large amounts of public money in the process. In the same way that a person who invests in their own health is less likely to become ill and therefore saves the medical system money, an Island that invests in its health, building stronger communities, happier people, and a clean environment and a diverse and modern economy, will produce significant long-term public savings.

I moved to Prince Edward Island because it is not like the rest of the world. I came here because the things that I value – a strong sense of community, people caring about each other, a love of place, care of the land and water, and the knowledge that life is about more than just making money and buying more stuff – all of these values are reflected in the Island way of life. I want us to measure that, to value it and to protect it. Not only will this be a good thing for us lucky enough to live here today, but it will send a message to people everywhere that when it comes to PEI, here is a place that cares about its people, its communities, and its natural environment.

I believe that by leading the way in proclaiming that PEI is above all else concerned about the quality of life of its citizens we can become a magnet for progressive, community-minded people to reinvigorate our rural communities, to strengthen our economy, and create a new era of prosperity and contentment on Prince Edward Island.

I want to close by quoting presidential candidate Bobby Kennedy from 1968:

“Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our Gross [Domestic] Product... counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage.... Yet the gross [domestic] product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

The *Well-being Measurement Act* will provide the evidence base for good policy that seeks to integrate and harmonize social, economic, and environmental objectives with a view to enhancing well-being in the largest sense for both present and future generations. In other words, it will measure that which makes life worthwhile, and I urge

all members of the House to offer their support for this historic bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Chair: Hon. members, we will now go to reading the *Well-being Measurement Act*. I would be happy to start a speaking order. If anybody wants to be added just catch my eye and I will add you, I would be happy to add you to the speaking list.

1. In this Act,

(a) “management committee” means the management committee established pursuant to subsection 3(1);

(b) “Minister” means the Minister of Finance;

(c) “Standing Committee” means the Standing Committee on Public Accounts of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island.

Shall the section carry?

Mr. Roach: Question.

Chair: You have a question?

Mr. Roach: Yeah.

Chair: Sure.

Mr. Roach: First of all, I would like to –

Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you.

I would like to thank the hon. Leader of the Third Party for raising this issue in the House, and his ideas are helpful and insightful on wellness, and I am glad to see that collaboration.

Just a question on 1(c), Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Does the Leader of the Third Party, do you sit on that committee?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I do. I sit on every committee (Indistinct) –

Mr. Roach: Also on health and wellness?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Mr. Roach: Okay, thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Again, I also want to comment on the importance of measuring well-being outside of the GDP scope, and I understand what you’re saying there and it is a very important thing, so thank you for bringing this forward.

I did want to know if you had brought this idea forward to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts prior to introducing the bill.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I’m sorry; I missed – why we had not?

Mr. Trivers: Did you bring it before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts prior to introducing the bill?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: No, I did not, hon. member. I did speak to the Chair, however, to let him know that this bill was coming forward.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: I was wondering why you felt legislation was the way to go as opposed to starting off with a motion and then getting that passed, that sort of process.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: That’s a very good question. I certainly need to address that.

We see many motions coming before this House and indeed we debate very many worthy motions, but it strikes me that a lot of the motions that we pass do not have a lot of legislative teeth. They don’t have a lot behind them. Sort of like telling your child to go and clean your bedroom without enforcing it. You can say that – well, I speak from my own experience. You can tell your children to go and clean their bedroom as many times as you like, but unless you actually enforce it it’s not likely to get done.

This legislation would say: Go and clean your bedroom now and I’m going to come and check that you’ve done it. I brought forward a bill rather than a motion because I

wanted it to have some teeth. I wanted it to have some oomph behind it.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

I like to think that motions have teeth. We run them here all the time. Members in this Legislative Assembly all speak to them so I take exception to the fact that motions don't have teeth because we spend a lot of time working on ours. We bring very good issues forward to the Legislative Assembly here on a weekly basis and speak at length for hours about them, so I take great exception to that.

Why didn't you bring this through the Public Accounts Committee? The committees of the Legislative Assembly are very powerful. We have one that I sit on with you, that's the education and innovation committee where we've done great. We've had great cooperation amongst all the members regardless of what party they represent. We've had different representatives right across Prince Edward Island come in and present to us.

If these metrics that you're talking about, if they are so readily available, why didn't you write a letter to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and ask him for the committee to follow out that work anyway? It would have been up to the members of the committee to follow through and do it just like any other committee.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I suppose I could have that. I believe, as I said in my remarks earlier, that this information is actually readily available, but I think it will require a certain skill and a certain amount of work to collate all of this information, to collect it and to make it into a usefully presentable order, and I think that would require more than a simple letter to the committee Chair.

I think what this act does is it instructs, in this case, the Public Accounts Committee to collect that information or to go out to Islanders, actually – that's what it really does – and ask Islanders what matters to them. What is it that is the most important thing in your life? That's not something that

can be done – it would sort of take all of that consultative aspect of the bill out of it.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: I guess what I'm asking is: Why didn't you write a letter to the Chair of Public Accounts Committee and ask them to do what you're trying to instruct them to do through legislation? Ask them to go out and meet with people, ask them to gather, ask them to put it in a readable format, and ask them to present it back to the House. Not just write them a letter and ask them to write you back the answer with the metrics. Actually have the committee do the work because inevitably you're asking the committee to do the work anyway, so why didn't you ask the committee do the work because you sit on the committee?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Hon. member, this bill is standard practice. This is what was done in the federal parliament, it's what was proposed in the Nova Scotia parliament, so I don't think I'm doing anything that's unusual or out of place at all.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: That's not what I asked you. What I asked you was: Why didn't you write a letter to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, a committee which you sit on, and ask if the committee can meet and collect the information that you're talking about and present it back to the Legislative Assembly?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I did speak to the Chair of Public Accounts Committee and he was happy that this bill was coming forward. There was certainly no indication from him that this was in some way not an appropriate process.

Mr. Myers: Question.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: That's not what I asked you. What I asked you was: Why didn't you write a letter to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and ask that the work that you're trying to instruct them to do through

legislation, why didn't you ask: Can the committee do this work?

If you wanted to do it even through a trial basis so you can go back to the House and say: See, this works so well, we did it on a trial basis this summer when the committee could've met and talked about this, and presented it back to the House this fall and used it as a supporting document for your legislation.

So now you're asking us to try it blindly where you could've asked the committee to do it, got their agreement, had a report presented to the House here now, and used it as a supporting documentation.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: As I said, hon. member, I did speak to the Chair of that committee. It was my decision, based on the activities that have happened in both our federal government and at least one other province in Canada, that this is the appropriate way to go forward with this. It's a fairly complex idea and it's not something that I think I could have communicated clearly enough in a letter to the Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

What that, if this is such a complex idea, I believe in principle what you're talking about, the Leader of the Third Party. But if this is such a complex idea, have you held any meetings with the public or public forums to get their ideas and hear what Islanders are saying on this across the Island?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I have not held any public meetings. I've certainly spoken to dozens and dozens of Islanders in that regard and the bill actually – part of the bill is recommending that we go out to Islanders and do a consultation process. That's exactly what this bill is planning to do, hon. member.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: So with that, why wouldn't you get that information first to really provide the framework and the groundwork and get the feeling of Islanders

and their comments and maybe suggestions on this prior to bringing forth the bill and maybe taking that information to the standing committee and working with that group to bring it before the House?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Hon. member, there have been several studies done on Prince Edward Island already, and in fact, Dr. Irene Novaczek who sits in the gallery today was the author of one of those studies, Quality of Island Life Study of Tyne Valley in 2006, I cited in my remarks.

There has also been social and cultural values mapping as a decision supporting tool for climate change adaption, immigrants, Island – there's several studies here that have already been done on Prince Edward Island. I think the public will is there, the information is there. What is lacking is the government aspect of this, the government will to get involved and to be a partner in this. That's what this bill does, it invites government to be part of the discussion.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

Is the hon. member willing to bring on the person he just indicated that's in the gallery to sit at the table and to provide her opinion and comments and beliefs on this?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I hadn't planned on doing that. I –

Leader of the Opposition: Personally, I would like to hear her opinion and what her thoughts are.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: There's a couple ways you could go (Indistinct) – I'm in an unusual situation. I'm usually out in right field there and I'm sitting in the pitcher's mound here, so I'm not quite sure what to do.

Chair: (Indistinct).

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Madam Chair has just pointed out there are only four minutes left in the discussion here, and perhaps we should just continue and hopefully come back and discuss this further.

But I think it's important to note that this is not a new idea. Studies have been on Prince Edward Island, it's not a new notion for Islanders. All I'm asking for here is for government to be involved in the process in order that we develop a set of measures.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

Mr. Currie: Thank you very much, Chair.

First of all, I just want to acknowledge the Leader of the Third Party for bringing the *Well-being Measurement Act*. As the health minister and minister of family and human services we're always striving to continue the quality of life for Islanders.

I guess I'm trying to understand. In our department of health we have the Chief Public Health Officer. The announcement that our Premier shared last week was on the creation of the HUB and the new role that the Chief Public Health Officer will play in her annual report on the state of children in the province.

Just want to understand sort of the function of the act. Right now the Chief Public Health Officer monitors reports on the state of health and the population of the province. We are all aware of that. It includes up-to-date information and trends on life expectancy, education levels, household incomes, employment, etc., obesity rates, physical activity rates, sense of community belonging. There's some themes that tie in that are fairly consistent to what you've shared. This is certainly very formative information. Health PEI also monitors and releases the information on access. We have data coming from CIHI.

Just trying to kind of understand where all of that information that's currently being done, that resources are being put into – can you speak to that? I've got a couple questions, but can you speak to that about sort of that role that's ongoing, that work that's ongoing and does provide good data and good information to help us shape policy and to be better, basically? Maybe your thoughts on that.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Certainly. Thank you, hon. member.

As I've stated a couple of times now, I believe that a lot of the information that would be required in order to set up this score card, if you like, for government is already there. The problem is it's not arranged in a useful manor. It's scattered between departments, whether that be the department of energy, department of health and wellness, department of justice, the department of communities, land and environment. All of the information is there but it's not being collated and organized in such a way that is useful necessarily to inform public policy, particularly when we look at making decisions for the long term.

I mentioned that in the country of Wales their act is called the *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act*, absolutely looking at the long-term consequences of the decisions we're making. In order to do that this information has to be presented in a coherent manor, and that's the problem, it's not, it's scattered throughout departments.

Mr. Currie: Yeah. I'm trying to understand the – because there is, if you look at the student drug report, I mean, the Chief Public Health Officer, who is Dr. Heather Morrison, I feel that her data and her detailed information is very helpful. Trying to understand what we're currently doing and how this potentially could blend in. As I did share, we are going to be looking at another level of involvement by the Chief Public Health Office on the state of children –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Currie: – in the province, so look forward to more conversation.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Adjourn debate.

Chair: Hon. members, the debate has been adjourned.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Madam Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair, and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried. –

Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *Well-being Measurement Act*, I beg leave to

report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Deputy Speaker (Gallant): Shall it carry? Carried.

I call on the hon. Opposition House Leader for adjournment.

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, I call for adjournment.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, that this House adjourn until tomorrow, November 25th, at 2:00 p.m.

Deputy Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Good night, everyone.

The Legislature adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2:00 p.m.